

NEWS RELEASE

Parents afraid to send children to school due to violent attacks in Kenya's North Rift, says World Vision

NAIROBI, Kenya (August 30, 2011) — As children around the world head back to class next week, many Kenyan parents in the country's North Rift are hesitant to send their children to school due to violent attacks on schools in the region. Ongoing community conflict is causing serious safety issues for students and threatening their health as schools are often the only place to count on a nutritious meal during the current drought crisis, says humanitarian agency World Vision.

Cyclical drought is a major reason behind this conflict, as communities clash over increasingly scarce pastureland and water sources. Cattle raids are rampant and when livestock is stolen there is no longer milk to feed children. Families caught in the crossfire often flee to safer areas and this displacement can lead to a lack of education opportunities for children, and in turn, malnutrition, when they miss out on school feeding programs.

"Strengthened efforts are needed to ensure schools are safe places," says Rose Tum, World Vision Kenya's peace-building coordinator in the North Rift region. "Some teachers have resorted to carrying firearms into classrooms for protection. Several schools have even dug defensive trenches so they can protect children from attacks."

World Vision recently surveyed parents in the North Rift communities where food shortages are a severe problem. Sixty five percent of parents said they send their children to school to ensure they receive food, but many also expressed fear that their children may become targets.

There are complex connections between conflict, education and the well-being of children in Kenya. Fear of violence is just one factor that impacts school attendance, but grinding poverty also plays a major role. Girls are often married at a young age and their education is then abandoned.

"Poorer families often can't afford to send their children to school due to the cost of uniforms or tuition fees and so those who need a meal the most may not get one," says Tum.

During a crisis like the ongoing drought in the Horn of Africa, education is critical to long-term, sustainable development work in places like Kenya where World Vision is supporting communities through the construction of classrooms, professional development for teachers, and awareness programs to promote education and peace-building.

World Vision started working in Kenya in 1974, and is currently responding to the drought emergency throughout the Horn of Africa with food aid, specialized health and nutrition programs, shelter, clean water and sanitation services. The agency's emergency response is operating in tandem with its long-term development activities that include agricultural support for small farmers and veterinary care for livestock.

Canadians can make a donation to World Vision's efforts in the Horn of Africa by visiting worldvision.ca or calling 1-800-268-5528.

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