# Continuity Education in Emergency and Conflict Situations: The Case for Using Open, Distance and Flexible Learning

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## Abstract

Emergency and conflict in countries such as Syria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan have made us more aware of the long-term serial disruption and psychosocial damage faced by people caught up in emergency and conflict areas. Open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) has sometimes been employed in these regions to maintain a degree of continuity in education. For the most part, however, this role has been *ad hoc,* short-term, and often bearing limited relation to the psychosocial and educational needs of the displaced or traumatised populations it serves.

But could ODFL play a more planned, significant and relevant role in emergency and conflict regions and if so, how? This paper will address this core question. We identify particular aspects of ODFL programmes, which are especially useful in reaching and extending basic and secondary education to hard-to-reach children and those in emergency and conflict contexts. Through a specific case study of the recent conflict in Sri Lanka, we show how ODFL is currently being used for these groups and to what effect. We argue that by building on proven achievements and integrating ODFL more systematically into the existing national planning for conflict and emergency zones, it could play a significant and cost-effective role in these regions and also, more widely, in facilitating links between the non-formal and formal sectors and improving the quality of provision.

# Introduction

### The Complexities of Education in Emergency Situations

Emergency situations, whether due to conflict, natural disaster, health epidemic or economic fallout, have, unsurprisingly, a direct impact on access to education. It is only relatively recently, however, that we have gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the complexities of that impact and what is needed to respond effectively and with sustainable results. For example, a recent report to the UN Human Rights Council, Coomaraswamy (2010) described the realities children face in refugee camps in Sudan, Chad and DR Congo:

> The first thing one notices is that they are dangerous, in the sense that you always meet children who have been victims of sexual violence when they went to get firewood or went to the toilet etc - so they are dangerous places. Secondly, they are places of idleness. There are situations where children are recruited into armed forces and therefore many

have been recruited by one group or another. A first step towards making things safer for displaced children would be a guarantee that all children are offered at least some regular education - to keep them away from the militias, and to give them some skills, for the time when they can restart their lives again.

In some regions, however, schools, students and teachers can be actual targets:

> Last November, men on motorbikes used water pistols to squirt acid in girls' faces as they walked to school on the outskirts of Kandahar. More than a dozen girls and several teachers at the Mirwais School for Girls had acid thrown in their faces and one was so badly disfigured that she had to go abroad for treatment. The attacks caused such distress and fear that many parents kept their girls home for several weeks but most have since returned to the school, vowing not to be intimidated'.

(Starkey, 2009)

Displacement of people – whether in emergency or conflict situation – is usually serial, has a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable communities and can extend beyond national boundaries. For example, among the many people affected in the monsoon flooding in Pakistan, were 45,000 Afghan refugees forced by the floods to flee from their refugee camps and without the identification cards needed for registration with the Pakistani relief organisations.

Responses, educational or otherwise, must take into account both immediate needs but also longer-term interventions and systems for recovery and reconstruction. This can be difficult to achieve because many international NGOs and donors tend to exit when the immediate impacts of an emergency have been stabilized. The shortfall in aid to Pakistan and Syria has reminded us too that donors prefer to fund countries that have both a good track record and good systems in place to disburse funds and to monitor spending. The International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) also warns us that 'depending on the nature of design and implementation education has the potential to perpetuate or entrench dynamics of fragility' (INEE, 2013).

Emergency situations can exclude large numbers of children and others from receiving any form of education.  According to recent estimates, (Save the Children, 2010, UNESCO ,2013) there are thirty-nine million school-age children (out of the estimated seventy-two million not in school) who live in conflict-affected areas and fragile states. One in three children in these areas do not attend school compared to one in eleven children in other low -income countries.  The figure is higher in some countries:  in Liberia, 73% of primary-aged children are out of school; 81% in Somalia and 80% in Afghanistan's Uruzgan, Helmand and Badges provinces. The barriers are highest for the poorest and most disadvantaged children: girls, children from minority ethnic groups, disabled children and those living in remote rural areas that have little or no chance at all of going to school.

**The Role of Education in Emergencies**

The vital role of education as a response to emergencies has been recognized with the establishment of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) - a global network of around 1,400 individual and organisational members who work together within a humanitarian and development minimum standards framework to ensure the right to education in emergencies and

post-crisis reconstruction:

> Education is not only a right, but in situations of emergencies, chronic crises and early reconstruction, it provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection, which can be both life saving and life-sustaining. Education sustains life by offering safe spaces for learning, as well as the ability to identify and provide support for affected individuals – particularly children and adolescents. Education mitigates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by giving a sense of normalcy, stability, structure and hope for the future during a time of crisis, and provides essential building blocks for future economic stability…. it can also save lives by protecting against exploitation and harm, including abduction, recruitment of children into armed groups and sexual and gender-based violence. Lastly, education provides the knowledge and skills to survive in a crisis through the dissemination of lifesaving information about landmine safety, HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict resolution and peace building

<div align="right">(INEE, 2004:5)</div>

## What can ODFL Offer?

In this paper we are making the case that, with political will and careful advance planning, ODFL could play a significant role in conflict and disaster areas. For example, teachers and radio broadcasters with training for emergency situations could develop banks of ready-made educational resources which could be deployed at different stages of emergencies to provide children with immediate educational continuity, whether informal or formal. These could take the form of, for example, open-source resources mapped against the national curriculum (for both students or teachers) and ready-made radio programmes (for early childhood care and education, psycho-social, family or child-to-child approaches, edutainment and more structured educational programmes with accompanying print materials).

Given the right policy and infrastructural framework, ODFL can demonstrably support five areas in education but could be more widely deployed for educational provision in conflict and disaster areas in an integrated, coordinated, comprehensive and planned way.

## Open Learning: Five Broad Different Purposes

| | | *Purpose* | *Examples* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Accessing Education** | 1 | Para-formal and alternative schooling systems | Open schools<br>Community schools<br>Alternative life-skills-based basic education |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 2 | Supporting successful transition to and performance in formal schools | Early childhood care and education [ECCE] <br> Feeder or bridge schools <br> Continuity schooling <br> Accelerated learning (AL) |
| **Supporting Education** | 3 | Raising the quality of formal and non-formal school by providing ready-made educational resources | Structured learning materials <br> Schools radio and TV broadcasting <br> Interactive radio instruction |
| | 4 | Training, networking and resources for intermediaries (e.g. teachers, broadcasters, mentors, planners) | Teacher training and professional development by distance education <br> E-networks for teachers, educational broadcasters, planners <br> Self-study manuals for teachers, educational broadcasters and planners <br> Open source educational resources |
| | 5 | Communication for development (C4D) strategies | Campaigning programmes focused on children's needs – school readiness, health, nutrition advocacy <br> Edutainment – broadcasting soaps with campaigning messages |

Source: UNICEF, 2009: 16

**Displacement and ODFL's Role in Continuity Education and Equivalency**

Displacement, whether internally (IDPs) or externally (EDPs), is the most significant cause of educational discontinuity and lack of access to certification in emergency contexts. This has a serious long-term impact on the life chances of those affected and ODFL could play a significant role in

addressing this.

Fieldwork evidence from Sri Lanka in our report (UNICEF, 2009a) is revealing about the complex nature of displacement: 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. Many experiences of disruption and displacement are not single events, 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.

A series of short-term accommodations of displacement meant that children lost up to a year or more of any kind of schooling. Even when families were settled in particular IDP camps, (and 'being settled' would be something that only became apparent after a certain amount of time had elapsed), schooling was fragmented, with children first in school in the camp (being taught typically by a mixture of qualified and volunteer teachers) and then taking classes using the premises of local schools after the local children had finished for the day. By this stage many of the children found it difficult to resume their schooling and were stigmatised as a group. Where resettlement and a movement back to the home village has taken place, there was evidence that only a proportion of children have returned to their original school: in our field study examples of both primary and secondary schools the proportion was between 40% and 80%. Attendance at all of the schools we visited was also low, in some cases with more than 20% of the children not in school on the day of the visit. It seems likely as well that the serial disruption to these children's education and the consequent sheer amount of school missed is an important factor in subsequent non-attendance even if they are officially considered back in school.

Kirk (2009) makes the point that a lack of education and certification for refugee or displaced children, youth and adults denies them a sense of identity – either continuity with the mother country or belonging to the host country – as well as access to other services and resources of the state. As funding for education usually drops after the initial emergency, formal recognition and identification of certification possibilities need to be built into the initial response to an emergency situation. For the longer term, Kirk (2009) argues, donor support and ministries of education should,

> encourage national curriculum, assessment, certification and validation development within regional and international frameworks, which support cross-border equivalency, interoperability and mutual recognition and validation. The quality assurance needed to provide the security for registration, exam papers, marking, etc. is demanding but necessary particularly where accreditation and certification is provided in asylum countries. This requires strong coordination and collaboration.

(Kirk, 2009:114)

It just so happens that these facilitative mechanisms – increasingly called flexible learning strategies - already exist in the form of large-scale *special schooling systems* (with independent routes to recognised equivalent achievement and transition) and *initiatives supporting transition to* (and performance within formal or parallel) schooling systems, albeit not widely used in emergency contexts at the moment but which nevertheless could provide strategies for addressing access and

certification challenges in emergency situations rapidly and at scale (see Tables 1 and 2 below).

All have been successful in providing education to out-of-school-children (OOSC) and youth, which include learners in conflict and emergency zones. No one case provides a single solution but they provide a body of established work and commonalties from which to learn:

- flexible approaches and delivery which can adapt to the needs and life circumstances of excluded children and young people
- close partnership between government and NGOs which allows for the creativity and community-based approach of NGOs within an overriding government framework and supportive government legislation
- equivalency of accreditation
- ease of transition between alternative and regular education provision
- potential for accelerated curriculum and also a curriculum which allows children and young people to gain educational skills alongside more functional learning
- community-based approach, recruiting teachers from the community and training them to work holistically supporting social as well as educational aspects of children's lives and also facilitating change in community attitudes.

Table 1. Initiatives supporting transition to and performance within formal or parallel schooling systems

| *Strategy* | *Governance* | *Delivery* | *Examples* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Early childhood care and education programs (ECCE) promoting school readiness among disadvantaged children. | Large-scale government-led initiatives, some in partnership with NGOs; small targeted NGO crèche-type projects. | Pre-primary schools located near or in compounds of government or registered non-government primary schools, radio broadcasting, crèche-type projects | *The Equal Access Initiative, Nepal* *BRAC Pre-primary schools (BPPS), Bangladesh Project Why, India* |
| Second chance bridging programs preparing OOSC for transition to | Government or NGO-led programs, large- or small-scale initiatives | Residential schools in urban and rural areas with high numbers of working children, | *MV Foundation, India Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SAA), India* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| formal schooling | | child marriages | *ROSC, Bangladesh* |
| Community projects linking to equivalent exam systems | MoE-led initiatives via network of NGO-led community initiatives | NGOs working with specific groups, accredited by Open Schools with independent route to equivalency exams | *Butterflies, India* *The Flexible Junior Secondary Certificate, Bangladesh* |
| Integration of non-formal schools into the formal infrastructure and exams | NGO-led community schools, or GO and NGO and UN partnerships initially, then taken over by governance by MoE | Rural and urban community schools supported by apex organization initially | *COPE, Afghanistan* *Community Primary School Program, Bhutan* *PACE-A, Afghanistan* |
| Child-seeking outreach programs of elite schools bridging OOSC into orbit of formal and recognized schools | Elite fee-paying schools subsidizing compound schooling and/or dual or external enrolment with local government primary school | Outreach school within the compound of a fee-paying school with access to formal exams; dual/external enrolment with examination board | *St Agnes Loreto Day School, India* |
| Continuity schooling for children of seasonal migrant workers | Local Government schools + worksite NGO partnerships | Four-dimensional model strengthening local government schools + seasonal hostels in villages, worksite schools/centers, | *Janarth, Setu and Sankalp, India* |

| | | and summer accelerated bridge course in villages. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Special strategies for IDPs, EDPs and refugees | MoE, NGOs, UN agencies | Facilitation of cross-border examinations, distance learning, host country school access, refugee educators, camp schools, broadcasting. | *NIOS, India (distance learning) School-in-a-box, BEE Communication Hub, The Recreation Kit, UNICEF* |

Table 2. Special schooling systems

| *Strategy* | *Governance* | *Delivery* | *Examples* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Open Schools* | MoE initiated, in various organizational structures (e.g. parastatal, university) with authority to provide nationally-recognized qualifications centrally or via network of accredited NGOs | Government rural and urban CLCs and accredited NGOs, all supported by apex organization (resources, teacher support, accreditation) running on demand education. Transition to formal education potential. | *National Institute of Open Schooling, India Open School, Sri Lanka Bangladesh Open School Namibian College of Open Learning* |
| *Community-based schools* | NGO mainly but can include MoE partnerships. State recognition and potential for | Rural and urban community schools supported by apex organization | *BRAC, Bangladesh ADEP, Afghanistan COPE,* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | transition at secondary level | | *Afghanistan* |
| *Equivalence Programs* | MoE centrally-produced curriculum resources equivalent to formal + route to national equivalence exams | Government CLCs, Islamic Boarding Schools, religious and social organizations or community organizations, all supported by apex organization. Transition to formal education potential | *Alternative Learning System, Philippines Packet A, B and C, Indonesia* |
| *Rural small-school development and reform* | MoE or MOE + local NGO partnerships | A multi-grade educational model for small rural schools or substitution of locally-trained teachers for absentee professional teacher | *Escuela Nueva, Colombia Shiksha Karmi Project, India The Lok Jumbish project (LJP), India* |
| *Integrated general and vocational (IGVE) Schools* | MoE recognized NGOs with funding from bilateral agencies, INGOs, World Bank + employers | Local clusters of four integrated general and vocational schools + one Technical School. Sitting government exams and linking technical education with mainstream | *Underprivileged Children's Educational Program (UCEP), Bangladesh* |

**Apex Organisations for Special Schooling Systems**

The National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) in India offers basic, secondary and vocational education to its own students but also operates as a parastatal invested with the power to act as an external examination board on a national scale up to pre-degree level. One of its roles is as an apex organisation with the remit to be an *accrediting agency for other state open schools and NGO providers*, enabling them access to recognised certification, to cherry-pick from their good quality, ready-made materials and to benefit from advice, staff development and training in how to create their own materials. It also allows for opportunities for cross-border education for displaced or expatriate Indiana through, for example, its study centres in Kuwait, Nepal and UAE.

Large-scale schooling systems like NIOS and BRAC in Bangladesh have the potential to provide a life-cycle approach to provision so that learners have progression routes *through* levels and *between* different providers, as well as access to recognised formal or equivalent qualifications.

They also take advantage of the principles of technology (e.g., specialization division of labour, economies of scale and ICT) to operate at scale and widen access to high quality education at low cost.

They could provide a mechanism for each of the identified strategies for addressing identified certification challenges in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Strategies for addressing certification challenges for refugees and IDPs

| | *Strategy* | *Populations* | *Actors* | *Case Study Examples* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Facilitation of cross-border examinations for IDP and refugee students (may include working with regional examination bodies) | Returnees, refugees, IDPs | MoEs, NGOs, UN agencies, teachers | South Sudan/Uganda, Afghanistan/Pakistan, Guinea/Liberia, Guinea/Sierra Leone, Ingushetia/Chechnya, DRC Congo/Congo |
| 2 | Facilitation of host | Refugees, IDPs | MoEs, teachers, | Liberia/Sierra Leone, Liberia/Ghana, |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | country school access and examinations for refugee students | | UN agencies, NGOs, donors | Somalia/Kenya, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Myanmar/Thailand |
| 3 | Development of distance learning alternatives | Refugees | NGOs, universities | Sudan/Chad, Myanmar/Thailand |
| 4 | Support for refugee educators in the development of local certification boards | Refugees | UN and NGOs, refugee teachers and educators | Inter-regional Examinations Board in Tanzania |
| 5 | Policy development for returning refugees and IDPs and for local integration | Returnees, 'locally integrating former refugees' | MoE, NGOs, UN agencies | Southern Sudan, Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia |
| 6 | Advocacy and technical support for development of international and regional conventions | Refugees, IDPs | UN agencies, MoEs | Latin America |

# Four Examples of ODFL Interventions: From a Sri Lankan Case Study

**School in a Box**

The most well-known education resource for allocation in an emergency situation is the teacher's emergency pack, the 'school in a box'. The school in a box has been used extensively in Sri Lanka, post-tsunami, and has been regularly deployed in its conflict situations. On the day of the field visit to Trincomalee, for example, the plan was to send out 19 schools in a box to augment other resources in three Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) being set up to accommodate 1 500 students.

As a basic piece of kit, it has wide application in that it can be used in any teaching and learning situation and across all age groups. It provides the basic necessities for setting up a classroom and is designed to cover the first 72 hours of any emergency situation. But it does not of itself provide teaching and learning: this also necessitates, among much else, curriculum materials and teachers. School in a box is designed to be used with a 'locally developed teaching guide and curriculum' which means resourcing at a much more localised level than is required to provide the quite generic equipment in school in a box. Providing appropriate local curriculum materials, say, 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.

**Home School Programme**

This is a programme being developed by the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education (NIE) to support children in conflict-affected areas in situations where security issues mean that they cannot attend school. The Home-School modules are designed to provide learning for children in Grades 1–5 (though similar modules for children in lower secondary school are under discussion). The aim of the programme is 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'. The fact that they are being developed by NIE, the institute responsible for the development of all curriculum materials in the formal system of education, ensures that the modules follow the national curriculum for these grade levels.

The modules cover mathematics and first language Sinhalese and Tamil, each with its own booklet of materials. The idea of the likely learning situation is that children would be allocated to a group of children who live close to one another and would gather in the home of one of the group. The person leading the learning, a 'mediator' would be a parent or young adult who has had a secondary education and so would be able to support the children working on the modules. There would be a teacher; a 'facilitator' rotating among the various groups offering help and guidance.

**Catch Up Education (CUE)**

The CUE programmes are the responsibility of Zonal Education Authorities and Provincial Education Authorities and development partners like UNICEF and Save the Children provide significant financial support and technical assistance. CUE is designed to support a wide variety of children,

including those who are not attending school as well as those who are in school but who require support to reach the required levels of their peers. A typical CUE class is a multigrade class run separately to others in the school, either during school hours or outside them, and conducted by specially trained teachers (or volunteers) adopting group-based and child-centred teaching methods.

For children caught up in the conflict but have been resettled in schools, catch-up is seen as providing a final return to normalcy, a 'getting back on track'. However, it is acknowledged that to date there has been little 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, of necessity missing out on the classes being taken by their peers.

**The Open School**

The Open School in Sri Lanka was inaugurated in 2005 and began its programmes in 2007, with significant continued funding from the German development partner, GTZ. It offers courses, which have equivalency in terms of end-of-year accreditation, to Grades 6–11 in the formal system. Because it has so recently come into existence, (and just as the Home-School programme above) it is still in the process of developing materials, particularly in Tamil and particularly at the higher levels. For this reason at least, it would not necessarily be entirely straightforward in practice for an Open School 'graduate' to bridge the gap from completing Level 3 (the equivalent of completing Year 11) and successfully take 'O' Level examinations and supplementary materials are being developed by Open School for that purpose.

The Open School has so far been targeted at several kinds of marginalised groups of young people. Those include Moslem children who have been brought up in fundamentalist communities and attend religious schools which do not recognise the formal system of schooling; children of Veddah communities (groups which are said to be indigenous to Sri Lanka and which predate the Sinhalese and Tamil communities), children of plantation workers, young people and adults in prisonand in correctional centres, and young people and adults who have been caught up in the armed conflict in the north and east.

The present number and geographic spread of regional centres (and students) is limited. But both the Ministry of Education and the Department of Open School are enthusiastic about scaling up the initiative, particularly by establishing centres in the conflict-affected areas of the country. Nevertheless of the 13 centres currently open, only the three centres in Puttalam are catering to large numbers of IDPs, although there are current plans to raise awareness of the Open School in the conflict-affected areas in the Trincomalee district.
Evidence of the acceptability of the Open School in Sri Lanka is limited by its relatively recent introduction, the relatively small number of current centres and dependence on donor funding. However, it is providing education, which has currency within the formal system and can issue end-of-year certificates for the government Grades 6–11 to students who have completed its courses. And although the Open School nationally is catering to relatively few students at the moment compared with an estimated need, the centre in Puttalam for example is attracting large numbers of new students. The success in Puttalam of the Open School, with 11 sub-centres opening and hundreds of students on waiting lists, suggests that the Open School in Sri Lanka could achieve more widespread acceptability given the right conditions.

**Sri Lanka Emergency Educational Provision: Building for the Future**

With the decades-long conflict apparently over, there are real opportunities for Sri Lanka to address the needs of the thousands of children and young people who have been affected by the conflict. However, challenges persist. There are signs that the large amounts of funding which poured into Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami are now drying up. Save the Children in Sri Lanka, for example, announced significant cutbacks in operations and staff in 2009. This is a reminder that the work of international development partners is often at the mercy of decisions made thousands of miles from the places they affect.

The overall plan must be to further develop the skills and expertise of Sri Lankans to meet the needs of children affected by conflict. The need to build local capacity was something highlighted in many of the discussions with Sri Lankans, and especially those who are Tamil-speaking. In terms of the specifics of this conflict, there are serious political conversations needed to address matters such as the chronic shortage of Tamil-speakers in key areas such as the development and writing of curriculum materials. The shortage of teachers in the conflict-affected areas in IDP camps and temporary learning centres where volunteers are drafted in to fill the gaps, and in resettlement schools where Tamil-speaking Maths, Science and English teachers are in chronically short supply, is an issue to be urgently addressed with government.

It appears to be the case that government priorities for new educational interventions firmly enshrine the formal system, and its improvement, as the primary site for the achievement of education for all, with non-mainstream options only for exceptional cases, for whom the formal system is proven to be inappropriate. 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 difficult circumstances need provision, which is flexible enough to respond to their needs, and the context in which they live, but which also leads to recognized educational achievement and further educational opportunities. While emergencies can and do increase vulnerability, there are views and experience that disasters can sometimes offer opportunities for longer-term change in terms of equality and quality of provision.

A major reason for highlighting the work of the Open School is that they are in-country organisations, which, as such, are able to formulate long-term policies that are owned by the citizens of Sri Lanka. There is a clear potential in the Open School, and in continued partnerships with other organisations, to meet the complex needs of those affected by conflict. One necessity might be to help the Open School to lower its age requirement and develop materials for a younger age group, because, although it has primary-age students, these are outside its official age-remit.

**Conclusions**

The picture that emerges from our discussions and case study can be summarised in four main points:

- Educational responses need to be based on an expanded vision of access to basic education and on a careful analysis of specific access issues from a deep understanding of a national and local context.
- Significant progress in providing education in emergency contexts to children and others is only likely to be made through abandoning ad hoc provisions for more strategic planning, one which

considers ways of introducing flexibility and a diversity of provision, approaches and providers.

- As poverty is a cross-cutting issue among displaced groups, any responses necessarily need to be multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral and address issues such as psychosocial aspects, health and nutritional support, proactive child-seeking practices, birth registration, stipends and so on.
- A key area in planning is likely to be the need for enabling frameworks and infrastructures for policy and accreditation, which can build constructive links between formal and non-formal provision and allow for successful transitions between them.

**The Need for Research**

In this paper we have been making the case for raising the profile of ODFL as a planned strategic response to providing continuity education in emergency and conflict situations. But underlying the policy gap is a data gap stemming from the need for:

1. strengthening the monitoring and profiling of learners affected by emergency and conflict zones
2. strengthening the monitoring of existing learning activities, e.g., far more documentation of field experience on the value and impact of existing ODFL approaches to education in the prevention of, response to, and recovery from natural disasters and complex emergencies.
3. monitoring transitions (or non-transitions) of learners back into mainstream or non-formal education and the degree of articulation between the formal and non-formal sectors.
4. rigorous tools and methodologies to measure the value and impact of these ODFL approaches and to establish the intellectual, academic and research foundations of the field and support its professionalization  and capacity to produce and be informed by sound research.
5. the synthesis of existing research and evidence about ODFL interventions in emergency and natural disaster areas to highlight and cross reference topics and themes and identify research priorities and knowledge. The INEE's 'academic space', and the networks coordinated and inter-agency approach, would be a natural site for this platform.
6. in-depth country studies reviewing the existing educational policy, planning, provision and providers for conflict and emergency zones in close consultation with the key players and organisations involved, and determine whether and in what ways ODFL could make a useful, possibly significant, contribution to providing continuity education in these areas. Fast deployment, mother-tongue resources, access to accreditation and cross-border education and certification are likely to emerge as key issues. Open learning may already be in use in these zones and another strand to the research would be to determine whether any economies of scale, effort and costs can be made in terms of pre-preparedness through a more coordinated use of open learning.
7. in-depth country studies examining the potential for national frameworks/safety nets for continuity education in war and disaster zones which might include an open framework for accreditation and a common framework of learning outcomes, quality criteria, assessment
8. identifying the teacher education needs for specialist provision in conflict and disaster zones

**Coda:  ODFL for Emergency Contexts is not New**

The use of open and distance learning to maintain continuity of education is not new, for example, the   Namibian Education Project (later called the Namibian Extension Unit), set up in Zambia in the 1980s for political refugees from Namibia and Angola at the height of the struggle for independence.

The project provided formal education at a distance as well as adult basic education in health and other areas. Many of these refugees became the future leaders of Namibia in the 1990s when independence was achieved and the leaders returned home. The Extension unit was reorganised with donor support to provide traditional formal education through distance learning and established a strong tradition of distance learning from secondary level to degree level in Namibia today. There are similar examples from South Africa where the South African Extension Unit worked through the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania, with support from UNHCR to provide education for the members of the exiled African National Congress and other refugees.

Open schools are not a new concept. More than fifty years ago, Canada, Australia and New Zealand all had government-run educational programmes which offered courses from kindergarten to Grade 12 through what we would now call distance education. Australia's School of the Air, which used radio to reach children on the remote farms in the Outback, captured the imagination of the world. These programmes were designed for particular groups, such as the children living on scattered sheep farms or in families responsible for lighthouses. They also served students in small towns whose schools could not offer specialized courses for want of qualified teachers. These open schools also served in times of crisis. When New Zealand had to shut down its whole school system because of epidemics of measles in 1985, 1991 and 1997, all the children in the country studied for a period of weeks through the Correspondence School. The largest open school outside the Commonwealth, France's Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance (CNED) was created to serve the thousands of French children who were evacuated from the cities at the outbreak of World War II. These early open schools were successful. At the primary school level, their parents using high quality learning materials tutored pupils. At the secondary level, students were usually highly motivated learners taking the courses to satisfy requirements needed for admission to specific programmes of advanced study.

**Acknowledgements**

**Key Agencies and Background Reading for education in Emergency and Conflict Zones**

- International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) http://www.ineesite.org
- International Rescue Committee, http://www.rescue.org
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