



Reintegration of War-Affected
Youth and Children in Post-Conflict Settings:
A framework for intervention
programmes

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Introduction

Many countries have been severely affected by armed conflicts in recent years. The war has left affected countries with a thick net of destruction encompassing social institutions, economic enterprises and human beings. Usually, children and adolescents are the most vulnerable population affected in armed conflicts.

Once hostilities have ceased, governments start a long process of recovery and reconstruction, with the assistance of multilateral and bilateral organizations and with NGOs. This long process of reconstruction is challenging and demanding, especially at the social and educational level.

The present paper is an attempt to understand the complex issues involved in rebuilding educational systems in post-conflict settings and to draw a framework for intervention programmes aimed at supporting educational reconstruction efforts. As an emerging area of action, post-conflict educational reconstruction still needs to be substantiated and studied.

Although prepared and implemented at the country level, intervention programmes could have a sub-regional umbrella for overall coordination, financing and sharing of experiences. This umbrella could integrate or go in parallel with, for example, the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) for the Great Lakes Region in Africa, or elsewhere.

This approach is justified by the similarities of certain issues related to adolescents and children who took part in armed conflicts and, to the urgent need to demobilize and reintegrate them.

1 - Context and Issues at Stake

* Armed conflicts have become tragically common in recent years all over the world, and especially in Africa. According to the most recent estimates, some 4 million people have been killed in these armed conflicts worldwide since 1989, and more than 35 million people have been displaced, about half of them are children. Usually, children are the most vulnerable group of the society affected by armed conflicts.

* According to the estimates made by the Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, more than 120 000 children under 18 years of age have participated in armed conflicts across Africa. Some of these children are no more than 7 years old. Girls too have been used as soldiers, though generally in much smaller numbers than boys.

* The risks to adolescents and children of participating in armed conflicts are obvious as it is the case for adults. Moreover, children are at an added disadvantage as combatants. Their immaturity may lead them to take excessive risks through the dirty war they are forced to do: spying, messaging, walking through mine fields, torturing, etc

* With regard to girls, they are raped or unwillingly they become the girlfriends or wives of rebel leaders or members. The risks to these girls of sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies are obvious and enormous.

* Under the influence of drugs or alcohol, children are forced to commit atrocities against their families, home communities and civilian populations in general. From the social point of view, this represents a threat and a disintegration of social relationship within families and communities.

* Very often, the armed conflicts have left the country (ies) with a thick net of destruction. They have devastated school and health facilities, economic enterprises and forced millions of people to flee from their homes. Consequently, thousands of children and adolescents are thrown outside schools and left without any hope to be reintegrated into civilian life.

* This dire situation is getting bleaker when one observes that these young and child soldiers are originally coming from the poorest and the most deprived families. Consequently, if appropriate actions and measures are not taken immediately to solve the problems they are facing as well as the society, they will become marginalized and excluded young people in the very near future, often the poorest of the poor in a world of growing poverty, deprivation and social instability. And as such and within an unchanging context, these

adolescents and children may return to violence as mean of fulfilling their needs. This constitutes a serious threat to the society as a whole and a serious destabilizing factor to the State in particular, once hostilities have ceased.

2 - Reactions and Commitment of the International Community

* The publication in 1996 of Graça Machel report on « The situation of children in armed conflicts in Africa » contributed to raise the awareness of the International Community on the plight of children in armed conflicts and its tragic consequences. The UN General Secretary appointed a Special Representative to tackle the problem of children involved in armed conflicts and, in 2000 defined the main orientations of the UN policy towards this problem. These policy orientations are contained in his report entitled « Role of UN peace missions with regard to disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration ». They constitute in fact the basis of the international community assistance to countries in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, at the educational, social and economic levels.

* At the World Education Forum in Dakar (April 2000), it was recognized that one of the barriers to attaining Education For All (EFA) was in fact the existence of countries affected by conflicts, or natural disasters. Education is important for children and adolescents wherever they are, even affected by human made or natural disasters, and it becomes particularly important for rebuilding societies following violent conflicts. The Dakar Framework for action provided for this new approach and, education in emergency and crisis situations has been made an important component of the Education For All programme.

* As a result of this new orientation, UNESCO mandate has led to its new role in post- conflict settings in different parts of the World, including the long-term contribution of its Regional Programme For Education for Emergencies and Reconstruction (PEER) in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Given that influx, education in situations of emergency and crisis, is no more considered as a secondary concern that could wait until more immediate needs are addressed. Education being a top priority as well as shelter, health and food, educational interventions should begin immediately.

* In its new Medium Term Plan (2002-2007), UNESCO is attempting to provide leadership and strategic vision in System-wide renewal and reform in post-conflict situations. This is truer, because of the limited mandates of other UN agencies concerned with emergencies and crisis, especially at the educational level. Very often, emergency education responses provided by many agencies

were fragmented, valuing more the immediate needs and the short-term perspective.

With that in perspective, UNESCO's Medium Term Plan is putting the emphasis on programmes and activities likely to assist the countries in post-conflict situations to restore and reconstruct effectively their educational systems, to promote social harmony and sustainable national development. On the other hand, UNESCO, through its Education for Peace Programme, is emphasizing the promotion of skills and values for non-violent conflict prevention and conflict resolution and the construction of a culture of peace.

* To ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned programmes and activities, related to situations of emergency and crisis, UNESCO is cooperating with Sister UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, UNOPS, World Bank..), a large number of NGOs implementing emergency education programmes in the field, and Government institutions. With respect to its global mandate, UNESCO is ensuring through this cooperation and partnership scheme, technical support and leadership in the reconstruction of educational systems that will provide a solid framework for peaceful and sustainable national development in the future.

3 - Target Beneficiaries of Intervention Programmes

* Several groups of a given society have taken part, directly or indirectly in armed conflicts. Consequently, the society as a whole is being affected in one way or another.

* In a post-conflict setting characterized by its extreme complexity, the intervention in principle should address all the groups of the society, with the aim to outgrow war and heal from violence. With the concern however of being more specific, seeking a positive impact in the long run and, coping with a priority agenda, specific target groups could be identified and addressed.

* The first of these target groups covers the former child soldiers who are or will be disarmed and demobilized. Usually, they are between 10-18 years of age, with many of them under 7 or 8 years of age. A special attention within this group needs to be given to girls who have taken part in the armed conflicts. Generally speaking, this group of children, which corresponds roughly to basic and secondary education, constitutes the first priority in reconstruction and reintegration programmes for almost all stakeholders and partners.

* The second group comprises the ex-combatants adolescents, who are 18 years of age and above. They could be considered as adults in the design of

intervention programmes, but with specific and well defined components that fit with their age, sex, profile, potential and aspirations.

* Apart from demobilized child-soldiers and young ex-combatants, two other groups could be taken into account:

- Orphans and widows who are taking care of their families after their husbands' death,
- Women and girls who have been directly affected by war (rape, abandon, exclusion from schools, etc..).

These two specific groups, victims of armed conflicts are very numerous in Africa, in particular in the Great Lakes region.

* One could extend the list of target groups in order to include those, for example, who failed in their schooling life and dropped out, or those who have been excluded from the educational system because of the war and constitute now the excluded marginalized youth (youth at risk). However it is true that there is a need to have homogeneous groups for better assessing their needs, defining the objectives of intervention programmes and designing the implementation ways and means.

4 - Constructing Interventions in Post-conflict Settings: Some Guiding Principles

* Embedded in a diversity of contexts, from the social, economic and cultural point of view, post-conflict settings are diverse and specific. The effective responses to these settings are highly interrelated with local histories and conditions. Hence the emphasis put on case studies to avoid linear and prescriptive approach and to keep up with the challenge of creativity and flexibility and ensuring openness to successful interventions in other contexts with the necessary adaptation.

* Post-conflict education and integration is an emerging area of action. Despite the interventions taking place here and there, little evaluative and reflective materials are available about mainly educational interventions in different contexts. This obviously militates in favour of having additional case studies and practice-based insights.

* Post-conflict educational reconstruction is challenging because of the multiplicity of constraints and demands: humanitarian, aiming at healing the

wounds of violence; social aiming at rebuilding social cohesion and peace; political aiming at rehabilitating civil institutions and technocratic aiming at rehabilitating the educational system per se – Given this multiplicity of constraints and demands, there is a need to adopt a minimum of balance, trying always to safeguard the welfare of children and youth for whom the intervention is taking place.

* Generally speaking, there is always a bias in reconstruction efforts towards giving more weight to the technocratic rationality. Despite its importance, this approach does not value the participation of target groups in the design of the reconstruction programmes or projects. Children and adolescents participation can be fundamental to a recovery and reconstruction process centred on them. The convention on the Rights of the child offers a strong basis for the promotion of children's participation in project planning, implementation and monitoring.

This is true as well with regard to dialoguing with communities, families and other stakeholders about important choices and their impact on children and youth interests and about ensuring a support to the implementation of these choices. A careful stakeholders and partners' analysis, in conjunction with target groups, can create schemes that are responsive and realistic.

* Post-conflict settings have multiple phases and transition points: emergency, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, that might sometimes overlap. It is thus important to take into consideration the situation and the phase in which the country is. This would help in a better assessment of partners' capacity to undertake activities for rehabilitation and reconstruction and in a better assessment of country's capabilities for the same purpose.

* As we all know, the relief efforts in most of the post-conflict situations focus on short-term needs and tend to neglect the development orientation. This would create dependency and tend to perpetuate it over time. The most important aspect in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction is to create the conditions for sustainable development, giving away ownership of development – centred programmes to the nationals. The most efficient way to do it is to focus on capacity – building and putting gradually the emphasis on investment in skills related to planning, management, monitoring, evaluation, peace, democracy process etc.... This kind of investment would engender benefits – newly acquired skills – that can be expected to continue beyond the project or programme assistance and duration. With that in mind, the post-conflict situations provide a good opportunity to examine the shortcomings and weaknesses of old systems and look for new solutions and approaches.

* On the other hand, going for programmes or projects on a grand scale is tempting given the large numbers of target beneficiaries. It seems important however, to strike a balance between the limited resources available and the need to reach a critical mass of children and young people. Clearly, there is much to be achieved by first building contextually relevant projects that may afterwards be promoted and accepted on a wider scale.

* The process of educational reconstruction dealing with individuals, communities and institutions is a rather slow process. Its pace does not coincide completely with that of organizations providing assistance and looking as quickly as possible for measurable results. This would militate in favour of keeping a minimum of patience in dealing with processes of human development and community reconstruction.

* While seeking to create a sense of immediate security for children, youth and community members, post-conflict interventions should not neglect the importance of prevention of future conflicts. UNESCO is playing a major role in this regard, through the Culture of Peace initiative. The current decade, 2000-2010, has been designated as the decade of the Culture of Peace, and post-conflict educational reconstruction has much to contribute to the realization of the vision of a world free of violence, and terrorism in all its forms.

5 - Objectives and Components of Intervention Programmes: an Integrated Approach

* By definition, children and youth programmes in post-conflict situations are very complex and, as such require holistic and integrated approach to address the underlying causes of conflicts, violence, poverty and the familiar. To guarantee success, these programmes should be anchored in local sustainability and closely networked with other aid organizations, UN agencies and donors. These linkages allow for a multi-pronged approach while respecting the precise nature of each programme component.

* Flexibility is an integral part of the overall programme methodology. This would enable a constant process of adapting and responding to locally identified needs as they arise during the course of the programme activities.

* The long-term development objective of intervention programmes in post-conflict situations would be to help children, young people and communities to overcome violence and rebuild their own lives and paths of development and to support the countries educational reconstruction efforts.

* In order to achieve this development objective, emphasis is put on education considered to be a key element within a larger agenda to outgrow war and conflicts, heal from violence and determine future paths of development. Education can help to re-establish social stability and facilitate the acquisition of basic skills and competencies needed for economic recovery in a long-term perspective.

* Based on that basic assumption and, taking into account the nature of armed conflicts characterized by violence, economic destruction, loss of employment and lack of basic education, the approach should attempt to address comprehensively all these issues. The intervention programmes could thus include three major components: social intervention through psychological counselling and guidance, educational intervention through the provision of basic formal or non-formal education and « economic » intervention through the acquisition of employment and self-employment skills.

* With regard to the social reintegration, the intervention component should attempt to create a sense of security for children, youth and community members and absence of threat. This could be reached through close involvement of target groups and local communities in needs assessment and programme design likely to build a sense of belonging among participants and to enable them to comprehend the reality. Concomitantly, actions need to be taken for the protection and care of war-affected children and adolescents within the context of the family and the community. The projects developed in some African countries point to the importance of family reunification in the social reintegration of former combatants and the interactive dialogue with local communities to accept the child and to reintegrate him.

* Moreover, education and training programmes provide for counselling and guidance services as well as for peace, civic and human rights education. The educational intervention (per se), is oriented toward the development of children and adolescents abilities. In terms of human capacity development, this education (basic) can provide children and adolescents with enabling skills of literacy, numeric, critical thinking and life skills. Under normal circumstances, these skills play a critical role in the long process of sustainable development, they become particularly important in post-conflict settings for social and economic reconstruction.

This basic education could be provided either formally or non-formally. For those children who would like to return to school, which are relatively still normally functioning, they will be integrated into the existing network, provided that necessary materials are provided to schools as well as refresher courses for teachers... As for the rest, the most adapted form of learning would be non-

formal basic education likely to provide children, young people and adults with immediate tools, knowledge, skills and attitudes directly related to the world of production. This form of functional literacy and numeric has greater meaning and empowers illiterate people to build on their increasing capabilities through mixing literacy and numeric training with production – based, income-generative activities and basic needs.

* The third component intimately related to basic education (formal and non-formal) focuses on skills development. This kind of training geared towards “economic integration” could be provided either formally or non-formally. Given that most of the jobs, in the African context, are located in the informal sector of the economy, the training schemes need to recognize this reality and come up with adequate responses that promote skills of survival, adaptability and creativity, anchored in the traditional economy of the country steeped in practiced basic modes of knowing. The skills to be imparted and developed are those valued by local businesses and craftsmen and linked to income, economic survival and immediate solution of needs and problems.

* Depending however on the local realities prevailing in the country or district with regard to the availability of vocational training centres, the market demands and the profile of trainees, formal vocational training could be organized in these centres. An efficient coordination between all concerned partners (donors, managers, vocational trades and associations, target beneficiaries..) needs to be sought, based on a market survey and analysis, in order to define a responsive training content and programme. As mentioned later, a learning modules approach could be applied in the training, putting thus the emphasis on competencies rather than on duration.

* The main objective of the skills development training would be to improve trainees’ chances to be self-employed or to find a job and as such to alleviate the problem of unemployment in the country.

* While adapted to the informal sector of the economy and to the economic survival, the immediate education and training should pave the way for further education and skills training and for improvement and change in the long run. This is true as well as for skills training imparted in vocational centres.

* However, education or training alone does not necessarily guarantee sustainability or self-employment. A holistic intervention, providing a combination of training, non-formal education and credit, can be most successful in addressing the needs of ex-combatants.

* Flexibility as mentioned before, is an integral part of the overall intervention programme, particularly of skills development training. This is mostly true because of the changes occurring constantly in the markets, which lead to a flexible combination of courses and variation over time. The most efficient way to do it is to adopt an approach which tends to put more the emphasis on the competencies and skills parameter, than on duration parameter of skills training or vocational training programme.

6 - Training modalities: towards a learning modules approach

* While it is usually admitted that the host trainers can only impart skills to the same level they themselves master, the vocational training programmes could benefit from opportunities of upgrading skills of trainers, and thus providing better skills to trainees. The same could be said about vocational training centres that could be adequately equipped with standard teaching materials, reference books and strengthened teaching theory in order to organize upgrading courses or courses in subjects of high demand among small and medium enterprises.

* In shifting from duration parameter to competencies parameter in designing vocational training programmes, the learning modules approach could be adopted. A learning module is defined in terms of a set of skills and competencies that need to be mastered for the achievement of a defined activity or set of activities that lead to a defined product. The craftsmen or host trainers are usually acquainted with the intuitive and practical skills needed to doing and making things. Within a more elaborated context, a collaboration framework could be developed, bringing together production, vocations and training specialists to define in details the products, competencies and learning sequences or modules of a training activity and the time needed for implementation.

* Two main modalities could be thought of in non-formal skills development training: Center-Based Training (CBT) and Enterprise-Based Training (EBT).

The Center-Based Training is the way where people are encouraged to work in groups or cooperatives. This form of training has the advantage of sharing tools and equipment between the members of the group and cultivating the spirit of working together, badly needed in a post-conflict situation. It is considered as a basis for assistance to income-generating activities that often follow groups training.

The Enterprise-Based Training, or the traditional apprenticeship training, is in particular the most common mode of skills acquisition in the African continent. The advantages of this mode of training are that trainees are exposed to the real

constraints and challenges faced by the small enterprise and within it. The training imparted by the host trainer is very practical leading in principle to self-employment. The credit system is usually linked to this kind of training. In some cases, a mix of Center-Based and Enterprise-Based Training took place, whereby a host trainer in the small enterprise trained a small group of trainees.

* Choosing anyone of the training modalities, depends on the context of the country, the specific objectives of a vocational training / skills development programme for ex-combatants, the available external resources etc.... Whatever the choice is, the short-term prevailing concern should gradually pave the way for improvement and change. The traditional apprenticeship could be improved through a sandwich approach to “on the job training” that combines reinforcing general education (basic literacy skills) with a more scientific and technological approach to vocational skills training. Another challenging path could be to create systems which link formal education with vocational training, and vocational training with job programmes, moving towards the concept of lifelong learning.

7 - Some Planning Considerations

* The planning process for intervention programmes dealing with reintegration of war-affected children and youth is almost the same as for any other development plan or programme. Usually, it starts with an in-depth situational analysis aiming at highlighting the major problems and issues, defining alternative solutions to these issues, objectives and targets to be achieved, ways and means of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

* Given the very complex nature of these programmes, there is a need to adapt the planning process to this complexity and ensure a minimum of flexibility for necessary readjustment and adaptation in due course.

* The above-mentioned complexity shows itself in the set of problems and issues that need to be addressed at the same time: individual insecurity, social instability, illiteracy, deprivation, unemployment etc.... In order to ensure success in the implementation of programmes, there is a need to collaborate closely with other partners, Multi and Bilateral Donors, UN agencies, NGOs, Governments, civil society institutions.

* At the level of the preparatory phase and, prior to undertaking an in-depth situational analysis, there is a need to review the intervention programmes in post-conflict settings, already implemented or on going. This is mostly true because these programmes are rather limited in number and constitute an

emerging area of action with little evaluative and reflective materials. Such a review would help in getting a clear idea about the nature of intervention programmes and their components, the real constraints and challenges they are facing, the different alternative solutions adopted.... All that would help in devising schemes that could be more realistic and responsive.

* Despite all the similarities that could exist between countries in post-conflict situations and between some target groups within the same country, there is always a specificity to be safeguarded and taken into consideration in shaping a specific intervention programme. This would affect the assessment of needs as well as the identification of targets and objectives and the ways and means to implement them.

* Local and in-depth preparatory phase is absolutely necessary to build a good information base covering all aspects of the intervention programme and serving to prepare a thorough diagnosis. This preparatory phase, which needs time, would serve as well to start negotiations, at the outset of the programme, with managers, donors and beneficiaries, in order to ensure a common understanding with regard to the overall goals and objectives of the programme, avoiding thus surprises during implementation. As for diagnosis per-se it should clearly identify the target beneficiaries, assess their needs and identify the subject areas of training, etc..

* Given that, in many post-conflict situations, some immediate humanitarian needs are still unmet, careful attention should be given to ensuring necessary external resources for vocational training and skills development. To what extent the priority given to this kind of training at the national level meets the same order of priority for external donors?

* It is tempting, as we have seen earlier, to go for programmes and projects on a grand scale, given the vast numbers of war-affected children and youth. It is important however to have a balance between the limited available resources and the need to reach a critical mass of beneficiaries. Clearly there is much to be achieved by first building contextually relevant small projects or programmes that may then be promoted and accepted on a wider scale. This is one of the most important lessons to be learned from several projects implemented in the field.

* A special attention should be given to the coordination structures in charge of implementing the intervention programmes. This structure should be strong enough to coordinate a very complex programme involving several partners and including a lot of activities. The selection of good coordinators is a must, and a

special training¹ could be thought of in case of necessity. Some field projects point out to the lack of qualified personnel in charge of coordination and management.

* Within the special context of the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for the Great Lakes Region in Africa (9 countries), the intervention programmes could thus have a sub-regional umbrella addressing common issues in terms of demobilisation and reintegration of youth and children including all the components mentioned before. The implementation at the country level (national) or even at the local level (district) gives more credit to the coordination function and the necessity to provide it with qualified human resources.

¹ The International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP – UNESCO Paris) could offer this training.