the field of education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction through its website and listserv. INEE’s website contains good practice guides, training resources, evaluation materials and advocacy tools – a comprehensive resource for practitioners, academics, policymakers, donors and governments. The INEE listserv allows members to exchange information about training opportunities, new resources and tools while also providing a forum for discussion about current challenges and innovative practices.

INEE was honoured by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children at the annual Voices of Courage luncheon in New York in May 2006, a much deserved recognition of the dedication and perseverance of all the INEE members who have worked to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction.

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Education and conflict: an NGO perspective

by Lyndsay Bird

NGOs working in education in conflict-affected areas have realised the importance of listening to children, encouraging their genuine participation in programmes and publicising and scaling up the innovations which often arise in the aftermath of war.

Many meetings on education and conflict fail to consider the perspectives of children. Children should be considered as ‘clients’ and as the reason for education interventions. Frequently, however, children are alluded to from a theoretical perspective. The emphasis on the effect of conflict on educational systems – rather than on children’s lives – compounds this.

As Jason Hart reminds us, there is a need to listen to children in more concrete and effective ways. Children should be placed within the context of the community they live in and the learning processes they are engaged in through community life. This implies consideration not only of formal schooling but also of the informal educative processes that can often be more significant – especially in times of conflict when access to formal schooling may be jeopardised. Determining how and what children learn in times of conflict depends on understanding how they receive information – from teachers in schools, parents, radio, gossip with their peers or storytelling from their elders. By genuinely listening to children and taking note of their concerns and needs in our programming interventions, the policy and research debate can be better informed from a truly ‘grounded’ perspective.

NGOs and civil society groups – being close to the areas of conflict – become aware of and therefore take advantage of opportunities for innovation that arise during conflict. These may include new curricula, methods of teaching or home-based learning. NGOs, state authorities and donors supporting post-conflict reconstruction need to capture small-scale innovations and to scale up or mainstream them without losing the freshness and direct approach that give them an innovative edge. We need to ask if the current funding modalities of post-conflict reconstruction – focusing on sector or budget support rather than projects – provide less opportunity for support of innovation? Should donors set aside funds for innovation and directly support the scaling up of innovative approaches? How can academic research institutions be encouraged to support such innovation?

A ‘disconnect’ still exists – despite the best efforts of events such as the University of Oxford and UNICEF Education and Conflict Conference – between the field and the research communities. There is a need to build on work already being done by some NGOs/agencies to build a research component into country programmes and/or to establish linkages between academic institutions and field-level NGO staff in order to support in-country research, document lessons learned and more widely disseminate best practice.
The precious chance to go to school

by Isabella Kitari Feliciano

I am a student at Comboni Secondary School in the south Sudan capital, Juba. I am a leader in the local chapter of the Girls’ Education Movement. GEM is a pan-African initiative to bring about positive change in the lives of girls.

Less than two years ago I spent my schooldays wondering if I would have to run from the classroom to escape shooting. Today I am eighteen years old, in my first year of secondary school. And instead of worrying about bullets, I am raising my voice on behalf of other young people.

Juba saw a lot of fighting. Many of us died. People couldn’t even walk across the main bridge for fear of being beaten by soldiers. There were bombs everywhere. Soldiers would harass us, searching our bags, saying that they were looking for explosives. Landmines kept us at home. I remember a day when we weren’t allowed to go to a prayer meeting unless we were accompanied by an armed soldier. What kind of childhood is it when you can’t even go to church without a gun?

The war has made us poor. Many children in the villages don’t go to school because they can’t pay school fees. These children are mostly girls – because people think girls don’t need education, and because they think that a girl’s destiny is just to be a wife. I don’t see things that way. There are so few girls who complete their education here. Only one girl in a hundred even finishes primary school. But I am going to school so I can gain the knowledge that will help me rebuild my country. When I grow up, I want to become a lawyer so I can oppose the things that are wrong – in southern Sudan and in the whole world. I want to change all the things that keep girls out of school. I want to change the fact that girls have to get married even if they’re just twelve or thirteen. I want to make sure that girls don’t leave school because they get pregnant. I want to make sure that no-one laughs at a girl because she is menstruating and doesn’t have the money she needs to buy sanitary supplies. I want to make sure that girls like these don’t say, “it is better for me not to go to school.”

Through GEM, this year I participated in the launch of the Go To School initiative and even sang in front of the President of South Sudan. In front of so many people, I called out, “Good morning southern Sudan, let all children go to school!” I learned that day that my voice is strong and powerful. Now I want to use my voice to help other children go to school. I want to tell the world that education should be free, that it is the right of every child. I want the world to know that we are grateful for peace but that we are eager for much more. We need teachers who will encourage our spirits. We need schools that have desks and chairs; food to keep us from hunger; uniforms, shoes and school supplies. June 16th is the Day of the African Child. It commemorates a time when thousands of children in South Africa marched in the streets to protest discrimination and demand equality in education. Today marks 30 years since that march in Soweto. I’m glad that I can be part of a tradition of young people working for justice. And I’m proud that today my voice is strong enough to join in the calls for change.

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