

Promoting resilience

Developing capacity within education systems affected by conflict¹

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Introduction

Given the potential increase in conflicts and tensions as a result of climate change and rapidly declining resources, there is a growing sense of urgency among the international community to engage in strategies that mitigate conflict and promote peace. To move away from a 'culture of imposition' to a 'culture of dialogue' is particularly essential in countries emerging from civil war. These countries are typically not only furthest away from reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but are far more likely to slip back into conflict.

Donor agencies and the UN have already prepared for and are seeking ways of preventing and resolving violent conflict. For example, in 2005, the UN established the Peacebuilding Commission to assist countries in post-conflict transition to consolidate their peacebuilding processes; in 2008, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to reinforce mediation and conflict prevention; the European Commission's Peacebuilding Partnership (PBP) was established in 2007 to strengthen international and regional capacity to analyse, prevent and respond to violent conflict and disasters, as well as to improve post-conflict and post-disaster recovery; and in 2008, the World Bank created the State and Peace-Building Fund (SPF) to address the needs of state and local governance in fragile and conflict-prone situations.

Yet within these initiatives, there is limited recognition of the evident role education has to play in assisting nations affected by conflict to recover and emerge as 'stronger and prouder nations' (IIEP-UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to understand how education institutions and the systems that support them can encourage conflict-affected countries to transform into stable and resilient states.

Education and conflict mitigation

Typically, when education is associated with conflict mitigation or peacebuilding, it is linked to peace education. While these programmes clearly have value for the individuals concerned, there has been limited systematic analysis of their effect on statebuilding or how they may have contributed to peacebuilding. Neither have education systems been critically analysed for the potential to contribute towards peacebuilding. It appears easier to find evidence where education systems can be manipulated for political or ideological purposes or where education institutions, staff and pupils are targets of attack (Save the Children, 2008).

This lack of recognition of the role that education plays in conflict, and lack of inclusion of any type of education indicator in most of these assessments is quite startling given the potential role of education to influence politically, to reinforce inequality or to inculcate or indoctrinate through biased curricula.

Lack of access to educational and employment opportunities can also fuel tensions and is frequently a major cause of social and civil strife, as demonstrated in the Middle East in 2011. There is less evidence when considering whether education has a direct effect on peacebuilding. This could be because education is seldom considered in either conflict assessments, mitigation strategies or peacebuilding agreements (Dupuy, 2009). In addition, education strategies or the relationship of education to conflict are rarely considered in the typical conflict-assessment tools employed by most donors or agencies.

Likewise, in the same way that conflict assessments infrequently consider education, conflict-affected states rarely have educational policies that support education as a tool for conflict mitigation. When conflict-affected countries do have an education sector plan (ESP), it typically deals with building short-term access and delivery of education. Yet education should be designed and delivered to support prevention of conflict as well as post-conflict reconstruction (Thyne in Tebbe, 2009).

Conflict-sensitive educational planning

Educational planning is an important step towards developing policies and strategies that can contribute towards conflict-mitigation efforts. It is also a cost-effective option. To prevent conflict is much less expensive than the cost of reconstruction. For example, in 2008, global military expenditure was estimated at US\$1.4 trillion. For every dollar used for prevention, \$2,000 was utilised on weapons and military costs (Kotite, forthcoming). Through comprehensive analysis of the context of the conflict situation and examining the threats to peace, it is possible to develop strategies that can help prevent conflict and to incorporate these strategies into education sector planning processes. Successful implementation of such strategies, policies and programmes in any education plan depends largely on the capacities of planners, administrators and local authorities. This is particularly so in situations of conflict, where educational systems can be undermined or destroyed, or captured politically or ideologically.

As contributors to the 2011 Education For All Global Monitoring Report, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) reviewed ten education sector plans². Of these, only five had specific strategies or preparedness for conflict included in their plans, and of the five, the number of strategies was limited to less than two. Given the type and level of conflict in these countries, it is shocking that most plans reviewed did not address the issues of conflict in a comprehensive way.

There was greater reference in the plans to policies or programme strategies, such as inclusion or capacity development for teachers and administration, which could indirectly contribute to greater

stabilisation. While these are policies and strategies that could apply to any developing country, they are important indicators of the 'health' of the education system. Non-inclusive, discriminatory systems without quality education provision are more likely to lead to grievances.

Uganda and Sierra Leone are two examples of how countries emerging from conflict are trying to address the issues challenging their countries and are setting out a strong roadmap for reconstruction through education sector planning.

The Uganda Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (2004–2015) has attempted to address the conflict in the north of the country through an approach that aims 'to support [and] guide... quality education... for national integration, individual and national development'. One of the ways in which the country aims to achieve this is through fee-free universal primary education programmes targeted at disadvantaged children and children in conflict areas. The ESSP extends education ministry resources to programmes serving conflict areas.

In addition, the ESSP proposes that one of its strategies is to 'design and help teachers use curricula and instruction appropriate for pupils in conflict areas'³. It also mentions that although the barriers to teaching literacy in local languages in Uganda are considerable (producing written materials, persuading parents, and resolving political problems surrounding languages of instruction), the education ministry aims to provide sufficient quantities of reading materials in local languages, both by procuring and distributing them and by helping teachers develop their own reading materials. Such policies can help to overcome feelings of alienation and exclusion that are often accompanied by policies that do not address issues of mother tongue instruction.

The Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2007–2015) highlights the complexity of developing a peacebuilding strategy and calls on development institutions for guidance: 'One area on which this document is relatively silent is that of education during times of crisis and emergencies. Planning for the unexpected is difficult at the best of times but given the volatile nature of the sub-region and the tendency for problems in one country to spill over and affect neighbouring countries, there is a need to put a strategy in place. At the time of preparing this document, the two agencies leading in this area were UNICEF and Save the Children. It is proposed that these two entities, working together with designated senior officers of [the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology], produce a strategy to be scrutinised and endorsed by the Steering Committee for the implementation of the ESP before approval by the Government of Sierra Leone.'⁴

The process of planning in crisis-prone situations

Educational policy-makers need to be supported to develop greater understanding of the complex dynamics of education in conflict-affected contexts and to investigate the effectiveness of educational policies and programmes in reducing conflict in a proactive rather than reactive way. Currently there is limited guidance to support ministries of education and education policy-makers to do this. Yet the process of planning is straightforward and follows basic steps. Conflict/disaster risk reduction (C/DRR) strategies involve diagnosis of



the current situation (vulnerability analysis, review and revision of policy); defining precise objectives in accordance with available means (corrective measures); costing and funding of these; and developing monitoring indicators: for example, whether institutions at district level have contingency plans in place.

As part of its work with the capacity-development initiatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s Global Education Cluster, the IIEP and UNESCO are working with a number of countries to integrate disaster preparedness and emergency response measures into education sector planning processes.

For example, in South Sudan, the Ministry of Education is developing an ESSP with support from UNICEF and the IIEP. The aim is to ensure that education contributes towards peacebuilding and that conflict and disaster risk reduction is an integral part of the planning process.

Using technology for educational planning in conflict-affected countries

Technology is already being used both for teaching and learning, as well as for data collection and management in a number of conflict or post-conflict situations. It has also been used to support policy planning where there is a need to integrate national, regional and local information. Data 'about demographics, input and teacher allocation, services production and student performance, broken down by relevant jurisdictions and sex and age groups to produce useful policy suggestions and design relevant plans' (Alvarado, 2009). Visualisation of data through simple technology can also assist decision-makers to advocate more easily for policy reform. For example, StatPlanet, is a data visualisation tool that includes up-to-date statistics on demography, economy, education, environment and energy, gender and health for most countries in the world (Van Capelle, 2009).

The impact of armed conflict on education

From UNESCO's Education for All 2011 Report

Over the decade to 2008, 35 countries experienced armed conflict, of which 30 were low-income and lower middle-income countries. The average duration of violent conflict episodes in low-income countries was 12 years. In conflict-affected poor countries, 28 million children of primary school age are out of school – 42 per cent of the world total. Children in conflict-affected poor countries are twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as children in other poor countries.

Only 79 per cent of young people are literate in conflict-affected poor countries, compared with 93 per cent in other poor countries. State and non-state parties involved in armed conflicts are increasingly targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Schools and schoolchildren are widely viewed by combatants as legitimate targets, in clear violation of international law. Over 43

million people are reported to have been displaced mostly by armed conflict, though the actual number is probably far higher. Refugees and internally displaced people face major barriers to education. In 2008, just 69 per cent of primary school-age refugee children in UNHCR camps were attending primary school.

Armed conflict is diverting public funds from education into military spending. Twenty-one developing countries are currently spending more on arms than on primary schools; if they were to cut military spending by 10 per cent, they could put an additional 9.5 million children in school. Military spending is also diverting aid resources. It would take just six days of military spending by rich countries to close the US\$16 billion Education for All (EFA) external financing gap. Education accounts for just 2 per cent of humanitarian aid. And no sector has a smaller share of humanitarian appeals funded: just 38 per cent of aid requests for education are met, which is around half the average for all sectors.

At a country level, technology also provides an increasing range of opportunities for policy-makers and planners, and demonstrates that it is possible for technology to be employed in a strategic way, according to the context.

For example, in South Sudan, over 90 per cent of schools have been mapped using digital technology and Google Earth. The former Academy for Educational Development (AED) (now Family Health International) used VSAT (very small aperture terminal) satellite dishes to examine issues of inequity in school distribution. The data collection opportunities that this system offers, as well as visual images of the location and condition of the schools, can overcome issues of distance and security. They can also provide accurate comparative data to alert planners where there are inequities.

Conclusion

It is evident that education can play a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating conflict. Unless the factors within education systems that can exacerbate or mitigate conflict are recognised, examined and addressed as part of an overall conflict-mitigation strategy in countries affected by or prone to conflict, then the situation will not change. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that within the regular processes of educational planning, the potential for conflict is considered. When conflict and disaster-sensitive educational planning is undertaken in a systematic and coherent way, the education system can develop the necessary resilience to withstand the impact of conflict and/or disasters. It is equally critical that during the process of conducting conflict assessments or undertaking peacebuilding initiatives, education is considered as a core element of analysis. It is therefore essential that policy-makers and education actors globally recognise the importance of education's role in mitigating conflict and disasters. As Mahatma Gandhi so aptly stated, 'If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.'

Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from briefing paper prepared for UNESCO-EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011

- 2 Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda. For more on education plans, refer to <http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org>
- 3 http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Uganda/Uganda_ESSP_2004_2015.pdf
- 4 Government of Sierra Leone Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2007). Education Sector Plan 2007-2015. p. 11. http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Sierra%20Leone/Sierra_Leone_ESP.pdf

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