

## Introduction—Understanding education, fragility and conflict

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Published online: 9 November 2012  
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**Abstract** This Introduction discusses approaches to and perspectives on analyzing the complex relationship between education, fragility, and conflict and its underlying causes and dynamics. It argues for the need for contextual and time-bound multi-level analyses of interlinked societal dimensions in order to address the ultimate purposes of education policies and programmes, whether they aim to ameliorate or transform existing conditions. Examples are presented of the ways these dimensions apply to the country cases on Afghanistan, Bolivia, Nepal, and Sudan and to the discussion of why quality data is important for analysis, and for policy and programme design.

**Keywords** Education · Fragility · Conflict · Afghanistan · Bolivia · Nepal · Sudan

In the field of study on education, conflict, and fragility, a current focus is on identifying parameters for analyzing the complex dynamics and factors underlying their relationship, in part to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and programmes (Brown 2011; INEE 2011b; Smith 2005). This is partly because conflict and fragility are factors contributing to the likely non-achievement of the Millennium Development and Education for All goals by 2015 (UNESCO 2011; UNPF 2010; World Bank 2011).

Much existing research relates to violent situations, often armed conflict, including those in countries characterized as fragile states or as having so-called fragile situations or fragility. According to Patrick Montjourides, writing in this issue of *Prospects*, as of 2010, at least

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The articles in this issue originate from an international meeting held in Oslo, Norway in April 2011 in conjunction with the launch of the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2011). The co-organizing partners were the University of Oslo, the Norwegian UNESCO National Commission, the Norwegian Agency of Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. All articles are produced in their entirety for this special issue of *Prospects*.

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I am grateful to Lindsay Bird, Kees van den Bosch, Wim Hoppers, Jon Lauglo, and Alan Smith for very helpful comments and suggestions on a previous draft of this Introduction.

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seven different lists of conflict-affected countries existed; they had been developed by different agencies, institutes, and organizations, including the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, the OECD, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. Some of the lists refer to conflict, fragility, and fragile situations interchangeably, although the lists have generally been based on different sets of criteria and have different aims, and therefore attend to different concerns. Only six countries (Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, and Sudan) appeared on all the lists. Of these, Afghanistan and Sudan are the subject of analysis in this issue of *Prospects*.

Smith (2011, p. 3) argues that using the term fragility has been “an unhelpful distraction” for several reasons: it is conceptually weak, and a (donor) construct to substitute for pejorative terms such as “failed” or “fragile states”. Also, according to Smith, it remains important to distinguish between the role of education before and after conflict and its role in a humanitarian situation. On the other hand, Mosselson, Wheaton, and Frisoli (2009) see the need to expand our understanding of fragility, moving from a state-centric definition to one that also considers other factors associated with fragility. These range from natural disasters and external shocks, to the international system, to outright violent conflict. All these phenomena could affect the lives of individuals and societies and, therefore, should be in focus when developing policies and programmes. This understanding is also reflected in the current focus on mitigating conflict through educational planning that relates the risk of violent conflict to other factors including natural phenomena and potential disasters (see, e.g. MacEwen, Choudhuri, and Bird 2010). A similar understanding is presented by INEE (2011b), which regards the concept of fragility as being particularly useful in extending the unit of analysis from the state to a “deeper exploration of the various causes (human and systemic) of failure to provide basic services (security, justice, health and education) to affected populations” (p. 11). In this Introduction, I use the term fragility in order to distinguish between situations that could potentially erupt into conflict, whether armed or not, and those that are in, or have experienced, conflict.

The distinction is also captured in Galtung’s (1990) emphasis on negative and positive peace which means understanding not only the causes of the presence of war or violence, but also the conditions for peace and non-violence. Education can allegedly play a role in both conflict and peace—the so-called double face of education (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Dupuy 2009). Education is often regarded as a tool for peace through intergroup understanding and the teaching of common humanity. It may also be a long-term force for the “spread of reason” and the decline of violence in the world (Pinker 2011). However, education can be also seen to build enmity, and grievances about inequitable access to education as a valued resource can be a source of conflict. Although the tension between the two sides may be accentuated in situations of conflict, it should not be understood as relevant only in such circumstances. Education exists in interrelationship with the structural conditions of any global or local context and the time for possible intervening events. Since the purposes of education are ultimately political, innate tensions have always manifested themselves in different emphases on, for example, intrinsic or instrumental values, social mobility or social reproduction, mass or elite education, access or quality, and equity or relevance, to name but a few.

The nature of these tensions may change depending on the time and circumstances within and across contexts, supporting the argument that fragility should be understood as a dynamic concept with temporal and spatial elements (Mosselson, Wheaton, and Frisoli 2009, p. 4). The tensions can be explained by the ultimate purposes for societal development that education is to serve and the underlying thinking that drives such purposes. Another question that is also relevant to the discussion of the double face of education is whether the dominant strands in the international education and development discourse—economic (human capital) and humanistic (social justice) thinking—are coming together or remaining separate.

In the current development discourse, education is acknowledged for its potential to straddle issues of democracy, good governance, and human rights, and to both assert the primacy of the market and capitalism and advocate for global redistributive social justice (Mundy 2007). Both strands can be understood as originating in liberal, rational thinking and in thinking about liberties. However, while human capital thinking has focused more specifically on the need for progress understood as economic development and economic growth for which technical solutions rooted in science are possible, justice thinking has focused more on the need for structural solutions to issues of inequalities and inequities globally, regionally, and nationally, as rooted in political, socio-cultural, and economic conditions (Fägerlind and Saha 1989; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, and Halsey 2006).

This is important because both multilateral and bilateral agencies have been instrumental in the debate and in policy and programmes in what are termed fragile, conflict, and post-conflict areas. For example, the INEE (2011a) framework for analyzing education and fragility is based on the frameworks developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) (INEE 2011b, p. 12). Furthermore, a number of international agencies have redirected the general focus for their international development assistance to contexts understood as fragile, or as being in a conflict or post-conflict situation. For example, according to its 2010 education strategy, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID 2010) plans to direct 50% of its aid to education to fragile and conflict-affected states, including Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sudan, which are in focus in this issue of *Prospects*, although in these cases on a much smaller scale than to other countries, such as Pakistan. Underlying this interest is an acknowledgment that education can be used to prevent conflict and be a tool for peacebuilding. This means that conflict-sensitive educational planning must be undertaken and supported with efforts to develop the capacity for conflict prevention and education programmes for peacebuilding at the systemic, institutional, and community levels (Kotite 2012).

The articles in this issue supplement the expanding literature and debate on the relationship between education, fragility and conflict. The issue includes analyses of the dynamics of education, fragility, and conflict in contexts as varied as Afghanistan, Bolivia, Nepal, and Sudan, based on original data collected by the authors. In addition, one author highlights the importance of the nature and quality of data to enhance knowledge and understanding of fragility and conflict, and to strengthen evidence-based policy making and actions. The four country-based studies contribute to understanding the dynamics and factors for conflict and peace from a historical perspective and in view of current government attempts for change. The final article shows how, in specific instances, appropriate data have contributed to understanding and addressing conflictual issues.

The purpose of this Introduction is to contribute to the ongoing discussion on whether conflict-sensitive approaches to education should be ameliorative (“do no harm”) or transformative (Dryden-Peterson 2012). To do so, I will interpret those five articles in light of existing frameworks for analysis and ways of understanding the relationship among education, fragility and conflict, as outlined specifically in Smith (2005), Brown (2011) and INEE (2011a, b). This involves focusing on causes and impacts at different levels of analysis in view of temporal and spatial boundaries.

### **Analyzing education in fragile, conflict and post-conflict situations**

Education serves economic, political, and socio-cultural purposes for societal development (Brown 2011) and the causes of conflict can be related to these three main perspectives

(Smith 2011). INEE (2011a, b) has identified the environment as an explicit fourth dimension, whereas Smith (2005) understands environment as part of the economic dimension related to “resource wars”, involving struggles over commodities and natural resources (p. 375). In this Introduction, environment is understood as part of the economic dimension and education as another important resource and, therefore, a constituent part of “resource wars”.

Smith (2005) underlines the need to understand the diversity of contexts within which education is required to operate. Thus, he distinguishes between four types of environments: those with (1) relatively peaceful and stable conditions; (2) violent conflict; (3) reconstruction following conflict and political transition; and (4) peace and reconciliation processes. These four contexts are represented in this issue of *Prospects*. Bolivia is an example of a relatively peaceful and stable environment, Afghanistan has violent conflict, and Nepal and Sudan are undergoing reconstruction following conflict and political transition. Both Nepal and Sudan have experienced fairly recent peace processes, and signed comprehensive peace agreements, Nepal in 2006 and Sudan in 2005. However, the signing of the peace agreement has not led to the absence of war or war-like operations in the border area between Sudan and South Sudan after South Sudan’s independence in July 2011, and in both countries reconciliation remains a pertinent issue for the future.

In this Introduction I analyze the role of education in the four countries in light of the relative importance that the contributing authors attach to the economic, political, and socio-cultural perspectives or dimensions. According to Brown (2011), “the links between education and conflict are difficult to disentangle because they operate on a multitude of levels” (p. 191), which have contradictory implications for policy and planning. Nevertheless, Brown and INEE (2011a, b) seem to agree on the domains to address which are security, governance, the economy, society, and the environment. Or, as Brown puts it, they are structures and socio-economic divisions, political inclusion and exclusion, cultural preferences, and mobilization of rebel supporters through schools (p. 192). For simplicity, here I conceptualize these domains in accordance with the three main perspectives. The *political* perspective encompasses security, governance, political inclusion and exclusion, and mobilization. The *economic* encompasses structures and socio-economic divisions, and the environment. And the *social-cultural* encompasses cultural preferences.

Turning to the educational categories that need to be addressed to mitigate conflict and fragility, the INEE (2011a) identifies these as planning, service delivery, resource mobilization, and system monitoring, while Smith (2005) identifies them as the political and policy environment, administrative and structural features, and aspects of practice. Here I simplify them by understanding planning and resource mobilization as part of the political and policy environment, system monitoring as part of administrative and structural features, and service delivery as part of practice. The authors are highly consistent with respect to the areas that deserve attention, and the dynamics and factors they identify as potentially enhancing or mitigating fragility and conflict. These are partly captured in the domains and categories specified above. Only Smith (2005) underlines variation across his four different contexts.

Common to all the authors is an understanding that situations of conflict and fragility arise particularly when existing inequality leads to grievances because of lack of legitimacy. To Brown, inequality relates to the three main perspectives on society identified earlier: GDP per capita as an expression of *socio-economic* differences; relative inclusion or exclusion from *political* participation and power; and ethnicity, religion, and gender as potentially *culturally* divisive. The combination of the three is particularly “incendiary” (Brown 2011, p. 193). Education is seen as important in either sustaining or mitigating issues of inequality which, according to Smith, demand “conflict-sensitive education systems” which aim at

empowerment rather than social control (2005, p. 379). Brown emphasizes several important factors in creating and maintaining, or mitigating, fragility and conflict: language of instruction; cultural preferences in education content and style; the context for particular forms of decentralization, notably fiscal ones; and the use of schools as sites for rebel recruitment.

In addition to the importance of language of instruction, Smith (2005) underlines educational content, in particular curriculum skills and norms (“learning outcomes” and generic skills), and specific subjects (history, geography, culture, art, music, and religious education) as playing key roles, together with the general nature of learning resources and textbooks, and the role of teachers and teacher education. He sees two particular challenges in violent situations: ensuring adherence to international humanitarian law and ensuring that education forms part of humanitarian assistance, i.e., recognizing education as the fourth pillar in addition to food, shelter, and health care (Midttun 2000). Sensitivity to conflict should be expressed during reconstruction through responses to various needs: physical (infrastructural), ideological (depoliticization), and psychological (trauma-related). During times of peace and reconciliation, reconstruction programmes should be linked to the mainstream education sector and support the long-term goal of conflict prevention through interlinking human rights education, citizenship programmes, and intercultural and peace education (see also Kotite 2012).

In its examination of four situational analyses of education and fragility (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Liberia), the INEE team concludes by identifying priorities for policies and programming based on major challenges and dilemmas (INEE 2011b, pp. 60–64). These include access and quality, with a particular focus on civic and social, as well as economic relevance; and governance, management, and financing, with particular focus on privatization of educational provision, centralization and decentralization, and funding modalities. They describe several entry points for the interconnections between education and fragility, and therefore for prevention and mitigation. The *societal* entry point includes building and/or strengthening peace, the state, and the nation through equal, generalized, and safe access to education; nation-building and good citizenship; preparation for livelihoods and entrepreneurship; gender sensitivity; and environmental sensibility. The *system-specific* entry point includes building and strengthening a functional education system through planning, legislation, and regulation, along with community governance and developing teacher capacity. Finally, the *people-oriented* entry point includes building and/or strengthening people’s capacity to live and cope with fragility through physical protection, including mine-risk education, HIV and AIDS education, disaster-preparedness programmes, and safe school construction. Kotite (2012) names these three levels as systemic, institutional, and community.

### Analyzing education, fragility and conflict in time and context

The perspectives and entry points for education, fragility, and conflict outlined above underline the point that in any specific context, analyses, policies, and programmes must address three interlinked dimensions—political, economic, socio-cultural—and three analytical levels—the macro (societal), the meso (organizational/institutional) and the micro (individual), and in an integrated way. The work must be done in view of ultimate aims for amelioration or transformation and in regard for the temporal boundaries for each analytical level.

For his historical analysis of how the Mediterranean societies developed in the 15th through 18th centuries, the French Annales historian Fernand Braudel (1967) adopted a three-dimensional time scale so he could analyze structures and events along cyclical patterns rather than as linear development processes. For this purpose, Braudel

(1967, 1969) distinguished between three time scales. In the long term, he looked at structural conditions, related to fundamental conditions of material life, states of mind, and the natural environment. In the medium term, he looked at organizational conditions related to forms of social, economic, and political organization. And, in the short term, he looked at the impact of individuals and events. Applied to education, the long term would refer to education's role in political, economic, and social life, and, for example, to issues of security (fundamental conditions of material life), cultural preferences (states of mind), and the environment (natural environment), including education's role in addressing illegitimate inequalities that might be expressed in inter-group rivalries. The medium term would apply to the forms of organization of the education system, e.g. planning, policies, and decentralization. The short term would apply, for example, to rebel movements recruiting children from schools (impact of individuals and events).

Thus, Braudel's three-dimensional time scale could also be applied to the analysis, planning, and programming of education, fragility, and conflict. While other authors, including MacEwen, Choudhuri, and Bird (2010) and Kotite (2012), underline the importance of the short and the long term, the additional focus on the medium term may ensure that more sustained attention is paid to ameliorative or transformative measures that can achieve ultimate aims. This is important, since the analytical frameworks for understanding the relationship between education, conflict, and fragility selected for this Introduction adhere to humanistic and social justice thinking that identify issues of inequality and inequity as fundamental to explaining and addressing conflict and fragility in the long term. On the other hand, governments and international agencies that provide funding and technical assistance often follow more technically-oriented economic thinking and solutions that are implemented in the short to medium term, often in circumstances of scarce or no data and, willingly or unwillingly, they circumvent previously formulated long-term aims. These issues are exemplified in the following brief presentation of the papers in this issue of *Prospects*.

### **Perspectives on and dynamics of fragility and conflict in Bolivia, Sudan, Nepal, and Afghanistan**

It is notable how education has been used as an instrument for political purposes in different ways at different times by different stakeholders in all four country cases. This shows us not only that the dynamics of education move in the opposing directions of maintaining or transforming the existing social order at all analytical levels (macro, meso, and micro), but also that, as an entry point, education contributes to creating the particular circumstances with short-, medium-, and long-term effects.

#### **Bolivia**

In the case of Bolivia, Mieke Lopes Cardozo shows how the Evo Morales government intends teacher education to be an entry point for long-term macro societal transformation, based on strongly formulated societal values that both reinforce aspects of the historical past and differentiate the current government from earlier (colonial) and current international education reforms associated with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In Galtung's terms, the education system in Bolivia aims to support positive peace through attention to social justice through, amongst other vehicles, an inclusive education system that also acknowledges indigenous knowledge and values.

Focusing on the meso level in the medium term, Lopes Cardozo shows the inherent tensions amongst teacher education institutions, specifically urban and rural ones, that have different interests in preserving or changing the historical past, leading to different views on, and attention to, policy reform areas. She also shows how the particular stakeholders, including managers, teachers, and students, may simultaneously support the long-term values for societal change, while not necessarily supporting the suggested medium- and short-term reform areas that are not in their immediate interest. Similarly, she argues that students who are “outsiders”, i.e. potential future students, want access to teacher education for its expected personal benefits, rather than in support of the government’s long-term transformation effort.

Lopes Cardozo’s entry points for education, therefore, relate to all three levels of analysis (individual, institutional/organizational, and societal) and all three perspectives (political, economic, and socio-cultural). She shows how the short-term implementation of the new policy is being slowed down by the government’s inadequate efforts to overcome a range of institutional barriers that prevent education reform in the medium term and may have negative impacts on long-term transformation efforts. Therefore, the main areas of fragility are to be found in the gaps between governance and service delivery as reflected both in issues of inclusion versus exclusion from educational and other opportunities, and in institutional or systemic issues that need attention at the macro level, such as corruption and infrastructure.

## Sudan

As in the case of Bolivia, Anders Breidlid shows how education in Sudan has been used for political-ideological purposes by both the government in the North, and the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM) in the South, during the long conflict between the North and the South. Education has reinforced inter-group cleavages and grievances and can be understood as one element in the “resource war” to maintain or prevent access to power, along with efforts to control oil resources. In contrast to the situation in Bolivia, however, these purposes reflect built-in tensions at the macro level between the two different value systems, Islamist and Western. Whereas education in Bolivia is intended to unite the country along the stated values in support of social transformation, education in Sudan was used by the government in the North to maintain the existing social order, linking Islamist education with existing political and economic power. In contrast, in the South, education was intended as a means of transforming the social order maintained by the government in the North and for independent development through adherence to Western thinking on progressive modernization, including literacy and Christianity.

The effect, in the short, medium, and long terms, was the division of the country along the lines of religion (Islamist vs. Christianity) and ethnic group (Arab vs. non-Arab). In the current period of reconstruction, Breidlid states, such ideological tensions could potentially continue in the South as inter-group rivalries unless, as in Bolivia, the (relative) peace and reconciliation process includes considerations of the indigenous knowledge and value systems that still exist alongside the Western-influenced modern one as reflected, amongst others, in adherence to Christianity. This situation needs to be addressed in an inclusive education system that can help form a South Sudanese identity based on territorial solidarity and a common cultural heritage.

The main area of fragility in the new Republic of South Sudan, according to Breidlid, continues to be related to issues of socio-cultural and ideological differences in which education can play a potentially ameliorating role—provided that it is reflected in priorities in

resource allocations. Because resources are scarce, Breidlid anticipates that the teaching of basic academic skills in the short term might take place at the expense of attention to underlying socio-cultural and ideological differences and of ensuring access to higher education as a way to improve societal opportunities in the long term—which would also be essential for independent development. This underlines the importance of interlinking macro long-term governance, medium-term planning, and short-term service delivery around core issues of access, quality, and relevance as important areas for educational reform.

## Nepal

As in the case of Sudan, Tejendra Pherali emphasizes the use of education for political purposes in Nepal. But unlike the case of Sudan, which is explained through attention to socio-cultural differences, Pherali also pays close attention to deeply rooted socio-economic differences that are linked with issues of comparative exclusion and inclusion of social groups in political power when explaining long-term macro societal development in Nepal. Like the Bolivia case, the Nepal case highlights the internal tensions in the education system and the use by stakeholders of education—ranging from the government to local communities, to teachers, to students—to either maintain social order or attempt to transform it. In contrast to Bolivia where students outside the system attempt to use education for their personal benefit in a situation of peace and relative stability, students in schools in Nepal were recruited, either forcefully or voluntarily, in support of the anti-government struggle during the conflict period or were caught in the middle, together with their teachers, between opposing forces.

Just as Breidlid identifies the need for solutions to the manifest issues of ethnicity and potentially contrasting value systems in South Sudan, Pherali emphasizes that peace in Nepal has not included reconciliation and serious attempts at solving the deeply rooted socio-economic, political, and cultural differences. On the contrary, he argues, reconstruction has led to renewed politicization of education in the forms of corruption, rent-seeking, and maintenance of existing power relations, particularly through the (ab)use of decentralization policies. In contrast to Bolivia and Sudan, Pherali highlights the role of international education policies and agencies in this development that is considered to have reinforced previous tensions.

The main area of fragility, according to Pherali, remains the continued politicization of education that reflects attention to short-term technical solutions to improve school effectiveness rather than the long-term reform of structurally embedded inequalities that is considered to be a precondition to lasting peace and reconciliation.

## Afghanistan

As Breidlid did for Sudan, Kaja Borchgrevink focuses on the use of education for political-ideological purposes in Afghanistan and on the issue of opposing value systems, Islamic and secular. In contrast to Sudan, this is understood as an issue of long-term security (political) rather than a cultural one (ethnicity) arising from the earlier conflict period, but with a major influence on reconstruction and potential peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

As Pherali did for Nepal, Borchgrevink relates the use of (religious) education in madrasas to the issue of recruitment for anti-government struggles and, in the current reform context, also to government attempts to control education and promote westernization. As in the other three cases, Borchgrevink highlights how different institutions have different ways of relating the purposes of education in the madrasa sector to long-term purposes for societal development, supporting either maintenance or transformation of the existing social order



understood from a values viewpoint (Islamic versus secular). She considers that this tension is likely to continue unless current reform attempts are undertaken in a more inclusive way, given the traditional division between religious and secular educational institutions and their different views on the utility and value of religious education.

Although, as in South Sudan, the main area of fragility in Afghanistan relates to the socio-cultural dimension, this is differently linked to long-term macro societal development; as Borchgrevink explains, political (security) concerns related to curbing radicalization are at the core of the government's attempts to reconstruct the education sector. These include the following entry points: long-term macro governance, with a strong emphasis on government oversight of the total education sector; and short- and medium-term planning of the education system with particular attention to issues of access, quality, and relevance. The success of the reform, according to the author, depends on successful mediation of underlying differences with the Islamic communities.

### **Addressing fragility and conflict: The importance of data and analysis**

In essence, although each country case is different and unique, they all, in different ways, support the same argument: sensitivity to conflict must include efforts to transform structures, behaviours, and attitudes not only towards an absence of overt conflict, but also towards the presence of peace, with attention to both visible and structural forms of violence and inequalities (Dryden-Peterson 2012). The cases show how the perspectives, domains, and categories for fragility and conflict identified in the selected literature, for example issues of resource mobilization, recruitment, and decentralization, have played out in different ways. They also point to common issues, particularly the importance of socio-economic differences, relative inclusion or exclusion from political participation and power, and ethnicity and religion as being culturally divisive.

Furthermore, the country cases share a high degree of commonality in the aspects of educational practice that could reinforce or mitigate fragility and conflict. In particular, these are language of instruction (Sudan and Nepal), the content of curricula and textbooks (Sudan, Afghanistan), the content and use of subjects, such as history and religion (Sudan, Afghanistan) and the role of teachers, pedagogical practice, and attitudes (all four cases). Thus, the inside of the classroom is important not only to “unlearn the culture of violence”, as Breidlid puts it, but to set the direction for future values, knowledge, and skills that could either sustain or transform political, economic, and cultural development.

Of equal importance and regarded as a fundamental prerequisite by Montjourides, is system monitoring based on quality data without which we would fail to protect, provide, reconstruct, and ensure peace (UNESCO 2011). Appropriate data can both highlight the scale of the problem and help to determine the entry points for education. For example, according to Montjourides, in both South Sudan and Afghanistan, combining data from different sources has increased our knowledge about the needs of the education systems and has let policy planners attend better to issues of fragility and conflict rooted in, amongst other factors, ethnic and gender differences. In Afghanistan, combined data sources have also helped determine the concrete impact of the conflict in terms of foregone educational progress, while the scarcity of specific kinds of data has prevented monitoring of the system using all recognized indicators.

Therefore, the need for accurate, complete, and sound data should not be understood in a technocratic sense, but rather as a necessity if stakeholders at all levels of education are to attend to the embedded structural inequalities that drive fragility and conflict. Of similar

importance are the choices of approaches and priorities for research that would inform policies and programmes on education, fragility, and conflict. In this respect, it seems particularly important to design and apply frameworks and approaches that highlight the complexity of the relationship between education, fragility, and conflict at the three interacting analytical levels (macro, meso, and micro) and the three-dimensional time perspective.

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