

INEE Thematic Issue Brief: Conflict Mitigation

Definition

Conflict mitigation is an approach applied to a range of strategies and activities undertaken in a situation of crisis, be it an immediate emergency or protracted crisis, to address causes of conflict and change the way those involved act and perceive the issues. It is a process through which humanitarian, recovery and development activities are reviewed for their effect on the conflict context in which they take place and their contribution to longer-term peace and stability. Conflict mitigation refers to those actions and processes that ensure conflict sensitivity so as to not fuel tensions or exacerbate sources of violence (i.e. “do no harm”), and seek to contribute positively to transforming the causes of conflict in the medium to long-term by altering the structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict. Conflict mitigation approaches can be used for conflict prevention as well as interventions in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Conflict Mitigation as a Thematic Issue

Delivery of education in emergencies and situations of fragility can interact with conflict dynamics in numerous ways. While conflict negatively impacts education through the destruction of or attacks on schools, materials, students, teachers and other education personnel, education may also contribute to conflict by denying access to some students, reinforcing inequities and social injustice or through the use of a biased curriculum. Given this, it is critical that humanitarian responses for education are approached from a conflict sensitive framework that understands education’s potential for impacting conflict and fragility, while simultaneously reducing the negative and increasing the positive impacts of education.

Education stakeholders must be self-reflective about the possibility of their education interventions impacting negatively on the conflict, especially since the ways in which education interventions may do harm are nuanced and not always obvious. However, stakeholders must also recognise the role education plays in mitigating the causes of conflict and fragility and act accordingly. Delivery of education in emergencies and situations of fragility can contribute to mitigating conflict along the three primary aspects of conflict: structural, behavioural and attitudinal. For example, education can: alter structural contradictions (structural) by serving as a highly visible symbol of a state’s commitment to and relationship with its people; improve relations and interactions (behavioural) by bringing together different people of different origins within the same classroom, teaching them how to work together peacefully; and encourage structural changes in attitudes (attitudinal) by teaching children to overcome prejudicial stereotypes through instilling the values of cooperation and tolerance of cultural differences, thereby reducing the risk of conflict and helping build a sustainable peace. With such potentially positive impacts, education must be made to mitigate rather than exacerbate conflict.

Addressing Conflict Mitigation in the INEE Minimum Standards

The INEE Minimum Standards support conflict mitigation by assisting education practitioners to adequately analyse and understand the conflict context in which they operate. Examples of how conflict mitigation is mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook include the following:

- **Foundational Standards** serve as the focal point for conflict mitigation within the INEE Minimum Standards. Community participation in conflict mitigation activities is encouraged and should draw upon and strengthen local capacities. The analysis standards have been strengthened to reflect the need to conduct an adequate and ongoing conflict analysis, detailing the current and changing political, social, economic, security and environmental issues at play, in order to build an in-depth understanding of the conflict on which to base education interventions. The guidance further reminds education practitioners to conduct, review and update this analysis in coordination and collaboration with other actors, building off the assessment data that already exists.
- **Access and Learning Environment Domain** calls for safe and equitable education for all groups as a measure to reduce conflict and build peace. Furthermore, the guidance in the

domain emphasises the need to ensure that students, staff and the learning site are safe, secure and free from all forms of threat and attack.

- **Teaching and Learning Domain** highlights the need to conduct a process of curriculum and textbook review with national authorities and members of different ethnic and other social groups in order to reduce bias and instil messages of citizenship, conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the community.
- **Teachers and Other Education Personnel Domain** emphasises the need to train and support teachers to promote equity, non-discrimination, and non-violent conflict resolution in the classroom. Furthermore, during conflict and post-conflict situations, the past actions of teachers - such as participation in fighting forces - must be vetted and come to terms with by the community to avoid exacerbating social tensions.
- **Education Policy Domain** stresses the importance of developing equitable education laws, regulations, policies and responses based on a solid analysis of the local context, ensuring such policies and actions protect education institutions, staff and students and do not exacerbate social tensions or contribute to ongoing or renewed conflict.

Additional Guidance

The thematic issue of conflict mitigation is a comparably new subfield and the practical basis of evidence and tools for good practice has yet to be developed. Ongoing efforts by a number of stakeholders, including the INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility, will contribute to the development of this base of lessons learnt. Nevertheless, a number of key lessons on conflict mitigation, derived from consultations on the update of the INEE Minimum Standards handbook, include the following:

- **Ensure conflict sensitive participation:** While broad-based, substantive participation is critical, it may have the potential for exacerbating conflict if such participation contradicts local culture, norms and traditions. Furthermore, participation should not be limited to consenting voices but also adequately incorporate dissenting voices and opinions, particularly where the criticism is concerned about programmes doing harm or creating negative unintended consequences.
- **Address conflict-related barriers to participation:** Factors that may hinder or prohibit participation occur both within families and communities, and in some situations, the absence of community participation may be a signal of the impacts of the conflict or other emergency. Therefore, a community education committee should engage a range of community members as much as is possible, but with the recognition that in an unpredictable environment, safety of an individual or a group is paramount.
- **Monitor the impacts of education programmes on the context:** The evolving context of the crisis and the interactions of interventions within that context must be continually monitored to reflect the changing educational needs of the population, evaluate the extent to which programmes are meeting those needs, understand how programmes are responding to the context, and measure the unintended consequences of the interventions. This helps ensure that interventions are relevant and responsive, and take into account possibilities for improvement and contribute to mitigation of conflict and/or disaster risk reduction.
- **Address conflict dynamics in the location of education facilities:** The location of the learning site must be appropriate in terms of equitable access and physical safety and security. A participatory analysis can provide the necessary information for the establishment of equitable and safe educational facilities accessible to the whole community, without re-entrenching divisions within the community.
- **Address issues of educational relevance:** All learning opportunities should be relevant to both the learners and the context, providing opportunities for the learner to contribute to the broader economic, social and political needs of the country. Furthermore, access to post-primary and other types of education should not be limited to certain groups, as such discrepancies can create or maintain tensions that may contribute to conflict.