

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

EDUCATION AND EMERGENCIES

Eldrid K. Midttun, Education Adviser
Norwegian Refugee Council

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Abstract

This keynote address examines the global situation and the prospects for education in emergencies, including natural disasters and armed conflicts. It reviews the roles of different actors in emergencies and their coordination and cooperation. The author describes the efforts of the Norwegian Refugee Council in planning and providing relevant, quality education support to individuals and communities affected by emergencies.

The title of this workshop, “Moving from Access to Relevance: Improving the Quality of Education,” can be understood to mean that there is agreement on access, that the right to education is or should be a given, and that relevant education would help improve the quality of education programs. Education in Emergencies can be included under this title. While access to education is by no means secured in crisis situations, education programs in emergency phases are, in some cases, well ahead of the ordinary school systems in non-emergency situations in comparable countries with respect to relevance and, perhaps, also to quality. This discussion does not address education in emergencies, which is, however, possible, viable and urgent.

Emergencies and Education

The US Fragile States Strategy uses a slightly different terminology than the one I use here. I will briefly refer to the following understanding that has been broadly if not formally adopted within the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.

Emergencies include the acute, the chronically unstable as well as the return and early rehabilitation phases. Education is seen in a broad context and can relate to the normal school system as well as to temporary and short-term interventions of formal or non-formal character. An important element is responding to the needs of the affected groups and their surrounding communities, by providing messages of immediate importance and topics of special relevance in the actual situation and for the future. Emergencies refer to natural disasters and armed conflicts. This paper emphasizes the latter.

Poverty and Conflict – Failed States and Unstable Governments

A newly published list of 60 so-called Failed States makes it clear that if we believe that education is important for a state to develop in a positive manner, our support to this sector is more urgent than ever. It is in the interest of all countries that we apply lessons learned thus far and make joint efforts in planning for the future. A map of poverty and conflict, even one that is a few years old, shows the enormous challenges ahead given that some two billion people live in weak states. Most of the poor countries are on the list of the failed states, and more are projected to join them.

We know that conflict breeds poverty and poverty breeds conflict. We also know that half of the countries embarking on the road to peace fall back into conflict within five years.

1. If we do not offer substantial education support to “the red” countries, we will never reach the millennium development goals of education for all.
2. Statistics show an improvement of only some 20 million enrolments over the five past years. The global community promised education for all by the year 2000, again for 2015. We are once more well behind in meeting the target: Promised funding has not come through.

How do we explain that so many highly educated donors, governments, and institutions with the power, funds, influence, choices and planning capacity, fail repeatedly to keep promises given the numbers of uneducated people who want to learn and who could help their own states from failing?

The Fate and Survival of Young People

Education does not guarantee a peaceful, just world. However, the uneducated may revolt, as happened in Sierra Leone; the Sierra Leone Minister of Education said at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, “We have miserably failed our youth. They are uneducated, unemployed and unemployable.”

We can imagine the desperate, hopeless situation of children, youth and adults in an emergency situation as drowning with no lifeboat. Their fate and perhaps their loyalty may be decided by which boat comes first to “rescue” them – the armed group, criminals, an extremist group, prostitution – or the school. If no school boat comes or does not have room for all the school-age youth and children, chances are that others will provide the only, often destructive and forced alternative.

There is no doubt that many regimes, civil, religious or military, do not truly care about their people, do not give priority to their health, education and wellbeing and appear to prefer that the better part of their populations be uneducated.

However, it is important and timely that we, the educated and wealthy of the so-called north and west, be willing to reflect on issues relating to our roles.

- Re-examine our part in denying education to people in countries of poverty, disaster and conflict by not fulfilling our promises.
- Consider, if and when we do give support, how we are perceived, how we are working with the recipients so that they will not resent us later on.
- Realize that the culture, money, knowledge, and power that we hold may be perceived as crushing to someone even while they are receiving needed support.

While so many people lack and want education, it is painful to acknowledge that more than one dictator was educated at a missionary school, and that many terrorists, criminals, drug pushers and other negative elements are often highly educated. It is therefore clear that education is only part of the picture, along with subject matter, the learning environment, state and community influence and ideology. No doubt the roles of national and international actors in emergencies also have considerable influence.

Roles and Coordination

The UN, governments, humanitarian organizations, peacekeepers and military forces play different roles in conflict situations. There should be a clear understanding of the mandate and responsibility of each and, if possible, of local perceptions of each group. This does not preclude

coordination, which can give support and help prevent misunderstandings leading to dangerous and difficult situations.

At the session on building bridges between USAID and the Defence Department, I learned more about the thinking and rationale for a closer contact. There are dilemmas and exceptions even when close cooperation is not routine, such as when a military escort is needed to secure food transports or when we allow an armed policeman into our humanitarian vehicle when going over the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan to ensure our safety.

One type of contact is familiar to us in Norway. For several years, there have been exercises or role-plays involving military units and humanitarian organizations. The humanitarians play the roles of UN agencies and governments of countries at war and of their own governments. The purpose of the exercise is for all involved to learn more about the mandates, roles and functions of the various actors in conflict and emergency situations. We are also aware that the UN is developing a concept on how to coordinate better the relationship between military and humanitarian actors.

Many humanitarian organizations and most UN agencies avoid being associated with military forces in countries of conflict, fearing that their impartiality will be compromised, and that target groups may be confused. Whatever the plans or perspectives, a thorough and open discussion is essential in order to avoid misunderstanding and misperceptions. Coordination mechanisms and how well they work in emergencies vary from one situation to another. Whether the government or a *de facto* authority takes charge, or whether a UN agency has a sector mandate for education, all actors have a responsibility for contributing to the best possible coordination and use of the present expertise and abilities.

The coordination and overlapping between emergency and development actors should be pursued more fervently than is the case today, namely to ensure a sustainable continuation of education efforts that demand support over a longer period. Some humanitarian actors see themselves solidarity organisations and side with one party in a conflict. But most are aiming to be impartial. This means that there should be more of an effort to reach across to the different factions or groupings when security allows. Our experience from among other places, Angola, Sierra Leone and the Caucasus, is that the education sector may be a good door-opener for such cross “border” initiatives. Summing up coordination comments, humanitarian and development actors with different mandates should more often coordinate efforts better with authorities and among themselves to ensure that rapid interventions are meaningful and have a long-term perspective. In education this may be especially important, as support to the education sector normally must be given well beyond the post emergency phase.

The Norwegian Refugee Council Model – One Example for Responding to Education Needs in Emergencies

In general NRC activities run through three pillars: Twenty Country Programmes; Emergency Standby Rosters of some 500 people who have been recruited, trained and are ready to be called for and deployed by UN agencies anywhere in the world on short notice; and Advocacy on behalf of our target groups – refugees, internally displaced and returnees.

Education is one of four core activities: *i*) the soft components of teacher training, methodology and materials; *ii*) construction and rehabilitation of houses and schools which is placed with the Shelter activity; *iii*) distribution of food and non-food items, and *iv*) information and legal assistance. Camp Management is being tested as a probable additional sector. In the mid-nineties, when we made public our goal of providing education on short notice, we realised that we had to prepare ourselves since education cannot be taken off the shelf as easily as the Red

Cross can open hospitals and provide medicines. We needed to establish a framework and define a number of principles:

- Working Principles, Effective Processes and Programme Development skills.
- Human, Material and Financial Resources. The human resources, i.e. the educators, were included in the standby roster from 1994 on and have been instrumental in rapid response for NRC as well as for UN agencies. When material resources are not found in the country, they can be adapted from generic sources or from similar programmes. This kind of sharing is increasing. For example, with INEE and its members to speed up the response. The Norwegian government is the main source of our financial resources.
- Cooperation with Education Authorities is seen as instrumental, as are coordination with other actors and capacity and competence building for staff and partners. These elements also make up part of the exit strategy.
- Reminders that education provides protection, responds to needs and ensures rights.

Key Target Groups

Teachers make up the single most important element in education programmes, and considerable effort goes into training and following up to ensure the best possible quality in the given circumstances. Teams of local trainers carry out this work which is occasionally supplemented with additional training or support from international technical experts.

For an organization with short- to medium-term planning horizons like NRC, priorities must be given to manageable projects within the mandate. Children and youth who have lost out on education because of the war deserve a second chance. Ten to thirteen year-olds are offered a 6-12 month catch-up programme to enable them to enter or re-enter formal school, which, we hope exists. Uneducated 14-18 year-olds and older people are in great need of meaningful basic knowledge, life skills and skills training. They are also greatly needed by their war-torn communities for constructive rebuilding and reintegration.

Normally people affected by natural disasters are not within the NRC remit, but with offices in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, we will provide support to communities affected by the tsunami for one year.

Relevance and Quality

Relevance and quality can be defined in many ways. Relevant education would probably include meaningful knowledge and skills that cater for survival, livelihood, self-reliance and influence in the actual situation and environment. The definition of what is relevant will change when people move from home to exile, from camp to settlement or from an acute phase to the transition to development. Programs must be flexible while also catering for the future with a core of formal and general subject matter.

Quality education in emergencies is more difficult to define than under normal circumstances. Relatively low standards of some elements may be acceptable and still safeguard education quality under certain conditions. A good teacher in a plastic school can provide relevant quality education. Elements of a definition of quality include the following.

- The acquisition of knowledge and skills seen as useful in and by the community.
- Learning takes place in a conducive atmosphere, with a teacher and methods that inspire attendance and completion.
- Viable national and international institutions recognize the education and make it possible for the pupil to move to the next level of academic or vocational education or training.

Emergencies and Opportunities

Relevance plays an important part in NRC-supported programs. From our experience, donors, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations in cooperation with education authorities in several countries and situations have contributed to making education programs more relevant for teachers and students in their particular situation and phase of conflict or post-conflict.

Unwanted as they are, emergency situations often create opportunities for change and for new subject matter that may not be there in peaceful societies. They make the needs for additional knowledge and awareness more obvious because the school system is weaker, but the situations may make education authorities more aware and more open to changes. Good education programs help protect learners mentally, psychologically and physically. They also help save and develop the intellectual potential for acquiring knowledge and skills. In addition to new subjects, learner-centred pedagogy, training and follow-up of trainers and teachers give children and teachers both immediate relief and longer-term benefits.

There is a constant effort to connect preaching to practice, by, for instance, introducing democracy in the classroom, cleaning the classroom environment and convincing the teachers that putting the stick away makes a contribution to changing the culture of violence.

NRC and many other education actors have included the obviously relevant need for functional literacy along with other new subject matters including peace building and conflict resolution, civic and human rights, environmental concerns and health, with a strong focus on HIV/AIDS, in addition to skills training.

The HIV/AIDS Pandemic

There is little disagreement on the relevance and necessity of a strong focus on HIV/AIDS awareness. In addition to the personal tragedies that it is creating, the pandemic is affecting education planning in many highly affected countries. Conflicts and poverty make the situation worse as communities break down, and violence and deliberate violations increase the spread of the virus. Studies carried out by the African Development Bank and others have shown how AIDS and related illnesses affect teachers and children, and in particular, girls.

The need to provide correct and relevant knowledge is more urgent than in any other situation and a change of behaviour is vital. The target groups cannot be limited to school children and youth. Community leaders, peacekeepers, religious leaders, humanitarian personnel, males and females must also be informed. Trainers and teachers are instrumental in delivering the messages, notably after having received training themselves, including a strong focus on ethics and codes of conduct vis a vis the children and adolescents. Being aware of the current US policy on HIV/AIDS information, one can appreciate and support the strong call for abstinence but still fail to understand the ban on the use of condoms. In reality abstinence is not an option for a vast number of girls and women – as long as men do not understand the danger and leaders do not take responsibility for contributing to the change of behaviour and customs.

Special Attention: Non-formal Youth Education

I would like to mention The Youth Education Pack, a pilot project for young people between 14 and 22, half boys and half girls, carried out in Sierra Leone over the past two years. The objective was to provide a compressed year of education and learning with three components including functional literacy, life skills and skills training for this target group comprising primarily returning Internally Displaced Persons and refugees but also locally affected and some demobilized youth soldiers. All had missed out on all or most of their education.

An evaluation done after the two years illustrated that the skills training element was the most important to the young people and that they in fact were able to get jobs. The literacy part was too

academic and therefore seemingly less relevant. The program did a lot for the young people's self-esteem and their standing in the community while also contributing to the re-integration of child soldiers. The main dilemma is that unless this type of intensive quality programme is supported by an international actor in the early post conflict phases, a local NGO cannot continue it and will not be given priority by the authorities who are struggling to get the formal system in place.

Catching Up: A Rapid Response with a Long-term Perspective

Depending on the mandates of education or humanitarian actors, priorities and methods of response will vary. At the same time as attention is being given to the formal system, sufficient attention should be given to the backlog of over-aged out-of school children and youth. Mechanisms need to be created for them to catch up and look towards a productive future. A list of priority actions could look like this, notably all in consultation with the given education authorities.

- Programs for teacher training and for qualification of the untrained teachers.
- Catch-up and Accelerated Learning Programs for the backlog of those who missed out
- Generic learning materials for adaptation and local development.
- Community involvement and partnership with development organizations for ownership and sustainability.
- Emergency Funds for rapid response, including funds to secure multi-year programmes that enable more children and youth to complete their basic and continued education.

Expectations for the Millennium Development Goals

The Norwegian government has issued its strategy of support to the education sector, calling it *Education – Job Number 1!* We take this as a serious commitment to making material contributions to the global effort. We are rapidly approaching the release of the MDG Working Group Report for 2005 and the Summit meeting in September. Preliminary comments have stated that the report “will show how the Goals can be met through a coordinated effort of investments in health and education in poor countries.” We would like to believe that promises made in the year 2000 will be honoured.