



Bridging the Gaps

Lessons learned from an NGO-University partnership

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Education is a basic human right and a bedrock of human development. Nevertheless, approximately 28 million children living in countries or regions affected by conflict are not receiving an education. Millions more affected by humanitarian emergencies such as flooding, food shortages, earthquakes, and other disasters are also left out of education. Children and youth living in Sub-Saharan Africa figure greatly in the out-of-school statistics as both civil conflict and natural disasters disproportionately affect this region of the world. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, half of out-of-school children globally live in Sub-Saharan Africa, with another 10 million dropping out of primary school annually.

Even when governments prioritize and support education, school systems, administrators, and teachers are often ill-equipped to prepare for and respond to crises that affect the education sector. A teacher working in Kenya during the post-election violence in 2007-08 shared that she sensed the tension and emerging divisions among students

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in the classroom leading up to the election, but was unsure how to manage those interactions before, during, and after the violence wreaked havoc on schools and communities. She wished that she had been better prepared at the time and has since taken steps to gain skills in peace education, disaster risk reduction, and inclusive education by earning her degree in a new graduate program for Education in Emergencies offered by the University of Nairobi, with support from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a humanitarian NGO.

In order to understand the critical importance of providing education in emergencies, this article discusses

the ways in which education can be life-saving and life-sustaining. It highlights a capacity gap, particularly amongst national practitioners, in the education in emergency arena and the corresponding capacity-building needs for practitioners working in this growing field. To illustrate the type and scale of change that is required, the article then presents a case study of a partnership between an African University and a US NGO that is working to fill this gap and build sustainable local, national and regional capacity through a graduate study program. The partnership between these two institutions is the rare collaboration that allows for the critical time and space for the University of Nairobi and the IRC to ensure that teaching, learning, and research among graduate students and University faculty are relevant to the needs of children and youth affected by crisis.

Importance of Education in Emergencies

Education is critical for the tens of millions of children and youth affected by conflict and disasters. It provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection that can save and sustain lives. Quality education saves lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and exploitation of a crisis environment. Education in emergencies sustains lives by offering safe spaces for learning, where children and youth who need other assistance can be identified and supported. Educational opportunities also mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of routine, stability, structure, and hope for the future. Education provides children with the opportunity to learn new skills and values and helps them to become responsible adults, able to contribute to longer-term peace-building efforts, social stability, and economic growth.

Moreover, emergencies may even offer an opportunity for national authorities, communities, and international stakeholders to work together for social transformation by creating more equitable educational systems, building better structures, and implementing stronger educational policies. Groups that are often excluded, such as young children, girls, adolescents, disabled children, refugees, and internally displaced persons, can benefit from new educational opportunities. This can be a peace dividend after a crisis, resulting in improvements in access to and quality of education.

To respond to the growing number and complexity of humanitarian crises today there is a need to increase capacity in the field of Education in Emergencies. Education practitioners need specialized skills in assessment, response planning, monitoring and evaluation, conflict mitigation, and disaster risk reduction to assist governments, international organizations, and local communities not only to prevent and better prepare for crises but also to overcome the challenges of providing quality education during emergencies and in their aftermath. The need for qualified national education practitioners is particularly acute in Africa where, even though many educators have

lived through emergencies and have tremendous practical experience, there are few opportunities for them to obtain the skills and qualifications required to be effective practitioners in the humanitarian field. For instance, Ms. Salima Namusobya stated in her presentation at the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) conference in 2008, “Can’t Africans be Humanitarians too? Building Local Capacity to Co-ordinate and Manage Humanitarian Responses in Africa,” that because most national institutions or universities in Africa have not yet



An ethnic Somali woman holds her baby at a malnutrition feeding centre in Mandera, Kenya. There is a great need for humanitarian workers in East Africa.

incorporated humanitarian subjects into their curriculum, local staff can only benefit from on-the-job training and refresher courses during employment.

Capacity Building Gaps in Humanitarian Fields

While many humanitarian policies and inter-agency guidelines contain clear commitments to building national capacities, the practice often falls short of the rhetoric. A background paper written for the 26th Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2010 indicates that international relief efforts, most of which are foreign-driven, tend to ignore and even sideline local and national capacities. As Ms. Namusobya points out in the ICVA presentation mentioned above, the result is that the humanitarian field is characterized by top-down approaches that employ international personnel largely from developed countries in professional posts, while nationals and people from the region are often employed in supporting roles without decision-making authority.

This is a model that is inefficient and unsustainable. According to the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project's ECBinter-active web portal on staff capacities, the intricacies of geographic, historical, tribal, social, cultural, linguistic, and political factors that are critical to operating effectively in a crisis environment are often unknown by expatriates, leading to misinformed and/or inadequate responses. Combined with ineffective communication and short-term relationships between the international humanitarian professionals and the communities they serve, these barriers can result in scant national and community ownership of the programs set up by humanitarian actors, which can ultimately undermine the sustainability of such programs.

According to the 2011 to 2013 strategic plan of the



Capacity building graduate programs will help address the severe deficiency of humanitarian workers in East Africa.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Education Cluster (the mechanism responsible for education within a humanitarian response), increasing country-level capacity is the most sustainable approach to addressing education priorities in terms of education needs and rights in preparedness, response, recovery, and risk reduction-related activities. The International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards handbook, which articulates a global framework for the education-in-emergencies field, defines capacity building as actions that strengthen knowledge, ability, skills, and behavior to help people and organizations achieve their goals. The handbook emphasizes that “every effort should be made to identify education experts, including teachers, other education personnel and developers of curricula, within the affected population to be involved in program planning and implementation.” The standards also assert that education personnel and communities should participate

in training on roles and responsibilities that build sustainability for the long term, such as on resource mobilization and management, the maintenance of facilities, disability awareness, and special measures to ensure the participation of children and youth.

As highlighted during the discussion on strengthening the local staff capacity in Africa at the ECB Project's 2012 conference, capacity building requires much more than one-off trainings; it is about acknowledging and strengthening existing systems, structures, and the capacities of partners. It involves peer learning, exchange, mentorship, and on-the-job opportunities to do the work. Building partnerships that are grounded in respect and equitable relationships with two-way learning and decision-making are essential. Thus, building trust is paramount to both establishing partnerships and strengthening capacities. However, building trust takes time. Time is not a commodity available in traditional emergency work.

Just as important as individual capacity building are institution strengthening efforts, which are targeted at the leadership and governance structures of partners, to develop and strengthen systems and processes that outlive individual staff and are not undermined by turnover. In addition to improving service delivery and performance management, strategies and policies to improve accountability and enhance the transparency of decision-making processes and financial procedures are essential.

Case Study: Nairobi, Kenya

In response to the critical need for more and better qualified practitioners, the IRC and the University of Nairobi joined forces in 2009 to establish the first-ever graduate program for Education in Emergencies in order to strengthen national and regional humanitarian and educational capacity in Kenya and greater East Africa. Education practitioners require specialized knowledge, skills, and qualifications to assist governments, international organizations, and local communities—not only to prevent and better prepare for humanitarian crises, but also to overcome the challenges of providing quality education during emergencies and their aftermath.

The decision to launch this flagship program in Nairobi, Kenya and at the University of Nairobi was made for a number of reasons. First, Kenya hosts significant numbers of refugees—the majority originating from Somalia and Sudan but also Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda—in two refugee camps, both of which have been operating for over 20 years. According to UNHCR's 2012 assessment of refugee education in Nairobi, there are over 50,000 refugees residing in the city, including more than 29,000 school-aged children, with numbers expected to rise in the future. Second, the post-election violence that broke out in Kenya in 2007-08 after the last presidential election highlighted the need for educators and school administrators to be better equipped to prevent, prepare for, and respond to inter-ethnic conflicts through schools and educational processes. Third, the University

of Nairobi is a long-standing institution of higher education, and faculty and university administrators within the School of Education were keen to develop this new area of study and research.

The IRC and the University of Nairobi designed a robust and ongoing capacity building plan to guide the development of a new graduate program for Education in Emergencies. The core elements of this plan entailed curriculum development, faculty development, student/alumni development, and partnership expansion. The numerous opportunities, challenges, and strategies for building regional and national capacity for Education in Emergencies through a graduate program are presented below along with a brief description of project activities.

Forming Curricula for Education in Emergencies

To ensure that the graduate-level curriculum would be responsive to the needs of the growing field of Education in Emergencies, a survey to assess the key knowledge, skills, and competencies required for the field was circulated globally to members of INEE. University of Nairobi faculty, practitioners, and other key stakeholders working

courses, supervise student projects, and carry out research to contribute to building the evidence base for the Education in Emergencies field. These activities and related objectives included site visits to emergency education programs in internal displacement camps in Northern Uganda and the Dadaab refugee camp in Northeastern Kenya in order for faculty to experience what emergency education is like in practice. International organizations offer tailored workshops to help faculty understand specific topics and issues of importance to the field, and international education conferences offer faculty opportunities to promote the new study program and learn from other practitioners and researchers working in the growing field of emergency education. Faculty can be supported by extensive course preparation and co-teaching, and the recruitment of Visiting Practitioners to collaborate with and support University faculty throughout the capacity building activities further strengthen teaching and learning practices.

While this project offers an incredible opportunity to strengthen the capacity of African scholars to contribute to and help shape the Education in Emergencies field,

“Quality education saves lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and exploitation of a crisis environment.”

in Nairobi participated in a curriculum development workshop on campus during which they reviewed, organized, and prioritized the survey findings into meaningful categories and course outlines that ultimately led to the development of seven courses that were approved by the University of Nairobi’s faculty senate.

With the opportunity to offer the first-ever graduate-level Education in Emergencies program comes the challenge of maintaining an up-to-date curriculum that reflects a steadily growing and changing field. Universities around the world will need to catch up, and the University of Nairobi, in particular, will need to overcome the challenges of faculty and students’ limited access to academic and grey literature (i.e. manuals and reports published by international organizations) and faculty who are less accustomed to regularly updating curriculum, teaching, and reading materials. The University of Nairobi, with support from the IRC and other partners, can overcome these challenges by requesting and donating new materials, demonstrating ways to regularly access and update class materials with support from the Visiting Practitioner, and facilitating periodic comprehensive curriculum review.

Building Capacities for Teaching and Learning

Concurrent to the curriculum development process, the IRC facilitated a set of comprehensive capacity building activities for the University of Nairobi faculty to strengthen their skills and abilities to teach the new

faculty members are currently having to straddle their primary specializations (e.g. educational administration, curriculum studies, economics of education, comparative education) and the Education in Emergencies specialization until there are clear indications and encouragement by senior administrators that a permanent move to Education in Emergencies will be supported and that they will be eligible for promotion and the equivalent of tenure.

In addition to the comprehensive and ongoing capacity building plans illustrated above, the IRC is trying to mitigate these challenges by creating and supporting research opportunities for faculty that lead to peer-reviewed publications and the continued scholarly development of participating faculty members. Both partners are also working to raise awareness among senior administrators about the interdisciplinary nature of the Education in Emergencies field, and that a faculty member’s move to Education in Emergencies is not an abrupt departure from their area of expertise, but rather an opportunity to apply their knowledge and research to a new and important field in which the University of Nairobi can play a leading role.

Supporting and Advising Students

Student learning and development were strengthened in a number of ways. Efforts included: facilitating access to diverse reading materials and establishing an Education in Emergencies resource center within the School of Education’s library; introducing more and varied student-

centered and interactive teaching methodologies; and improving support and supervision of research projects. Students and alumni (the first cohort of eight students graduated in August 2012) were also supported in their efforts to identify and secure internship opportunities through job search and career planning workshops and one-to-one mentoring.

The opportunity for students to study in this new academic program—for which there is great enthusiasm from prospective students, not only in East Africa but also from around the world—is currently hampered by restrictive admissions criteria that require applicants to have a Bachelor's in Education. The IRC and the University of Nairobi are working to explore the possibilities of expanding the admissions criteria to include 2-3 years of relevant work experience or to develop diploma or certificate programs, possibly through e-learning, that could serve as a bridge into the Master's program.

The curriculum, faculty, and student development activities—as well as overall program success—hinge on strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders including the Kenyan government, UN agencies, international NGOs, schools, and other universities. Partners have supported the project by donating reading materials, serving as guest speakers in class, inviting students and faculty to events and training workshops, hosting interns, hiring graduates, and financially supporting the overall project and partnership.

Although there are numerous opportunities to engage new partners in the Education in Emergencies program, it can be challenging, at times, for the University of Nairobi to manage interest and meet the expectations of external partners. One strategy for overcoming this challenge is to form an advisory group to help guide the strategic planning and implementation processes at critical junctures, thereby streamlining the management of partnerships. Plans to formally initiate the advisory group are underway.

Lessons Learned

There are three key lessons learned from this project. First, it is of paramount importance that we support a holistic capacity building program that not only works to strengthen participating faculty members' content knowledge and technical skills for the field of Education in Emergencies, but also one that develops teaching and research skills that enhance the focus on student-centered learning and increase and improve the application of qualitative research methodologies.

Second, the establishment of strategic partnerships is critical for supporting capacity building activities as different types of partnerships, both short- and long-term and with different types of partners (e.g. international organizations, higher education institutions), are needed. These partnerships can be mutually beneficial as external partners offer opportunities for students, alumni, and faculty to gain experience studying, working, and carrying out research while simultaneously contributing to partner

agencies' learning and research agendas or filling human resources needs.

Third, the focus on capacity building requires a concomitant focus on institution strengthening at the University of Nairobi in order to ensure the enduring institutionalization and long-term sustainability of the Education in Emergencies program. In their book, *To serve and to preserve: Improving public administration in a competitive world* (2000), Salvatore Schiavo-Campo and Pachampet Sundaram state that “durable institutional change takes a long time. The expression ‘rapid institutional change’ is an oxymoron, except possibly as a result of a political revolution.” Participating administrators and faculty must promote the Education in Emergencies program both vertically to senior university administrators and horizontally across their campus to other faculty and departments to educate colleagues and students about the importance of this program.

Finally, this type of project and partnership requires long-term engagement, investment, and strategic partnerships. A strong framework has already been established given that the Faculty Senate approved the new academic program and the University of Nairobi is covering all recurrent costs. With ongoing commitment, support, and resources, the innovative nature of this project ensures its relevance and responsiveness to the evolving field of Education in Emergencies while helping to ensure the program's long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

The establishment of a University graduate program for Education in Emergencies responds to the need for comprehensive study and training opportunities that adequately equip graduates with the requisite skills they need to work with a diverse array of stakeholders in their collective efforts to provide quality education for children and youth affected by crisis. Graduate study, when coupled with experiential learning opportunities, provides a more meaningful and lasting way to build the capacity of current and emerging education practitioners in comparison to one-time, isolated, or short-term training activities currently offered by international organizations.

Nevertheless, short-term workshops and alternative training activities are still needed because not everyone will be able to access post-graduate learning opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa or elsewhere without significant scholarship support. Given that the education rights of millions of children are unfulfilled, and the need for qualified national education practitioners who can combine practical local knowledge with the skills and qualifications required to be effective practitioners in the humanitarian field is high, it is incumbent upon academics and practitioners alike to learn from the lessons of the IRC and University of Nairobi partnership to better coordinate their study and training efforts in ways that are mutually beneficial and relevant to the needs of the important, growing field of Education in Emergencies. ■