**LA 1 Article of the Week #9 Week of 11/30-12/1**

**Opinion: Education fund needed for children fleeing countries in crisis**

**By Anthony Lake, Project Syndicate, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.26.15**

NEW YORK – Some time ago, I met a young girl in Jordan’s large Zaatari refugee camp. Like the tens of thousands of other children there, she and her family had fled the ever-worsening conflict in Syria. I first met her in a makeshift classroom situated in a sea of tents. Later, I saw her again, playing with other children on a poorly built playground. I asked her where she would rather be, learning in the classroom or playing with her friends. I know what my answer would have been at her age. But she chose the classroom – and her answer says a lot about what this conflict has done. Of all the things she was forced to leave behind in Syria, her education was the one thing she could not afford to lose – not if she were ever going to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor and avoid a future dictated by poverty, violence and loss.

**Hunger For Learning**

I’ve heard that same hunger for learning from so many children affected by the crisis in Syria and other emergencies around the world. Children desperately want to go to school. Their families desperately want them to get an education. In the midst of violence and constant change, school is a place of learning and opportunity, a sanctuary for healing and health. It is a place where children can live a normal life and hope for the future. Education increases the chances that, someday, children will be able to support themselves and seek a better life for their families. Not only that, it also provides them with the skills to rebuild their societies. And it can give them a desire to seek reconciliation when the conflicts have been resolved and the catastrophes have ended. So reaching the children affected by emergencies – and providing them with the opportunity to learn – helps both the children and it helps the country they are in to grow. Leaders around the globe are preparing to adopt the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will guide development efforts for the next 15 years. Development goals help leaders better their countries so they can be more independent, make money and help the people in those countries. Focusing on education is extremely important as leaders discuss the SDGs.

**Goal: Universal Access To Learning**

The good news is that people around the world agree that schools can help create a more equal and stable society. The proposed education Sustainable Development Goal shows this. It calls for everyone to be able to get an education no matter what their background is. They have had goals like this in the past. The Millennium Development Goal for education called for everyone to have access to primary, or elementary, school education. However, the SDG is better. It is calling for universal access to learning – from early childhood development to secondary school and beyond. As we embrace the new education goal, we should consider one of the main obstacles to making it a reality: the rising number of emergencies around the world. According to a new report by the Overseas Development Institute, nearly 1in 3 children out of school today is living in a country affected by crisis. In the 35 countries most affected by violence, 65 million children ages 3 to 15 are at risk of missing out on learning. For the youngest children, crisis and conflict mean that schooling never starts. For others, it means that education is interrupted, never to be restarted. For still others, the quality of education is poor because of a lack of adequately trained teachers or appropriate materials. It can be bad enough that students will not even learn basic reading or writing skills.

**Funding Outrageously Low**

Some groups face particularly serious challenges. Children with disabilities rarely even get to go to school in developing countries. In times of crisis, they are especially unlikely to get an education. And according to new data released by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, young women living in conflict-affected areas are nearly 90 percent more likely to be out of high school or middle school than women in more stable countries. This is a huge problem, given that even a single year of additional schooling for girls increases both their earning power and the likelihood that they will send their own children to school. Though the number of children affected by crisis is reaching an all-time high, the funding to help support countries with education in emergencies remains outrageously low. In 2013, less than 2 percent of emergency aid went to education and learning opportunities. And though education is clearly a development priority, less than 10 percent of official development aid for education that year went toward children trapped in emergencies. To meet the new SDG target on education, our investments need to respond to the realities of a rapidly changing world. That begins with acceptance of a basic truth. Learning is not only a critical element of relief for every child in an emergency, but also a crucial investment in the future development of their societies. We must act on this knowledge, by securing greater and more predictable funding for education in unpredictable emergencies.

**Pay Now, Or Pay Later?**

Over the last few months an informal group has been considering a proposal to establish a new global fund for education in emergencies. Though many details remain to be discussed, the idea is gaining strength and we should build on that momentum. For we face a choice, one that we must make together: Should we spend more now on education in emergencies, or pay the price of a lost generation of poorly educated children who will someday not have enough knowledge from school to rebuild their broken societies? A generation of children who are denied the chance to reach their own dreams will find it much harder to give their own children a chance at a better future. And the long-term costs of that vicious cycle will affect us all.