Data collection and the Safe Schools Declaration: building upon current practice

Discussion paper on implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration

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Worldwide, attacks on education continue to have serious consequences for the futures of children and communities living through conflict.[1] These incidents range from threats and the recruitment of children into armed groups, to the deliberate targeting of educational buildings and educators themselves, as well as the military use of schools.

The 82 states that currently endorse[2] the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) have resolved to take action towards the "protection and continuation of education in armed conflict".[3] One component of the SSD is a commitment by states affected by such violence to collecting data on attacks on education. Endorsing states have also committed, where in a position to do so, to "provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance" to other endorsers: this could include assisting affected states with data collection activities.

This paper gives a broad introduction to current data collection efforts to monitor attacks on education, highlighting some of the actors involved and the methodologies used. This review is not exhaustive, but seeks to demonstrate the different types of data collection frameworks, their purposes and contributions, as well as the differences between them. The paper also briefly explores some developments in the field of data collection, and potentially useful examples of state involvement in current data collection practices.

The purpose of this paper is to give a basic overview of the current state of the field, and to identify how practice could be supported and strengthened. Recommendations are offered on how states endorsing the SSD, as well as supportive civil society, can contribute to enhancing current monitoring and reporting efforts. With states set to review progress on the SSD at a third international conference on safe schools hosted by Spain in May 2019, an opportunity is

A destroyed school in Syria (Photo: Various agencies/Failing Syria report)

available to look at developments in the commitment area of data collection.

The value and purposes of collecting data on attacks on education

Developing a clearer understanding of attacks on education through data collection has several functions in itself, and can, in turn, facilitate the fulfilment of other commitments outlined within the SSD – such as ensuring the continuity of education, and victim assistance.

When attacks occur, data collection can help direct crisis response efforts and interventions to minimise harm to students and their mentors, the facilities they learn in, and prevent the disruption of education. Monitoring and reporting can also contribute to accountability in the event of attacks. If data collectors gather detailed information such as dates, precise locations, the documentation of the impact sites and weapons used, for example, this information can potentially be used for investigations towards prosecutions where violations have taken place. Understanding patterns of harm and the behaviour of armed groups in affected regions can also contribute to early warning systems and preventative measures.[4]

Data collection, furthermore, serves broader purposes, such as developing a global understanding of the problem of attacks on education, and supporting advocacy for an effective global response. It can also contribute towards measuring progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education, and the Education 2030 Agenda.

The current range of data collection efforts

An 'attack on education' is not a legal category, and various types of incidents are included in the monitoring that different organisations do. Some may only include violent attacks that purposefully target the provision of education. Others will include a much wider range of incidents, such as the issuing of threats or the persecution of teachers' unions. Some may exclude attacks on university campuses, if their focus is on children's education.[5]

Practitioners will retain separate definitions and scopes according to the purpose, function and context of their monitoring. Collecting data for accountability, for example, may require more detail and verification than data for advocacy; and insecurity may mean that while investigations on the ground may be possible in some contexts, remote monitoring systems will need to be deployed in others. Nevertheless, ongoing discussions to develop a shared, broad understanding of the concept of attacks on education, and how they should be recorded, are important to ensuring that the full scope of the problem is understood globally, and responded to.

Global monitoring frameworks

A number of organisations and frameworks undertake global monitoring and reporting of attacks on education. These efforts have a variety of scopes to their data collection, ranging from the documentation of violations, to the broader monitoring of the range of incidents that pose barriers to education. Some release findings publicly on a periodic basis, some release data continuously, while others report

internally and only to relevant governmental, non-governmental, and international actors. Ongoing monitoring efforts include:

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (MRM). The MRM monitors six categories of harm. The persistent occurrence of five of these, including "Attacks on Schools and Hospitals,"[6] cause conflict parties that perpetrate them to be listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. This activates the MRM in the country concerned, and means that an appraisal of the situation in that country will also be included in this report. Some countries where no conflict parties are listed for violations, but which are deemed situations of concern to the international community for the occurrence of these harms, are also included in reporting under the MRM.[7] The MRM is activated for the provision of "accurate, timely, objective and reliable information"[8] for use in United Nations reporting. The data is produced to inform responses by the UN Security Council and member states.[9]

At the country level, monitoring teams are organised through Country Task Force Monitoring and Reporting groups (CTFMRs). In relation to "attacks on schools," the task force collects information on attacks on school infrastructure, attacks on education personnel, threats of attacks, military use of schools, and other interference to education.[10] The specific information collected include data on the location of an attack, the date of the attack, the extent of destruction on education facilities, the means of the attack, the number of victims, and the perpetrator(s) of the attack.[11]

The UN MRM framework has robust verification processes. The scope of data collected is narrow, covering only direct physical attacks and the closure of institutions as a result of direct threats. Different CTFMRs also operate different data collection mechanisms, and there is not a shared cross-country database for MRMs. The UN MRM framework does not attempt to be comprehensive in its data collection; the standards of verification it upholds would require far too many resources to be comprehensive. Rather, it seeks to document, verify, and report on the most troubling trends of violations against children, including attacks on schools. In addition, it documents 'emblematic' or representative cases to illustrate the situation. The MRM also does not operate in all countries where attacks on education are taking place.

The **Education Under Attack** reports released periodically by the Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack (GCPEA) aim to mobilise concern and advocate against attacks on education, through giving a broad, global picture of the pattern of harm. The Education Under Attack research analyses "any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff...or education officials, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, materials, or facilities." The research also looks at the forced recruitment of children in transit to and from schools, events of sexual violence against students, and the motivations of perpetrators. It does not include gang or criminal violence.[12]

The Education Under Attack research has a broader scope than UN MRM, focusing not just on attacks on children, but on attacks on students, education personnel, and educational facilities at all levels of the education system. In addition, it analyses attacks occurring in

any context of armed conflict or political violence, not only those that are on the agenda of the UN Security Council.

Education Under Attack reports discuss the wider global climate of education security, and then profile the most heavily affected countries. These are those states that have experienced "conflict or... a significant level of political violence during the reporting period," and where a minimum threshold of attacks on education have occurred.[13] GCPEA researchers gather data from reports of UN MRMs, NGOs and other monitoring organisations (including datasets maintained on different specialist subjects, such as incidents of terrorism), analysis of media reports, and "interviews with groups collecting data in the countries profiled and with country experts."[14]

Education Under Attack has been selected as the primary source for UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)'s thematic indicator 4.a.3[15] monitoring progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.[16] The UIS thematic indicator reports on the "number of attacks on students, personnel and [educational] institutions," as well as the number of students and education personnel harmed in attacks on education. The data from Education under Attack 2018 was released by UIS in September 2018.[17]

Some monitors have more narrowly defined or specialist mandates. The Scholars At Risk (SAR) Network's annual report **Free to Think**, for example, publishes data highlighting attacks on academics and academic freedom, university students, student groups and campuses, and state censoring of materials and curricula. Data is collected from regional monitors, who relay incidents on a rolling basis categorised into six types of violations, which are then, following validation procedures, published by SAR.[18]

Insecurity Insight's Aid in Danger project includes an Education in Danger component, which monitors "threats and incidents of violence as well as protests and other events affecting education." These are included within Insecurity Insight's open-source **Safety in Numbers Database (SiND)**. This dataset focuses particularly on attacks against educators, and is broader in scope than Education Under Attack, but uses a narrower range of sources. It collates reports of those killed, injured, assaulted, kidnapped or arrested, as well as sexual violence against educators. It also includes reports of access constraints, facilities destroyed or damaged, occupation or use, and criminal activities in educational facilities. The basis of the data is "open source [information], public [and] confidential reports from SiND partner agencies."[19]

Case studies

A range of organisations document case studies of attacks on education that generate ad hoc data on single events, a particular conflict, one affected group, or a specific party to a conflict. Such documentation is primarily collected through open-ended or semi-structured interviewing and field research, often accompanied by quantitative data drawn from media reports, open-source databases, UN reports, government officials, or partner data.

International advocacy organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and humanitarian organisations such

as Oxfam, for example, produce case studies following high-profile instances of attacks on education. Several documented the mass kidnapping of female students in Chibok, Nigeria, by Boko Haram in 2014 for instance. Local or national human rights and other NGOs also undertake this kind of work.

This type of documentation provides valuable snapshots of attacks on education that can complement as well as feed in to datasets that aim to give a broader overview. The qualitative approach can provide important context, and in many instances elevate the voices of victims. Instability can be a barrier to access to affected regions, which can compel researchers to draw data from samples of convenience or contact subjects remotely.[20]

Developments in data tools

The magnitude of accessible humanitarian information is currently growing significantly.[21] The open sharing of data, in many cases across divergent fields and sectors, is changing a previously silo-ed landscape of humanitarian information technologies.

The **Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX)**, managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is an open platform for the sharing, consumption, and analysis of data. The HDX currently hosts 374 datasets regarding education and education in emergencies, which cover the location of schools, education statistics (such as enrolment and literacy rates), and crisis-specific indicators, including several datasets on attacks on education.[22]

Education Above All, in partnership with GCPEA, Insecurity Insight and others, maintain the **Education and Conflict Monitor** on the platform, to help centralise and visualise available information on attacks on education. These partners are also exploring how innovative technologies such as SMS reporting can be used to collect data on attacks.[23]

Leaps in aerial photography, geographic information systems (GIS), and geospatial mapping have also produced better, accessible data on the locations of schools, students and educators susceptible to harm. Increasingly cheap and reliable information communication technologies (ICTs) are also connecting students and educators in remote or attack-prone regions to state officials and rapid response facilitators, opening lines of communications and data collection both prior to and following attacks on education.[24] Broader access and open source data invites collaboration and scrutiny from any individual or group interested in the information available.[25]

Initiatives by states and state bodies

The SSD commits affected states to collect data on attacks on education and the military use of schools; it also commits endorsing states to provide international cooperation and assistance, which could include support to data collection.[26] Encouraging examples of state involvement and partnerships in data collection practices can serve as benchmarks, from which both affected and non-affected governments can build, towards better understanding and curbing attacks on education in a broader range of contexts. A few recent examples are given below.

In the **State of Palestine**, which suffered over 1,000 attacks on education between 2014 and 2018,[27] the Ministry of Education (MoE) has played a key role in data collection, as part of voluntary reporting under the MRM. Focal point monitors within schools that have been trained by UNICEF record attacks on education as they occur, with data then collected within the MoE, via a relay of information from schools to the district level. This information is then sent from the MoE to regional Save the Children staff and on to UNICEF, for a process of data cleaning and two-step verification. Finally, the incident and its corresponding data are entered into the MRM database, to be used in UN reporting including to the Security Council.[28]

Since violence broke out in **Mali** in 2012, highly responsive local level education officials have regularly relayed data to the Education Cluster regarding "school closures, school occupation, attendance information and information on exam centres in unsafe areas," for the sake of advocacy with the Ministry of Education and others for the protection of unsafe areas.[29] In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the Ministry of Education has supported Education Cluster assessments of attacks on education, using its communications channels to allow the coverage of thousands of schools.[30]

In 2015, with the support of UNICEF, the **Central African Republic** introduced EduTrac,[31] a digital tool using SMS networking that links teachers, humanitarian workers and government officials across otherwise remote locations. EduTrac enables the collection of data on enrolment, literacy and closure statistics, but could also serve as an early warning system and a channel through which authorities can be alerted to attacks on education, for their response.[32]

Recommendations

The Safe Schools Declaration has provided a means to stigmatise attacks on education at the international level. Endorsers have committed to strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms as a measure to protect the universal right to education. To advance this commitment, in the context of a third international conference on safe schools scheduled for May 2019, states and others should consider taking the following steps:

Affected states endorsing the SSD should:[33]

x   Share information at the third international conference on safe schools (and in other appropriate forums) on the capacities and activities in their countries to gather information on attacks on schools and military use, either by the state or other organisations;
x   Facilitate access and support to other entities that are collecting data, including international organisations and civil society, in the interests of increasing coverage and impact, and supporting impartiality in data collection;
x   Use the data collected on attacks on education to facilitate efforts to respond to the harms caused - including through the assistance of victims, and through taking steps to ensure continuity of education for those affected;
x   Embrace and support technological developments that can assist with data collection and sharing;
x   Share good practices in all these areas with other states at the third international forum on safe schools, and with civil society, to help advance implementation of the SSD.

Other states endorsing the SSD, including donor countries, should:

x   Offer funding and other support to data collection as a key activity that informs response, prevention and accountability efforts - whether undertaken by other governments, international organisations or civil society.

All states endorsing the SSD should, through tools such as national statements, expert input to discussions, and funding support:

x   Promote and support work to develop the centralisation of data and common understandings of the broad, global scope of attacks on education, whilst respecting the different mandates and focuses of local data collection efforts;
x   Encourage data collection that is holistic and disaggregated - for example by gender and age, and that records the means of violence used. Support data collection that provides adequate indicators to document gender-based violence;
x   Ensure all data collection 'does no harm' and operates with adequate understanding of local contexts and complexities.[34]

Civil society and international organisations should:[35]

x   Collaborate with national governments and the broader international community to support and strengthen the monitoring and reporting of attacks on education by states as well as international organisations and civil society;
x   Continue to develop collaborations on the sharing of data and development of technologies to facilitate data collection. When sharing data between partners, the privacy and safety of victims and intended beneficiaries should be respected;
x   Continue discussions on the harmonisation of definitions of attacks on education.

END NOTES

1 See Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack, 'Education Under Attack 2018' (May 2018) http://eua2018.protectingeducation.org

2 As of December 2018. For the most up to date list of endorsing countries, see https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/development-cooperation/safeschools_declaration/id2460245/

3 The full text of the Safe Schools Declaration is available at: https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf

4 For more information, see e.g. Human Rights Watch, 'Attacks on Education: Monitoring and reporting for prevention, early warning, rapid response and accountability,' 2010, https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/02/10/attacks-education-monitoring-and-reporting-prevention-early-warning-rapid-response

5 For further discussion on how different organisations and mechanisms define attacks on education, see Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict's (PEIC) 'Attacks on Education: Addressing the Data Challenge' (2015) https://educationandconflict.org/publications/publications/data_challenge.pdf

6 Following UN Security Council Resolution 1998, in 2011

7 United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Unicef, 'Guidelines: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict' (June 2014) https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MRM_Guidelines_-_5_June_20141.pdf

8 United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict 'Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations' (online portal): https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/monitoring-and-reporting/

9 For more information on standards of UN MRM, refer to the 'Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on Grave Violations Against Children in situations of Armed Conflict: Field Manual' (2014), http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/files/MRM_Field_5_June_2014.pdf or the UN Guidance Note for the Implementation of Security Council 1998. https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttacksonSchoolsHospitals.pdf

10 Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, 'Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998,' (2014) https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttacksonSchoolsHospitals.pdf

11 Protecting Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC) 'Attacks on Education: Addressing the Data Challenge' (2015) https://educationandconflict.org/publications/publications/data_challenge.pdf

12 ibid

13 ibid

14 ibid

15 Indicator 4.a.3 of the SDGs is the "Number of attacks on students, personnel and [educational] institutions", and will quantify how many individual attacks have occurred within a given time period. This indicator is included to provide a "broad measure of the safety of learning environments" within the context of the wider goal of universal Quality Education. (UNESCO, 'Metadata for the global and thematic indicators for the follow-up and review of SDG 4 and Education 2030' (2017) http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/sdg4-metadata-global-thematic-indicators.pdf)

16 Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack, 'Education Under Attack 2018' (May 2018) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf

17 Available at UIS Statistics, http://data.uis.unesco.org

18 Scholars at Risk (SAR) 'Free to Think'. (2017) https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Free-to-Think-2017.pdf

19 SiND Attacks on Education Dataset, available at: https://data.humdata.org/dataset/sind-education-dataset

20 For example, Human Rights Watch personnel investigating allegations of attacks on education in India had to conduct certain interviews by telephone to regions that were heavily populated by Naxalite insurgents, whereas data collection was otherwise first-hand accounts from researchers ('Sabotaged Schooling: Naxalite Attacks and Police Occupation of Schools in India's Bihar and Jharkhand States' (2009) https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/12/09/sabotaged-schooling/naxalite-attacks-and-police-occupation-schools-indias-bihar). Likewise, in their report 'No Place for Children: Child Recruitment, Forced Marriage, and Attacks on Schools in Somalia,' (2012, https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/02/20/no-place-children/child-recruitment-forced-marriage-and-attacks-schools-somalia), documenting attacks on schools by Al-Shabab militants, HRW relied upon the accounts of Somalis who had the means to flees the militants and relocate to safer hubs within Mogadishu

21 While access to ever-growing depositories of information provides opportunities for humanitarian engagement, it also poses potential risks to intended beneficiaries. The collection of metadata raises issues around privacy and accountability, as well as growing inequality in representation between "data haves and have-nots". Certain developing open-source technologies, such as crisis live mapping, could also be exploited by for example revealing lootable locations or giving data that could be used to assign targets for further strikes. For further discussion on the potential pitfalls of big data and humanitarian response, see e.g. United Nations 'Big Data for Sustainable Development' http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/big-data-sustainable-development/index.html

22 See https://data.humdata.org

23 See https://data.humdata.org/organization/education-and-conflict-monitor?sort=metadata_modified+desc

24 For an example of how ICTs can link previously disparate communities and states ministries, refer to the case of EduTrac in the section Examples of State Practice below.

25 Initiatives such as OpenStreetMap have used voluntarily crowdsourced data to compile maps to be utilised by first responders during natural disasters, for example. See https://www.preparecenter.org/content/openstreetmap-humanitarian-response

26 Global Education Cluster, 'The Role of the Education Cluster in Monitoring, Reporting and Responding to Attacks on Education; Mapping of Perspectives and Practises' (April 2016) http://educationcluster.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapping_Report_Attacks_on_Education_EC_Country_perspectives_in_tracking_FINAL_2016_05_31.pdf

27 Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack, 'Education Under Attack 2018' (May 2018) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf

28 The case study is described in Protecting Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC) 'Attacks on Education: Addressing the Data Challenge' (2015) https://educationandconflict.org/publications/publications/data_challenge.pdf p6

29 Global Education Cluster, 'The Role of the Education Cluster in Monitoring, Reporting and Responding to Attacks on Education; Mapping of Perspectives and Practises' (April 2016) http://educationcluster.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapping_Report_Attacks_on_Education_EC_Country_perspectives_in_tracking_FINAL_2016_05_31.pdf

30 ibid

31 Unicef, 'Using SMS to Reach Schools in Five Minutes in a Conflict-Affected Country' (June 2015) http://unicefstories.org/2015/06/09/using-sms-to-reach-schools-in-five-minutes-in-a-conflict-affected-country/

32 Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack (GCPEA), 'What Schools Can Do to Protect Education Under Attack and Military Use' (September 2016) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf

33 For more information on how states can enhance monitoring and reporting capacities, see 'Education Under Attack 2018' Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack (2018) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf and GCPEA, 'A Framework for Action,' (2017) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/a_framework_for_action.pdf

34 For more information on DNH principles, refer to the International Network for Education in Emergencies' (INEE) toolkit 'Minimum Standard for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery' (2012) http://toolkit.ineesite.org/resources/ineecms/uploads/1313/INEE_2010_Minimum_standards_for_education.pdf

35 For more information on how civil society and others can enhance monitoring and reporting capacities, see 'Education Under Attack 2018' Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack (2018) http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf

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