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Advancing Education Solutions: Research for Scaling up Education Innovations in Emergencies and FCV-Affected Areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria

Toward Resilient Education Systems: EiE Capacities and Policy Gaps

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Executive Summary

This policy brief draws on a comprehensive risk assessment of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria, examining how social, political, environmental, and economic factors impact education in fragile and conflict-affected (FCV) areas. The assessment highlights growing risks such as terrorism, armed conflict, displacement, and natural disasters, which have led to widespread school closures and increased vulnerabilities for children and youth. Despite efforts by governments, humanitarian actors, regional and local bodies to strengthen Education in Emergencies (EiE) systems, significant capacity and resource gaps persist. The report identifies crisis-responsive education innovations, including Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and digital solutions such as radio to increase access to quality and equitable education in FCV-affected settings. It also calls for increased investment in emergency preparedness and response, mental health support, and inter-agency coordination. Strengthening resilience in national education systems is critical to ensuring inclusive, safe, and continued learning for children and youth in West Africa.

Introduction

Across West Africa, protracted crises and climate change are placing education under extreme pressure. In Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria, thousands of children are out of school due to conflict, insecurity, displacement, and environmental shocks. Globally, 224 million children of primary and secondary school age are affected by conflict and crisis, with 76 million currently out of school (Geneva Global Hub for EiE, 2024). **In West and Central Africa alone, more than 14,364 schools have closed due to armed violence—up from 13,200 in 2023—affecting 2.8 million children in 2024** (R-EiE WG, 2024). Over 5000 of these schools are found in Burkina Faso; over 19 million out of school children are unable to access school in Nigeria. Girls and children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by conflict and disaster due to increased risks of exclusion, violence, and limited access to essential services, including education.

With humanitarian funding shrinking and emergencies rising sharply, especially across the Global South, the learning crisis in Africa is accelerating, with devastating consequences for national development and communities. As the continent hosts the world's youngest generations, the global impact of millions of children missing out on education is profound and difficult to fully grasp. Access to education during crises must not be overlooked in favour of other basic needs. These regions are often affected by extreme and multidimensional poverty, lack of opportunity, and exploitation by armed groups. EiE offers not only a lifeline amid these challenges but also a pathway to a more secure and dignified future.

This policy brief explores how national education systems in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria can strengthen their resilience and continue delivering inclusive learning opportunities in fragile and crisis-affected settings, including the Sahel, Central East and Central South regions of Burkina Faso, the Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana, and Northeast Nigeria. It provides policy recommendations to enhance risk reduction, emergency preparedness, response capacities, and institutional coordination, while upholding every child's right to safe, quality education and protection from all forms of violence.

Background

In Burkina Faso, children, especially in conflict-affected areas, face severe hardship due to poverty, displacement, food insecurity, and disrupted education. Over 2 million IDPs have experienced repeated school closures due to terrorist attacks, particularly in the provinces of Séno and Oudalan. As of March 2023, the Sahel region, home to nearly 502,000 IDPs, was the most affected by internal displacement. Though less impacted, the Central East (notably Boulgou and Kouritenga) also suffers from insecurity, with 126 schools closed as of early 2022, affecting over 21,000 students and 650 teachers. In the Central South, schools remain open despite occasional community conflicts linked to traditional leadership.

According to the 2023–2024 Education in Emergencies report, 5,319 schools were closed across Burkina Faso, affecting over 818,000 students (including 394,000 girls) and 24,281 teachers. This accounts for roughly 20% of all schools nationwide. While 1,304 institutions have since reopened, they currently serve just over 262,000 students (MENALP and ST-ESU, 2024). Ongoing conflict has led to serious human rights violations, especially against women and children, resulting in repeated displacement, family separation, psychosocial distress, and school dropouts. In 2024, an estimated 3.4 million children required humanitarian assistance (UNICEF, 2025).

In Ghana, rural women, children, and youth face ongoing marginalisation, with education frequently disrupted by flooding, violence, and insecurity, especially in the North and Upper East regions. In districts like Bawku and Garu/Tempane, ethnic conflict has led to school closures, displaced teachers, and left many children out of school. Bawku's overcrowded schools now host refugees from Burkina Faso, where language barriers affect learning (AFC, 2025), and some schools remain closed due to insecurity, with over 400 teachers having fled since 2021 from the Bawku and Pusiga districts (Agbey, 2024). In 2024, six hundred teachers were posted to the Upper East with only 10 selecting Bawku Municipal for service as teachers.

Meanwhile, extremist groups operating near the Burkina Faso border heighten security risks, while tensions grow between host communities and over 9,000 Burkinabé refugees. Although camps were established by UNHCR in the Upper West and Upper East regions, funding cuts have halted services, placing over 2,000 school-enrolled children at risk of dropping out. These conditions enable armed groups (e.g. JNIM and ISIS) to recruit vulnerable children and youth and are worsened by the spread of illegal mining (galamsey), now present in 11 of 15 districts in the Upper East, which exposes children and displaced people to exploitation and hazardous labour (COGINTA Ghana, 2025; NABOCADO, 2024).

Nigeria presents a similar landscape where children, women, youth, and rural IDPs face significant risks due to limited educational access, poverty, unemployment, and structural discrimination. The ongoing Boko Haram insurgency remains the most critical threat, having caused widespread violence, school closures, children's abductions, and displacement, particularly in Borno State, in the Northeast region, severely disrupting education (Nigeria EiEWG, 2024). Since 2009, over 2,295 teachers have lost their lives, 1,400 schools damaged or destroyed, and more than 802 schools closed, leaving around 630,000 children, including over 327,000 girls, out of school (Nigeria EiEWG 2024a).

In IDP camps, 42% of children cannot attend school, and in Borno, 60% of primary-age girls are out of school. Among those who do attend, 72% finish primary school without basic reading skills. Literacy rates remain critically low, with only 35% of adolescent girls and 46% of boys in Borno able to read.

Despite ongoing efforts by humanitarian actors, access remains limited—over 800,000 people are in areas unreachable by aid. Gender-based violence (GBV) further threatens children’s safety and education, with 1,053 cases reported in Borno in mid-2024 (UNICEF, 2024). Additionally, over 2.5 million people remain displaced in the state, often living in overcrowded and unsafe conditions that compound barriers to learning (UNOCHA, 2025).

The destruction of schools, displacement of teachers, gender-based violence, and widespread displacement caused by conflict and violence as well as natural disasters continue to have lasting consequences for children and youth in West Africa, putting them at risk not only of missing out on education but also of further exposure to violence and exploitation, particularly by extremist groups that recruit and profit from illegal activities such as mining and human trafficking.

EiE Capacities and Policy Gaps

Evidence from Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria highlights promising efforts to support learners, parents, and educators during crises including psychosocial support (PSS), learning material distribution, temporary learning spaces, and school reconstruction. However, all three countries face challenges such as limited disaster preparedness, inadequate resilient infrastructure, insufficient crisis response resources, unsustainable funding, logistical barriers (especially in remote or insecure areas), a shortage of trained PSS professionals, and weak coordination among local actors. Still, each country has shown commitment and is taking steps to ensure education continuity in FCV-affected areas by leveraging non-formal education approaches and digital tools. For the purpose of this research, the EiE capacities focused on the following education innovations: 1) AEPs/Speed Schools; 2) Psychosocial Support and Socio-emotional Learning (SEL); 3) Digital learning; and 4) Girls-focused programming.

AEPs/Speed Schools, and Complementary Basic Education (CBE) in Ghana, have been widely implemented across all countries, particularly in target regions. However, in some cases, these programmes have yet to be extended to FCV-affected areas or adapted to evolving contexts, such as using digital tools. Alongside other non-formal education initiatives like catch-up classes, second-chance education, and peace schools, they have played a key role in ensuring continuity of learning for thousands of children. Despite this, gaps remain in securing adequate and sustained funding, especially during emergencies, and in adapting responses to local needs. Infrastructure is often lacking, teacher availability remains a challenge, and capacity-building for emergency contexts is limited (e.g. providing emergency response training to School Management Boards). There is also a need to systematically integrate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), risk mitigation, and peace education into the curriculum to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to emergencies and prevent conflict.

PSS and SEL also remain limited across the region due to funding issues, insufficient capacity-building and lack of targeted interventions. In Burkina Faso, PSS and SEL are gradually being integrated into the national EiE strategy, but most initiatives remain project-based. Partners like ST-ESU, UNICEF, and Humanity & Inclusion are developing teacher training and student support programmes, though their reach is still limited. In Ghana, the 2023 Safe Schools Programme mandates school-based counsellors in all schools, focusing on student and teacher well-being. However, GES lacks the resources to fully train them, especially at the basic level. While PSS is prioritised in emergency-affected regions, the national contingency plan (2023–2026) provides little detail on teacher training or prevention strategies. In Nigeria, psychosocial and trauma-informed teaching remains largely absent, with current support project-based and unsustainable due to funding challenges.

Moreover, the integration of cost-effective digital tools in emergency contexts remains relatively new across all countries, with limited policymaking, especially in relation to AEPs or Speed Schools. In Burkina Faso, efforts are underway to incorporate digital solutions into crisis-affected education, such as UNICEF’s 2024 Distance Learning by Radio Programme (PEDIR) and the use of community radio in remote areas. Teachers are gradually receiving digital training, but coverage remains limited. The Directorate of Information and Communication Technologies for Education (DTICE) is also digitizing

the national SSA/P curriculum for broadcast, though poor digital infrastructure in remote regions remains a key barrier.

In Ghana, radio- and home-based learning were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic through a multi-stakeholder partnership. Another notable innovation was UNICEF's Digital Learning Passport. However, the government is still in the process of exploring and testing affordable, rapidly deployable solutions to sustain education for children and youth affected by crises, including conflict. While the importance of digital tools is acknowledged in *Ghana's EiE Contingency Plan (2023–2026)*, there are currently no formal policies or frameworks in place to institutionalize their use in emergency education contexts.

In Nigeria, both national and subnational DRR strategies in education have begun incorporating digital tools, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, though implementation remains uneven across regions. In Borno State, the use of technology, particularly radio, has become a vital component of the education response, especially when integrated in AEPs. A recent policy initiative into the right direction was the *National Plan on Financing Safe Schools (2023–2026)* which advocates for multi-modal learning approaches to make education more resilient to future shocks by leveraging on technology. Yet, more coordinated action is required to institutionalize these practices, ensure equitable access to digital tools, and provide continuous professional development for teachers on technology use in emergencies.

Lastly, girls-focused programming, is key to recognizing the specific challenges faced by marginalized girls, including early marriage, poverty, child labour, and gender-based violence, and in ensuring continued access to education. In Burkina faso, the *Sub-Saharan Africa Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project*, funded by the World Bank, supports women's and girls skills development, encourages positive masculinity and challenges gender norms. Similarly, in Ghana, the *STAGE* program combines accelerated literacy and numeracy with life skills training to reintegrate out-of-school girls and adolescent mothers. In Northeast Nigeria, *Girls for Girls (G4G)* initiatives are improving girls' school access and retention while fostering leadership and life skills.

While several promising programmes are being implemented, particularly in FCV-affected areas, investment remains limited, and the overall response is insufficient to meet existing needs. Most interventions are still project-based and donor-driven, lacking integration into national education systems. Inclusive and crisis-responsive models such as AEPs, Speed Schools, and girls-focused initiatives show strong potential but require formal policy recognition and support for long-term sustainability and scale-up. Digital learning solutions, including remote and radio-based education, remain underutilized and are yet to be embedded in national education policies or DRR strategies. Experiences from COVID-19 in Ghana and ongoing insecurity in Burkina Faso and Nigeria highlight the urgent need for institutionalized, cross-sectoral policies that align with national education plans and ensure learning continuity for the most vulnerable.

Non-formal education thus remains insufficiently institutionalised and unsustainably implemented in FCV-affected areas across the three countries, despite its potential to promote inclusive and equitable innovations. Interventions also reveal weak coordination and limited information-sharing among humanitarian actors, both during and after crises. In Ghana, for example, DRR strategies often overlook the education sector and do not prioritise learning continuity. A lack of coordination between the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) hinders the alignment of EiE contingency planning with broader DRR efforts. Stakeholder mapping also reveals a disconnect between national/international actors and local, regional, and community-based structures. In response, AFC has initiated dialogue with NADMO and other relevant stakeholders to help bridge this gap.

In Nigeria, this research has catalysed ongoing discussions between education stakeholders and NEMA, the national DRR agency, to operationalise the link between education and DRR. The CSEA team has also launched a Policy Learning Working Group to support the design, implementation, and scale-up of AEPs in Northeast Nigeria, with a focus on Borno State. This initiative seeks to guide strategy, scale

innovations, and align education reforms with national development goals by promoting inclusion, resilience, and sustainable learning outcomes. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, CERFODES has initiated dialogue with the Ministry of Education, the Education Cluster, and other key actors to strengthen cross-agency collaboration and inform EiE policymaking. The organisation is also positioning itself to support the government in drafting the upcoming national EiE strategy (2025–2028).

Policy Recommendations

Considering the ongoing education crisis in West and Central Africa, the consortium recommends the following actions to strengthen EiE preparedness and response across FCV-affected areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria:

Prioritise EiE in National Budgets and Crisis Response:

1. Increase national education budgets to **at least 4-6 % of GDP or 15-20% of public expenditure** according to global education benchmarks and ensure consistent, transparent, and sustainable EiE budget lines at national and subnational levels. There should be at least 5-10% ear marked for education in Emergency programming to assist children remain learning in conflict affected areas—this should include more extensive support to Accelerated education programming and psycho social support to teachers/learners who remain in these areas. Tested education programming via radio should also be scaled up in the FCV areas.

In Burkina Faso, the government allocated 28.34% of its public expenditure to education in 2025, marking significant progress (Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Prospective, 2024). However, it remains unclear how much of this budget is directed toward non-formal education and EiE. By contrast, Ghana's education budget represented only 12.7% of total government expenditure in 2024, with non-formal and inclusive education receiving the smallest shares, averaging just 0.35% and 0.23%, respectively, between 2019 and 2024 (Republic of Ghana and UNICEF, 2024). In Nigeria, the 2025 national budget allocates only 7.3% to education, also falling short of recommended benchmarks. For EiE-specific funding, the National Plan on Financing Safe Schools sets aside just ₦27.4 billion for very high-risk states over the medium term (2023–2026), an amount that is largely insufficient to meet urgent needs, particularly in the BAY states, where over 2 million children remain out of school (Nigeria EiEWG, 2024b).

2. Ensure adequate funding for disaster management agencies to respond rapidly to education disruptions, including investments in early warning systems and school-level emergency preparedness plans. All countries showcase lack of inter-agency coordination and available funding for emergency preparedness and response, particularly at the local level.
3. Ensure sustainable funding mechanisms that reduce reliance on external sources and support the institutionalisation and scale-up of non-formal learning pathways, including AEPs, Speed Schools, digital learning, and girls-focused initiatives to reach out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) affected by crises. Although non-formal education is included in the national education strategies of all countries, it remains underprioritized compared to formal education. It is one of the most underfunded subsectors, and its crucial role in integrating millions of OOSCY is not sufficiently recognised, notably in the context of EiE.

Support Teachers and Strengthen Local Capacity:

4. Build the capacity of teachers, School Management Boards (SMB), parents, and community members in emergency preparedness, inclusive education, and PSS. These areas remain significantly underfunded and underprioritized across the three countries, yet they are essential for ensuring an effective and coordinated response during emergencies.

5. Establish a comprehensive package of incentives, including mobility benefits, housing subsidies, priority access to training, safety protocols, and wellbeing support for teachers in crisis-affected areas. These measures are critical to retaining staff, reducing absenteeism and burnout, and preventing school closures.
6. Governments should prioritise local teacher recruitment, including volunteers, who are familiar with the context, to address teacher shortages in FCV-affected areas. They must also provide comprehensive training on teaching methodologies, safety, and risk management, extending these efforts to non-formal and transitional education programmes.

Make Education Systems More Inclusive and Resilient:

7. To ensure EiE programmes efficiently address specific barriers faced by girls, children with disabilities, refugees, and displaced learners, contingency plans and strategies should incorporate context-specific, community-led approaches that prioritise equity and inclusion. For instance, this could include scaling the *Girls4Girls* initiative or collaborating with organisations of persons with disabilities to adapt teaching approaches and materials.
8. In the context of EiE, SEL and PSS, together with gender-responsive components are key to support learners and teachers well-being. Yet, there are not consistently embedded into formal and non-formal education responses across the three countries. To address this gap, EiE stakeholders must invest in capacity-building to train teachers and education officers to deliver and embed this support within their programmes.
9. Promote inclusive and crisis-resilient school infrastructure that is accessible (e.g., wheelchair ramps, flood- and climate-resistant structures), gender-sensitive (e.g., separate toilets), and safe (e.g., lockable classrooms). This is essential to ensure school communities are prepared for emergencies and remain open.
10. As part of prevention and preparedness efforts, governments should integrate disaster risk awareness, conflict resolution, and peace education into school curricula to strengthen learners' resilience and reduce risks of future violence. This is particularly relevant in FCV-affected areas, where ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts (as in Ghana) or terrorism (as in Burkina Faso and Nigeria) remain persistent threats.

Invest in Data, Monitoring, and Continuity of Learning:

11. Data gaps or discrepancies during emergencies hinder the development of responses that address real needs. Therefore, there is the need for all the three Governments to establish or strengthen crisis-sensitive education information systems with disaggregated data on attendance, learning, and protection risks to support timely, evidence-based decisions that can inform EiE strategies.
12. Evidence from education innovations showcases the power of radio and technology in reaching the most vulnerable during emergencies. Yet, despite their proven impact, these approaches are still only gradually being incorporated into learning modalities and are rarely reflected in education policy. This makes it urgent to institutionalise education continuity plans that embed flexible non-formal learning pathways using radio, mobile, and offline technologies, ensuring inclusive access during and after crises.
13. Given the current absence of monitoring and evaluation of EiE programming, responsible education stakeholders should implement participatory monitoring and evaluation processes that actively involve communities. This approach will support accountability, transparency, and locally owned solutions in emergency responses.

Strengthen Coordination and National Ownership/Localisation:

14. By regularly engaging through Policy Learning Groups and existing EiE working groups or clusters, coordination can be strengthened between ministries of education, disaster risk management agencies, and local civil society actors, reducing duplication of efforts and enhancing joint planning.
15. An inclusion and equity lens in education access amid emergencies is crucial to ensure no child is left behind in accordance with the UN SDG 4 and national education frameworks. Therefore, aligning national EiE and DRR strategies is key to ensuring the education needs of refugees, children and youth with disabilities, displaced learners, and crisis-affected communities are fully included.
16. Adapting national DRR frameworks to explicitly include and prioritize education access is essential for recognising education as a core component of national risk and resilience plans. Integrating education as a key pillar in both humanitarian response and development efforts will highlight the direct connection between DRR and EiE.

Based on these policy recommendations, the consortium advocates not only for an increased share of GDP and/or public expenditure to be allocated to education, including EiE and DRR, but also for stronger integration and coordination across sectors. This would better equip the education system, particularly school communities, to prevent and respond to emergencies while reducing reliance on external funding for projects and initiatives from both international organisations (e.g. UN agencies, The World Bank, GPE.) and foreign governments (e.g. FCDO, and USAID, which is no longer operational). Equally important is the need for ongoing teacher training and community capacity building to ensure that local actors, often the first responders in emergencies, can maintain access to essential services, including education, during crises. By regularly collecting and analysing EiE-related data, stakeholders can build more resilient, crisis-responsive education systems capable of withstanding future shocks, particularly those driven by conflict and violence. Moreover, sustainability can be achieved by leveraging local expertise and resources, and by fostering community-led, context-specific responses in FCV-affected areas across the three countries.

Conclusion

As conflict, violence, climate shocks, and displacement continue to disrupt education across West and Central Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria, it is essential to take stronger, more coordinated action to ensure learning continuity for all. This means moving beyond short-term, project-based interventions, often dependent on external funding, toward the institutionalisation of non-formal, community-led, education initiatives within EiE frameworks, aligned with DRR strategies and backed by sustainable funding. By investing in inclusive, gender-sensitive, and crisis-responsive approaches and empowering local actors, governments and partners can build resilient education systems that protect learning and safeguard futures, even in the most fragile settings. Above all, it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that no child or young person is left behind.

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