



Background

Traditionally, education was not seen as a front-line humanitarian priority, but more of a longer term development intervention. This perception changed over time as awareness grew of the need and demand for formal and non-formal education in emergency situations,¹ and in 2003 minimum standards for education in emergencies were developed, articulating a minimum level of educational quality and access and early reconstruction. These are being revised in 2021 because of changes to the context of humanitarian crises, and now include climate change, pandemic, growing migration, and stronger recognition of the connections between child protection, safeguarding and education.² They are also being updated in light of the Sustainable Development Goals.³

Link Education did not start out as a humanitarian organisation, but due to specific crises which happened in countries of operation over the last six years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Link has grown in experience, capacity and commitment to respond where emergency and crisis affect education, with a particular focus on those most vulnerable. Link has also developed a Climate Change Approach Paper⁴ with strong linkages to this education in emergencies paper, due to the fact that many future emergencies are likely to be climate-change related. With growing conflict and insecurity in Ethiopia, a fragile situation currently in Uganda, and the possibility of further COVID-19 impacts, there is the potential that Link will have to adapt further to support education to continue in emergency situations.

Overall Approach

Link believes that education is a fundamental human right, and recognises that quality⁵ education is a means of protection, hope, and prosperity for communities and countries experiencing or emerging from humanitarian or other disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic catapulted many organisations, including Link, into responding to what became a global education crisis like none other, and Link drew upon existing education in emergency standards,⁶ partner and organisational expertise in assessment and response, and contributed to the creation of new strategies specific to the pandemic and to local context.

¹ <https://odihpn.org/magazine/developing-minimum-standards-for-education-in-emergencies/> downloaded 14.09.21

² ibid

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁴ Link Education International (2021), Climate Change Approach Paper

⁵ Emerging practice shows that when education is equitably available, of good quality, relevant, conflict and gender-sensitive, it can break cycles of violence and conflict, redefine gender norms and promote tolerance and reconciliation (EENET <https://inee.org/collections/gender> downloaded 15.09.21)

⁶ INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies: Preparation, Response, Recovery (2010)

In countries where Link works, we partner with government and civil society to improve educational access and outcomes for children, especially those furthest from education opportunity or at risk of dropping out early. Those children are often girls, sometimes boys, and often children living with disabilities. The same is true where emergency occurs and governments need support to develop, coordinate and implement an education emergency response, keeping in contact with students, schools and communities, and limiting the time that students miss out on learning. Children from the poorest backgrounds and who are vulnerable are often those most affected by emergency and Link has supported partners to conduct assessments to find out more specifically how an emergency has impacted on the most vulnerable children, and develop a response.

Understanding that gender-based and sexual violence are common, especially in emergencies,⁷ where the rule of law may be diminished and a culture of impunity prevail, Link works to strengthen safeguarding and child protection mechanisms working closely with partners, schools and communities. Link challenges gender norms which perpetuate gender-based and sexual violence, working with men and women, boys and girls, and is committed to upholding the highest standards of professional and personal conduct.

Globally, there is an increasing number of girls, boys and youth affected by crises, and a recognition that no child or young person should be left behind in terms of education or life opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone further light on this, and not only in the global south. The climate crisis will and is already disproportionately affecting the poorest members of societies, and is likely to cause increased migration within countries and across borders.⁸ In countries like Ethiopia a combination of the pandemic, the impacts of climate change, and growing conflict have the potential to further disrupt educational access and quality. Link is developing capacity as an organisation to adapt to these emerging humanitarian crises, engage in the climate change narrative, and build both into future programming.

Experience

UGANDA

In the remote rural area of Katakwi District which was heavily affected by violent conflict, Link supported the return of internally displaced people to their farms and villages to re-start their lives. Incursions by Karamoja warriors, and the violence of the Lord's Resistance Army had caused families to flee to refugee camps, where children grew up, missing out on gaining lifeskills they would need on their return to life outside of the camps such as cultivating land and growing food. Children were often traumatised by their experiences, and had only limited access to education.

Link Uganda focused on supporting the development of farming skills in the communities through the creation of community farming groups, and in schools, the development of demonstration gardens. Alongside this Link worked with district education staff and schools

⁷ <https://gho.unocha.org/global-trends/gender-and-gender-based-violence-humanitarian-action>

⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/>



to welcome children back, promote learner-centred teaching methods and create child-friendly school environments. Training for school level stakeholders and district education staff included teacher supervision and the development of participatory planning and accountability.

A former learner and project participant from Aketa Primary School took over a small piece of family land, grew crops, and after selling his products for two years, was able to buy nine cows which he then sold to buy his own three acres of land. He married, built up a second herd of cattle and trained three local men on the approach he had taken. The Headteacher of the primary school was proud of the boy who did not do well in school, but thrived in learning and using the farming skills he had learned with innovation and confidence.

MALAWI

In Malawi, Link has worked with the non-formal education system through support to Community-based education centres under the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Girls' Education Challenge initiative, with funding from UKAid. TEAM Girl Malawi provides educational opportunity to over 5,000 of the most vulnerable girls, who otherwise would not have accessed education. Link leads a small consortium of organisations each of which brings specific expertise and focus to the project.

Not long after the project started, the COVID-19 pandemic forced further re-design and adaptations to TEAM Girl interventions, which the Link team based on a rapid assessment⁹ to find out the status of project girls in their school communities, and the specific impacts on their lives and education. We found that there was very low access to technology like radio, mobile phones and internet, so most of the girls enrolled in the programme wouldn't benefit from distance learning options while learning centres were closed.



⁹ TEAM Malawi Rapid Assessment Report (2020)

Instead, we provided home learning packs including books, worksheets, pens and paper, and trained community facilitators to support home learning. We also provided information to parents and community members to help students continue learning while at home. Facilitators met their learners once a week in groups of three or four at a suitable location within the community which was easily accessible. They supported students to complete home learning journals to reflect on their learning progress and helped them with any challenges. Facilitators also visited learners with disabilities at home to discuss any additional support needs with them and their parents. Almost a quarter of learners reported feeling more anxious, so in addition to the academic work, facilitators covered COVID-19 prevention and emotional resilience activities with their students.

In a follow-up survey over 95% of students asked about their learning experience said that they found the content useful and teaching good quality. 75% of learners reported that they felt they were progressing well, and this is supported by the data from termly tests. “I am now able to believe in myself and to make good decisions about my life” said one TEAM Girl Malawi participant.

ETHIOPIA



The STAGES¹⁰ project in Ethiopia reaches 61,345 girls through the UKAid funded Girls’ Education Transition initiative, and is being implemented over eight years in 144 schools and four woredas¹¹ of Wolaita Zone, in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region (SNNPR). When schools were closed across the country due to COVID-19, Link supported partners to conduct a rapid assessment of the status of project girls, which highlighted that very few would be able to access distance learning via television, mobile phone and radio, that girls were anxious about missing their lessons, and about a rise in domestic chores at home, and that there was a heightened risk of gender-based and sexual violence in school communities, including early and forced marriage.¹² The migration of girls for work from school communities was also cited to have increased. One girl interviewed for the STAGES Midline Evaluation stated that, “COVID-19 has made education for girls more complex”.¹³

In response, Link Ethiopia joined the government-led national and regional coordination of the COVID-19 response, worked closely with zonal, woreda and community partners to keep in contact with girls during school closures. Working through community structures, including village and religious leaders and health extension workers proved to be particularly valuable, as was having already existing relationships with these structures prior to COVID-19. Members of Mother Groups, local government Gender Officers and Link team members visited the households of girls married during school closures to connect with them and encourage their return to school. Safeguarding and child protection mechanisms were strengthened across all project activities.

¹⁰ Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems

¹¹ Local government areas

¹² STAGES Rapid Assessment Report (2020)

¹³ School to School International (2021), STAGES Midline-1 Evaluation Report

In preparation for schools opening again the Ethiopian Government recruited many new teachers with the aim of reducing class sizes to reduce the spread of COVID-19 infection. Link worked with dedicated teams of local trainers to provide additional training for these teachers which encompassed health information, the social and emotional aspects of learning and returning to school post-COVID, and methodologies to help meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Similarly, school leaders and local government supervisors benefited from instructional leadership training, to develop their capacity to support their teachers and to continue to improve their schools. Specific sanitation and hygiene items were provided to schools as they reopened, including water canisters, soap, disinfectant and sanitiser.

Link Education is committed to upholding these minimum standards in emergency settings...



Communities participate

Coordinate activities with government and others

Conduct assessment to understand needs and barriers to education

Prioritise social and emotional wellbeing of students/school staff

Prioritise safeguarding, safety and protection

Support teachers to use learner-centred, gender and inclusion sensitive teaching methods

Support school leadership and supervisors to lead

Consider existing national and international policy and practice

Monitor regularly and evaluate to improve emergency response and accountability

Guided by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)