

Unconventional views on education and the disaster context

Foreign agencies whose mission is disaster "relief" necessarily attend to the most urgent needs in education: reconstruction of classrooms, replacement of lost teachers, quick skill training programs. The press is to supply educational "blankets" that cover the variety of disaster situations communities suffer.

But, as Hans Reiff notes in his paper, "education is mainly a domestic affair," worked out over years to fit the cultural idiosyncrasies of a country (although often imposed on marginal communities). Blankets woven outside the country often are not "long" enough. Although they are warming, they also can suffocate fragile endogenous efforts more appropriate to the long-term development needs of a country. There is not much a relief agency can do to relieve this tension — the educational requirements for the short-term restoration and reconstruction of a community are not the same as those for a long-term development process.

The two papers that follow offer some conceptual frameworks for understanding the contradictions between relief and development. Noel McGinn points out that the education that contributes to restoration of a community's social structure may also reproduce the same features that made the community vulnerable to the disaster event. Hans Reiff reviews experiences in Lebanon and Kampuchea to trace out independent cycles of donor intervention and community redevelopment, noting the several points where they are not in synchrony. Both papers point up the need for private voluntary agencies to distinguish between their clients and other groups likely to obstruct efforts to assist the affected population

Educational development, basic human needs and disaster relief: Lessons from a few experiences

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For more than three years I did not go to school. There were no schools to go to. Now I don't like holidays. They make me think of the bad days.

Kum Sakhom, 14 years
Kampuchean Chronicles, 1980

This article summarizes the relative success and major constraints in harmonizing and managing short-term disaster relief work and longer-term educational development programmes in Kampuchea (1980–1981) and Lebanon (1983).

The critical issues are obvious. In a disaster situation both donors and recipients are preoccupied with immediate problems and the need for "crisis management," to make decisions regarding education incrementally, resulting in a discounting of long-term benefits. How can immediate needs be balanced against a long-time horizon? How can *ad hoc* policies which, in the long run, may be self-defeating, be minimized?

What follows is a personal account of my experiences in disaster relief in education, based on memory and on information extracted from national documents, agency reports and old notebooks. The paper tries to outline the major constraints and potentials for effective programming of educational development in a disaster context.

Both the governments and the agencies involved in the two relief operations formulate their co-operative action along the continuum of "emergency relief — rehabilitation — reconstruction — development." In the case of UNICEF and most of the NGO's, the adjective "humanitarian" was added, suggesting a focus on the individual. In view of this, the following general framework and definitions are proposed (see Table 1).

One of the most important methodological lessons learned regarding the ways in which education can have a crucial impact on meeting survival needs in situations of man-made disaster (war, civil war) is that human needs require a mixture of "material relief" and "relief of mind" and that relief (*a feeling of comfort at the ending of anxiety, fear or pain*) cannot be easily reflected in proposals for investment in either physical or human capital. The concept of relief, basic needs and development, as interpreted and