

**Education in Emergencies as a Catalyst to Peace and Development:
The Essential Role of a Community of Adults**

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SUB-THEME OF INTEREST: *EDUCATION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RECOVERY*

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ABSTRACT

This paper presented at the 11th UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development presents the methodology used by AVSI and The Permanent Centre for Education, in Kampala, Uganda, to enhance education in emergency situations. The methodology rests on the conviction that affected children need adults who will guide them to re-discover their inner values as human beings, instilling hope and catalyzing development and peace. This paper argues how this is the first and most important level of protection, why psychosocial support must be an integral part of formal and non-formal education contexts if we are to achieve quality education in emergencies and improve the sustainability of investments.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Psychosocial training for a community of adults improves education in emergency and post-conflict settings
- This low-cost methodology enhances material investments in education in emergencies
- Quality education which engages a community of adults around children sets a foundation for peace and development
- The PCE is a local resource in Uganda which has seen positive results in terms of impact on teachers and schools

KEYWORDS

Education, Emergency Programs, Conflict, Psychosocial, Global Programs

1. INTRODUCTION

When unprecedented disaster threatens the functioning of communities, education becomes a crucial first level of protection for children, with the further potential to accelerate recovery and development, keeping in mind that neither of these results will be achieved automatically.

This paper responds to the following questions from the experience of a local centre for education located in Kampala, Uganda, within its history of collaboration with AVSI, an international development organization.

- *How can education contribute to sustainable development and a peaceful society?*
- *In what way does education in emergency and post-conflict settings contribute to psychosocial recovery?*

Our philosophy of education rests on the conviction that care-givers must consider the full value of education in an individual's growth. The adults in vulnerable children's lives must deliver education as a tool that helps learners recover their identity, self worth and sense of belonging. A broadened understanding of education, its purpose and the main actors involved is essential in all circumstances, but becomes more urgent in situations of conflict and emergency. Methodologically speaking, the approach proposed in this paper does not argue for the need of bringing psychosocial experts into emergency contexts, but to empower existing human resources to give value to the fullness of the human person, and in particular to oneself and to the child or student. It is a method that complements provision of material inputs (school infrastructure, learning materials and related basic goods such as food and water) and has the potential to be a low-cost catalyst for generating high quality educational environments for war affected children, youth and adults.

The PCE¹ methodology has been developed from our experience with AVSI Foundation's² interventions in education in emergencies. With over 25 years of experience in East Africa and the Great Lakes region, AVSI has been engaged in ensuring that all children have access to quality education--both in peaceful times and in emergencies--as a critical building block for the development of each country, each community, and each person. It is from these enriching experiences that the PCE has developed a holistic response to education particularly suited for post-conflict settings that has yielded valuable results.

¹ The Permanent Centre of Education (PCE) is a non-profit company that was founded from the experience of Fondazione AVSI education programs. It was established in Uganda in 2002 and has facilitated Education in Emergencies responses in other countries like Rwanda, South Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi, Kenya and Democratic Republic of Congo.

² Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (The Association of Volunteers in International Service – AVSI) is an international, non profit, non government organization founded in Italy in 1972. AVSI has development programs in 32 countries of Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

2. Historical Background

2.1 The Emergency Experience in Northern Uganda and the Region

In the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda and areas of South Sudan, the education of thousands of children has been interrupted by decades of conflict since the early 1980s. As a result, educators in these communities are presented with children with a multitude of challenges as they embark on re-integrating them into schools. Many ex-child soldiers who were fortunate enough to escape from captivity find themselves far behind their classmates and unable to concentrate on their curriculum-based school activities.

Some of these children have not only witnessed brutal murders but have also been forced to kill while in captivity. Young girls have been exploited as sex slaves and rape victims. Inevitably, children in these conditions register high dropout rates, and those who do remain in school tend to lose their curiosity and enthusiasm for life in general, exhibiting risky behavior and often times registering minimum academic or cognitive progress.

Because the teachers who care for these children nearly always come from the same community, they consequently have had similar traumatic experiences. These caretakers find themselves tasked with the important role of providing not just curriculum based learning, but also a sense of normalcy to the children.

However, many of these teachers, trained and untrained, are largely unprepared for the reality of the task that awaits them in these classrooms. According to the UNICEF status report of 2006, teachers without appropriate training have the potential to exacerbate risks to already vulnerable children. Such a situation would certainly contradict the fundamental principle that education should mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict and facilitate recovery.

AVSI has been present in Northern Uganda since the early eighties, even before the insurgency and civil war that began in 1986. During that difficult period and up to today, AVSI has never abandoned the people, but has grown with them trying to face the difficult situation with the help and efforts of the local population. AVSI's approach has improved and developed by struggling day after day to find the best solutions to the always evolving situation.

At the beginning of the insurgency in northern Uganda, thousands of people from the villages were gathered and internally displaced in camps; 2 million people were displaced in 20 years. These people were initially gathering around the hospitals and trading centers which transformed into large, densely populated IDP camps. In the conflict in northern Uganda, children were the most critically vulnerable, not only because many of them were orphans, but also because they were the target of the LRA rebels seeking child soldiers.

The first step in AVSI's response was to protect the children who were loitering around in the camps without any kind of help or surveillance. The situation was critical;

thousands of children lived in displacement with no educational infrastructure, no scholastic materials, and no teachers. AVSI, together with other NGOs and the local governments, intervened by putting in place temporary infrastructure and providing food, soap and basic non food items.

The international community was doing a terrific job, but the conflict was not ending and a new intensification of the conflict broke forth in 1994. It was in this second phase of the conflict that AVSI played a focal role in changing the approach to the emergency situation in education. Thanks to the experience it had in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, AVSI began to look at the problem of education from a different perspective.

Orphans and traumatized children are constantly exposed to the risk of being abandoned to their own destiny, being marginalized or stigmatized. The school, or simply the gathering place where these children were invited to spend their time, gave AVSI the opportunity to start working with each one of them. Emergencies sometimes make one lose focus, swallowed by the myriad things to do and problems to solve. But the worst that can happen is to lose the center of your intervention, that is, to lose the child by reducing him/her to the needs or problems he/she has. This was clear in Rwanda where children who lost their parents would refuse food or treatment for their wounds. **AVSI saw this as evidence of the need for each and every child to be embraced, to feel that he/she belongs to someone.**

This is the simplest of all the conclusions, but it was the least understood. AVSI began to communicate this fundamental approach to the social workers, to the medical staff, and especially to the teachers and caretakers who were spending most of their time with these children.

2.2 Psychosocial Programs and Education- Protection and Development

AVSI was one of the first agencies in Rwanda and northern Uganda to implement psychosocial trainings. But this is not the solution in itself, but rather is the beginning of a path. This is the point of departure of all of the work of the Permanent Centre for Education: when educators, social workers or medical staff members discover their own value and their own needs and desires, they easily understand that even the patient or the child in front of them has the very same needs and desires. Caretakers become more available and attentive to the people they care for, who in turn start feeling again that they are important for somebody, that they are loved by someone. A qualitative difference in services results from this change of perspective of oneself and of the other.

Applied to the school environment, AVSI's psychosocial trainings have been offered to teachers and administrators. Children will never stay in or return to school if the school doesn't become an attractive place; and what makes the school attractive is more than just the sum of the school buildings, materials, and possibly the food. The attractiveness of a school is the subject in front of the children, that is, the teacher. Therefore, the role of the educator must be reinforced and unveiled. **In this way, the school can truly become the first line of protection for children; not simply with the school as a place of refuge, but rather as the host to a person (an adult) who stands in front of these children**

and looks at them for what they really are, that is, for their irreducible uniqueness and dignity.

Emergency situations can last from a few months to many years. In Sub-Saharan Africa, many conflicts have been endured for more than 20 years (Uganda, South Sudan, Somalia, etc). In these situations, the challenges continue to multiply, affecting all sectors of life including education. In the long run, prolonged emergencies tend to have a deleterious effect on livelihoods and the fabric of social life. In a society where a child of 10 or 15 years has never seen his/her parents working a single day, or where youth in their twenties spend their days drinking or watching television, what is the chance for real future development? Which role can education play in this context?

In post-emergency settings different actors rush in with lots of educational inputs, like back-to school kits and reconstruction of buildings. These are all very necessary and good material inputs, but they are expensive and without committed and focused adults to utilize them well, their value can be reduced or their potential not fully unlocked. Rescuing the meaning and importance of work in such a context becomes a priority. Education is all-encompassing, meaning it is not only for all the children but for everybody-- women, men, youth, and adults--and touches upon all aspects of life.

In emergency contexts it is too easy to forget that giving away food for free is necessary and of paramount importance in certain situations, but doing it for decades without accompanying these actions with any educational interventions is not only unsustainable in the long run, but it becomes harmful. There cannot be development without helping people to grow in the consciousness of the importance of their lives, and of the dignity of their work, whatever it may be. To become responsible for one's own life and the lives of one's wife and children is not automatic. Each one of us needs to be educated. That is why AVSI and PCE use the same approach with the communities, with the parents or guardians, and also with the school management committees and the local government officers. **Unless the whole community realizes the fact that working, caring for somebody else's life and taking care of what is called the common good is a need for each and every human being, there shall never be true development. Individualism and egoism shall prevail; and out of this, corruption, misgovernment and conflict.**

3. Criteria for Action

In recent years, psychosocial support has become a recognized and necessary component of education programming in emergencies and transitional contexts. As a result, humanitarian relief agencies have had to re-think and re-define the role of teachers, parents/guardians, and social workers. The PCE has implemented formation programs tailored for these three vital categories of care takers in the life of the child.

3.1 The Teacher as Care-Taker

The etymology³ of the verb '*to educate*' indicates that the primary duty of educators is 'to draw out...' The fundamental responsibility of an "educator" is to "draw out" all that a

³ Refer to Latin meaning of word "*educere*"

child possesses through the process of teaching and learning. The inherent value and potential of the child should be recognized as the starting point of the educational experience. However, in extremely difficult environments such as camps for internally displaced persons and other post-conflict settings, many teachers are preoccupied with the logistical challenges of teaching; and in the best cases with the resulting grades of the children under their care.

The impact of such demanding environments on teacher morale and school quality cannot be underestimated. Even though some teachers demonstrate an understanding of the core curriculum, they often have no idea how to relate their academic subjects to the reality of the children's lives. Consequently, the children's life experiences are seemingly alienated from their classroom experiences, causing them to feel lost and unable to appreciate school in general. The teachers, on the other hand, feel dissatisfied, frustrated, and unable to offer meaningful companionship to their learners.

In contrast, it is amazing to see how the school in a post-conflict context can become a safe learning environment with mutually fulfilling relationships between the child and the teacher when an educator realizes the meaning of his/her job and its beauty.

3.2 The Social Worker as an Educative Companion

In transitional settings, social workers are often dispatched to communities as part of the humanitarian aid response, becoming crucial links in facilitating recovery and rehabilitation. The temporary learning shelters or schools usually serve as locations for social workers to carry out their follow-up interventions because of the uncertainty in many of the children's homes and lack of alternative community structures.

However, often these social workers are preoccupied with administrative responsibilities such as submitting vital records to their development agencies. This challenge is increased among those whose scope of work includes paying school and health care fees and delivering basic requirements to individual children. Inevitably, the need to focus on administrative and logistical details that are required by donors results in marginalization of the fundamental emotional wellbeing of the child. A social worker in such an environment finds himself/herself interacting with a child in an almost 'mechanical' way going through the motions, unable to develop an affective relationship.

The possibility for a change is still there. AVSI and the PCE have seen how the presence of a social worker even in big communities can significantly change the relationships among other social workers and with caretakers or how this presence can become a recognized reference point for the whole community.

3.3 Parents and the Family on the Educational Path

Disaster and armed conflict always alter the core structure of families. It is not uncommon to find child-headed families and disintegrated homes. This phenomenon leaves the parenting duties in the hands of adults in the extended family or community.

Despite such devastating circumstances, the family unit as we know it remains a critical starting point for the educational process. We have discovered that non-formal education, i.e. the attention and stimulation received by children in their home, forms an integral part of the formal education experience. However, because many parents' perception of guardianship is restricted to the provision of fees and scholastic materials, children seldom get this first form of education.

In cases of education in emergencies, young learners need even more than just food, shelter, safety and health care. Such a learner needs love, acceptance and appreciation. He/she needs to be perceived first and foremost as a human being, then as a learner.

While true in all cases, the need for educational environments to be based on this value of the person is more dramatic in environments marked by violence and insecurity. In some communities where AVSI and the PCE have worked, former child soldiers who were forced to kill their own kin while in captivity have not always been readily accepted or re-integrated in their families. As a result, the children's sense of worthlessness is heightened, thereby making them even more vulnerable to risks and less open to learning. In such circumstances, educators cannot embark on rehabilitating the child single-handedly. Instead, the parent/guardian and social worker must be equipped to help the child face the reality of his/her new life with courage and responsibility.

4. Methodology of the PCE

The Permanent Centre for Education has developed a pro-active and comprehensive approach to enhancing education in emergencies. Our methodology is best illustrated through two key tenets:

- The person is the pivotal center and purpose of any development program.
- All people and communities, regardless of their situation, carry with them a wealth of resources, a positive place from which to begin.

Our experience indicates that to educate is not simply to train or impart knowledge but to bring out of the person his/her full potential, and this dynamic process not only engages the learner but also the educator. In developing activities, PCE focuses on education as a tool to help children recover their identity, self worth and sense of belonging. We perceive the human person as unique and unrepeatable. The PCE uses a learner-centered methodology, rather than a lecture method, in our training workshops where we involve trainees in an active and constructive participation, provoking and guiding them to discover the content by themselves. This is done by asking them to refer to personal experiences, daily life situations and significant testimonies. **PCE trainings reach out to all three categories of key stakeholders who impact on the lives of children in emergencies and post-emergency contexts: teachers, social workers and parents.**

The PCE believes that every person and every community represents a potential resource, no matter how vulnerable they are. This means to value the tradition, experiences and relationships of every person. This principle originates from a positive approach to reality

and helps persons recognize their own value and dignity and take up their own responsibilities. For this reason, our training modules rest on the conviction that education should form persons able to deal with all the challenges of life, developing their potential, values and attitudes, taking up their commitments as people who can stand in front of every reality with passion, courage and certainty. **The ideal of the PCE is an educational environment where each child and adult can experience a belonging and gain a perspective of hope for his/her life and future. Herein lies the potential for education to best contribute to a peaceful society and sustainable development.**

4.1 Entry Point: Headmasters and All-School Approach

While PCE interventions have a proposal that extends beyond the walls of the school buildings, the focus remains on schools as the primary place of learning and as an essential point of community gathering. In communities where young people are struggling to stay in school against a backdrop of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and a complete distortion of society as they knew it, we have found that children need adults who will accept them and guide them to re-discover their inner value as human beings. This requires a collective approach to caregivers in making a committed return to the core substance of education. Our approach aims at giving coherence in the educational proposal; all the people involved in the educational process of a child must share the approach in order not to create confusion or skepticism.

The headmasters are our entry point and remain a focal point in the development of the educational proposal. The PCE has found that if a headmaster becomes aware of the importance of the newly proposed methodology, his/her way of working changes and as a consequence the way teachers prepare their lessons or relate with the learners changes too. Teachers are the second focal point of interventions and trainings.

Let's not forget that schools in Sub-Saharan African countries tend to occupy almost all the time of the students, most of whom spend from 10 to 12 hours a day in the school compound and more than half of them live as boarders. That is why after meeting the teachers we always prepare seminars for the non-teaching staff, valuing their jobs and responsibilities as important contributions to the school environment.

From our experience, we have seen that the level of commitment of teachers is most often proportional to the interest that the school management committees (SMCs) have in scholastic issues. Often, SMCs are frequently absent and not influential. We created a special training session to help them in their role.

Our attention couldn't withdraw from the parents/guardians. The tendency for them is to think that once the children are attending school the responsibility of their education is completely left to the teachers and the parents' role is relegated to the payment of the school fees. They usually need help to regain the importance of the parental role and to understand better the wide scope of education.

Lastly, the PCE also gives attention to the role played by the social workers who are often times the connection between the child and the school as well as the child and the

family. Sometimes, the child is enrolled in a school without any adult relative to back him up. In such situations, the social workers take on a double role of sponsor and guardian.

5. Results

The PCE has conducted 300 trainings for an estimated 17,000 beneficiaries from 2002 to date. These trainings have been held not only in Uganda but also in Kenya, Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Kazakhstan, Israel and Thailand.

An internal qualitative evaluation has been conducted soliciting feedback from those who have attended PCE training courses. The findings are encouraging and promising. From a recent post-intervention questionnaire we found that, according to the participants, our intervention were considered “useful” or “very useful” for the improvement of their professionalism by 98% of the trainees (55% “very useful”), and most of them (98%) confirmed that it was useful also for their personal life.

What is surprising is that despite the fact that the training did not directly address some issues like teaching methodology, relationships among colleagues, or correction of students, many teachers declared that their approach to these aspects of their work had improved. For example the evaluation provides evidence of the following:

- Change in how teachers look at their students: Many related that each learner has acquired importance and the past of these students has become interesting to them as teachers.
- Change in how teachers present lessons: 70% of the Teachers said that they now set specific objectives in their lessons, and most importantly, they declare that now their focus is not on themselves but on the students.
- Change in manner of discipline and correction, with greater respect and marked shift away from corporal punishment and humiliation as discipline.
- Improved collaboration among teachers, both professionally and personally: 60% of the Teachers communicated that they are more interested in involving parents in the daily progress of their pupils.

Overall, the feedback from schools where PCE has conducted trainings supports the conclusion that this approach improves teacher motivation and enhances the learning environment. AVSI and the PCE expect that there will be multiplier effects including reduced teacher absenteeism and turn-over, reduced drop-out rates, increased enrollment and ultimately improved learning.

PCE continues to improve its interventions with groups and schools. In particular, more work is being done to measure the impact on the children in the schools reached, who at the end of the day are the primary targets of the interventions as well as the best hope for the future of the countries where we work.

6. Conclusions

We end this paper where we began- with the view that in the aftermath of armed conflict or natural disaster humanitarian aid interventions in formal and non formal education have to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to yield valuable and lasting results. We cannot forget that in education, nothing is mechanical; material inputs are necessary but not sufficient for results to be seen in terms of learning and well-being of students.

The initiatives of the Permanent Centre for Education have grown out of AVSI's engagement with communities in the middle of and immediately following emergency situations, and primarily violent ones in Sub-Saharan Africa. AVSI continues to be committed to education of all children at all times. Within the context of a growing global commitment not to forget education in emergencies and post-conflict settings, we also cannot forget the importance of equipping adults to deliver education well and in a way that can really contribute to peace and development of a community. This paper presents one example of an organization fulfilling this role, the PCE, a local education provider in a small city suburb of Kampala called Luzira. The PCE is equipped to collaborate with a range of partners to enhance the quality of education by working directly with schools in ways that enhance the material inputs, putting the dignity of the person at the centre.

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