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Peacebuilding Education for Children during Ethnic Conflict

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Abstract

The paper focuses on peacebuilding education for children during ethnic conflict. During protracted violent conflict, school environments play a key role in children's psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, the paper looks at the relationship among ethnicity, education, conflict, and peacebuilding. It also focuses on children's ethnic socialization and distinguishes peacebuilding education from peace education. The paper further dwells on the nature and dynamics of violent ethnic conflict and education for peace programmes. In addition, the paper discusses the negative and positive faces of education in ethnic conflict and the goals of peacebuilding education. Guiding principles for peacebuilding education and guiding principles and the roles of external actors were discussed. Finally, the paper looked at ethnicity, peace education, conflict and peacebuilding; early childhood development and peace; educating former fighters; challenges of youth employment; education reform, and physical violence in schools.

Keywords: Conflict; education; ethnicity; peacebuilding; youth employment.

1. Introduction

Conflict and insecurity are among the most significant development challenges of our time. High proportion of out- of-school children across the world live in conflict-affected contexts. Finding new and sustainable ways of addressing these challenges will strengthen returns of investment both in the field of emergency, as well as, long term development.¹

The structures and processes that appear to turn ethnic intolerance into unbridled violence are highly complex. A list of causal factors might include 'historical forces', economic tensions, 'bad' governance, perceived threats to cultural identity and (in ways that are not adequately understood) formal, non-formal and informal educational processes. Ethnicity itself is often asserted to be a key contributor to 'ethnic conflict'. However, it is increasingly evident that

“ethnicity neither causes conflict, nor in many cases does it accurately describe it. Rather ethnicity/identity is increasingly mobilized and politicized in contemporary violent conflicts”.²

Figure 1: Displaced children during civil war in southeast Nigeria.



Source: Jacob ³

Violent conflict can redraw the lines of marginalisation by reinforcing existing marginalisation, causing the marginalisation of new groups, providing marginalised groups with new opportunities. Daily pressure, discrimination, and violence in the school environment impose a significant burden on children's psychological and socio-emotional wellbeing. 230 million children live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts and up to half of the countries that have experienced recent conflict are destined to relapse.⁴ Children in conflict-affected situations are more than three times as likely to be unable to go to school twice as likely to die before the age of five, and more than twice as likely to lack access to safe water.⁵ 58 million children of primary school age are out of school with 36 % living in conflict-affected zones.⁶ In 55 low- and middle-income countries, where the level of educational inequality doubled, the probability of conflict more than doubled, from 3.8% to 9.5%. ⁷ The effect of conflict on education varies from group to group, and it is crucial to understand these differences when designing education policies.

'Schools as safe spaces' have emerged as key approaches in the field of education in emergencies and entail socio-emotional learning, conflict-sensitive education, or peace education interventions. During conflict, education can offer knowledge and skills that provide protection, while in the longer term, it can help develop values and attitudes that prevent conflict and build peace. ⁸ Peace, together with freedom, equality, and justice, are the most desirable values in almost every society. The educational system fulfills this mission for society

through the schools, which have the authority, the legitimacy, the means, and the conditions to carry it out. Peacebuilding is a fast emerging theme in education and early childhood.

On the other hand, education can undermine all of these processes. Inequitable provision of services based on curriculum and teaching methods can reinforce existing exclusion and stereotypes. Thus, education needs to be delivered effectively and equitably to ensure that it is a driver of peace rather than war. Therefore, this paper unveils peacebuilding education for children during ethnic conflict.

Figure 2: Conflict-affected children in northeast Nigeria



Source: ⁹

2. Ethnicity, peace education, conflict and peacebuilding.

There is a great deal of ethnic heterogeneity within contemporary states, despite the implicit claims to homogeneity of culture and identity. Traditionally, education systems have played a key role in maintaining this fictive image of cultural homogeneity. Coulby ¹⁰ highlights some of the ways in which education has been used in the service of cultural homogenization, including the invention and use of a canon of “national literature” and the promulgation of a common national language – two essential components in what has been called the “naturalization” of citizens. Whether the end result is assimilation or integration depends on both the way schooling is structured and the content of the curriculum (both hidden and explicit).

Through the liberal lens, the principal task of public schooling, properly organized and delivered, has traditionally been to create “harmony” within a nation of divergent peoples. Public schooling is viewed as an investment in a social contract the benefits of which are believed to accrue not only to the individual who experiences schooling but also, and perhaps

more importantly, to the wider society.¹¹ But the current challenge of education in many countries, especially newly established ones intent on forging a national identity, is to maintain peace within their own borders, while fostering tolerance of their often very divergent neighbours.

Peace education is a concept grounded in the theory that education can lead to peace. It achieves this by encouraging non-violence and reconciliation among students. It involves activities and lessons on sharing, working in groups, interacting with others, and dealing with emotional stress positively: "Governments and international organizations develop and implement peace education programmes either in schools as part of the formal curriculum or outside schools as alternative interventions. With regard to impact on learning outcomes, peace education programmes are among the most widely evaluated interventions in contexts of both post-conflict and protracted conflicts".¹²

Contemporary violent conflicts - especially ethnic conflicts - are increasingly dirty. The principal weapon of war is terror. Not only do warriors target civilians, and especially children, systematically, but they employ control through the creation and manipulation of fear.¹³ Their strategies include scorched earth tactics to starve populations and destroy infrastructures, sexual torture and mass rape, ethnic and social cleansing, and even genocide.

The concept of peacebuilding originated in the field of peace studies in the work of Galtung.¹⁴ Core concepts in his work includes the distinction between negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the absence of structural violence and the conditions for war). Galtung argued that peacebuilding is distinct from peacemaking and peacekeeping and involves, 'addressing and removing the root causes of violence - the structural and (a later addition to his work) the cultural violence - that feed into and enable direct violence'.¹⁵ He also placed importance on local ownership. Lederach in Galtung,¹⁶ another key scholar in the field, highlighted that peacebuilding is a dynamic and social process. A key concept in his work is conflict transformation, which signifies an ongoing process of changing relationships, behaviour, attitudes and structures from the negative to the positive. According to this rationale, education for peace-building goes beyond 'peace education' to contribute to broader social transformations.

3. The Goals of Peacebuilding Education

Peacebuilding is an activity that is ultimately defined by its impact.¹⁷ This is why such a broad range of development activities can fall within the peacebuilding rubric.

3. (i) *Demilitarization of the mind*: The demilitarization impact of education may be direct - for example, through the dismantling of the cultural and socio-psychological predisposition of an individual to use violence as a first, rather than last, resort. It may, however, be indirect, in the sense of altering collective views and responses of society that may be reflected in the decreased prominence of military weapons in social, political, and economic life; the gradual delegitimization of a gun culture; and the evolution of non-violent modalities of conflict management.

3. (ii) *Problematization*: Education is commonly understood to provide the means for the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, and thence for development. Education also has a critical role to play by encouraging individuals to question taken-for-granted understandings and facts. It might be understood as a process of opening a world closed by the oppressive immediacy of militarized conflict. Education may serve to cultivate more positive, critical orientations that explore the connections between taken-for-granted facts or understandings and the reinforcement of those structures and processes that maintain and perpetuate underdevelopment and violent conflict.

3. (iii) *Articulation of alternatives*: Peacebuilding education (during and after violent conflicts), no less than peacetime education, must be a place that articulates and demonstrates alternatives. Children take their cues from the legacies of hate and distrust that permeate a post-conflict setting. It would be naive to believe that the existence of a place of tolerance, dignity, and respect will meet and defeat a militarized culture in a direct confrontation. The fundamental objective is to show children that alternatives exist, if choices are made. While these choices might be hard and painful, they do exist. This, then, is a message of empowerment: you have a choice; you have the power to change your world in a way that affects your place and role - past, present and future.

3. (iv) *Changing the rules of the game*: Peacebuilding education has a positive impact to the extent that it can alter the basic rules that guide the interaction of identity groups in all spheres of life - social, commercial, political, and so on. It is not automatic that increased cooperative contact in one sphere or realm will necessarily spill over into other realms. Thus, peacebuilding education seeks to build bridges between groups and communities that have been separated and polarized by violent conflict. The guiding logic of interaction would shift from intolerance, suspicion and hopelessness to tolerance, trust, and hope. So too would it seek to re-humanize those who have been de-humanized.

3. (v) *Delegitimation of violent forces as a means of addressing problems*: The demilitarization of war-torn societies cannot be separated from the need to demilitarize the peacebuilding initiatives of the international community. The challenge for peacebuilding education is to delegitimize gun-based authority structures, and relegitimize traditional or alternative authority structures, while maintaining an ability to work on the ground. Peace-nurturing initiatives should be planned and implemented in a manner that reinforces constructive local initiatives.

4. Peacebuilding Education as a Remedy to Rehabilitate the Children in Nigeria

Emergency-affected community members actively participate in assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the education programme.¹⁸ The emergency-affected community, through its chosen representatives is involved in prioritizing and planning education activities to ensure effective delivery of the education programme. Children and youth are involved in the development and implementation of education activities. The community education set up should hold public meetings to conduct social audits of education activities and their budgets. Training and capacity-building opportunities exist for community members, including children and youth, to manage education activities.

Local community resources are identified, mobilized and used to implement education programmes and other related opportunities. Communities, education personnel and learners identify education resources in the community. Community resources are mobilized to strengthen access to education, protection and the quality of the education programme. Stakeholders recognize and support the capacity of communities, and education programming is designed to maximize the use of local skills and capacities.

A timely education assessment of the emergency situation is conducted in a holistic and participatory manner. An initial rapid education assessment is undertaken as soon as possible, taking into account security and safety. Core stakeholders are involved in identifying what data need to be collected; in the development, interpretation and refinement of indicators; and in information management and dissemination. A comprehensive assessment of education needs and resources for the different levels and types of education, and for all emergency-affected locations, is undertaken with the participation of core stakeholders, and updated on a regular basis. Education is part of an inter-sectoral assessment that collects data on the political, social, economic and security environment; demographics; and available resources, to determine what services are required for the affected population. The assessment analyses existing and potential threats to the protection of learners, using a structured risk assessment of threats, vulnerabilities. Local capacities, resources and strategies for learning and education are identified, both prior to and during the emergency. The assessment identifies local perceptions of the purpose and relevance of education and of priority educational needs and activities. A system is established for sharing assessment findings and storing education data.

A framework for an education response is developed, including a clear description of the problem and a documented strategy for action. Baseline data are collected systematically at the start of a programme. Emergency education response strategies reflect a clear understanding of the overall data. Valid benchmarks and indicators are identified to monitor the impacts of the educational response on children, youth and the whole community. Information collected from the initial assessment is updated with new data that inform ongoing programme development. Education response strategies prioritize the safety and well-being of all children and youth, including those who are vulnerable or have special education needs. Education response strategies progressively meet the needs of emergency-affected populations for inclusive and quality education, and serve to strengthen national education programmes.

All relevant stakeholders regularly monitor the activities of the education response and the evolving education needs of the affected population. Systems for continuous monitoring of emergency situations and interventions are in place and functioning. Women, men, children and youth from all affected groups are regularly consulted and are involved in monitoring activities. Education data are systematically and regularly collected, starting with baseline information and following with tracking of subsequent changes and trends. Personnel are trained in data collection methodologies and analysis to ensure that the data are reliable and the analysis is verifiable and credible. Education data are analyzed and shared with stakeholders at pre-determined regular intervals. Monitoring systems and databases are regularly updated on the basis of feedback to reflect new trends and to allow for informed

decision-making. Data that identify changes, new trends, needs and resources are provided to education programme managers on a regular basis. Programme adjustments are made, when necessary, as a result of monitoring.

Figure 3: A Doctor feeding the displaced children during civil war with milk.



Source: Jacob.¹⁹

There is systematic and impartial evaluation of the education response in order to improve practice and enhance accountability.²⁰ Evaluation of policies, programmes and outcomes of interventions is conducted at appropriate intervals against overall response strategies, specific educational and child protection objectives, and minimum standards. Information is sought on the unintended effects of the intervention. Information is collected in a transparent and impartial manner from all stakeholders, including the affected populations and partners from other sectors. All stakeholders, including marginalised groups, community education committees, national and local education officials, teachers and learners, are included in evaluation activities. Lessons and good practices are widely shared with the broader national and local community and humanitarian community, and are fed into post-emergency advocacy, programmes and policies to contribute to national and global education goals.

Figure 4: The impact of the civil war on the mother and the children.



Source: Jacob.²¹

5. Guiding principles and the role of external actors.

If education is to have a sustainable peacebuilding impact, then it will have to be driven by those individuals and groups within war-torn, war-born, and war-threatened societies themselves.²² This means that external actors must assume supporting and facilitating roles-roles with which they may not be comfortable or familiar. This does not suggest that external actors should reduce their development assistance, rather that they should devolve decision-making authority and, where necessary, support the development of the managerial capacity needed for war-affected populations to regain administrative control of both public and private educational initiatives. The identification, cultivation and support of national and local peacebuilding capacities require a sustained commitment, as well as a willingness to take risks, experiment, and learn from mistakes.²³ The same features that characterize peacebuilding education must also characterize the role of external donors, namely that it:

- 5. (i) is a process rather than a product
- 5. (ii) is long-term rather than short-term
- 5. (iii) relies on local, rather than external, inputs and resources
- 5. (iv) seeks to create opportunities rather than impose solutions

If these are accepted as the guiding premises of peacebuilding education, then Southern voices must drive the process at the front end, not after the formulation of frameworks and approaches; and not only for the implementation of someone else's solutions.

6. The Negative Face of Education

Brass ²⁴ examined the following peace destroying conflict-maintaining impacts of education within specific examples of identity-based conflicts (and non-conflicts)

- a. the uneven distribution of education as a means of creating or preserving positions of economic, social and political privilege.
- b. education as a weapon in cultural repression
- c. denial of education as a weapon of war.
- d. education as a means of manipulating history for political purposes.
- e. education serving to diminish self-worth and encourage hate.
- f. segregated education as a means of ensuring inequality, inferiority, and stereotypes.
- g. the role of textbooks in impoverishing the imagination of children and thereby inhibiting them from dealing with conflict constructively

7. The positive face of education

In contrast, some peacebuilding and conflict limiting impacts of education were identified ²⁵ as follows:

7. (i) conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity nurturing and sustaining an ethnically tolerant climate.
7. (ii) education and the desegregation of the mind.
7. (iii) linguistic tolerance
7. (iv) cultivation of inclusive conceptions of citizenship
7. (v) the disarming of history'
7. (vi) education for peace programmes
7. (vii) educational practice as an explicit response to state oppression.

8. Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Peace

Early Childhood Development interventions have been found to promote constructive social behaviour among parents and communities, including improving communication. ²⁶ Interventions that promote child-to-child interaction can help children develop positive behaviour skills, including team work, cooperation, conflict management, regulating emotions, showing appreciation for diversity and processing complex information. Such skills are important for peaceful interaction and reduce the reliance on violence to resolve conflict. ²⁷

Education programmes provide safe places for children during the day, allowing families to go to work. The case study also found that ECD in this context promotes constructive social behaviour among children. This includes developing interpersonal skills that enhance constructive interaction among peers. In this way, ECD, or pre-primary education, is shown to have a role to play in building peaceful and resilient communities in the post-conflict contexts.

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The following recommendations are made by UNICEF ²⁹ to build peaceful and cohesive societies through ECD:

8. (i) Implement ECD programmes that are safe, nurturing and inclusive - targeting the most vulnerable children and bringing different community groups together around shared goals.
8. (ii) Integrate peacebuilding into parenting programmes for marginalised populations that cannot access ECD centres, and set up strategies to reach out to isolated and marginalised or isolated families.
8. (iii) Integrate ECD components into peacebuilding capacity-building, curricula and training materials for workforce and caregivers.
8. (iv) Advocate for the development of policies, guidance and tools that recognise and include ECD strategies as part of peacebuilding.
8. (v) Ensure investments and continued capacity building on measurement of the long-term contributions of ECD programming on social cohesion, resilience and equity goals.
8. (vi) Build capacity of social, print, and online media to understand the role ECD can play in promoting peaceful societies.
8. (vii) Leverage support at the national level for contributions to global efforts of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium to adopt a United Nations resolution on education and peacebuilding, inclusive of ECD.

9. Educating former Fighters

For peace to be maintained, educational opportunities must be offered to former combatants and for those who missed out on education during the conflict. ³⁰ Education can contribute to social transformation, for example by providing 'catch up' or accelerated learning programmes as part of Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) in the post-conflict phase. ³¹ "A lack of knowledge about target beneficiaries, uncertainty regarding the appropriate levels of education among ex-soldiers and the absence of a market survey that could provide a guide as to which skills were in demand were to prove to be significant oversights" . ³²

10. Challenges of Youth Employment

As already noted, poverty and high levels of youth unemployment has been shown to increase the risk of conflict. ³³ A better understanding must be developed of the causes and drivers of resentment and other grievances, and whether these lead to unrest. The private sector must engage with educational institutes to forge partnerships to strengthen curricula that are suitable to prepare young people for work. Education systems must give young people the skills demanded by the market, yet education alone cannot overcome all the barriers. ³⁴ Simply increasing education in such contexts will not produce the fundamental changes that are necessary in ethnic conflict-affected societies. Transformative solutions are required to change the underpinning logic and structures of behaviour. ³⁵ Youth unrest is linked to the context that has generated it and therefore influenced by social, political and cultural issues. ³⁶

10. Education Reform

Once conflict has ended, the reconstruction of the education system is not just about physically rebuilding schools and hiring teachers, it is also about using the post-conflict period to lay the foundations for future peace. Education systems that contributed to the conditions for violent conflict must 'build back better' in times of peace. "Programmes directed towards education sector reform may contribute towards broader social transformations, particularly in post-conflict situations where opportunities arise to raise questions about the extent to which the education system will simply reproduce previous structures and unequal power relations. Early engagement with this issue may be particularly important, since the window of opportunity to initiate change in the immediate post-conflict period may be limited and the new UN peacebuilding architecture may have an important role in 'seeding' such work even in the early post-conflict phase".³⁷

11. Physical Violence in Schools

Schools must be peaceful environments for educational outcomes to be maximized. Peaceful schools are unequivocally good for education, for children and for peacebuilding.³⁸ The UN Security Council Resolution 2225 – Safe Schools Declaration – was endorsed by 49 countries as of October 2015. It states that "education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury and exploitation; it can alleviate the psychological impact of armed conflict by offering routine and stability and can provide links to other vital services".³⁹ Despite this, there is evidence that schools are not places of peace, but too often places of violence.⁴⁰ "Children in conflict-affected countries are at particular risk from gender-based violence. Moreover, the direct and indirect effects of widespread sexual violence can continue long after conflicts end. Children's vulnerability to school-related gender-based violence also increases if they live with a disability, express a sexual orientation different from the mainstream, or are part of an already disadvantaged group".⁴¹

12. Conclusion

There is a rebranding of development education programmes as peacebuilding initiatives without thoughtful consideration of what that shift means in practice. The shift, however, is a significant one, with important consequences for programming. It involves putting conflict sensitivity at the heart of programming. Provision of skills training needs to be long-term and well linked to thorough analysis of the labour market. School construction and catch-up programmes need to include serious consideration of sustainability and equality issues. Crucially, the shift towards peacebuilding is also a move towards a more political realm. Skills training and analysis of labour market needs may involve taking decisions on what type of employment is best for a country and what its future economy should be based on. The UNESCO⁴² global monitoring report's call for a greater role for education in peacebuilding is therefore a hugely significant one. The decision to respond should be taken consciously, based on thoughtful reflection on what the shift means in terms of consequences for agency positioning, priorities and programming.

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