EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (EiE) COMMUNITY

# When the Waters Recede: EiE Flood Responses

*Monthly Call | 12 November, 2024*

### About the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Community Calls

Staff, alumni and fellows from across the Teach For All network come together regularly to share ideas, solutions and resources to support students and communities impacted by emergency situations. If you'd like to become a Member of the EiE Community and receive invites for future calls, please complete this short form!

### Community resources

- Insights from the last EiE Community call
- Register for the next EiE Community call
- Join the EiE Facebook Community

## Key insights from this call



**IMPACT OF FLOODS**

- Traumatic Events
- Lack of Preparedness
- Importance of Accurate Information



**EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

- Partners' Relief Activities
- Alumni and Fellows' Leadership
- Community-led Efforts



**LESSONS LEARNED**

- Emergency Preparedness
- Tips and Advice
- Climate Work

## Insights on the Impact of Floods

**Traumatic Events**

When network partner communities are affected by floods, whether small-scale or nationwide emergencies, it's likely that impacted communities experience some level of trauma related to the crisis. For example, when 2024 floods devastated villages and towns across Nangarhar, Laghman and Parwan provinces, **Teach For Afghanistan** saw firsthand the extent of physical injuries, death and psychological impact. Many of their own staff and fellows lost personal possessions or even their homes, and over 800 public schools suffered significant damage. When their teams traveled across the impacted region to assess the needs, they saw children with broken limbs, flattened houses and other devastating sights. These floods were also a 'crisis within a crisis', as they occurred against a backdrop of four decades of war, the closure of girls' education for more than two years, as well as the arrival of half a million undocumented Afghans who have been forcibly returned from Pakistan.

After the devastating floods in Valencia, Spain, **Empieza por Educar** described the scenes as 'apocalyptic', resulting in 77,000 children being out of school for weeks following the floods. Communities rallied round to provide psychosocial support to one another, including volunteer systems to look after children so that parents could

focus on repairing their houses and streets. Additionally, **Teach For Bangladesh** fellows in the flood-affected regions described how fearful they were each time they left the house, having to wade through the deep floodwaters and risk falling into open manholes.

At **Teach For Poland**, when half a year's worth of rain fell in just three days, a third of their country was impacted by flooding. The rain overwhelmed drainage systems, rivers and reservoirs, with many families losing all their possessions and having to live in accommodation provided by the authorities. Due to the traumatic nature of this event, many system teachers remained on disaster-related leave for months after the crisis. Teach For Poland fellows saw symptoms of flood-related trauma among their students and system teacher colleagues, and have received training on how to respond to such behaviours. After the floods in Kenya, an additional source of community trauma that **Teach For Kenya** observed occurred due to Government-led house demolitions, evictions and forced evacuation of people living on flood-prone land. This greatly affected some of their students.

## Lack of Preparedness

An observation made by many flood-affected network partners is the lack of preparedness within their countries and their education systems. For example, although **Bangladesh** is a very flood prone country, the areas impacted by the 2024 floods are actually not usually at risk, meaning that adequate flood mitigation systems and preparedness procedures were not in place in this particular region. The result was the worst flooding in 34 years, affecting more than 5.8 million people and displacing 500,000. Similarly, although **Afghanistan** is a country vulnerable to natural hazards - including earthquakes, floods, droughts and landslides - due to the economic situation, there has been insufficient investment in preparedness.

In **Kenya**, the schools which Teach For Kenya support are chronically underserved and marginalised, with low investments made into their physical infrastructure. For example, most are in slum areas - makeshift structures with poor sewerage systems. Hence these schools were not prepared to withstand the vast 2024 floods. In **Poland**, Teach For Poland fellows observed the raised level of water in the river whilst walking to their school, and saw sandbags already laid out. The town's residents were kept informed of rising water levels, mostly via social media, but local authorities still weren't prepared for such a violent flood.

## Importance of Accurate Information

Network partners found it important to get timely and accurate information on the scale of the flood and the resulting community needs. **Teach For Afghanistan's** approach to this was to coordinate closely with the Directorate of Economy to get initial ground-level information, and then conduct their own house-to-house assessments to understand the impact in communities and inform their relief efforts. Similarly, **Teach For Kenya** conducted needs assessments, through their fellows and teacher coaches, across three regions. They collaborated closely with School Principals and other system teachers to determine the number of flood-affected schools that they could support.

During the floods in **Spain**, misinformation became a significant problem. Following the chaotic scenes, which saw the arrival of more than 600 litres of water per square metre, Valencia's residents weren't receiving consistent information from the

authorities and were relying a lot on social media, seeing images and videos of destruction. Fake news stories were prevalent, particularly when people weren't able to contact their families. In **Poland**, many local residents didn't respond to the call for evacuation, reporting that they didn't receive enough detailed information about the amount of water that would flow into their towns and villages.

## Insights on Emergency Response

### Partners' Relief Activities

Following the floods, **Teach For Afghanistan** immediately distributed food packages to impacted families, and installed solar panels and new carpets in 5 flood-destroyed schools. They shared life-saving messages in Pashto and Dari, using disaster risk reduction posters in order to educate community members and students about what to do in the face of future floods. They trained their fellows on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) as well as first aid. Their staff even donated blood for the injured patients at the hospitals. They continue to collect donations to their flood-relief efforts.

Following the floods in Poland, **Teach For Poland** launched an Emergency Appeal and successfully raised $15,700 for a flood-impacted school. This money helped the school repair its damages, buy a pump and renovate the destroyed heating system. **Teach For Kenya's** flood relief efforts focused on distributions of food (maize flour, cereals, sugar and cooking oil), and sanitation/ hygiene care packs, which went to 2500 of their flood-affected learners. Umbrellas and gumboots were also distributed to hundreds of their fellows, coaches, system teachers and headteachers. 1000 learners also received replacement learning supplies, exercise books and writing materials. Additionally, four hand washing stations were installed at flood-impacted schools, and Teach For Kenya helped clear school drainage systems and clean-up damaged school premises.

### Alumni and Fellows' Leadership

Despite **Teach For Bangladesh** schools and classrooms being submerged in water, students were still showing up to learn - whenever the water got low enough they sat at their desks despite their feet being in water. Each Teach For Bangladesh fellow displayed courage, resistance and a sense of possibility in the face of this adversity. Numerous fellows and alumni supported flood-impacted families through the distribution of food and clothes, coordinating aid relief across different regions, donating medicines, building materials and sanitary items. Some fellows even constructed bamboo bridges making transportation easier for cut-off communities, and hired boats to rescue stranded community members. Teach For Bangladesh's students also felt compelled to help, and they collected relief supplies (such as dry food items, water purification tablets, lighters and hygiene products) for distribution to their impacted peers.

**Teach For Poland** fellows from all across the country engaged in various fundraising efforts for the flood-affected region. For example, one fellow donated giant beanbag cushions for all the flood-affected students, so they could rest and relax. Another fellow led a Christmas present initiative, whilst another assembled care packages of hygiene products, canned food and bottled water. Another fellow coordinated with a national tourism company and arranged for the flood-impacted students to be given free holiday excursions around Poland, with accompanying psychologists. This initiative distracted the students from their harsh realities and also gave their

parents time to rebuild their homes. As soon as the floods arrived in communities, **Teach For Afghanistan** fellows immediately started helping that first night, by getting patients to hospitals, supporting injured people and launching fundraising initiatives.

**Community-led Efforts**

During the floods in Spain, the concept of 'community' was felt very strongly, with thousands of people from all across the country coming to Valencia to help. **Empieza por Educar** saw firsthand how teachers stepped up as frontline responders, going above and beyond. Schools across the region opened their doors to out-of-school students whose schools were closed. Groups of teachers came together via social media to plan how they could help, organising school clean-ups, etc. Community members also created an app for car-sharing - with hundreds of cars piled up and the Valencia metro line destroyed, mobility was very challenging. People also cooked food for the relief volunteers and delivered meals to elderly flood-affected people who were trapped indoors.

Community-led responses were equally strong in Kenya. For example, Mr Kariuki, a father of a **Teach For Kenya** student, is a retired soldier who has previously served in conflict settings and complex humanitarian emergencies. When the floods hit his community, he leveraged this expertise to coordinate the rescue efforts and evacuate his neighbours to safety during the night and the subsequent days of flooding. Hear more from Mr Kariuki in this video. Teach For Kenya saw many other instances of collective leadership and unity in the aftermath of the floods. Virtues of 'harambee' ("*all pull together*" in Swahili) and sharing came out strongly. For instance, there were far more community members in need, compared to the number of care packs Teach For Kenya had, so the community members agreed to divide all the items so that no-one went home empty handed. Teach For Kenya students also identified their most impacted peers, to make sure they received replacement learning items.

## Insights on Lessons Learned

**Emergency Preparedness**

Given Afghanistan's vulnerability to natural hazards, **Teach For Afghanistan** is now developing a Disaster Risk Reduction strategy with input from local experts. It includes a pillar on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). As their Director of Operations and Partnerships reflected: *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and the future belongs to those who prepare for it today."* Following the floods in **Spain**, the Spanish Government passed a law making it mandatory to train all students in Spain on the prevention of, and protection against, effects of climate change.

**Teach For Poland** has been reflecting on how to integrate new training topics into their programme to prepare their teachers for future emergencies. For example, psychological first aid; empathic communication (elements of Non Violent Communication); wellbeing and self-care; what to use in difficult moments (resources in and around me, my vision and motivation); and problem solving. They also recognise the importance of regular drills for improving community preparedness and helping people respond quickly during flood events. Such preparedness can reduce panic and also allow for faster evacuations and efficient sandbagging efforts. Teach For Poland also shared how the impact of climate change underscores the need for adaptive measures. For example, improved flood forecasting using systems like the European Flood Awareness System, which

provides early warnings that help regions prepare for extreme weather. Or enhanced infrastructure, such as reinforced levees, dams and reservoirs to absorb floodwaters.

**Tips and Advice**

When offering advice to other network partners who may in the future be impacted by flooding or a similar sudden onset crisis, **Teach For Bangladesh** suggested that other partners replicate their new 'Emergency Shelter' protocol. This thoughtful and proactive step ensures that in the event of an emergency, Teach For Bangladesh's Head Office and Regional Offices can be used as primary shelters for all their fellows and staff. **Teach For Afghanistan** advised that network partners have an 'Emergency Plan' ready before any disaster occurs, which has key contact numbers, lists of emergency supplies, instructions for regular drills, and financial preparedness for emergencies.

**Teach For Poland** offered the advice that, if operating in a flood-prone area, network partners should prepare an 'Evacuation Kit' in advance, in order to save time and to make sure people take everything they need in an emergency. This Kit could include essential items such as: necessary documents, a torch, lighter, face masks, paper map, can opener, non-perishable food for two days, notebook and pencil, raincoat, first aid kit, spare clothes, soap, cash and water. **Teach For Kenya** advised other network partners to create a small 'Emergency Reserve Fund' so that impacted organisations can quickly respond and support crisis-affected students immediately in the aftermath of an emergency.

**Climate Work**

**Teach For Bangladesh** recognises the importance of tackling the main root cause of flooding - climate change. For the last few years they have been actively preparing their students and their fellows to tackle the climate crisis head on. For example, through environmental education in their classrooms, tree-planting initiatives, creating green classrooms, designing green curricula, and showcasing local innovations such as biodegradable seed pens. Teach For Bangladesh fellows have been invited to speak about Climate Education at key6 global events, such as COP29. They also lead initiatives such as Climate Week, where student projects are launched on environmental protection, water conservation models, rooftop gardening and recycling. Their fellows lead fireside chats and climate awareness dialogues with students and parents, addressing eco-anxiety and sparking conversations using climate education music, rap and play activities. Their fellows have also supported students to form Disaster Emergency Response Teams and created a Disaster Literacy manual, through which students can learn about disaster preparedness, risk identification and response plans. They've studied cyclones, floods, heatwaves, earthquakes, lightning and fire safety, practised drills and studied emergency scenarios.

At **Teach For Poland** they recognise the importance of a long-term commitment to climate adaptation, as intense weather is becoming increasingly common across the world. Their fellows will start to teach about nature-based flood mitigation measures and enhanced natural flood defenses, such as restoring wetlands and riverside forests to create natural buffers that absorb excess water. They will also discuss with their students the importance of green infrastructure, like permeable pavements in urban areas which help reduce surface runoff, slowing the speed and volume of water entering rivers. **Teach For Kenya** also leads a variety of Climate Education work in

their schools, to build teacher and student readiness for reducing the risks of climate change in their country. Their fellows find exciting ways to equip their students with the mindsets and skills needed for climate action. They know that by helping communities address the root causes of flooding and other such catastrophes, then together we shall have solved such problems by half.

## Key Resources

1. Teach For Afghanistan deck and recording
2. Teach For Bangladesh deck and recording
3. Teach For Kenya deck and recording
4. Teach For Poland deck and recording
5. Empieza por Educar deck and recording
6. Insights on the Role of Education in Disaster Prevention

**Attendees dialed in from:**

Teach For Afghanistan, Teach For America, Enseñá por Argentina, Teach For Bangladesh, Teach For Chad, Teach For India, Teach For Kenya, Teach For Lebanon, Enseña por México, Teach For Nigeria, Teach For Poland, Teach For Slovakia, Empieza por Educar, Teach For Uganda, and Teach For Zimbabwe.