



## Education for young people in fragile situations – the need for support

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**In fragile situations many young people suffer from the effects of war, unemployment and marginalisation. They may, however, be actors for peace and reconstruction if supported in the right way. Various forms of youth education show positive impact and donors should prioritise these.**

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With massive unemployment, insecure livelihoods and unpredictable political transitions in many fragile states, there is an urgent need to train and educate young people – tomorrow's citizens. Governments and donors now realise this, yet, according to recent documentation, donors commit only 10% of what is needed to educate and train youth in fragile situations, and provide even less. UNESCO, among others, points to the serious under-funding as the most problematic aspect of aid to education in fragile states, especially at secondary school level.

There are good reasons to prioritise aid to young people in fragile situations. Support to secondary education, accelerated learning programmes, and technical and vocational training can considerably reduce youth violence and increase young people's self-esteem. This potentially helps to change their marginalised position and encourages local societies to perceive them as a resource, not a threat. War-affected youth have been assisted to make livelihoods, earn incomes or proceed in education by programmes that are holistic, context-specific and cater to the particular needs of young people. Such programmes are expensive and require long-term commitment.

This policy brief recapitulates main findings and recommendations of a study commissioned to analyse impact and lessons learned from three main forms of education and training provided to youth in fragile situations.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In fragile situations donors should

- **Provide quick and long-term support** to youth education and training. This requires bridging the divide between humanitarian and development aid.
- **Ensure that aid is pooled, coordinated and closely aligned** with the recipient government where possible, by drawing on: the Global Partnership for Education, the New Deal, the Education Cluster and the International Network for Education in Emergencies.
- **Balance support** to the delivery of education through various organisations with a strengthening of the system to do so.
- **Support secondary education, accelerated learning and technical and vocational training** as three main ways to reach war-affected youth. What form is most beneficial depends on the specific national and local context and young people's needs.



## THREE FORMS OF YOUTH EDUCATION WITH DIFFERENT ADVANTAGES

Different forms of education and training can positively impact young people in fragile situations, but how depends on which form, the specific context, the existence and functioning of a national school system, and how the youth population in a specific area is affected by fragility and war.

### *Secondary education*

Secondary schooling is the official schooling for youth who have already completed primary school and who function well enough to be ready to spend several years in full-time education. Thus, it is primarily an option for young people whose life has not lost all sense of normalcy, and who live in areas where the school system is functioning. Secondary education can impact young people's future aspirations and non-violent social engagement. It can provide young people with an official status as 'schooled', which again qualifies them as citizens and as adults in the eyes of the community.

There are several factors to prioritise when supporting secondary education:

#### **1. Long-term commitment**

The biggest challenge for donors is to allocate enough funding for secondary education on a long-term basis and to work closely with the system to make qualitative changes.

The aim is to ensure that secondary education has a positive impact on young people's lives and is aligned with local and national priorities. Therefore donors should support secondary education specifically, and prioritise more balanced support between primary, secondary and tertiary education.

#### **2. Access and safety**

It is important to ensure access, safety and a secure learning environment. Groups that have hitherto been excluded must be guaranteed access. Also safety and a non-violent learning environment have proven vital for secondary schooling to potentially impact young people positively.

#### **3. What is taught and how**

Changes in the content of curricula and books are pertinent to provide new values, ideals and social relations that break with inequality, discrimination and elite readings of, for example history and geography. After the end of a violent conflict and regime changes, it is important to take immediate symbolic initiatives and provide new values and relations as an alternative to those which underpinned the conflict. Successful programmes have prioritised training, recruitment, distribution and support of teachers, so they can appear as potential role models for new values, practice and knowledge. Changes in teaching content also entails including locally appropriate vocational subjects such as agricultural skills, and linking to further education or some form of work.

## SCHOOLING AND TRAINING HELP RESTORE FUTURE HOPE – SOME EXAMPLES

### *New ideals through secondary schooling*

Schools and secondary level students are often central targets for propaganda and recruitment during conflict. They are also central for creating new ways when the conflict ends. In Nepal (with a multi-donor funded secondary education programme), students literally tore out any sections in their social studies books that gave elite readings of history, unequal portrayals of different parts of the population etc. Shortly afterwards new content was added. In conflict-affected areas of the country many young people have regained trust in the future, and adopted new ideals of equality and peace through secondary schooling. In rural areas, the school is often the only place where young people encounter new ideals and relations. Secondary school students are perceived as the future citizens by their local societies and as people to be involved in reshaping their country. Moreover, there is a surprising resemblance between what is taught in schools, and how students act on, and iterate their aspirations.

### *Holistic programmes can reduce violence and make youth valuable*

In Liberia communities with strong tensions between different combatants after the war experienced a transformation away from violence and insecurity after young people were enrolled on holistic ALP (run by Ibis) and TVET programmes ('Youth Education Pack' by Norwegian Refugee Council). The combination of training to sustain livelihoods with learning how to take care of themselves, how to cooperate and assert themselves have given young people new hope for the future and trust in themselves. This is further enhanced, as their families and communities have ceased to see them as a threat but rather as a resource of value to the community. Everyone emphasised that violence had been markedly reduced.

### ***Accelerated learning programmes (ALP)***

ALPs give war-affected youth who missed out on or never entered schooling a new chance and are relevant for a large part of the young population in fragile contexts.

ALPs have provided young people with self-esteem as well as hope for and trust in the future. ALPs have had an important impact in reducing local violence and improving the young people's handling of their lives as well as their social status. Finally, ALP has had great impact on marginalised groups, especially girls (young mothers), for altering unequal relations.

The most important lessons learned when supporting ALPs are to:

#### **1. Align with the education system**

Donors should ensure that ALP is integrated into the education system and formally owned by the Ministry of Education, even if implemented by various organisations. This entails ensuring that salaries, incentives and certificates correspond to those in the school system. Donors should support close coordination between implementing NGOs and the education system, especially at regional level to ensure that best practices by NGOs can be adopted and replicated by the education system. In Liberia, for example, ALPs have often been located in existing school buildings and have trained and used already existing primary school teachers, which has served to build up the education system.

#### **2. Support organisations with different capacities**

Humanitarian organisations have expertise in quick set-up, and development organisations can act as 'bridging agents' and continue this work with a more long-term commitment and thus more thorough teacher training and follow-up for example. Best results have been achieved where support has been provided to organisations with different but complementary capacities. Hence support to organisations with a good track record in teacher training and facilitation of their coordination with the education system for example, can benefit the education system in the long run.

#### **3. Ensure inclusion of youth-specific subjects**

Curriculum and teaching should include both condensed primary content and some of the urgent issues for youth in the specific fragile context. Subjects such as life skills, HIV/AIDS and peace education, for example, are important. Child-care and child meals have helped young mothers to access education, which again has improved their status in society.

#### **4. Prioritise local involvement**

Local involvement, capacity building and ownership are keys to success. Parents, communities and local authorities need to understand the relevance, show interest and pro-



*Young men check the results after finalising a training course, Nepal.*

vide support to allow young people to enter this relatively demanding education, and to ensure ALP runs for as long as there is a need.

### ***Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)***

TVET is directly targeted at work and employability, and it is highly wished for by many young people in fragile situations. It is often provided in war-affected areas to a mix of refugees, former combatants and vulnerable local youth. Holistic and well-designed TVET programmes have significantly improved livelihood and employment opportunities for youth. They have also positively influenced young people's self-esteem as well as their standing in the communities. Importantly, TVET has reduced aggressive behaviour and local violence and many young people contribute to their local society after having been enrolled. TVET has also facilitated a change in gender relations.

Lessons learned show that:

#### **1. Holistic TVET programmes have impact**

Holistic TVET programmes combine the teaching of 'hard' technical and manual skills with other subjects or 'soft' skills that are equally important for young people to make a living, economically and socially. Trauma counselling, health and life skills and citizenship education in combination with vocational training has been shown to give young people the necessary support to transform themselves from being, for example, former combatants to being acknowledged as citizens who contribute to their local society. For young women, child-care facilities or child food support are important to make any form of skill training feasible. Holistic programmes help the young people to start youth groups where they support each other and work together, and they provide long-term supervision and follow-up to ensure that youth can make a living. Holistic TVETs succeed in creating employment and at the same time provide 'soft skills' that enable youth to reintegrate and be accepted as important members of their society.

#### **2. Build on local needs and involvement**

TVET should be designed in alliance with local authori-



ties and with the involvement of the local community and only after thorough business and labour market analysis and close examination of local needs and trainer capabilities. It is important to ensure involvement of local business to fund skills training according to their needs, to provide apprenticeship possibilities and employment after end training. Support to campaigning to enhance the prestige of manual work can also increase the acceptance of and financial support to TVET-trained youth. Likewise, local community involvement is a prerequisite to ensure that TVET is accepted and has the intended impact on employment, youth behaviour and gender relations.

### 3. Careful selection of partners – making linkages

Good TVETs are expensive as they add multiple components including follow-up, a main key to success. Donors therefore have to be careful in selecting the right partners while at the same time working to have the government officially recognise the importance of technical and vocational skills. Hitherto, such programmes have been run by humanitarian organisations, but recently development NGOs have entered the field. Some build on the humanitarian experience but contribute a longer time perspective.

## CENTRAL DONOR PRIORITIES

Several factors are of fundamental importance for donors to ensure when supporting youth education in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

First, there is a need to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development aid. Often humanitarian organisations have the experience and expertise but work short-term. Development work has experience with long-term work, follow-up and cooperation with the education system, but there is a lack of conflict experience and they act

slower. In situations where organisations bridge this work, education has shown good results. Bridging is also needed within donor agencies.

Second, coordination and alignment are core to ensuring that various youth education programmes become more than drops in a vast ocean. When programmes are aligned with the recipient government, and coordination between implementing organisations ensured, the good and context-relevant programmes can be adopted as national practice, even if they depend entirely on external funding. There are now some new practices established that aim at exactly this. The New Deal, the Global Partnership for Education and the co-lead Education Cluster are recent attempts to ensure close coordination and local ownership in education.

Third, global minimum standards for education in fragile situations now exist, and should be followed. The International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) should be used and supported as a main player. INEE was founded to support, train and enable information-sharing between organisations working on education in fragile situations. The most important outcome is the now widely applied 'Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crisis and Early Reconstruction'. This is by far the best researched and most widely acknowledged set of principles foregrounding any type of educational aid in fragile situations.

Finally, there is a strong need for longitudinal impact documentation, and for donors to support this, to improve future interventions.

## FURTHER READING

INEE 2010. The multiple faces of education in conflict affected and fragile contexts. INEE Working group on education and fragility.

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*The opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Institute for International Studies.*