

The Role of Education in Peacebuilding



Findings from Lebanon, Nepal and Sierra Leone

In 2011, UNICEF commissioned research to investigate the role of education in peacebuilding in conflict-affected states, as part of the Education and Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition (EEPCT) programme – a partnership between UNICEF, the Government of the Netherlands and the European Commission. The research study was published the same year the *Education For All, Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2011) called for an increased role for education in peacebuilding.

The study consisted of two phases: Firstly, a literature review of education's role in peacebuilding. Secondly, the completion of three country case studies (Lebanon, Nepal and Sierra Leone – selected to encompass a cross-section of very different conflict environments), based on extensive consultations with a wide range of national and international stakeholders, including UN representatives, government officials, civil society, and teachers. There was a particular focus on UNICEF's work.

Overview

Access to a quality education is regarded as a right that should be maintained even in the most difficult circumstances. In the midst of conflict it can provide knowledge and skills that provide protection, while in the longer term, it can provide values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself. Education is deeply implicated in processes of socialization and identity formation, which have direct relevance for statebuilding, economic growth and the development of social cohesion. On the other hand, education can undermine all these processes and, therefore, we need to ensure it is

delivered effectively and equitably and is a driver of peace rather than war.

Thus, it is crucial that transformation is supported through reforms to the education sector and attention is paid to the values and content within education systems. The study suggests that education programming should be based on high quality political economy and conflict analysis that is sensitive to the conflict dynamics of local contexts.

'Conflict-sensitive education' needs to address immediate threats, such as attacks on the education system itself, as well as ensuring education systems incorporate conflict perspectives as a routine part of planning and practice. In post-conflict societies many people will look to the education system to help future generations understand the conflict and the processes that led to its transformation.

The support offered has to be informed, sensitive and patient, and must recognize that the primary agency for managing the transformative process rests with the conflict-affected society itself.



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Key Findings

- The concept of peacebuilding is not well defined. UNICEF must decide its own interpretation, which would need to go beyond humanitarian assistance and to emphasize social transformation within conflict-affected societies.
- Neither UNICEF nor the education sector has been strongly integrated into the UN peacebuilding agenda within countries.
- Consistent with its mandate, UNICEF has comparative advantages to take a lead on peacebuilding, however it must consider the implications of how this may affect how education programming is perceived and how peacebuilding relates to other UNICEF priority areas.
- For UNICEF education programming to support peacebuilding there is a strong need to: build key partnerships at the global level; work with national governments; identify partners that share transformation goals (with the understanding this may create tensions with other partners or governments); make education programming more relevant to post-conflict transformations; take a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding programming; ensure a peacebuilding/conflict analysis lens informs all policy; and move from generic 'global' solutions to well theorised programming adapted to local circumstances.
- There is a need for a comprehensive capacity-building strategy for peacebuilding across all agencies from headquarters level to field offices.
- There are important distinctions between humanitarian response programming, the provision of conflict-sensitive education, and programmes aimed at transformative peacebuilding. Thus, it is important to develop monitoring and evaluation indicators that are particular to peacebuilding outcomes.
- There is a distinctive role for research that generates new knowledge and insight into education programming and how it relates to longer-term peacebuilding.

Recommendations for UNICEF

- Develop a comprehensive policy paper (in consultation with field offices) on UNICEF's commitment to peacebuilding.
- Identify areas of common agreement with global partners about the contribution of education to peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries.
- Carry out a short (3 month) study to gather information about the extent to which UNICEF is currently integrated within the UN peacebuilding presence in conflict-affected countries; and how this operates in practice, obstacles and possible improvements.
- Conduct assessment of capacity for conflict analysis and support for peacebuilding within HQ and field offices.
- Run pilot studies in three countries to test the feasibility and direction of a shift towards education programming that has a more explicit peacebuilding rationale.
- Introduce an education and peacebuilding programme in a limited number of countries (based on pilot studies' findings).
- Place greater emphasis on knowledge management and institutional learning.

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The full report is available (along with all project outputs) online at www.educationandtransition.org

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