

## Understanding Education's Role in Fragility

Synthesis of Four "Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility": Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Liberia

### POLICY BRIEF

#### Background

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is an open, global network of representatives from NGOs, UN agencies, donors agencies, governments, academic institutions, schools and affected populations working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure all persons the right to quality and safe education in emergencies and post-crisis recovery. The INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility was established in 2008 as an inter-agency mechanism to coordinate diverse initiatives and catalyse collaborative action on education and fragility. Its goals are to:

- strengthen consensus on what works to mitigate fragility through education while ensuring equitable access for all;
- support the development of effective quality education programmes in fragile contexts; and
- promote the development of alternative mechanisms to support education in fragile contexts in the transition from humanitarian to development assistance.

As part of this mandate, the Working Group commissioned a research programme entitled "Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility" including four country case studies — on Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia and Liberia — and a synthesis of these studies as a means of further developing the evidence base necessary for understanding the role of education in either exacerbating or mitigating fragility. The four countries were selected to encompass a range of different types and stages of fragility, with diverse geographical locations and historical antecedents to such fragility. The synthesis highlights some key programming challenges and lessons learnt for education policy and planning in fragile contexts.

For more information on INEE and the Working Group, and to download the reports, visit <http://www.ineesite.org> and <http://www.ineesite.org/educationfragility>.

#### Summary

This brief summarises the major findings of the synthesis report examining the relationship between education and fragility based on the four country case studies. The synthesis report highlights education's impact on fragility across a spectrum ranging from the negative, where education actively or deliberately reinforces and perpetuates fragility, to the positive, where education can make inroads into fragility. In addition, the synthesis report highlights key education policy and programming lessons learnt in relation to contexts of fragility including:

- **Access and quality:** Ensure equal, generalised and safe access to education while guaranteeing its quality and relevance.
- **Civic and social relevance:** Promote national unity while acknowledging and respecting differences.
- **Economic relevance:** Promote education for employment by matching skills and knowledge to the labour market; by establishing education and employer partnerships; by bringing the private sector into national planning; and by promoting some form of regulation and accreditation for private schools.
- **Centralisation and decentralisation:** Promote adequate degrees of decentralisation in combination with some form of central regulation, while strengthening capacity and monitoring efficiency at both central and decentralised levels.
- **Funding modalities:** Ensure aid harmonisation and aid alignment with government priorities, while also strengthening government management capacity with the aim to guarantee sustainability.

The main targets and goals for educational programming in relation to fragility mitigation as recommended by the synthesis report include:

- **targeting the education system** by building and/or strengthening its functionality through national education plans, legal and regulatory frameworks, international standards, community involvement and local ownership, and teacher capacity development;
- **targeting individuals and groups** by building and/or strengthening their capacity to cope with fragility through programs aimed at physical protection; and
- **targeting the overall fragility of the state and promoting both peacebuilding and state-building** through equal, generalised and safe access to education, a focus on nation building and good citizenship through civic education programmes, education as preparation for livelihoods and entrepreneurship, child-friendly schools and informal initiatives, as well as a focus on gender sensitivity and environmental sensibility.

## Methodological Approach

At the core of the synthesis report is an analytic framework comprised of three types of comparative approaches. The first takes specific domains of fragility as its starting point and examines how education might impact on them, negatively and positively; the second reveals a varied and nuanced spectrum of impact; and the third outlines six areas of difficult policy and programming choices which appear to be common. The results have generated some insights into the relationship between education and fragility, and suggested recommendations for education policy and programming to improve the mitigating capacities of education in fragile contexts.

### I. Education and Fragility by Domains

The first comparative approach takes five specific domains of fragility – Governance, Security, Economy, Social and Environment – as its starting point. It is based on the premise that education is not neutral in a fragile context but instead sits at the nexus of these five domains of fragility interacting with them all. This approach aims to identify drivers of fragility within these five domains in a given context and examine how education might impact on these drivers both negatively and positively. The impacts are shown to vary, for instance, according to whether access to education is made a privilege or a right; whether curricula and textbooks are biased and divisive or objective and inclusive; and whether education governance and management are characterised by inefficiency, incompetence and corruption, or efficiency and high levels of capacity and transparency.

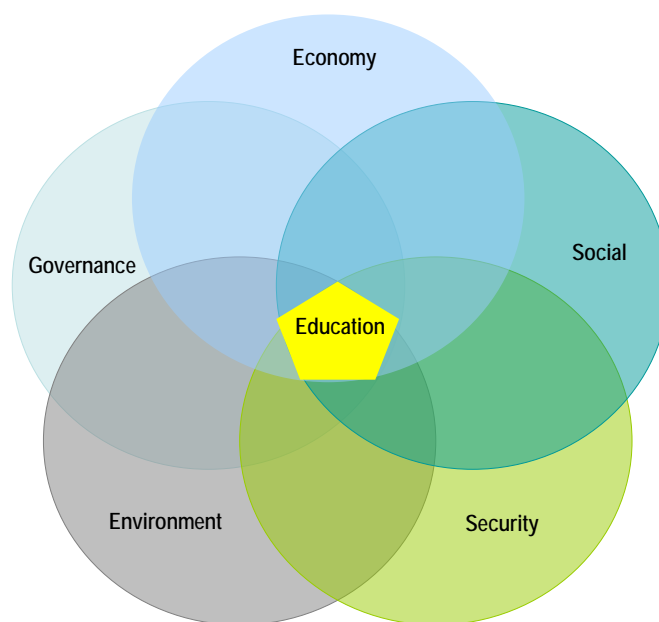
#### Education and Fragility by Domain

##### **Governance Domain:**

Weak institutions of governance and ineffective exercise of political power; political arena and administrative structures fragmented along identity lines; power interests linked to inequality and discrimination in resource allocation; lack of political will and/or capacity to ensure the basic well-being of the population and to foster inclusion; widespread corruption; undemocratic and repressive state; concentration of power; lack of or limited legitimacy as well as trust in the government; limited state capacity and efficiency.

**Environment Domain:** Weak environmental management and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources; environmental degradation, generally affecting the poor and powerless disproportionately.

**Economic Domain:** Widespread poverty and static or declining national growth; high levels of debt and of dependence on foreign aid; weak, undeveloped, unproductive economy, vulnerable to global shocks; high levels of unemployment; widespread inequalities in resource and income distribution.




##### **Social Domain:**

History of distrust, grievance and violent conflict; weak national identity and ethnic, religious, and class-based divisions, polarisations and tensions; alienated, aggrieved and disempowered youth, leading to juvenile delinquency; grievance among the poor and the marginalised; widespread gender inequality and violence; widespread attitudes of passivity; high levels of illiteracy and limited access to education; vulnerability to health shocks and food insecurity.

**Security Domain:** Legacy of war; ongoing intra-state conflicts linked to identity and resources; widespread lawlessness, crime and human rights violations; inability of the state to maintain territorial control and guarantee physical security; ineffective security sector reform, including unsuccessful or incomplete demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants, and inefficient and corrupt military and police forces.

## II. Spectrum of Impact of Education on Fragility

The second comparative approach highlights the multiple faces of education, breaking down the relationship of education to fragility into a broader spectrum of five types of possible impacts, ranging between the two extremes of either exacerbating or mitigating fragility. The aim of this analytical approach is to show the complexity of this relationship, as well as to provide some insights into past and present practice.

Spectrum of Impact	Type of impact of education on fragility	Examples and Elaboration
Exacerbating Fragility  Mitigating Fragility	<b>Education actively or deliberately reinforcing and perpetuating fragility</b>	Education deliberately being used to reinforce or perpetuate fragility through the politicisation of structures, curriculum and textbooks; targeted exclusion and marginalisation; attacks on schools by belligerents; etc.
	<b>Education reflecting the status quo</b>	Education not so much designed or manipulated by key actors to create tension or foster power interests, but simply reflecting the fragile status quo by reproducing and failing to challenge existent patterns of division, inequality, violence, corruption and inefficiency.
	<b>Education inadvertently favouring fragility</b>	Well-intended, but inadvertently counter-productive interventions, ranging from peace agreements which further entrench social divisions and tensions, to vocational education and accelerated learning initiatives which lead to frustration among unemployed graduates.
	<b>Education enabling people to live with fragility</b>	Education enabling people to live and operate in the existent fragile context by softening its impact. This includes curricula enhancing capabilities in livelihoods, health and conflict resolution.
	<b>Education making inroads into fragility</b>	Education starting to break the cycles of fragility themselves. This includes education's effect in challenging the reproduction of inequality and division, in enhancing national unity and national hope for the future, in strengthening civil engagement and in building legitimacy of the government.

On the negative side of the spectrum, education is shown to:

- **actively or deliberately reinforce and perpetuate fragility**, exemplified by the militarisation of textbooks in Afghanistan or a fragmented system, with biased curriculum, textbooks and teacher training maintaining ethnic and language divisions in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- **reflect the status quo**, exemplified in Cambodia by schools that reflect and reproduce urban/rural and rich/poor disparities or corruption and patron-client relations.
- **inadvertently favour fragility**, exemplified by technical and vocational education and training and accelerated learning programmes in Liberia that were unable to lead to employment, resulting in heightened frustrations among graduates as well as programmes targeting former combatants creating grievances among non-recipients.

On the positive side of the spectrum, education is shown to:

- **enable people to live with fragility**, exemplified in Afghanistan by expanded access to education taking children off streets and creating a sense of routine in a context of general insecurity, with distance and radio schooling enabling education despite security challenges.
- **make inroads into fragility**, as exemplified in Bosnia-Herzegovina where greater central regulation in view of European Union accession promoted quality improvement and the de-politicisation of education reform. In addition, policies and regulations on language and national symbols in integrated schools in Brčko have promoted social integration and cohesion, making inroads into fragility.

## III. Policy and Programming: Challenges, Dilemmas and Lessons Learnt

The final comparative approach brings together issues within the education sector, examining them in terms of policy and programming priorities. Despite the recognition that some solutions and challenges are highly contextually specific, the synthesis report attempts a tentative formulation of general lessons learnt.

### Access and Quality

The expansion of equal access to basic education is shown to often come at the expense of quality. In Liberia, a programmatic dilemma has been found between focusing on the education of ex-combatants, who present a special risk factor to stability, and ensuring general education provision. Grievances among non-recipients of such programmes for ex-combatants have been alleviated, at least partially, through the introduction of free and compulsory education. Free primary education policy however, appears to have had the side-effect of leading to more and more over-crowded government schools, thereby affecting the quality of public educational provision. The lesson learnt is **to ensure equal, generalised and safe access to education while guaranteeing its quality and relevance**.

### Civic and Social Relevance

A focus on national identity with the aim to enhance social cohesion is shown to sometimes result in assimilationist practices. In Afghanistan, attempts have been made by the government to build a unified Afghan identity based on Islam, aiming to break down Sunni and Shi'a divides, and promoting a moderate Islam in contrast to Taliban excesses.

The strategy rests on the assumption that a credible national identity can integrate or override other competing identities; however, agreement has not yet been forged on what characterises, and who should define, a 'true' Islamic identity. The lesson learnt is ***to promote national unity while acknowledging and respecting differences and particularities.***

#### **Economic Relevance**

Education's ability to provide livelihoods is shown to be greatly challenged by a generally volatile and weak market place, with education not matched to labour market needs. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where youth unemployment is four times higher than the European Union average, the curriculum is seen to lack a professional orientation, and hence does not appear to contribute to preventing youth emigration to countries where opportunities are available. The lesson learnt is ***to promote education for employment by matching skills and knowledge to the labour market and by establishing education/employers partnerships.***

#### **Private Education Provision**

Privatisation of educational provision on the one hand allows expanded access whilst, on the other, often results in poor quality as well as class disparities. In Cambodia, private provision, and especially the growing private higher education sector, has faced issues of poor quality. Additionally, the private sector appears to contribute to exacerbating social disparities, widening the gap between the wealthy and poor. The lesson learnt is ***to ensure quality private education while avoiding entrenching inequalities and divisions.***

#### **Centralisation and Decentralisation**

On the one hand, central control is shown to be important in providing cohesive direction and regulation, but to sometimes result in dangerous concentration of power; on the other hand, decentralisation is shown to be important in giving ownership to communities, but runs the risk of increasing ethnic or religious fragmentation, as well as inefficiency due to a lack of capacity at the local level. Liberia has a highly centralised education system, despite a strong legacy of community involvement in education. This system, for example, leaves District Education Officers with limited discretion or budget within their control, consequently limiting the opportunity for capacity development at the local level. Such centralisation is seen to heighten vulnerability, with concentration of power both creating bottlenecks and resulting in fewer checks on excess and patronage. The lesson learnt is ***to promote adequate degrees of decentralisation in combination with some central regulation, while strengthening capacity and monitoring efficiency at both central and decentralised level.***

#### **Funding Modalities**

Faced with weak governance, donors are shown to tend to favour the projectisation of aid in order to circumvent the 'unreliable' state apparatus, often resulting in the fragmentation of initiatives and in a lost opportunity to build local capacity. In Cambodia, direct-to-ministry and recipient project agreements are still practised, which dilutes efforts to align aid with government priorities. This approach has led to great fragmentation, with only 35% coordinated technical aid. Despite moves towards alignment, concerns remain about the quality and integrity of national systems. Action by partners to use those systems has therefore been cautious, selecting and using those that comply with global standards, and increasing the amount of aid provided through programme-based approaches. The lesson learnt is ***to ensure aid harmonisation and aid alignment with government priorities, with the aim to enhance state ownership and avoid fragmentation of planning while also strengthening government management capacity with the aim to guarantee sustainability.***

### **Recommendations**

Education policy, planning and programming in fragile contexts cannot afford to ignore possible negative and positive impacts on drivers of fragility. The primary recommendation for educational interventions is to map the connections between education and fragility as a critical process which should serve as the basis for determining needs and risks, setting targets, and evaluating progress.

Additionally, suggested goals of educational programming include the strengthening and building of:

- *A functional education system* through initiatives such as national planning; joint planning across donors and government; the development of a robust data system; legislation and regulation; community governance and teacher capacity development.
- *People's capacity to live and cope with fragility* through initiatives such as physical protection including mine-risk education, HIV/AIDS education and disaster preparedness programmes.
- *Peace, the state and the nation* through initiatives aimed at promoting equal, generalised and safe access to education; nation-building and good citizenship; preparation for livelihoods and entrepreneurship; gender sensitivity; and environmental sensibility.