ETHNICITY / POLITICAL AFFILIATION / RELIGION

MAIN OBJECTIVES

• To ensure that all children and youth regardless of ethnicity, political affiliation, identity or religion have equal access to quality education, especially during emergencies and early reconstruction.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Education can promote inclusion, equity and positive social transformation. Equally, it can reinforce and widen social, economic and cultural divisions. Education can worsen fragility and conflict when certain groups are denied schooling or are discriminated against within it. Political, religious and ethnic affiliation, or combinations of these, can directly affect access to and inclusion in education. Throughout history, many states have supported education of varying quality for different members of their populations. In such instances, access to education becomes highly politicized, as less powerful groups demand better-quality education for their children, and more
powerful groups seek to retain their advantage in society. In times of conflict and emergencies, these controversies are likely to intensify.

In any crisis, agencies who respond to emergencies are also in danger of maintaining or even worsening the entrenched exclusion and prejudice experienced by many people before an emergency. This exacerbation of discrimination may happen by default if action is not taken from the beginning to identify pre-existing and new patterns of discrimination and power, which must then be challenged in emergency responses. (Save the Children, 2008a: 8)

Most of the world’s conflicts are civil wars. In 2007, all conflicts were based within states rather than between them (Human Security Project, 2008). Political, religious or ethnic differences are almost always components of civil conflict. Education may be part of the conflict – the education system often reflects, conveys or even aggravates conflict along political, religious or ethnic lines.

The denial of education may become a weapon of war in itself, through, for example, forced closure of or attacks on schools. Minorities may be denied access to education altogether, or education may be used to suppress their language, traditions, art forms, religious practices and cultural values. Teachers may use their position in the classroom to assert their ethnic, political or religious position, or teachers and schools may be seen as parties to the conflict and become targets of the warring parties (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Further challenges relate to conflicting parties’ manipulation of history and textbooks for political purposes.
At the ministry level, instability may lead to frequent changes in senior personnel of the Ministry of Education, and thus, to frequent policy changes.

When children from different religious or ethnic groups speak different languages and have different traditions, the issues of access and inclusion become more complicated. In these situations, educational authorities will need to consult widely with members and representatives of all groups when determining policies and practices related to language and curriculum (see the Guidebook, Chapter 4.1, ‘Curriculum content and review processes’).

In a situation of forced migration, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) may reside in a country or region with different ethnic, political or religious groups. While the level of hostility is usually lower in the host country/region than in the refugees’ place of origin, these differences may be a source of new tension and conflict. Refugees and IDPs may be denied access to local school systems because of differences in ethnicity, political affiliation or religion (as well as lack of places in the local schools). If refugees or IDPs of different ethnic, political or religious groups reside in the same camp, there may be serious tensions and possibly violence, as well as competition for assistance and jobs. At times, it may be necessary for students with different ethnic, political or religious backgrounds to study separately from one another – especially in a conflict or post-conflict situation where the safety of children and youth may be endangered if they study together.

In a post-crisis situation, returnees are often subject to discrimination if they have a different ethnic background, or belong to a different religious or political group from others in their community. Discrimination may continue until conditions improve and trust-building measures are in place. Sometimes
redressive measures intended to assist a group who have been discriminated against can make this group more visible, leading to increased discrimination from the dominant group.

In crisis or early reconstruction, education therefore needs to be carefully examined to investigate whether there is a risk of certain groups being denied their rights, or of worsening existing tensions.

OVERCOMING ETHNIC SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION: EXPERIENCE FROM THAILAND

Integrating migrant children into schools

Children of illegal Burmese migrants into Thailand did not have access to formal education even before the 2004 tsunami, while some dropped out post-tsunami. Recognising this, Grassroots Human Rights Education (GHRE) initiated a migrant learning centre project. Children who have never been to Thai schools, as well as those who attend school irregularly, receive support to facilitate their integration into Thai schools. Children who participated in these learning centres expressed that they were less intimidated by Thai people because of their participation. However, not all Burmese migrant boys could be pulled out of child labour and brought back into the education system. GHRE is now reaching out to parents of such children to persuade them to enrol them.

Addressing discrimination against children whose parents do not have citizenship

Displaced Thais received limited relief from the government of Thailand following the 2004 tsunami. NGO Foundation for Children realised that while young people took part in children’s centres in their own village, they felt excluded in inter-centre sports camps and other events organised by the foundation. They held discussions with both the displaced Thai children and children of parents with citizenship, and the gap between the two groups is slowly being bridged.
Addressing discrimination against religious minorities

Another excluded group is children from the Moken or Muslim community, who are a religious minority in Thailand. One of Save the Children’s programme staff noted during a visit that Moken children were very shy when they took part in children’s clubs organised in the tsunami affected areas. They did not take part as actively as children from Buddhist communities. Special efforts were made to encourage them to open up and join in. After taking part in several disaster risk reduction activities, they gained more confidence and participated actively.

Source: Save the Children (2008a)

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

Differences in the quality and content of education received by different ethnic, political and religious groups can give rise to social tensions and armed conflict. These issues should be addressed in a preventive manner.

In renewing the education system after conflict, steps should be taken to reduce tensions between different sections of society, in order to build sustainable peace.

All activities and plans should be thought through so that they can contribute to reducing tensions between cultural, religious or ethnic groups. Plans for managing education should include extra time and effort for establishing everyone’s commitment to the idea of equal access to education and learning for all. These problems may take some while to resolve, but if inclusive approaches can be reiterated they will help education contribute to stability and equity, rather than undermining it.
Some suggested strategies are indicated below.

**Summary of suggested strategies**

**Ethnicity/political affiliation/religion**

1. Review government policies related to education and non-discrimination.
2. Review government practices related to education and non-discrimination.
3. Establish how education is resourced and what effect that has on excluded groups.
4. Encourage the use and recognition of multiple languages.
5. Ensure that school management committees and parent-teacher associations/organizations have representatives from the various political/ethnic/religious groups within the school community.
6. Ensure the protection and safety of all children.
Guidance notes

1. Review government policies related to education and non-discrimination.
   - What does the constitution say about the education of all citizens?
   - Does the government’s national ‘Education for All’ (EFA) strategy specifically address the education issues of all of the country’s various religious/ethnic/political groups?
   - Do education policies explicitly state that all children have a right to education in institutions of the same quality? Does this apply to public and private educational institutions?
   - What government policies have an effect on access to education for the country’s various religious, ethnic, political groups? Consider:
     - Language policies: Is one language of instruction mandated that can lead to the exclusion of some children from schooling?
     - Curriculum policies: Are some groups or religions portrayed negatively in the national curriculum and textbooks? (See the Guidebook, Chapter 4.1, ‘Curriculum content and review processes’, for more information.)
     - Recruiting policies – for both teachers and administrators (including those in the Ministry of Education): Do equal opportunity and non-discrimination policies exist with regard to hiring all education staff?
     - Non-discrimination policies for students: Do education policies explicitly state that all children have a right to education in institutions of the same quality? Does this apply to public and private educational institutions?
2. Review government practices related to education and non-discrimination.

- Are some groups or religions portrayed negatively in the national curriculum and textbooks? (See the *Guidebook, Chapter 4.1, ‘Curriculum content and review processes’,* for more information.)

- Are certain subjects or parts of the curriculum sensitive? If so, educational authorities should carefully make decisions related to the timing (during or after emergencies) of when

- School funding policies: How are funds allocated within the country? Was the distribution formula developed based on a principle of equity so that no groups are disadvantaged or discriminated against? (See the definition of equity in the *Guidebook, Chapter 2.2, ‘Gender’.*)

- Does the education system encourage appreciation of diversity, or does it seek to educate all students according to the viewpoint of the majority or the ruling group?

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**THE TWO FACES OF EDUCATION IN ETHNIC CONFLICT**

“Children do not come to the classroom as blank slates. They bring with them the attitudes, values and behaviour of their societies beyond the classroom walls . . . Prejudiced children are more likely to be moralistic, to dichotomize the world, they externalize conflict, and have a higher need of definiteness. Under conditions of inter-ethnic tension and conflict, such characteristics unavoidably find their way into the classroom and must be taken into account if the peace-destroying impact of education is to be minimized.”

Source: Bush and Saltarelli (2000: 3-4)
certain subjects such as language, history, art, culture, etc. are introduced. (For more information, see the Guidebook, Chapter 4.1, ‘Curriculum content and review processes’.)

- How does the curriculum present the histories and practices of different groups within the country?
- Include diversity and non-discrimination in teacher training.
  - Encourage teachers to adapt materials and teaching content to become more relevant to the lives and interests of children in their classes.
- Do equal opportunity and non-discrimination policies exist with regard to hiring education staff? Are members of all political, religious and ethnic groups actively recruited for teaching and administrative positions? Promote equitable, mixed recruitment by example.
- Are schools (private, religious or otherwise) aware of and in compliance with state policies on non-discrimination? Make local schools and inspectors aware of standards that exist.
- When government policies and current practices differ, consider how these differences can be addressed. When possible, use non-political means, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education for All targets or the country’s Constitution to resolve differences.
- Are children of different religions, ethnic groups or political affiliation taught in the same classrooms or separately?
  - Include questions such as the following in assessment, consultation and review with different education stakeholders:
    - Who is usually welcomed into school, and who is not?
    - How do access and enrolment rates vary depending on the students’ ethnicity, religion, first language and political affiliation?
3. Establish how education is resourced and what effect that has on excluded groups.

- School funding policies: How are funds allocated within the country? Was the distribution formula developed based on a principle of equity so that no groups are disadvantaged or discriminated against? (See the definition of equity in the Guidebook, Chapter 2.2, ‘Gender’.)

- Is education better in some places than others? For example, do schools in some areas of the country have more resources to pay for teachers, build schools, buy school materials, etc.? Take this information into account in planning and budget preparation.

- Has the government committed resources to cater for the needs of IDPs in education?

- Does the state allocation of funds for education favour certain groups, such as the ruling political party? Where appropriate, develop positive but neutral relationships with local representatives of all political groupings.

- Ensure that donors and funding agencies are aware of resourcing inequities.

- Where there has been a large influx of people to an area, or where education services have received weak funding in the past, support work with local agencies and partners to produce accurate figures of the numbers of children in the local area, and to request increased funding.

- Link with other emergency or crisis response programmes to improve access to services for the most excluded groups. Make other programme teams aware of information you have on children excluded from school, and coordinate the targeting of support to the most vulnerable families, such as cash transfers and health inputs.
GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO EDUCATION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

In Northern Ireland, segregation along religious lines was almost total until the 1980s. This emphasized differences and encouraged mutual ignorance and perhaps most importantly, mutual suspicion between Catholics and Protestants. Catholic school-leavers were found to have, on average, lower qualifications than their Protestant counterparts, and hence reduced job opportunities. A government-sponsored study in 1973 found that this stemmed largely from unequal funding arrangements. State schools, overwhelmingly attended by Protestants, received full state funding, whereas independent Catholic schools had to rely largely on their own resources. Some specialists called for integrated schools. Several of these have come with the support of parents, but statistics show that the majority of students continue to attend highly segregated schools. More recently therefore, the Government of Northern Ireland equally funds Catholic and Protestant schools and aims to give all children the opportunity to learn about each other.


4. Encourage the use and recognition of multiple languages.
   
   • Find out what languages children speak at home, and what languages are considered important by different groups. Recognize which languages are considered politically sensitive.

   • What are the languages of instruction, both in policy and in reality? Is one language of instruction mandated that can lead to the exclusion of some children from schooling? Why do teachers use certain languages for teaching and learning?
Does the use of this language exclude some children from school, or contribute to low achievement? Share this information with all stakeholders.

Challenge assumptions that only one language should be used in education. Promote the idea that children can learn important languages well, but that in order to do so they need to start learning in the language most familiar to them. Wherever possible, teaching should be in the language most children use at home for at least six years, with other key languages being introduced gradually.

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AS PART OF ETHNIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

“Through its language, a given group expresses its own societal identity; languages are related to thought processes and to the way members of a certain linguistic group perceive nature, the universe and society” (Stavenhagen, 1996). In many cases, the imposition of a dominant language on ethnic groups (both inside and outside the formal school system) is a repressive act, both in intention and outcome. It can also have a unifying impact, however. In Senegal, for example, where there are 15 different linguistic groups and where Islamic and Christian populations have long coexisted peacefully, no civil wars have occurred since independence from France in the 1960s. One important factor in explaining the relative ‘ethnic peace’ in Senegal is that after independence, French was made the official language in a conscious effort to prevent linguistic conflict, while Diola, Malinke, Pular, Serer, Soninke and Wolof were declared to be national languages. Not only are these languages a critical part of the curriculum, they are also used in radio and television broadcasts and literacy campaigns. While Wolof could have been declared the country’s official language, given its predominance, this was never attempted, as it would have offended different ethnic groups.

Source: Bush and Saltarelli (2000: 11, 17–18)
• Make sure that the languages spoken by local stakeholders in education are recognized and respected. Conduct meetings in different languages; arrange for interpretation; and ensure that teacher training predominantly uses the language that teachers themselves are most familiar with.

• If teachers need to build children’s skills in other languages, develop training for them both to improve their second-language skills and to teach it as a subject.

### LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN CRISIS AND RECOVERY: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Advise teachers to teach in children’s mother tongue if they speak the language, and to slowly and carefully introduce less familiar languages that are considered important for children to learn.

Encourage teachers to work in partnership with adults from the community so that classroom activities can be conducted in the children’s first language. When there are multiple language groups in a class, one community adult can work with each language group. Alternatively, a multigrade approach can be used, where classes are based on language group rather than age.

Encourage the production of reading and writing materials in children’s home languages and in dominant languages. Encourage children to write stories in their own language and to draw activity pictures. Children can tell stories in their language based on the pictures and can use the written stories for reading in class with other children.

In longer-term responses, introduce some teaching of other languages as subjects.

In longer-term responses, support teachers to gradually transition to using other languages that are necessary for exams, for re-entering regular schools and so on.

Source: Adapted from Save the Children (2009)
5. Ensure that school management committees and parent-teacher associations/organizations have representatives from the various political/ethnic/religious groups within the school community.

- Identify which areas of education are sensitive or will need particular focus. Build this awareness into meetings and consultations with representatives from the various political/ethnic/religious groups.
- Conduct participatory training and consultation exercises to promote non-discrimination, especially among teachers, school management committees, parent-teacher associations and headteachers.
- Arrange for those managing education to directly hear children’s views on improving education, particularly those of children often excluded from education. Work to get acceptance for the idea that children will learn successfully when their views are responded to.
- Encourage mixing of members of different political/ethnic/religious groups in informal and formal settings related to education at every opportunity. Teacher training is a particular opportunity to bring together people who have been separated by conflict.

6. Ensure the protection and safety of all children.

- Advocate locally and in wider networks for attacks on schools to end.
- Develop distance learning or home schooling options where it is unsafe for children to attend school every day.
- Do integrated schools currently put some children at risk? If so, consider separate schools, shifts or classrooms as a short-term approach.
• Consider extracurricular means of integrating children, such as sports and recreation programmes, even if these are infrequent at first.
• Even when children are separated, work with teachers and education leaders to ensure that all children have access to the same quality education and the same core curriculum.
• Support teachers and school management committees to create awareness among children and adults in post-conflict areas about precautionary measures against land mines.

EDUCATION IN POST-CONFLICT KOSOVO

“Given that ethnic discrimination was seen to be one of the critical factors underlying the conflict, it is not surprising that the issue of ethnically separate schooling was a key policy concern in the eyes of both internationals and Kosovars at the beginning of the post-conflict reconstruction. At the level of rhetoric there appeared to be complete consensus – all parties quickly endorsed the position that all children should be accommodated in a single, inclusive education system that respected the language and cultural rights of all. However, the decade of sometimes brutally enforced segregation and exclusion had taken its toll. In the first three months after the end of the NATO Campaign, a new version of the old parallel system was re-established as the Kosovo Albanian refugees returned to their villages and homes, and many Serb and other ethnic minorities either left Kosovo or moved to areas regarded as safer.”…

“Faced with this conundrum – separate schooling was unacceptable, but separate schooling was a de facto reality and the only way to ensure access for all, UNMIK’s next tactic was to propose an incremental strategy termed ‘unification’”… which “proposed acceptance of the status quo of schools already established, but introduced over time a reversal
of the institutional separation that had developed after 1992” . . . “Progress towards integration of all schools within a single, unified system, which still remains the explicit goal of the MEST and UNMIK, has been exceptionally slow” . . . . “The issue of unification of schooling provides a particularly graphic example of the challenges that planners confront in a context where official policy commitment to an integrated non-discriminatory system runs directly against the political realities on the ground, and depends on political agreements that are well beyond the reach of education officials.”

Source: Sommers and Buckland (2004).
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


