

## The multiple faces of education in conflict-affected and fragile contexts

Conditions linked to conflict and fragility – including poor governance, violence, repression, corruption, inequality and exclusion – may affect accessibility, quality, relevance, equity and management of education provision in ways which can exacerbate economic, social or political instability. Within a given context, education can help produce the benefits of inclusive and constructive integration of individuals and communities, socially, politically and economically. However, depending on the nature of design and implementation, education also has the potential to perpetuate or entrench dynamics of fragility. An understanding of these dynamics is critical to ensure that education, at a minimum, does no harm and, at its best, contributes to conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding.

### Conflict and fragility: Potential barriers to education provision

#### *Economic and financial impacts*

The economic and financial impacts of fragility and conflict on education delivery can result in a degradation of quality, a dramatic decrease or complete cessation of education provision and/or imbalanced investment at different levels or geographic areas of the education system. In addition to limited investment and availability of economic resources, uncoordinated and/or disconnected service delivery and the lack of transparency and accountability in conflict-affected and fragile situations can leave education systems vulnerable to corruption, neglect and poor management. Economic insecurity may prevent students from meeting the required expenses associated with education or force learners to pursue income-generating activities instead of attending classes. Limited economic opportunity may also have implications for the relevance of education for a significant majority of young people who find themselves unable to translate skills acquired into material gain.

#### *Impact of Violence*

Endemic violence, breakdown of rule of law, government repression and/or active presence of armed groups and/or state security forces introduce serious protection threats, leaving students, personnel and education facilities vulnerable to attacks, recruitment and abuse. Such violence – both directed against and occurring within the education process - has long-lasting consequences for education systems as well as individual learners. Curfews and checkpoint closures, landmines and destruction of school property can dramatically affect provision and access. Even when physically able to access education, learners and staff may be exposed to abuse, violence and discrimination that can adversely affect quality and learning outcomes and have devastating social and psychological effects.

#### *Social conditions*

Communities may rally around an education system to sustain it during conflict or degradation as a result of fragility; on the other hand, increased tensions and divisions associated with conflict and fragility may dramatically decrease public engagement in the education system. Unequal access to education along religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic lines is a common grievance contributing to and resulting from conflict and fragility, as are the irrelevance or exclusionary nature of curricula which privilege the history, culture, religion and language of one culture over another. Furthermore, conflict and fragility may disrupt the social fabric of society in ways which increase the vulnerability of particular groups, for example, forced migrants, women and girls, learners with disabilities or marginalized youth.

### Education: Potential impacts on conflict-affected and fragile contexts

Education's potential to either mitigate or exacerbate conflict and fragility is a result of nuanced interfaces between education policies, planning, and programming and the drivers and dynamics of conflict and fragility. Simply ensuring that children and young adults receive basic education services does not automatically translate into policies, systems and classrooms that will contribute to conflict prevention or peacebuilding. Schools and classrooms can provide the space in which people of different origins can be brought together and taught how to live and work together peacefully. However, the dynamics in fragile contexts can negatively impact the quality of what children and youth experience in the classroom and further entrench inequity, divisions, discrimination and structural violence along religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic lines.

#### *Access, equity and inclusion*

Access to education has proven itself as a contributing structural factor both fueling and moderating conflict. Education is a highly symbolic indicator of equity, linked to income-earning potential and the ability to diminish or perpetuate inequalities. Education policies or practices that exclude groups of citizens can contribute to broader patterns of

exclusion, cutting off individuals and groups from the economic and social life of their communities and countries. Additionally, identity issues can intertwine with equity and exclusion and play out within education systems via language of instruction, curriculum, pedagogy, and the teaching of history and religion, among other areas.

### *Relevance via content and quality*

Schooling impacts on individuals' ability to think critically and manage and resolve conflict. Schools and classrooms can provide the opportunity for students to learn the skills, knowledge, values and behaviors to resolve disputes nonviolently, respect human dignity and practice tolerance and nondiscrimination. However, in violent contexts, intolerance, hate and violence are often transferred to classrooms via messages in curriculum and textbooks, corporal punishment and discriminatory treatment. In addition, education systems that do not link to livelihoods, economic opportunities, mobility and increased standards of living risk entrenching disparities and development of grievances.

### *Management, structures and participation*

Structures of education systems, the management of them and the participation of stakeholders within them similarly interact with fragility at individual, community and national levels. The way in which the management and education systems function, and how stakeholders' participation is facilitated within them, can foster constructive interactions and relationship building or promote distrust and entrench intolerance. Decentralization policies and practices have the potential to increase equity, improve relevance and help solve a range of other local-level educational challenges. However, depending on how decentralization is implemented, it can work against participation and have negative effects on local relationships.

## Recommendations

The 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) on education and violent conflict and the World Bank's 2011 World Development Report (WDR) on conflict, security and development will put forth recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to undertake in order to enhance broad development and education goals while mitigating fragility and building peace. The INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility offers the following recommendations to be incorporated into both reports:

### **Education is more than service delivery**

Education must be recognized for the diversity of roles it plays in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, namely,

- as a stabilizing factor, and therefore as a service that should be delivered;
- as a potential source for contributing to the likelihood of conflict and perpetuation of fragility; and
- as a potential means to mitigate conflict, contribute to state-building and build more resilient societies.

### **Education must be considered from a quality as well as access framework**

A focus on quality is critical. Curriculum must be relevant to the social, political and economic contexts to enable learners to take advantage of or contribute to the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities, and both curriculum and teaching methods must be inclusive and free of bias in order for education to contribute to mitigating conflict and fragility, particularly in the longer term.

### **Analysis of education's role(s) in conflict and fragility is indispensable as the basis for education policy, planning and programming to ensure that education does not exacerbate conflict and fragility**

In-depth knowledge of the nuances of education's many interfaces with conflict and fragility is fundamental to developing policy, planning and programming for education in situations of conflict and fragility. Understanding these nuanced influences requires comprehensive qualitative analysis including a) through examination of the drivers and dynamics of conflict and fragility and b) analysis of education's interactions with those drivers and dynamics. Conflict analysis or assessments should include a full education sector diagnosis using fragility indicators as one of the core components of the assessment. Likewise conflict/fragility analysis should be included in the educational planning and sector review processes. Analysis should also draw on the extant quantitative data that is increasingly available.

### **Taking a holistic perspective of the education system is essential in conflict-affected and fragile contexts**

A holistic perspective on the education system must be ensured, including consideration given to secondary and higher education, as well as to alternative modes of delivery for children and youth who have missed educational opportunities. Additionally, education's capacity to build social capital and contribute to sustainable livelihoods and economic and other forms of development requires attention to a range of educational opportunities.