Promoting Quality Education in Post-Conflict Situations: A Community Participation Approach

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Abstract

Conflicts have devastating impact on children's education. Formal and non-formal education structures are corroded, communities displaced and fragmented and educational inputs threatened. Maintaining a sufficient educational corps, recruiting educators, properly training and remunerating them become a challenge. During conflicts, the state may not have the capacity and political will to provide education. Communities in troubled or remote areas may become isolated and beyond the reach of government services and this may create gap which needs to be filled by non-state actors to ensure learning continues. Education is important both for its intrinsic human worth and for possibilities for societal improvement which may contribute towards an end to the conflict, the provision of schooling becomes a priority and focus of community engagement. In the absence or inability of an education authority to manage the education system, the community needs to step in to re-establish schools and keep the system functioning. The research sets out to explore the types of roles communities play in the provision of education and the conditions that may hinder or encourage positive engagement in both emergency and reconstruction settings. The research recommends that social and affective aspects of learning and active participation of all should be emphasized towards improving the educational quality in situations of post-conflict. Cultural and social dimension should be at the centre of community participation in education.

Key words: Promoting quality education; Post-conflict situations; Community participation approach

INTRODUCTION

The nature of war has changed dramatically over the last half-century. As the "new wars" have shifted from the international to the intra-national arena, the line between civilian and combatant has blurred. Prior to World War I, the ratio of military to civilian casualties in conflict was 8 to 1. Today, that ratio has been turned on its head, as civilian casualties now outnumber military casualties in conflict by that same ratio, 8 to 1 (Kaldor, 1999). The educational development of nations affected by civil and regional conflicts have slowed or stalled while conflict has displaced entire communities, destroyed families and transformed social structures, such is the case with some parts of North Eastern Nigeria. Although the devastation of contemporary conflict is clear and well-known, important questions about post-conflict reconstruction remain largely unanswered as the international community, national governments and communities struggle to rebuild. How will social and economic communities recover and rebuild in modern post-conflict environments? What role can education play in the reconstruction process? And most importantly, what roles do communities play in the entire reconstruction process.

During conflicts, the state may not have the capacity or political will to provide education, communities in remote or troubled areas may become isolated and beyond the reach of government services. The displacement of people, including teachers, the use of schools as military bases and the destructions of classrooms all inhibit education, while state resources to address these issues during times

of conflicts may be non-existent or in limited supply. The retreat of the state from the provision of public services definitely creates a gap which needs to be filled by non-state actors such as the communities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and public spirited individuals (World Bank, 2005a, 2005b). Given the intrinsic human worth and the possibilities for societal improvement which may contribute towards an end to the conflict, the provision of schooling frequently becomes a priority and focus for community engagement. In the absence and inability of an education authority to manage the education system, communities in conflicts areas need to step in to re-establish schools and ensure that learning continues.

Post-conflicts expectations of the state are usually high and education frequently ranks as one the most important factors in influencing refugees and Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) to return home. Shortly before the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the North, South Sudanese returning home indicated that their number one priority—ahead of food, shelter, clean water and security was the expectation that the newly formed government would address the issue of education (Cook, Melia, & Deng, 2004).

The research therefore sets out to examine the role the community plays in the provision of education when the state is weak or incapacitated during a conflict or post-conflict reconstruction settings and what factors can undermine or promote positive community participation in the provision of education.

1. THE EFFECT OF WAR/CONFLICT ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

While major wars particularly between and among countries have diminished over the past several years, wars in form of inter-tribal conflicts and insurgencies have remained. While the reasons for these conflicts vary, the impact they have on the educational systems is self-evident.

(a) *Conflict destroys educational infrastructures*. This is the case in North East Nigeria where Boko Haram has sustained attacks since 2010. In Borno State (the epicentre of the insurgency) alone, more than 50 state primary schools have been destroyed (Integrated Regional Information Network IRIN, 2013).

(b) *Conflicts displace population and restricts access to education*. According to Munoz (2008) up to 90% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have no access to education. In Nigeria many have been forced out of their homes as a result of Boko Haram attacks and are staying in very squalid conditions in IDPs camps.

(c) *Conflict mains and kills students and education staff*. Since the insurgency started in Nigeria, hundreds of students and teachers have been killed. On the 12th of March, 2012, gunmen linked to Boko Haram attacked Hausawa–Danmaliki Primary School in Kumbotso Local Government Area of Kano state where several pupils and teachers were killed. In October 2012, about 40 students were killed at the Federal Polytechnic Mubi Adamawa State while in September 2013, a school of Agriculture in Yobe State was also attacked at night by Boko Haram and more than sixty students were killed (Oladunjoye & Omemu, 2013) These are among the several attacks on schools by Boko Haram which have left both students/pupils and teachers dead.

(d) *Conflict forces children out of school and into armed groups*. Kermeliotos (2015), quoting UNICEF reports that an estimated one million children have been forced out of school as a result of violent attacks by Boko Haram in North East Nigeria and its neighbouring countries. He further reported that more than 2,000 schools in Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon have been forced to close. This staggering figure of out of school children has increased the risks of children being abused, abducted and recruited into armed groups. The case of the Chibok girls in Nigeria is well known.

1.1 What Is a Community?

A community is a social unit of any size that shares common values, or that is situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a village or town). It is a group of people who are connected by durable relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who mutually define that relationship as important to their social identity and practice. Communities may be defined by the characteristics they share, for example culture, tradition, language, law, class, race and/or geography. They typically have some form of collective interest and/or identity. Additionally, they are likely to have some form of group structure (whether formal or informal), as part of which different members are likely to have different roles related to their common goals. They are also likely to have a degree of local autonomy and responsibility (Uemura, 1999).

Bray (2000) identified three main foundations for communities:

(a) Geography—constituted by those living within relatively small areas such as villages and towns.
(b) Identity—religious, socio-economic, racial or ethnic.
(c) Interests—philanthropic or shared concerns on collective issues.

Whilst communities may be founded on more than one of these characteristics, it is important to recognize which of these predominates in prompting the community to action in providing education. This will have implications for the nature of social capital within communities, and how others, including the state perceive their participation. Social capital has many definitions and underpinning these definitions are trust, relationship and reciprocity.

1.2 What Is Community Participation in Conflict or Reconstruction Situation?

While there is ample literature available regarding the overarching definition of community participation in (formal and non-formal) education settings, there are relatively few definitions of community participation in conflict or reconstruction settings. Sullivan-Owomoyela and Brannelly (2009) say this may in part be explained by the significant number of individual who become displaced (internally and externally) during conflict, thus creating unstable community bases which have varying forms and level of participation. In other words, as they say, a global definition is not possible.

However, community participation may refer to both the processes and activities that allow members of an affected population to be heard, empowering them to be part of decision-making processes and enabling them to take direct action on education issues (INEE, 2004).

Community participation studies (across a spectrum of settings) have shown the various channels through which communities may be involved in the learning environments, for example school governance (community education committees (CECs), school contributions (in kind and financial), school contribution, etc. (Uemura, 1999).

Beyond the immediate school environment, communities can also play a role in improving attitudes towards learning and thereby promoting participation (particularly for girls). During the conflict period, especially during displacement, individuals may be forced or allowed opportunities to enter into new roles. This can prove to be a destabilizing factor, but is also an opportunity to strengthen positive relationships that emerge, for example, the opportunities women and girls may gain in being decision-makers or, at the very least, having a more active voice.

1.3 Levels of Community Participation

Shaeffer (1994) poses different levels of community participation that vary according to the degree of engagement and activity. With this classification system, participation ranges from passive collaboration or involvement with the education system, to an actively engaged role. These are not only distinguishing features between different communities, but are also likely to exist within communities where individuals will play different levels of participation.

According to Shaeffer (1994) passive engagement or involvement with the education system may include the following acts:
(a) Use of mere service such as enrolling children in school or using a primary health care facility.
(b) Involvement through the contribution (or extraction) of money, materials and labour.
(c) Involvement through mere "attendance" (for example at parents' meetings at school),

implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others.
(d) Involvement through consultation on a particular issue.

Active participation for him includes the following:
(a) Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors.
(b) Participation as implementers of delegated powers.
(c) Participation in "real decision-makers at very stage", including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation and evaluation.

Similarly, the World Health Organisation (WHO) (1999) characterizes community participation on three different levels: marginal, substantive and structural participation. In marginal participation, the community's input is "limited and transitory and has little direct influence on the outcome of the development activity" (WHO, 1999, pp.16-17). Substantive participation is characterised by the community being actively involved in determining policies and carrying out activities, even though the mechanisms for these activities may be controlled externally. In structural participation, the community is involved as an integral part of the project and its participation becomes the ideological basis for the project itself. Here the community plays an active and direct part in all aspects of the development process and has the power to ensure that its opinion are taken into account (WHO, 1999, pp.16-17).

Other organisations working in the field of education in emergencies and/or reconstruction have varying definitions for community participation with the key words empowerment, sustainability, active involvement and culture as prominent themes. For instance the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE) (2008) defines community participation as

...both the processes and activities that allow members of an affected population to be heard, empowering them to be part of decision-making processes and enabling them to take direct action on education issues...Additionally, community participation serves as a strategy to identify and mobilize local resources within a community, as well as build consensus and support for education programmes. Community participation must be real and sustained empowerment and capacity building, and must build upon efforts already underway on the ground.

Similarly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stresses the importance of community participation in education in emergency situations in its *Education: Field Guidelines* (2003). It indicates that communities should be involved in all areas of education activities, from initiation to planning to implementation. In particular, community associations that focus on developing education programme should be encouraged and supported to ensure their sustainability.

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION: WHY AND HOW?

Education has a positive influence on the dynamics of conflict and make a contribution to peace-building. The UN Secretary-General's (2009) report on peace-building identifies a number of recurring priorities in conflict-affected situations, "establishing security, building confidence in a political process, delivering initial peace dividends and expanding core national capacity". These priorities the report says include "the provision of basic services, such as water and sanitation, health and primary education". However, in conflict-affected situations education is also about more than service delivery because it is a means of socialization and identity development through the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes across generations. According to Bush and Salterelli (2010), Smith and Vaux (2003), and Davies (2004) education may therefore be a driver of conflict (fuelling grievances, stereotypes, xenophobia and other antagonisms) but can also be a way of contributing to 'conflict transformation and "peace-building"

Education is a fundamental right that should be maintained at all times, even in the most difficult circumstances. This is not simply an ideological statement. Where education is maintained in the midst of conflict it may provide an important mechanism for the protection of children against abuse.

Education is also an essential tool for human development and eradication of poverty. Children rarely get a second chance at education. Where the opportunity of education has been lost due to conflict, it is not just a loss to the individual, but a loss of social capital and the capacity of a society to recover from the conflict.

Quality education is not only about cognitive development (basic numeracy or literacy): It should also include the development of a sound values system that reflects universal values and human rights (Castle et al., 2005). These values include equality, respect for others, tolerance and honesty. Thus it becomes imperative to explore rights-based approach to education which though is relevant to all education systems, is particularly important in conflict-affected areas, where people may have suffered human rights abuses. In these circumstances, rebuilding an education system is the prime opportunity to ingrain these concepts within the structure, helping to safeguard against future abuse.

Active participation of the community facilitates the identification of community-specific education issues and strategies that are effective in addressing them. It also serves as a strategy to identify and mobilize local resources within a community, as well as build consensus and support for educational programme. Community participation must include real and sustained empowerment and capacity building, and must build upon efforts already underway on the ground (INEE, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Communities can play an integral part in education provision both during and after conflicts. This participation can greatly contribute to continuing the provision of education, reconstruction and conflict resolution efforts. It can provide a foundation for partnerships with the state after the conflict has subsided but as has been noted certain factors have to be present for the contribution of the community to education to be meaningful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the absence or near absence of government involvement in education during reconstruction after conflicts, the community can take the initiative into their hands to ensure that schooling continues. This it can do by:

(a) Enrolling learners in an education programme: communities can ensure that schooling is sustained by ensuring that all displaced children of school going age are sent back to school. How this is done depends on what means the community finds the most convenient but the active participation of all stakeholders (community elders, teachers, parents etc.) is important if this is to succeed.

(b) Providing material and financial resources: this may be done primarily in the form of providing land for school construction or classroom venues, contributing materials (for example, stone and wood) for school rehabilitation and maintenance of school buildings. Protection of school buildings and property against vandalism may also be undertaken by the community.

(c) Communities can also contribute human resources in the selection of teachers or collaborate with child protection officers or the security agencies to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. The teachers selected have to be ones accepted by the community, active in community affairs and show interest to work as teachers in such environments.

To promote community participation in education, the paper makes the following recommendations:

(a) Build trust and heal relationships: This is the first step to ensure effective implementation of humanitarian and development activities. Education programmes provide 'neutral' spaces if teachers and education authorities view all learners as equal. In other words, all should be treated equally irrespective of their part in the conflicts. This helps to heal the scar of the war and build healthier and more positive relationships.

(b) Traditional authorities and structures should be revitalised, where appropriate, to ensure that cultural and social dimensions are at the centre of education community participation activities. Interventions need to be socially acceptable and responsive to local priorities and community structures in order to be long lasting and move beyond tokenistic participation. Engagement with communities should be culturally appropriate and strengthen or revalidate positive cultural mechanisms and traditions.

(c) Local bonding and bridging social capital mechanisms can be strengthened by understanding each partner's asset(s). Local education authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may provide a bridge between community education stakeholders and regional or national education officials (Woolcock, 2001; Putnam, 2002; Edwards, 2000; Burde, 2004). Genuine partnerships are based on an understanding that not all parties bring the same resources. A balanced understanding of what works and why it works is needed.

In addition, partnerships need to be developed incrementally with mutual gains and contributions from all partners. As countries stabilize, the nature of community and civil society involvement inevitably shifts as the state is able to take on more of a leadership role and is in receipt of more funding.

Community participation in reconstruction settings becomes more formalised as activities are better coordinated between NGOs and UN agencies working with communities and state. As education sector planning is strengthened, states are forced to consider how they intend to engage communities and form education partnerships.

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