



Teacher Compensation in Fragile States, Situations of Displacement and Post-Conflict Return

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“Isn’t it ironic that I teach other people’s children and yet can’t send my own children to school?”

- Teacher interviewed in Darfur

Introduction

Infrastructure and material, though necessary, are not sufficient conditions for ensuring quality in school. The teacher is a critical factor that provides coherence to the conditions determining quality. The importance of capable teachers is all the more apparent in environments plagued by instability and vulnerability. In emergency and transition settings, teachers are not only facilitators of learning, but also often represent one of the only consistent sources of reassurance and normalcy for children and their communities.

Teachers play a vital role providing physical protection and psychosocial support that complements the nurturing of parents and caregivers. Teachers also help facilitate the continuity of learning for children. The critical importance of this function is illustrated by the fact that children do not achieve permanent literacy and numeracy skills without four to five years of continuous learning. Teachers are also a conduit for providing life-saving information to children to enable them to live in a crisis environment.¹ Teacher development, acknowledgement and support have crucial long-term implications for any education system.

Teachers’ professional continuity becomes imperative in societies in transition because of their critical tasks in helping to restore a sense of stability and confidence among affected populations during difficult circumstances. However, because they are often drawn from those same affected communities, they are equally vulnerable to instability and deprivation – a serious challenge to building and maintaining a cadre of qualified teachers in emergency and crisis situations. The issue of teacher compensation is very real in these contexts. If not paid appropriately, teachers leave the education system, seeking other employment to support themselves and their families. This leaves the state or other actors to recruit, train and support new teachers – causing massive inefficiencies in educational investments. If teachers are not able to earn a living, they will leave for another form of employment. This loss of qualified and newly trained teachers is a significant and difficult loss to regain and in many cases, leads to a tragic circle of constantly training unqualified teachers to address understaffed schools.

The teacher condition in context of displacement and post-conflict return, however, indicates that the challenges go beyond monetary compensation. There are critical issues around the conditions in which these teachers work, including their workload, security, nutritional status and the consistency in their work environments. The factors shaping the situation are varied and complex, and there is an urgent need to understand this intricate web of factors as policymakers, practitioners and donors determine and influence guidelines for teacher compensation.

¹ Nicolai, S., Triplehorn, C.

Context Specific Issues for Consideration

It is impossible to divorce the challenges of strengthening educational quality in conflict settings and the teachers who are charged with maintaining that quality. Likewise, their unique situations are inherently bound to the difficulties that they face in emergency and conflict-affected environments.

The basic questions that need to be asked to frame our understanding of this context include:

- How can governments working with conflict-affected populations be supported to uphold their commitments to EFA and work towards acceptable teacher remuneration?
- How do we define roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders – government, humanitarian agencies and civil society in ensuring acceptable teacher compensation?

Furthermore, serious attention must be given to the barriers that prevent stakeholders from harmonizing its approaches to teacher compensation:

- Why are we not able to arrive at teacher compensation that is equitable and fair in the context of Fragile States, Displacement and Reconstruction?
- What is the basis on which teacher compensation is determined? What are the factors that influence it?
- Who is responsible for teacher compensation in these contexts? How is teacher compensation managed?

Many developing countries are grappling with the issue of teacher compensation. Compounding this complexity in conflict-affected environments are the lack of coherent policies, disbursement of populations across national borders, and huge range of actors engaged in educational service provision. Moreover, the balancing act between ensuring educational access to large numbers of children (especially the most excluded and marginalized among them) has hugely influenced the complexity of the issue by exacerbating disparities in the professional training and remuneration of teachers. Several of the contextual factors affecting teachers are highlighted below:

Overwhelming demand for education: In the context of fragile states, situations of displacements (both IDPs and refugee camps) and post-conflict return, the nuances around unmet demand for education becomes even more challenging. Take the case of post-conflict return settings, where there is a sudden influx of a large number of people, including children, for whom education must be provided.² Their previous dislocation has serious ramifications on individuals, families and infrastructure. In such settings that are plagued by weak and reforming government institutions, even minimal increased

² For instance the demand for education has gone up phenomenon in Afghanistan.
<http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/EducationSupplement/09.pdf#search=%22problems%20for%20teachers%20in%20refugee%20camps%22>

demand for education is too much for systems to cope with and, in turn, becomes extremely difficult for teachers to navigate.

Chronic insecurity: Insecurity in all three contexts (fragile states, situations of displacement and post-conflict return) is a condition that any education initiative will have to address. Teachers pay a heavy price in this situation, wherein they themselves are put under risk for their own well-being. Their jobs are made harder by the trauma their students have endured and their shifting classroom make-up given the migration of families in insecure environments. Further, the weakened (or absent) state and inadequate governance has led to ambiguity in roles and responsibilities amongst different stakeholders.

Inadequate financial resources in fragile states: Some of the critical causes of fragility, conflict or displacement are problems related to stability and economic growth. More often than not, such fragile states face problems of poor revenue generation, chronic histories of startlingly low national incomes, and future plans for economic regeneration still underway. Remedying this situation demands long-term commitment on the parts of governments and associated donor agencies. Traditionally the financial commitment to education in these countries has been inadequate, and future budgetary allocations are highly dependent on plans for economic regeneration and the progress made in this direction. Teachers are left to bear an enormous burden, working in under-resourced settings, often without adequate or regular pay, support, or training. Furthermore, less qualified or poorly trained teachers are often hired in these instances, complicating structures for compensation.

Inadequate financial resources in hosting nations: Similarly displaced populations who flee to neighboring states often find themselves in less than hospitable conditions in their new host countries, where policies in the existing educational environment are weak and resources for refugees are few. Countries that are hosting refugees are often coping with poor economies and have limited resources to support their national education system.³ Chad, for example, will need almost four times as many teachers by 2015 and meanwhile hosts more than 220,000 refugees from Darfur.⁴

Value placed on the educational profession: In the given economic scenario, inflation is often rampant and wide disparities exist between teaching and other occupations. Traditionally-low salaries for educators make it difficult for teachers to keep up with the escalating real cost of living. This leads to questions about how and where does the teaching profession stand in comparison to other professions. In setting policies and determining practice around compensation, non-state providers (e.g., NGOs, communities, or religious groups) face difficult questions about whether they should opt for greater compensation compatibility for their teachers in terms of that with other

³ Uganda currently hosts more than 250,000 refugees from neighboring countries: Sudan, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁴ UNESCO. *Teachers and Educational Quality: Monitoring Global Needs for 2015*. 2006. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001457/145754e.pdf#search=%22Teachers%20and%20Education%20Quality%20%2B%20UNESCO%20%2B%202006%22>

similar professions. This often leads to inconsistency with official policies and difficulty in harmonizing practice for teacher compensation in these fragile and post-conflict contexts.

Weak institutions: In many cases, emergency situations render state structures vulnerable to economic crises. There are many competing priorities for governments, forcing them to improvise with what is available and put in place arrangements which are sub-optimal in comparison to standards used in normal times. The international agencies working in partnership with states are sometimes not very sensitive to these constraints when they insist on minimum acceptable levels in respect of many components of the system. Teacher compensation is often one such area. On the other hand, it is also true that teachers' inputs are sometimes under-rated by the bureaucracy that controls government finances. Without clear value placed on teachers' salaries and champions to uphold their entitlement to adequate pay, teachers are left without voice or influence in weak institutional environments.

Poor governance and lack of recourse: The socio-political scenario in the case of fragility and reconstruction is often defined by a number of internal challenges, including factionalism and conflicts. Political stability and coherent policy formulations are at best in the process of finding their bearing. Functionality and effectiveness of structures and systems may not yet be in place. The issues related to governance, including the delivery of education, are well recognized as problems in the two scenarios.

Other countries are rebuilding after years of conflict that has decimated infrastructure and are still striving to ensure functioning systems are in place. In Liberia, after 14 years of civil war, thousands of refugees are repatriating and demanding education for their children. However, as of earlier this year, the Ministry of Education did not have the capacity to maintain accurate records of teachers and still had no systematic method to pay teacher salaries.⁵

Lack of long-term investments: Emergencies elicit speedy response from funding organizations. Nonetheless, it is often in the form of a large quantum of funding with short timeframes for spending. While immediate relief is effectively addressed through such a funding regime, rehabilitation and reconstruction including education are long-drawn processes and do not get adequately supported beyond a limited timeframe. This is a factor that effects creation of any long-term arrangement for teacher deployment or compensation structures.

⁵ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. *Help Us Help Ourselves: Education in Conflict to Post-Conflict Transition in Liberia*. March 2006. http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/lr_ed.pdf

Issues for Reflection

- Who should decide on teacher compensation structures, in situation of crisis and afterwards?
- Who should take responsibility for providing funds for teacher compensation? Who will bear the cost, now and in future?
- Whose responsibility is teacher compensation? What is the role of the government and of donor agencies in harmonizing various policies and practices?
- Should there be a different compensation strategy for the crisis period and for the long-term?
- Is compatibility with other similar professions possible?
- Should the compensation be defined in monetary terms and should issues related to cost of living, security, etc. be considered?
- Should there be incentives for teachers?

Teachers' Roles, Challenges and Requirements

The profile of the teacher in the context of fragility, reconstruction and displacement needs to be understood. At a personal level, teachers invariably will be victims of the same circumstances as those faced by their students and students' families - displacement, insecurity and personal trauma. At the professional level, as teachers they are facing the challenge of working with learners who are traumatized, distracted from their studies, coping with differing content and languages, housed in poor infrastructures and facing a paucity of material, pedagogical or management support for effective learning. In particular, they are ill-equipped to teach large, multi-grade classes with such limited teaching and learning material nor have they regularly been coached on how to best prepare children for living in a post-conflict environment.

Resulting factors that must be considered in the compensation debate include the following:

High teacher turnover: Teacher attrition is a reality. Poor work conditions, high workloads, inadequate and inconsistent salary payments all contribute to teachers leaving their posts in conflict environments and too often abandoning the profession altogether. This is further aggravated by the presence of international organizations and the availability of better-paying work with NGOs and UN agencies. In Chad, it was shared that security guards were getting a much higher salary than school teachers in refugee camps.⁶ In the case of refugees, the desire to return home also adds to teacher attrition. Many teachers may have been killed during conflict as they are often either targets of violence or are recruited as capable military leaders. Post conflict settings can lead to the

⁶ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. *Don't Forget About Us: The Education and Gender-Based Violence Protection Needs of Adolescent Girls from Darfur in Chad*. July 2005. http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Td_ed2.pdf

feminization of the teaching profession due to a lack of male teachers and/or out-migration to seek work, as well as low or non-existent salaries.

Teacher preparation and flexible capacities: In situations of emergency and conflict, when mainstream school systems collapse or when there is displacement of communities, alternative school systems are established. What transacts in these alternative systems may be drastically different from the practices in the mainstream systems – in terms of school schedules, the nature of teaching-learning (nature of pedagogy), material used, student assessment techniques used and so on. These alternatives often differ from the mainstream systems in teacher qualifications, teacher preparation, and ongoing professional support. This makes parity in teacher compensation across systems problematic, as well as the integration of students back into the mainstream.

Diverse definitions and roles of teachers: Examples of diverse alternative programs include preschool centers, primary schools, alternative primary schools, secondary schools, accelerated learning programs, adult literacy classes, psycho-social counseling and religious studies. All these diverse programs have teachers – each with different roles, qualifications and compensations.

Teacher motivation: Teacher motivation is often considered a critical factor in alternative schools set up in societies in transition or in situations of emergency. Volunteers drawn from the affected communities are considered more suitable for being employed as teachers in these alternative systems because of their personal commitment and inherent understanding of the trauma that has been suffered by the populations with which they work. Motivation for and readiness to log in longer hours of work, to carry out a variety of duties outside of what is traditionally considered professional responsibility of teachers and to work in close liaison with the community are often found in these volunteer teachers in greater measure than among professionals not from the affected population. It is, however, difficult to expect high order of consistency in performance among newly trained or volunteer teachers, in spite of their high level of motivation. It could be problematic therefore to calibrate an adequate compensation for voluntarism using the salary structures for the professional community of teachers as a benchmark.

Teacher qualification: That brings us to the issue of teacher qualification, there is a great deal of variation in the qualifications of teachers recruited and working in these contexts. From school graduates who are volunteer teachers to university graduates and trained teachers, the issue is of course very contextual. In the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan there have been instances where qualified doctors and lawyers worked as teachers. Their former status makes them respected and generally learned, but not necessarily a gifted teacher.

Issues for Reflection

- How do we reconcile the variations in experience and type of teacher qualifications and educational environments where they are asked to work while deciding on compensation?
- How do we arrive at a common agreement on who should be called a teacher?
- Should we distinguish between primary school teachers and teachers for other levels of learning?
- Should there be parity in compensation of these diverse teacher groups?
- How can such a system be implemented across agencies fueling educational work, particularly as displaced persons cross geographic and national borders?
- How can consistency in salary scales be reached across organizations?
- What should be the criteria for defining compensation – work schedule and duration / content / job role / level of schooling / teacher qualification / teacher- child ratio?
- Should there be incentives for working in difficult circumstances? How should this be decided upon?

Teacher Management and Accountability

Teacher compensation is part of the larger issue of teacher management. Therefore, it needs to be seen holistically to include the issue of fund flow and fund management, teacher accountability and performance. The critical issues of ownership and sustainability need to be considered upfront. In the context of fragile states, post-conflict reconstruction and displacement, there are a number of players who are implementing education programs, among them – religious groups, local NGOs, INGOs, and governments. Each of these actors has their own performance standards and outcomes for the teachers. Each has its own organizational structure for teacher management through which fund flow and accountability are ensured. Various related factors need to be explored:

Accountability: The three factors – compensation, accountability and consistent fund flow – have to be considered together. There is a need to harmonize compensation and job profiles. The need is to establish standards and guidelines for minimizing exploitation of teachers, as well as misuse of funds.

Coordination and the urgency of humanitarian response: In all of these contexts, there is an urgency to provide education to the affected populations as early as possible. This haste, although justifiable, propels different stakeholders, especially NGOs, to initiate options/strategies that give immediate results and in some way arrest further deterioration of the situation and its effects on children. These solutions many a time include recruiting teachers who are immediately available and are able to work with children. This often compromises teacher qualifications, resulting in multiple professional cadres. Decisions are then made about teacher compensation based on what is best suited to the urgency of the situation, not necessarily long-term structures or

compatibility with existing or emerging policies. There is a need to be cautious here. It is many times tempting to convert the temporary arrangements, once they demonstrate impact, into permanent ones, and this may well not be possible for the local government or desirable for the overall integrity of the compensation system.

Supervision and support: Inherent in this is the issue of scale and sustainability and the issue should be seen in the context of the economic readiness and capacity of the particular government. Regularizing teachers requires that a system for monitoring and support around those teachers.

Micropolitics: Inherent also is the issue of vested interests and continuance of the parallel systems initiated, including refugee camps!

Issues for Reflection

- How do we ensure compatibility between compensation and performance?
- How do we strike a balance between immediate needs and long-term development?
- How do we balance between pilots programs and systemic ownership?

Remaining Critical Issues

Although the factors discussed above give good insight into what issues must be considered to better plan an execute better compensation systems for teachers in fragile states, situations of displacement and post-conflict return, there are still several cross-cutting and over-arching questions that remain. Among them are:

- What should be the role of the community in deciding and contributing to teacher compensation and ensuring accountability?
- Is the affected community in a position to undertake the above?
- Should there be special incentives for special conditions or qualifications (such as incentives for women teachers)?
- What role could and should teacher unions have?
- What is the donor responsibility?
- Is there a charter, or guiding beliefs and principles that could be our point of reference?
- Since these are issues which are highly contextual and local, how are we qualified to deliberate on these, particularly in exclusion of the local actors, or at the least, without contextualizing our discussion in a specific circumstance?

Possible Next Steps

Many of these issues have been long recognized as hindering the adequate functioning of schools during and after conflict. However, we need to move forward to solutions (even if only partial) to address these situations so that education can continue for those

children at risk, preventing “lost generations” unable to contribute to the reconstruction of their societies. Some critical steps could be:

1. Identify key players, (local and international) both for emergency and long-term development work and create platforms for discussions, both short term, such as agreements on salary scales in crisis situations, and longer-term work with governments to increase teacher pay;
2. Document good and bad practices which have navigated or not navigated through bureaucratic structures. These case studies could act as advocacy material;
3. Define roles and responsibilities of stakeholders;
4. Include strategies that acknowledge that issues such as teacher compensation are best negotiated by communities, and that civil society’s efforts should be to create mandate locally;
5. Develop a strategy to support governments in creating long-term teacher compensation and teacher development plans ;
6. Develop broad criteria or guidelines for teacher compensation;
7. Enable broad categorization; and
8. Link teacher compensation with teacher development and teacher management strategies.

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