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

Overview

> *Children and youth have a wide range of educational needs in emergency situations, especially when affected by conflict.*

Alternative education programmes are increasingly implemented in emergency and post-conflict situations. This policy brief looks at how these programmes respond to the diverse education needs of children and youth affected by emergencies and conflict. It also analyses the challenges in implementation of alternative education programmes in post-conflict settings and puts forward policy recommendations for their sustainable planning and coordination. This policy brief is based on findings presented in the book *Alternative education: Filling the gap in emergency and post-conflict situations*, by Pamela Baxter and Lynne Bethke. This book and policy brief are the result of a partnership between CfBT Education Trust and IIEP-UNESCO.

Children and youth have a wide range of educational needs in emergency situations, especially when affected by conflict. They may have missed all or part of their primary education, or have had their education disrupted in other ways. Older children and youth may want to access education, but not be able or willing to attend primary school with younger children. They may prefer to gain basic literacy and numeracy skills and perhaps learn a trade or skill that will help them obtain employment. In addition, children affected by conflict or trauma will need psychosocial or life skills programmes to help them cope with the effects of the conflict. Alternative education programmes strive to meet these wide-ranging needs. Case studies undertaken in Sierra Leone, Kenya and Nepal examine some of these programmes that are offered in emergency situations and look at their contribution to achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) including those on educational quality.

Alternative education programmes

Alternative access programmes provide alternative methods of delivery to 'fill the gap' of education provision for children who are not enrolled in the formal system…

'**Alternative education**' is the over-arching term that refers to education programmes that are not considered formal education programmes. Often, but not exclusively, they are offered outside the auspices of the formal government education system. Alternative education, in its strictest interpretation, includes programmes that are not managed by the government but rather implemented by agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It also includes non-formal education programmes where the certification and validation of learning is not automatically assured; ad hoc education or awareness programmes that respond to a specific perceived need, and short-term emergency education programmes that are considered bridging programmes to the formal system. There are two main types of alternative education programmes: those that provide an alternative means of access to education and those that are alternative in curriculum provision.

Alternative access programmes provide alternative methods of delivery to 'fill the gap' of education provision for children who are not enrolled in the formal system due to age, gender, ethnicity or geographical location. Alternative access programmes, such as home-based or community-based schools, generally include the use of a formal curriculum and pedagogy. They may also condense the primary cycle, for example from six years into three years (accelerated learning programmes), and may use different pedagogical methods (for example more learner-centred and participatory approaches) than are generally found in the traditional formal system.

Alternative curriculum provision programmes offer non-traditional/alternative subjects such as HIV and AIDS prevention or landmine awareness, either within traditional, formal curricula or in parallel to the formal system. These subjects may be designed to respond to specific short-term needs, which are sometimes included in curriculum reform processes. Most of these programmes are designed to change behaviour. They often require different methodology and pedagogy that are also considered different or 'alternative' in approach.

The Nepal Peace Education Network began in 2006 with the aim to change the behaviour of both teachers and students, providing them with skills for constructive living. During workshops sponsored by UNESCO-Nepal, participants had the opportunity to explore and internalise the concepts of peace education. They then developed awareness and education programmes in conjunction with already existing non-formal approaches using a rights-based methodology. This peace education programme was then infused into the general school curriculum. Within weeks there were flourishing school-based programmes and UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Education mainstreamed the programme. In 2008, UNICEF supported the revision of the formal curriculum to include peace education at all levels. This aimed to ensure a national approach to peace education as a subject to be infused into traditional core topics in the curriculum, such as history or civic education.

Challenges in implementing alternative education programmes

> *There is often a lack of 'hard' data on the outcomes or effectiveness of alternative education programmes in emergency situations.*

Ministerial capacity

In a conflict situation, ministry personnel may have missed opportunities to develop further their own capacities. There is often a limited understanding of new pedagogy, or the pedagogy and content in use may be outdated, making it difficult to adopt new ideas and techniques. In many post-conflict situations, external agencies find themselves working with multiple governments – and sometimes, as in the case of Liberia and Timor Leste – with a United Nations transitional authority in lieu of a government, all in quick succession. Policy-making is often difficult for these new authorities, and it is perhaps even more difficult for their policies to be validated by successive governments. In such situations, contested or weak political administrations may be less effective in implementing education reform. The gap created by this lack of effective administration often means that the formal education system is in disarray and the government cannot provide education throughout the country (for example in Somalia or in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the government does not have control over all regions of the country).

Photo courtesy of Erika Boak

Sierra Leone has recently established peace after a long and vicious civil war. During the conflict and in the immediate post-conflict period, United Nations agencies, NGOs and others attempted to support reconciliation and the rebuilding of Sierra Leone with initiatives in formal and non-formal education that responded to the myriad needs and problems facing the country. Because of the devastation to the educational system in the country, however, many of these initiatives were implemented outside the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS) structure or were only loosely coordinated with the Ministry.

In 2008, the MOEYS, in conjunction with UNICEF, teacher training colleges and other partners worked to streamline the many ad hoc, alternative subject-based initiatives into the mainstream curricula and by doing so, changed the way traditional subjects are taught. The programme entitled 'Emerging Issues' initially brought together a diverse group of ministry and institution personnel from other organisations. While the programme has a curriculum reform and upgrading component, the main focus is on training teachers. The content of this teacher training is an attempt to improve the attitudes and behaviour of the teachers as well as provide skills and knowledge that will then be transferred to the students. This approach is a key component of the 2007–2015 Education Sector Plan for Sierra Leone.

Data collection

There is often a lack of 'hard' data on the outcomes or effectiveness of alternative education programmes in emergency situations. Comprehensive information about programme completion, drop-out rates, transition into formal education systems or behaviour change is rarely readily available. This is symptomatic of broader data collection issues in conflict-affected settings but may also

> *Programmes may be planned for three years, but if the funding is not available, even the best-planned programme cannot succeed.*

be an indication of the perceptions about the relevance of alternative access programmes in particular. These data are needed, however, to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes and to mark progress with regard to the achievement of the Millennium Development and EFA goals.

Sustainability

In emergencies, organisations are often restricted to single-year funding and priorities can change very rapidly. Programmes may be planned for three years, but if the funding is not available, even the best-planned programme cannot succeed. Differing priorities between implementing agencies and governments may lead to programme termination. Also, programmes may be overtaken by changes in policy or sometimes political events. For alternative access programmes, the challenge is to continue until all children in the target group have either completed or been absorbed into relevant and appropriate mainstream programmes. Similarly, planning for behaviour change programmes should include targets for the percentage of the population who accomplish the desired behaviour change so that interventions can continue until change has been achieved.

The accelerated learning programme (ALP) in Liberia started in 1998 on a pilot basis to address the needs of out-of-school children following a period of sustained conflict in the country. Because of renewed violence in the country, the programme was not fully operational until 2005–2006. Beginning in 2006, the Ministry of Education and its NGO implementing partners began regular coordination meetings. Through this process, all parties agreed on a framework for data collection for the ALPs run by the different NGOs. This also became part of a national ALP Education Management Information System, which was useful for ministry planning related to the continuation of the ALP. In 2008, the Ministry decided to extend the ALP for another two cycles (or five to six years). During this time the Ministry expects to make alternative education provision available for the remaining over-age learners.

Photo courtesy of Erika Boak

Recognition of learners' attainments

For alternative access programmes that are designed to transition children into the formal system, the challenge is to address the assessment of learning attainment in the planning and design phase. Linking community schools with the formal education system so that learners' attainments can be recognised and validated also presents a challenge. Youth who participate in programmes that provide a mix of literacy and skills training often do not receive formal recognition of their learning attainments (although they may receive a certificate of completion). In the case of alternative curriculum provision programmes, the measures of changed behaviour do not fit neatly into the formal assessment system. This then requires efforts to assess learners' behaviour changes and the acceptance of assessment tools used to ascertain if change has occurred.

Teachers' remuneration

Given the many competing demands for the government budget in most crisis-affected countries, governments struggle with the recurring cost of teacher salaries. Some countries (such as Sierra Leone) have conducted a teacher census to ensure that those on the payroll are 'real' teachers. Where ghost teachers exist, they need to be identified and removed from the payroll so that additional teachers can be recruited without raising salary costs.

In situations where all trained teachers are automatically considered part of the teaching force and therefore require payment, there is a cost associated with the recognition of teacher training which can sometimes be

prohibitive for governments. Where teacher training institutions are semi-autonomous, it may be possible for recognition of training to be independent of remuneration. In this situation, discussions about the recognition of teacher training should be with the teacher training institutions. This was the case for the UNICEF 'Emerging Issues' programme in Sierra Leone and the 'Peace Education Programme' in Kenya.

Responding to what the learner brings

Alternative access programmes, including those that aim to transition children into formal education, typically target a range of out-of-school children, generally in terms of age, but also in terms of experience and background. The age range results in a wide variety of developmental levels, educational understanding and personal circumstances; some may have previously attended formal

school and some may never have gone to school, some may have sophisticated social skills and others have been isolated. The learners' wide range of developmental and social capabilities presents a challenge for the teacher who may not have the necessary skills or resources to cope with this diversity.

Policy implications

Agencies should advocate particularly for the use of a rights-based, activity-oriented methodology in alternative subject and alternative access programmes.

As national governments bear the primary responsibility for education in their countries, they must be involved throughout the process of assessment, design, implementation and evaluation of all education programmes including alternative access and curriculum provision programmes.

Develop policies for alternative education programmes

Governments should ensure that there is an appropriate alternative education policy in place that meets the needs of children and out-of-school youth. For access programmes,

the content should be in line with the formal education programme and community needs so that learners can transfer into the formal system or have their learning validated upon completion of the alternative access programme. For alternative subject programmes, the design should ensure that there is a curricular structure that is cyclical in its development so that concepts can be effectively built. In addition, because most alternative subject programmes emphasise behaviour change, these programmes must incorporate appropriate pedagogical methods and alternative assessment methods must be developed in order to measure resulting behaviour changes.

Ensure relevance in alternative education programmes

Policies and content of alternative education programmes need to follow national guidelines. Agencies should advocate particularly for the use of a rights-based, activity-oriented methodology in alternative subject and alternative access programmes. Teacher training materials should use this methodology and must take into account the level of the teachers' experience and understanding when training teachers in alternative methods.

> *Government and agency policies on alternative education should include comparable pay structures, based on teachers' qualifications and experience.*

Plan for sustainability

Government policies for alternative education need to allow for clear transitions into formal or other systems. Where agencies are applying short-term strategies for alternative education, plans must include an exit strategy that draws upon the baseline needs assessment and subsequent data collected and analysed. Time frames for the closure of a programme should be clearly communicated to the learners, teachers and community members as well as to the ministry and other partners. In addition, arrangements also need to be put into place to allow teachers to transfer onto the government payroll where applicable, or expectations about the length of teacher employment should be clearly communicated. Working committees that develop alternative subject programmes should have ministry representation and donors should support the lengthy process of curriculum development or change. Donors should ensure sufficient funding for alternative education programmes so that the needs of target groups are met or until they can transition into the formal system.

Coordinate with education authorities

Agencies and organisations need to communicate openly and constructively with ministries of education to support the development of clear national policies and guidance on alternative education programmes. Education agencies and NGOs have a vital role to play in helping governments and relevant ministries understand the role of all alternative programmes in response to, and achievement of, the Millennium Development and EFA goals. Approaches to coordination should build capacity and understanding step by step, taking into account the political and financial pressures the ministry may have.

Develop policies for teacher remuneration

Government and agency policies on alternative education should include comparable pay structures, based on teachers' qualifications and experience. Salaries or stipends should be harmonised from one programme to another and with the government salaries for equivalent work. Incentives for opportunities such as in-service training should be used sparingly as they may limit intrinsic motivation for professional development.

Harmonising teacher salaries and incentives does not mean that the issue of low teacher salaries should be ignored. Instead, agencies should address the underlying problem of extremely low salaries through advocacy to the government or donors and provide support for interventions such as a teacher census to ensure that the proportion of the budget for salaries actually gets to the working teacher.

Recognise learner and teacher attainments

National authorities should include alternative education programmes in national accreditation policies. Governments need to ensure the recognition and certification of learner and teacher attainments after review of alternative programme curriculum and teacher training. This should include allowing children to sit for the national primary examination or to make the transition into formal education after completing the programme. Implementing agencies should make links with the examination board or committees to develop appropriate assessment procedures. Teacher training institutions should be informed of any teacher training being undertaken and develop a structure whereby this can be accredited towards a general teaching certificate.

Some implementation recommendations

Needs assessment	Planning and design	Coordination	Teacher training and accreditation
Ensure inclusion of local educator expertise in needs assessments in order to develop responses appropriate to the specific needs and context of the country. Ensure that needs assessments are inclusive of all groups and populations and ensure that programmes are developed that respond to the needs of all groups (*with special consideration given to groups that have historically been marginalised*). Ensure that interventions are in response to need and context. Map the interventions and geographical areas covered to minimise the potential for overlap and gaps. Update the mapping periodically and systematically.	Identify locally available expertise, through liaison with the relevant ministries and other educational institutions (including teacher training institutions and non-government school organisations such as parish schools) for all phases of the project to strengthen the capacity of local educators. Estimate the number of learners who may want to enrol in the programme, the duration of the programme and the number of cycles that will be necessary in order for potential learners to complete the programme. Liaise with the curriculum development sections of the ministry to ensure inclusion and integration with the formal curriculum, or to identify how/where alternative subjects can be implemented. Identify how closely the 'levels' of an accelerated programme match the grade levels of formal primary education so that school administrators can ensure appropriate integration of learners. Develop an exit strategy with clear indicators. In instances where programmes will be transitioned into the formal system it should also be indicated when and how the programme will be taken over by the government.	Ensure comprehensive data collection, including the number of learners who complete, drop out, or subsequently enrol in the formal school system. Develop joint teacher training initiatives, where possible. Share materials among the government ministries, agencies and NGOs.	Train teachers on qualitative procedures that look for synthesis of ideas and practical, consistent application of techniques. Provide structured training on core classroom management skills and developmental principles of multi-grade and multi-age teaching. Advocate for the recognition of teacher training programmes as well as recognition of the work undertaken by the teachers and students.

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 have been 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:

www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation

www.iiep.unesco.org/information-services/publications/emergencies-and-reconstruction.html