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for every child

Education Under Threat in
West and Central Africa

Education Under Threat: Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

Algeria

Mauritania

Timbuktu

Kidal

Agadez

MALI

Gao

Meneka

Tahoua

Zinder

NIGER

Mopti

Sahel

Tillabery

Maradi

Kayes

Nord

Koulikoro

Segou

Boucle du Mouhoun

Centre-Nord

Dosso

Centre

BURKINA FASO

Centre-Est

Est

Nigeria

Sikasso

Hauts-Bassins

Centre-Ouest

Centre-Sud

Benin

Cascades

Sud-Ouest

Ghana

Togo

Guinea

Côte d'Ivoire
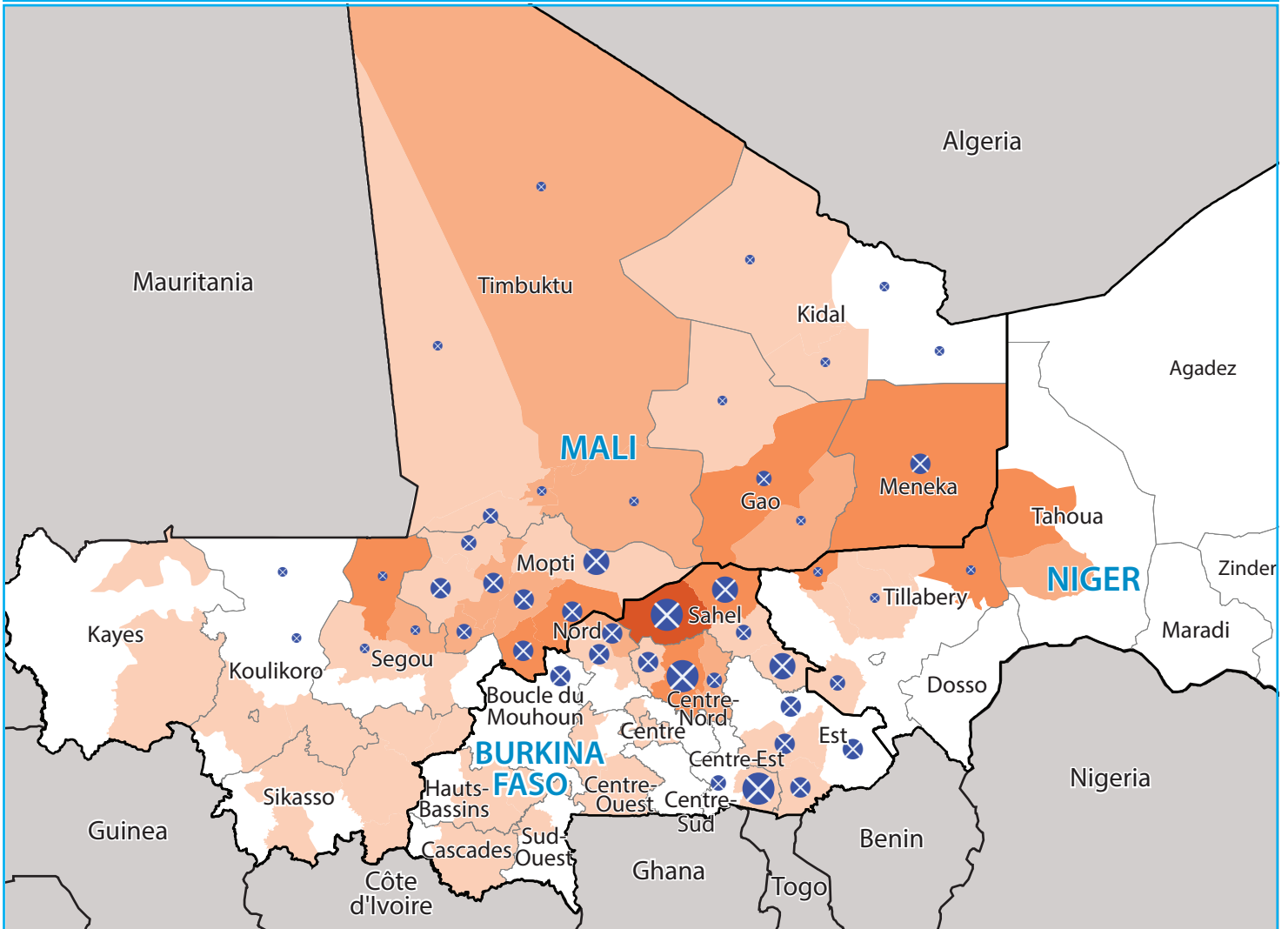
Administrative boundaries

National

Region

Schools closed by sub-region

- ⊗ ≤ 25
- ⊗ ≤ 50
- ⊗ ≤ 100
- ⊗ ≤ 200
- ⊗ > 200 and ≤ 500

Internal displaced persons

- ≤ 5,000
- ≤ 10,000
- ≤ 30,000
- ≤ 50,000
- > 50,000 and ≤ 105,000

Note: This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

INTRODUCTION

"For us to develop, we need education. Especially for girls. Without education, our children are facing a future of joblessness and poverty. It is a catastrophe."

– Father Arcadius Sawadogo

Father Sawadogo lives in Dori, northern Burkina Faso, in a part of the country where thousands of schools have been shut down or destroyed.

Sadly, attacks on schools are not a rare occurrence in West and Central Africa. As of June 2019, 1.91 million children were being robbed of an education in the region due to violence and insecurity in and around their schools. In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, a surge in threats and attacks against students, teachers and schools – on education itself – is casting a foreboding shadow upon children, their families, their communities and society at large.

Among other key facts regarding this crisis (see box on page 3), it is worth noting that according to the Annual Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict:

1. More than one quarter of the 742 verified attacks on schools globally in 2019 took place in five countries across West and Central Africa.

2. Verified attacks on schools in Mali doubled between 2017 and 2019, and a sharply rising number of schools have closed or become non-operational due to violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger over the last two years.

3. And the Central African Republic saw a 21 per cent increase in verified attacks on schools between 2017 and 2019.

In this Child Alert

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Despite the risks they face, communities on the front lines of this struggle will not rest until their children are guaranteed the education that is every child's right. But it will indeed be a struggle without greater support, given that education-in-emergencies programmes in West and Central Africa remain severely underfunded.

This must not become a forgotten crisis.

Without education, children face a future stripped of hope. The life of a child kept out of school is a tragedy of unfulfilled potential and lost opportunity. In a region confronted by increasingly complex conflict and instability, education can never be an option; it is a necessity and a matter of survival. Regardless of conflict, children must be provided with the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes they need to become responsible, active and productive adults.

Out-of-school children also face a present filled with dangers. Compared to their peers who are in school, they are at a much higher risk of recruitment by armed groups. Girls face an elevated risk of gender-based violence and are often forced into child marriage, with ensuing early pregnancies and childbirth that threaten their lives and health. Both boys and girls become easier targets for traffickers and are quicker to fall prey to recruitment into armed groups.

Thirty years after governments around the world adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to an education is in jeopardy today in communities affected by conflict in West and Central Africa. Now more than ever, governments must reaffirm their commitment to education and protect spending on education for their youngest citizens. Now is the time for renewed efforts to make sure the potential of a generation of young people is not wasted.

Attacks on education: Key facts

The number of schools forced to close due to rising insecurity in conflict-affected areas of West and Central Africa tripled between the end of 2017 and June 2019.

As of June 2019, 9,272 schools were closed in the region, affecting more than 1.91 million children and nearly 44,000 teachers.

The increasing number of children forced out of school due to violence in West and Central Africa contributes to a total of 40.6 million primary and lower secondary school-aged children who are out of school in the region. About one in four children globally who need humanitarian support – including education and other services critical to learning – live in just 10 countries in West and Central Africa.

Nearly half of the schools closed across the region due to attacks, threats of attack and increasing violence are located in northwest and southwest Cameroon; 4,437 schools there closed as of June 2019, pushing more than 609,000 children out of school.

More than 2,000 schools are closed in Burkina Faso, along with more than 900 in Mali, due to growing violence across both countries.

The number of schools closed due to violence in the four countries affected by crisis in the Lake Chad Basin – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – stayed at roughly the same high level, varying only from 981 to 1,054, between the end of 2017 and June 2019.

Between April 2017 and June 2019, the countries of the central Sahel – Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – witnessed a six-fold increase in school closures due to violence, from 512 to 3,005.

Note: *References to school closures include schools closed or non-operational.*
Sources of data: *Ministries of Education, humanitarian partners and UNICEF.*

1.   Schools attacked, learning at peril

"I was in class in my village. We heard screaming. Then people started firing guns. They shot at our teachers and killed one of them. They burnt down the classrooms. I was scared. I felt weak and lost. Then we just ran." – **Hussaini, 14**

Hussaini* should be spending his days on a school bench, reading books, like other students his age. But since his school was destroyed and he and his family were forced to escape their village in northern Burkina Faso, he has not set foot in a classroom. "I used to love school, to read, to count and to play during recess," says Hussaini. "It's been a year since I last went to school."

The attack was not random. Many areas in West and Central Africa are witnessing increased hostility towards education by warring factions. Particularly,

in the countries of the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, ideological opposition to what is seen as Western-style education – especially for girls – is central to many of these hostilities. As a result, students, teachers, administrators and the education infrastructure are being deliberately targeted.

When education is under attack, safe schooling in the traditional sense becomes impossible to provide. The

BELOW: Burkina Faso. Despite violence that destroyed his school and forced him to flee his home, Hussaini, 14, has been able to continue his studies because of Radio Education in Emergencies. The programme broadcasts lessons and provides trained facilitators including Abdoulaye (left), who provides students with guidance and support. [names changed]

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threat of attacks creates a sense of fear in local communities, forcing schools to close, teachers to flee and schoolchildren to remain at home, unable to learn in classrooms with their peers.

But in desperate times, innovative approaches can provide solutions. Today, UNICEF is working with governments across West and Central Africa to offer alternative teaching and learning tools – and to diversify educational options and opportunities – so that we can reach children wherever they may be. Conflict in this region has taught us that while a traditional classroom is preferable, it is not the only place to provide learning activities.

Since 2016, for example, UNICEF and the Children's Radio Foundation have collaborated on designing and piloting the first-of-its-kind Radio Education in Emergencies programme. For children in crisis-affected areas who cannot physically go to school, this initiative provides up to nine months of broadcast lessons in literacy and numeracy, along with life-saving messages about living in conflict. Depending on the context, radio lessons might be aired by national networks or community stations, or even circulated to listening groups via a USB key.

Prototype lessons are now available even for children who have never been to school.

Radio education has implications even beyond emergency settings. It is a promising approach in the region for children who are out of school – not all of them due to conflict or insecurity. Non-emergency countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Sierra Leone have expressed interest in developing their own radio learning initiatives for children who cannot feasibly be reached by formal schooling.

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*Names have been changed to protect the identities of children and young people in this Child Alert.

MESSAGES OF HOPE

In countries where protracted conflicts and crises shut down schools for long periods, radio education – while not covering the full curriculum – provides children with the basics so that a return to school down the line will be easier. In highly insecure areas, this approach creates a protective routine. It also offers life-saving information and messages of hope.

Thanks to a radio set he received as part of the pilot programme, Hussaini is still learning every day, even though he is not going to a physical school. Now he does his learning at home. "It's good. All the family listens to the [radio] lessons now," says Hussaini. But he still misses his old school. "We had good teachers," he recalls. "I don't know where they are today."

Abdoulaye, 23, a trained facilitator in distance learning, visits Hussaini on a regular basis to make sure he is listening to the lessons and to help him with homework. "Abdoulaye is like my older brother. He helps me a lot," says Hussaini.

Abdoulaye emphasizes how people have been deeply affected by the escalating attacks by armed groups in northern Burkina Faso. "At first, they only threatened schools," he notes. "Nowadays, they actually kill us. They are targeting the population, displacing people by forcing them to leave their communities. As facilitators, we try to be discrete because of the security situation. If people see what we are doing, we could get killed."

But Abdoulaye insists he is not intimidated. "It's very important for these children to learn," he says. "They are our younger brothers and sisters. We must help them. Parents also want their children to learn, despite the risks. They feel it's their duty as parents to educate their children."

2. A safe embrace in times of danger

A temporary break in schooling can become permanent. Small, locally based solutions can keep up the habits of learning and provide a safe environment for children.

One day in 2017, Fatoumata says "bad men" arrived in her village school in the Ségou region of Mali and insisted that the two teachers leave. The pupils were told to go home. On that day, Fatoumata was not too concerned; she was sure she would be back in school soon. But two years later, the school remains closed.

Fatoumata, 12, always liked school, not that it was easy. Alongside regular schoolwork, Fatoumata had house chores to tend to, like most girls in her village. She had to sweep the floors and collect water from a source far from her family's home. The chores continued in school, too, where the girls – but not the boys – were asked to clean classrooms every morning. Fatoumata still found time to go over her mathematics homework in the evening. It was her weakest subject, she says.

A year after her school closed, Fatoumata had grown accustomed to not attending classes. She was in danger of slipping out of education forever, like many children whose schooling is interrupted. But then a UNICEF-supported community learning centre was set up in her village. The centre is a place where children feel safe and regain, or develop for the first time, the habit of learning.

Community learning centres are staffed by local volunteers, or animators, who are trained in basic teaching techniques and speak the local language with pupils. The centres provide a small, safe area for teaching children basic mathematics and reading. Children are encouraged to write about family and community history in their notebooks. Most of all, they are encouraged to play – a vital activity, especially for children living in insecure areas.

Explains Sharmila Pillai, Education in Emergencies Specialist at UNICEF Mali: "Community learning centres are not just bringing continued learning to crisis-affected children. They are also bringing a much-needed sense of normalcy."

In the Ségou region, there are now 19 community learning centres attended by more than 1,200 children, about half of whom are girls. The insecurity here may continue, but for now, Fatoumata is back in her village, learning. Since the centre opened, she has not missed a single day. She says she has always wanted to finish secondary school and open a mobile-phone credit shop. To that end, she has already achieved a major step: She is now better at mathematics than her parents.

SAFETY AND SUPPORT

In areas where insecurity persists and schools remain closed, community-run learning centres help ensure that children will not lose out on any previously acquired education. However, the ultimate goal is to bring all children to school, including those who have never had any access to education.

Therefore, temporary measures must respond to the crisis while taking long-term needs and goals into consideration – including the needs of the substantial number of children who are out of school for reasons unrelated to conflict. Beyond community-based approaches, innovative educational mechanisms include interactive audio learning and teacher training by tablet. School kits can also address shortages of education materials.

In addition, children in insecure environments require various measures to increase their sense of safety in school. These measures may comprise safety enhancements in the form of upgraded infrastructure, as well as teacher training in school-based emergency planning. With such training, teachers can prepare risk analyses and work with students on risk mitigation plans, including how to 'lock down' or evacuate the school in an emergency.

Mohammed, 12, first fled Banki, in northeast Nigeria, when his school was attacked and set on fire. "I was at school and then I heard shouting and we ran. A classmate of mine opened the gate," he explains. "They destroyed everything we worked on in our books, and they burnt them. One of my schoolteachers was killed."

Mali: Miriam, 14, and Rokiyatou, 11, work together on their lessons at a temporary learning space set in a camp for people displaced due to conflict in the region.
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Using the Safe Schools Declaration to reduce attacks

The Safe Schools Declaration is a political commitment to better protect students, teachers and schools during armed conflict; support the continuation of education in times of war; and take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools. The Declaration was opened for state endorsement in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015. To date, 95 countries have endorsed it, including most of the countries affected by conflict and violence in West and Central Africa.

Endorsing the Declaration builds local, national, regional and global momentum towards safeguarding education from attacks. For humanitarian organizations, it presents an opportunity to engage with governments and their respective ministries and armed forces on creating a more protective environment for education facilities. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has signed the Declaration, a ministerial decree included an explicit reference to holding perpetrators accountable for requisitioning schools for military purposes.

While only governments can endorse the Declaration, non-state armed groups can adopt and implement the related Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Humanitarian organizations can use the guidelines as a tool in their efforts to convince these groups to respect the right to education.

Mohammed and his family took refuge on the other side of the border in Cameroon, where he attended school sporadically for a while. But Mohammed is now back home in Banki. Although the town is still considered one of the most dangerous places in Borno State, its local primary school has reopened. Refurbished with support from UNICEF, it has been designed with security and safety for children in mind – including a high perimeter wall, entry and exit gates, and teachers who have been trained to provide psychosocial support.

In northeast Nigeria, where fighting continues between government forces and non-state armed groups, UNICEF works to help conflict-affected children reintegrate into learning with the assistance they need to realize their right to an education. This support comes in the form of temporary learning centres; teaching and learning materials; teacher training in positive classroom management and emergency preparedness; school rehabilitation; and community engagement in school-based decision making.

Such interventions enable children and families to better cope with the stress of conflict and displacement. "I'm motivated because people who get an education can succeed," says Mohammed. "I've seen it – they have good lives."

But there is more that can and must be done. Countries across the region have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, a commitment to prevent attacks on education and protect the victims of such attacks (see box on page 3). Now is the time for governments and their armed forces to work with humanitarian partners on specific plans for putting the Declaration into action.

BELOW: Northeast Nigeria. Mohammed, 12, attends a school in Banki that was reopened after being attacked. With support from UNICEF, the school now includes a high-perimeter wall, gates and teachers trained to provide psychosocial support to children affected by conflict.

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3. Fanta's joy: Protecting girls' education

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"Education is important. If a girl marries young, it's dangerous. If her husband doesn't care for her, with an education she can take care of herself." **– Fanta, 14**

Fanta lives in a makeshift tent in a settlement in Zamaï, a village in the Far North Region of Cameroon, along with 1,500 other displaced people – about 900 of whom are children. Wearing a soft, embroidered dress sewn by her mother, she curtsies as she shakes hands with visitors, her greeting barely audible. She avoids looking them in the eye, giggles and covers her mouth as she speaks.

But as soon as Fanta starts talking about the day a year ago when members of the Boko Haram armed group came for her family – really for her father, who was a police officer – the bashful demeanour changes. Her words become more measured, her voice stronger.

"I lived with anxiety every day," she recalls. "They would come three, four times a day looking for my father." At the time, her family consisted of her parents, three brothers and a sister. Today, only her mother and two younger brothers are left.

"They killed my father and my older brother," says Fanta. "They took my sister away. I haven't seen her since."

The widespread abduction of girls like Fanta's sister often targets those who are in school, as Boko Haram and other armed groups harbour ideological objections to girls' education. Girls who are abducted are frequently forced into child marriage. In addition, fear of violence and the need for protection in humanitarian settings may compel families to marry off their daughters at an early age for greater security.

ABOVE: Cameroon. Fanta, 14, attends school near the refugee settlement where she landed after the Boko Haram armed group attacked her family, killing her father and brother, and kidnapping her sister. Kidnapped girls are often forced into child marriage – not what Fanta wants for her future. She hopes to study and become a dressmaker.

IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a major obstacle to sustainable development, with devastating effects on girls, their families and their communities. Four in 10 girls are married before the age of 18 in West and Central Africa. They often drop out of school to get married, and early pregnancies can leave permanent damage to their health.

Marriage is not what Fanta plans for her own future – at least, not yet. "At first, I wanted to become a nurse, but now I hope to be a dressmaker," she says. "If I have income, I can help my family."

The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married or have children before the age of 18. Girls who remain in school are also less likely, later in life, to give birth to children who suffer malnutrition or die in their early years. In Burkina Faso, for example, children born to educated mothers are four times less likely to suffer from severe stunting than the children of mothers who did not receive an education. In Burkina

Faso and Nigeria, children born to educated mothers are four times more likely to survive past the age of 4.

Investment in girls' education will remain critical in the countries of West and Central Africa, especially in emergency settings, which tend to accentuate existing problems such as child marriage and gender-based violence. Whether it means rebuilding schools with gender-appropriate sanitation facilities or producing radio school broadcasts in insecure areas, every effort must be geared towards making education as accessible as possible for girls, in particular.

"We are safe here. There are guards, but life is hard," Fanta says, referring to the settlement in Zamaï. On rainy days, water pours through the torn fabric of the tent, but Fanta still goes to school every day. "It is my joy," she says. "I like to learn how to read and write. Back home I used to go to school too, but the last three years before we escaped, we were too scared…. They would kill you if you did."

The threat of school-related gender-based violence

In addition to attacks and threats against education, school-related gender-based violence is another dire threat that UNICEF and partners are working to address in West and Central Africa and around the world. It involves physical, sexual and psychological acts of violence in and around schools, underpinned by unequal access to resources and power, and inequitable gender norms and stereotypes.

Without increased efforts to raise awareness about this insidious form of violence – and effective measures to prevent it – many schools in both emergency and non-emergency settings will fail to provide the safe space that children need to realize their right to education.

4. Improving schools, preparing teachers

Through the integration of Quranic schooling and basic formal education, children can gain access to quality, inclusive, culturally relevant learning.

After the long dry season, the Dala Shuwari suburb on the outskirts of Maiduguri is hot and dusty. The desert-like conditions in Borno State, northeast Nigeria, are tough for young children at the local primary school. The heat is not conducive to learning. But at least now, corrugated shades installed in the classrooms with support from UNICEF provide some respite from the sun.

There are more than 500 children enrolled in the school, just under half of whom are girls. In one way or another, all these children have been affected by the conflict between government forces and armed insurgents in

the area. Many of their parents have been killed in the fighting, and many of the children have had to drop out of school at different times.

The school offers Quranic education combined with basic formal schooling. The state education authorities now consider such integrated Quranic schools part of the formal system under a strategy developed with UNICEF. Previously, children in religious education were considered to be out of school.

BELOW: Burkina Faso. In conflict-affected areas, preparation and awareness are essential. At the Yalgho Primary School, children take part in an exercise to learn how to shelter in place or evacuate if emergency strikes.

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UNICEF's contributions to Quranic school integration have included advocacy and awareness-raising; provision of teaching materials and teacher training (including training of female teachers); assistance with harmonizing a curriculum that incorporates basic numeracy and literacy into religious studies; and the establishment of benchmarks for quality learning. UNICEF is also helping to make integrated Quranic schools and learning centres more child-friendly as well as improving the education infrastructure – with gender-appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for girls and boys, for example.

At the school in Dala Shuwari, the vibrant and committed headmistress is a woman named Aisha from the local community. Aisha is convinced that education has the power to transform children's lives. She previously lived and worked in Bama, close to the border with Cameroon, but moved when the fighting there became too intense.

Now that her school combines Quranic studies with formal education, Aisha believes parents are more open to enrolling their children – and they are seeing the practical difference it makes in their lives.

"Some parents tell me their children can write now and help them write their names on forms and other things," she says. "Many of the parents never went to school themselves, so they can't write or read."

Aisha adds: "I'm very happy that all my children at the school are receiving an education. It will help them in the future. The conflict here put all the children out of school. But now they are coming back. They say they want to be a doctor, nurse, engineer. I pray for them. That's why education is so important."

BELOW: Cameroon. Conflict has a devastating impact on children's right to an education. Jemima (centre) was out of school for a long time when her family was displaced by violence, but now studies in a school supported by UNICEF.

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IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Teachers are, of course, central to fostering an environment that is conducive to learning. In emergency contexts, children are exposed to mental distress and loss, which can be detrimental to their capacity to learn and absorb new information. With proper support, however, a child can successfully go back to school and learn, even after the most traumatic experiences.

UNICEF supports efforts by education authorities across the region to upgrade teachers' skills – for example, by equipping pre- and in-service teachers to work with community members on emergency preparedness and response plans, and to provide students with psychosocial support. Such support helps children heal, recover and build resilience.

The story of Fatima shows how challenging children's past experiences can be and highlights the importance of psychosocial support in a school setting.

Fatima, now 15, is originally from a village close to the Sambisa forest in northeast Nigeria. One day, the insurgents came and asked her mother for Fatima's hand in marriage. When her mother refused, they threatened to kill her and Fatima. The girl was subsequently abducted while collecting firewood and taken to the forest, where she was forced into marriage with a Boko Haram fighter.

Throughout the marriage, Fatima says she was treated badly and beaten with electric wire, which left her with permanent scars. She was impregnated and gave birth to a child, who later died. She was then divorced by the fighter, kept in a house with other divorced women and deprived of adequate food for months.

Fatima eventually managed to escape and ended up in Banki, where she heard she could find help. Now she is enrolled in a UNICEF-supported school and has been receiving psychosocial support. She is also learning to produce liquid soap in a livelihood training programme. Fatima says going back to school has played a vital role in her recovery.

"I used to go to school before, but it was destroyed by the insurgents," she says. "In Banki, I was encouraged to go back to school. I've seen people who have gone to school, and I'm impressed by what they've done. I want to be a nurse or a teacher. I want to learn and share my knowledge with others."

ABOVE: Nigeria. UNICEF Child Protection Specialist Miatta Abdulai provides Fatima, 15, with much-needed psychosocial support as the girl attends school and rebuilds her life. Fatima was abducted and forced into marriage by insurgents in her hometown, Banki.

Stop attacks and threats against schools, and support quality learning for every child

UNICEF and partners call on governments, armed forces, other parties to conflict and the international community to take concerted action to stop attacks and threats against schools, students, teachers and other school personnel in West and Central Africa – and to support quality learning for every child in the region. *To reach these goals:*

States must protect education and endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, which calls for stopping attacks on schools, education facilities and personnel. UNICEF supports governments as they endorse, implement and abide by the principles of the Declaration; work to create protective learning environments; and follow guidelines for protecting schools from use by military or non-state armed groups during conflicts.

Teaching and learning must be designed to build peace and support girls' education – including tackling gender-based stereotypes, preventing child marriage, combatting gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and protecting pregnant girls' right to education. At the same time, curricula must be developed in consultation with local communities to ensure their relevance to local values, context and culture.

Authorities must build the capacity of education personnel through training in core knowledge and competencies, proven pedagogical methods and provision of psychosocial support. They must also expand the capacity of teachers and other school personnel to identify and mitigate risks in times of conflict, prevent sexual and gender-based violence against children, and refer child victims of violence to medical and psychosocial services.

All school-aged children, including refugee, migrant and displaced children, must be able to continue learning through access to quality education. Increased efforts by governments, communities and the private sector, working together, will be needed to provide education, protection and psychosocial support to these children. No matter her or his location or background, a child's right to learn should never be jeopardized – both for that child's sake and in the interest of our shared future.

Parents and communities must be essential partners in ensuring access to quality education during and after emergencies. They must receive all necessary assistance to build their knowledge about quality learning, enhance their commitment to enrolling children in safe and protective school environments, and participate in school-based risk mitigation initiatives.

Governments and their international partners must work to diversify available options for quality education and formalize culturally suitable alternative models, such as integrated Quranic schools, while maintaining learning standards. These alternatives can and should include innovative, inclusive and flexible approaches (e.g., digital learning, broadcast lessons or the use of education materials in braille) that are responsive to learners' diverse needs.

Donor governments must commit to multi-year, flexible funding to support education in emergencies and create linkages to longer-term education programming. More support is critical because programmes providing education in emergencies in West and Central Africa are severely underfunded. Data available as of 5 August 2019 show a funding gap of 72 per cent of the total US$221 million required for these programmes across seven countries in the region. This is one of the biggest funding gaps for education in emergencies globally. It puts education at risk, cuts a lifeline to children caught in conflict and blocks a proven path towards ending poverty and building peace.

Source of funding data: Financial Tracking System for Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. OCHA Humanitarian Response, 2019.

In communities affected by conflict, violence and instability, education is often the first service suspended and the last restored. Even as we address the immediate need to restore quality education in these communities, it is important to pursue innovative, longer-term solutions. When the emergency has passed, this work will have laid the foundation for high-quality, inclusive education – and more peaceful, prosperous societies – for years to come.

FRONT COVER: At the Yalgho Primary School in Dori, Burkina Faso, children take part in an emergency drill in which they practice sheltering and evacuation in the event of an armed attack.

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Child Alert is a briefing series that presents the core challenges for children in a given crisis location at a given time. This issue examines attacks on children's right to education in West and Central Africa, and provides examples of efforts to protect children and their learning opportunities in conflict-affected parts of the region.

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