



Education sustainability in the relief-development transition: Challenges for international organizations working in countries affected by conflict

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the challenges that affect sustainability of educational support provided by international organizations during the relief-development transition in post-conflict countries. Given the growing consensus within the international community about the role that education can play in humanitarian response and the long-term development perspective that is expected to accompany educational support provided in these contexts, this qualitative study draws on structured interviews with practitioner-experts working in different types of international organizations to present the key challenges for the sustainability of educational support in the relief-development transition.

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1. Introduction

Education is a right protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), but over 28 million children around the world are currently out of school and are denied an education as a result of civil conflict (UNESCO, 2011). Traditionally, international organizations responding to humanitarian crises ignited by conflict addressed issues related directly to nutrition, healthcare and shelter, relegating education to the developmental sphere once a country stabilized. During the 1990s, however, many United Nations' agencies and international non-governmental organizations began to prioritize education as an essential component of humanitarian response due to the recognition that education can play a critical role in facilitating stability, imparting life-saving messages, establishing a sense of normalcy and inspiring hope for the future. As a result, there is growing consensus across both humanitarian and development agencies that "education reconstruction begins at the earliest stages of a crisis...[and should be] undertaken concurrently with humanitarian relief" (World Bank, 2005, p. 32).

The consensus about the role of education has developed amidst the changing nature of conflicts from inter-state warring factions between two (or more) countries' military branches to intra-state complex political emergencies that increasingly affect civilian populations. Within this changing landscape, a "relief-development gap" has been identified as the time after which "...humanitarian agencies leave an area [once a] crisis has

subsided but before incoming development agencies have established programmes" (Emmott, 2002, p. 2). When governments of the conflict-affected countries are unable or unwilling to assume responsibility for the delivery and continuity of education, the relief-development gap widens and threatens the sustainability of educational programs implemented by international organizations during the humanitarian phase of a crisis (Sinclair, 2002; Munslow and Brown, 1999). This article examines the challenges that affect the sustainability of educational support provided by international organizations in the transition from humanitarian relief to development in post-conflict countries.

1.1. Relief-development transition

The concept of a "relief-development continuum," which implies a smooth linear transition between humanitarian relief and development assistance, surfaced within the traditional decision-making processes about reconstruction following inter-state wars and natural disasters in which a central government continued to function and assume responsibility for its citizens (Sinclair, 2002; Munslow and Brown, 1999). The changing nature of conflict that erupted in the post-Cold War era, which increasingly entailed violent clashes between groups, factions and political parties within a nation's borders, challenged those assumptions. Hence, the concept of a "relief-development gap" emerged not only to account for the shifting dynamics of conflict, but also to address the failure of humanitarian and development agencies to adjust to the new reality. As such, the "gap" referred to the uncoordinated time and space that existed as humanitarian agencies were withdrawing from a particular country but development agencies had yet to arrive (Emmott, 2002; Suveiu, 2006).

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This so-called gap between relief and development, which is better conceptualized as a transition, is bedeviled by several challenges, including but not limited to: a “chaotic multiplicity of needs” and competition for limited resources (Moore, 1999, p. 2); “poor coordination, cumbersome donor procedures and unstable governments” (Emmott, 2002, p. 2); and international humanitarian personnel “ill-equipped to deal with development” issues (Demusz, 1998, p. 241). There is a clear need to sustain efforts initiated during the relief period and to resolve the “unrealized symbiosis” (Moore, 1999, p. 1) that continues to hamper the transition from humanitarian relief to development.

1.2. Sustainability

Sustainability and sustainable development aim to “[meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 24). Within education, the concept of sustainability rarely has been applied beyond issues directly concerning the environment. However, the concept of sustainability is intimated in discussions about “scaling up” educational reforms (Healey and DeStefano, 1997; Elmore, 1996; Uvin et al., 2000, p. 1409).

The importance of education sustainability was made evident in the work conducted by Grace Akukwe Nkansa, from the (formerly known) Academy for Educational Development, and David Chapman, from the University of Minnesota. They developed a “synthesis model of sustainability” that consolidates perspectives about sustainability from the following: economic models, which focus primarily upon the long-term economic benefits and self-sufficiency of a project once external funding ends; socio-political models, which look at the transfer of knowledge and skills from project implementers to those who will oversee the activity over the long-term; ecological models, which entail the preservation of resources to ensure “survival of individuals and cultures” in the future; and finally, innovation-diffusion models, which highlight the importance of local ownership and acceptance (Chapman and Nkansa, 2006, p. 512). The synthesis model highlights several key components that need to be taken into consideration when discussing sustainability within the education sector; however, the model’s perspective is limited in that it only addresses the management and socio-cultural dimensions taking place at the community level. Its development based upon the example of a politically stable country in Africa also limits its applicability to post-conflict environments in which a country has experienced a protracted crisis and is undergoing the transition from relief to development. Given the dearth of literature and research on education sustainability beyond the important focus on the environment, this article identifies the challenges confronted by international organizations in their efforts to sustain education programs during the relief-development transition.

1.3. Methods

This article draws on a qualitative study that sought to create a global perspective on the challenges that affect sustainability within the field of education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. The primary methodological technique employed for the study was in-depth, structured interviews with 12 practitioner-experts from a range of organizations, including NGOs, UN agencies and donors from Canada, Europe and the United States working actively in the field of education in emergencies. This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure the inclusion of organizations, and particularly individuals, who possessed information and educational expertise that could not have been obtained through the use of randomized strategies (Maxwell, 1996). The NGOs were chosen due to the size of their education in emergencies’ portfolios in comparison to other organizations (e.g. type and range of educational programs, and number of countries in which the organization was involved). The UN agencies were selected due to the prominent role that education in emergencies and reconstruction played in their humanitarian and/or developmental mandates. The bi- and multi-lateral donors were selected contingent upon the level of financial support provided for education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction work compared to others. Table 1 includes the list of organizations represented in this study.

The criteria used to select the individual practitioner-experts from each of these organizations required that their professional positions reside within the education departments of their organizations and that, when possible, they assumed the greatest degree of responsibility in regard to their organizations’ education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction portfolios. The participants were also selected for their longevity in the field (average of 15 years of professional experience) and their abilities to offer comparative perspectives through their experiences either working for other organizations during their careers or in partnership with other organizations that were responsible for the direct implementation of particular educational interventions. To elucidate a global perspective, all of the participants were based in the headquarters’ offices of their respective organizations. The length of the individual interviews ranged from 45 min to 2 h.

The identification and analysis of challenges were sought at the global level for three reasons in particular: (1) to ensure that the perspectives of the primary organizational actors in the field of education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction were accounted for; (2) to explore the ways in which the challenges identified by these individuals may have varied by type of organization (e.g. United Nations versus non-governmental organizations versus donor agencies); and (3) to determine the degree to which sustainability was considered a priority for the educational work their organizations provided in conflict-affected

Table 1
International organizations represented by practitioner-experts.

Name of organization	Type of organization
CARE	International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)
International Rescue Committee	
Save the Children	United Nations’ Agencies
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	
United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)	
United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)	
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)	Bi-lateral Donor Agencies
Department for International Development (Dfid)—United Kingdom	
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Multi-lateral Donor Agency
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)	
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	
World Bank	

countries. Sample questions from the interview protocol included the following:

1. How would you define “sustainability” for education programs implemented by international organizations in conflict-affected/post-conflict countries? What are the key components/critical factors?
2. From your perspective, what are the primary challenges confronting international organizations in their efforts to sustain education programs in conflict-affected/post-conflict countries?
3. Do the primary challenges change depending upon the country context? If so, how?
4. How do these primary challenges change depending upon the organization implementing the education program, if at all? [Please provide an example]
5. How do these primary challenges change depending upon the type of education program being implemented (e.g. teacher training, accelerated learning program, life skills, etc.)? [Please provide an example]
6. How is sustainability affected when international organizations set up parallel structures to the government/Ministry of Education? [Please provide an example]
 - a. When are parallel structures necessary?
 - b. When can they be avoided?
7. Is sustainability important? Why exactly?
8. Is sustainability a top priority for your organization? If so, why?
9. How does your organization measure and/or evaluate the sustainability of educational programs?
10. What do you and your organization need/require to be able to better respond to these challenges (e.g. resources, tools, training)?
11. Which policies/practices with regard to sustainability have you found to be most promising internal or external to your organization? [Please provide an example]
12. If education programs in these contexts are unsustainable, what are the short-term vs. long-term consequences?

Prior to data collection, a general list of categories was created that stemmed from a review of the literature as well as the author’s professional experiences working in this field. However, inductive analysis described as “*discovering* patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 159; emphasis in original) guided the overall data analysis process. Data analysis for the interviews continued during the transcription process and entailed adding new categories and sub-categories to the initial list for each of the questions asked. A second and more thorough review of the categories led to the consolidation of the master list of categories into a smaller, more manageable set of the challenges that appeared to affect the sustainability of education programs in the transition from relief to development. The excerpts or phrases from the interview responses that related to these challenges were highlighted and grouped accordingly. In addition to grouping the data in this way, the responses were also cross-referenced by type of organization in an effort to explore any similarities or differences that surfaced as a result of organizational affiliation.

2. Results and discussion: challenges for international organizations working in conflict-affected countries

The findings presented here reflect consensus across the practitioner-experts in this study about the challenges that affect the sustainability of educational support provided by international organizations in the transition from humanitarian relief to

development in post-conflict countries. These often times interrelated challenges are diverse and cover a wide spectrum of issues involving: the ways in which operational frameworks affect planning processes and organizational engagement in the transition between humanitarian relief and development; capacity building provided through technical assistance to governmental officials and community members; internal human resources development; coordination with and across partners; and funding and finances (or lack thereof) for education.

2.1. Operational frameworks for providing education in emergencies

An organization’s operational framework derives from a combination of the following elements: (1) the type of organization (e.g. NGO vs. UN vs. donor); (2) the institutional mandate and whether it calls for engagement in the humanitarian sphere, development sphere, or both; (3) internal organizational structures in terms of the relationship between humanitarian and development divisions (if applicable); and finally, (4) the nature and phase of the conflict to which an organization is responding.

A typology of the various organizations working in this field was offered by the World Bank representative, who reviewed the modes by which these organizations provide educational support and the degree to which these modes link to government. He stated:

“[Implemented by]” means different things to different people. Some projects are implemented totally by the agencies, some are done in partnership with the agencies, and some are done through the government by the agencies. Different modes of implementation have serious implications for [the way one looks] at sustainability. The World Bank works largely through governments which has its limitations. Generally the UN works in partnership with governments but handles a lot of the implementation itself. NGOs tend to work around governments (Interview, August 30, 2007).

This general typology of organizations has been accepted over the years; however, there are indications that many NGOs are making concerted efforts to work more closely with governments. Nevertheless, if a partnership with the government is deemed critical for ensuring the sustainability of certain kinds of educational support, then the ways in which different organizations engage with governmental partners is an important factor.

For UN organizations, “there is a role from their mandates as inter-governmental organizations to support system reconstruction” and work directly with governments (Interview, UNICEF, October 3, 2007). The UNESCO representative stated that his organization “has [an] in-built position to work with governments. . . [which is] a testament that we need to invest in planning, [put] systems back together on a stable basis, and reorient the education [sector]” (Interview, October 30, 2007).

Clearly, each type of organization has its advantages and disadvantages that ultimately affect the sustainability of educational support. NGOs may work more nimbly and efficiently than other types of organizations, but the challenges they face asserting their legitimacy in the eyes of the government can affect the sustainability of NGOs’ educational support. UN agencies may have better resources to draw upon as well as an obligation to collaborate with governmental partners, but bureaucratic hurdles both within these agencies as well as the governments with which they are working can impede sustainability. Donor agencies, which do not work as direct implementing agencies, must work through governments and mediate any political resistance that may emerge; such resistance can slow down progress and impede the sustainability of educational support.

For all of these organizations, the ways in which their organizational mandates position them in the humanitarian and development spheres and subsequently their role with governments elicit a slightly different set of challenges. The representative from UNESCO addressed these concerns by stating that:

Many [organizations] define themselves in terms of emergency response, but do they define themselves in terms of development agencies? I think that's a real issue on the part of some of them who go in [early] and brave the difficulties. Do they have the mission to really continue forwards? Do they have staff, resources, technical capacity to do that? I think that's a real challenge for some of them because many of them don't have sustained economic support unless they have a very good relationship with the parent donor country to actually offer that long-term engagement (Interview, October 30, 2007).

Therefore, organizations guided by a humanitarian mandate that want to sustain their educational support beyond the acute emergency phase—i.e. the immediate onset of a crisis during which “children may be cut off from their existing schools and communities” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 21)—must do one or both of the following: (1) secure appropriate funding, staffing and technical expertise for their organizations to be able to continue their work over a longer time period; and/or (2) establish partnerships with other international organizations or governmental counterparts in order to transfer the educational support provided prior to withdrawing from the country.

For these organizations that rely on mandates to work within both the humanitarian and development spheres and are structured to do so internally, challenges remain. Within the donor group, the representatives for both the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and USAID cited challenges that stem from their own organizations' internal structural divides between the humanitarian and development sectors. According to the representative for the Dutch Ministry:

One big challenge is to bridge the gap between humanitarian response and the transition to development. I can look at two divisions within the Ministry, one that takes care of humanitarian assistance and the other reconstruction and good governance in transition situations. They are in the same department mind you, but there is not a smooth collaboration between the two and the dynamics are quite different also. The humanitarian division can just react to any emergency through Flash Appeals and CAPs [the Consolidated Appeals Process] and they act on the waves of publicity while the other engaged in reconstruction has to act in a more difficult way. There's not much interest by the media or public. The work is not very glamorous. It is quite difficult to find what agents to support in what way. It's a completely different type of work (Interview, September 3, 2007).

Similarly the USAID representative highlighted the challenges stemming from internal structures within her organization in which the Office of Transition Initiatives does not have a long-term mandate for education work, but the Office for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade—in which the education team is located—does not have the ability to work in crisis situations. She also pointed out additional challenges for USAID in regard to political pressures from the United States government and the lack of continuous funding:

The Office of Transition Initiatives will do a fabulous job working with vocational skills for returned combatants for instance, but they have no capacity to take it to the second phase and try to integrate it with the Ministry of Education and

host government. And that's where USAID Education should come in, but we are tied by restrictions by Congress to only work in formal education. It's very hard for us to work in non-formal education. A part of USAID will start a great program, with combatants let's say, and literacy and education, but no one within USAID can really follow that and take it the second step toward more sustainability because of the funding restrictions. That's a huge issue for us in fragile states (Interview, September 6, 2007).

Whether an institutional mandate covers one particular phase or the entire spectrum of emergency and development work, the internal challenges that these organizations face and their influence on the sustainability of educational support are multifaceted. Organizations with a narrower focus on the humanitarian phase need to secure the financial and human resources, internally or vis-à-vis external partners, to continue their education work. Organizations with broader mandates encompassing the relief-development transition must overcome internal challenges that hinder different divisions from working effectively with one another. Organizations that focus predominantly on the development sphere face pressure to engage earlier with humanitarian actors in order to better plan the transfer of responsibility for educational support from one group to another.

2.1.1. Long-term planning

The processes that organizations facilitate to create their vision and plans for educational support in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries are inevitably multifaceted; however, the practitioner-experts in this study identified a few select challenges that can be equated with the vision and planning process that include: the need for long-term planning, continuity of engagement, close collaboration with the government, and the integration of parallel and complementary structures into the system.

The UNICEF representative noted the importance of vision and planning in tandem with the need for long-term funding and ongoing support from various arenas beyond the education sector: “One [challenge] for sustainability is our own short-term vision and short-term funding cycles, which leads to moving on to different priorities be they in different countries, or being redefined in organizations or [by] donors” (Interview, October 3, 2007).

The CARE representative discussed the need for advanced, long-term planning that entails clear steps for how and when an organization will hand over a particular project or program to the governmental authorities, including capacity building efforts and close coordination with the government throughout the process:

I think CARE is very conscious that we are not there forever, and that is not the role that we should be taking of being a service delivery agency. So the kinds of programs that we implement have a phase [during which] we want to turn it over to the government agency and have activated [plans] around goals [in which] building capacity of the government is one of the program activities. There is a phase in and phase out for us (Interview, September 10, 2007).

Deeper engagement with governmental counterparts has become the goal of most organizations working in this field; however, this transition to government is challenging given the capacities of the government to assume responsibility in post-conflict settings. When asked how CARE prepares for this type of phased approach and transition period, the practitioner-expert stressed the need to do the following: “When and how you handle things with the government needs to be implemented in advance. You need to have indicators as to when the government is ready...and when the milestones are achieved” (Interview, September 10, 2007).

In addition to the importance that CARE placed on its collaboration with the government, she also talked about complementing this phased, top-down work at the governmental level with a bottom-up approach at the community level:

In many countries CARE has worked directly with the community trying to make sustainable structures within the community, largely...with the early childhood development and education programs. Making community structures more sustainable, finding players (could be NGOs, religious or faith-based organizations), [and] working with them to build optimum capacity for that unit to carry on the activities is important (Interview, September 10, 2007).

The NORAD representative also reflected on the importance of community involvement for sustainability: “To make the activities sustainable you have to involve the community. You should involve them by using their resources in terms of building, or involving them in the recruitment of teachers” (Interview, September 5, 2007).

There is broad agreement that working with both groups—government and community—is imperative for sustaining education programs in the relief-development transition. The stronger the sense of ownership of the educational support that can be instilled, the better the chances are for sustainability. While this sense of ownership can and should be garnered in the early phases of humanitarian relief, it becomes essential as the country begins to transition to reconstruction and development. Ownership can be jeopardized, however, when educational support is provided vis-à-vis systems set up parallel to the government.

2.1.2. *Justifying parallel education systems*

The vision and planning processes become more critical when organizations establish projects or programs that run parallel to the governmental system. The interviewees in this study agreed that education provided by means of a parallel system not only was justifiable, but was obligatory if the government were incapable of providing that service. However, there was also consensus that parallel systems must be integrated into the official governmental system as quickly as possible.

Informants justified the need for parallel systems in several ways. First, they argued that parallel systems were potentially necessary in acute emergency situations, given the life-saving potential of education that entails life skills and psychosocial support. Second, the provision of education in any form was valued as it could potentially mitigate or prevent a return to conflict. Third, the inability of the government due to lack of commitment or capacity to provide education was provocation, they felt, for international organizations to intercede. Fourth, given the right to education protected by multiple human rights conventions, several representatives commented on the obligation their organizations have, particularly as UN agencies, to respond.

The donor representatives in this study stressed the importance of responding to educational needs when and if governments are not in a position to do so. The practitioner-expert from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated unequivocally: “if you want to reach the uneducated people and the government structure is weak [and unwilling] then other channels need to be found”. If the government “is willing, but only weak they can be supported,” and UNICEF can assume a supporting role in that situation (Interview, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 3, 2007). The World Bank representative made an equally strong point, stating that:

Sometimes the government deliberately ignores the education sector and has no interest in sustaining it; that doesn't mean that there is no need for education. Sometimes it is just so

incapacitated or so absorbed in other priorities that it doesn't have the resources to focus on it. You can't wait for the government to recover to restore service provision (Interview, August 30, 2007).

In a refugee camp-based context, a parallel system often times is inevitable, as noted by the UNHCR representative:

If they are camp-based, then the camps are usually very far from the local infrastructure, from the local villages and borders due to security and environmental reasons. The government [indicates] where you have to build the camp and you have to build it in the bush so it's not possible for the refugee camp to go and be involved in the local schools. We need to put up refugee schools in the camp, so often it's a necessary parallel system (Interview, August 28, 2007).

In urban settings, refugee children are often able to integrate more easily into the public schools due to physical proximity.

Furthermore, the UNHCR representative pointed out that in certain cases refugees may contribute to the establishment of parallel systems as they strive to maintain certain cultural or linguistic practices:

In [Francophone] Guinea, the [Anglophone] Sierra Leoneans refused to enroll their children in local schools because they wanted to maintain their own language and curricula. The refugees themselves set up parallel systems, but these are not recognized and didn't get recognized curricula. They preferred that, although we really tried to convince them to go to recognized schools so that they could get certificates. It was this strong sense of nationality that was more important than [attending] a recognized school (Interview, August 28, 2007).

Further, according to the Save the Children representative, parallel systems may be necessary to provide refugees with skills:

Whatever skills you are able to provide to [refugees or IDPs] they will be able to take forward within whatever system, and hopefully at some point there will be some alignment. When you look at parallel systems in refugee programs or returnee programs the refugees are ideally given skills that they can take across the border (Interview, October 2, 2007).

The representative from the International Rescue Committee made a similar observation as she addressed the idea that you are not supposed to have anything sustainable in refugee camps due to the overarching goal of encouraging refugees to return to their home countries. She stated that in refugee settings, there should be a “heavier emphasis on skills building” and the transfer of these skills to the community, because it is thought that skills are more easily sustained once refugees return or resettle (Interview, September 21, 2007).

Despite general agreement about the intrinsic value of any education, training or skills development provided to students or teachers by international organizations through parallel systems, several practitioner-experts stressed the importance of validating this acquisition of knowledge and recognizing the related challenges if these learning and training opportunities are somehow disconnected from the national system. Recognition and validation signify, for example, that a student's previous educational preparation will be taken into consideration and that they will be placed in the appropriate grade if schooling continues or will be offered employment opportunities in accordance with their educational achievements. For teachers, whether their skills have been newly developed or recently upgraded, any previous training would be acknowledged accordingly in teacher recruitment and compensation decisions.

When there is a functional government in place, the NORAD representative stated that:

You always need to see the activities in relation to what the government is doing, and that's very essential in terms of teacher training for example. Because if you do teacher training you always have to consider how to validate the training and so you have to integrate your training into the government system (Interview, September 5, 2007).

In summary: "If your output is human resources and skills, the challenge is to make sure that they are valued, recognized and rewarded otherwise they are not sustainable. It's not only in the system, but also the society and economy which needs to value them" (Interview, World Bank, August 30, 2007).

Once a viable government is in place or becomes capable of assuming greater responsibilities, most organizations will want to transfer any human resources that they have helped develop to the Ministry of Education in an effort to ensure teachers' continued employment. If the Ministry of Education is unfamiliar with the teacher training program that has been developed or disapproves of the methods used in the program, major delays in the absorption of these individuals is likely. If large quantities of teachers have been trained by international organizations, the state of the country's economy and corresponding education budget may not be sufficient to cover these additional costs. On occasion when NGOs or UN agencies assume responsibility for teacher compensation or the provision of incentives, they rarely are able to provide funding for indefinite periods of time; delays by government or international organizations may have a dire effect on the teachers and their livelihoods. Similarly, if communities have supplemented teachers' salaries in an effort to prolong educational support for their children, they will be eager for the government to assume this responsibility. Given these realities, the sustainability of educational support provided to students and teachers comes into question.

The practitioner-experts addressed the necessity as well as the challenge of integrating parallel systems into the government structure. The World Bank representative depicted the challenges that arise when this does not happen:

You get orphaned schools that are built and created by communities with support of NGOs, and the government doesn't even recognize them as part of the system. When the NGOs or agencies go away the schools implode because there are no resources. They need to be integrated into the system (Interview, August 30, 2007).

Within the acute emergency phase, there was a sense that engagement with the government was possible: "you can start to have some kind of engagement with local authorities anywhere between eight weeks to six months; we can probably start a lot earlier than we do you can start to have some kind of engagement with local authorities anywhere between eight weeks to six months; we can probably start a lot earlier than we do (Interview, DFID, September 17, 2007). If educational support is provided in such a way that is "untethered from the governmental system" (Interview, Save the Children, October 2, 2007) or the community and remains that way, then sustainability is highly unlikely.

2.1.3. *Supporting complementary education systems*

Apart from the points provided about the justifiable nature of parallel systems and the need to integrate these systems within the government, there was also an acknowledgement of the positive side of parallel systems, or what several practitioner-experts defined as "complementary." This term was applied to describe systems that were in fact parallel to the official governmental system, but that were established in direct coordination with the

government. Two very specific and detailed examples were offered of CARE's and Save the Children's educational programs, both by interviewees working for different organizations.

In the first example, the UNICEF representative illustrated the efforts that CARE made in Afghanistan to create a complementary system, the details of which follow here:

When there was a new government after the Taliban, CARE had this very good community-based education program called COPE [Community Organized Primary Education]. Under the Taliban they basically set up their community-based schools in communities where there weren't any government schools and that was a very clear policy although at the time the government schools were only for boys. Even so they said let's go to communities where there is demand, where there is no conflict with existing services. Then what happened when the Taliban left, they said let's now look at which schools we could potentially handover as government schools if the government is willing and tried to work with different government [counterparts] to do that. Then they said where is our new niche now? They defined their niche as even more remote communities where it would have been unlikely that the government would have any outreach for a long time to come. They did this very quickly and established [the program] almost immediately with the district education authorities. They really thought through what the implications were of the new situation. I didn't see that with other NGOs which took much longer to change (Interview, October 3, 2007).

This portrayal illustrates the way in which an NGO initially established a parallel system as part of its humanitarian relief operations, but strategically and effectively used the opportunity that the Taliban's departure offered to connect with the new government and coordinate their educational plans in a complementary fashion. They were able to do this when other NGOs were still contemplating how they might change their educational support, if at all, as the country moved from the relief to post-conflict reconstruction.

In a similar illustration, the practitioner-expert from the International Rescue Committee spoke about the need for parallel systems in certain country contexts and the ways in which they can be connected later in a positive way with government. She cited an example from Save the Children-United Kingdom and their work in remote, pastoralist areas in Ethiopia in which the government did not rely on a framework for non-formal education programs and did not prioritize formal education in remote areas due to the prohibitive costs of doing this type of work in sparsely populated areas. She described Save the Children's non-formal education work in detail in the following excerpt:

[Save the Children UK] started with a small pilot of alternative basic education in the Somali region and documented its success and a couple ways of improving access to these pastoralist and rural populations that were traditionally excluded from education systems. Then they documented their learning achievement through their pass exam rate and they worked at a local level with the local district education office very intensely to work together to come up with the curriculum that's sort of an accelerated version of the formal school curriculum. They set up criteria for at what point is a school ready to enter into the formal school system. They just started with a few centers and over time the national ministry of education [started] to draft a national policy based on that model for reaching agro-pastoralist and remote rural, particularly sparsely populated areas (Interview, September 21, 2007).

Due to the effectiveness of this complementary program, a major donor got involved and "helped fund other districts to come

up with their own strategy for this alternative basic education, using curriculum that was specific to their contexts” (Interview, September 21, 2007).

2.2. Two-pronged approach: capacity building in tandem with service delivery

An important strategy for ensuring integration into the system is to collaborate with the government and to create capacity building opportunities that will help education authorities prepare to assume responsibility for and sustain education programs. Capacity building can be defined as the “enhancement of capabilities of people and institutions to improve their competence and problem solving capacities in a sustainable manner” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 50). Capacity building is both an opportunity and a challenge. In order to accomplish this objective, several practitioner-experts in this study advocated a two-pronged approach that allows international organizations to provide educational support quickly and as part of their relief efforts while simultaneously building the capacities of governments to assume greater responsibility for education. A two-pronged approach provides needed services to the target populations without delay while keeping the government informed. It also creates a space for governmental officials to develop their educational expertise and assume greater ownership of the activities being provided within the education sector, and it provides a solid foundation upon which the government can sustain education initially provided by international organizations.

The International Rescue Committee representative captured this idea in the following depiction, while also articulating the nuances of a two-pronged approach depending on the nature and phase of a particular conflict:

If you are working in an internal displacement setting vs. a refugee setting vs. a post-conflict setting, like Liberia and Sierra Leone, your approach will be completely different and their definition of sustainability will have to differ. In a refugee setting, it's direct implementation. In an IDP setting you might have closer coordination with the government or integration where people are actually going to government schools. Each country is different and they set their refugee policy differently. Some countries like Uganda promote a more integrated approach where they do not have refugee camps, but settlements; people don't get any food distribution, but they get access to land. Schools are not run by INGOs. The schools are government schools and directly under the authority of the government. Where you have a situation like Ethiopia or Guinea, it's a refugee camp and the government wants international aid organizations to run all of the activities and they give the international community a lot of autonomy. It varies depending on the policy and the involvement of the government in the refugee situation. [Also] it will depend on the stage. If you are in a country like Sudan, Liberia or Sierra Leone where it's very much post-conflict or early recovery it's all about the government. It's all about strengthening the government and institution-building, not about direct implementation entirely. In Guinea, it was all about direct implementation. In Sudan, or in Liberia, it might be both—a two-pronged approach. There is direct implementation, but you are also very much building capacities of the ministries that eventually have to take over those activities (Interview, September 21, 2007).

The NGO worker's example demonstrates how her organization and other NGOs are adapting their ways of working to better engage with governments.

By engaging in a two-pronged approach that entails “close coordination and handover plans” international organizations can avoid making the government appear “incompetent or not able to do its job” (Interview, International Rescue Committee, September 21, 2007). The UNICEF representative agreed, but stated that it is “very hard to strike [the balance] because you are dealing with low capacity in many cases” (Interview, October 3, 2007).

There is support for beginning capacity building efforts quickly. During the humanitarian phase when the primary focus is on service delivery, the DFID representative stated that “Ministry officials need to be engaged, trained and given the capacity to continue the program over the long term.” In the post-conflict transition “there still needs to be capacity building so that the program can continue to be sustainable” (Interview, DFID, September 17, 2007).

The practitioner-experts in this study thought that all international organizations have a certain role to play in capacity building. Whereas UNESCO has a specific mandate to engage in capacity development with governments, the UNESCO representative noted the comparative advantage of other organizations, particularly NGOs, to assume this role:

In some cases I'd rather it be an NGO than an international agency that may then use that power to sell loans, for example, to a government. This is where the NGOs may have a certain sort of marketing edge for this kind of service, because they are not pushing a particular product or a particular set of commitments that a government may have to live with for several years to come. It's this honest broker role (Interview, October 30, 2007).

The various forms that capacity building efforts could take were also considered by the practitioner-experts. The World Bank representative suggested a possible approach that he called “arms-length technical assistance,” which he described as:

putting the first responsibility for the development of the strategies and the policies in the hands of locals, [doing research] in the local language, and using local institutions. Technical assistance then is in the form of peer review, review of terms of reference, suggestions for how they might be improved or tightened, and then review of findings and so forth. The consultants are then people who are consulted by the government rather than people who consult the government and then produce wisdom, which tends to be the form that technical assistance takes usually. We “grow” consultants to go in and tell the government what to do. If consultants are people who the government consults whether it needs information or shares a development policy or staffing system. . . it would help to turn around the relationship. The government is almost saying “don't call us, we'll call you”. If it is handled well I think it is really empowering and helps to build institutional capacity in the country and real political capacity. It's slower. The quality control [may not be] as tight, but I think the trade offs in terms of ownership are well worth it (Interview, August 30, 2007).

A more hands-on approach was suggested by the International Rescue Committee practitioner-expert, through which international organization staff would be assigned to work in the central Ministry of Education or the local district education offices. The purpose of these assignments would be to perform an advisory role that would help to build the capacity of the Ministry. The challenge here is that “you don't want that person to take the place of the government official so that when the person leaves everything they have done [falls apart]” (Interview, International Rescue Committee, September 21, 2007). She noted that the advantages and disadvantages of this approach need to be documented and examined more closely, but that it has potential.

The importance of engaging in a two-pronged approach that involves service delivery and capacity building is abundantly clear. By building the capacities of the government and its related education authorities, particularly in those countries emerging from a protracted conflict, the probabilities that education programs will be more sustainable is also evident. The ability to engage in capacity building activities is directly related to the internal capacities of the international organizations and the availability and quality of their human resources to meet these needs. Even for those organizations that have included capacity building among their primary activities by mandate or by choice, improvements need to be made to ensure more effective capacity building that will lead to sustainable education programs.

2.3. Human resources

The quantitative lack of education staff and the qualitative deficiency of capacities needed to respond in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings were cited as endemic to the field of education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. This field is still relatively new, with greater attention being focused on its activities in recent years. Nevertheless, this challenge affects an organization's ability to plan effectively, work collaboratively with governments and other international organizations, and provide quality educational support.

The Save the Children representative discussed the need for greater technical capacity and stated that when practitioners with this type of expertise are available, they are not being engaged early enough:

People are far too general in terms of what they do. We don't bring in technical people soon enough; therefore we don't offer something that is of enough quality to actually stay the course. [For example, take] safe spaces [i.e. places developed with communities to protect children during emergencies through structured learning, play, psychosocial support and access to basic services (INEE, 2007, p. 1)]... what happens after that? If they turn into an early childhood development or youth program that's a fairly specific skill set and it requires some real understanding of community mobilization. How do you set up community structures to sustain something when there are very little resources? That's a lot to ask. Equally, look at the lack of really solid curriculum people in the field. We are doing teacher training and I think we are passing an age where we can do the rudimentary teacher training that we have been doing, such as in the late 80s-early 90s when we were teaching people how to use lesson plans. I think we are getting a little bit farther than that now so when we are looking for teachers to develop psychosocial curriculum or a curriculum on landmines, it needs to be fairly sophisticated and needs to be tailored to different age groups. Right now we are block shooting for say 6-12 year olds and we are mixing all of the other kids because we don't have the expertise (Interview, October 2, 2007).

The Save the Children representative duly noted that practitioners have been doing the best they could over the years, but that the changing nature of the field and the increase in and expansion of educational interventions today necessitates greater technical capacity (Interview, October 2, 2007).

In accordance with these comments, the International Rescue Committee representative indicated that one of the biggest challenges in regard to capacities entailed those needed for practitioners working across the relief-development transition and the shift in approach that the transition signifies. She stated that although headquarters' staff may have a general awareness of the skills and capacities needed to work in this shifting environment, it

proves more difficult for field-level staff. She provided the following example to underscore these difficulties:

It's hard for staff. At one point they are in a relief situation and they enter a community and they are handing out everything and then suddenly they are supposed to transition to a more development perspective where they are asking the communities [to contribute]. We want to reduce dependency and start promoting self-reliance so we are asking them to match our contribution (Interview, September 21, 2007).

She noted that her organization has not hired "people with post-conflict, capacity building, advisory skill sets in terms of institution-building" which is disconcerting as they see institution-building "lead[ing] to sustainability" (Interview, September 21, 2007). According to her, as a country continues to stabilize and move toward development, staff need to be capable of "engaging in high level advocacy and coordination," and know how to "promote good governance and decentralization" (Interview, February 9, 2008).

In a similar vein, the UNESCO representative commented that a certain professional expertise would be required for NGOs or other international organizations planning to engage more actively in the relief-development transition and with ministries directly:

[You need a] very sound choice of persons who would fulfill that role. It's not going to be someone that is a typical go-getter, someone in an NGO that gets things done perhaps in terms of the emergency response phase. It needs a more considered mind and more experienced perception of things, someone who can speak with gravitas with ministers and visiting dignitaries or representatives of other agencies. I would strongly suggest that if NGOs are getting into [more capacity building with governments] that they have to invest in people who have extensive personal resources and experiences that they can draw from (Interview, October 30, 2007).

The challenge does not only exist for NGOs and UN agencies working in the humanitarian sphere, but also the larger development agencies. The World Bank representative stated:

We need more people who understand public administration and education management. We need people who understand the system. There aren't many people with a systems perspective in any of these development agencies which always surprises me. There are quite a lot of economists and there are quite a lot of teachers, but there are not so many people who understand how an education system is publicly administered (Interview, August 30, 2007).

A lack of education staff and the weaknesses in their capacities directly affect an organization's efforts to sustain educational support in the relief-development transition. Educational programs may not be developed and facilitated as best as possible given staff members' lack of expertise in education and understanding of what is required for the longer term. Efforts to connect with governmental or community counterparts may be thwarted if there are not enough education staff to assume these roles, or if staff members do not possess the necessary skills for cultivating these types of relationships.

2.4. Coordination

The perennial challenges of coordination among and between international organizations were noted across the broad relief-development spectrum, but particular attention was paid to the post-conflict phase during which new resources and new actors

arrive. Practitioner-experts from UN and NGOs alike commented on the number of organizations entering post-conflict countries and the potential for this influx to frustrate Ministries of Education. The UNICEF representative stated:

In terms of post-conflict countries there is a tendency for new NGOs, new agencies and new donors to come in and establish themselves particularly when they see a lot of funding around; the UN does this too. [There is] “flag planting” and so on vis-à-vis domestic constituencies (Interview, October 3, 2007).

The UNESCO representative noted the politics affecting the flow of funding:

[In] post-conflict countries you often have a very different cast of characters. . .the development banks come in if it is high profile politically. Many donors establish again a presence in countries and they all want to be seen at least politically as providing funding to countries (Interview, October 30, 2007).

Apart from the development banks and donors arriving on the scene, UN agencies and NGOs with a development focus are also jockeying for position in post-conflict countries. The sheer number of organizations present can take a toll on struggling Ministries to interpret and assess the plans proposed by each organization. The CARE representative elaborated on why this can prove problematic for sustainability:

[Another] aspect that I think hampers moving toward sustainability is that in post-conflict there are too many players that come on board and each of these agencies has their own agenda, which could be curriculum or teacher training. With so many voices around, the host government or the host agency that is trying to put these systems together has difficulty in hearing all of the voices and making a coherent system out of it. Some educational agendas and initiatives get integrated and sustained, but some others fall off entirely (Interview, CARE, September 10, 2007).

The UNESCO representative noted that, even when the government possesses a strong political commitment to the education sector, their capacities in a post-conflict environment, coupled with a “fragile economic situation,” may not allow them to make the best decisions about the various educational plans being promoted. This may lead ultimately to shifting priorities in the future:

[Post-conflict] poses challenges as well in terms of coordinating agendas and not overloading new governments by wanting to go too fast and then after a few years being frustrated [with] priorities changing (Interview, UNESCO, October 30, 2007).

Ministries may be overwhelmed not only by the number of new organizations present in a post-conflict country, but also by the sheer number of organizations that make up the NGO community. Practitioner-experts from CARE and UNICEF commented on the need for a collective voice within the NGO community and “no more one NGO negotiating for itself” (Interview, CARE, September 10, 2007; Interview, UNICEF, October 3, 2007). Although a country’s transition to post-conflict may draw the attention of a range of actors as well as resources, the timing of the donor agencies’ arrival poses a related challenge. Donors are being asked to enter the fray earlier: “at this point in time, the development organizations come in very late in the post-conflict area. They should be there in the beginning and the negotiations should take place on higher, more global levels much earlier” to ensure better coordination and sustainability (Interview, UNHCR, August 28, 2007).

2.5. Finances

Whereas this study seeks to explore the challenges affecting the sustainability of education programs that look beyond the financial variable, the pervasive problem of funding cannot be ignored, particularly given its impact on the sustainability of educational projects and programs. The World Bank representative summarized the problem related to the unpredictability of external financing succinctly by stating that “high promises [during] reconstruction” are contradicted by the “low delivery of funds,” and that “bridging the gap between humanitarian and development reconstruction financing still presents a challenge” (Interview, August 30, 2007). Practitioner-experts from other donor agencies as well as the UN agencies and NGOs all concurred with this point.

Whether funding is more readily available during the high profile humanitarian phase of a crisis or is being allocated for very specific activities per donors’ often ambitious conditions, implementing organizations may not have much influence on how the money is to be used. One of the NGO representatives expressed that an organization has little choice but to accept any funding offered, especially when confronted with the urgent needs presented by a crisis:

We don’t have much of a choice. The need after a post-conflict situation is so great that you really just want to go ahead and do your work and implement the program. You take the money and move on. When these mega-programs come along and within three years the funds have dried up and you have to wrap up your program in six months, that then becomes a major issue, but there is no way an agency like CARE can raise the resources to continue the program (Interview, CARE, September 10, 2007).

When an organization does have more input, the amount and duration of funding, if known, affect what type of educational support an organization can provide:

I think the funding determines in a big way what you choose to do. For instance, any good education program needs long-term funding. If you want children to finish one cycle of primary schooling it requires 5–6 years of funding in x [number of] provinces and x [number of] schools. The kind of funding you are talking about is a large denominator vs. where you are going to go with one manual on say life skills (Interview, CARE, September 10, 2007).

The unpredictable nature of external funding and resultant shift in priorities emerge for different reasons across the range of bilateral and multilateral donors. Explanations for these shifting priorities may include the development of new humanitarian and developmental crises, a change in political leadership, or the whims of certain Ministry officials. The USAID representative explained the ways in which her organization has tried to remedy the problem despite the fact that it poses other problems:

We end up having programs we call “accordion programs.” One year we’ll have \$5 million and the next year we’ll have \$1 million so we have to reduce and expand. That’s very difficult to manage. It’s difficult to make the host governments understand why we have to cut here and there, it’s difficult for implementing partners because they have put in place their programs and projects and all of a sudden they have to cut or suddenly expand. It puts our implementing partners and our host governments in very difficult positions. So. . .when we design a program we always, or often, have a core set of activities that we know will not be touched. We tend to design

programs that can be scaled up or that can be reduced, which is very difficult and makes it hard to do any long-term community participation because it's all based on sustainability (Interview, USAID, September 6, 2007).

Clearly, the erratic and unpredictable nature of funding in these contexts can greatly affect the sustainability of education programs generally as well as in the transition from relief to development specifically. Whereas the global donor community endeavors to streamline financial assistance provided for humanitarian and development work, the amount of aid allocated for education is still a concern, especially as the debate continues about the role of education in the humanitarian phase of a crisis. In short, financial realities deeply affect the sustainability of education programs.

3. Conclusions: ensuring sustainability in the humanitarian-development transition

At worst, [from a lack of sustainability] you get empty hulls of school buildings, buildings that have fallen apart right after they have been rehabilitated because there is no ownership. You get frustrated teachers, officials, students and parents because of raised expectations. If [education] is not sustainable, the legitimacy of the state, which is usually pretty tenuous anyway, is undermined and things collapse, and that usually results in a return to conflict (Interview, World Bank representative, August 30, 2007).

This was the response given by one practitioner-expert in this study when asked about the long-term consequences if education programs in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts were unsustainable. The respondent's emphasis on the damage exacted on physical structures, human resources and state systems illustrates the critical role that education has the potential to play as a country transitions from relief to development.

The challenges elucidated in this study by the educational practitioner-experts working at the global level are numerous and often times interrelated. Sustainability entails a variety of critical factors that cover the gamut of physical materials, human resources, structures and systems. Per the findings presented here, international organizations need to strive to do the following in their efforts to sustain educational support:

- Reconcile internal, structural challenges between their humanitarian and development divisions (if applicable) that prevent the organization from providing cohesive and coherent services and technical assistance.
- Ensure that adequate human resources personnel are available within the organization who are equipped with the appropriate technical capacities and skills to carry out work in the education sector.
- Create long-term education plans that promote ownership by national and local stakeholders vis-à-vis top-down and bottom-up approaches.
- Include strong linkages to national educational policies when possible.
- Communicate education plans and related advocacy messages to the appropriate education authorities, especially when educational support may be provided through parallel or complementary systems that fall outside (immediate) national priorities.
- Implement a two-pronged approach that includes timely service delivery of educational support coupled with capacity building of national and local stakeholders that prepares them to bear greater responsibility of educational provision over the long-term.

- Coordinate all relevant international, national and local stakeholders in an effort to harmonize support and avoid duplication of effort.
- Engage in partnerships among and between relevant and diverse organizations and national and local stakeholders, including, in particular, partnerships that leverage the comparative advantages that each group contributes and prepares one or more actors for the transfer and assumption of responsibility for the longer-term.
- Secure long-term and predictable financial assistance that initially is generated through a combination of external assistance and a country's national and community resources with expenses ultimately being covered in the government's national, district and local education budgets.
- Integrate educational support provided into the system—i.e. the government level, community level or both—by transferring responsibility of the program to the appropriate stakeholders.

The integration of educational support into the system was considered a key factor, but the terms "integration" and "system" should be defined very broadly. "Integration" may be as complex as the complete and total integration of an educational program into a Ministry of Education, including all of its elements (e.g. material, physical, human and financial); or, it may include a simpler integration of one particular element of educational support (e.g. recognition and accreditation of teacher training provided by an international organization by national education authorities). Similarly, the "system" could refer to the formal education system and its related education authorities, or it could refer to the system in place at the community level in which students, parents and community members have been involved and assumed ownership of the educational support provided (e.g. maintenance of newly constructed or rehabilitated school buildings).

The efforts being undertaken by the range of international organizations working in this field, most often with extremely limited resources, must be applauded. However, these organizations and others need to continue their efforts to advocate for the fiscal, political, and social resources that they need to better respond to the educational needs of children and youth affected by conflict. If the opportunities, knowledge and skills provided by educational support during a crisis are not recognized and leveraged in the transition to development, this lack of sustainability has the potential to create resentment among the population as well as exacerbate the underlying fragility of a nation and reignite conflict.

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