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Addressing 'serial disruption': designing and providing education for children caught up in conflict

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Abstract

The conflict in Sri Lanka, which has recently ended, has spanned several decades and affected generations of children in the north and east of the island. This paper, based on field research carried out in 2009 just as the conflict was ending, explores the obstacles to providing quality education to children caught up in the conflict. Despite the efforts of the government and national and international NGOs to provide an alternative education, significant numbers of the children fail to progress: the reasons include a lack of priority given to education during times of conflict and a focus on short and medium term solutions which do not address the children's long-term needs. A central argument in this paper is that it is an understanding of the effects of 'serial disruption' suffered by these children and their families, where they are moved frequently and at short notice from place to place, which is key to understanding this failure. The paper draws together the successful features of several initiatives from Sri Lanka for a discussion of what needs to be in place to provide quality education for children on the move, in terms of infrastructure, curriculum and teaching.

Keywords: education, conflict; post-conflict displacement; disruption; Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

In fragile and conflict-affected states around the world, generations of children are suffering from repeated disruption to their education which can span the whole of their school lives. This paper is based on research funded by UNICEF Region of South Asia (ROSA), and carried out in Sri Lanka during 2009 as part of a study into alternative means of providing basic education for 'hard to reach' children in South Asia (CDEC 2009a). The research in Sri Lanka focused on children caught up in conflict (CDEC 2009b)

The civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) started in 1983 and ended in May 2009, typical of the general picture of intra-state armed conflict in terms of the duration of the violence (UNESCO, 2011, p, 138). It was fought primarily in the north and north-east of the country. In the final decade, the fragile ceasefire agreement of 2002-January 2008 was marred by serious levels of conflict throughout its existence, and over the final 17 months of the war, the government of Sri Lanka regained control of the whole island.

The length of the internal conflict in Sri Lanka means inevitably, that there has been an acute lack of robust government data for the conflict-affected areas in the north: the most

recent national census to include the north was conducted in 1981. The seven districts missing from census data, in effect, 28% of the sample (MoE, 2008:1), are predominantly populated by Tamils, so data on one of the acknowledged ethnic and religious groups involved in the conflict is missing from all national statistics. Even recent national surveys (e.g. the 2011 Dept of Census and Statistics Child Labour Survey) do not include data from the Northern province. In addition, there are no systematically maintained databases of the child population at national or provincial level, and thus no child-specific data, much less such data disaggregated by age, gender and administrative locality (Social Science Research Council, 2006). Given this, statistics on education in Sri Lanka need to be treated with caution. Despite Sri Lanka's reputation as a country which has extremely high levels of primary net enrolment and high transition rates from primary to secondary school to complete the 9 year cycle of compulsory education, government figures suggest that 8% of children aged 5-14 could be out of school. (MoE 2008, p, 68) and other figures suggest a much higher proportion, e.g. of 18% failing to complete Grade 9 (World Bank 2005). And in districts in the north and east where the conflict was mainly located, it seems likely that local proportions are markedly higher. One Sri Lankan study for example, suggests that dropout within one district might be higher than 30% (Jayaweera and Gunawardena 2007, p, 30) and DfID suggests as of 2004 that one million children under the age of 18 in the north and east were affected by the war, and one third of school-aged children had either never attended school or had dropped out (DfID 2004, p, 76)

Besides those who may have dropped out, disruption to education includes those who officially remain within the education system but whose schooling has been significantly affected. Such children can have very different patterns of enrolment and attendance and these patterns have implications for the design of initiatives that are intended to meet their needs. Children may be enrolled but attending rarely because they are afraid of violence and abuse on the way to school, harassment at checkpoints, abduction or landmines. A child trying to overcome these obstacles in situations of conflict may have well-grounded fears about getting to and from school. And on arrival at school the needs of one particular child may be different – in some very complex ways – to those of another equally vulnerable child in the same class. Those needs typically concern social and emotional well-being as well as academic learning, and altogether there need to be highly attuned and flexible responses by those organizing education if such a child is to hope to succeed.

2. Displacement

Displacement has been the most significant cause of conflict-related educational disruption in Sri Lanka. In the final year of the war, during the period April 2008 to May 2009 for example, more than 280,000 Sri Lankans were internally displaced, adding to the at least 227,000 who remained displaced from the period prior to April 2008 (iDMC 2011). Cumulatively over the 3 decades of the conflict, at least one million people (iDMC, 2008:3) were displaced and iDMC estimated that the lives of at least 300,000 children have been affected (iDMC, 2008:8).

As we know, violence reinforces inequalities and it is the poorest who are worst affected (UNESCO 2011) and least able to deal with the crises. Education remains the most neglected area of the humanitarian response to conflict and displaced children are among the 'least visible' and at the risk of extreme disadvantage in education (UNESCO 2011). Schools were routinely used by the security forces and as temporary camps for IDPs, meaning that they were routinely targeted and attacked, and rebuilding has become a significant concern (UNESCO 2011, p,143-144).

Displacement takes many forms and can involve movement within a conflict area; movement from a conflict area to a camp or resettlement area; return home after the immediate emergency; relocation to another camp or resettlement area, and repeated displacement from the new area for numerous reasons. Displacement is often not a single event, but a number of random forced migrations, which may display no coherent pattern of movement, may consist of temporary stops each lasting only a few weeks and might altogether last for months, years or even decades. Not all displaced people live in camps or centres, or far from their home areas: some live on the streets, others with relatives, whilst a few find new accommodation. Of those who live in camps, some are in very temporary immediate relief/transit camps, with no freedom of movement; others are in 'temporary' IDP camps, either with or without freedom of movement; still others are in permanent IDP camps, again either with or without freedom of movement; whilst others are in resettlement villages.

So, we would argue that the following time/place-related 'sites of conflict or displacement' are important for children caught up in conflict:

- immediate: immediately at the outbreak/resumption/intensification of conflict, at the site of conflict
- ongoing: at the site of ongoing, sustained conflict, when families continue to live in or near their home
- short term: at the site of first displacement (short term may be repeated with a further displacement)
- medium or long term: at IDP camps, with no freedom of movement outside the camp
- medium or long term: at IDP camps, with freedom of movement outside the camp (e.g. to attend a 'host' school); living with relatives ; living with 'host' families
- long term: in resettlement villages/returned to their home areas.

The factors necessary for the success of any educational initiative will in some ways be determined by the different conditions and histories of each of these settings. The danger of such a list of settings, however, is that it may suggest a possible coherence of provision and a progression of support which it is not possible to provide. From the point of view of an individual child caught up in conflict, the period of displacement may in fact be a bewildering series of re-locations with each successive re-location promising some stability, some settling down, but subsequently disrupted again by further forced movement at short notice. In each location a group of displaced people will form and

with each subsequent displacement, fragment and reform in different groups in different locations. The route navigated through displacement by an individual child may in fact be incoherent.

3. Serial disruption

> "Our hometown was Pungudutheevu. During [the] '79 troubles, my parents were displaced and settled at Chettikulam. During [the] '83 troubles, they went to Killinochchi. Due to the '95 troubles, we came to Madhu, and from there again, during the '98 troubles, we came here to Arasadikulam". (SSRC 2006, p, 30)

One aspect of displacement which appears under-reported is the overall 'serial disruption' on the education of children. Data from the field study suggests that the effect of serial disruption to children's education is much more than cumulative. The fieldwork carried out included visits to 10 schools in the Batticaloa and the Trincomalee districts of Sri Lanka, in areas which supposedly were resettled, with families returned from displacement and back in their original communities. But parents and carers in each school told similar stories, where the family had been moved on for periods of up to two and a half years from 2006 onwards, with frequent moves often of a relatively short distance (e.g. 5 kilometres), at short notice and for short-term stay. And in each school visited, only a proportion of the children had returned – one school had only 40% of the children it had prior to displacement, and the school with the highest proportion had 70%.

For a child, each placement in a new location may have lasted only a few weeks before a subsequent move, and the family, if indeed still all together, on the move again. And the families from one community would with each move become more separated from each other, so that children were separated from their friends, classmates, and from their teachers. In focus group discussion with parents, pupils, teachers, volunteer teachers, and interviews with headteachers, education zonal directors, and aid agency officials, there was a consistent picture of how fragmented an experience this could be for children, with education provision in each new location set up as a temporary response to a short-term need. Parents in Muttur for example spoke of their gradual step by step displacement to IDP camps in Batticaloa (an overall distance of perhaps 100-150km). Children were eventually set up in schools in the IDP camps: volunteer teachers spoke of giving classes by oillamp in the IDP camps, the size of the class determined by how far the light could shine, and children spoke of playing games and cards. Eventually these children were accommodated in extra shifts at various local schools in Batticaloa, but by that time, according to the parents, the children, out of school for between one, two or more years, could not easily reintegrate back into classes. It is not clear what help they were given in schools to do so and parents also spoke of their children being stigmatized by their status. A headteacher spoke of a school originally of 800 having only 330 back in the school after two and a half years, and the school was operating while still full of shellholes and rusting broken metal furniture.

Given the thousands of children displaced the volatility of the situation in these districts – particularly at the height of the local conflicts which occurred from 2006-2008 – and the

necessary sharing of humanitarian support across government departments and different aid agencies, there would have been great difficulties in providing holistic long-term support for each child in such a situation. So, for the conflict-affected child in Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts, the field study suggests there were a series of short-term make-do classes using whatever provision (for example volunteer adults and whatever teaching materials could be made available) Aid agencies have taken account of psycho-social needs and the children told stories of play and games in the IDP camps, but each story made clear the lack of coherent individual provision of coherent and long-term learning for each child.

And the freedom to move back home did not signal the end of the dis-location. In all the resettlement areas visited there was a large and intimidating military presence everywhere, both army and local militia, with repeated checkpoints, some within in sight of the schools visited. Basic infrastructure at schools (water supply, sanitation) was often not in place, livestock and other means of livelihood had often been destroyed and not all families had returned. Some had picked up employment elsewhere and their children were travelling from distance into school – living a transient lifestyle. Others had apparently stayed wherever they had ended up. One or two of the parents I talked to spoke about their own displacement as children and that their current home was where they had ended up. And most of the parents I talked to across the 10 schools had not completed Grade 9; many had not completed primary school. As the local UNICEF Head of Station explained about the current situation, no-one had any idea where missing children were living or how many or indeed whether children were in education. His analogy was of education provision in the area like 'a supermarket' for people to access if they could, but with no matching to the particular needs of people, and no motivation to gather robust data on those needs.

4. Education during times of conflict

4.1 Provision

This is not to denigrate the important work which was being carried out to try and alleviate the situation. There has been considerable exploration of the conditions and parameters for successful educational responses in times of conflict, Since 2005, there has been an interagency cluster set up under the auspices of OCHA in Sri Lanka and agencies which have been heavily involved include Save the Children, Plan, GTZ, Savodaya, and UNICEF. Their involvement has helped to ensure that children's education continues to be considered in any response. But education until recently has been still relatively marginalised in any response to an emergency situations. It is underfunded, and more crucially is appears not to be planned for in the medium to long term (e.g. Dolan 2008). And as explained in a recent UNICEF study on Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia, there is minimal flexible and alternative provision in Sri Lanka for children whose needs are not met by the existing school system (Davies et al., 2008)

We would argue from our study, (CDEC 2009a, 2009b), that the educational requirements of all children in Sri Lanka caught up in conflict include:

- safety, physical and psychosocial responses, including medical care, therapy and counselling,
- opportunities to be distracted, play, enjoy themselves, meet friends, heal, learn vital life skills and learn what they would be, were they in school or its alternative
- structured learning which will enable them to keep up with their peers who are in school
- accredited learning within the national system, especially if their absences from formal schooling last more than a year
- support back into formal schooling, which may involve catch-up, remedial or bridge courses
- opportunities to obtain national qualifications, for example 'O' and 'A' levels.

4.2. Emergency provision

Where temporary learning centres (TLCs) have been set up, there has been major effort on the part of aid agencies to provide the constituent parts of schooling: a learning space, resources such as blackboard, chalk and exercise books, someone to teach, and resources such as textbooks for the children. The teacher's emergency pack, the 'school in a box' has been widely deployed in times of emergency and as an initial emergency response to address people's lack of basic facilities such as shelter, water, sanitation and food. 'School in a box' addresses these same kinds of needs – a tangible resource for physical and practical support. For example in the evening of the day I arrived in Trincomalee I met with the local UNICEF Education Officer who was in the process of setting up 3 TLCs for about 1500 students overall. He thought he had 26 teachers and 1 principal altogether to provide teaching, though he knew that was not enough and that there was a shortage of specialist teachers. Volunteers were being inducted but it was not clear how soon they could be used. He had 19 'school in a box' kits, for the basic necessities for setting up a classroom for the first 72 hours of the emergency situation.

'School in a box' does not of itself provide the means of teaching and learning: this also necessitates, among much else, curriculum materials and people to teach. School in a box is designed to be used with a 'locally developed teaching guide and curriculum' which means resourcing at a much more localized level than is required to provide the generic equipment in the school in a box. Providing appropriate local curriculum materials in local languages also necessitates a high degree of forward planning, both in terms of the logistics of getting the right materials to the right places, and in the longer-term, the resourcing and the development of the materials. The development of age-appropriate materials to be used in times of conflict is a major undertaking and providing materials for a sound and balanced education for each grade level, or perhaps across more than one grade level, is a significant task. Added to this is the fact that as any teaching guide and curriculum may well have to be mediated by volunteers rather than qualified and

experienced teachers, it will need to be written with this in mind. So providing a school in a box may not always be the simple response it first appears. Developing the specific complementary resources, being able to deploy them in the quantities necessary, and finding sufficient adults able to teach will always be problematic in times of conflict.

4.3 Home provision

Perhaps in recognition of this, in 2009 the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, through the National Institute of Education (NIE) and with funding and technical assistance from a number of aid agencies including UNICEF, was developing a programme of 'home-school' modules. It is indicative of the difficulty of organizing alternative provision to school, that it took almost 3 decades of conflict in Sri Lanka, with several phases of conflict where there was significant displacement of the population in the north and east of the country, for the need to be acted upon. However the benefits should not be underestimated. This was to support children in conflict-affected areas, in situations where security issues mean that they could not attend school. The home–school modules, written in both Sinhalese and Tamil, were to provide primary-age learning to 'enable children to continue to follow the school curriculum and to attain the required level of learning achievement despite being unable to attend school on a daily basis'. And under the direction of NIE, the institute responsible for the development of all curriculum materials in the formal primary school system, the modules follow the national curriculum for these grade levels. Their deployment was envisaged in situations where an untrained local volunteer, 'a mediator', ideally a secondary school graduate, would lead the learning of a group of children at home. And a 'facilitator', a teacher, would support several groups, rotating among them to give guidance. By March 2009, only Grade 1 and Grade 2 materials were ready to be piloted, with Grade 3–5 materials still under development. But the finished materials were used extensively in Vavuniya in 2009 for children displaced in the final months of the fighting.

The potential drawbacks to this type of provision include the fact that the materials were designed for multigrade teaching and it is not always easy to pitch materials which are not too hard for children from the younger grade or too easy for children from the older grade, especially as teachers in Sri Lanka do not generally have experience of multigrade teaching. Primary curriculum developers in Sri Lanka have also typically found it difficult to reconceptualise materials as multigrade (Little et al 2006). Significantly, it was also easier for NIE to develop modules in Sinhalese than in Tamil, even though the need for Tamil-medium materials was much greater. On a positive note, this was much more flexible provision, in acknowledgement that there may not be qualified teachers on hand. Their design also addressed the problem of the situation of children varying from day to day to day and over an extended period, with multiple disruptions and the chance of missing school for days, weeks or months at a time.

However, it was still not clear how much the perspective of the individual child could be considered. These home-school modules, with each module designed as a once-only experience for the child were predicated on the idea of the child in a stable group of home learners with everyone remaining in the same physical location guided by an adult

who could pick up the threads of mediating the group each time there was a block on attending school. The serial disruption described earlier, with a child dislocated repeatedly and into different groupings of adults and children, would mean that a coherent following of the modules could be difficult. And it was not clear how much material there was – i.e. how much disruption these materials would accommodate. Neither was it clear whether this programme offered accredited learning for children, so that their continued learning through multiple periods of difficulty and disruption could be formally recognized on their eventual return to school.

4.4 Catch-up education

What was given much greater recognition with education authorities in Sri Lanka in 2009 was 'catch-Up Education' (CUE), something which for primary age children has since been combined with basic literacy programmes, under the heading of 'accelerated learning' (UNICEF 2011). In 2009, CUE was organized at zonal and provincial levels and provided with significant financial support and technical assistance from agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children. CUE was designed to support a wide variety of children, including those not attending school. A typical CUE class would be multigrade, run separately to others in the school either during school hours or outside them, and taken by specially trained teachers (or volunteers) adopting group-based and child-centred teaching methods. It had been used extensively by UNICEF, GTZ and other national and international NGOs in the north and east over a number of years.

The fieldwork in Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts provided key opportunities to explore how CUE was perceived in practice. One feature immediately apparent during the fieldwork visits in May 2009 was that catch-up education depended on the funding provided by the aid agencies and the arrangements for the teaching and learning needed to fit around the practicalities and the time taken to secure this. As a result, CUE was limited to only some schools and was only just about to begin in May, though the school year had begun in January. There did not seem to have been any systematic analysis of the effects on children of their participation in these classes, nor whether in fact they do reintegrate successfully back into the formal system. Where children are in catch-up classes during school time, they are necessarily missing out on the classes being taken by their peers. Further, it appeared within some of the schools visited that they were already running some sort of remedial class and the children who would be starting CUE were already separated out from their peers. Notwithstanding the fact that the aid agencies were offering bespoke (if seemingly limited) materials and training for these classes, it became apparent that in practice it is difficult to separate out the idea of catch-up classes from the idea of remedial classes, i.e. classes to help those children who might well always have difficulty in keeping up, including children with special needs or specific learning difficulties.

It would also appear from the field study that promotion to the next grade depended critically on whether the child had been in school, and the need to repeat a year seemed to correspond more regularly to non-attendance (after three months' absence a red line is drawn in the register) rather than a child not attaining a particular level. So, CUE class

may in some cases be a metaphor for the class taken by groups in the school who have the most difficulties with their learning. If this is so, this is a conflation of many different kinds of learning need. In Sri Lanka, perhaps more than in other South Asian countries, education is age-specific. Students are stigmatized by repeating a year and/or being separated out from their peers and this can be a major cause of dropout (e.g. MG Consultants 2009). A recurring theme in conversation with children during the field visits was their concern about being put into a separate group: one extremely shy young girl asked, in front of her headteacher and a large group of teachers and parents, not to be put in the catch-up group.

Another kind of catch-up offered through Ministry of Education-organized non-formal education for hard-to-reach children in 2009 included classes such as basic literacy classes. These were offered out of school hours to school-age children with the aim of reintegrating them back into the formal education system. The subsequent integration of CUE and basic literacy in schools is a progressive move, as large numbers of conflict-affected children and young people, i.e. a significant proportion of all school-age children displaced during the last decade or so would benefit from basic literacy classes.

Basic literacy classes were also available at local NFE centres, for young people aged 14+ who dropped out of school, though such basic literacy classes do not give any kind of accreditation of their own and it was not clear whether there were sufficient NFE personnel to identify the children out of school along with those who have never enrolled or dropped out, then send them to schools, literacy centres or NFE centres (e.g. MG consultants 2009). In 2009, the north and east lacked a large number of NFE centres. Precisely because of the conditions caused by the conflict, there was little or no support for education from the local communities, for example through the village committees which monitor school attendance and supervision and which support programmes of non-formal education.

Catch-up education provides a valuable means for some children of re-integrating into mainstream education after the disruption caused by conflict. However, what was designed to address a medium-term situation such as a single, quite lengthy absence from school has been used to address the long-term learning problems of students as well as shortcomings in the quality of provision of inclusive education in the formal system.

4.5 Alternative provision

What seemed to be relatively marginalized by educational authorities and the agencies in Sri Lanka was existing types of alternative education which could provide a coherent and long-term response to the needs of children caught up in conflict. Sri Lanka has an Open School, established since 2005 as a government department with significant though modest funding from agencies such as GTZ. Its courses, offered for the first time in 2007, have equivalency in terms of end of year accreditation for years in Lower Secondary onwards – i.e. Grade 6 and above in the formal system. Still in the process in 2009 of developing its complete programme, operating on a very modest scale, and formally targeted at students aged 15+, it nevertheless was apparent that Open School was

attracting a wider age range than its official remit and that it was starting to work with a significant number of IDPs and former IDPs. There had been no specific large-scale push by Open School to cater for those caught up in the conflict, although the centres in and around Puttalam, in the north-west of Sri Lanka and populated by a significant number of long-term IDPs, were teaching IDPs from Jaffna and Mannar. There had been no plans to open school centres in Batticaloa, Trincomalee or anywhere in Vavuniya, though there was a general plan to open new centres which would cater for more IDPs, with an awareness raising event was planned for Trincomalee. A visit to the centre in Puttalam as part of the field study indicated still modest numbers of students, with fewer than 1000 registered and reserved for courses, but increasing demand for what Open School has to offer, with sub centres opening and waiting lists for places. The tutors were adapting materials for younger learners on the basis of agreements negotiated with local Education Zone directors.

And a reminder if needed, that the kind of provision that Open School offers centres on highly structured learning materials which have been centrally and professionally produced for use at scale. The learning materials produced typically also include teacher/facilitator instructional guides and professional development materials as it is not always assumed that those in charge of the learning are qualified or experienced teachers. Open School learning is also typically designed around ease of access onto a programme and flexibility of provision in following it. Open School classes typically use a wide range of types of existing learning centres, and tend to assume that teachers/facilitators are mobile and can take the learning to where the class is. What is less helpful for primary-age and lower-secondary age children with an Open School model is that a lot of the learning consists of self-study, as Open School is more usually targeted at adults. Adaptation of any Open School-type materials for a younger age group would need to include the premise of face to face teaching as a requirement, if this type of provision were to gain favour.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Concerns

What was surprising, given the protracted nature of the conflict in Sri Lanka was the relative emphasis on short-term responses, the reliance on the formal system of education to provide solutions to the serial disruption to children's education, and the apparent political difficulties of countenancing any alternative longer term solution.

It appeared that Sri Lankan government priorities for educational interventions are firmly enshrined in the formal system as the primary site for the achievement of education for all, with non-mainstream options only for exceptional cases. But the formal school model, with its fixed schedules and five-to-seven year cycle, age-related enrolments and grades, and its teacher-delivered standard national curriculum, can present a barrier in itself. Children in times of conflict need provision which is flexible enough to respond to

their needs, and the context in which they live, but which also leads to recognised educational achievement and further educational opportunities.

It also appeared that it was difficult for all involved to enable 'child-centred' provision – that is to view needs from the perspective of the individual child. It is simplistic to ignore the difficulties in terms of physical danger, necessary speed of response, political considerations, logistics etc of an emergency situation. But three decades of conflict makes clear that what might seem like a series of separate, short term situations are in fact phases of a much larger and much more protracted situation.

5.2 Suggestions for future planning

Some of what has occurred in Sri Lanka will of course only apply to that context. But from those working in Sri Lanka, for local and national government, for local NGOs and international agencies, and those working in schools, and parents and pupils, there were a series of repeated suggestions which could have relevance elsewhere.

The first suggestion is to begin an educational response in any conflict-affected location with the view that it would need to last for 2-3 years, and that it would be necessary to plan for at least that length. This was the view of many involved in UNICEF Education in Sri Lanka and a considered reflection on the situation in Sri Lanka from 2006 onwards. Relevant to that discussion of course was the knowledge that this would involve, among much else, securing funding for the medium to long-term rather than the short-term (Dolan 2008).

The second suggestion is to plan the provision of education, as far as is possible, as if from the perspective of the individual child, taking into account the effects of these patterns of multiple disruption to attendance at school. This would for example entail provision in any location which can more easily take account of where the child has come from and what the child has just learnt, and builds on that. It would be foolish to underestimate the difficulty of this shift in perspective, but the potential for improving a response is significant, given for example, the figures on the current proportion of children dropping out from basic education in the conflict-affected areas in Sri Lanka because of the effects of such disruption to their education.

The third suggestions is to lobby local and national government for the means to discover where missing children are, what their education has been and what has happened to them. There have been small-scale local initiatives which have had some success have included teachers going round the area to look for 'missing' children. But it seems likely that in many situations, children on a large scale are 'missing' education and effectively their schooling is over.

The fourth suggestion is to plan for, design or adapt alternative curriculum which can be taught by non-experts, working with local and national government if at all possible, so that it fits national curriculum provision. With such provision, there need to be built-in explicit 'how to' guides for the volunteer teachers and all those supporting the learning. This addresses the issues in the medium to long term, and it seems helpful to first

consider the extension of existing alternative provision in the country if that can fit the situation. Open School, which is an appropriate example in Sri Lanka, is just one example of the kind of flexible provision which, where already established in a country could have the capacity to provide education to large numbers of conflict-affected children.

The final suggestion is to work with national government wherever possible to try to ensure that alternative provision of education is formally accredited as equivalent to the education the child would have been receiving. The equivalence of alternative educational provision and the accreditation of education at 'other than school' can help to ensure both a coherence of provision, and that children are credited for the learning that they have achieved outside school

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