Developing global partnerships in higher education for peacebuilding: A strategy for pathways to impact[1]

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Abstract

Higher education faces attack, erosion, under-funding and loss of capacity in contexts of armed conflict and state fragility. Losses in university capacities through casualties, injuries, and internal displacement or forced migration are difficult to compensate for due to the degree of investment required to restore or lay new foundations for quality teaching and research, while attacks on universities may also discourage learners from attending tertiary education. Drawing upon a research and capacity development project in Somaliland, we propose a global strategy for higher education partnerships in teaching, research and development with practical outcomes in the area of education, conflict and peacebuilding. This strategy would address research and pedagogical training needs for higher education teachers; develop educational partnerships between higher education institutions in conflict-affected regions to facilitate collaborative teaching exchange; and, enhance collaboration between higher education institutions, civil society and I/NGOs to promote peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies.

Key Words

higher education, partnerships, conflict, peacebuilding, fragile contexts

Introduction

Violent conflicts and complex emergencies cause significant capacity losses in education which may comprise both physical destruction of educational infrastructure and losses in human capital, where civilian injuries, casualties, displacement and psychological trauma rob countries of capacities that are needed to rebuild and recover after crisis (UNESCO 2011; GCPEA 2014). At least 36% of the world's out of school children live in conflict-affected contexts (Global Partnership for Education 2015), where education environments

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can often be unsafe and extremely vulnerable to violence. Even though the impact of violence on children, teachers and the school sector are well documented in the literature (UNESCO 2009; 2011; Save the Children 2013; Pherali 2016; GCPEA 2018), research into the nexus between higher education (HE) and violent conflict is underdeveloped. Attacks on HE are not only damaging to the existing system of provision, but also have enduringly debilitating impact on national capacities to recover from and reconstruct after conflict.

In recent decades, HE seems to be part of the global agenda for educational development in low and middle-income contexts. As opposed to the earlier evidence relating to rates of return that favoured investment in primary education over other forms of education (Psacharopoulos 1989; 1994), HE in recent years has been argued as the contributor to social and economic development through:

> … the formation of human capital (primarily through teaching); the building of knowledge bases (primarily through research and knowledge development); the dissemination and use of knowledge (primarily through interactions with knowledge users); and the maintenance of knowledge (inter-generational storage and transmission of knowledge). (OECD 2008, p. 13)

Although increasing recognition of the importance of higher education has recently led to a greater allocation of funding in this area (World Bank 2000; MacGregor 2015; SPHEIR 2017), a large proportion is allocated to fund scholarships that returns to institutions in high-income donor countries (McCowan 2016). In conflict-affected and humanitarian contexts, where the share of education aid is less than 2%, higher education is a low priority as the efforts mainly concentrate in the provision of basic or informal education (UNICEF 2015). Access to HE for refugees is dismally 1% as compared to 34% globally in the sector (UNHCR 2016). For example, before the war started in Syria, 26% of Syrians attended higher education (Watenpaugh, Fricke and King 2014) but in 2016, as estimated by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, this fell to less than 5% (Al-Hawamdeh and El-Ghali 2017). Again, the international response to the Syrian higher education crisis primarily focuses on the provision of scholarships rather than taking a broader approach to protecting or rebuilding the encumbered university system inside Syria.

As part of the recovery process, conflict affected states would require strategies and resources to regain lost capacities and innovate new approaches to address the impact of conflict. This article deals with challenges to rebuild HE in conflict-affected contexts and proposes new partnership-based strategies in the HE sector. Firstly, the paper explores how universities and funding bodies in the Global North can support the design, provision and safeguarding of higher education in conflict-affected and fragile contexts and then, it proposes pathways to impact through North-South and South-South global dialogues to support capacity development in research and teaching and to promote peacebuilding and sustainable development.

The international recognition of universities is determined by their quality of teaching, research and innovations, which depend on the strength of their institutional quality assurance mechanisms. As Ezeokoli and Ayodele (2014) argue, the quality of higher education services should be considered a strategic issue for social and technological

development and economic growth. The quality of higher education can be measured by the quality of its academic staff, well-stocked libraries, laboratories and the curriculum that is aligned with needs in the labour market (Alam, Mishra, and Shahjamal 2014). Most importantly, universities require an effective management system that implements rigorous internal quality assurance. Noaman et al (2017) propose eight general quality criteria for higher education which include, well organised curriculum, qualified professional staff, pathways for career prospects for graduates, upgraded educational infrastructure, e-services that facilitates access to global knowledge and overcome geographical barriers, library services with access to electronic resources, administrative services, and accessible and safe locations of universities. Drawing upon a quality survey in universities in Saudi Arabia, they find that 'the appropriate scientific topics for a student's scientific path', 'curriculum line with the requirements of the labour market', 'academic qualifications'; 'the curriculum enhances student skills and self-capabilities', and 'staff professional experience' as the most important dimensions that contribute to higher education quality (Noaman et al 2017, p. 38). However, many conflict-affected and fragile countries lack in capacity and resources to improve quality in terms of modernising teaching and learning facilities, pedagogical approaches and research. The struggle for rebuilding physical and intellectual infrastructure also underpins the lack of qualified academics and regulatory frameworks that are the backbone of quality provision (Altbatch and Knight 2007). More importantly, as Ramirez (2015) cautions, this approach of generalisation of quality could be problematic in contexts where the system of HE is not well established, and that, while it may be possible to identify some quality assurance principles, these need to be flexible/open enough so that 'western' priorities are not imposed uncritically on other higher education systems.

There seems to be a global convergence in the measurement and understanding of quality, encouraged by the internationalisation of higher education and the development of new ranking systems (including the QS world university index). However, the convergence is misleading, as it depends on the borrowing and adaptation of predominantly Western quality assurance frameworks by HE institutions in the developing world (Blanco-Ramirez and Berger, 2014). The process of convergence is encouraged by multinational organisations and Northern consultants but, as Blanco-Ramirez and Berger (2014, p. 90) argue, it is also 'generally welcomed by partners in the Global South'. Blanco-Ramirez and Berger (2014, p. 90) further explain that –

> '… the intentionality and active nature of this process raises particularly significant concerns in the Global South where such practices are often adopted because of the legitimacy they are believed to carry without adequate regard for the contextual differences that exist in terms of socio-historical, economic, cultural and intra-nation power differentials' (Blanco-Ramirez and Berger 2014, p. 90).

It is important to recognise that a stated commitment to preserving quality is not sufficient without action to support this, and the adoption of Western/Northern standards is often not possible without capacity support. Hence, any attempt to educational reforms and the debate about quality in fragile or conflict-affected contexts must not undercut or substitute local or national initiatives in these arenas, but should capitalise on context-specific efforts, initiated by local stakeholders through a dialogic process.

Strengthening higher education in conflict-affected contexts

Feuer et al (2013) argue that rebuilding HE in conflict-affected societies underpins three important dimensions of the HE and conflict nexus. Firstly, university students and academics are often at the forefront of violent movements and therefore, dispersed during conflict as they either participate in or are forced to flee the conflict. The post-war demobilisation should involve strategies for bringing them back to employment through relevant vocational or higher education training (Buckland 2006). Secondly, HE serves as a critical space for knowledge production and engagement in plurality of political views which can both ameliorate and fuel political tensions (Den Boer and van der Borgh 2011). Thirdly, the post-conflict reconstruction of HE, without concurrently addressing ethnic, gender-based and social dimensions that undermine equity of access and quality, can facilitate the return of conflict (Bacevic 2013).

There is a plethora of evidence indicating that investment in HE leads to economic growth by providing high levels of skills and knowledge as well as building enhanced civic cultures (Etzkowitz 2004; Schleicher 2006; Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski 2011; McMahon 2009; McMahon and Oketch 2013). HE has also been argued to serve as a catalyst for stabilisation and securitisation, reconstruction, statebuilding and peacebuilding (Milton and Barakat 2016). The expansion of HE provisions in conflict-affected contexts can provide hope for a stable livelihood for young people and reduce the likelihood of relapse into conflict (Collier et al, 2008). Moreover, investment in this area enhances the prospects of reconstruction in post-war periods (Dryden-Peterson 2010). Though not recognised prominently in mainstream statebuilding strategies, HE can 'make a constructive contribution to rebuilding fragile states, by (re)building institutional capacity, supporting efforts to establish the rule of law, and civic engagement' (Milton and Barakat 2016, p. 411). By promoting the messages about consequences of violence, addressing the social, political and economic inequalities and engaging constructively in identity politics, HE can support sustainable peacebuilding. Notwithstanding analyses of attacks on HE (Novelli and Selenica 2014) and approaches to rebuilding the post-war HE sector (Brunskell-Evans and Moore 2012), HE is largely neglected in the educational development discourse (Milton and Barakat 2016).

More recently, partnerships in higher education have been conceptualised as an integral part of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2015). Goal 17 aims to revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development by enhancing:

> North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism. (SDGs 2015)

This paper proposes global partnerships for post-war recovery, which, while such partnerships may offer Northern institutions access to significant research potential, are

designed mainly for strengthening and benefitting weaker institutions. In partnerships, characterised by horizontal power relations, 'members of the collaborating group … have mutual respect and trust,' and are 'able to compromise while seeing collaboration as being in their own interest' (Connolly, Jones and Jones 2007, p. 160). These partnerships, as will be argued, are fraught with difficulties that emerge from discordant research cultures, uneven bureaucratic infrastructures, varying reporting, communication and evaluation expectations, high rates of staff turnover at the conflict-prone partnership site, and lack of prior established working relationships. Such academic partnerships can be complex and sometimes daunting, when persevered, could help universities to stimulate post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding.

Initiatives on partnerships between universities in the North and those in conflict-affected contexts can be situated within this international policy framework not only for 'knowledge sharing' but also collaborative knowledge production and skills exchange. However, unless there is a robust strategy for sustainable partnerships, simply the project-based funding approach is unlikely to achieve these broad objectives (Amey 2010). In low-capacity contexts, sustained assistance would require the 'institutionalization and collective commitment of resources, broadly defined, and greater ability to translate the activities into the accountability systems of the academy should they be program reviews, faculty evaluation criteria, or other institutional measures of productivity' (Amey 2010, p. 66).

The proposed strategy for HE development with the objective of long-term, sustainable peacebuilding underpins the notion of positive peace and social justice (Galtung, 1976; 1990; Fraser, 2005). More specifically, it is acknowledged that HE has importance beyond economic development to social transformation where the sector contributes to address systemic injustices both within and around the education system. The recent work on the '4Rs' theoretical framework (Novelli et al, 2015), *Recognition, Redistribution, Representation and Reconciliation*, linking the work of Nancy Fraser (1995, 2005) and John-Paul Lederach (1995; 1997) offers the education community in conflict-affected contexts with tools to analyse the goals of HE. The '4Rs' framework contends that a sustainable approach to peacebuilding emphasises social development by addressing 'underlying causes of conflict such as political, economic and social inequalities and injustices' (Novelli et al 2015, p. 15). HE research and strategic partnerships can benefit from these notions in formulating policies and implementing partnerships programmes. This framework should strive to promote access of marginalised communities to HE; promote inclusion in educational decision-making; recognise diverse identities and languages and; bring communities across dividing lines together to build sustainable peace.

Empirically, the paper draws upon an academic development project between the UCL Institute of Education and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Hargeisa University in 2016-17 that focused on collaborative research, curriculum development and graduate teaching, including engagement with a broad range of local educational stakeholders as well as regional HE institutions. From this, the following four pathways to impact in HE have been developed through which to help universities with diminished capacities to build

towards the 'three pillars' of higher education – teaching, research and service (Knight 2004; Oketch et al 2014):

1. capacity development in teaching and learning;
2. research training and collaborative research;
3. curriculum development and teaching exchange and;
4. academic programmes in education, conflict and peacebuilding.

Interactions between higher education, conflict and peace

Higher education helps to shape policies and build democratic systems of governance by producing researchers, teachers, education practitioners, scientists, entrepreneurs and other highly-skilled professionals (Marginson 2011). Firstly, a transformative higher education system can provide 'a space for breaking down knowledge monopolies in society' (Feuer, Hornidge and Schetter 2013, p. 2); promote peace through equitable access; encourage constructive critical dialogue into the causes of, and solutions to conflict, inequalities and reconciliation (Johnson, 2018). Thus, while adopting 'transgressive' approaches to 'drive new cultural norms, inclusion and respect for human rights' (Owen et el 2018, 58), HE can help 'reconstruct shattered economic and physical infrastructure' and restore 'collapsed governance systems' and 'social cohesion' (Barakat and Milton 2015, p. 4). However, in addition to resources, this necessitates support to teaching and research capacities, a task that is rendered excruciatingly complex by a multitude of debilitating effects endured by the HE sector in conflict-affected contexts.

Secondly, higher education is one of the major targets in armed conflicts where attacks on learning facilities, students and academics are pervasive and university premises are frequently occupied by military or armed groups (GCPEA 2014). Resulting losses in university capacities through casualties, injuries, and forced displacement or migration are difficult to compensate for due to the degree of investment required to produce high calibre teaching and research staff, while attacks on infrastructure may also discourage learners from pursuing their education or at the very least, impact upon their potential academic performance.

Finally, in the era of globalisation, the HE domain has witnessed an 'academic revolution' (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009) in terms of diversification of programmes that universities offer and their engagement in globally interconnected knowledge production. Universities and national governments are under enormous pressures to respond to 'an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions' (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009, p. iv). In post-war societies, the development of the higher education sector faces challenges to meet these demands. Unlike resource-abundant countries such as Singapore, China, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, where universities from Europe and North America have established their campuses, conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Nepal offer little in terms of profitability whilst stakes on

physical and financial security of investments are very high. Despite these challenges, there is usually high demand of HE in post-war societies as it is regarded as a pathway to stable livelihoods, economic development and conflict mitigation (Ishiyama and Breuning 2012; Milton and Barakat 2016).

However, post-war states that often adopt neoliberal policies de-prioritise public investment in the HE sector (Buckland 2005; Agresto 2007; Heyneman 2009), resulting in a vacuum which is being increasingly filled by the private sector with serious financial implications for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The location of universities in the urban settings and decreasing public funding in HE means that access to HE is unequal and limited to the economically privileged. From a conflict perspective, inequity in access to HE could be a driver of instability.

Conflict, stability and higher education development in Somaliland: A case study

Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, Somalia has been fragmented along zonal administrations. This began with the separation of Somaliland, and later led to the division of Somalia into three recognised territories; Somaliland, Puntland and the South Central Zone (Lewis 2014). Levels of security differ and educational systems are also distinct given that different political entities control the three regions, and that the different entities have varying capacities, prompting the provision of a range of private and charitable schools. Additionally, Awdalland, Galmudug, Jubaland and Khaatumo are new administrations negotiating political recognition. Somaliland has maintained a state of relative peace since the early war years (post-1994), but, due to on-going violence elsewhere, large parts of Somalia have experienced significant instability. Protracted, multi-level violent conflicts and ongoing political instability have thwarted efforts to establish a functioning education system. After the conflict began in 1990, only 600 formal schools remained open, enrolling 150,000 children (Cassanelli and Abdikadir 2004). Over 90% of these were destroyed in the Somali war that began in 1991 (Williams and Cummings 2015). Added to this is the rise of radical and insurgent groups, who have also introduced their own education system such as, Al Shabaab's Islamic schools. According to the Africa Educational Trust (2017), at least 17 distinct curricula are being taught in Somali schools.

Somaliland is markedly distinct from other Somali territories. While it is anchored in the Somali state, it experiences partially higher levels of development, based on the diaspora investment and the political stability that is maintained by its self-governing structures (Ahmed 2000). Somaliland's current stability emerges from its political distinctiveness as a hybrid democracy that relies on its unique clan system combined with modern government institutions such as, houses of parliament, judiciary and elected government. The state is structured around a democratically elected presidency and a parallel Guurti (House of Elders), which mediates disagreements and approves legislation. Both institutions are dominated by the *Isaaq* clan with their male representatives, which means minorities and women are under-represented but law and order is maintained through strong clan-based

internal cohesion. Yet, the lack of international recognition of Somaliland's independence means Somaliland is not eligible for international development aid as an independent state.

Somailand's higher education sector is still in its infancy (relative to the provisions available in neighbouring states). Its first university, Amoud, was established in 1998, while the largest state University, the University of Hargeisa, was founded in 2000. Since then, many higher education institutions have been established in both Somalia and Somaliland, including public and private institutions. Current estimates suggest that there are close to 50 higher education institutions in the Somali territories and 15 in Hargeisa (the Somaliland's capital) alone, where the vast majority of these were established between 2004 and 2012 (Heritage Institute 2013). However, this number is likely to have increased dramatically by 2017 as a 'laissez-faire environment together with the high demand for university education provided the necessary condition for the rapid growth of the sector' in Somaliland (Ali, 2016, p. 16). This expansion is also attributed to a significant increase in numbers of educated Somalis who are returning from abroad to establish educational businesses in the context where there is a lack of regulatory framework that could enforce requirements and minimum standards for a functioning university. Consequently, these institutions largely focus on teaching, sometimes, conferring degrees from foreign universities with limited or no provision of research or knowledge production.

There are limited library facilities and access to e-services in Somali universities is non-existent or bare minimum, making it difficult to access online publications (Heritage Institute 2013). The lack of publications affiliated with these institutions makes it difficult to obtain information on their activities through publicly available sources. Universities are also affected by a general lack of qualified teaching faculties. In a survey of 44 institutions and 2,501 lecturers, it was found that merely 11% of lecturers were reported to have gained PhDs whist 50% of them had Masters and 39% only Bachelor's degrees (Heritage Institute, 2013). This has led to a growing dependence on regional universities in neighbouring Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia for curriculum and teaching materials in exchange of royalties, where 10 to 12 percent of student fees (ranging between USD 500 and 750 per annum) are paid to a parent university (Ali, 2016, p. 18). This means that many universities are established by entrepreneurs who rent buildings, hire instructors, and import teaching materials, with no or little regulations to run the business. This arrangement does meet the immediate demand for access to HE programmes but undermines the aspect of academic development through research, continuing professional development of staff and innovations in the curriculum. Most institutions operate as 'coaching centres', teaching imported courses, detached from national goals of democracy, peace and prosperity. There is urgent need for technical support for local academics to develop capacities in curriculum development, research, and quality assurance to build a strong HE environment (Pherali and Lewis 2017). From a peacebuilding education perspective, HE should serve the community needs by providing relevant knowledge and skills; allowing for critical examination of societal inequalities; and facilitating effective dialogue across the growing HE sector (Feuer, Hornidge and Schetter 2013).

In protracted crises such as in Somalia, peace and development can only be realised by implementing policies that ensure equity in educational access; promote inclusion; appreciate social diversities (e.g. clan identities) and; nurture peaceful ways of dealing with differences (Novelli et al 2015). This requires developing the capacity of Somali institutions to address legacies of conflict and historical differences by capitalising on traditional practices of dialogue and inculcating aspirations for a new peaceful future (Walls 2017). This need is pertinent in the context of Somaliland (which enjoys political stability), as well as in Puntland and in South Central Somalia, which continue to suffer from violence and instability. Unfortunately, the role of HE in stabilisation and peacebuilding is largely unrecognised in the Somali region. The following section will analyse an innovative HE partnership project in Somaliland which provides new insights into HE development in conflict-affected contexts.

From 2015 - 2017, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) at the University of Hargeisa in Somaliland and the UCL Institute of Education collaborated on an academic partnership project to develop a new postgraduate course on *education, conflict and peacebuilding* that would be later integrated in the IPCS' post-graduate provision in Peace and Conflict Studies. A research-based participatory approach was employed to develop the course, involving academics, education authorities, graduate students, and NGO practitioners who support education and peace programmes in Somaliland. The objective was to draw upon global debates about education and conflict; conduct research into dimensions of peace in the Somali region and then to contextualise the knowledge to develop a post-graduate academic course in the University of Hargeisa.

The research process was three-fold: Firstly, a rigorous literature review was conducted to identify the existing body of theory and empirical evidence on peacebuilding education at a global scale. This also included a review of relevant examples of postgraduate teaching on education and conflict in HE institutions across the world (Pherali and Lewis 2017). Secondly, an empirical study was conducted in Somaliland, Puntland and the South Central Zone to capture different conceptualisations of peace in Somali society[4] and interconnections between education and conflict. Education practitioners, academics, youth, elders, political leaders and education policy makers (N=31) were interviewed about their perspectives on peace and the role of education in promoting stability and development in the Somali region[5]. Thirdly, a curriculum development workshop was organised in Hargeisa in May 2016 to discuss the findings of the field study and literature review and to capture feedback from workshop participants who also provided inputs on curricular contents, pedagogies and learning partnerships that were needed to deliver the course at IPCS. This collaboration benefitted from 'the process of collective knowledge generation' by bringing 'comparative and cross-cultural perspectives to bear on local situations' (Crossley and Holmes 2001, p. 399). More specifically, IPCS provided contextual

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[4] By Somali society, it is loosely meant Somali speaking cultural community across Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. It is recognised that people in Somaliland prefer to be referred to as 'Somaliland society' to distinguish themselves from Somalia. As outsiders, authors feel that it is beyond their mandate to make claims about political preferences.

[5] Findings of this study are reported in Ali and Isak (2017)

local expertise: legacies about conflict, cultural and political sensitivities culturally nuanced pedagogical approaches whereas, colleagues from UCL Institute of Education synthesised global literature and accessed their academic contacts to document cutting-edge knowledge and teaching programmes in the field of education, conflict and peacebuilding. The combination of these mutually complementary abilities and knowledge helped shape the project, design curricular contents, build local partnerships for educational excursions. This process culminated in development of a post-graduate module in *education, conflict and peacebuilding* which was piloted with 20 graduate students representing, development and government agencies (e.g. ActionAid, Norwegian Refugee Council, Africa Education Trust, Care International, Ministry of Education etc.) at IPCS in March 2017. The module assignment involved a short-term practicum with an educational organisation and prepare a reflective portfolio that could demonstrate a critical understanding theory and practice in the field.

This module has a specific focus on understanding the role of education in the production and prevention of socio-political tensions and in the development of skills for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding in the Somali region. This goes beyond the confines of teaching students conflict resolution skills or peace education, to a wider mandate of building students' abilities to critique the power dynamics that underlie inequalities and conflict drivers in education in Somaliland and beyond (Freire 1970; Novelli et al 2015). The fieldwork and/or practicum involved in the module helps students to develop new insights into these dynamics, merging theory and practice and to become knowledge producers, rather than simply learners. In the pilot year of the programme, their final assignments were used not only to assess their critical understanding of core concepts about education and peacebuilding, but also to evaluate the content, quality and pedagogical approach of the teaching programme.

The above-described methodology was aligned with the strong sense of Somalilanders' pride in 'hybrid democracy' which has its traditional values and practices in its core but recognises the need to engage with international partners to benefit from cross-cultural collaboration (Crossley and Holmes 2001). In Somaliland, civic participation is central to any initiatives that are related to peace and politics. This value should also underpin any meaningful teaching programme that strives to incorporate diverse views and conflicting narratives, so as to facilitate critical dialogue and empower local people to work towards peace (Feuer, Hornidge and Schetter 2013). As University of Hargeisa reflects civic and community culture of Somaliland, the project adopted a bottom-up, grassroots approach to understanding historical narratives and local participation, incorporating indigenous perspectives and cultural values in the university course. The Somaliland's peace is also very fluid and its political climate is highly complex, calling for a continual revision of understandings on these issues. Therefore, an adaptive course structure was prioritised, as well as the teaching of research skills intended to empower the graduates to undertake lifelong learning as future practitioners of peacebuilding education.

It was found that students were more comfortable in conducting oral presentations and explaining complex theoretical concepts and illustrate case studies than to demonstrate

their understanding in writing. Student group presentations and their interactions with Members of Guurti (House of Elders), the Somaliland upper house that also plays an instrumental role in conflict resolution in Somaliland, clearly demonstrated their abilities to question and develop new narratives of social transformation.

However, their limited English proficiency significantly hindered them from articulating their ideas in writing, as well as limiting them academically. The experience during the pilot of the course shows that the University of Hargeisa needs to provide rigorous English training to its students to improve their levels of written English prior to their commencement of graduate study to maximise the programme impact, or switch to Somali-language instruction (which is less appealing given that IPCS has adopted English as the medium of instruction).

In low-income contexts, access to research funding for higher education researchers can be limited and the research component of many North-South partnership projects is usually led by academics in the Northern universities: owing to the need to 'transfer capacity' from North to South, 'North-South partnerships have … been largely managed from outside the developing countries, and their sustainability has been donor-dependent' (Nakabugo, Barrett, McEvoy and Munck 2010, p. 3). This project was designed particularly to enable academics at University of Hargeisa to lead an empirical study including, the research design, fieldwork and dissemination of findings at an international conference. The course was delivered jointly by academics from both UoH and UCL Institute of Education to facilitate staff professional development at both ends. The involvement of local guest speakers to reflect on their experience of peace in Somaliland contributed to contextualisation of theoretical debates covered in the course.

Somali HE institutions are beginning to serve the first pillar of their role through teaching and learning (Knight 2004) even though rigorous programmes of continuing professional development for HE teachers are urgently needed. The other pillars, such as research and development, knowledge dissemination, and civic engagement, are significantly under-developed. As observed, the joint research with local academics, though challenging at times, was found to be encouraging in terms of promoting unique insights into the context as well as engaging in collaborative scholarly activities and publications. Horizontal power relationships between North and South partners (Connolly, Jones and Jones 2007) in the process of curriculum development, teaching and joint research activities enhanced the quality of collaborations. Hence, there is potential to apply such approaches more broadly to other conflict-affected and fragile states to maximise the impact of collaborative academic work in HE.

Building HE capacities for peacebuilding: A strategy for partnerships and pathways to change

Evidence from the previous section suggests that Northern partners can help support Southern HE institutions that are low on resource, teaching and research capacities. However, it is easy in these situations for Northern partners to become overly critical and to dominate the development process through academic elitism. It is important, therefore, that North-South partnerships in HE be also utilised to broaden South-South partnerships among the regional universities that are interested to internationalise their teaching and

research programmes, so as to provide counter-balances on Northern 'leadership' or domination. As part of the project, the University of Hargaisa, School of Education in University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University were linked through a joint research symposium on higher education and peacebuilding which was held in Kenya. This event enabled two Kenyan universities to join the project activity and brought together academics from three east African universities and two UK universities to engage in a dialogue with several non-governmental organisations, donors and Kenyan Ministry of Education about enhancing South-South and North-South partnerships in HE and peacebuilding, as well as to critique the approach to capacity development. This enabled academe to interact with practitioner organisations who were supporting education in conflict-affected contexts as well as to learn from each other about teaching and research activities.

Building upon the experience in this project, the following pathways have been proposed which, if expanded, could make a significant and particular contribution to professionalisation of the sub-field of education and conflict, while more generally enhancing professional development in the HE sector in conflict-affected and fragile contexts:

- *a pathway through teaching capacity development:* professional development opportunities in the HE teaching and learning are rare in the institutions of conflict-affected and fragile states. Through pedagogical and curriculum training for HE teachers, academic partnerships can improve teaching and learning practice and produce multiplier effects by utilising the support of Northern universities.

- *a pathway through research training and experience in collaborative research:* HE institutions in conflict-affected environments often lack in research capacities due to the devastation of research infrastructure in war. Thus, their role in community engagement, knowledge sharing and national policy making is largely undermined. Improved research capacities of HE staff would not only promote research-informed teaching but also enhance their role in knowledge production and policy reforms in their countries, as well as contributing to global understandings of post-conflict education recovery.

- *a pathway through curriculum development and teaching exchange:* South-South partnerships have the potential to promote academic synergies at regional levels. This kind of collaboration would be easier to succeed logistically and more equipped to respond to regional political, social and economic challenges. Through collaboration in curriculum development and teaching, regional HE institutions could develop strategic partnerships for joint research, teaching exchange between staff as well as promote student mobility.

- *a broad pathway through an academic programme in education, conflict and fragility:* the impact through this pathway assumes that the development of integrative academic programmes in education, conflict and fragility in Southern universities could help professionals to scale up knowledge about the root causes of

conflict and conflict-sensitive approach to their teaching, research and policy dialogue. The development of such programmes simultaneously across participating universities could further facilitate collaboration between HE institutions, and with practitioner organisations, to produce a new generation of cadre that is better equipped to respond to educational needs in emergencies and protracted crises. In the long-term it might also help to nuance, improve and professionalise the field of education in emergencies.

Across these pathways, partnerships with local government and non-governmental organisations that work in the area of education and conflict are crucial. However, educational partnerships in conflict-affected and politically contested societies are always challenging. Firstly, working across different cultures requires patience, persistence and most importantly, a deep commitment to contribution. As noted previously, there are genuine concerns about North-South partnerships with regards to the potential domination of Western educational values in the process of capacity building. International academics may experience cautiously friendly attitudes from partners, but a number of cultural disconnections, scepticism and different understandings of research will impact on perceptions of power and equality on all sides of the relationship. Mitigating this requires a commitment to long-term engagement and mutually beneficial collaboration from all partners, as well as open dialogue about educational priorities on a level footing (Connolly, Jones and Jones 2007). However, long-term maintenance of partnerships is not always supported by needed long-term availability of funding (Amey 2010). Where money is unavailable, partnerships must be maintained through continued verbal commitment and communication, with realistic expectations.

Secondly, academics from the West might subconsciously expect outcomes beyond the capacity of partner organisations in conflict-affected contexts. This may be reflected in terms of meeting deadlines, producing paperwork to Northern bureaucratic standards, quality of outputs and the medium and levels of communication between partners during a given project: owing to the complexity of bureaucratic systems developed within Northern institutions (which place very high burdens of reporting and accountability on academics), working across systems can be extremely difficult for project partners (Eddy 2010). The capacity of a Southern institution may not be responsive to these requirements.

Thirdly, it is easy for Northern institutions to develop a saviour complex, expecting high levels of enthusiasm or gratitude for their assistance, which may not manifest in partnership processes. These expectations lead easily to frustration, disengagement and hostility. Therefore, patience and resilience throughout is key to understanding and communicating the reporting requirements and bureaucratic impediments impacting on all stakeholders, as well as the expectations of work.

Fourthly, international development organisations are likely to create a parallel segment of economically exclusive job market, which often drains out skilled and qualified workforce from public universities to the INGO sector in conflict-affected contexts. This situation makes public sector jobs (including academic positions that can only afford to pay the national wages) unattractive to many qualified people, leading to high staff turnovers during

partnerships. Again, this requires understanding from partnering international institutions and effective mitigation of risks pertaining to staff retention.

Fifthly, there are always challenges around technologies, travel visas and security situations that affect project activities. For example, it is usually difficult to secure European or US visas for academics from low income or conflict-affected countries, while Western academics may be barred from or charged high insurance premiums for trips to conflict-affected regions. This requires serious discussion of what is and is not achievable through partnership activities.

Finally, the political views of partners and the ways in which international academics express their ideas in their deliberations is likely to determine intimacy in and productivity of the partnership. Honesty and transparency on both sides of the debate are important in building trust, but so is diplomacy.

Despite the risks, this strategic partnership model envisions two-fold outcomes: firstly, it would enhance professional development of HE teachers by improving research, curriculum development skills and pedagogies. Secondly, by establishing a new academic programme and promoting research in the area of education, conflict and peacebuilding, it would build national capacities to address the causes of conflict and promote social transformation. However, these outcomes can only be achieved by those willing to work through the aforementioned challenges with honesty and commitments.

Conclusion

The global HE terrain has seen considerable internationalisation in the 21st century. Indeed, 'the international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volume, scope, and complexity during the past two decades', with collaborative activities ranging from more 'traditional study-abroad programmes', to other activities that 'stress upgrading the international perspectives and skills of students, enhancing foreign language programs, and providing cross-cultural understanding' (Altbatch and Knight 2007, p. 290). However, these debates are underdeveloped in contexts of low income societies that suffer from the legacy of violent conflict and state fragility. Owing to insecurity, high costs and restrictions of mobility for their students and teachers and lack of resources, universities in conflict-affected and fragile contexts struggle to capitalise on potential opportunities that HE sector offers generally. Barriers also extend to their limited ability to global engagement in research and development. This is deeply problematic and creates North-South hierarchies in the global HE sector. The post-colonial mind-set that values Northern universities as producers of knowledge inhibit the potential of universities in the South to play an important role in their development by perpetuating external dependency in research, policy reforms and skills development.

It should also be recognised that South-South partnerships alone are not necessarily the trouble-free replacement of the existing problematic power relations between the North and South. The regional geopolitics and historical tensions between societies in the global South could equally influence the quality and outcomes of South-South HE partnerships. In order to break these barriers and reduce complicity in maintaining these inequalities, we

have proposed four pathways to change through participatory horizontal partnerships in HE in conflict-affected contexts. These pathways also underpin the notion of peacebuilding as a process of social transformation in which conditions of injustices and social, cultural and political inequalities are addressed through critical engagement and dialogue (Lederach 1997; Novelli et al 2015). The quest for quality in HE has regrettably been no longer about pushing humanity's progress forward by working cooperatively in pursuit of new knowledge, rather, too often, it has been about competition for profits and international recognition. In this paper, on the contrary, dialogic, horizontal and meaningful North-South and South-South partnerships have been proposed to work together to overcome the world's most significant HE challenges. Success of this strategy relies on long-term commitments from all stakeholders in the HE sector.

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