Donors' engagement: Supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states

Overview

> *…to encourage greater engagement in education in fragile and conflict-affected states.*

This policy brief puts forward recommendations to donors, UN agencies, private foundations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and governments to encourage greater engagement in education in fragile and conflict-affected states. It is based on findings presented in the corresponding publication *Donors' Engagement: supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states,* by Laura Brannelly, Susy Ndaruhutse and Carole Rigaud. This book and policy brief are the result of a partnership between CfBT Education Trust and IIEP-UNESCO.

The research underpinning this policy brief set out to examine the changing nature of donors' engagement in supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states and to outline lessons learnt and emerging good practice. A key part of the research was a detailed examination of the policies and practices of three main donors – the European Commission (EC), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) – and two leading INGOs – the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Save the Children UK. A field visit to Liberia was carried out to obtain a more detailed country perspective.

Photo: Save the Children / Mats Lingell

Current engagement

> *…over half of the world's out-of-school children live in fragile and conflict-affected states…*

Millions of children are denied the right to education across the world and it is estimated that over half of the world's out-of-school children (40 million) live in fragile and conflict-affected states, yet these countries receive a disproportionately low amount of education aid.[1] Many are therefore at risk of not achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. The ultimate responsibility for ensuring access for *all* children lies with governments, but for many countries (especially the poorest), progress also relies heavily on support from the international community, especially donors. In 2000, donors

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[1] Save the Children. 2009. *Last in line, last in school 2009: meeting education needs in countries affected by conflict and emergencies.* London: International Save the Children Alliance.

CfBT Education Trust

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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> *…no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal [UPE] by a lack of resources…*
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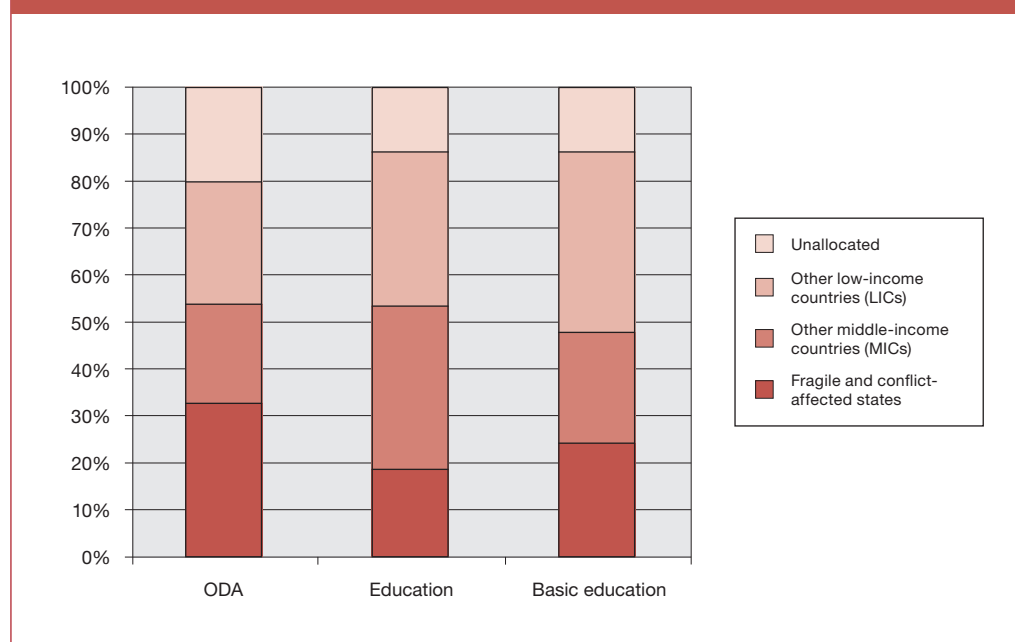> [Dakar Framework for Action][2]

made a commitment to ensure that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources" (UNESCO, 2000: 8).[2] Nearly ten years later, have donors increased their political and financial commitments to education in the poorest countries, especially in fragile and conflict-affected states?

The volume of development funding received by fragile or conflict-affected states does not appear to correlate with their comparative needs for basic education and support

required to meet the Education For All (EFA) goals (see Figure 1 below). As regards humanitarian aid, education remains one of the least-funded sectors, receiving just 1.9 per cent of all humanitarian funds in 2007, with stark variation between donors. Whilst in absolute terms the amount of funding going to education is small, responses to humanitarian funding requests have improved in recent years. In 2008, 48 per cent of consolidated appeal process funding requirements were met, which was comparable to the health, shelter, water and sanitation sector responses.
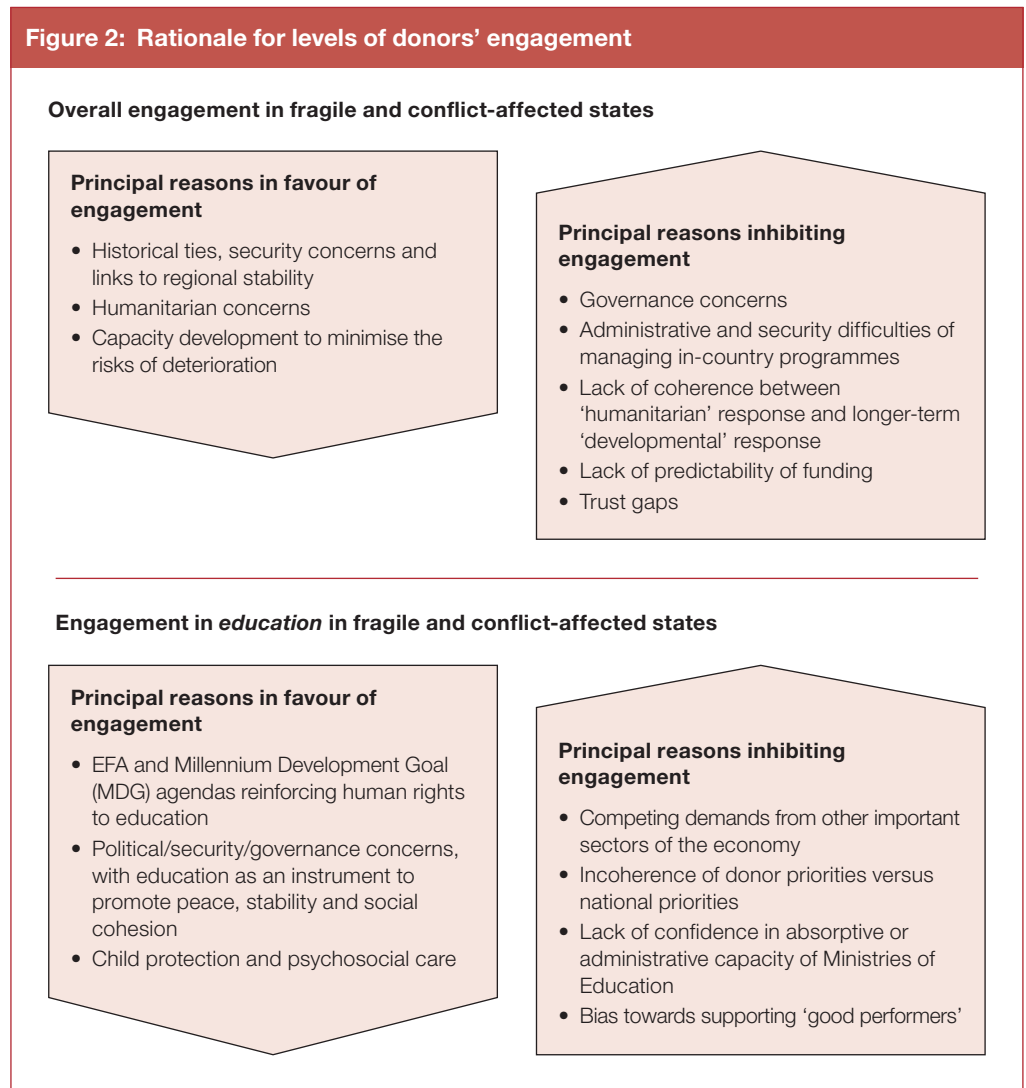
Figure 1: Donors' aid allocations by recipient group

Legend:
- Unallocated
- Other low-income countries (LICs)
- Other middle-income countries (MICs)
- Fragile and conflict-affected states

Source: OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System database.
In this analysis the countries identified as fragile and conflict-affected were removed from the list of low- and middle-income countries so that data was not double-counted, hence the expressions 'other LICs' and 'other MICs'.

[2] UNESCO. 2000. *The Dakar Framework for Action – Education for all: meeting our collective commitments.* Adopted by the World Education Forum, Senegal, Dakar, 26–28 April 2000. Paris: UNESCO.

Figure 2: Rationale for levels of donors' engagement

Overall engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states

Principal reasons in favour of engagement

- Historical ties, security concerns and links to regional stability
- Humanitarian concerns
- Capacity development to minimise the risks of deterioration

Principal reasons inhibiting engagement

- Governance concerns
- Administrative and security difficulties of managing in-country programmes
- Lack of coherence between 'humanitarian' response and longer-term 'developmental' response
- Lack of predictability of funding
- Trust gaps

Engagement in *education* in fragile and conflict-affected states

Principal reasons in favour of engagement

- EFA and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agendas reinforcing human rights to education
- Political/security/governance concerns, with education as an instrument to promote peace, stability and social cohesion
- Child protection and psychosocial care

Principal reasons inhibiting engagement

- Competing demands from other important sectors of the economy
- Incoherence of donor priorities versus national priorities
- Lack of confidence in absorptive or administrative capacity of Ministries of Education
- Bias towards supporting 'good performers'

Funding modalities

There is a range of ways in which donors can provide funding to fragile and conflict-affected states. Funding can be disbursed either bilaterally or through pooled mechanisms, which are coordinated by donors for a given set of activities. These can be used to finance projects, budget support or multi-donor trust funds (MDTFs). Depending on use, funds can be managed by the recipient government, the donor or an NGO and can be disbursed through government or separate parallel systems. Guiding principles on appropriate aid modalities are found in the 2007 *DAC Principles for Good Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*[3] and the 2005 Paris *Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*[4] which both focus on strengthening government systems and capacity for accountability, and on harmonisation and coordination. (See Box 1 on page 4.)

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[3] OECD. 2007. *Principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations.* Paris: OECD. DAC is the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

[4] Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability. 2005. Paris. Retrieved 27 April 2007 from **www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf**

Box 1: OECD DAC principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations

The two basic premises

1. Take context as the starting point.
2. Do no harm.

The role of the state and peace-building

3. Focus on state building as the central objective.
4. Prioritise prevention.
5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives.
6. Promote non-discrimination.

The practicalities

7. Align with local priorities.
8. Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors.
9. Act fast… but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.
10. Avoid pockets of exclusion.

In all contexts of fragility, the research found that pooling funding wherever possible generally reduces transaction costs for governments and increases coordination and harmonisation. Where it is not possible to use government systems as a channel for funding, a lead donor, UN agency or NGO can be appointed to manage the funds according to agreed financial procedures, thus lowering the risk of corruption or financial mismanagement. Table 1 summarises the most appropriate financing mechanisms according to states' level of fragility, drawing upon lessons learnt and emerging good practice from the research.

Table 1: Most appropriate funding modalities according to DAC category of fragile states

DAC category[5]	Most appropriate funding modalities	Application of lessons learnt and emerging good practice
Deteriorating	Project support; humanitarian aid. Disbursed through donors, NGOs or United Nations (UN) agencies.	• Funding via NGOs is often the preferred option, ideally through pooled funding. In 2005 in Zimbabwe, seven INGOs developed the Joint Initiative, a multi-sectoral programme supported by pooled funds from the donors. • State-building activities should take place with local government, communities and civil society, where working with central government is not possible. • Plan for the medium to long term. In Myanmar, UNICEF manages a pooled fund with a five-year plan supported by several donors.

[5] The OECD DAC distinguishes between four different categories of fragile states:
(i) Deteriorating, where capacity and/or will are/is weakening, the country may be in conflict or at risk of conflict;
(ii) Arrested development, where capacity may vary but there is a lack of political will so capacity is not being used for pro-poor development;
(iii) Post-conflict transition where capacity is low, but will may be high or low;
(iv) Early recovery, where capacity is low, but will is high (OECD, 2008).

DAC category[5]	Most appropriate funding modalities	Application of lessons learnt and emerging good practice
Arrested development	Project support; humanitarian aid. Disbursed through NGOs or UN agencies.	• Work with a range of actors to build state capacity. In Somalia EC projects are implemented by INGOs working closely with government officials at national and regional level. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the IRC is working closely with provincial government as well as implementing partners and non-state actors (NSAs).
Post-conflict transition	Mixture of projects, trust funds, budget support and pooled funding. Disbursed through UN agencies, MDTFs managed by UN or World Bank, donor-managed pooled funding or individual projects.	• Evidence emerging from several countries on the use of MDTFs has shown that whilst they may contribute significantly towards greater coordination and harmonisation in post-conflict settings, they are often very slow to disburse money and their high administrative costs can mean that they are not the most cost-effective modality. • Encouraging community support and participation in post-conflict contexts can lead to greater sustainability. A community-based education (CBE) programme in Afghanistan managed by a consortium of partners including the IRC has contributed significantly to the coordination of other CBE actors and is strongly aligned with ministry of education activities. • NGO and donor interventions should align with a government's priorities and education plan where available. In the Côte d'Ivoire, Save the Children's education programme was designed and planned in line with the Government's EFA plan.
Early recovery	Budget support and pooled funding. Disbursed through pooled funding or direct budget support managed by recipient government.	• This is the easiest category within which to work; to use a variety of aid modalities and to align more closely with the government's education plan where this exists.

Source: Based on OECD. 2008. *Service delivery in fragile situations: key concepts, findings and lessons*. Paris: OECD, with examples given by authors.

Emerging issues

Coordination

This emerged as a key issue for all stakeholders, from coordination in delivery and community participation, to alignment with government approaches and working with state structures. All three main donors were involved in country-level coordination mechanisms, including where they existed, joint review processes. They were often contributing to pooled funds, therefore *de facto* they needed to coordinate with other donors. Each of the donors expressed a desire to provide greater continuity between the provision of humanitarian and longer-term development aid. However, there is a risk in some cases that coordination mechanisms between different aid agency and government departments responsible for different aspects of development assistance are too informal or not as effective as they could be. All donors emphasised the importance of identifying their comparative advantage and concentrating their development assistance on sectors in which they felt their efforts and finances could be most fruitfully put to good use, which requires a good knowledge base to work effectively.

> *Lack of documented evidence in the public domain of the effectiveness or impact of donor and NGO support to education in fragile and conflict-affected states is a significant challenge.*

State-building

It was important to all donors to engage civil society and work to build states at the most appropriate level. Experience showed that NSAs can often act more rapidly and efficiently in specific geographical areas or for small projects, but that they are not always effective in building ownership and being able to scale up nationally. This underlines the need to ensure that long-route accountability mechanisms[6] are also being pursued over time. Nonetheless both NGOs interviewed provide examples of how small community projects can be scaled up by working with stakeholders at different levels and concurrently, where possible, to help forge links between levels and to build capacity.

Capacity development

Where donors work more directly with government using technical assistance in an appropriate and effective manner, the challenge remains to ensure skills are being transferred to local stakeholders and at an appropriate cost. In Liberia, a challenge echoed by all stakeholders from the Government, donors and NGOs was the low level of (financial) information sharing and coordination despite a number of existing coordination mechanisms. Individuals also felt that donors should be doing more at ministerial level to build capacity to effectively manage funds and support coordination. The biggest issues highlighted were not the level or number of donors wishing to engage (although there was a shortfall in funding) but (i) the capacity for programmes to be implemented over a longer period, and (ii) ministry ownership of programmes.

Sustainable engagement

In Liberia, several interviewees, including donors, identified the problem of 'hesitant investors'. These are willing to provide initial support to ensure continuity of service delivery during the emergency/relief stages, but are then cautious of engaging in the longer term and committing funds, in case their activities are not aligned with local priorities (in instances where education plans or strategies are not in place). There was concern amongst various partners that as the shift towards reconstruction takes place, there will be a significant funding gap until the Government is able to step up its provision. This would leave areas at risk of neglect and possible deterioration. New partners and programmes are beginning to be established in Liberia that could cover the predicted funding gap. Yet, to a large extent current donor funding is running parallel to the Ministry of Education's budget, which makes it challenging to estimate the full scale of activities and requirements of the education sector.[7] The longevity of NGO operations is primarily contingent upon funding and security. Accessing funds can involve time-consuming procedures. NGO project or programme size was generally much smaller than that of the donors, underlining the need for NGOs to improve their ability to attract and then manage larger sums of money so that they can have greater impact. However, this is likely to require significant internal capacity building of programme managers in attracting, managing and spending substantially larger amounts of money. This can be difficult given the high security risks which reduce the ability to attract and retain appropriately-skilled staff.

Evidence base

Lack of documented evidence in the public domain of the effectiveness or impact of donor and NGO support to education in fragile and conflict-affected states is a significant challenge. This makes it difficult to draw lessons learnt that could be applied in similar contexts, but the following recommendations make some suggestions.

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[6] Long-route accountability refers to the relationship between citizens and their elected government. As part of their role as elected representatives the state is accountable to its citizens to ensure delivery of services as outlined in their policies, whilst citizens voice their demands and needs to the government.

[7] UN. 2007. United Nations development assistance framework 2008-2011. Monrovia: UN.

Summary of recommendations

1. **Develop responses to address immediate needs, but with long-term development goals to ensure coordination of humanitarian and development responses.** DAC Principles 1, 5 and 9

Engagement in education requires a long-term commitment for any learning outcomes to be sustainable. Time needs to be spent planning for the medium- to long-term to facilitate a more holistic approach between the humanitarian and development responses. To enable this to happen, donors need to be willing to make longer-term commitments to multi-year projects, working with and through government where possible.

2. **Select aid modalities that are appropriate to the context and to the level of stakeholder capacity, balancing recipient and donor needs, contexts and capacities.** DAC Principles 1 and 2

A combination of different aid modalities is likely to be appropriate and effective for achieving educational objectives in the four DAC categories of fragile states. It is important for external stakeholders to examine the level of capacity in government and amongst NSAs, the reliability of public financial management systems, and the legitimacy of the government before deciding on which modality or set of modalities to use in a given situation.

3. **Align education response with the identified needs and comparative advantage of stakeholders.** DAC Principles 1, 7 and 10

When deciding how to engage with education in fragile and conflict-affected states, external stakeholders need to consider how their resources can be best placed to ensure needs-based, appropriate responses. Some external stakeholders may have to consider if they have the necessary in-country capacity and infrastructure to respond quickly, or whether it is more appropriate to fund as silent partners or contribute to a pooled fund. At the level of service delivery, external stakeholders need to coordinate responses so that there are no gaps or duplication in terms of geographical coverage, sector support and beneficiary groups to ensure that partners' strengths are maximised.

4. **Work through shadow-aligned systems[8] if unable to support the state directly.** DAC Principles 1, 2, 7 and 8

Where external stakeholders are unable to work in any way with government systems due to serious legitimacy or governance concerns, the use of shadow-aligned systems may be justified but should be applied for short periods of time with the objective of transferring ownership to the government in the longer term. As a country moves towards reconstruction and recovery, external stakeholders should seek to engage more with state systems and begin to integrate responses that have been shadow aligned in the past.

5. **Identify opportunities to engage with NSAs, to build the capacity and ownership of education responses, but be careful not to undermine the legitimacy of the state.** DAC Principles 1, 2, 3 and 6

Working with NSAs and communities allows for more holistic state-building as it helps strengthen local accountability mechanisms. In contexts with high operational risks, working through local NSAs can help maintain delivery of educational services, although capacity may be low. Engagement with NSAs should be with the intention of strengthening states in post-conflict transition and early recovery stages; as such activities should be aligned with state strategy and educational priorities. Where governments are willing to engage with NSAs, there are greater partnership options, and often an ability to reach areas of the country where the government has limited capacity or resources and NSAs have a comparative advantage, for example in remote rural areas.

6. **Recognise that coordination is not easy, so maintain realistic expectations.** DAC Principles 1 and 8

Coordination efforts are often complicated by factors beyond the control of participating parties, especially in deteriorating contexts. Financial coordination can be costly, both for project-based funding, and the time requirements in establishing pooled mechanisms. Where this is inhibitive or inefficient, external stakeholders should seek to use next-best approaches. External stakeholders need to support and coordinate with emerging government systems, particularly in situations of post-conflict transition and early recovery. Due to important international frameworks such as the *Paris Declaration*, the focus on and responsibility for coordination has often been placed on the shoulders of external stakeholders. However, governments in post-conflict transition and early recovery stages should ideally be leading coordination efforts. They need to be open to engage with internationally-initiated mechanisms and ensure harmonisation with existing state structures.

7. **Prioritise local ownership and support education sector policy and plans where possible.** DAC Principles 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7

To ensure responses are based on needs, donors and NGOs should be wary of transposing standard programme models to different contexts. Instead approaches should be informed by consultation and adapted to the local context and needs. Any interventions should seek to work with, if not through, state systems to act quickly to build state ownership and capacity of response; and to coordinate responses. State priorities should be used as a foundation for harmonising efforts and maintaining a focus on joint goals. Likewise governments need to be open to external support and advice in the development of plans focusing on approaches that will best meet the needs of beneficiaries.

8. **Ensure service delivery responses also contain an element of capacity development.** DAC Principles 1, 3, 5 and 7

Opportunities should be sought to both provide essential services and to develop local capacity at all levels from the central state to local communities, where possible. Institutional memory and experience of donor funding procedures and public financial management requirements are often low in fragile or conflict-affected states. This should not be a deterrent to working through governments; rather time needs to be taken to support states and, where appropriate, procedures should be adjusted to the local context. Efforts to build capacity should be linked to broader development goals and multi-sector approaches.

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[8] Shadow alignment is where donors work in a way that is compatible with government systems, although not directly through government systems in the short term.

Forthcoming publications in this series
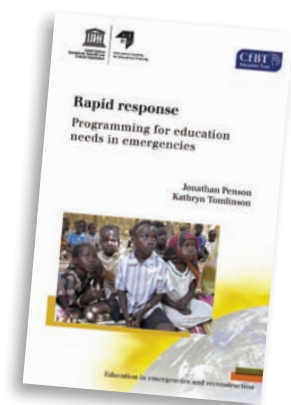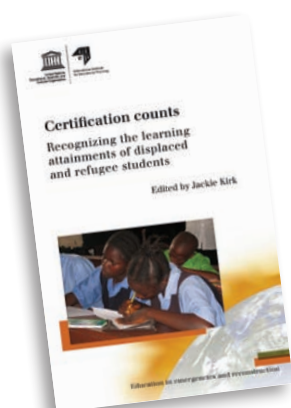
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