

Editorial

by David Johnson and Ellen van Kalmthout

Education is increasingly accepted as an integral part of humanitarian response in emergencies. It can help restore normalcy, safeguard the most vulnerable, provide psycho-social care, promote tolerance, unify divided communities and begin the process of reconstruction and peace building.

Research also suggests education can entrench intolerance, create or perpetuate inequality and intensify social tensions that can lead to civil conflict and violence. Education is a key determinant of income, influence and power. Inequalities in educational access can lead to other inequalities – in income, employment, nutrition and health as well as political position, which can be an important source of conflict.

Interest in education and conflict issues and recognition of the importance of education provision in crisis situations are growing. Within the UN system, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)¹ recognises education as an important part of humanitarian response. Education is included both in Common Humanitarian Action Plans (CHAPs) – which lay out response strategies and plans for individual emergency countries or regions – and in the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), the UN mechanism to raise funds for humanitarian action.²

The Education for All Framework for Action³ adopted at the World Education Forum in 2000 in Dakar included an explicit call for support to education in emergencies. Growing concern also led to the creation of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). Created in 2001, INEE – the flagship in the EFA movement for education in emergencies – now has over 1,300 members from a wide range of organisations.

Donors are also increasingly supportive of education in emergencies, transition and post-conflict situations. The OECD/DAC Fragile States Group is undertaking analytical work on service delivery in key sectors (including education) in order to improve aid provision in fragile states.⁴ Donors are also exploring possible ways to support

education in fragile states as part of the work of the EFA Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI)⁵, a partnership of bilateral donors, multilateral agencies, civil society and developing countries working to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015.

There is also increased academic attention to education and conflict issues. Research is still limited but there are increasing efforts at documentation, research and evaluation – as evidenced by studies from the World Bank and UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).⁶ While individual practitioners typically lack the necessary time and resources to document experiences, UN agencies and NGOs are now making more efforts to document and evaluate their work. As a result, a considerable 'grey literature' on education in emergencies now exists.

UNICEF is a major player in this field because of its concern for children's rights. UNICEF actively supports education in all countries affected by natural disasters and civil conflict. UNICEF is now strengthening mechanisms for generating and applying experiential knowledge based on lessons from the field, to inform policy and design intervention strategies, as well as identifying and promoting 'recommended practices' that are supported by evidence.

Oxford University is increasingly engaged in research and knowledge generation in this emerging discipline. A UNESCO chair in Education as a Humanitarian Response was recently established in the Centre for Comparative and International Studies in Education.⁷

Given the rapid growth of and converging interests in the field of education and conflict, there is

a need to bring research, policy and practice more closely together through an inter-disciplinary effort that draws on the policy-research work of academic institutions and the strategic programming practices of development agencies. To further the dialogue and to shape such a research agenda, Oxford University and UNICEF co-convened a conference at Oxford University on 'Education and Conflict: Research, Policy and Practice', 11-12 April 2006. The conference aimed to develop a better understanding of the interrelationship between education and conflict, with contributions from theory and research, and practical field-based examples of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. The conference brought together representatives from UN agencies, the World Bank, bilateral organisations, donors, NGOs and academia.

This supplement complements the FMR issue on education and emergencies – 'Education in emergencies: learning for a peaceful future' – published in January 2005.⁸ It includes summaries of key presentations to the conference and includes additional contributions, in particular from the field. We hope that it will contribute to sharing insights from theory and practice with a broad audience and stimulate and inform further documentation and research that will in turn strengthen policy, practice and theory.

David Johnson is a Lecturer in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford. Email: david.johnson@st-antony.oxford.ac.uk. Ellen van Kalmthout is a Programme Officer in UNICEF HQ. Email: ekalmthout@unicef.org

1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

2. <http://ochaonline.un.org/cap>

3. www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/dakfram_eng.shtml

4. www.oecd.org/department/0,2688,en_2649_33693550_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

5. www1.worldbank.org/education/efaffi

6. www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/emergency/emergency_1.htm

7. www.edstud.ox.ac.uk/research/comparative2.html

8. www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR22/FMR22full.pdf