

Translating global education standards to local contexts

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Global standards such as the Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards need to be applied locally and this requires a thoughtful and committed contextualisation process.

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards articulate the minimum level of educational quality and access in emergencies and express a commitment that all children, youth and adults have the right to safe, good quality and relevant education even in the most dire circumstances, including forced displacement.¹

In practice, because the standards are written in generic terms they need to be contextualised in a given situation; it is about 'translating' and adapting global standards to make their content appropriate and meaningful to the given circumstances. For example, the global guidance on teacher-student ratio is that "enough teachers should be recruited to ensure an appropriate teacher-student ratio"; the appropriate teacher-student ratio for a refugee camp school may differ significantly between contexts of long-term displacement and schools in recently displaced communities.

Informal contextualisation can occur when users review, tailor, pick out sections and adapt the guidance for their particular needs. Formal contextualisation, however, is a collaborative group process to develop a set of contextualised standards that engages all education stakeholders in a given context. The outcome is then recorded and shared widely, making it available for all education colleagues to use in that context.

Such a consultative, collaborative process also helps build a strong community of practitioners and policymakers in the country and offers an opportunity to hear the hidden voices and perspectives from, for example, refugee or host community teachers and parents who may have previously

been excluded from similar activities. This approach may help empower affected populations to claim their right to education in emergencies and strengthen the accountability of duty bearers to meet their obligations.

Sri Lanka and Ethiopia

In both Sri Lanka and Ethiopia, education practitioners from non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, policymakers from the Ministry of Education (MoE), and other government officials from geographically diverse regions of their countries attended two-day workshops in their capitals to draft national education standards through contextualising the INEE Minimum Standards. In Ethiopia in order to ensure that refugee issues were mainstreamed into the country-specific standards, the initial consultation held at the national level was followed by a second workshop in the refugee-hosting area of Dollo Ado in which refugee experts reviewed the draft standards through a refugee/IDP lens.

In both countries, the agenda and materials were developed in consultation with the host organisations (Save the Children in Sri Lanka and UNICEF and Save the Children in Ethiopia) to cater to local needs. Guidance on how to approach sensitive topics, such as tribal and ethnic conflict, was also incorporated.

Participants were divided into groups, each group with an MoE official, local representation and geographical diversity. Attention was also given to ensuring that gender, religion, ethnicity and language were equally represented. The groups worked on three or more standards each to cover the entire 19 Standards of the Minimum

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Standards Handbook over the course of two to three days. The small groups later reviewed each other's work and offered additional feedback and ideas to strengthen the content. Participants also drafted a list of practical ways that they would use the contextualised standards to inform and guide education policy and practice in their work.



INEE contextualisation workshop in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, 2013.

The facilitators then compiled the work into one document, highlighting any outstanding issues, questions and content gaps. This first draft was shared with all the participants and with other educationalists located in the respective countries. Their comments and further guidance were incorporated in a final version of the local standards.

Lessons from the contextualising process

In general, participants appreciated the opportunity to sit at the same table with colleagues from across the country and especially with those from the MoE. The participants owned the contextualisation process and its contribution to their own education work. Securing government attendance and convening a diverse group of participants were applauded, as this will have a direct impact on the future level of adoption and usage of the standards in both countries. In Ethiopia, participation by a wide variety of stakeholders including strong participation by the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and colleagues from the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and Protection Clusters helped to strengthen the content of the standards and to build bridges between the MoE, ARRA and the Education Cluster.

One positive outcome from the Sri Lanka workshop was the identification of the many official circulars and policies on education that could be used in and/or related to an emergency context. Sri Lanka does not have one specific education in emergency (EiE) policy or a policy that explicitly deals with EiE, and its draft New Education Policy neither explicitly nor implicitly deals with EiE. This was a recurrent and glaring gap throughout the workshop and the drafting of the contextualised standards.

In addition to identifying gaps in education policy, contextualisation exercises may also raise awareness of existing laws and policies that are applicable in an emergency context. In Ethiopia, for example, participants working in refugee response expressed a need to clarify whether and how government policies apply in refugee contexts. A final contextualised standards document may be able to provide such guidance to identify how existing education policy applies in various emergencies to better inform EiE initiatives.

Strong MoE participation from the onset through to the end of the process is essential as government representatives are the only

ones who can validate enquiries about existing circulars and local laws and their integration into the finalised document. Some participants learned about certain circulars and laws already in place and others (especially those from the MoE) were made aware of the nuanced difficulties of implementing these laws in the field.

In Sri Lanka, it was agreed that a follow-up workshop or virtual meeting should take place with all the participants within 6-12 months after launching the contextualised standards in order to see who has done what in disseminating and applying the standards, and to see what good practice and lessons learned have emerged.

In Ethiopia, it was also suggested to develop a monitoring system on how the standards were being applied as a way of sharing knowledge, good practices and challenges.

For future contextualisations of humanitarian quality and accountability standards, the following points could be helpful:

- Ensure diverse participant representation in the contextualisation process (in terms of geographical location, expertise, organisation or government, etc).
- Endorsement and active involvement and/or leadership of the process by the relevant government Ministry are crucial.
- Link the contextualisation process to broader processes in the sector, eg sector planning.
- Invest time and effort in supporting the follow-up process by identifying 'champions' of the use of the standards in country and by holding face-to-face or virtual follow-up meetings to allow users to share good practice and learn from each other.
- Allow several months for the contextualisation process in order to give ample time for the group work and peer review process.

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1. <http://tinyurl.com/INEE-MinStandards>

