

## Helpdesk Research Report

# Education and building legitimacy during conflict

Brigitte Rohwerder

27.03.2015

## Question

*Summarise the available evidence on how far support to education has strengthened governance at the local, regional and institutional level during a conflict<sup>1</sup>.*

## Contents

1. Overview
2. Service delivery and state legitimacy
3. National governments
4. Local and provincial authorities
5. NGO and non-state providers
6. Rebel groups
7. References
8. About this report

## 1. Overview

Education in fragile and conflict affected states has begun to attract considerable international attention as a result of security and governance concerns (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 50; Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 24). Consequently the policies and approaches adopted by donors engaging in fragile and conflict affected states emphasise the importance of developing institutions, working with civil society, and addressing inequality; without undermining the legitimacy of the state (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 149, 228). Education is viewed as a state responsibility in most contexts and there is general agreement that such provision can

---

<sup>1</sup> Please see: Rohwerder, B. (2015). *Delivering education during conflict* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1209). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, for a companion review of support to education delivery during conflict.

promote state legitimacy<sup>2</sup> (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 4; Burde et al, 2011, p. 23; Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 45).

This rapid review summarises the available evidence of how far support to education has strengthened governance during conflict. At the request of the enquirer **the focus within governance is on legitimacy** and whether support to deliver education during a conflict by state and non-state actors has strengthened their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. The report looks at education delivery and legitimacy in relation to national governments, local and provincial authorities, NGOs and non-state providers, and rebel groups. It should also be noted that some of the literature also indicates that education can be used for highly political purposes and have a role in conflict dynamics (Smith, 2014, p. 116; Burde et al, 2011, p. 20, 22). Therefore, at all levels of the education system, governance of the education system is also a crucial issue (Smith, 2014, p. 116).

The rapid review uncovered a **small body of grey and academic literature** which mentions the impact of education delivery on strengthened legitimacy during conflict. There is **more assumption in the literature than evidence** around the idea that education delivery increases state legitimacy (Burde et al, 2011, p. 36). This assumption is grounded in evidence of the inverse; that lack of access to education fuels grievances and violence (Burde et al, 2011, p. 36). There is also an acknowledgement in the literature that the complex relationship between service delivery and legitimacy means that ‘any **inference of causality** is at best an inference’ (Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 11). Very little of the literature uncovered looks at what occurs during conflict, with **more interest and evidence around situations of fragility or post-conflict contexts**. There is some literature which looks at the relationship between state legitimacy and service delivery during conflict more broadly. There is a small body of literature which looks at service delivery by rebels and the impact on their legitimacy.

The main points made by the literature on education delivery during conflict and strengthened legitimacy for those delivering it includes:

- **Service delivery and state legitimacy:** expectations for services vary and this has an impact on the relative importance that service delivery plays in contributing to citizens’ perceptions of state legitimacy. Oversight rather than actual delivery is more important for state legitimacy, although the way in which it is delivered can impact on state legitimacy.
- **National governments:** support to education during conflict may provide the state with legitimacy. National leadership and domestic ownership of the education sector is important for promoting this state legitimacy. However, there is little evidence of what form this support to the state should take and some ethical issues if such support enhances the legitimacy of an illegitimate state.
- **Local and provincial authorities:** local and provincial authorities may have the capacity to deliver education when national governments cannot. In some cases this has strengthened trust in authorities and improved engagement in local governance. However there are issues with local authorities’ long-term capacity. As a result those supporting education have tried to build capacity and local structures which can integrate with state structures when they regain the capacity to deliver education.

---

<sup>2</sup> Legitimacy is understood as ‘the ability of the government to work in the interest of the public and demonstrate fairness to all groups in providing security and services’ (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 4). Citizen’s expectations and perceptions play an important part in state legitimacy (Ndaruhutse et al, 2012).

- **NGOs and non-state providers:** education provision by non-state providers may negatively affect state legitimacy, although it may also improve local governance. As a result some non-state providers have tried provide education which can integrate into state structures.
- **Rebel groups:** in areas not under state control, support has occasionally been provided to rebel groups to help them deliver education. Their provision of education helps them gain legitimacy as pseudo-governments. Support to rebel authorities to provide education may play into conflict dynamics.
- **Rebel groups and service provision:** by providing social services more generally, rebel groups can deprive the state of the legitimacy that stems from the social contract. It is important though that attempts to prevent rebels delivering services ensure that there is alternative provision available in order to prevent a humanitarian crisis or radicalise populations. It seems that service providing groups are more likely to enter peace talks and negotiations with them are more likely to be stable.

## 2. Service delivery and state legitimacy

A recent study has found that in practice ‘the relationship between a state’s performance in delivering services and its degree of legitimacy is nonlinear’ (McCloughlin, 2014, p. 1). There is no guaranteed or straightforward causal relationship between a state’s performance in delivering different services and its degree of legitimacy (McCloughlin, 2014, p. 2). As a literature review looking at government legitimacy in fragile and conflict-affected countries and service delivery also finds: i) expectations for services vary between and within countries and therefore context is critical as the relative importance that service delivery plays in contributing to citizens’ perceptions of state legitimacy also varies; and ii) citizen’s expectations also vary over time and so what is required to build and maintain legitimacy by the state will differ over time (Ndaruhutse et al, 2012, p. 4; see also McCloughlin, 2014).

In addition, the literature review found that (Ndaruhutse et al, 2012, p. 4-5):

- It is better for the state to outsource quality service delivery than to deliver poor quality services.
- Providing oversight of service delivery is more important for state legitimacy than who delivers them.
- The way in which services were delivered was important for doing no harm and state legitimacy.
- It was important for service delivery to be equitable, with good management, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms, and for it to be of good quality.

Other important factors in the relationship between service delivery and citizen’s perceptions of state legitimacy include (McCloughlin, 2014, p. 2):

- How easy it is to attribute (credit or blame) performance to the state.
- The technical and political characteristics of the service.

## 3. National governments

A number of studies suggest, but do not necessarily provide evidence, that support to education delivery is important during conflict because it is one of the most visible state services and thus has an ‘important

symbolic value in (re-)establishing the legitimacy of the state' (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 4; Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 124; Burde et al, 2011, p.11, 23; Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 45; Davies and Bentrovato, 2011, p. 15; INEE, no date, p. 9). Research does show that education during conflict has 'positive and incremental effects on future economic growth, health indices and infant mortality rates, peace and security, and paves the way for good governance and active engaged citizenship' (Trani et al, 2011, p. 1188). A study of four fragile and conflict affected countries<sup>3</sup> found that the legitimacy of the state is enhanced by when education is perceived as equitable in terms of access and outcomes (Davies and Bentrovato, 2011, p. 60). The ability to pay teacher salaries is also important for state legitimacy, as it helps 'restore confidence in governing authorities, and can avoid dissatisfaction amongst an influential group of the population' (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 11).

A study of a number of different fragile and conflict-affected country case studies found that there needs to be national leadership and domestic ownership of education sector development in order to promote legitimacy (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 6). Therefore it is important that international support to education delivery fosters this (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 6). However, efforts to support state capacity to deliver education during conflict are problematic (Burde et al, 2011, p. 23). This is because 'the concept of state capacity is insufficiently theorized, making it difficult to measure empirically and analyze the connections between state provision of education, government legitimacy, and conflict and to determine the most effective practices for building capacity' (Burde et al, 2011, p. 23). In addition, as support to service delivery can enhance legitimacy even in an illegitimate state, those providing support have an ethical challenge of whether to provide support to such states to deliver services (Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 11).

#### 4. Local and provincial authorities

In some situations national governments lack the capacity to deliver education during conflict, and local and provincial authorities may deliver education instead (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 90). A few different cases of the relationship between education provided during conflict by local and provincial authorities and legitimacy were flagged up in the literature. However, very little information was provided about this relationship. These case studies indicate a number of issues including lack of longer-term capacity of local authorities and the difficulties of working in conflict. In some cases engaging parents and the community has strengthened trust in authorities and improved engagement in local governance. Those supporting local and provincial authorities have worked to enable these structures to integrate into national systems at a later date.

In **Syria**, Save the Children has worked with local or village councils due to the erosion of traditional governance bodies they would normally engage with (Save the Children, 2014, p. 16). However, while these local councils provide 'some of the most effective governance structures for education provision in northern Syria', they often lack the capacity to fulfil their role (Save the Children, 2014, p. 16).

In **Somalia**, Save the Children have worked closely with regional authorities to 'strengthen their capacity and provide a basis for further state-building when a national government is formed' (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 94). This has involved working extensively at the community level to help 'encourage state accountability and legitimacy, and form a foundation for state-managed programmes' (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 94). They have had more success in the more peaceful areas, than in areas where coordination is limited by conflict (Brannelly et al, 2009, p. 94).

---

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Liberia.

In Hebron, in the **West Bank**, UNICEF supported the Education Directorate of Hebron's Distance Remedial Education Project (DREP) delivered education during conflict<sup>4</sup> (Sultana, 2006). The innovative nature of the programme helped change attitudes and practices in a system that had traditionally been a centralist mode of government which was both 'rigid and unresponsive to real needs' (Sultana, 2006, p. 73). DREP also reinforced and increased the trust parents had in the Education Directorate (Sultana, 2006, p. 73).

## 5. NGO and non-state providers

In some situations where national governments lack the capacity to deliver education during conflict, it is provided by non-state actors such as NGOs instead (Rose and Greeley, 2006; Brannelly et al, 2009). Often this is carried out at the community level. This can raise challenges for transferring the responsibilities back to the state in the longer term as it can negatively affect state legitimacy (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 6; Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 21). For example, in **Bosnia**, Rose and Greeley (2006, p.23) found that where there was community engagement with education, it occurred as a substitute for the state, resulting in it undermining rather than contributing to state legitimacy in the longer term. However, a literature review of service delivery and state legitimacy finds that there is still a lack of clear evidence on whether non-state provision has a negative impact on the legitimacy and visibility of the state (Ndaruhutse et al, 2011, p. 47).

In some cases, those supporting education delivery have tried to build capacity and structures which can integrate with state structures when they regain the capacity to deliver education (Brannelly et al, 2009). For example, community and home-based schools in **Afghanistan** are often supported by NGOs and UNICEF (Sigsgaard, 2009, p. 20). Many of these organisations recommend that all education support should help build the capacity of the Ministry of Education (Sigsgaard, 2009, p. 20). Making community and home-based schools comply with Ministry of Education policies and curricula makes it easier to integrate them into the formal system and helps strengthen the government system as opposed to competing with it (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 17). A study of education in Afghanistan suggests that, while assessing education's impact on governance is problematic, in principle support to school management committees for community-based schools can promote local democracy (Sigsgaard, 2009, p. 24).

## 6. Rebel groups

In some situations, local populations cannot or do not accept the state, and international support can be channelled through rebel movements in control of these areas in order to ensure that education delivery is not interrupted (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 15). For example, international NGOs and UNICEF worked with the then rebel **Sudan** People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) during the conflict in southern Sudan (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 15). A Secretariat of Education, approved by SPLM in 1984, and in partnership with UNICEF since 2000, has developed into a Ministry of Education (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 15). There is growing consensus that when rebels provide services they are 'capable of building a larger base of support vis-à-vis the legitimacy gained as pseudo-governments' (Heger and Jung, 2013, p. 4; Grynkewich, 2008, p. 354). This is particularly the case when substituting for poor governance on the part of the state (Heger and Jung, 2013, p. 8).

However, complications can arise where this support 'heightens tensions between *de facto* and *de jure* governments, with external agencies caught in between' (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 15). Save the Children-Norway's work in **Nepal** was able to overcome the tensions between Maoists and the government through

---

<sup>4</sup> Please see Rohwerder, B. (2015). *Delivering education during conflict* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1209). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, for more information about the DREP.

the development of education committees formed at a very local level (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 16). These resulted in greater commitment from the District Education Office and helped put pressure on the Maoists to support the schools (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 16). The project helped bring together Maoists and government officials to support community driven initiatives (Rose and Greeley, 2006, p. 15).

Additionally, support to rebel authorities to provide education may play into conflict dynamics. A report looking at education and conflict in **Côte d'Ivoire** suggests that the government of Côte d'Ivoire may have played up the difficulties faced by the rebel groups in delivering education in areas under their control as a way to discredit these groups and legitimise the government position (Sany, 2010, p. 8). The government cancelled exams in rebel controlled areas, justified by security concerns, and declared some of the schools opening there as illegal, while public services in government areas went uninterrupted (Sany, 2010, p. 8). This led the rebels to accuse the government of 'cultural genocide' and a parallel education system was put in place with the support of international NGOs and donors (Sany, 2010, p. 8).

As a result donors and NGOs became part of the conflict dynamics, as by 'providing education to the northern citizens and contributing to the development of a parallel education system, the NGOs may have inadvertently prolonged the conflict by bolstering the rebels' legitimacy' (Sany, 2010, p. 9). However, this possible impact has not been examined in great detail (Sany, 2010, p. 9).

### ***Rebel groups and service provision***

A number of different studies look at the impact of rebel groups engaging in service delivery more broadly. A study of social services provided by violent non-state groups found that their service provision can deprive the state of the legitimacy that stems from the social contract (Grynkewich, 2008, p. 350). However, removing these groups and the services they provide risks causing a humanitarian crisis and radicalising populations (Grynkewich, 2008, p. 350). The paper suggests one way to overcome this issue is through a strategy of "displacement," whereby the state removes non-state social services while at the same time extending its own welfare capacity (Grynkewich, 2008, p. 350). Such a strategy is likely to require outside assistance, actions that do not alienate the support of citizens, and risks a potential short-term increase in violence (Grynkewich, 2008, p. 364).

A report published by the Joint Special Operations University looked at the role Hezbollah's service delivery played in gaining support from the people for its political aims (Love, 2010). Education is a priority for Hezbollah and they have spent USD 14 million on supporting it and developing a curriculum supportive of their ideas (Love, 2010, p. 25). This has resulted in the education of thousands of poor Shi'a throughout **Lebanon** and successfully marginalised the Lebanese Department of Education (Love, 2010, p. 25). Their provision of social services has resulted in political support and their election to parliament (in 2010 they held nine seats) (Love, 2011, p. 26).

Another study of over 400 terrorist and rebel groups and rebel service provision<sup>5</sup> argues that the provision of services such as education strengthens a group's organisational coherence by 'increasing support, legitimacy and organizational capacity associated with service provision' (Heger and Jung, 2013, p. 3). This is hypothesised to mean that these service providing groups are more likely to enter peace talks and that negotiations with them are more likely to be stable (Heger and Jung, 2013, p. 6). However, service provision is linked to specific types of violence such as to suicide bombing, attacks on civilian targets, and highly lethal attacks (Heger and Jung, 2013, p. 8).

---

<sup>5</sup> Focusing on their involvement in and behaviour during peace talks (Heger and Jung, 2013).

## 7. References

- Brannelly, L., Ndaruhutse, S., Rigaud, C. (2009). Donors' engagement: Supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states. UNESCO, IIEP, CfBT. Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001833/183363e.pdf>
- Burde, D., Kapit-Spitalny, A., Wahl, R., & Guven, O. (2011). *Education and conflict mitigation: what the aid workers say*. USAID & EQUIP1. Retrieved from: [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education\\_conflict\\_mitigation.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education_conflict_mitigation.pdf)
- Davies, L., & Bentrovato, D. (2011). *Understanding education's role in fragility: Synthesis of four situational analyses of education and fragility: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Liberia*. Paris: IIEP. Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001915/191504e.pdf>
- Grynkewich, A.G. (2008). Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non- State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:4, 350-370. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10576100801931321>
- Heger, L., & Jung, D.F. (2013) *Negotiating with rebel governments: The effect of service provision on conflict negotiations*. Working paper presented at Annual Peace Sciences Meeting, Knoxville, TN, 26 October. Retrieved from: [http://www.du.edu/korbel/sie/media/documents/research\\_seminar\\_papers/negotiating\\_with\\_rebel\\_governments.pdf](http://www.du.edu/korbel/sie/media/documents/research_seminar_papers/negotiating_with_rebel_governments.pdf)
- INEE. (no date). *The multiple faces of education in conflict-affected and fragile contexts*. INEE. Retrieved from: [http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/INEE\\_Multiple\\_faces\\_of\\_ed\\_in\\_conflict-affected\\_\\_fragile\\_contexts\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/INEE_Multiple_faces_of_ed_in_conflict-affected__fragile_contexts_FINAL.pdf)
- Love, J.B. (2010). *Hezbollah: Social Services as a Source of Power*. Joint Special Operations University. Retrieved from: [http://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU10-5loveHezbollah\\_final.pdf](http://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU10-5loveHezbollah_final.pdf)
- McCloughlin, C. (2014). When Does Service Delivery Improve the Legitimacy of a Fragile or Conflict-Affected State? *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/gove.12091>
- Ndaruhutse, S., Ali, M., Chandran, R., Cleaver, F., Dolan, J., Sondrop, E., & Vaux, T. (2011). *State-building, Peace-building and Service Delivery in Fragile and Conflict-affected States: Literature review (Final Report)*. Practical Action, Save the Children, & CfBT. Retrieved from: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/SD34.pdf>
- Ndaruhutse, S., Dolan, J., Pearson, N., Talbot, C., Ali, M., Bohara, R., Kayijuka, G., Mtisi, S., Musoke, S., & Scott, R. (2012). *Synthesis Research Report: State-building, Peace-building and Service Delivery in Fragile and Conflict-affected States*. Practical Action, Save the Children, & CfBT. Retrieved from: [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Service\\_delivery\\_and\\_state\\_legitimacy.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Service_delivery_and_state_legitimacy.pdf)
- Rose, P., & Greeley, M. (2006). *Education in Fragile States: Capturing Lessons and Identifying Good Practice*. Paper prepared for the DAC Fragile States Group. Retrieved from: [https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/Education\\_and\\_Fragile\\_States.pdf](https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/Education_and_Fragile_States.pdf)

Sany, J. (2010). *Education and Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire* (Special Report 235). Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/special\\_report\\_235.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/special_report_235.pdf)

Save the Children. (2014). *Futures under threat: The impact of the education crisis on Syria's children*. London: Save the Children. Retrieved from: [http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/FUTURES\\_UNDER\\_THREAT.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/FUTURES_UNDER_THREAT.PDF)

Sigsgaard, M. (2009). *Education and fragility in Afghanistan: a situational analysis*. Paris: IIEP. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education\\_and\\_fragility\\_in\\_afghanistan.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education_and_fragility_in_afghanistan.pdf)

Smith, A. (2014). Contemporary challenges for education in conflict affected countries. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 3:1, 113-125. Retrieved from:  
[http://eprints.ulster.ac.uk/29259/1/Smith%2C\\_A.\\_\(2014\)\\_Contemporary\\_Challenges\\_for\\_Education\\_in\\_Conflict\\_Affected\\_Countries.\\_Journal\\_of\\_International\\_and\\_Comparati.pdf](http://eprints.ulster.ac.uk/29259/1/Smith%2C_A._(2014)_Contemporary_Challenges_for_Education_in_Conflict_Affected_Countries._Journal_of_International_and_Comparati.pdf)

Sultana, R.G. (2006). Education in conflict situations: Palestinian children and distance education in Hebron. *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, 11:1, 49-81. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.um.edu.mt/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/39472/Hebron-MJES.pdf](https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/39472/Hebron-MJES.pdf)

Trani, J-F., Kett, M., Bakhshi, P., & Bailey, N. (2011). Disability, vulnerability and citizenship: to what extent is education a protective mechanism for children with disabilities in countries affected by conflict?. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15:10, 1187-1203.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.555078>

## 8. About this report

This report is based on four days of desk-based research. It was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2015.

The GSDRC Research Helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of key literature and of expert thinking in response to specific questions on governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. Its concise reports draw on a selection of the best recent literature available and on input from international experts. Each GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report is peer-reviewed by a member of the GSDRC team. Search over 400 reports at [www.gsdrc.org/go/research-helpdesk](http://www.gsdrc.org/go/research-helpdesk). Contact: [helpdesk@gsdrc.org](mailto:helpdesk@gsdrc.org).

### Expert contributors

Susy Ndaruhutse, CfBT Education Trust  
Danielle Jung, Emory University  
Lindsay Heger, One Earth Future Foundation

### Suggested citation

Rohwerder, B. (2015). *Education and building legitimacy during conflict* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1213). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.