Rapid response:

Programming for education needs in emergencies

Overview

The research questions whether standardized interventions are appropriate and effective educational responses.

This policy brief presents recommendations for policy and practice for those working to design and deliver education programmes in areas of conflict and emergencies. These recommendations are based upon the findings from the corresponding publication *'Rapid Response: programming for education needs in emergencies'* by Jonathan Penson and Kathryn Tomlinson. This book and policy brief are the result of a partnership between CfBT Education Trust and IIEP-UNESCO.

Education is increasingly accepted as an important emergency response for children, yet conflict environments often do not allow for state and/or informal provision of public education. United Nations (UN) agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seek to fill this gap as quickly as possible, often using standard programmes to respond to the needs of children. The research underpinning this policy brief set out to examine the influences on educational programming in emergencies caused by conflict. In particular, it questions whether standardized interventions are appropriate and effective educational responses, focusing on child-friendly spaces, school feeding programmes, and pre-packaged education kits. It draws on a review of literature regarding these key interventions, as well as over 80 interviews with specialists across the globe. The research focused on experiences in Lebanon, Sudan, Timor-Leste and Uganda, with field work undertaken in the latter three countries.

Factors affecting educational programming

Decisions regarding educational programming have to be made quickly and take multiple factors into account. It is clear from the research that dedicated staff sought to provide for the education and protection needs of children quickly and effectively in an emergency. Their ability to do so and the effectiveness of response was also affected by the following factors:

An **organization's structure**, particularly the relationship between field offices and headquarters, impacts on this process, especially when headquarters staff encourage the use of standard initiatives. Interactions with other actors through advocacy – the multiple ways in which information is used to try to bring about change – also affect decision-making.

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The research examined **donors' influence** and found that while donors' policy affected their willingness (or otherwise) to fund education in conflict and post-conflict emergencies and therefore impacted on the ability to deliver programmes, the content and delivery of education programmes was less affected by donor policy. The same was true of **publicity**, only more so, in that while the use of images of children was widespread, there was very little evidence that this affected what was done for these children. In Sudan the international (media) profile impacted on external interest in the area, and hence on funding availability and programming possibilities.

The **regular use of standard educational interventions** (such as child-friendly spaces) had the greatest influence on programme approach. Frequently the decision about what to do in an emergency had effectively been made before any particular emergency occurred. An organization's standard initiative was often rolled out early in the response without undertaking adequate on-the-ground assessment. While the needs of communities were often said to be at the root of programming, in practice, these needs were more often described in terms that fitted the existing intervention models. Needs assessments focused more on how to implement, rather than *what* to implement.

Standardized initiatives

Child-friendly spaces

The intervention termed 'child-friendly spaces' has multiple names, yet a fairly consistent shape among most agencies. They aim to provide a protective environment during emergencies in which children can receive structured learning, psychosocial support and play. There can be an uneasy balance between child-friendly spaces as an educational and/or child-protection response, particularly in terms of the varying forms of safety that they may or may not provide. It seems that while 'psychosocial' support is claimed as an objective for almost all child-friendly spaces, understanding of what this means differ, and capacity to deliver such support varies even more so.

School feeding

School feeding involves providing children with culturally appropriate and nutritiously prepared food for immediate consumption and/or the related provision of take-home rations (packaged foodstuffs) given to children for consumption at a later time by them or their families. The provision of food is often conditional to regular attendance at school which is often an aim of the programme. The historical development of school feeding in the West has shown that questions regarding the influence of publicity and fundraising on the use of school feeding programmes and the pedagogical impact of providing food through schools are not new concerns. Lack of evidence continues to hamper analysis of the effectiveness of such programmes. It seems that often school feeding is implemented due to a belief in its efficacy, but whether it is the most appropriate intervention under specific circumstances remains questionable.

Pre-packaged education kits

Pre-packaged education kits are intended to provide materials quickly to restart education. They are typically a collection of basic educational materials for teachers and students contained within a lockable, transportable container. The contents may include exercise books, pencils, erasers, scissors, a teaching clock, counting cubes, and posters, with the box lid doubling as a chalkboard. The kit may include a teacher's guide, and training on best use of the kits is sometimes provided. Issues around appropriate content, sourcing of materials, logistics of distribution, and usage *in situ* continue to be raised. The attractiveness of kits as a quantifiable response, and the lack of differentiation for varying emergency contexts or age ranges, arose as points of concern during this research.

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The **reasons for the popularity of standardized interventions** included:

- their ease of implementation;

- the weight of previous experience that programme managers brought with them from former emergency situations to new ones; and

- the desire by agency headquarters to deploy standardized 'corporate' responses, which could be measured and compared.

For these reasons emergency education programming often started with a pre-determined activity to implement *before* assessing the needs, and hence, the objectives to be achieved within a particular context. Programmes, therefore, were less a response to community than to agencies' needs, and risked organizations not effectively working with community-driven initiatives and/or exploring possibilities for alternative programming. For example in Timor-Leste child-friendly spaces were rolled out as part of the initial emergency response to address the psychosocial and protection needs of children. This provided a generic response, with little adaptation for the needs of different camps or child populations and then remained in operation for over a year with insufficient review or evaluation.

Objectives for interventions need to be mutually agreed with stakeholders and clearly defined. The research found that there was often variation in understanding of the concept of psychosocial support, with play seemingly privileged over learning as the key focus of activities. In addition the research found a lack of systematization of psychosocial activities, both in terms of the numbers of such projects and their content.

The **appropriateness and desired sustainability** of programmes changes over time as emergency situations develop. In northern Uganda 'emergency' measures, such as education kits and school-feeding programmes, were being used in attempts to achieve 'development' objectives. Whereas in Lebanon, while some agencies collaborated with schools and the public education sector, many deliberately did not, raising questions about the long-term appropriateness of stand-alone standard initiatives like child-friendly spaces.

In recent years, there have been powerful, global advocacy campaigns which sought to promote **universal primary education** (UPE). The Education For All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) particularly stress the importance of increasing access to primary education. These campaigns have had an important effect on educational policy in developing countries; donors have used them to address recipient government performance, and the public has been mobilized to demand UPE. This movement towards access at the primary level seems to have affected education in emergencies as well, with the result that emergency interventions have been similarly re-aligned. The research found that, whilst EFA and the MDGs were not often explicitly cited as factors in programming decision-making, emergency interventions nonetheless did take place within this global convergence of educational policy, and were indeed concentrating more on access issues and younger children. This may expose older youths to active involvement in the conflict and be putting non-formal education initiatives at risk. This was seen in south Darfur, Sudan, where provision for the most vulnerable children and for secondary school-aged youth was problematic.

Policy implications

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The following policy implications are presented for implementing agencies and donors, with recommendations as to how educational programming in emergencies might be improved. These include specific suggestions concerning the further development of school-feeding programmes, education kits, and child-friendly spaces.

Programming in emergencies

Needs assessment and programme design

Both headquarters and field staff should question whether programming is a real response to a culturally appropriate assessment of a community's needs, or a standard 'off-the-shelf' response, which may not be fully suitable for the context. Programme design, ideally benefiting from previous experience, should be sufficiently flexible to allow for adaptability, as new situations demand, and field workers should be free to do this within the parameters of good practice. If circumstances do not allow the community to influence programme design, then this should be acknowledged – trying to create the appearance of participation where there is none is potentially harmful.

Coordination

Effective coordination between providers is vital. The changing nature of the environment actors are working in can make relationships between stakeholders difficult. This was seen at multiple levels between communities and providers, and between NGOs, UN agencies and the government. This is particularly true when agencies take on multiple roles. For example in some cases for the Interagency Standing Committee's Education Cluster, agencies took on a dual role as donor and coordinator of the cluster. This raised questions about the need for the separation of such powers in an emergency.

Focus of interventions

Organizations could usefully reflect on the extent to which the distinctions between education and protection made in programming are a product of their own structures and staff backgrounds, and whether these distinctions obstruct a holistic response to children's needs. Secondary school-age children need to be better catered for, and donors need to be more open to funding education-orientated interventions in an emergency. In the interests of providing a sense of continuity and normalcy for a child, the guiding principle should be that of 'minimum necessary change'.

Child-friendly spaces

The concept of **'child-friendly spaces'** needs to be defined and described accurately

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enough to remove ambiguity and differing interpretations between headquarters and field staff. The ubiquity of child-friendly spaces should be acknowledged, yet the fact that they are not a panacea, should also be recognized. In particular, the extent to which child-friendly spaces meet community needs should be re-examined, concentrating on whether play adequately addresses communities' desire for education. Alternatives should always be considered when programming, especially those that build on ways the community already has for providing for the education and protection of children. The design and implementation of child-friendly spaces should address the needs of older children, especially those at risk from recruitment into the armed forces or abuse during conflict. The same is true of the most vulnerable, including the disabled, ethnically or socially marginalized, and the poor. Design of child-friendly spaces should also consider what will happen to spaces when the conflict ends.

Where volunteers are used to staff the space, their time should be recompensed in a way which is locally appropriate and valued, and that does not cause conflict with other organizations running similar programmes.

School-feeding programmes

Where school-feeding programmes are used for developmental purposes, such as increasing school attendance, this needs to be explicitly recognized, and programming needs to incorporate plans for how (or whether) the initiative will become self-sustaining from the outset. There is scope for using a greater range of alternative programme designs for school feeding, and for greater flexibility in the response. The implementation of the programme needs to include specific strategies for ensuring that the most vulnerable children are not excluded.

Pre-packaged education kits

The requirements of education kits used in the intensive stage of a conflict differ from those of the rebuilding phase, and may differ as well in a conflict as opposed to an environmental disaster, for example. Organizations using education kits need to consider whether the different circumstances and purposes of their use should be reflected in different kits. Secondary education kits should be used more frequently, and the contents modified for that use. Kit contents need to include items which better address the needs of boys and girls, as well as children with disabilities. Greater effort should be made to source kit contents locally in order to support the local economy and ensure that items are culturally relevant. Distribution should be informed by needs assessment to prioritize schools in greatest need, and supported by appropriate training, including culturally appropriate manuals.

Summary of recommendations

The table below provides a series of recommendations for donors and implementing agencies, concerning education programming in emergencies, and then specific recommendations regarding standardized interventions.

Education programming in emergencies	Child-friendly spaces
• Consider the extent to which education programmes respond to educational and/or protection needs, and how greater integration between the sectors might benefit the holistic care of children and contribute to longer-term recovery of both individuals and the education or protection system.	• Ensure that the concept 'child-friendly space' is defined and described accurately enough to remove ambiguity and differing interpretations between headquarters and field staff.
• Give field workers the flexibility in programme management to respond meaningfully to local contexts.	• Ensure that using child-friendly spaces does not prevent agencies from considering and developing alternatives, including engaging the community in providing for both psychosocial and educational needs in an integrated manner.
• Consider the extent to which responses can meaningfully engage with communities and respond to their needs.	• Examine whether separating games and sport (psychosocial) from formal or informal learning is necessary and effective.
• Ensure that community participation or consultation is culturally appropriate, and that responses based on consultation are community driven, protecting existing positive initiatives rather than imposing a standard model.	• Explore ways of providing spaces and activities which are geared towards older children, especially those at risk from recruitment or abuse during conflict, perhaps through a range of 'vocational' and 'academic' activities.
• Continue to advocate the importance of education in emergencies with institutional donors and other funders, including education needs of secondary-aged children.	• Ensure that greater and more sensitive provision is made for disabled children through staff training, appropriate equipment, and layout and access arrangements.
• Work towards 'necessary change', that is, change should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure that previous negative factors (such as discriminatory curricula or male-oriented teaching practices) are effectively challenged, but change should not be brought in for change's sake.	• Consider the possibility of providing appropriate compensation for the poorest families to allow their children to attend.
	• Incorporate exit or transition strategies which are sufficiently flexible to meet a range of future probabilities, into programme design from the outset.
	• Find ways to ensure that volunteers' time is appropriately compensated and reviewed if the situation goes beyond a short-term emergency.

School feeding programmes	Education kits
• Promote the use of feeding programmes as a way of building self-sustaining, school-meal programmes through a planned, negotiated transition strategy. • Consider widening the coverage of feeding programmes to include more non-formal programmes. • Ensure that the aims of a school- feeding programme are clearly defined and appropriate to either an 'emergency' situation, or one in a 'development' context. • Ensure that exit or sustainability strategies do not compromise the attendance of the most vulnerable children.	• Where possible, source materials locally. • Provide items suitable for children with a range of disabilities, and items which are suitable for girls' use in specific cultural contexts. • Expand coverage to include secondary education kits. • Ensure that supporting training and materials are available. • Where kits are are used, provide appropriate teacher training. • Consider adapting kits according to context and needs either to provide materials for short term provision, or to be used as longer-term supplements to encourage developmental activities. • Undertake needs assessments, which distinguish those schools in need of materials from those which do not, and prioritize distribution accordingly.

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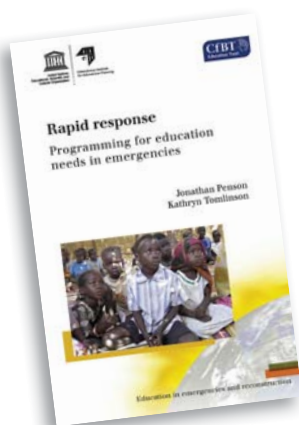
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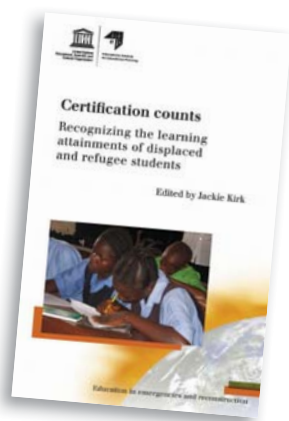
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