Education for all: damning report on state of education in Africa

By Issa Sikiti da Silva

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The state of education in many parts of the world and Africa, especially in zones in conflict, is appalling, miserable and in bad shape, according to a 2011 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report set to be released today, Tuesday, 1 March 2011 in New York.

The report titled "The hidden crisis: armed conflict and education", not only says conflict is robbing 28 million children of a future, but also slams governments for diverting public funds destined for education into military spending.

Children exposed to rape, sexual violence

The report points out that armed conflict is exposing children to widespread rape and other sexual violence, targeted attacks on schools and other human rights abuses.

Out of 35 countries that were affected by armed conflict from 1999 to 2008, 15 are in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the report, which adds that children and schools are on the front line of these conflicts, with classrooms, teachers and pupils seen as legitimate targets.

"Rape and other sexual violence have been widely used as a war tactic in many countries, including Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Insecurity and fear associated with sexual violence keep young girls, in particular, out of school," the 2011 EFA-GMR says.

"Of the total number of primary school age children in the world who do are not enrolled in school, 42% - 28 million children - live in poor countries affected by conflict.

"Of the rapes reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one-third involve children (and 13% are against children under the age of 10). Unreported rape in conflict-affected areas in the east of the country may be 10 to 20 times the reported level. That would translate into 130,000 to 260,000 incidents in 2009 alone."

Report endorsed by Nobel Peace Prize laureates

UNESCO says the 2011 report has been endorsed by four Nobel Peace Prize laureates: José Ramos-Horta (East Timor), retired archbishop Desmond Tutu (South Africa), Oscar Arias Sánchez (Costa Rica) and Shirin Ebadi (Iran).

SA's Archbishop Tutu, who introduced the 2011 report, has been quoted as saying: "This report documents in stark detail the sheer brutality of the violence against some of the world's most vulnerable people, including its schoolchildren, and it challenges world leaders of all countries, rich and poor, to act decisively."

UNESCO says the report sets a comprehensive agenda for change, including tougher action against human rights violations.

It also recommends the overhaul of global aid priorities, strengthened rights for displaced people and more attention to the ways education failures can increase the risk of conflict.

The EFA-GMR, developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO, also slams governments for wasting resources of aid donor countries on military spending. "It would take just six days of military spending by aid donors to close the US$16 billion Education for All external financing gap," the report says.

Poor education in 'peaceful' countries as well

However, the poor state of education is not only confined to poor countries or countries in military conflict. Even in so-called industrialised or 'peaceful' countries, quality education is still an empty dream for many parents and pupils.

In countries such as SA, Africa's economic powerhouse boasting half of the continent's GDP, the situation is getting bad to worse as almost four million pupils do not have desks, schools lack basic equipment (libraries and computers), and proper security (gang attacks, armed robberies, sexual violence and drug dealers).

SA bought military equipment worth US$4.8 billion in 1999, yet its state of education is still dreadful and shocking.

The report cautions that most of the world is set to miss most of the 2015' six Education for All goals signed by over 160 countries in 2000.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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