

Why building more schools won't achieve education:



Education is just the tip of the iceberg.

Education is one of the keys to escaping the cycle of poverty. Yet 58 million children are still out of school, many because their families can't afford the fees, or because they need to work to help their family survive. For half of those children out of school, war has put a stop to their studies, meaning they are falling behind and may never catch up. No matter where a child lives in the world, poor nutrition, gender inequality, poverty, or conflict can end their education before they even walk in the classroom.

Tackling these barriers to education is a more sustainable way to improve education access and outcomes than just focusing on building more schools. Here's how:

Equality and Power

Hidden school fees are common in many countries, making education too expensive for children from poor households. If that child is a girl, she is even less likely to go to school because her family may not value education for her as much as for her brother, or her parents may keep her home to care for her siblings. In Canada, less money is spent per student on education for First Nations students than for non-First Nations students, setting these children back before they've even started.

Challenging racism and sexism in our societies, and supporting programs that re-balance the scales to reach the most neglected children is what's needed now to ensure education for all.

Healthy Ecosystems

If you're hungry or sick, it's tough to focus in class. This is more than just a distraction; without enough safe, nutritious food a child's brain can't develop, and their ability to learn takes a nose dive. It may sound odd, but having clean water and toilets at school is essential to reducing gender inequality in education, as it's common for girls to drop out at puberty if they can't find safe, private toilet facilities nearby.

By fighting for food justice, clean water and sanitation for all, we can make sure that every child who has a chance to go to school will have the ability to learn and reach their full potential.

Partnerships and Solidarity

In many developing countries, years of under-funding and wage freezes have weakened local education systems, resulting in untrained teachers and worn-out classrooms. For students to finish school better than they started, governments need to commit more resources for teacher salaries, training and materials. This is a challenge, as many developing countries have been spending more money paying back loans to rich countries than on education or health for their own people.

Pressuring our governments to keep funding education at home and around the world, sharing skills and knowledge for teacher training, and supporting debt reduction and cancellation programs are sustainable ways to support education for everyone, everywhere.

Dignity and Human Rights

Education is a human right that far too many children are being denied because their communities are caught in conflict and war. When children are not in school, they are at an increased danger of abuse and recruitment into armed groups. Others have been denied an education in a way that is less violent, but can be just as dehumanizing: not being able to learn in their own language. When children aren't taught in the language that they speak at home, it limits their ability to learn.

If we don't help displaced children catch up, put an end to escalating global conflict, and support culturally appropriate education, major progress made in education over the last decade will be lost. In order to ensure education is equally accessible to all, schools need to provide culturally appropriate resources and be a safe place where students can learn free from fear.

Working to ensure respect for cultural identity, peace, and understanding will ensure that more children can claim their human right to education.

Related Stories...

On War, Stories, and Giving Back: Illustrating Liberian Books for Liberian Children

SCIC Member: [CODE](#)

I grew up in Liberia while my country was at war. My sister and I attended school, afraid that we would have to suddenly flee, never knowing if the conflict would force our school to close.

Many did. And now, almost an entire generation is illiterate.

Education: LookDeeper.ca

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Sitting under a tree, I would draw stories in the dirt. This was my way of bringing my ideas to life and expressing myself.

I would draw to escape my reality – much like reading a book – but there were no books around. There was nothing to do but wait for the war to stop and for the situation to improve.

I discovered from those stories that I drew in the dirt that I had a natural talent as a children’s book illustrator. My career has continued to evolve, and now I’m also working as a graphic designer and photographer!

When I met [CODE](#)'s Liberian partner, the WE-CARE Foundation, I was given the opportunity to illustrate four books with vibrant images that reflect Liberian culture. Seeing the first copies of the finished books was amazing. My little sister was so proud of me and what I had accomplished that she brought them to school one day, bragging about them to her friends.

My Turn to Give Back

My work as an illustrator is so meaningful to me. Drawing stories in the dirt allowed me to escape during a very difficult time in my country’s history. Now I hope the books I’ve illustrated not only get children interested in reading, but also provide adventure and joy.

When I have the chance to do something that gives back – I take it. So I was delighted when I was asked to travel to neighbouring Sierra Leone with CODE to help local illustrators create books just like the ones I worked on. It was wonderful to see how eager and talented the illustrators were. They saw the books I worked on and said ‘if you can do this, so can we!’ It was one of the most satisfying things I've ever done.

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Story by Chase Walker, Children’s Book Illustrator, Graphic Designer, Photographer. Originally published on codecan.org.



[CODE](#) is a Canadian non-profit organization with over 55 years of experience in the literacy and education space. CODE works tirelessly to ensure a supply of locally-produced, engaging and culturally-relevant books for children and youth, so that they can develop their love of reading, while preparing themselves for a brighter future through education.

In addition to training local authors, illustrators and publishers, CODE works closely with local teachers, school administrators and librarians to give them the skills, knowledge and confidence to effectively guide children in learning to read, write and think critically about the world around them. CODE works in Africa, Canada and the Caribbean.

Better Nutrition, Better Learning: Women Farmers For Food Sovereignty

SCIC Member: [Change for Children Association](#)

Lack of access to food is the main cause of food insecurity in Bolivia. Rural and indigenous communities depend heavily on subsistence agriculture, and people often experience food shortages due to frequent natural disasters and sudden changes in food prices. These factors affect the nutrition of children, causing serious and chronic malnutrition.

In developing countries, it is often women who do most of the farming, and with little reward. In Bolivia, the Mosesten indigenous women farmers behind the [Better Nutrition, Better Learning](#) project are bringing improved food security to their communities

Due to the lush rainforest geography and climate, many non-indigenous peoples have migrated to the Alto Beni region of Bolivia to work in the logging industry and in banana and citrus fruit plantations. Resources are being over-exploited for export and the rainforest ecosystem is being compromised.

In an effort to protect indigenous lands while responding to the high rates of poverty and malnourishment, Mosesten Indigenous Women have employed sustainable agriculture practices to successfully harvest and process food to provide nutritious, locally-grown food for the Government's school breakfast program.

The story of the student who must walk long distances to reach his/her school and spends much of the day hungry

is a common one. Parents of school children in Alto Beni, Bolivia all remember having a school breakfast program in place when they attended schools and all testify to its capacity to increase school performance amongst the students. Since the federal government passed its National Development Plan in 2007, highlighting the responsibilities of municipalities to take on this program, local citizens have been pressuring their municipal governments to fulfill their obligations to local school children.

Through collective organizing, investment in agriculture and support for small-scale farmers and sustainable farming practices, these small farmers are improving food security in their own communities.

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*Change for Children's program, Better Nutrition, Better Learning, combines training in agriculture and enterprise development to help women produce more food (**improved food security**), create nutritious & marketable food products and then sell them to*



Education: [LookDeeper.ca](#)

*the school feeding program (**improved income security**) ensuring children are well nourished (**improved child health**) and thus able to learn (**improved education**).*

Change for Children supports sustainable community development in Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean. It is through partnerships with community groups and individuals who are advocating for southern communities, that we stimulate positive, long-term social change.

In solidarity with southern partners who are committed to pursuing sustainable solutions, Change for Children is committed to understanding what our role is, as Canadians, in the struggle to alleviate global poverty.

Change for Children does not have offices in the developing world; instead, we support and empower local organizations who apply local knowledge and skills to solve problems and improve their communities. It is in this way that sustainable solutions are developed.

Our Partners: *Fundacion Renace is Bolivian-based social and environmental NGO with a 6-year history working with indigenous and rural campesino communities on sustainable agriculture projects. The Mosesten Indigenous Women's Group has been organizing in their communities for many decades, providing social and emotional support to women, and encouraging participation in community decision making.*