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Education

In postwar and post-disaster contexts, national authorities, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations must provide children who have been displaced or are otherwise affected by restricted mobility, growing insecurity, lack of infrastructures, and/or qualified personnel and loss of livelihood and families with access to schooling. Schools are not safe from direct attacks during times of armed conflict. For example, in rural areas, schools may be the only permanent structures, which makes them highly susceptible to shelling, closure, or looting. Local teachers may also become primary targets because they are considered important community members, they may hold strong political views, and they may embody the only form of government representation in an isolated village. The destruction of education networks is one of the most severe democratic setbacks for countries affected by conflict. The deterioration and loss of basic education and professional skills normally takes years to replace, making the overall task of postwar recovery extremely difficult (Aguilar and Retamal 2009). As a basic principle, the 1989 Convention on Rights of the Child obliges “State parties [to] take all feasible measures to

ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict” and make primary education available and compulsory without limitation.

Education in emergencies has expanded as a subfield of expertise and humanitarian assistance because of the high number of children affected by disasters and wars. Education in emergency projects is often part of a larger program encouraging social change and resilience at the community level.

According to international law, displaced refugee children can attend regular schools in host countries but very few are able to in practice. Some host governments refuse to make educational activities for refugee children available or even to allow humanitarian agencies to provide it (Aguilar and Retamal 2009). Providing ongoing access to education in emergencies may range from transitional home-based education (Kirk and Winthrop 2007) to assistance in camps and schools in host communities to double schooling. Protecting children's right to education in emergencies requires attention to the full cycle of education from supporting families to rebuilding schools. Among other concerns, education providers must take into account how to (re)integrate schools into larger societal institutional settings and how to restore trust through access to the “ladder” of education. It is also important to convey life skills and values for health, gender equality, responsible citizenship, and environmental awareness, and provide protection for marginalized groups such as minorities, children with disabilities, and out-of-school adolescents (Sinclair 2007).

Although, in some contexts, agreements and procedures to guarantee access to education exist, they often fail to ensure the quality of the teaching and learning process and the effectiveness of the education response (Gallano 2018). Bottom-up participatory evaluations of education projects aim to identify the challenges of a complex emergency timescale, the production of knowledge, and the capacity to hold a child-centered perspective (Maclure 2006). The latter implies attention and consideration not only to formal schooling but also to the informal educative processes that can play a significant role in society, especially in times of conflict (Anderson and Mendenhall 2006).

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Emergency

Traditionally defined as an unexpected and serious situation requiring immediate action to solve it, emergency is the primary reason for mobilizing humanitarian actors to intervene in contexts affected by human-made or natural disasters. Employed in situations of human conflict, the notion of “complex emergency” first took place in Mozambique toward the end of the 1980s when aid to the displaced was needed (Calhoun 2008). It indicates a multiplicity of causes underlying emergencies, with the involvement of several actors, beyond just victim, and the need for an international response. Unlike natural disasters, complex emergencies “have a singular ability to erode and destroy the cultural, civil, political and economic integrity of established societies” (Duffield 1994: 3).

In more recent academic literature, the state of emergency is no longer interpreted as a matter of fate, but rather as a geopolitical strategy to set out specific global achievements, and the historical result of longstanding economic, political, and social failures. Thereby, most factors that give rise to emergencies are identifiable, even though largely dealt with by humanitarians as autonomous problems to which there is no solution but intervention. Humanitarian work tends to approach emergencies as discontinuities, for which intervention and aid are the only strategies able to restore linearity and predictability. As such, emergencies delineate the temporal and spatial limits of crisis and risk and, therefore, shed light on the urgent character of humanitarian action. Adopting a critical approach, emergency and general tendencies to interpret political processes as catastrophes have increasingly been studied as modalities of governance to preserve social and political order by establishing