Promoting participation: Community contributions to education in conflict situations

Overview

> *During conflict, the retreat of the state from the provision of public services creates a gap that is often filled by non-state actors to help ensure continuity of learning.*

Communities can play an integral part in education provision both during and after conflict. This policy brief presents recommendations for policy and practice for those working with communities to design and deliver education programmes in areas of conflict and emergencies in order to promote positive community participation. These recommendations are based upon the findings from the corresponding publication *Promoting participation: Community contributions to education in conflict situations* by Joan Sullivan-Owomoyela and Laura Brannelly. This book and policy brief are the result of a partnership between CfBT Education Trust and IIEP-UNESCO.

Photo: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Palestine

Community participation is a familiar concept in the development, humanitarian and education sectors, and increasingly a standard feature of programme design. During conflict, the retreat of the state from the provision of public services creates a gap that is often filled by non-state actors to help ensure continuity of learning. Communities, recognising the intrinsic worth of education, are often among those who step forward to provide education. Their participation in education during and after conflict 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. However, communities often face challenges that make effective engagement in education difficult.

Furthermore, participation is not invariably positive if it is divisive or reinforces inequalities.

The research upon which this policy brief is based explores the roles communities in both conflict and reconstruction settings play in the provision of education and the conditions or factors that can either inhibit or encourage effective community involvement. The recommendations in this policy brief are drawn from the experiences of communities in a variety of contexts, including: prolonged instability resulting from conflict; situations with large refugee and internally displaced communities; and those in situations of reconstruction, including Liberia, the West Bank, Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Afghanistan, Southern Sudan and northern Uganda.

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Defining community participation

Community participation refers 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. Active involvement of the community facilitates the identification of community-specific education issues and strategies that are effective in addressing them. 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 include real and sustained empowerment and capacity building, and must build upon efforts already underway on the ground.

INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction, 2004, page 80

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Promoting positive participation

"Where traditional structures exist in more settled or stable environments, there is a greater foundation upon which partnerships can be built between communities and the state…"

There are several factors which contribute to promoting community participation and fostering partnerships between communities, the state and other education partners.

The restoration of trust

Communities in conflict-affected situations have gone through considerable turmoil and change. Before they can positively engage in educational activities, trust needs to be restored. The chaos of war often destroys or discredits traditional social structures and authorities, and government structures in place after a conflict may lack legitimacy or be seen to favour certain groups. Whilst educational objectives may be the focus of participation, time also needs to be devoted to reconciliation processes and the restoration of relationships to ensure that participation is inclusive, and that community priorities are clearly identified. In Liberia, the Forum

for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is in dialogue with communities to discuss and identify educational needs, encouraging ownership of plans before commencing any activities.

Furthermore, engagement in education activities can enable such relationships to be rebuilt. This is particularly important for displaced and returning communities where a sense of social cohesion is likely to have been severely disrupted. Where community structures are transitory and there is no solid foundation of social networks, initiating and sustaining community-wide participation can be challenging. In Jordan, community initiatives implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provided opportunities for the refugee community to meet and form informal networks. They also used volunteers and local welfare groups as a mechanism for integrating refugees within their geographical communities.

Where traditional structures exist in more settled or stable environments, there is a greater foundation upon which partnerships can be built between communities and the state (or other external agencies). In turn, this may enable more active partnerships to address educational needs. In Afghanistan, community mobilisation teams working on the Primary Education Program worked with village councils to reach agreement on issues such as girls' attendance at school, school location and timetabling.

> *It is necessary to adopt a long-term approach to community participation. This often requires a shift in roles for the community from the operational aspects of education towards management and governance.*

The importance of context

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. The healthy aspects of community participation are negated when a 'one-size-fits-all' community participation approach or a set of 'best practices' is implemented without taking into consideration the local context (i.e. by including cultural mechanisms or social practices validated by the community). In the West Bank, establishing a Palestinian education system was a key step in strengthening cultural, social and political identity. Education was a key priority for the community. They maintained children's learning even when schools were closed.

Planning for the long term

As regions and countries stabilise, it is necessary to adopt a long-term approach to community participation. This often requires a shift in roles for the community from focusing on the operational aspects of education (contributing resources, etc.) towards the management and governance of education. In Afghanistan, community projects were initially small, isolated and often fragmented with varying models of learning and access for students. With the support of local and international NGOs, some of these initiatives were further developed and replicated on a larger basis. Gradually, models of schooling at local and regional level began to emerge and activities became more coordinated, but schools remained resourced by community efforts and external support. Community models are now receiving some state support, with increasing alignment and integration into national policy and education systems; for example some NGO-trained teachers are achieving formal qualifications and becoming employed by the state.

These changes in roles need to take place incrementally, supported by training and guidance so that community members feel empowered and confident in these roles. This is a challenge if funding of projects is only short-term, as well as in the reconstruction phase where expectations for services and external support are high.

Keeping expectations realistic

Communities often play a pivotal role in ensuring the continuity of education delivery during conflict. However, if the conflict is prolonged, many initiatives can become increasingly dependent on external actors to provide resources and to sustain community motivation. This was evident in the case of Southern Sudan where the Sudan Basic Education Program supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had difficulty in convincing communities to support the volunteer teachers and provide other in-kind contributions to schools. This was because communities were used to receiving payments or stipends from NGOs for similar in-kind contributions.

Creating a shared sense of ownership around education needs to be emphasised from the start and retain a focus on activities and interventions to encourage locally-generated participation and avoid participation fatigue. To be truly effective and sustainable, education interventions need to recognise stakeholders' contributions, but also their limitations, so that expectations are appropriately managed.

> *'The community in Tambura was initially not accustomed to active participation in education and other project development activities. The people expect the NGOs to do most of the things for them. Part of this problem was due to the fact the community did not know in what ways they should participate in the education activities. Training them on issues of community mobilization, defining clear roles and responsibilities of all program stakeholders and developing reflective action plans has tremendously improved their participation.'*
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> (Page 3, EQUIP 1, 2005. Crisis education project profile: rebuilding education and civil society. Washington: USAID.

> *Genuine partnerships are based on an understanding that not all parties bring the same resources.*

Building partnerships

It is important not only to build trust within communities, but also between communities and their partners. 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. For example, selecting teachers from the local community who are known and accepted by the community is as important as providing teachers with the right training. This is reflected in the Policy Guidelines on Community-Based Education from the Afghan Ministry of Education. These prioritise community appointment of teachers to ensure that teachers are active within the community and will be supported by the communities.

In addition, partnerships need to be developed incrementally with mutual gains and contributions from all partners. As countries stabilise, 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 the state. As education sector planning is strengthened, states are forced to consider how they intend to engage communities and form education partnerships. This commitment to partnership and community engagement is reflected in the *2008–2012 Education Development Strategic Plan* of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Policy implications

The following policy implications are presented for governments, implementing agencies and donors, with recommendations as to how positive community participation might be encouraged. These include specific suggestions of elements for inclusion in national policy guidelines on community participation, and more broadly in guidance and policy on emergency and post-conflict education programmes and school management.

Promote the use of existing positive community structures

Non-discriminatory approaches for community engagement should be reinforced in national policy, agency guidelines and NGO interventions. Government inclusion policies should be supported with transparent mechanisms for engaging with communities. These should promote open communication between community members and other stakeholders to rebuild trust and provide opportunities for restoring relationships.

Promoting, and in some cases revalidating, positive traditional authorities and structures can be an integral part of building trust and relationships, whilst providing a meaningful framework to engage with communities. While these mechanisms may be weak in technical areas (for example lacking a strong understanding of pedagogical issues), they are helpful in ensuring a safe learning environment to provide continuity and a sense of normalcy for learners. Such structures, however, have to be inclusive to ensure that they do not perpetuate societal divisions and instability.

Work with existing community capacity and needs

The state, NGOs and UN agencies should work with communities to identify realistic contributions from all partners with regards to physical resources, time, and decision-making/governance capacity. This should be reviewed with time, after training and in light of other community development initiatives.

> *Lessons learnt and good practice should also be applied to scale up local or regional initiatives, where appropriate.*

Situational analysis and needs assessments should be focused on community priorities and include an assessment of their capacity to support education initiatives. Communities should be actively involved in the planning and design of programmes, with participation going beyond the approval of existing models and approaches. Planning should respond to particular educational needs. In addition to responding to community needs, programmes should also be planned to correspond with locally available resources.

Integrate capacity development and training for communities

National or agency education sector plans, and capacity development policies or strategies, should include a component of capacity development for community structures. Communities may be asked to take on unfamiliar roles as part of their support for education initiatives. These roles and responsibilities need to be fully explained to ensure active and appropriate participation and to assist the functioning of community liaison points and governance mechanisms such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Consequently a component of capacity development and training should be integrated into the design of community-based programmes.

Integrate education responses with broader community initiatives

Government and agency coordination mechanisms for the education sector should ensure that multiple community committees or tokenistic community involvement is avoided. To assist in relationship building and to breed sustainable responses, education programmes should work alongside other community projects such as child protection initiatives, skills development and livelihoods initiatives. This should allow projects to address multifaceted issues and provide coherence in responses to broad issues such as child welfare or issues affecting school attendance.

Plan for the long term and utilise examples of good practice

Government policy and guidance, alongside international guidelines, including agency manuals, need to be contextualised at a local level before being applied in practice. Positive

models and approaches that have emerged during conflict or periods of recovery, or elements of these approaches should be drawn upon in national policy, and used as examples of effective community engagement. Lessons learnt and good practice should also be applied to scale up local or regional initiatives, where appropriate. Tools and guidance such as that provided in the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*, should be used as importance sources of information and support in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

Implementation recommendations

The following implementation recommendations aim to encourage the state, NGOs and other education partners to assess ways in which community engagement is approached to ensure that it promotes rather than hinders community involvement in education.

Recommendation	Lessons learnt
Ensure education programmes are adapted to meet the specific needs of communities.	Education needs to be appropriate to the needs of the community. Particular groups may need more targeted support (such as youths trying to complete primary education missed during years of conflict; women seeking to develop basic skills to support local entrepreneurship; and ex-combatants). Community needs should be integrated into education programming, with models adapted to the context rather than transplanted to the location.
Identify positive community mechanisms to engage with and work through to ensure continuity in education delivery and integrated approaches to address community needs.	Working through traditional structures increases the likelihood of community participation being sustainable. It helps focus on community priorities and ensures local ownership. For external actors working with communities, taking the time to identify community leadership and operational mechanisms is essential in building relationships and trust, through which education partnerships can be formed.
Build on local capacity to strengthen education programming.	Engaging communities allows states affected by conflict to increase access to education. Care should be taken to ensure that community participation in this regard is not exploitative and that participation remains an active rather than passive form of consultation.
Take a holistic approach to education and develop community structures to address issues of child welfare and rights.	Education – as a commonly recognised need – can provide a focal point around which communities can positively engage. Children's educational needs cannot be addressed in isolation, so community structures engaging with education should also be empowered to address multiple issues concerning child welfare and rights.
Support community structures with training and guidance.	Communities need guidance and support to take on new roles in education, whether self-initiated, or empowered to do so by NGOs or the state. Guidance and frameworks help establish expectations and familiarise community members with concepts and roles that may be unfamiliar.
Recognise that financial engagement affects partnership dynamics and expectations.	Communities in conflict-affected situations invariably lack resources but are often approached to provide compensation for teachers and other support for schools. NGOs establishing relationships with communities should seek to address these needs, but also avoid raising expectations of prolonged financial support or financial components becoming the centre of community engagement.

Recommendation	Lessons learnt
Use education opportunities to build informal community support networks.	The indirect benefits of community participation in education programmes can be great, particularly when working with displaced communities that need to restore relationships. Sufficient time for the development of community networks should be integrated within NGO-initiated community education programmes, working at the level of households where necessary. This in turn is likely to increase levels of ownership and to extend the reach of the education programme.
Build upon positive community initiatives that emerged during conflict and, where appropriate, integrate these within national strategies in a locally realistic manner through local authorities and consultation.	Partnerships between communities and with the local government or external agencies should be utilised to advocate for education and integrate community-based approaches into national policy or strategy. This needs to be done with careful consultation to ensure that communities maintain ownership at the local community level whilst also enabling initiatives to be scaled up. In these instances external actors such as UN agencies and NGOs can play an important mediation role, liaising with the state on communities' behalf.
Consult with communities to ensure that they are supportive of education approaches, and that post-conflict education systems are perceived to be fair and not divisive.	The nature of education and what is taught is a political issue. Communities need to be comfortable with cultural aspects of the curriculum such as history, music, religion and civics. In situations of prolonged conflict and/or in disputed territories this can be divisive and also a barrier to education if parents are unhappy with what their children are being taught.
Balance the development of a national education system vis-à-vis a robust civil society movement.	As the capacity of newly-established or recovering government institutions develops, support for community participation in education should be maintained. Communities should remain empowered and engaged in education, even if the focus of their role changes, in order to develop an inclusive education system. This is particularly important in situations of prolonged conflict or instability where external support to community initiatives may be inconsistent or fluctuate with political conditions. Systems and frameworks for community involvement need to be flexible enough to cope with changing circumstances.
Promote community involvement that restores education and reinvigorates self-sufficiency.	Communities mobilised to support education during conflict may become 'fatigued' and look back towards the state to take over the responsibility for education with the cessation of violence and the transition towards reconstruction. Ways need to be sought to maintain momentum and community engagement. This may well be through NGOs, or the development of community roles beyond contributions to the running of schools and towards governance roles and involvement that address quality issues.

Forthcoming publications in this series

This series is a product of research partnerships between IIEP and CfBT Education Trust; and IIEP and the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, the International Rescue Committee and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Under these partnerships the following global thematic policy studies will be published in 2009:

- Certification counts: Recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students

- Rapid response: Programming for education needs in emergencies

- Opportunities for change: Education innovation and reform during and after conflict

- Promoting participation: Community contributions to education in conflict situations

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

- Alternative education: Filling the gap in emergency and post-conflict situations

The books and policy briefs will be available to download free of charge from the CfBT and IIEP websites:

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CfBT Education Trust
60 Queens Road
Reading
Berkshire RG1 4BS
UK

Tel: +44 (0) 118 902 1000
Fax: +44 (0) 118 902 1434
www.cfbt.com

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IIEP-UNESCO
7–9 rue Eugène Delacroix
75116 Paris
France

Tel: +33 1 45 03 77 00
Fax: +33 1 40 72 83 66
Email: info@iiep.unesco.org
www.iiep.unesco.org