**Making education resilient**

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After the initial rescue phase following an emergency, one of the most urgent—and daunting—tasks is to ensure the protection and education of displaced children.

Around the world an estimated 37 million children have their education disrupted each year because of natural disasters and the gaining effect of environmental and climate change. This year, in Pakistan alone, the floods have left more than 3.5 million children of school-going age displaced. The floods have also left more than 22,000 schools partially damaged or fully destroyed.

The recent calamity has added significantly to the historic woes faced by Pakistan’s fragile education system. Before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 floods, Pakistan was home to the second-largest population of out-of-school children in the world. Out of these 22.8 million out-of-school children, 54 percent were girls while 96 percent of the children living with various forms of disabilities also did not have access to formal education. Similarly, prolonged school closures during the pandemic had also significantly contributed to an acute loss of learning among the large majority of Pakistani students who did not have any access to learning while their schools remained indefinitely shut. According to expert estimates, students whose education came to a complete halt during the pandemic lost nearly two academic years of learning.

[Soldier martyred in cross-border attack from Afghanistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Oct-2022/soldier-martyred-in-cross-border-attack-from-afghanistan)

Being the seventh most impacted country by climate change, the sobering reality is that Pakistan must embrace more climate-induced calamities in the coming years. For the education system, this essentially means having to cater to a regular influx of displaced students and damaged educational infrastructure. This demands a carefully crafted policy and actionable plan that makes resilience inherent to the country’s education system.

The first step in this regard is for the education system at the district, provincial and national to have an integrated database detailing all human and non-human assets. Such a database would ensure that after any emergency, the state would not only be in a position to undertake an immediate assessment of viable infrastructure but would also be able to rapidly assess the availability of human resources to roll out educational activities in makeshift conditions.

This brings us to the second phase, which involves setting up temporary learning spaces in camp cities. Although these conventionally single-teacher, multi-grade centres are not in the least an alternative to formal learning, they are nevertheless important to provide essential protection and psycho-social support to children dealing with trauma. They are also important hubs providing children with the necessary knowledge on health, hygiene, and protection from violence as well as vaccinations, medicines, and child protection referrals. Finally, such facilities provide an important opportunity to extend support to the most vulnerable among the underserved, i.e., girls, children living with disabilities, and those belonging to minority groups.

[CAS Serena Hotels Int'l Men, Combaxx Sports Int'l Women Squash Championship concludes](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Oct-2022/cas-serena-hotels-int-l-men-combaxx-sports-int-l-women-squash-championship-concludes)

As the emergency moves from rescue and recovery to rebuilding, the most important priority is to ensure the speedy repatriation of children back to schools. This demands concerted resource mobilization efforts on the part of the state to ensure that when external help pours in, education does not take a backseat on the donor agenda. This also means prioritizing education within existing state resources rather than curtailing education development budgets to finance other needs.

There is immense value in learning from the work being carried out in this space by the country’s non-profit entities. Several recent white papers issued by the Education Champions Network as well as on-ground-work carried out by local organisations such as Awaz Centre for Development Centre offer low-cost replicable models for the state to learn from.

An earnest effort and intellectual investment into finally giving Pakistan a comprehensive education sector disaster risk management strategy and an actionable plan is, as they say, the need of the hour. Without such a blueprint in place our education system and with it the future of our children remains vulnerable to climate shocks.