

Education and Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Liberia[†]

James H. WILLIAMS*

In 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, Liberia ended 14 years of civil war. The country was devastated. More than 250,000 Liberians died in the war, approximately one fourteenth of the population. More than one million Liberians had been displaced. There were high levels of sexual violence, and children were routinely used as soldiers. One survey found that 69% of respondents had at least one family member killed. The country's infrastructure was destroyed. Education was affected as well. Thirty percent of the country's public schools were completely destroyed, and another 16% were partially unusable. Though the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) have reopened and are enrolling new students, no teacher trainees had been graduated for the 30 years between 1979 and 2009. The 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy document (PRS) reported that half the adult population was illiterate. Much of a generation missed out on education completely, with 55% of male children and youth and 81% of female children and youth illiterate (Government of Liberia 2008a).

The country has taken a number of steps to rebuild its physical, social and institutional infrastructure. Elections were held in 2005, and a president elected. Peace has been sustained, and the groundwork is being laid in a number of areas for a positive peace. A number of reforms have been initiated, and substantial investments have been made in roads, schools, hospitals, and other basic public services. Still, the extent of work needed, the lack of capacity and the low starting points present significant challenges to the nation's hopes for sustainable development. The reconstruction period is critical.

* Invited Professor (April 2010 - July 2010), Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University through a grant with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences (JSPS). Professor Williams is an associate professor of International Education & International Affairs at The George Washington University, Washington DC, U.S.A. He can be reached at jhw@gwu.edu.

The challenges of providing education¹ and other social services in a post-conflict environment are increasingly appreciated. Arguably less well understood is the role that education can play, potentially, in the process of social reconstruction. Often, education is viewed only as a service rather than as an agent of reconstruction as well. To understand education's potential role, it is useful to consider the larger relationships between education and armed conflict as well as education's relationship to the conditions that lead up to armed conflict and its consequences. This paper examines these issues in the context of Liberia, a country that has emerged from a brutal 14 year civil war into a sustained, though delicate, peace. The Liberia case is instructive in illustrating the role that education at the macro level can play in conflict and in reconstruction, and the dilemmas facing the education sector in a post-conflict environment.

This paper seeks to understand: 1) the roles that education played in the Liberian civil war and the conditions that led to it, 2) the roles that education can play in reconstruction and laying the groundwork for sustainable development, and 3) the dilemmas that beset education's reconstructive function.

Analysis of the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction has relevance beyond Liberia. The period since 1989 has witnessed an increase in the number and in many cases the nature of armed conflicts. More than in prior eras, much of this armed conflict² has taken place among armed non-state actors within existing states or across national borders rather than between nations. In comparison with previous times, more recent armed conflicts have resulted from the failure of nation-states rather than competition among relatively strong nation-states. Finally, recent conflicts have targeted civilian populations, including women and children, to a much greater extent. While all conflict has at least the potential to harm social and political institutions, internal conflicts are particularly destructive of national institutions and social cohesion. Education serves both as institution and as process, each with implications for social cohesion.

Theoretical Perspective on the Role of Education in Conflict

Though usually thought of in idealistic terms, education, in the context of a divided society, is not necessarily an unqualified agent of peace. A look at history

textbooks in a number of nationalistic states, e.g., states of the former Yugoslavia, for example, or Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, etc, suggests the extent to which education can be used to bolster a sense of unity and cohesion at the expense of the “other,” whether the “other” is outside state borders or within. Understanding is growing of the complex inter-relationships between education and conflict. These relationships might be considered in a two-by-two table (see Table 1). Across the top, education can both be affected by armed conflict and is also a cause or contributor to conflict and the conditions that make conflict more likely. Across the left, the relationship between education and armed conflict can be seen as positive or negative. A positive contribution might be understood as a strengthening of social cohesion and social capital without creation and denigration of an “other³.” A negative contribution might be the weakening of social

Table 1. Relationships between Education and Conflict

		AGENCY	
		Education Affected By Conflict	Education as Cause/Contributor To Conflict
DIRECTION OF RELATIONSHIP	Negative	1	3
	Positive	2	4

cohesion or social capital in a community or the denigration of an “other” to strengthen internal bonds against that “other.”

On the one hand, armed conflict, especially internal conflict, has a direct, generally negative, impact on education (quadrant 1). School children and school teachers, for example, are frequently targeted by armed groups, even in countries not at war⁴. Children may be harmed or recruited into armed service. School buildings are often damaged or destroyed. The systems of educational management and administration are often weakened. At the individual and family level, the safety necessary for effective learning is missing. At the societal level, conflict damages the social bonds of cooperation necessary for effective provision of educational services. In perhaps the most extreme case, for example, approximately

80% of Cambodia's teachers died as a result of conflict and deprivation during the Khmer Rouge regime, 1975-1979.

Still, while armed conflict generally has a negative impact on education, conflict may, as in quadrant 2, open up opportunities for education of previously marginalized groups. Wars shake up social systems, often upending entrenched hierarchies. The US civil rights movement, for example, was partially spurred by the service of African-American soldiers in World War II. Moreover, reconstruction may also open up opportunities for systemic reform (Buckland 2005).

At the same time that conflict affects education, education has an impact on conflict. While education is often viewed as a panacea for whatever ails society, and even if the limits of education are understood, education is rarely viewed as a cause of conflict and war. Yet in some cases, education contributes directly to conflict (quadrant 3), as for example in the indoctrination of school children against the Jewish people in Nazi Germany. In most cases, however, education works indirectly, by reducing or exacerbating factors that contribute to conflict. In the case of a weak state, education may contribute to or reduce state fragility⁵, which can be understood both as precursor to and consequence of armed conflict. It is useful in this regard to distinguish between conflict arising from among strong or mobilizing states and conflict arising from weak or fragile states, as in Liberia.

Ideally, as in quadrant 4, education would contribute to peace-building and peaceful resolution of conflict, directly and by helping to foster the conditions that lead to peace. In these ways, education is understood as having "two faces," a face that promotes peace and the conditions that lead to peace, and a face that contributes to or exacerbates fragility and conflict, reduces the prospects for peace, and undermines efforts at reconstruction (Bush & Sartarelli 2000; see also Barakat, Karpinska, & Paulson 2008; Smith & Vaux 2003).

Table 2 presents a typology of ways in which education can contribute to conflict and fragility or to peace and the reduction of fragility. The unequal provision of resources, for example, might contribute to a sense of grievance among groups which have been systematically excluded. Conversely, more equitable provision of educational services is likely to reduce grievance and demonstrate

Table 2. Role of Education in Conflict and Peacebuilding

DOMAIN	
A. HOW EDUCATION IS DELIVERED	
1.	Equitable and “fair” delivery of educational services, or systematic inequalities by location, language, ethnicity, gender, income, disability status, etc.
2.	Perception of fairness
3.	Equitable provision of educational services by different groups involved in provision, i.e. government, NGOs, international agencies
4.	Role of private education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase opportunities? • Segment the educational system? • Bring funding into the system?
B. WHAT SCHOOL TEACHES	
5.	Intended Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills — literacy, employable, academic • History & social studies • Giving students tools to think critically about historical divides • Conflict resolution
6.	Hidden Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Social practices • Silences
C. HOW SCHOOLING FUNCTIONS SOCIALLY	
7.	Reproduction of inequalities (and blaming victim) or Challenging inequalities
7a.	Reproduction of Inequalities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing historical advantage to rule • Hegemonic silence • Strengthening historical advantages
7b.	Challenging Inequalities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing mobility • Affirmative action on behalf of historically marginalized • Critical thinking regarding historical marginalization
8.	Socio-cultural functions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural hegemony of one group over another • Hope • Repository for social aspirations • “Safety valve” • Socializing function
9.	Reinforcing status quo or transforming it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcing • Transforming — toward resolution of conflict and greater social cohesion, or • Transforming — toward conflict

the government's willingness and ability to provide services to all citizens. Indeed, this was one of the explicit objectives of Liberia's leadership in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) (Government of Liberia 2008a).

From this perspective, formal schooling contributes to peace, conflict and fragility and thus supports or undermines reconstruction in three general ways—how education is delivered, what schools teach, and how schools function in the social order.

A fourth, more general issue is whether schools lead social change or follow it. In most cases, education tends to be somewhat conservative, reflecting the dominant values of the society it serves, largely after consensus is reached. In such cases, education might be said to follow social change, and to support social agreements and contracts ratified outside the education system, prior to adoption by schools. In some cases, however, education may precede a society's social contracts and help shape their terms. In such cases, education could be said to lead social change, to play a proactive role in helping shape national consciousness and values⁶.

Provision of educational services, particularly in a divided society, can promote peacebuilding and social reconciliation to the extent that it is done in a manner perceived to be fair without favor to or biased in favor of particular ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups, or particular geographic areas. Unequal provision often leads to grievance among groups who see themselves as receiving less than their fair share. Similarly and particularly in contexts where there is a history of unequal provision, organizations working in reconstruction may inadvertently fuel resentment by moving quickly, for example, in a context of reconstruction to rebuild a school in an area that has often received favorable resources in the past to the neglect of an area where a school has never existed. Such occurrences are quite common: Certain areas are easier to reach by road, for example, and thus tend to receive more resources than other areas, which may be in greater need, but which are more difficult to identify and reach. An agency unaware of the social geography of an area may see a school in need of assistance and support it, without awareness of such unintended consequences in a highly charged post-conflict atmosphere. Similarly, private education can channel

additional resources into a school system and serve the function of increasing overall opportunity. However, it can also foster segregation of different groups and permit a high level of socio-economic or ethnic stratification, which can undermine efforts toward social reconciliation.

Most obviously, schooling affects the prospects for peace, resilience, fragility, and conflict through what is taught. Through the intended curriculum, schooling provides literacy and numeracy, access to knowledge, and—though in varying degrees—skills, knowledge and attitudes useful in the workplace. Schools also teach about the social world, the world in which students grow up and the larger world beyond students' experience. History, social studies, geography, and civic education provide students with explicit and implicit understanding of who they are and who they are not, who is “us” and who is “other,” how things are, and how they came to be the way they are. Students are also provided instruction, though generally implicitly, in the nature of history, and their role in it. Is history presented as an interpretation of events which are socially understood, constructed and contested, and in which the individual has both individual and social agency, or as a set of fixed, unitary and unassailable historical and social facts to be memorized? Do students have a role in constructing history, or is it external to them? How is history presented when that history is recent and contested? Schools can work to provide students tools to understand and deal with conflict, both larger conflicts outside the classroom and more local conflicts within the school and community, or it can treat conflicts with silence. Typically, the more local, recent and contested the conflict, the less likely schools are to help students deal with it, often because the system as a whole and the people who staff it do not know or are not of one mind about how to deal with the conflict⁷.

Thirdly, schooling affects peace, conflict, and reconstruction through its overall sociological functioning within the society. Is the net effect of schooling to reproduce the inequalities and divisions in a society, or does it work on balance to overcome inequalities and bridge social divides? These questions, while important in any context, are vital in a context where social divides have led to recent armed conflict. Schools can enable the reproduction of inequality more or

less actively, by segregating students by ethnicity and offering different levels of quality to different groups as in South Africa and the United States during the eras of apartheid and racial segregation, or they can do so more passively, by allowing historical advantage to operate unchallenged to the benefit of some groups and the detriment of others. By not questioning historical and current inequalities, schools facilitate hegemonic silences that give advantages to the advantaged. Alternately, schooling can work to increase mobility across historical divides, teaching skills needed for advancement to all, providing affirmative opportunities to help counteract historical disadvantage, and teaching critical thinking to help students understand and challenge inequality themselves. Schooling tends to privilege the languages, cultures and worldviews of groups in power, ignoring or marginalizing those of other groups. This can foster a “colonization of the mind” (Fanon 1968; see also Friere 1970) that allows the “colonized” group to be dominated and exploited voluntarily by another. Such a dynamic inhibits conflict in the short run but lays the groundwork for greater conflict in the longer run.

Another social function of schooling might be considered psycho-ideological—to provide hope—hope that individuals or groups can improve their lot in life, whether likely or not; and hope that social ills can be ameliorated. Education as an expression of collective hope can be seen at multiple levels. In post-crisis situations, for example, educational activities are among the first activities that communities start up after passing of the immediate crisis. At the collective level, education as hope can be seen in the frequency with which education is proposed as a solution to a range of social ills, regardless of its likely efficacy in a particular situation. In this way, education might be seen both as fostering optimism and resilience among those who have suffered. Education might also serve as a kind of social safety valve for individual and social aspirations that may be difficult or highly unlikely to achieve in practice but which might escalate into dissatisfaction and instability without the windows of hope that education provides. Acquiring literacy in an accelerated learning program in a rural Liberian community may not lead to a job, but it expresses the wish for a better future and is what an individual can do to move toward that wish.

Finally, as discussed above, education may reinforce the status quo, changing only after a consensus is reached about the direction and nature of social change, or it can help shape the direction of social and political change, in some sense challenging the status quo. Often this is done in service of a reinterpretation of existing social values. In the US, for example, the right of elites in local communities to enforce separation of children by ethnicity was challenged by reference to deeper values of equality of opportunity under the law.

Method

This paper was developed separately out of a larger research project commissioned by the Education and Fragility Working Group of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The larger project involved a series of situational analyses of education and “fragility” in four different national contexts, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Liberia⁸. In the words of the terms of reference, the situational analyses were intended to: “Investigate education’s role in mitigating or exacerbating state, political, economic and social conditions of fragility; and offer policy, planning and programming recommendations to support education’s role in stabilizing fragile contexts (INEE 2009).”

The larger research was carried out in three stages. First a desk review examined all available documents on education in Liberia (more than 100). Gaps were identified in the literature-based understanding, and, interview protocols were developed for field work based on an analytic framework developed by the Working Group on Education and Fragility.

Secondly, a team of four researchers carried out three weeks of field work in Liberia in September 2009. Researchers interviewed more than 80 individuals at local, county and national levels. Informants included parents and community members, NGO officials, teachers and local school officials, government officials at all levels, university faculty, officials at international development agencies. Explicit efforts were made to interview subjects in rural counties outside the capital, and as a result, 40 percent of respondents lived outside Monrovia. The identity of all respondents was kept anonymous. Interview notes were taken, field notes transcribed, and further questions identified. During the third stage, field

notes were compiled and coded. Interview data were analyzed qualitatively and the results supplemented with documentary and statistical evidence obtained in Liberia. Finally, the report was drafted.

This paper is based on an analysis carried out in parallel to the INEE report, the views expressed here mine alone. This research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) In what ways did education contribute to the civil war and the conditions that led to it?
- 2) Given this background, what are the likely prospects for education to play an important role in reconstruction and national reconciliation? What role is education likely to play?
- 3) What are the challenges facing education in playing such a role?

The following sections of the paper present the findings. The background to the civil war is outlined, then the conflict itself and subsequent developments are discussed along with the role of education. Education as defined here refers to schools modeled on schools in the West. Liberia like others in Africa has a rich indigenous education tradition. The indigenous educational practices however are not articulated with the formal system. Indeed the dichotomies between Western and indigenous cultures and approaches to education mirror almost exactly the social dichotomies found in Liberia.

Background to the Conflict

To a great extent, the origins of the Liberian conflict can be traced to the origins of the state, linked as it was with slavery and the anti-slavery movement in the United States. Though inhabited from the 12th century, the territory was first called Liberia in the early 1800s, by the American Colonization Society, which sought to “resettle” freed slaves in the United States in Africa. Interestingly, the move to resettle slaves in Africa was seen as a good idea by those both opposed to slavery and for it.

Almost immediately, armed conflict broke out between the settlers and the indigenous people. Periodic conflict continued through the period of colonization

to independence in 1847 and beyond. The violence of the founding of the country, coupled with the assumption of superiority of European/American civilization led to a foundational decision about the political identity of the country. In the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC):

One option was a Euro-American orientation with the idea of a civilizing and christianizing mission at its core. The other option was to attempt to build an African nationality that blended Western and African values ... The choice of the former ... in time, alienated, marginalized, degraded not only the majority of the inhabitants of the Liberia area, but implicitly the very westernized black leaders who bought into and adopted the views derived from American colonialist sentiments (Government of Liberia 2009c: 71-2).

As a result, the Americo-Liberians, as the settlers came to be called, developed their own political, economic, and social institutions, modeled on American institutions and substantially separate and exclusive of the indigenous people. This established a dualism that persists to the present in a variety of forms—between settler and indigenous cultures, modern and traditional, cash/export-based and subsistence economies.

The concentration of power among a small group of Americo-Liberians led to elitism and cronyism. It provided fertile ground for corruption and emergence of a privileged elite, which ruled over a restive and gradually aggrieved majority population. Americo-Liberians represent about 5% of the population of Liberia. The availability of exportable natural resources did not encourage development of a broad-based economy. Economic development was uneven, with high levels of economic inequality. Liberia's economy was described in the 1960s as "growth without development" (Clower, et. al 1966). Underdevelopment and land insecurity were exacerbated by government land policies which until the 1950s did not permit indigenous people to own the land they had lived on for hundreds of years. Economic and social insecurity weakened traditional institutions. Along the coast and in more urban areas, the oligarchy became institutionalized. National institutions remained weak. Government services were limited in most

rural areas of the country, non-existent in some.

Politically, the institutionalization of the oligarchy also failed to foster development of strong national institutions. Mechanisms for resolving differences among different groups in society remained under-developed, and a “winner-take-all” political culture emerged. Institutions which assumed the forms but not the substance of democratic governance were used instead to further the interests of the elite, creating distrust in the institutions and uses of democracy. Those in power cultivated relationships with particular tribal leaders, with the result that some indigenous groups were favored over others. National consciousness remained weak with most of the population identifying primarily with their own ethnic groups. Government did not develop trust among the general population, but instead was used to further the interests of some at the expense of the many.

Efforts at reform attempted to improve the situation but without changing the underlying arrangements of power. As a result, half-hearted reforms tended to highlight problems but not resolve them.

Lack of a common national identity and purpose, factionalism along ethnic lines, lack of broad participation, and lack of faith in the good will of government led to public disengagement, and, when change came, a hardening of ethnic lines. At each stage, leaders took steps that exacerbated the problems until the Americo-Liberian oligarchy was toppled in 1980 by Samuel Doe. Doe attempted to redress historical inequalities but only for his own ethnic group and their allies, thus hardening the ethnic dimension of the simmering conflict, which broke out in open warfare in 1989.

The Civil War and the Effect on Education

The civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 2003, devastated the country. Most of the country’s physical as well as social, governance, economic and educational infrastructure was destroyed. Warlords and factional leaders recruited women, children and youth, often by force, and looted the country. There was no public water or electricity, for example, for 15 years. Most commercial and agricultural activity stopped. Brutal fighting killed more than a quarter million Liberians,

and many times more were displaced as refugees or IDPs. Entire communities were uprooted, and traditional governance and social systems destroyed. GDP fell by 90% between 1987 and 1995 (Government of Liberia 2008 a: 15). Central government collapsed. Many of the nation's educated population fled. Public finances were also ruined. By 2006, external debt was estimated at 800% of GDP and 3000% of exports.

Not surprisingly, the public education system also ceased functioning. The only educational services available were provided by communities, NGOs and other private entities. With peace, administrative systems had to be rebuilt from a very low level; teacher training institutes had to be rebuilt, restaffed, and reopened. Schools resumed but generally with poorly trained, poorly paid teachers and without adequate numbers of textbooks and learning materials. Still, students returned to school in great numbers. School enrollments increased from 465,000 in 2003/04 to over one million students in 2005/06 and 1.2 million in 2007/08 (Government of Liberia 2009a).

Reconstruction

With the Comprehensive Peace Accord, reconstruction began. An interim government took power as UNMIL, the United Nations peacekeeping force, enforced the terms of the peace accord. A number of reforms were initiated. Elections were organized and held in 2005. Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, Africa's first female head of state, was elected president in elections generally regarded as substantially free and fair. A poverty reduction strategy (PRS) was put in place, organized around four pillars, by which the government pledged to: enhance security, promote economic development, rehabilitate infrastructure, and deliver basic services, including education, health care.

As "key challenges" facing the education sector, the PRS named inadequate finance, weak capacity for management and governance at all levels, an outdated curriculum and inadequate textbooks, chairs, desks, and school supplies; low levels of access especially for girls and persons with disabilities; insufficient numbers of well trained, qualified, and motivated teachers; an understaffed and over-crowded public university; and poor quality programs at some institutions

of higher learning (Government of Liberia 2008a: 111). The government developed ambitious goals and objectives for the 2008-12 period:

“During the PRS period, the government’s overall goal for education is to improve access to and the quality of relevant education at all levels, emphasizing the availability of Universal Primary Education and recognizing the needs of the disadvantaged, especially girls. To achieve this goal, it will aim to achieve seven strategic objectives:

- Strengthen the curriculum
- Improve access to quality, safe, and hygienic schools...
- Recruit and train qualified teachers...
- Improve learning achievement and school completion rates...
- Strengthen the quality and accessibility of skills and vocational training...
- Improve the quality of tertiary education...
- Strengthen the overall governance, management, and financial basis of the education system” (Government of Liberia 2008a: 112-3)

Current Situation

Since 2003, Liberia has enjoyed a stable, albeit somewhat fragile peace. The economy is growing, but most Liberians still face a precarious economic existence. For many, economic insecurity has replaced physical insecurity as the primary source of anxiety. Liberia’s institutions are young and themselves fragile. The peace has brought high expectations on the part of the people, with corresponding demands on public services. Liberia remains highly dependent on development assistance. Still the citizens are highly resilient and optimistic.

Considerable progress has been made in the education sector. The government has worked to implement its Free and Compulsory Education Policy, which abolished tuition fees for public primary education. The Ministry has established a Gender Unit and developed a Gender Policy. Regional Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) were rebuilt and have reopened. School feeding programs have been implemented in many needy areas, and Accelerated Learning Programs

aimed at out-of-school youth were supported and extended to new areas of the country. As a result and with the security of peace, enrollments grew, by 82% between 2005 and 2007. Still in 2007, only 37.5% of primary school age children were enrolled in school (Government of Liberia 2008a: 34). The government is working to address these issues. It recently completed a comprehensive sector-wide five-year Education Sector Plan (ESP) as a result of a two-year process of consultation and development. The ESP includes all levels of education—early childhood and pre-primary education, primary, junior and senior high school, tertiary, teacher training, technical/vocational and adult learning. Still, lack of funding, trained personnel, and management systems slow efforts to rebuild the system as do lack of financial accounting and management systems and as well as high reliance on external funding which is often poorly coordinated.

The Role of Education

Liberians have high hopes for education. Official documents see education as an important factor in both the conflict and reconstruction. So do many of the Liberians we talked with. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report identified access to education as an important cause of the conflict:

The major root causes of the conflict are attributable to poverty, greed, corruption, limited access to education, economic, social, civil, and political inequalities; identity conflict, land tenure and distribution, etc. (Government of Liberia 2009c: 4)

Similarly, the PRS invested high hopes in education, which is hoped will serve at least three purposes—addressing historic inequalities, promoting economic development, and helping improve governance (Government of Liberia 2008a).

The people we interviewed saw education as an important component both to the conflict and to reconstruction. This was especially so in interviews with parents, community members and leaders, as well as school teachers, principals and students. Among Liberians we talked with, the effects of education on conflict were generally understood in individual terms: Education was seen, for example, as helping students distinguish right from wrong. Education helped students avoid manipulation by unscrupulous factional leaders. Education gave

students “occupation” and “a place to go” as well as a “stake” in the system that they would be reluctant to destroy. Most of all, education was seen as the way to employment. Yet considerable frustration was reported by those who had received schooling and were unable to find work.

Respondents were quite aware of disparities in provision. A few expressed these disparities, among other distributional inequalities, as a cause of grievance that helped fuel the conflict. Conversely, provision of educational opportunities was seen as a way of reducing grievance. One of the most popular of education initiatives, the Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP), provided a primary school curriculum in condensed format to overage children, most of whose schooling had been affected by the conflict. ALP programs were reportedly quite successful in providing useful occupation to those who had missed out on education due to the civil war. ALP also reportedly helped defuse grievance among those children and youth. Even so, some areas only received ALP programs in 2008, as the program was beginning to wind down. Primary schools were also used to help reintegrate ex-combatants into the community, often with little support other than the commitment and imagination of teachers and principals.

Inclusionary intentions are hindered by problems of implementation and the legacies of past exclusion; the extent of destruction and scale of effort needed; limited financial, human and organizational resources; as well as the high expectations of the people—to rebuild the system but better with more access and higher quality. Getting the school system back to where it was is itself a major task, one requiring the bulk of available resources, yet the demand is for schools to surpass the previous system in access and quality. Funding projections for the ESP suggest that a moderate increase in access is possible with some improvements in quality, but very little additional funding for other levels of education (Government of Liberia 2009b). As a result, it is unlikely that the all promises for education can be delivered.

Geographical location is a major factor in determining access. Our calculations suggest that the odds of an average 6-14 year old child in one relatively advantaged county, Bomi, enrolling in school are 1.9 to 1, as compared to 6.1 to 1 odds against an average 6-14 year old child from a less advantaged county,

Grand Bassa (Williams 2009). Income also predicts access. Being in the bottom income quintile means a child is 24% less likely, on average, to enroll in primary school than a child in other income groups (Vulnerability paper, cited in Williams 2009). Analysis of household survey data suggests that educational disadvantages may be multiplicative. Girls are 7% less likely to be enrolled in primary school than boys. However, girls from households where the household head lacks primary education are 36% less likely to be enrolled in school than girls whose head of household has a complete primary education, an effect twice that of boys.

In amongst the public school system is a large private sector, in which each school decides levels of tuition and determines admission. While a number of private schools are of low quality, the private option means that most children of better-off families attend well-resourced private schools. Private provision allows for greater mobilization of resources, yet it runs the risk of reducing elite commitment and thus improvements to the public system.

Though less visible, poor quality may be as significant a barrier to educational attainment as poor access. At some point, expansion of access requires a budgetary tradeoff with improvements in quality. Moreover, the system's emphasis on primary education leaves few resources for educating the generation that mostly missed out on formal education. The poor state of vocational-technical education, the lack of articulation between schools and the labor market, and the lack of jobs⁹ means that education is not meeting the livelihood needs of most youth.

Weaknesses in education compound fragilities in other sectors, which rely on the education system to prepare high quality workers for government, commerce, and production. Historically, the exclusion of larger society played out in and was reinforced by the education system. Urban children of Americo-Liberian families enjoyed much greater access and much higher quality of education than did children of the interior, or of indigenous backgrounds. The largely academic urban-focused school curriculum offered relatively little of relevance to the majority of children in rural areas or in the informal economy. In the scramble to rebuild the school system in Liberia, there has not been time to imagine a

transforming vision of education in the country. As a result, the system is being rebuilt much as it was, though with much greater intentions for inclusion. The extent to which these intentions can be implemented, however, remains a question.

Current Social Dilemmas in the Role of Education

In the context of reconstruction, Liberia's education system faces a series of dilemmas. How Liberia addresses these dilemmas may have a great deal to do with whether it reaches its goals and what role education plays in Liberian society. These dilemmas, like many social dilemmas, involve questions of values and preferences, that is politics, as well as technical and empirical issues.

Dilemma #1. What kind of education system should be (re)built? The first dilemma asks what kind of system should Liberia (re)build? As noted, crisis provides opportunities for reform (Buckland 2005). Crises may weaken usual bureaucratic resistance to new ideas. Destruction of the old system may provide the chance to rebuild the system better. External assistance may be more available in the aftermath of crisis. At the same time, the usual challenges of resources, implementation, and leadership may be compounded by the crisis. The question for Liberia is what kind of education system is needed in a society such as Liberia's? Historically in Liberia, formal education developed along an urban model and was intended primarily for socialization of Americo-Liberian children into an exclusionary social order. Little attention was given to indigenous cultures, or the livelihoods and life circumstances of the majority. What sort of education is best suited for a rural society with a predominately informal and agricultural economy and a number of traditional cultures, though with urban, formal sector economic, and national aspirations? Thus far the education system has done relatively little to bridge the social divide between descendants of America-Liberians and indigenous peoples. Given the likelihood and direction of economic development prospects, can education deliver for the mass of Liberians on the promise of a better economic life? These are challenging questions, questions to which there are few alternative models for answers. There may not be time to rethink the entire system and approach to education, but is the current model

the best for Liberia, even without the exclusions of the past?

Dilemma #2. How should the education system respond to the conflict?

Despite a great deal of evidence that suggests that Liberians are tired of conflict, the civil war in Liberia was halted but not necessarily resolved. Should education play a role in trying to resolve the issues that led to the conflict? If so, what can and should education do? School personnel we talked with said they worked with ex-combatants, trying to integrate them into the school and did the best job they could teaching all children who attended. The extent to which schools systematically taught directly about the conflict, worked directly on children's psychosocial issues, or taught conflict resolution skills is less clear. More commonly, it was reported that schools worked to resolve the conflict indirectly—by teaching “everyone who showed up at school”, by “teaching everyone equally” thus giving everyone a chance, by teaching a positive future vision “rather than dwelling on the past,” and by emphasizing a national and, more recently, a human rights-oriented identity. At the national level, the school system is working to target the previously excluded. No doubt these steps contribute to a more peaceful future. But should the education system do more? Should it delve into the specifics of the conflict, in an effort to prevent a reoccurrence? Is it too soon to do so? If so, when and how can the past be addressed? At what age level, grade and in what manner is it appropriate to teach about the conflict? How can education best be used to address the root causes of the conflict? How can education best prevent reoccurrence? To what extent and in what ways can conflict resolution be taught in schools? It may be the case that these questions are being addressed, but the research team talked to only one academic who was doing so, at a university center for conflict resolution and study with a relatively small number of graduate students. Additionally, UNESCO had prepared a human rights curriculum which was being introduced into schools, though with some resistance from rural parents who felt the individualism of the human rights approach was teaching their children disrespect for their elders and the necessity of contributing to the family economy. Otherwise, there was little evidence of the conflict being addressed in a systematic way.

Dilemma #3. How should the education system respond to the generation

most directly affected by the conflict? Children and youth were affected in several ways. In some areas, schools were targeted. Children and youth were recruited as child soldiers, sometimes forcibly. Non-combatants were also affected by the conflict but largely ignored in the effort to disarm and reintegrate child soldiers. Like most Liberians, children and youth were displaced on a large scale. Many children and youth were unable to attend school at all, or had their schooling cut short. Because of the length of the conflict, 14 years, much of several school generations missed schooling. Many children and youth experienced varying degrees of trauma as a result of the conflict, and their age suggests high levels of vulnerability.

It is especially difficult to program for youth. As no single ministry has authority over them, youth tend to fall through bureaucratic cracks. Youth are more difficult than children to find and to manage. Typically, youth are treated as problems rather than as resources. Should education address the psychosocial needs of children and youth affected by the conflict? How can schools do so with the resources and training likely to be available to them? How much responsibility should the education system assume for the education of youth who missed school? To what extent should the livelihood needs of youth be addressed, with estimates of youth unemployment ranging from 22 to 50% and more? Research suggests that programs aimed at out-of-school youth need to target basic educational needs and job skills as well as the social exclusion faced by youth. How can the education system “engage youth” “as resources”? To what extent, and how can education address these needs, especially given other national priorities? At the same time, what are the costs of not attending to the needs of one million Liberian youth?

Dilemma #4. How should Liberia balance competing claims on national resources? Previous discussion has noted the budgetary tradeoffs necessary in increasing access versus improving quality in the public primary school system. Decisions must also be made about the extent to which the system should focus on rebuilding the system that existed prior to the conflict versus first addressing historic inequalities. To what extent and under what guidelines should the system permit private provision of education? To what extent should the system

focus on achieving basic education for all versus providing support for other levels of the system—early childhood, secondary, higher, technical/vocational, adult? Which agendas should be privileged—reconstruction and restoration, addressing of historic inequalities, increased access, improved quality, increasing relevance? In a context where a substantial number of respondents felt a return to armed conflict was quite possible, these questions assume a greater urgency.

Dilemma #5. How can the education system best develop and sustain capacity, for itself and for national leadership? Weak capacity limits the ability of the education system to improve and to take advantage of available resources and opportunities. Within the education system, top management is capable but short-staffed and challenged in its ability and willingness to delegate. Lower levels of the ministry have less capacity, and the organizational incentives for good performance are weak. Still, many government staff are well-intentioned but lack sufficient resources and expertise. Well-qualified staff members are at risk of recruitment, often by development agencies with better pay, or brain drain to better paying jobs outside the country. County and district-level staff vary in capacity. They often lack the authority or resources to carry out their work effectively. Others need training. All levels of the system need training in specific skills appropriate for the job.

Capacity is most effectively embedded in an organization not just an individual. At the same time, capable individuals need good institutions to be effective, institutions where the rules, incentives, and organizational “culture” foster effectiveness. Ultimately, these are educational tasks in a larger sense of the word. Yet how can a system such as Liberia’s move toward the conditions for building and sustaining capacity? What role and responsibility do the institutions of education have?

Dilemma #6. How can aid be effectively distributed and used in a post-conflict environment? Development assistance is necessary in terms of meeting resource shortfalls in many post-conflict environments, certainly in Liberia. Moreover, the modalities of development assistance can play an important role in fostering institutional development and good governance. Yet aid effectiveness is challenged by the very conditions that make it most necessary. In 2009, for

example, most external funding of education to Liberia was still provided directly to implementing partners rather than through government budgets and processes. Of the US\$ 450 million in total external development assistance projected for 2009/10, for example, only US\$ 23.3 million was on government books. In the education sector, US\$ 45 million of \$70 million total spending on education is from external sources. Eighty-six percent of external support to education goes to basic education. A 2009 OCED survey based on 2007 data found that of the Paris Declaration Principles, indicators of ownership, alignment, management for development results, and mutual accountability were all low. Only harmonization showed a moderate level of performance. Weak capacity makes it difficult for external funders to provide direct support, yet development of government capacity and ownership require working with and through government financial and accountability systems. Innovative approaches such as the pooled fund managed by UNICEF and the Soros Foundation are promising but have not drawn other donors or funding. The dilemma remains how can aid best be provided to meet these contradictory demands. Again, the success of the peace depends on Liberia's ability to govern itself legitimately and well.

Conclusion

Like everywhere perhaps, education in Liberia presents a complex picture. On the one hand, provision of education promises a partial solution to historic patterns of exclusion, to the problem of under-development, as well as strategies for increasing civic participation in governance. On the other hand, education has contributed, albeit passively, to the dynamics that led to war. Education is hampered by the same problems as the rest of the country, yet the scale of public schooling requires massive efforts for any sort of impact. At both individual and collective levels, education represents hope. Hope in part for a modern life, and in part for a greater share. The extent to which education as currently conceived can assume a leading as opposed to following role in the national reconciliation and development project is unclear. Still, Liberians are resilient, and education is—as Henry Levin famously described educational planning—an exercise in hope.

† This paper was prepared in parallel with a situational analysis I led on education and fragility in Liberia for the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The INEE study focused on fragility and the role of education. This paper draws on much of the same literature and fieldwork but focuses more directly on the role of education in meeting the challenges of reconstruction.

I express our appreciation to the Government of Liberia, especially the Ministry of Education officials and staff, who gave most generously of their time despite extremely hectic schedules. Also, in supporting the Liberia research, the assistance of a number of agencies is gratefully acknowledged, including the World Bank, UNICEF, UNICEF/Liberia, USAID, UNESCO, the American Institutes of Research, and other supporting organizations of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and its Working Group on Education and Fragility. Without them, the research could not have been carried out. In particular, grateful appreciation goes to Peter Buckland, Kerstin Tebbe, Lyndsay Bird, and Timothy Brown, for their assistance and support. Regardless of this assistance, all views expressed here as well as any errors or omissions are mine alone and should not be attributed to INEE or any of its member agencies or to any sponsors of this research or to Kobe University or anyone associated with the Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies.

Notes

- 1 Education is recognized as a much broader phenomenon than formal schooling. Education includes informal education from parents and communities, as well as formal schooling, which is graded, provided or regulated by the state, and associated with credentials; and non-formal education, planned but not graded or associated with credentialing. This paper uses “education” in the sense of formal schooling, as it is the state’s primary instrument for intentional mass instruction, and is the form of schooling most closely associated with social reproduction, social cohesion, and national identity.
- 2 “Conflict” as used in this paper refers to armed conflict in which one or more groups attempt to impose their political will by violence against other groups. Conflict is a complex intra- and inter-personal phenomenon inherent to human social relationships and the human psyche. Conflict does not necessarily entail violence, and may serve a positive function, by raising awareness and pushing for resolution of unresolved issues. However, as used here and unless noted otherwise, “conflict” refers to armed political conflict among groups of people with actual or perceived differences in values, goals, and interests.
- 3 This type of social capital has been referred to as bridging social capital (Putnam).
- 4 See UNESCO, *Education Under Attack 2010*. Paris, 2010.
- 5 “Fragility” refers to states “where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor” (DFID). Fragility derives from the “fragile states” literature, which denotes a state between a developing state, which is on a path toward economic development, and a failed state. USAID distinguishes fragile states between those that are vulnerable and those that are already in crisis (USAID, 2006). One common approach specifies a continuum of five categories of states: weak, fragile, failing, failed, collapsed (Barakat, Karpinska, & Paulson, 2008). The DAC has categorized fragile states into four types: deteriorating; arrested development; early recovery; and post-conflict. “Fragility” is controversial because it focuses on the state, unduly so say critics, when sub-national and supra-national groups may be more salient.

Fragility is conceptually and empirically difficult to define. Yet it does describe contexts characterized by multiple inter-related problems that sap the capacity and will of government. Patterns of fragility include: corruption/rent-seeking, elitism/exclusion/factionalism, insufficient capacity, organized violence, public disengagement (USAID 2006). Provision of development assistance is more difficult in contexts of fragility for a variety of reasons. As a partial result, fragile states tend to receive far less development assistance than do other developing countries.

- ⁶ Of course, such values may aim toward peace or toward conflict.
- ⁷ In this regard, Bush & Sartarelli speak of seven goals of “peacebuilding education:” demilitarization of the mind; problematization; articulation of alternatives; changing the rules of the game; delegitimation of violent force as a means of addressing problems; re-membering and re-weaving the social and anthropological fabric; and nurturing non-violent, sustainable modalities of change (Bush & Sartarelli 2000: pp 22-32).
- ⁸ Haiti was also included in the original plan, but the earthquake precluded field research in January 2010 as planned.
- ⁹ Estimates of unemployment range from 22% for males overall (though 48% for 15-19 year old males and 30% for 20-24 year old males) and 40% for females overall (64% for 15-19 year old females and 46% for 20-24 year old women) to 85% (USAID 2009).

References

- B. Barakat, Z. Karpinska & J. Paulson, *Desk Study: Education and Fragility*. Oxford, Conflict and Education Research Group, Oxford University, 2008. Accessed November 1, 2009 at http://ineesite.org/uploads/documents/store/doc_1_FINAL-Desk_Study_Education_and_Fragility_CERG_2008.pdf
- P. Buckland, *Reshaping the Future: Education and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2005.
- K.D. Bush & D. Saltarelli (editors), *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Toward a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, Florence, Italy, Innocenti Research Centre, United Nations Children’s Fund, 2000.
- R.W. Clower, G. Dalton, M. Harwitz, & A.A. Walters, *Growth without Development: An Economic Survey of Liberia*, Northwestern University Press, 1966.
- F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1968.
- P. Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York, Continuum, 1970.
- Government of Liberia, *Country Status Report* (draft). Monrovia, 2009a.
- Government of Liberia, *Education Sector Plan* (draft). Monrovia, 2009b.
- Government of Liberia, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC): Final Report: Volume I: Consolidated Final Report*, Monrovia, 2009c. Accessed on October 23, 2010 from <https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final>
- Government of Liberia, *Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)*, 2008a, Monrovia. Accessed on October 23, 2010 from: <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/>
- INEE, “Analytic Framework for Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility: Understanding Education’s Role in Fragile Contexts” (unpublished document), Paris, INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility, 2009a.
- INEE, “Field-Based Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility: Understanding Education’s Role in Fragile Contexts” (unpublished Terms of Reference document), Paris, INEE Working

- Group on Education and Fragility, 2009b.
- D.H. Isser, S.C. Lubkemann, and S. N'Tow, with A. Addison, J. Ndebe, G. Saye, & T. Luccaro, *Looking for Justice: Liberian Experiences and Perceptions of Local Justice Options*, United States Institute for Peace, Washington DC, 2009, pp. 3-7.
- R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- J. Salmi, "Violence, Democracy, and Education: An Analytic Framework", in E. Roberts-Schweitzer with V. Greaney and K. Duer, *Promoting Social Cohesion through Education: Case Studies and Tools for Using Textbooks and Curricula*, World Bank Institute, 2006, pp. 9-28.
- A. Smith & T. Vaux, Education, *Conflict and International Development*, London, Department for International Development, 2003.
- UNESCO, *Education Under Attack* 2010, Paris, 2010.
- USAID, *Liberia Youth Fragility Assessment*, Washington DC, Equip 1, Aguire Inc, 2009.
- USAID, *Education and Fragility: An Assessment Tool*. Washington DC, 2006. Accessed October 24, 2010 at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADH913.pdf
- J. Williams, "Education and Fragility in Liberia: Country Study Report," (draft), Report submitted to the Education and Fragility Working Group of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2009.
- J. Williams, 2004). "Civil Conflict, Education, and the Work of Schools: Twelve Propositions", *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2004), pp. 471-481.

