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Prasanna S,

Chairman of Institute of Legal Education

No. 08, Arul Nagar, Seera Thoppu,

Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

Phone : +91 94896 71437 - info@iledu.in / Chairman@iledu.in



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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TIMES OF FRAGILITY: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF EQUITY AND ACCESS

AUTHOR - NIDHI SINGH* & UTKARSH SINGH**

* LLM, NATIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCES UNIVERSITY, NEW DELHI

** LLB, FACULTY OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF LUCKNOW

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Abstract

"Recognizing the positive aspects of conflict imply a profound change of perspective: it involves appreciating differences, enjoying controversies and embracing complexity"

Education is a tool which act as a window to the conflict resolution however it is the first victim of a fragile ecosystem originating due to various conflict finding their ground into inequality, gender disparity , a destabilized world order , cultural exclusion and infrastructural and resource limitation. In such a fragile world order, the goal of universal coverage of education are greatly affected and the ideal notion of equity, access and inclusion are constantly at bay.

This paper tries to address this key question with a focused approach on barriers restricting the realization of the equity access and inclusion of education with case studies highlighting the importance of community based approach, inclusive pedagogy and integrated humanitarian development strategies making education both a moral right and a pragmatic pathway to peacebuilding and resilience.

Keywords: Universal Education, Equity, Access, Fragile Education System, Sustainable Development Goals

I. Introduction

If we have to consider one right that acts as the cornerstone of social, political and economic development, then education emerges as the front-runner in this regard. However, as easy as it may sound, it is difficult to achieve in a world constantly hampered by conflict, political instability, chronic poverty and natural disaster. Collectively termed as the 'fragile' state of education, the realization of such crucial law takes the greatest setback. Structural flaws, pre-existing inequalities and marginalization of the vulnerable groups, particularly the female benefactor, disabled individuals and socioeconomic backward, it shakes the three pillars of universalization of education equity, access and inclusion.[1] Education system is not just characterized by the institutional functionality but is rather defined in complex relationships of safety relevancy and quality, providing a learning opportunity to the children and the youth, pillar of the next social order. Barrier to education either being the infrastructural, insecure socioeconomic order, displacement from their cultural and educational centers and perpetual exclusion from institutionalized education systems present a multidimensional facet of barriers to education. Such fragility has serious consequences: millions of children around the world being devoid of education, and many

[1] World Bank. (2025, April 14). *Delivering Education in the Midst of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV)*. World Bank.

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more attending institutions heavily under resourced, deviating from the path of injustice removal to being a medium of it. 103 million children in fragile/conflict-affected countries are out of school in 2024; one in three children in those settings are missing education.[2] The central issue the paper tries to address is whether in spite of their structural and contextual constraints, fragile educational systems can be changed to harbinger equity, access, and inclusion. Thus, the objective this paper tries to serve is threefold:

1. To examine the key obstacle to equitable, accessible and inclusive education in the fragile world order.

2. To look into the best practices being employed at global regional or local levels to promote EAI.

3. To suggest a way forward to bridge the gap between long-term systematic change and humanitarian response.

The investigative study done taps into the scholarly and the policy framework that tries to find the interposition of education into the fragile system and tries to look into the broader dimension that education serves both as a response to it and also as a mechanism of development imperative.

II. Conceptual Framework

A. Equity, Access, and Inclusion Defined

The synonymous use of the word equity, access and inclusion has somewhat diluted the context; however, they represent distinct and interrelated specs of education.

'Access' refers to the availability of opportunity to enter the education system and be a part of it. To broaden scope not only means availability of physical infrastructure but also affordability and safety of the institution.

'Equity' a broader concept from the general conception of equality extend beyond equal treatment includes fairness in outcome which may require a differentiated support for the disadvantaged groups to help them overcome the structural barrier.

'Inclusion' in its neutral conception focuses on the integration of all learners irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity or subjected disability thus promoting diversity and eradicating exclusionary practices.

Thus, these principles form the very base of the education system as cited by UNESCO- "inclusion and equity in education is the foundation for an education system of quality."

B. Fragility in Education Systems

Fragility in the context of education has more of a geopolitical notion and is categorically used for a state with a weak governance, instable political system and limited capability to provide for the basic services.[3] Extending the notion of education fragility can be understood as a system that is unable to guarantee continuous, safe and quality education. Fragility emerges where there is disruption in schooling due to teacher absenteeism, destroyed infrastructure and a clear lack of resource. Apart from this intrinsic fragility imposed by war or disaster, there is also an intrinsic fragility emerging out of and being reinforced by systemic exclusion. Examples of such exclusion can be centralized curricular system enforcing homogenized learning to neglect the minority languages or neglecting their special educational needs.

III. Theoretical Perspectives

The intertwined relationship of EAI and the fragile education system can be found in several theoretical frameworks:

- **Social Justice Theory:** this theory found its ground in brawls' principle of fairness and Sen's capability approach which emphasize on the redistributive and recognition aspect of the equity.[4] This means not just creating infrastructure aspects but also enabling that

[2] *2024 in Review – One in Three Children in Conflict and Fragile Countries out of School.*

[3] Rose, P., & Greeley, M. (2006). *Education in fragile states: Capturing lessons learned and identifying good practice.* INEE / DAC Fragile States Group.

[4] Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education.* Palgrave Macmillan.

learner acquires the capability to have a dignified living.[5]

- **Human Rights Framework:** this is derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the convention on the rights of the child, which perceive education as the cornerstone rights and creates a mandate on the states and international community to ensure access regardless of any setbacks being faced.

IV. Fragile Education Systems: Contexts and Challenges

Instability, weak institutions, and vulnerability to shocks are the brewing ingredient for a fragile education system that undermines the equitable, accessible and inclusive education system. These challenges present a very complex and interwoven complexity often overlapping with socioeconomically cultural and governance related lacunas. In this context, four major themes can be identified resulting in the fragility of education:

A. Conflict-Affected States

Conflict, and more specifically armed conflict, is probably the leading derived of fragility in education. In a war torn nation, such as Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan, catastrophic destruction of the infrastructure has led to a forced migration of millions rooting out an entire generation from formal education.[6] Educational institutions are targeted frequently and are used as safe heavens due to protection provided under international humanitarian law. Conflict-affected states are farthest from education goals; shows how conflict undermines access, quality, equity.[7]

Conflicts thus, have a multifaceted impact on education. Firstly, it disrupts the physical availability of the education infrastructure, creating a resource barrier in education delivery. Secondly, it creates a psychological shock in the evolving mind of children's inhibiting a children's ability to learn and making education delivery by a teacher a difficult task. Thirdly, the greatest challenge conflicts present is the gender-specific reconfiguration of education, which leads to the exclusion of girls out of the formal education system in fear of violence and often leading to early marriage presenting their own set of challenges. A UNESCO report estimates that in conflict-affected countries, children are 30% less likely to complete primary school than their peers in stable settings.

B. Post-Disaster Contexts:

Natural disaster is not only a setback for the socioeconomic order but also is a great hamper to the already fragile education system. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti destroyed around 4000 schools and greatly hampered the education of around 1.5 million children.[8] Similar was the case during the Ebola epidemic in West Africa during 2014-2016, which forced the schools to shut for months, bringing the education to a standstill, especially for the girls.[9] This study found that youth in the poorest households experienced the largest increase in school dropout rates post-Ebola.[10]

The greatest cause for such disruption is the lack of resilience in the education infrastructure and unstructured planning. Also, the global norms for recovery prioritize the food, shelter and the health of the affected, leaving education unsupervised and unfunded to absorb the challenges of the disaster. Also in such a fragile system, the children are forced to leave the education and tend to get engaged in labor, forced into marriage and migration.

In such a fragile ecosystem where education in itself is a privilege, the concept of equity and inclusion became a concern of the least importance. The post disaster infrastructure

[5] Hart, C. S. (2018). Education, inequality and social justice: A critical analysis applying the Sen-Bourdieu Analytical Framework. *Policy Futures in Education, 17*(5), 557-573.
[6] Loane, G., & Fal-Dutra Santos, R. (2017). *Strengthening resilience: The ICRC's community-based approach to ensuring the protection of education. International Review of the Red Cross, No. 905.*
[7] *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education* UNESCO (Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011)
[8] UNESCO. (2010). *Action plan for national recovery and development of Haiti.*
[9] Kabir, Mabruk. (2022). *Evidence on learning outcomes for adolescents in fragile contexts: a landscape analysis.* SEWG / UNESCO IIEP.
[10] **Smith, W. C. (2021).** Consequences of school closure on access to education: Lessons from the 2013–2016 Ebola pandemic. *International Review of Education, 67*(1), 53–78.

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that is set up is inaccessible to the children with disability, and the displaced group is excluded from even the delivery of such aid. Thus, disaster acts a catalyst to an existing inequality, thus making EAI as an important lens for disaster recovery efforts. "In education, an entire generation of children have seen their education interrupted. Nationwide school closures have disrupted the education of more than 1.57 billion students 91 per cent worldwide. An entire generation of students could suffer damage to their learning and potential." [11]

C. Weak Governance and Limited Resources.

The conception that fragility in education is associated with only war and disaster is faulty in itself. The structural weakness arising out of the political institutional framework is also a great impetus to such challenges. Weak governance system, chronic underfunding and the inefficiency of the educational institution in itself are the biggest contributor to the cause and erode their capability to provide for inclusive education[12] Democratic Republic of Congo is the suitable case where despite being a peaceful country, geographical challenges and weak governance have become the reason for barrier to equitable access.

In many of the global south country education as a pillar of policy is overly neglected by the states, which prevents the propagation of it to the lowest level of the strata and fosters inequality.

The budgetary allocation for the development of inclusive education is way below the recommended norms, creating a prominent urban-rural divide. The World Bank presented a data that showed that in a fragile system, the money spent on education is just only 2-3 % of the gap below the recommended norm of 4-6%. Bureaucratic inefficiency also acts as a hindrance to the effectiveness of the international funding, which fails to reach the targeted population, creating a question on the accountability of the governments.[13]

D. Displacement and Refugee Crises

The refugee crisis is one of the most pressing challenges to the achievement of EAI in the education system. A data suggest that more than 43 million people have been displaced worldwide and half of them are composed of children. This review highlights that education receives only 2% of humanitarian aid, the lowest of all sectors.[14] Refugee hosting states are presented with the challenge to integrate such a large number of learners into their already overburdened education system. Displacement thus presents itself with a great set of challenges for education. The refugee children spend a great amount of time in limbo without access to the formal education system. Further, if the education system is accessible, the language and cultural barriers present a great deal of barrier in the assimilation of such children.

Less than 3% of the humanitarian aid provided, as reported by UNHRC, is spent on education despite it being one of the most important priorities. They have to depend on the education provided by the informal education units set by various NGOs whose quality may vary and are not accredited by the national education authority thus limiting their accumulation into the formal streams of education.

In Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees are denied access to Bangladeshi curricula, forcing them into parallel systems with limited prospects for future employment or reintegration.

V. Barriers to Equity, Access, and Inclusion in Fragile Education Systems.

The aforesaid challenges that have been discussed are further compounded by the action of various specific barriers that act as a hindrance to the achievement of equitable, accessible, and inclusive learning. These

[11] UNICEF. (2020). *Don't let children be the hidden victims of COVID-19 pandemic.*
[12] Boak, E. (2022). *Education in fragile situations: a review of political economy and conflict analysis literature and tools.* Education Development Trust.
[13] ODI. (n.d.). *Education Aid in Fragile States: Delivering It Effectively.* ODI
[14] **UNHCR. (2011).** *Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). Refugee education: A global review.*

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barriers are rooted in social, cultural, and political dimensions whose intersection tend to prove detrimental to the vulnerable population. On a broader aspect, these can be divided into five major barriers: socioeconomic inequalities, gender disparity disability and special needs, language and cultural exclusion, and infrastructural/resource limitations.

A. Socioeconomic Inequalities

Poverty is one of the biggest detrimental to education in a fragile ecosystem. Households that deal with poverty for them, education becomes a secondary necessity. For them, the more the working hands, the better, so they tend to withdraw their children from the education and get them engaged in income generating activities that are mostly labor intensive. This not only deprives them of education but also led to their exploitation and violation of their basic human rights.

Education as we perceive in a democratic state is not free, but hidden costs are associated with it. Uniform cost, textbooks, examination cost along with the travel charges are also a cost that has to be borne by the families. In a fragile ecosystem where basic need is a challenge in themselves, such charges become unable to be borne by the families.

A study in Sierra Leone revealed that even after the abolition of official school fees, families were still required to contribute for materials and teacher allowances, disproportionately excluding poor children.

Moreover, poverty acts as an amplifying factor for other kinds of inequalities. Girls of low income household face a compounded impact of both gender based discrimination along with financial constraint. Disabled children of a poor household along with their physical challenges have to face the costs associated with special assistive devices and facilities that they are unable to bear because of their weak economic position. Therefore, socioeconomic inequality acts as a magnifying lens to all other fragility that exists on all other axes of exclusion.

B. Gender Disparities

The sustainable development goal 4 focuses on the challenge of gender inequality and tries to bridge the gap existent between the genders, but it is the harsh truth that gender remains as one of the most prominent causes of the exclusion in a fragile system and importantly in the field of education. The most prominent background for such exclusion is the fear of the violation of female modesty, harassment and abduction in a fragile system. These causes lead to disproportionate withdrawal of female students from the education system. "By the end of 2024, more than 52 million children in countries affected by conflict are estimated to be out of school; girls are nearly 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries compared to girls in more stable places."[15]

In Afghanistan, the return of Taliban rule in 2021 resulted in restrictions on girls' education beyond grade six, effectively excluding millions from formal schooling.

In northern Nigeria, the abduction of schoolgirls by Boko Haram has instilled widespread fear, leading many families to prevent their daughters from attending school.

Apart from security concerns, there is a cultural bias towards boys in regard to education as they are considered to be the bread and butter winner across various cultures. The burden of domestic responsibility is transferred to the girls from an early age, which deprives them of the time they can invest in the education thus lagging them behind their counter gender peers.

Further, the problem of child marriage in a fragile and conflict affected is of great concern. Parents sees marriage as a security nest for the girl's child and as a means to lighten their economic burden. Once a girl is married, they are seldom allowed to carry on with their education.

[15] *Education as a Lifeline: Building Resilience and Peace for Children* childrenandarmedconflict.un.org

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Apart from this, there are structural flaws that exist in relation to the education of the girl child. The institution that exists is devoid of female specific needs, and this problem is aggravated by a lack of female education staff in this fragile education situation. Further, the curricula that are being designed are gender insensitive and reinforce the stereotype rather than challenging them.

C. Disability and Special Needs

A UNICEF data presented an alarming figure of nine out of ten students with disability being excluded from a formal education system in a fragile education setup.[16] This data shows that children with disabilities are among the most excluded groups when it comes to the fragile education system. This does not arise only out of their own disabilities but also due to the existence of barriers to their inclusion. These barriers include:

1. **Physical Inaccessibility**: Lack of physical infrastructure compatible with the need of the physically disabled such as ramps, accessible toilets or transport services make the inclusion of these students practically impossible.
2. **Lack of Trained Teachers:** Teachers training module are not inclusive of the need of the specially challenged students limiting their participation especially to those of visually challenged or having hearing impairment.
3. **Social Stigma:** Disabilities are often stigmatized with these children being the prime target of the bullying or being hidden away by the families due to shame or fear of discrimination.

These exclusion are even more aggravated in the refugee setting. A study of Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that children with disabilities were twice as likely to be out of school as their peers, owing to both infrastructure barriers and the absence of specialized services.

D. Language and Cultural Barriers:

Language is a powerful tool of inclusion worldwide. Many states emerged on the basis of language, and language has served as an integrating and binding factor for them.[17] However, in a fragile context, language sometimes acts as a mode to create a national superimposed identity that may not align with the mother tongue of the marginalized group. This language now acts as a barrier to comprehension, participation and retention capabilities of the students.

In South Sudan, where more than sixty languages are spoken, the use of English as the primary medium of instruction disadvantages rural learners who speak indigenous languages.[18]

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are prohibited from studying in the Bangle language curriculum, and instead must learn through NGO-developed materials in Burmese, a language unfamiliar to many, further marginalizing them. Therefore, to make the education inclusive, a recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity has to be made, and policies and development should be accommodating of such diversity. However, fragile systems often lack the capacity or political will to implement multilingual or culturally responsive curricula, leaving minority groups excluded.

E. Infrastructure and Resource Limitations

Availability of a sustainable and inclusive Infrastructure is the foundational element of access yet in the fragile system, educational institutions are chronically under-resourced, non-existent and unsafe. Constant conflicting situation and disaster further bring the state of existing infrastructure to even a more poor state.[19] In the Central African Republic, for

[16] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2021, December 2). The world's nearly 240 million children living with disabilities are being denied basic rights. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fact-sheet-worlds-nearly-240-million-children-living-disabilities-are-being-denied

[17] Windle Trust International. (2023, June 27). Beyond enrolment: Addressing quality and language barriers in education. https://www.windle.org.uk/views/beyond-enrolment

[18] Awol, E. M. (2019). An examination of the challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in South Sudan primary education level. *Zanzibar Journal of Educational Research, 31*(1), 1–12.

[19] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2021, November 9). Nearly 240 million children with disabilities around the world.

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instance, only one in three schools has access to potable water and sanitation facilities, posing health risks and discouraging attendance, especially among girls during menstruation.

Apart from the physical limitation arising out of resource deprivation, it also extends to other facets of education. Teachers are underpaid, undertrained and often unpaid for months, hampering their morale and the quality of delivering education. . The result is that even when children can access schools, the quality of education they receive is insufficient to ensure learning outcomes.

VI. Policy and Global Frameworks for Equity, Access, and Inclusion in Fragile Education Systems

Owing to the fragility of the education system, the world community has developed together a range of normative framework along with policy framework and operational standards to safeguard access to education and maintain equity and inclusivity. This framework is devised as the end goal along with providing a practical roadmap for governments, development partners and humanitarian institutions.

The four major policy standards at the world level are:

- Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4),
- The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (KNEE) Minimum Standards,
- UNESCO and UNICEF frameworks, and
- Regional education compacts.

A. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)

Adopted in 2015 as part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG 4 commits the global community to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. "Unlike the earlier Millennium Development Goals, which focused primarily on primary education and gender parity, SDG 4 adopts a broader and more ambitious vision that explicitly emphasizes equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning.[20]

Key targets within SDG 4 highlight its relevance to fragile education systems:

• Target 4.1 calls for all girls and boys to complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education.

• Target 4.5 commits to eliminating gender disparities and ensuring equal access for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

• Target 4.A stresses the need for safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments.

SDG 4 acts as a normative framework that reminds the governments and international actors that crisis cannot be an excuse for exclusion and neglecting equity. Yet despite this, UNESCO suggests that with the current rate of action on SDG 4 goal millions of children will remain out of school by 2030.

B. INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (KNEE) has developed the Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery, published in 2004 and is widely used by humanitarian agencies. These standards make formalizing education an essential component of the humanitarian work and make it a primary goal rather than a secondary action.[21]

There are five key domains of the INEE framework:

1. Foundational Standards (community participation, coordination, and analysis).
2. Access and Learning Environment (equal access, protection, and well-being).
3. Teaching and Learning (curriculum, training, and assessment).

https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-240-million-children-disabilities-around-world-unicefs-most-comprehensive

[20] *United Nations.* (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (including SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). United Nations.

[21] *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.* (2024). *INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (2024 Edition).*

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4. Teachers and Other Education Personnel (support, supervision, and fair treatment).

5. Education Policy (enabling policies, law, and planning).

The core component of this framework is that along with restoring access to education, the action must also uphold equity and inclusion, with specific guidance for gender, disability, and minority inclusion. However, the challenge with this framework is that the actors are unaware of such standards and often the governments of fragile systems lack the capacity to align their national policy with INEE guidelines.

C. UNESCO and UNICEF Frameworks

• UNESCO has championed the idea of education as a global public good, emphasizing inclusion and equity as fundamental principles. Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Reports of UNESCO track progress of nations toward SDG 4 and highlight disparities in education.

Fragile and conflict-affected. UNESCO also supports multilingual education policies, recognizing linguistic exclusion as a barrier to equity.

• UNICEF, which is the leading UN agency for children, has operationalized education in emergencies through its Core Commitments for Children (CCCs), which establish minimum standards for education responses in crises. UNICEF programs often prioritize marginalized groups, particularly girls and children with disabilities, through initiatives such as "Learning for All in Emergencies."[22]

Another important initiative by UNICEF is the EDUCATION CAN NOT WAIT (ECW) FUND, which was launched in 2016. It finances multiyear education programs that take place in these fragile ecosystem states and primary target is gender inclusion and equality, disability inclusion and the integration of refugees into education. Recent data shows that ECW has reached to 5 million children through the financing of their partners and contributed to bridge the humanitarian-development divide prevailing in education around the world.[23]

D. Regional Education Compacts

Apart from the global framework, institutional setups and programs have been taken at the regional level that have sought to strengthen the education system of the fragile states. The prominent examples to it are:

In Africa, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025 (CSA) emphasizes inclusive and equitable education as key to continental development. CSA urges member states to integrate education into peace building and resilience strategies, recognizing the disproportionate fragility of African education systems due to conflict and poverty.

In the Middle East, the Jordan Compact (2016) represents a notable example of a regional education initiative tied to refugee inclusion. Under this agreement, Jordan committed to integrating Syrian refugee children into its national education system, with international partners providing financial and technical support. Though implementation faced challenges—such as overcrowding and resource shortages—the compact demonstrated how international burden-sharing can advance access and inclusion.

In Latin America, regional initiatives such as the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and its subsequent frameworks have emphasized access to education for displaced populations. Countries like Colombia have used these frameworks to extend education rights to Venezuelan migrants, although challenges persist in implementation and capacity.

These initiative are of great importance to strengthen the regional education ecosystem as the displacement from one region has a spill-over effect on the adjoining area, requiring collaborative solutions to tackle the problems,

[22] Aguilar, P. (2022). *The Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies: Landscape, challenges, and opportunities.*

[23] Nicolai, S., et al. (2019). *Global mapping report and analysis framework* (Education Cannot Wait). Education Cannot Wait.

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which will require policies that will transcend beyond the national policy silos.

VII. Strategies for Promoting Equity, Access, and Inclusion in Fragile Education Systems

The challenges as presented in the fragile context are daunting, however over the year with practical experience and studies conducted it can be concluded that a targeted strategy for different fragile systems can help to expand the blanket of access, equity, improve the quality and foster inclusion. These strategies operate across multiple levels: classroom practices, community initiatives, national policies, and international partnerships.

A. Inclusive Pedagogy and Teacher Training

Teachers are the focal point of fostering equity and inclusion. However, it is observed that teachers in the fragile education lacks inclusive aptitude in the fragile setting and are unable to address the diverse need of the learners'. Therefore, an inclusive pedagogy has to be devised, and teacher training programs have to be conducted to have them accommodate for the difference in ability, language and background.

International agencies have supported accelerated training models for teachers in emergencies, enabling rapid deployment while maintaining quality. Yet sustainability remains a challenge, as fragile governments often cannot absorb these teachers into formal payrolls, creating dependence on donor-funded stipends

B. Community-Based Approaches

Communities became the backbone of society in a fragile system where the state system collapsed. Community-based schools (CBS)—small, locally managed schools often operating in non-traditional spaces—have expanded access in rural Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Nepal. Studies show CBS significantly improves enrollment for girls, as proximity reduces security risks and cultural barriers.

Community-driven institutions also acts as an accountability check and ensure that the resources reach the intended beneficiaries. Community volunteers in some refugee camps have emerged as the para-teachers filling the void created by the teacher shortage.

However, the challenge still persists as this informal system has to be integrated with the national system to avoid the conflict and become temporary solutions.

C. Digital and Alternative Learning Modalities

Technological advancement in the field of education has opened an alternative to tackle the challenge, offering promising avenues for fragile contexts. However, the effectiveness still depends on the infrastructure reach, and a digital divide can further enhance the risk of exacerbating inequalities.

EXAMPLE 1: Radio education programs during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone allowed children to continue learning despite school closures.

EXAMPLE 2: The Iron Open Higher Education initiative provides online courses for refugees, bridging pathways to tertiary education.

EXAMPLE 3: UNICEF's Learning Passport delivers digital curricula for displaced and marginalized children.

E. Partnerships and Financing

For the fragile education system, financial constraint remains the biggest challenge. Out of the total funding for humanitarian aid, experts advocate that at least 10% should be earmarked for education; however, the trend still lacks this target.

Fragile education system for their need depends greatly on collaborative partnership that brings together various facets to create a pool to aid and finance the needs. Such partnership must also prioritize local ownership to better curate the fund allocation to address the needs in a more effective way.

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Conclusion

This paper has examined the challenges and possibilities of promoting equity, access, and inclusion (EAI) in fragile education systems. It has shown that fragility is shaped by conflict, disaster, weak governance, and displacement, each producing specific barriers—from poverty and gender inequality to disability exclusion and infrastructural deficits. Global and regional frameworks such as SDG 4, INEE standards, UNESCO/UNICEF initiatives, and regional compacts provide important normative and operational tools, but their implementation is hampered by funding gaps, sovereignty concerns, and donor-driven agendas. Case studies from Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Rohingya refugee crisis, and Haiti illustrate both the fragility of gains and the resilience of communities. They reveal that exclusion is not simply a byproduct of crisis but a political choice embedded in systems of governance and global power relations. Strategies for advancing EAI in fragile contexts include inclusive pedagogy, community-based approaches, digital learning innovations, and cross-sectoral partnerships. Yet critical analysis underscores that without addressing the humanitarian-development divide, power asymmetries in aid, and the structural roots of fragility, these strategies risk being partial and temporary. Ultimately, the pursuit of equity, access, and inclusion in fragile education systems is both a moral imperative and a pragmatic necessity. Education that excludes perpetuates cycles of poverty and conflict; education that includes fosters resilience, peacebuilding, and human dignity. As global crises intensify—from climate change to displacement—the urgency of building truly inclusive education systems in fragile contexts cannot be overstated.

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