

Catch-up-Classes in Post-Conflict Burundi: Reflective Notes on Three Constraints

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Catch-up-Classes (CuCs) and Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs) are educational strategies aimed to compress years of formal education into a reduced span of time. These programmes are specifically targeted for young people (ages 10-24) who have had to abandon school due to situations of conflict or natural disasters and aim to “catch-up” students so that they may once again re-enter formal schooling. This article presents conclusions from an evaluation of a CuC programme implemented in Burundi by an International Non Governmental Organisation. It analyses three main constraints that were observed during the course of the study: 1) the lack of livelihood strategies for out-of-school youth; 2) the lack of a preliminary analysis of national educational needs in terms of demand (schools) and supply (students); and 3) the fragile economic and social sustainability of the CuC programme. Using these observations as a basis, the article calls for the debate to further identify the educational contexts in which CuC/ALP strategies can be most appropriate.

Keywords: *Catch-up-Classes; Accelerated Learning Programmes; Post-conflict Primary Education; Burundi; Young People Education.*

1. Introduction

The Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction (INEE, 2004) emphasise that the right to education is not limited to those under 18 and call for a prioritisation of young people's (ages 10-24) education. In Africa, young people under 25 comprise about 60 percent of the population, representing a key force for peace, reconstruction and development (IDS, 2005).

Yet, living in conflict times makes people experience forced displacements, food insecurity, breakdown of social protection structures and an increased susceptibility to illnesses. Due to family separations and/or deaths of parents and caregivers, young people often become the heads of households with school-age dependent siblings. Other times, they have already formed their own families. Moreover, precarious school conditions and age differences in the classrooms present further disincentives for youth to re-attend school.

Thus, young people living in emergency and post-emergency situations are prone to missing out on the opportunity to attend school effectively twice: first, during conflict or natural disaster times, and secondly, during the period of reconstruction.

Catch-up-Classes (CuCs) and Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs)¹ are educational responses particularly tailored for these young people. CuCs/ALPs emerge as temporary alternatives to formal schooling by providing young people with intensive and/or compressed classes (for example

¹ While ALPs are better known for "compressing" the time of learning (for example, two years of primary school completed in one year), CuCs seem to represent a more general term for the provision of *intensive* education. Yet, CuCs and ALPs are considered synonyms here. While the programme evaluated is a CuC type, we think that the constraints analysed for it can widely be applicable to ALPs. A subsection in the article will specifically discuss this.

condensing two years of schooling into one). CuCs/ALPs aim to bring students up to a level where they can rejoin the formal school system.

This paper presents conclusions from research carried out by an International Non Governmental Organisation (INGO) in Cibitoke, North-West Burundi, to evaluate a CuC programme². It focuses on the existence of three constraints for the correct development of CuCs, some of which may be considered to be characteristic of CuCs/ALPs in general.

Firstly, young people³ often experience a rapid shift in economic needs. This demands that educational strategies incorporate elements that seek to expand and foster livelihood opportunities, something that the programme did not integrate. Secondly, the Burundian post-conflict school system is limited on capacity and has great difficulty in absorbing the massive return of students, including CuC students. Thirdly, CuCs were not cost effective and were relatively expensive, as they required a much higher investment per student by the INGO implementing the programme than the national formal schools. Moreover, CuCs generally work in parallel with the formal school system, which raises issues of economic and social sustainability.

This paper discusses the strategies for the education of young people in post-conflict contexts. It suggests that CuCs are not the most appropriate solution for the needs of young people in comparison to, for example, direct reintegration or vocational training packages. The lack of rapid, basic livelihood responses in the programme; the context of a few devastated schools in which to integrate students; the difficulty in integrating CuCs into the formal education system and their expensive budget all make it difficult to consider CuCs as a generally effective educational response as they do not address the underlying issues mentioned above. The article thus suggests that a larger discussion may be required regarding which contexts are most appropriate for CuC/ALP strategies, as well as which programming design decisions are most suitable for young people in reconstruction contexts.

2. Background

2.1. CuCs/ALPs in Post-Conflict Countries

Various types of CuCs/ALPs can be found within the work of international organisations in post-conflict countries⁴. In Sierra Leone in 1999, for instance, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) started an 8-month CuC programme for 10 to 13 yr olds who had lost out on schooling due to the war. The programme aimed to reintegrate the children into the third grade of mainstream school.

² The three-month field research (11/06-01/07) took place in the communes of Buganda and Mabayi. It included: a) visits to schools: open interviews and transect walks with directors and teachers; b) two informal group discussions with school directors in Buganda and Mabayi; c) a workshop with CuC teachers about drop-out cases; d) observation of both CuC and formal education classes; e) drawing and writing work with 125 CuC and non-CuC students in primary schools; f) writing of letters with Batwa students; g) fifty-one semi-structured interviews to ex-CuC students who left school afterwards (a total of 135); and h) gathering of provincial statistical data and of CuC/ALP bibliography.

³ Age intervals when defining 'young people' vary depending on the methodology and topic of study (HIV/AIDS, legal ages, unemployment...). In the CuC/ALP topic, different sub-divisions are also found: from 10 to 13 and 14 to 18 (NRC, 2005); from 5 to 17 (UNHCR in IDS, 2005); from 10 to 18 (Intili, 2006) and from 10 to 24 (IDS, 2005). In the research presented, the target was out-of school children ranging 6 to 18 (school age children). As for the sample age, the interval stemmed from TOR objectives: the ex-CuC students to be interviewed ranged from 12 to 23 years old. CuC and non-CuC students presently studying 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade in public schools ranged from 10 to 15. Here, CuC students were compared to non-CuC students with similar characteristics (same school and grade, same gender and age, year repeated/no year repeated) in order to compare history lives. Specific work was done with CuC and non-CuC batwa students only (aged 12-15), to identify particular demands. Samples were taken 50/50 from both communes and for both genders.

⁴ No examples were found of CuCs/ALPs implemented in countries that went through natural disasters.

Later, the NRC started to provide a longer-term ALP, compressing six years of primary schooling into three.

For 14 to 18 yr olds, the INGO envisaged a one-year *Youth Pack* programme, also piloted in Sierra Leone in 2003. The Youth Pack provided literacy, life skills and skills training in order for students to develop some literacy and professional habits to be more employable (NRC, 2005). Similar programmes have been introduced in other post-conflict countries by the same INGO.

In Afghanistan, USAID supported several organisations for the integration of ALPs within the *Afghanistan Primary Education Program* (2003-05), offering emergency access to accelerated elementary education for out-of-school youth between ten and eighteen years of age (Intili et al, 2006). In Liberia, USAID since 2004, together with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, run the Liberian Transition Initiative, a programme with an ALP component for over-age children that condenses six years of primary schooling into three (USAID, 2004).

A slightly different version of ALPs in Afghanistan, also managed by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF and implemented by the NGO BRAC, was the *Winter CuCs* (2002-04), that provided academic support during the winter school break before the beginning of the new academic term (Carwardine, 2004). Other programmes, such as the one managed by the organisation Catholic Relief Services in Afghanistan (2002), equally offered ALPs to the adult population, targeting particularly women (Capacii & Ullman, 2005).

2.2. CuCs in Burundi

After 13 years of civil war, peace was signed in Burundi in October 2003, followed by an election process in 2005. Security, reconciliation and reconstruction represented many challenges. The INGO focus of this study fights for the reduction of suffering and the ultimate elimination of poverty in the world's poorest countries, which includes Burundi.

Their programme in Cibitoke province aimed to reduce school abandonment rates through CuCs in two of their six communes. The INGO was also actively involved in improving teaching methods, through the exploration of child-based pedagogies within the CuCs, and worked closely with schools, parent/teacher associations and school management committees.

The CuC programme consisted of two years. During the first year, a selection of school age students (6-18) who had left school for more than one year received intensive CuCs (mornings and afternoons) in classes of 40 to 60 students. CuCs took place in a temporary annex located close to the schools and CuC teachers were trained and paid by the INGO. During the second year, students were reintegrated into the formal educational system.

Both during the CuC and the following reintegration year, free schooling was provided to CuC students by the INGO (school fees and school material such as books, bags, pens and uniforms). During the last two years of the programme (2006-07), it was decided that teacher training and school material would also be delivered to those students in formal schools in which CuC students were eventually reintegrated.

Additional support for CuC students and their families was given by the *outreach workers*, who were local workers contracted by the INGO. Outreach workers followed-up CuC students during the CuC classes and the reintegration year, focusing particular attention on potential dropout cases. Apart from their daily work with CuC students and ex-students, outreach workers led awareness campaigns

to sensitize the community at large of the benefits of schooling. This sensitization permitted the direct reintegration (without CuCs) of a significant amount of children into school, in addition to those students selected for CuCs.

In this particular programme, there was no accumulation of years. The first CuC year acted as a legal equivalent for the unfinished, missed year in formal schools. Once students had completed the CuC year, they would reintegrate in the formal school year immediately superior to the one in which they initially had left school.

In 2007, the last year of the 4-year programme, an evaluation was planned to assess the accomplishments of the programme objectives. The study equally aimed to follow-up on the absorption rate of former CuC students in the formal school system as well as analyse reasons for *double dropout* (CuC students who had already left school before CuCs and that again, left school *during or after* them).

The programme obtained many positive outcomes and accomplished many of the objectives. Since the project started in 2004, eight CuCs with sixty students each were established and 680 children were reintegrated into the formal system after the completion of the first year of the CuC programme. Excellent exam results were achieved by CuC students (exams were done in conjunction with the formal school system), together with a high percentage of school reintegration. A very innovative and valuable practice was the integration in CuCs of outreach workers from within the community.

Nonetheless, this article's aim is to focus on three main challenges that the programme should consider when reviewing, as the next section illustrates.

3. Three Constraints of CuCs in Cibitoke, Burundi

The article now presents the conclusion of the CuC programme evaluation in three main points: firstly, the priority needs of the students; secondly, the structure of the national school system; and thirdly, the nature of the programme in terms of sustainability.

3.1. The State of Students: Priorities in the Needs of Young People

As many CuC/ALP initiatives, the CuC programme in Burundi aims to provide basic primary education for older children. Yet, what is the situation of these young people? What are their most urgent needs? Does the programme respond to them?

3.1.1. Students' Voices and the Education Needs Pyramid

Fifty-one ex-CuC students were interviewed during the evaluation. All of them had dropped out of school twice: first, before the CuC programme during the conflict, and then again during or after CuCs. Reasons given by young people for their need to leave school were: 1) hunger and the immediate need to look for food (particularly orphans, students from the Batwa community and unaccompanied, self-sustaining children); 2) the need to take care of younger siblings and household (generally older sisters and a few older brothers); 3) illnesses such as recurring malaria, meningitis, anaemia and severe short-sightedness; 4) the engagement in an economic activity such as trading, agriculture, military groups or stealing (generally older boys); and 5) various problems of stigma with teachers and classmates (such as being involved in an armed group, as was the case for some young boys, the most vulnerable to armed service recruitment).

Patterns of abandonment, apart from formal fees and war displacements, both of which were unique to the conflict period, seemed to be identical in both war and post-conflict times, when CuCs were being held. In all cases, having a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear and health to live were *preconditions* for attending school – for both the students and *their relatives*.

CuCs supplied students with school material (i.e. book notes and uniforms) and included the construction of semi-structured schools and the provision of teacher training. However, the programme did not have strategies that targeted basic needs (food/water, housing/land, clothing and health).

In terms of food, an ex-CuC student commented that he went to CuCs because he thought that ‘they would give food’. Not having anything to eat, he ended up leaving CuCs during the first trimester (Cascant i Sempere: 2007). A 13 year-old girl doing her 4th grade affirmed: ‘Since I have started school, I have seen and understood its importance and how good it is. But, presently, I see the contrary of what we saw before. We leave school and go back home. We find no food’.

As for housing, an 11 year-old girl commented: "We live in a house where there are leaks. The rain falls on us. We prepare the food in a traditional cook [three stones with coal]. If we prepare the food [while] it rains, we have to stop. The water falls inside [the hut] and we sleep without eating"⁵. Many of the children also insist that they have no ownership or access to land. For those with access, renting takes money away.

Regarding clothing, a 13 year-old girl affirmed that she had no clothes but her CuC uniform⁶. As for health, a CuC batwa student in the 6th grade writes about illnesses and their effects: "We get sick and we do not find the means to get well. That makes us be absent for a month without following the classes [and] the teacher". For others, one of the obvious causes for repeating courses is falling sick "too many times"⁷.

Dimensions interact. Leaks in huts mean bad sleeping, and bad sleeping means ill-being: "Our house is not in good state. We sleep very badly. When it rains, we do not sleep at all"⁸. A 14 year-old boy assumes: "We live on dirty water. Clean water is far away"⁹; and again: "We drink very dirty water. We have a lot of snakes in our belly"¹⁰.

Dimensions of time and long distances are also transversal and interact with these elements (food/water, housing/land, clothing and health); for instance: "As we do not have any material to fetch the water, water finishes soon. We go [to fetch water] all the time... [then] I go to school; I go walking and it is long"¹¹.

Based on the 51 interviews to ex-CuC students and a collection of 125 writings and drawings by primary school students¹², an educational needs pyramid was drawn (chart 1), the foundation of

⁵ 3rd grade, non CuC student

⁶ 3rd grade, CuC student

⁷ 13 year-old girl, 4th grade, non CuC student

⁸ 14 year-old girl, 4th grade, CuC student

⁹ 3rd grade, non CuC student

¹⁰ 13 year-old girl, 4th grade, non CuC student

¹¹ 11 year-old girl, 3rd grade, non CuC student

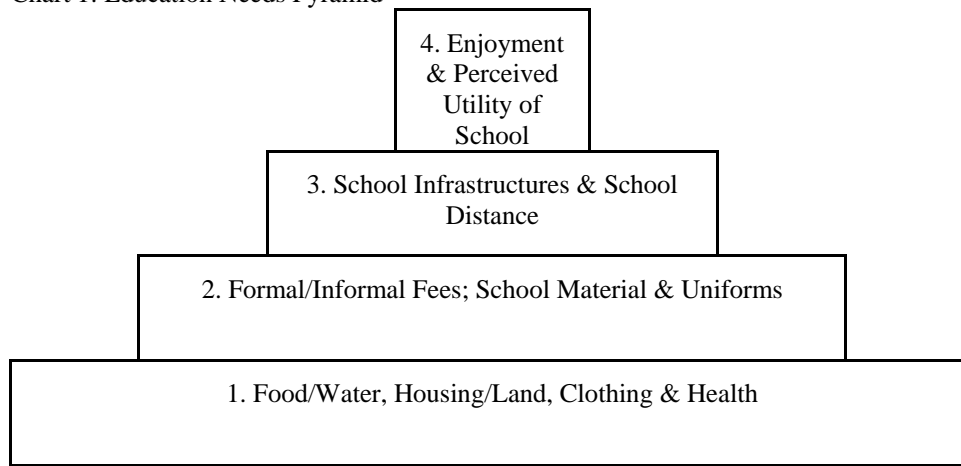
¹² The whole report on "Children's Voices" (in French) is available on: kas@cascantisempere.com

which are these basic needs (level 1). School materials such as book notes or uniforms and the payment of both formal and informal fees come next in the pyramid. If families or friends do not have money to pay for them, hopes for going to school are over (level 2).

As for school infrastructures and school distances (level 3), they do not seem to play a decisive role for abandoning school, as is the case in the first two levels; although it is clear that they influence children and families' minds.

On the positive side, there is a hope in children to find in school infrastructures that they do not have at home regarding level 1 and 2: a place to find canalized water and food; a place to do the homework in silence; a place for medicines/help for buying medicines. In this sense, measures such as opening up a school canteen or eliminating formal school fees are known for attracting a big sum of returning students.

Chart 1: Education Needs Pyramid



Source: Cascant i Sempere, 2007

Level 4 regards the enjoyment and the perceived utility of school for both children and their families¹³. For instance, in rural communities, it is common to consider that the 6th grades of primary school are sufficient for a child to become literate, with secondary school no longer being cost-effective. Another example is when many older boys and girls do not go back to school because of the shame of learning with younger classmates and of seeing their old classmates in superior courses. Also, many of these older students are prone to leave school if they get the smallest chance to earn a living.

As for issues of violence, they were not analysed during the study and were not thus integrated in the pyramid, but it is sure, they do have a place in it.

In short, the main obstacles claimed by students that prevented them from going to school stand on the first step of the needs pyramid. They are food, water, housing, land, clothing and health. With these primary needs resolved, students looked to have their secondary needs met. These are the lack of school material and uniforms and the payment of both formal and informal fees. For those students

¹³ “Utility” or “enjoyment” of school may not be seen as “needs”, but it is so in the students’ discourses when they consider that they need or do not need school because it is useful/useless, and because they like it or not. “Needs” are thus defined here as the factors that students have to have in order to decide to go and stay in school.

with these levels of needs covered, the third and fourth level of needs took place: school facilities, school distances and the usefulness and/or enjoyment of school.

3.1.2. CuCs/ALPs: Band-aid Responses to Structural Problems?

As a result of these challenges, successful CuC programmes would need to envisage solutions for at least both the first and the second levels of the children's needs pyramid. This is so because even when school costs are covered by the programme, the hunger, the thirst, the lack of shelter, land or clothing and the probability of illness tend to eclipse any assistance efforts. This is particularly pertinent for the Batwa community, who were found to live in a constant state of hunger thus face some of the hardest challenges in accessing schooling.

For those ex-CuC students who did not abandon school after CuCs, positive external circumstances could be seen to have had as much weight as the incentives of the programme themselves. With this in mind, CuCs/ALPs would need to take a more holistic approach and be linked to food, sanitation, land, housing, livelihood and health programmes in order to be sustainable in a context of persistent personal and social vulnerability.

Poverty, health and livelihoods on the students' side further couple with the limited school and teachers' capacity to absorb incoming students on the school side. Together, they appear as the root, interlinked causes of children leaving school.

3.2. The State of the Education System: Supply and Demand Issues

Most CuC/ALP initiatives, as was the case of the CuC programme in Burundi, aim to integrate over-aged ex-students into the conventional primary educational system. Yet, can post-conflict, formal educational systems absorb the additional influx of students? Are CuC/ALP initiatives taking into account the realities of formal education schools and systems? How do these transitional programmes assure school retention once students regain formal schooling?

3.2.1. A Supply Bottleneck: the Over-population of Schools

An educational system can be pictured as a supply and demand equation that, in order to work, needs stability. Schools (plus the educational governmental bodies) constitute the supply side of education while students (plus the families and communities they live in) represent the demand side.

Because of the recent war, the school system in Burundi is characterised by broken and ravaged infrastructures and scarce school materials. The insufficient number of teachers, together with the steep increase of students, makes pupil-teacher ratios unsustainable. Moreover, many of the current teachers are young and unskilled having themselves had low quality formal education during the war and little training at the present time.

As for the sharp increase of students returning to school, it is due to at least two recent events. Firstly, the progressive return of refugees and internally displaced Burundians since 2003. Secondly, the elimination of formal school fees in 2005 by the Burundian government.

The general situation of poverty, resettlement and recent drought in the Northern provinces partially offset this return tendency, making school attendance a difficult endeavour for children and their families, as seen before. All in all, while many children remain out of school because of the cited reasons, the education balance keeps weighing heavily on the demand side (high rate of returning

students), whose supply counterpart is unable to absorb (insufficient school infrastructures, school materials and teachers).

While the demand side is not to be neglected, the supply side manifests a much more urgent need for intervention. More students evidently demand more school resources such as material, equipment and infrastructures and more quality teachers. Facts are that children are coming back to school en masse by themselves and that schools cannot handle the high demand.

As the educational statistics from the province of Cibitoke reflect (chart 2), dropouts have risen in all communes from 2004/05 to 2005/06 (Buganda, Bukinayana, Mabayi, Mugina, Murwi and Rugombo). The dropout rate in Cibitoke has been the highest in 2005/06 (9.1%).

Chart 2: Total Dropouts in Cibitoke (Province & Communes)

	Buganda Commune dropouts	Bukinayana Commune dropouts	Mabayi Commune dropouts	Mugina Commune dropouts	Murwi Commune dropouts	Rugombo Commune dropouts	Cibitoke Province dropouts	Cibitoke Province dropout rates
2002/03	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.2%
2003/04	787	427	639	569	512	932	3866	7.2%
2004/05	815	863	602	392	605	341	3618	4.8%
2005/06	1029	980	920	1515	835	1081	6360	9.1%

Source: Cartes Scolaires 2002/06, Province of Cibitoke

As for first year students (chart 3), absolute figures show that first year dropouts in 2005/06 were three times higher than previous years (3,611 compared to 1,312 and 1,199 in 2003/04 and 2004/05). In 2005/06, 56.7% of total dropouts were 1st year students (3,611 out of 6,360). This means a 23% increase in relation to previous years, where 1st year dropouts represented 33.9% and 33.1% of total dropouts.

Chart 3: 1st Year Dropouts in Cibitoke Province

	Cibitoke Province 1st year dropouts	Cibitoke Province Total dropouts	Cibitoke Province Rate 1st year/total dropouts
2002/03	-	-	-
2003/04	1312	3866	33.9%
2004/05	1199	3618	33.1%
2005/06	3611	6360	56.7%

Source: Cartes Scolaires 2002/06, Province of Cibitoke

In short, the demand flow of education (children going to school) has been strongly intensified through the elimination of fees and the high return of displaced/refugees while on the other hand, the supply side has remained scarce, devastated and self-consuming (a high rate of course repetition blocks the ascendant flow of students through the system).

CuCs/ALPs are educational measures whose strategies mostly stand on the demand side. They may have *ad hoc* supply components such as constructing schools for the reintegrated students, teacher training or provision of textbooks and other school materials; however, these do not represent their main rationale. This means forcing more children into a school system that is already full. The

reintegration of yet more students under these circumstances (lacking or inadequate infrastructural buildings, over-worked teachers) can be strongly criticised if parallel measures of accompaniment within the programme are not taken to decongest the situation.

3.2.2. A Quicker and more Popular Supply-Demand Link than CuCs: Direct Reintegration

CuC/ALPs are intended for older children, refugees/internally displaced children or more generally, for children who have abandoned school for whatever reason and who, after years of non-schooling, *need intensive or compacted teaching support* for their re-entry.

According to interviews and provincial statistics, this causation may be doubtful. The fact of having been absent from school for a long time should not necessarily mean that direct integration (without CuCs/ALPs) is impossible – even when more than one year has passed. There may be an assumption that children need a bridge course just for the fact of having left school.

Following observations during interviews, capacity for direct reintegration seems to respond more to each child's capacities than to issues of abandonment. A student profile with bad exam results and/or repeating years of schooling may be in more need of further academic support – whether the student is *in or out* of school – than other dropout cases to which social awareness and/or responses to basic needs may represent the most adequate measure of support. Additionally, students may be in need of "catching up" in just one subject, perhaps various ones, but not necessarily all, for what investment on CuC packs may not always turn out to be a hundred per cent effective.

Statistics also indicate that many dropout students have opted for the itinerary of direct reintegration, both after the elimination of fees in 2005 and before, whether in the same or in an inferior year to the one in which they had to leave school. Chart 4 shows the number of children newly registered between 2nd and 6th grade, that is, previous dropout cases. They amounted to 31,387 children in 2002/03 (8442 + 7913 + ... + 3163) and 28,732 children in 2005/06 (7171 + 6423 + ... + 4347). These were, comparatively, more than 1st year students in both years, that is, 9,682 and 17,950 respectively.

Chart 4: Newly Registered Children in Cibitoke Province

	1e	2e	3e	4e	5e	6e	Total
2002/03	9682	8442	7913	6490	5379	3163	41069
2003/04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004/05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2005/06	17950	7171	6423	5643	5148	4347	46682

Source: Cartes Scolaires 2002/06, Province of Cibitoke

Chart 4 equally confirms the progressive tendency mentioned before regarding children starting or coming back to school. While the lack of data for 2003/04 and 2004/05 limits analysis of the yearly evolution, the new 17,950 children in 1st degree 2005/06, as compared to the 9,682 children in 1st degree 2002/03, seem sufficient to illustrate how strongly families have responded to the lifting of formal school fees in 2005 by sending their children to school.

The main knot does not thus seem to be *before or at the moment of* reintegration, but rather *once in* formal education. Together with the shortcomings related to teachers, school materials and

infrastructures, an added difficulty emerges on the supply side: large age differentials amongst students in over-populated classrooms.

3.2.3. An Added Problem on the Supply Side: Age Differences in Classrooms

The classroom, on the supply side, is the moment in the line of reintegration in which the problem of age differences most evidently appears and persists. The mix of ages in already over-populated classes makes teaching challenging and confusing, and acts as a disincentive to many girls and boys wishing to resume their studies. Do CuCs/ALPs foresee this challenge, working to assure school retention once their students re-enter the formal system?

In the case of CuCs, as they are not compressed, age differences remain intact once in the formal system. During the interviews, some older students stated, amongst them an 18 year-old girl, the best student in her CuC, that they did not want to go back with their old classmates and that they wanted to change schools or alternatively, stay in the CuCs until the 6th grade. Issues of pride and shame were strongly at play.

As for ALPs, its accelerated component may help reduce age differentials. Yet, research should be undertaken to prove whether the original problem, age differences, disappears or perseveres with ALP one/two-year shortcuts. Is a reduction of 2 years into 1 substantial enough?

Moreover, the age problem persists once ALP students are reintegrated into formal schools. Many other older, non-ALP students, will go back to formal schools directly. Not working on the supply side leads ALP students to return to a formal system in which, on the one hand, there will be many other over-aged, non-ALP students and, on the other hand, many classmates much younger. Thus, the central problem of age differentials in formal schools will remain unsolved.

An exception to this is ALPs in which the whole primary level is executed in total autonomy of the formal system. However, issues of impact and sustainability remain. For instance, the impact of CuC/ALP students will always be statistically minimal compared to the general flow of formal school students needing reintegration. As for sustainability, the local ownership is hardly attainable in terms of costs.

3.3. The State of the Programme: Economic and Social Sustainability

3.3.1. Economic Sustainability of CuCs

In catch-up schemes, attendance and performance at CuCs tend to be - and not surprisingly - good: schooling is free and the learning context rewarding, with enough school material, motivated and well-paid teachers and small classes (CuC classes were of 40-60 students compared to formal ones with more than 60 students). Yet, this isolated micro-reality is distant from the precarious general situation of formal schools in post-conflict countries.

The greater school conditions given within CuCs/ALPs only exist thanks to the high financial and technical investment of INGOs. The study on the CuCs in Cibitoke proved that the INGO's investment per student was comparatively much higher than what governmental institutions were able to offer per formal school student. That is, if teachers' salaries are divided by the numbers of pupils in class, the financial investment done per child per month is obtained. When CuCs (higher teachers' salaries and lower pupil-teacher ratios) and formal schools (lower teachers' salaries and higher pupil-teacher ratios) were compared, the investment differences per student were significant.

On a minor level, a quantity of money is also spent on difficult to manage monitoring & evaluation techniques of tracking the enrolment level of CuC/ALP students within formal schools - what brings about certain contradictions in the field (over-charging school administrations with tracking back ex-CuC students; manifesting a worry for just ex-CuC students and not all students, etc.). Long-term sustainability and/or ownership by the local population/government seem, in short, complicated achievements.

Some other logistical problems of the programme partly constrain its economic effectiveness. For instance, that of not having enough students for a CuC/ALP class in a given level. Other times, it is a particularly remote or inaccessible area that may not have sufficient students living close enough to the location of the CuC installations. In an area of the commune of Mabayi, children were invited, registered and expected to come, but then, not all of those students showed up the first days of school and/or completed the year.

3.3.2. Social Sustainability of CuCs

Most CuC/ALP initiatives function outside the formal system. Often times they do it in disharmony with formal schools and this has social implications.

CuCs/ALPs generally offer much better learning conditions with fewer pupils and more school material, creating an educative oasis within a generalised, post-conflict educational situation. Teachers leading the courses have often benefited from much higher salaries and from special training, what forcefully leads to comparisons within the local community about the different situation of formal school and CuC/ALP teachers and students.

Other minor but significant problems of synchronization appear. In the evaluated programme, for instance, the fact of having longer, more intensive timetables (morning and afternoon) than formal education (where there are two different shifts per day) prevented CuC and formal school teachers from preparing exams together, an old demand raised by formal school teachers.

The study also shows that the reintegration of CuC students into formal education has become sometimes difficult both in academic (end of support) and social terms (certain jealousy of the material they received or keep receiving during reintegration), while a notable feeling of abandonment by ex-CuC students was perceived during interviews.

Another social issue is that of *which students* are chosen for reintegration and *under which definition* of "vulnerable" or "poor" they are chosen. While CuCs create a healthy interest for schooling in the community, a parallel feeling of competition is also fostered.

4. Conclusions and Ways Forward

Conclusions from this research suggest that CuCs were not the most appropriate solution for reintegrating school-age young people into the educative formal system in Cibitoke (Burundi). The lack of rapid, livelihood responses to students' basic needs; the surrounding context of few, devastated schools unable to absorb the flow of students; and the question of economic and social sustainability of CuCs, all represent considerable hindrances for the generalisation of these programmes as good practices.

Although more research should be done, these findings could be applied to other CuCs with similar characteristics. Equally, while the programme evaluated is a CuC type with no condensation of years,

the constraints analysed in this article may likewise apply to ALPs. Apart from being more cost-effective programmes (i.e. with more efficient investment per student due to time compression), their element of compacted years does not necessarily offer further responses to the three constraints discussed for CuCs.

4.1. When and How to use CuCs/ALPs?

What are then the contexts and formats most appropriate for CuCs/ALPs? Is there yet potential in them as short term interventions to assist over-age youth mainstream into the school system?

As conclusions from this research suggest, the key problem is not to "assist over-age youth mainstream into the school system", but to keep them in schools. A large number of students already go back to school without any assistance, leaving the need for short term, back-up classes partly doubtful.

What is not the key problem will not bring key solutions either. However, if reintegration measures are to be the policy focus, CuC/ALPs should be pondered together with other ways of reintegrating students, including over-aged ones, such as school canteens, sensitization and elimination of formal school fees.

The key problem with aged students is *once in* schools. Yet, the effectiveness of time compression in ALPs to solve age differences for reintegration should not be taken for granted. It needs to be proven whether the compression of years is sufficient for ALP students to reintegrate and stay in schools despite their age, and whether this has any impact on age differentials of the many other older students found in schools.

Within this frame, CuC programmes could work on formats of academic support within the formal school system and under its same working conditions. They would operate as complementary lessons rather than substituting or competing with formal schooling, for instance, during school breaks. This was the case of the abovementioned NGO BRAC and its Winter CuCs, that provided academic support during the winter school break before the beginning of the new academic term (Carwardine, 2004).

CuCs can thus be a decongestion measure for students, whether *older or younger*, that are experiencing academic difficulties in one or more subjects and need tailored catch-up. This would potentially diminish repetition flows that over-populate schools and obstruct quality learning. The move is then from the demand to the supply side and, more concretely, from the "reintegration" up to the "performance" level once in schools. In this way, CuCs would act as a relief measure rather than as a burden for schools¹⁴.

As for ALPs and CuCs outside the school system, there seems to be more inconveniences than advantages. ALPs in which the whole primary level is executed in total autonomy of the formal system may prevent problems of reintegration and age, but issues of basic needs, sustainability and impact remain.

What could perhaps work as an accelerated programme is vocational training for out-of-school age adolescents (19-24). These programmes would link literacy, professional and life skills, thus

¹⁴ Outreach workers or interim teachers should be contracted in order not to overcharge teachers.

responding to adolescents' demands for practicality and attention to their basic needs. But more research should be done on whether it is effective and advisable to do so with school-age students.

4.2. Which Alternatives: Direct Reintegration, Age Differences In-class Responses & Vocational Training

Which strategies are most appropriate for young people in reconstruction contexts? Are there recommendations for the short term, if learners are directly reintegrated into the formal education system? A few alternatives are proposed here.

As policy responses on young people's education strongly depend on their age, the first suggestion would be to start categorizing age sub-groups within the vast group of "young people". For instance, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees currently reports population data by the following age groups: 0 to 4, 5 to 17, 18 to 59, and 60 and over. Bethke (IDS, 2005: 3) suggests that these broad age categories need sub-groups. Without more detailed age-related data it is hard to match age needs and plan effectively.

For the category of "young people" or "adolescents" (10 to 24), three age sub-groups are suggested. First, a younger category of youth or *pre-adolescents* (10-14). As this research evidenced marked differences in opportunities and aspirations between school age children (6-18) and those who are over 18 years old, a second and a third group could be *school age adolescents* (15-18) and *out-of-school age adolescents* (19-24). With this done, work can start with tailored policy suggestions.

4.2.1. Preadolescents and School Age Adolescents

In the first two groups, students that missed out school years but yet do not constitute a significant age gap in the assigned class after school level tests (say 1-3 years), could be directly reintegrated with no further measures but the general ones on strengthening school infrastructures and services (the supply).

As for students in these two groups who are more than 3 years older than the standard age year in the assigned class, direct reintegration into formal schools should yet be prioritised, but necessarily, with additional measures for in-class age differences.

An example of this is the creation of various shifts for different ages in the schools. The morning and the afternoon shifts are organised to separate students by age: younger/age-level students in the mornings and older/over-age level students in the afternoons¹⁵. This shift method certainly has its own limits (i.e. when strict gender segregation comes into play, making it difficult to separate classes by age as well as by gender); thus other measures regarding age differences in formal schools need to be urgently found.

Yet, one paramount policy issue concerns the number of teachers. It is evident that age differences, and quality learning in general, are better managed with lighter pupil-teacher ratios in formal schools. The ActionAid paper by Ainger et al (2007) presents International Monetary Fund policies as one of the major factors behind the chronic and severe shortage of teachers, given the requirements for poor

¹⁵ This has been proven to be effective in other countries such as Angola where some schools are organised in three shifts: children in the morning, young people in the afternoon and adults in the evening – all of them doing their primary schooling. Good organisational skills in the school administrations and electricity supply for the third shift were necessary.

countries to freeze or curtail public spending and thus, teacher recruitment. Donors have a major responsibility in defining conditionalities for this fundamental barrier.

Temporarily, and as a complementary measure for the scarcity of teachers, this evaluation considered the role of outreach workers as school-community links a good practice. Not only could they follow up formal education dropouts and give sensitization for direct reintegration, as they have successfully done in this project, but they could also track absenteeism, delays, violence, age, gender and ethnic issues¹⁶ as well as CuC support, in cooperation with directors and teachers.

4.2.2. Out-of-school Age Adolescents

Concerning young people over 18, strategies such as vocational training packages with elements of social skills and literacy, such as the aforementioned NRC Youth Pack, seem more appropriate in addressing their urgent livelihood demands.

More than a quarter of the 51 ex-CuC students interviewed spontaneously asked for polytechnic schools. Their preference for vocational training in relation to formal schooling was based on several perceived advantages: a) there are no fees and no uniforms; b) they are of shorter duration and do not engage all working days and; c) they bring made products home and can lead to money-making activities.

Whether accelerated or not, vocational training presents a realistic and relevant alternative for war-affected youth in need of urgent livelihood support. The fact that many targeted youth care for younger siblings going to school also represents an indirect, preventive dropout measure. Those students academically interested may opt for primary school subjects instead of skills training within the vocational training (as in the NRC Youth Pack) or come back to school when older, once they decide to do so and provided that adult primary school classes are offered.

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¹⁶ In terms of gender, research showed two main gender-linked tendencies in CuCs (following tendencies in provincial figures) that were: lower school access for girls and major rates of dropout for boys. In terms of ethnicity, the batwa community was the most affected by poverty, what made it difficult for batwa boys and girls to attend and stay at school.

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