

## The Contribution of Post-Conflict Education to Social Transformation and Sustainable Development

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### Abstract

*The role of education in post conflict reconstruction has become increasingly important and gained much greater acknowledgment in development studies in recent years. Education is increasingly accepted as an integral part of humanitarian response in emergencies. It can help conflict-affected community and individual to return to normalcy, safeguard the most vulnerable, provide psychosocial care, promote tolerance, unify divided communities, and begin the process of reconstruction and peace building. However, research also suggests that education can encourage intolerance, create or generate 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. Hence, education has potential to either aggravate the conditions that lead to conflict or to heal them. Nonetheless, the unavoidable conclusions must be that ignoring education, or postponing it, is not an option. This essay attempts to answer question on how post-conflict education be able to contribute to social transformation and sustainable development. It argues that education in general has a key role in both preventing conflict and rebuilding fractured post-conflict societies. Hence it puts forward education as a human development activity and must be undertaken with a development perspective if it is to contribute reversing the damage and to building resilience to prevent further violence conflict.*

**Keywords:** post-conflict reconstruction, education, social transformation

### Abstrak

*Peran pendidikan dalam rekonstruksi pasca konflik menjadi semakin penting dan mendapatkan pengakuan yang lebih besar dalam studi pembangunan di beberapa tahun terakhir. Pendidikan semakin diterima sebagai bagian integral dari bantuan humaniter dalam situasi darurat. Pendidikan dapat membantu masyarakat yang berada di area konflik dan individu untuk kembali ke kondisi normal, menjaga orang-orang yang paling rentan, memberikan perawatan psiko-sosial, mempromosikan toleransi, menyatukan komunitas-komunitas yang terpecah, dan memulai proses-proses rekonstruksi dan bina damai. Meski begitu, hasil riset menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan dapat memicu intoleransi membuat atau menghasilkan ketimpangan, dan meningkatkan intensitas sosial yang dapat mengakibatkan konflik sipil dan kekerasan. Pendidikan adalah kunci utama penghasilan, pengaruh, dan kekuasaan. Ketimpangan dalam hal akses pendidikan dapat berakibat pada ketimpangan-ketimpangan lain—seperti penghasilan, lapangan kerja, nutrisi dan kesehatan, dan juga posisi politik, yang menjadi sumber konflik. Oleh karena itu, pendidikan memiliki potensi untuk memperburuk kondisi yang akhirnya menghasilkan konflik maupun menyembuhkan masyarakat yang berada kondisi pasca konflik ini. Meski begitu, konklusi yang tidak dapat dihindari adalah melakukan pembiaran terhadap pendidikan, atau menundanya, bukanlah suatu opsi. Esai ini bertujuan untuk menjawab pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana pendidikan pasca-konflik dapat memberi kontribusi pada transformasi sosial dan pembangunan berkelanjutan. Esai ini memiliki argument bahwa pendidikan secara umum memiliki peran kunci untuk pencegahan konflik dan pembangunan masyarakat yang terpecah akibat konflik. Karenanya, esai ini mengedepankan pendidikan sebagai sebuah aktivitas pembangunan manusia dan harus dilihat dengan perspektif pembangunan jika ingin membuatnya berkontribusi untuk membalikkan kerusakan akibat konflik dan membangun ketahanan untuk mencegah konflik kekerasan di masa mendatang.*

**Kata kunci:** rekonstruksi pasca konflik, pendidikan, transformasi sosial

## Introduction

*The central, primary challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies has to do with mending relations and with restoring dignity, trust and faith ... More than the physical, institutional or systemic destruction that war brings, it is ... the destruction of relationships ... that has the potential to undermine the solutions to all other problems... (UNRISD, 2000).*

The role of education in post conflict reconstruction has become increasingly important and gained much greater acknowledgment in development studies in recent years. Education is increasingly accepted as an integral part of humanitarian response in emergencies. It can help conflict-affected community and individual to return to normalcy, safeguard the most vulnerable, provide psychosocial care, promote tolerances, unify divided communities, and begin the process of reconstruction and peace building.

However, research also suggests that education can encourage intolerance, create or generate 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 (Johnson and Kalmthout, 2006). Hence, education has potential to either aggravate the conditions that lead to conflict or to heal them. Nonetheless, the unavoidable conclusions must be that ignoring education, or postponing it, is not an option (World Bank, 2005).

This essay attempts to answer the question on how post-conflict education could be able to contribute to social transformation, identity reconstruction, and sustainable development in the war-torn societies. I argue that education in general has a key role in both preventing conflict and rebuilding fractured post-conflict societies. I agree with

Sarbib and Salmi (2005) on their foreword of *Reshaping the Future* that even when it is part of humanitarian response, education is a development activity and must be undertaken with a development perspective if it is to contribute reversing the damage and to building resilience to prevent further violence conflict.

To explain this argument, I will start by discussing the emergence of education and its significance in post-conflict reconstruction. Secondly, I will explain briefly the relationship between education and conflict. Finally, I will discuss on why education plays a significant role in post conflict reconstruction in terms of social transformation, identity reconstruction and sustainable development.

## The Emergence of Education as Priority in Post-Conflict Relief

In emergency situations, historical evidence and practices suggest that education is given low priority. Even though support for education has been provided as part of foreign assistance since the Bretton Woods institution were created, most bilateral donors did not articulate support for education during humanitarian crises (natural disaster or complex emergencies) as a deliberate policy intervention, separate from education for development, until recently, and some have not yet done so. Prior to the 1990's, most agencies maintained separate operations that responded to humanitarian crises without including education activities. Education services that were delivered in refugees camps maintained by international agencies—for example, in Vietnam, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Guatemala—were an exception to this pattern, but these interventions were not institutionalized under a broad education policy (Burde, 2005).

The Asian Tsunami in 2004 which has prompted a widespread humanitarian response, however, has indicated a significant shift on humanitarian action. Education, often an afterthought in a response to a disaster, now surprisingly becomes a high priority. According to Burde, providing education services as part of humanitarian response challenges many of the assumption on which

humanitarian action is based, breaking down division between relief and development (Burde, 2005). She further explained that the shift to a new approach, where policy makers challenge the persistent paradigm that dichotomizes humanitarian action from development, based on several reasons. First, the logic of the relief/development division is not meaningful for populations caught in these crises. For those crisis-affected people, returning to normalcy is way to cope with the crisis and education is seen as key ingredient in the process towards it. Second, the violent conflict nowadays has a new type and form which requires innovative responses. Numerous conflicts happen recently are intra-state where the victims are mostly civilians, creating a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Hence, the expanded impact of conflict on civilians violates international norms and laws of war, and therefore requires response that protects the rights of these civilians, which include the rights to development activities such as education (Burde, 2005)

She then argues that after September 11, policy makers in many donor countries re-examined the humanitarian development paradigm with special scrutiny toward the quality of, or lack of, education support to disaster and war-affected populations. Concerns over the role that education may play in stoking violence have added weight to the confluence of conflict-related issues (Burde, 2005). Hence, promoting education programs is no longer seen only as a charitable endeavor; many consider it essential to promote security (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2002; 2004; World Bank, 2005). Today, the critical role of education is being increasingly recognized. This increased attention to education in relief work is reflected in the rising numbers of programs, the greater funding available for this purpose, and the expanded role for education policies in post-conflict state building. The inclusion of education in the United Nations Consolidated Interagency Appeals (CAPs), for example, is an illustration of the importance attached to the role of education.

### **The Importance of Education at Times of War or in Post-Conflict**

While it is recognized the importance of post-conflict initiative which aims to provide “minimum acceptable level” of emergency humanitarian assistance such as water supply, food aid, and health services, there is growing awareness that these tangible activities, while unavoidable, are alone inadequate to address the human depth of conflict experiences and impacts. Hence, it is important to promote long-term strategic planning and analysis from a sectoral and rights perspective. Here education comes for its role for human development and peace. Rights can be promoted within and through education. Providing education during post-conflict does not mean only to provide education which aim to prevent the reemergence of conflict, such as peace education, but also to provide education for long-term objective. As the idea of “quality education for sustainable development” developed by UNESCO, education seeks to empower people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future. Education in wider perspective that teaches life-skill approach aims to help people to better understand the world they live in and to act accordingly.

However, the question is why education should be a priority when unquestionably the main concern should be to protect children from violence. The answer would be that education is actually a way to protect children from violence. Education in emergency situations can provide structure and stability for children and adults traumatized by conflict and displacement. School can serve as a fundamental protection tool for the most vulnerable children. It can also provide life-saving information on landmines, HIV/AIDS prevention, and health care (Henniger & Anderson, 2005). Education programs seek to protect children by providing cognitive and intellectual tools for them to make better decisions, exposing them to new ideas, and ensuring that they are physically counted (SC Alliance, 2005). Attending school can minimize the chance that a child will be recruited into a gang or a fighting group, be sexually or economically exploited, or exposed

to other risks. Whereas conflict made girls more prone to rape and other forms of gender-based violence, attending school will provide them with security and lessen those threats (Henniger & Anderson, 2005). Henniger also suggest that education will provide children with cognitive skills, give them hope for a better future and also teaches them the importance and meaning of life; lessons on peace building and conflict resolution help decrease the chance of future violence. Education is crucial to economic and social recovery, without basic educational skills, societies lacks the educated workforce essential for post-war reconstruction (Henniger & Anderson, 2005).

In addition, conflicts often happen in poor countries where women and girls are the most disadvantaged group in the matter of education. On the other hand women and girls have to do a lot of jobs—all household work—in such poor countries including taking care of the children, agricultural job particularly after harvest the processing of grains, taking care of the livestock, fetching water; they are to gather fuel for cooking and they are to look after the sanitation of family. But their contributions toward development and post-conflict reconstruction are not normally recognized. They do not have any decision making power in the family or in the society. This is particularly because women and girls have no education in most cases, skill training among the rural women and girls in poor countries is almost non-existent and so they cannot take up wage employment, the scope of which is, however, extremely limited. To their disadvantage, they have no adequate capital to undertake income generation activities (MacPherson, 1998). Hence, education is expected to help bring out these women out of vicious cycle of structural poverty. During conflict, education as a right is often neglected. Need to bear in mind that education is a right. This right often lost in countries at war. However, war and conflicts provide no exception to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which elaborates in article 28 the right of the child to education. The convention recognizes the right of every child to a free primary education and encourages

development of secondary education that is accessible and available (Roger, 2002).

Indeed, schooling can be all the more vital for children and families in times of crisis. Unfortunately, there are plenty challenges that have to be tackled in order to maintain education systems in countries at war or in post-conflict situations. A number of actions are urgently required to preserve and protect the right to education for those affected by war. Awareness of keeping school to work during conflict and post-conflict is one of those actions. It is imperative not to ignore the valuable contribution that education can make as an efficient means to promote reconciliation and peace (Roger, 2002).

However, education particularly peace education, is an extremely difficult task in war and post-war situations. Almost all studies of children in conflict shows how deeply damaging war and violence are in the lives of young people, even when they are not physically harmed and show only “normal” reactions. When children are living in war circumstances or have problems which are caused by a war situation, peace education has to start with as much restoration of normal conditions as possible. This is not only restoration in a material or a physical sense; it is also a matter of mental recovery. Children have to overcome their sorrow by mourning, utterance of anger, and integration of the experience of violence in a way that is not self-destructive. This is an extremely hard and often time-consuming task (Raviv, 1999). After this, according to Vriens (Raviv, 1999) in his essay, educators can try to help them to orient themselves toward the new positive possibilities of overcoming enmity and toward taking co-responsibility for peace. In this situation, he suggest that it can be helpful to offer children peace heroes to identify with as an alternative to their past war indoctrination (Raviv, 1999). Hence education, particularly peace education, plays vital role in saving the children and their future. Bearing in mind that according to UNESCO, more than half of the estimated 104 million children globally who do not attend school are living in countries affected by—or recovering from—

conflict. Education is one of the first things lost when people are displaced. Lack of education is both a violation of children's basic human rights and the biggest threat to any hope for a peaceful recovery of a war-torn society (Henniger & Anderson, 2005).

In her essay, Lori (2005) argues that the international community must make education a high priority in emergency response plans; donors must allocate funding for education at the onset of an emergency; quality of the education must be a main concern; and the humanitarian organizations and community members must coordinate better. She further explains that to meet those challenges, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergency have created the first-ever set of global Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies. These Minimum Standards are designed to provide a universal framework for appropriate and quality education programs throughout all stages of an emergency. These standards are the first step toward ensuring that education programs in emergency situations lay a solid foundation for post-conflict and disaster reconstruction.

### **The Relationship between Conflict and Education**

The relationship between conflict and education serves policymakers with conundrum. Education and its system produce skills, values, attitudes and social relations of dominant groups in society; accordingly, they are usually a contributory factor in conflict. Simultaneously, reconstructing and reforming education is increasingly viewed as a critical element in the strategy to reduce the risk of conflict or relapse into conflict (World Bank, 2005).

Across the world there is an urgent need to challenge the assumption that education will inevitably create a peaceful and equal society. Indeed it is true that education can be used as a solution for a broad spectrum of social ills and that formal education can shape the understanding, attitudes, and ultimately, the behavior of individuals. But if it is true that education can create a peaceful and equal society, then it is equally evident that it can have a socially destructive impact.

It is important that education take deliberate and conscious steps to dissolve inter-ethnic conflict (UNICEF, 2000).

In areas of conflict, education is often a part of the problem. As an example, The Report of the Fiji Islands Education Commission 2000 claims "serious lack of understanding between Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians" and this lack of understanding derive from a deeply complex history and current thinking within Fiji. Many educators in Fiji have failed to make education an agent for change by insisting on a traditionally-determined curriculum which is less relevant to more than 50% of the population. Indeed history and language have an important place in education, but the challenge is not to move back in time and embrace traditions as a sole working tool to resolve issues of today as this alienate the non-indigenous part of the population. The requirements for turning away from inter-ethnic suspicion, bitterness and conflict are deceptively complex (UNICEF, 2000).

To deal with such problem, the Education for Mutual Understanding Initiative introduced in schools in Northern Ireland. The initiative aims to increase tolerance and greater cross cultural understanding by educating and informing across conflict lines about the rich cultural and historical heritage of the parties to the conflict, to promote learning about self-respect and respect for others, and by contributing to the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions. The objectives of education for mutual understanding state that as an integral part of their education, the themes should enable pupils to learn to respect and value themselves and others; to appreciate the interdependence of people within society; to know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions; and to appreciate how conflict may be handled in non-violent ways (Smith and Robinson 1996).

Overall, conflict which has been conceptualized as "development in reverse", should be analyzed in the context of its impact on development. Reducing poverty and

decreasing reliance on primary commodity exports, both of which require a functioning and effective education system, have been shown to be critical strategies for reducing the risk of conflict. Ethnic or religious dominance rather than diversity is also a powerful contributory factor in civil conflict; education has a key role in mediating or deepening ethnic, religious, and other identity-based conflicts. Civil war itself increases the likelihood of further outbreaks of conflict. Education that helps to build stronger resilience to conflict is therefore a critical strategy for post-conflict reconstruction (World Bank, 2005).

Therefore, during humanitarian crisis, education must become an essential component and integral part of humanitarian action. Education can serve as protective tool, life-saving and life-sustaining in a conflict environment. UNICEF along with Save the Children since 2006 has adopted a cluster approach in which education become an integral part of humanitarian action.

### **Education for Social Transformation and Sustainable Development**

Education mostly accepted as the most important tool for both accumulation of social assets and formation and accumulation of social capital. This has been proven by research across disciplines over time. This is also why educational development occupies a central position in social development in most societies. In many countries where the levels of education are low or achievements are biased, the aim should be either to improve educational levels or reduce inequalities (Nayar, 2004).

An equitable way of social transformation means basic needs of people are placed before predatory pursuits of economic growth. It recognizes that health, well-being, and security of people depend upon fair distribution of resources and power. It involves people's participation in decision-making concerning their lives (Nayar, 2004). In most cases, economic growth would be likely to reduce the tendency to conflict, if it is equitably distributed. Equitable and poverty reducing growth would normally be likely to

reduce horizontal inequality, and might make persisting inequalities more bearable. Hence policies that succeed in promoting such growth should form part of any pro-peace policy package. But it should be taken into account that the growth must be widely shared. Inequitably distributed growth can re-enforce horizontal inequality and thus be conflict-promoting, as for example occurred in Rwanda. To simplify, a fairly distributed economic growth will prevent conflict while fail to do so will create one. There has been plenty of policy analysis which has been devoted to explain the conditions for widely shared growth. Policies that include measures to promote human development especially through the spread of education is considered help to prevent conflict or escalation of conflict.

In terms of education for sustainable development (ESD), the concept dates back to the Brundtland Commission's report in 1987, but it really gathered momentum after 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. The significance of ESD for development education is its conscious aim of addressing environment and human development concerns in a holistic, educational context. Proponents of ESD suggest that environment and development organizations share common concerns in regard to the sustainability of the planet and its people and, therefore, make natural bedfellows in the field of education. Development and environment groups also share the pedagogical practice of participative learning and encourage active citizenship in promoting sustainability. There is also some overlap in the content of environment and development education—models of economic growth, the use of natural resources, the quality of life, etc.—that lends itself to a more complete understanding of sustainable development issues. In contrast, some development educators have argued that ESD is not partnership of equals, with the more public friendly environment message eclipsing or minimizing the importance of human development. They also argue that ESD is not a simple hybrid of environment and development education, and adopting

such a perspective can traduce their respective agendas for change (McCann & McCloskey, 2003).

Education for sustainable development, as defined by UNESCO, is not merely a synonym for environmental education. Rather, it is the educational process of accomplishing sustainable human development—including economic growth, social development, and environmental protection—in an equitable manner. Thus, educational programs for sustainable development may include both formal and informal initiatives for poverty alleviation, human rights, gender equity, cultural diversity, international understanding, and peace. Challenges exist in implementing these concepts within education, such as incorporating sustainable science into curricula; strengthening collaboration between different levels of education; and compensating for the unequal access to information and knowledge in different parts of the world (editorial, 2005). However, the concept of ESD has fast become part of the development lexicon in Western countries since the Rio conference despite its addition to the myriad labels and acronyms that plague the development sector. The term has become even more consolidated in the public consciousness following the world summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg. The summit was a follow-up to the Rio conference, with the aim of agreeing targets and timetables for addressing key environment and development concerns such as global warming, lack of sanitation and clean water in poor countries, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the eradication of natural wildlife and plants. Although the summit plans of action fell woefully short of agreeing concrete and measurable steps for addressing its main agenda points, the event's international media coverage galvanized a worldwide discussion on sustainable development issues. Thus, development and environment issues will become increasingly integrated in the strategizing and policy-making of governments and NGOs in the future (McCann & McCloskey, 2003).

Moreover, the practice of ESD reinforces the need for healthy and vibrant development and environment sectors rather than threatening their very existence. ESD could represent a significant opportunity for development education to secure a stronger foothold in mainstream education as part of broader set of strategic relationships with statutory and non-statutory partners.

### Conclusion

Society emerging from conflict faces daunting reconstruction challenges. Priorities are sometimes difficult to determine in post conflict or in emergency situations. Here, humanitarian assistance cannot be reduced merely to the supply of food, medicine, and blankets; that there must be a close link between the concepts of “relief”, “rehabilitation”, and “long-term development”. There is growing recognition of the principle that the victims of conflict have an equally inalienable right to education as all other human beings. Here again, education—in its broadest sense—has a key role to play not only, in building the bases of democratic citizenship; not only in alleviating the physiological after-effects of conflict for young people; but also in ensuring that all sections of the population who have been excluded because their age, sex, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, political or economic situation, or geographical position are given a real opportunity to be brought back into social and working life. Overall, education plays vital role in social transformation and sustainable development.

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