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Acronyms

Danida	Danish International Development Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
TEP	Teacher Emergency Programme
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

Education Kits in Somalia¹

Eric Eversmann²

I. Introduction

Education kits are packages of basic education materials (pens, pencils, notebooks, etc.) that have been designed as part of a preparedness strategy to support schooling for populations caught in complex emergencies. Although the idea of prepackaging such materials dates from the 1980s, education kits have achieved heightened popularity this past decade with their use in the many emergencies that have gripped Africa. Today they are the most salient aspect of United Nations emergency education response. This paper presents the results of research into the use and effectiveness of education kits in Somalia between 1994 and 1997. Research was conducted in Geneva, Nairobi and Somalia between January and March, 2000 in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The purpose of this research was to produce a single country case study of the use of education kits. As a framework, the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) evaluation guidelines have been used, evaluating the program according to five criteria: efficiency, effectiveness, impact, relevance, and sustainability.³ Survey questions were based on a literature review and previous education kit evaluations and reports (see Appendix). Respondents were coded according to their role in the education sector: UN staff, NGO staff, and school teachers and school heads. The data gathered from the survey were supplemented with key informant interviews, individual school observations and unstructured interviews with other Somali educationists not directly participating in education kit distributions, but familiar with the needs of the sector. In analyzing the data collected, this report draws both specific conclusions on the use of education kits in Somalia and more general conclusions regarding kits as a central emergency education response.

II. Somalia

Since 1988 and the start of the civil war, Somalia has come apart. In 1991, the Republic of Somaliland, which territorially approximates colonial British Somalia, declared full independence from the rest of the country. Likewise, in 1998 the northeast region of the

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³ Danish International Development Agency, "Danida evaluation guidelines" [<http://www.um.dk/danida/evalueringsrapporter/eval-gui/index.asp>].

country, which experienced relatively little fighting throughout the war, took a step in this direction, declaring partial independence and establishing the Puntland State of Somalia. In the remainder of the country, the Center and South Zones, sporadic fighting continues as no clan or group has been able to establish hegemony; the city of Mogadishu itself is divided among three warring groups. In total the conflict has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and over a million displaced out of a total prewar population of about six million.⁴

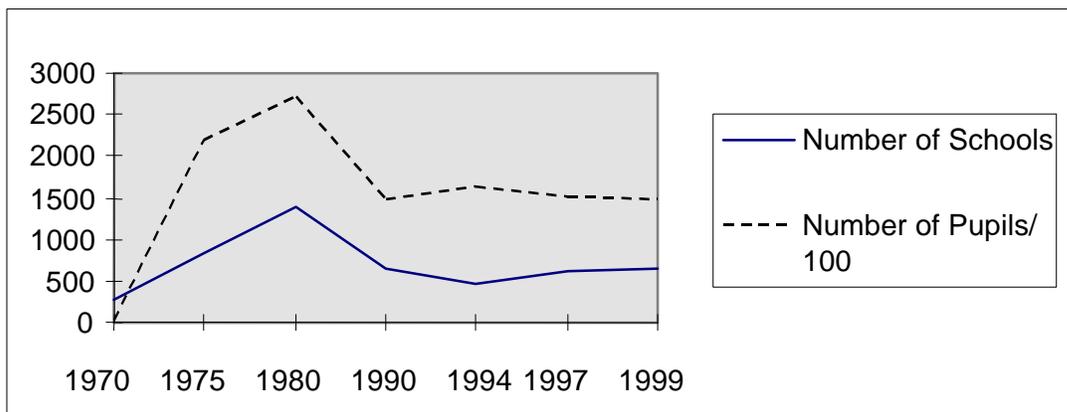


The formal education system was almost completely destroyed as a result of the civil war. Unlike crisis situations such as that in the former Yugoslavia, where strong education traditions have helped to preserve the system throughout the conflict, the formal education system in Somalia was institutionally weak to begin with. It was only in 1972, as a prelude to an overall education initiative, that the Siad Barre government introduced the first Somali alphabet, based on the Latin script, and Somali was made the official language of schools. A mass literacy campaign begun in 1974 saw a ten-fold rise in enrollment rates to 271,000 in 1982.⁵ At its best, however, the enrollment rate never surpassed fifty percent of the school-age population and gains were subsequently lost during the 1980s, as funding to the social sector shrank in favor of investments in defense.

⁴ Matt Bryden and Martina I. Steiner, *Somalia between Peace and War: Somali Women on the Eve of the 21st Century* (Nairobi: UNIFEM, 1998).

⁵ Gerard A. Bennars et al., *Mid-Decade Review of Progress Towards Education For All: The Somalia Country Case Study* (Nairobi: The International Consultative Forum on Education For All, 1996).

Enrollment and Schools in Somalia⁶



In small ways, the education system survived during the civil war through local initiatives supported by assistance from the international community. In this effort, United Nations (UN) agencies have played a central role, beginning in 1994 with the distribution of education kits and the provision of teacher training by UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and a school feeding program run by the World Food Program. At the same time UNESCO undertook a program to reprint the pre-1988 Somali textbooks, the majority of which had been destroyed during the war. With the withdrawal of UN military operations in Somalia in 1995 and a concomitant decline in donor interest, these initiatives began to wane; throughout 1996 UNICEF's Somalia education officer position was unfilled. Only in 1997 was a reevaluation of support to the sector undertaken and a reinvigorated effort begun that continues to date.

Today the status of education in Somalia is one of the worst in the world. A Survey of Primary Schools conducted in 1998-99 identified 651 formal schools enrolling just under 150,000 pupils—less than ten percent of children aged six to seventeen.⁷ Individual schools operate largely on their own in the absence of a national administrative infrastructure. There is no set national curriculum, with schools using Arabic-language, pre-war Somali, Kenyan, and/or Western curricula. There is cause for hope, however. As more areas free themselves of conflict, new schools are opening every day and enrollment rates in the youngest grades are rising. Further, while not equal to that of boys, girls' enrollment as a percentage of the total (35 percent of all pupils) is better than in many countries in the world.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Not included in the Survey of Primary Schools are the Koranic schools, which teach rote memorization of the Koran (in Arabic) and represent the most pervasive medium of learning, with an estimated 70-80 percent of all children attending such schools for at least two years.

III. Emergency Education and Kits

Providing support to education in emergency situations has long been an after-thought for international organizations. However, as Marc Sommers notes in his work, affected populations themselves place a high priority on education and often take the lead in organizing education as soon as possible.⁸ In recent years educationists have begun to challenge relief agencies to be more active in supporting these indigenous education efforts. While they have made some progress in recognizing the importance of education, much remains to be done, especially in the improvement of the educationists' own working practices.

Education responses, when they have occurred, have often been criticized for delays—preparedness, rapidity, and reliability of response being defining characteristics of emergency relief work. To some degree education kits themselves are a direct response to such criticisms, and various types of kits have been created by both UNICEF and UNESCO. For UNICEF, the kit represents a “stop-gap” measure, whereas for UNESCO it has been designed as a short-term basic literacy and numeracy education course. Common to both is the idea of prepackaging basic education materials to be quickly deployable as a reliable support to education during an emergency. Packaging materials in this way follows from emergency response strategies in other areas, especially health, where a kit-based approach is prevalent.

From the beginning education kits achieved popularity among both donors and many of those working with emergency education programs. For educationists, they provide a concrete, packaged product of materials deployable in a range of situations. For donors, they are a more visible product in a sector that has been seen to consist of “soft” development interventions as opposed to more tangible emergency relief products such as blankets and health supplies. This popularity of education kits among donors has further raised their popularity among educationists searching for funding for an oft-neglected sector.

To date the use of education kits in emergencies has received mixed reviews. According to their supporters, kits are pedagogically sound and represent the best available method for achieving preparedness and reliability in an emergency education response program. Their detractors counter that there are both pedagogical as well as methodological flaws in their design, that they fail to accomplish even their most basic goals of preparedness, and that they are cost inefficient. This research has attempted to test both these assertions for and against education kits by examining their use in Somalia between 1994 and 1997.

⁸ Marc Sommers, *Educating Children During Emergencies: A View from the Field* (New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, March 1999). See also, Annie Foster, *From Emergency to Empowerment: The Role of Education for Refugee Communities* (Washington: Academy for Educational Development, 1995).

IV. Data

The use of education kits has been evaluated here according to five criteria: efficiency, effectiveness, impact, relevance, and sustainability. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to express their level of agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree, while 5=strongly agree) with twenty statements regarding the use of education kits in Somalia. Their responses are considered in reference to the level of agreement they expressed as compared to all questions on the survey. The average response to all statements was 3.67. On the graphs presented below, a solid bar marks this average. All 38 respondents (made up of UN, NGO and school staff) were ethnic Somalis working in Somalia.

A. *Efficiency*

As a measure of the “productivity” of the intervention, efficiency asks to what degree the outputs achieved derive from efficient use of financial, human and material resources. The four statements in this section tried to assess the extent to which the program’s main components—kits and training—were perceived to have been provided on time and in sufficient quantities. The statements were:

1. Kits have been delivered on time and as agreed.
2. Trainings (on kits) have taken place as agreed.
3. Training was provided on how to use the kits.
4. Trainings were sufficient for teachers to use the kits effectively.

Efficiency is the criterion on which the education kit program received the lowest marks. For each of the four statements, the level of agreement was below the average for the survey. Although all groups showed some level of disagreement with these statements, members of the UN staff were particularly strong in theirs. This is especially true with regard to the provision of trainings, levels of agreement with which are the lowest of any group in the entire survey.



Delays in the delivery of kits was the first cause for dissatisfaction on the part of respondents. Responding to the statement “kits have been delivered on time,” all of the marks were below the average for the survey with the exception of those provided by school staff. NGOs were most critical of the delays in kit delivery, giving this statement the most negative rating of any in the questionnaire and expressing frustrations with the poor efficiency of the program. For both NGOs and UN agencies, delays in providing materials became not only an issue of efficiency, but of credibility as well. On this point, a Training Needs Assessment report, prepared for UNICEF Somalia by independent consultants, noted that

[e]ducational leaders in all the research locales complained of promises made by representatives of certain external agencies that were not honoured. False promises not only led to the break of trust but also acted as barriers to community initiative and action.⁹

Interviews revealed that when kits were distributed, it was often the case that not enough kits were supplied. In some cases NGOs and schools compensated for inadequate numbers of kits by removing the materials from the kit boxes and distributing them equally across classes, effectively eliminating the benefits of prepackaging by treating the materials as bulk supplies.

The remaining three questions in this section referred to the provision of training. Training on how to use education kits is considered essential by all UN and NGO staff interviewed. Again, these questions received some of the most negative responses in the survey. Among all respondents the UN staff agreed least with the statements. In follow-up questions, UNICEF and UNESCO staff related that training on how to use the kits

⁹ Sheila P. Wamahi et al., *Report of the Training Needs Assessment for Primary School Teachers, Headteachers and Supervisors/Trainers in Somalia* (Nairobi: UNICEF, 1999), 7.

rarely took place because of the sporadic nature of the distributions and a lack of support materials from the respective country offices.

B. Effectiveness

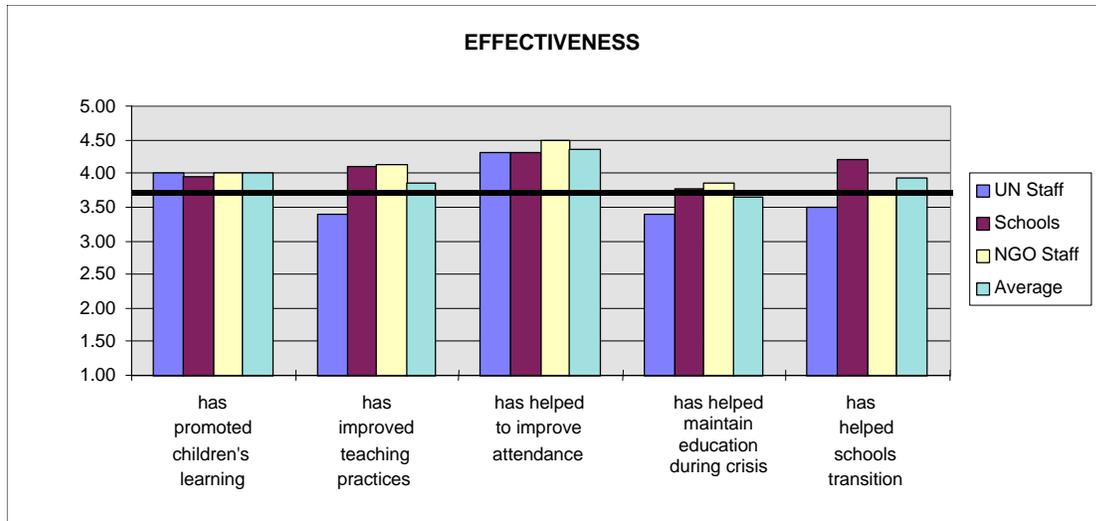
Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which formally agreed-upon objectives have been achieved. Findings in this section are limited by the inability to measure quantitatively learning outcomes at school. As elsewhere, perceived educational outcomes as opposed to measured ones are considered here. Five statements comprised this section:

1. The education kit program has been successful in promoting children's learning.
2. The education kit program has been successful in improving teaching practices.
3. The use of kits has helped to improve attendance.
4. Kits have helped to maintain education during crisis.
5. Kits have helped schools transition between crisis and more formal education provision.

For the most part, respondents agreed strongly with the statements in this section, pointing to a high degree of perceived effectiveness. By far the strongest agreement in this section was with the statement that kits had helped to improve attendance.¹⁰ This is the only statement in the survey to which all three groups averaged over 4 in their response. Statements regarding the improved learning and teaching practices were generally agreed to, while respondents expressed mixed levels of agreement with the effectiveness of kits in maintaining education and helping schools transition from crisis to reconstruction.

The strong response with regard to attendance results from the fact that poverty, and the related inability to purchase school supplies, forms one of the main barriers to formal schooling. Because the learning process hinges materially on the pupil's exercise book and pen, most children will not attend school if they do not have these supplies. In classrooms visited, only 3-5 percent of children were present without an exercise book. For this reason the distribution of kits was so universally perceived as successful in raising attendance. As long as children have materials, they attend classes. It was widely reported across all groups interviewed that additional children would flock to school just on the rumor that materials were going to be distributed that day. Clearly, in a situation where there is a demand for education, the provision of basic materials increases access.

¹⁰ This statement referred to attendance and not enrollment. Gains in attendance were often temporary (i.e., fewer long-term enrollment gains), falling off as materials in the kits were depleted.



For the same reason that there was a unanimous opinion that kits had improved attendance, respondents felt that the provision of materials had helped improve the levels of both learning and teaching. Again, because the learning process is based on copying lessons into exercise books, the provision thereof meant that it was easier both for teachers to do their jobs and for children to learn. The exception here is the response of UN staff who were decidedly less in agreement as to improvements in teaching practices. Whereas other groups saw the provision of chalk as leading to an improvement in teaching practices, UN staff were looking more for an improvement in qualitative pedagogical practice. This is likely because they are for the most part former teachers themselves and therefore acutely aware of both the needs and deficiencies of the current teaching corps.

Across all of the statements here, school staff members are very positive about the results achieved by kits except in response to the statement “Kits have helped to maintain education during crisis.” In interviews, school staff members were more realistic about the ability of a box of materials to sustain education during crisis, saying that education materials are merely one part of a larger educational equation, all elements of which must be supported for materials to achieve their goal of helping to maintain education in a crisis.

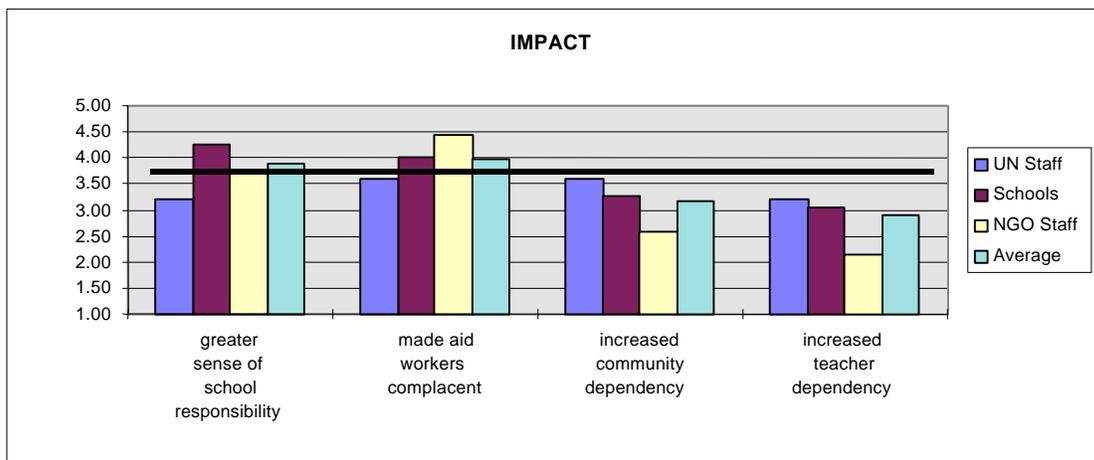
C. Impact

Statements in this section tried to examine the positive and negative consequences resulting from working with education kits, whether these were foreseen or not. The four statements below were chosen based on readings of previous emergency education reports and evaluations.



1. Kits gave teachers/school directors a greater sense of responsibility or investment in the program.
2. Working with kits made aid workers overly complacent about providing training and additional support.
3. Kits increased community dependence on external supplies.
4. Kits increased teacher dependence on external supplies.

There was general agreement with the statement that “Working with kits made aid workers overly complacent about providing training and additional support.” Respondents cited as examples the sporadic delivery of kits and the fact that kits often represented the sole aspect of support. Additionally, in areas of the country that had passed out of an emergency phase, respondents expressed dismay that they continued to receive kits as opposed to more long-term development oriented support, for which they felt they were ready. Additionally, education staff in UNICEF expressed fears about the effects of this complacency on access for girls and adolescents. Because the kits are neither gender sensitive nor address the learning needs of those outside the formal system, in failing to provide additional support and work with recipient communities, benefits are unequally distributed toward young children and boys along the lines of existing biases and prejudices.



Respondents strongly disagreed with both statements that sought to gauge dependency. Again, however, there was a discrepancy between the responses of UN staff and the other groups. The chart below shows how statements ranked according to their level of agreement as compared with all questions on the survey (1 = most agreed to, 20 = least agreed to). In comparison with all other statements on the survey, UN workers agreed relatively strongly that kits promote community dependency (4th most agreed-with

statement), less so with regard to teacher dependency (11th).¹¹ School and NGO staff, on the other hand, both dismissed the idea of any dependency.

	UN Staff	Schools	NGO Staff	Total
Kits increased community dependency on external supplies.	4	18	18	17
Kits increased teacher dependency on external supplies.	11	20	20	20

Most interesting here is the fact that NGOs and schools both expressed strong disagreement with these statements relative to their other responses on the survey. This result was contrary to a predicted donor/recipient split that would have seen NGO staff responses more reflective of those of the UN staff. The survey failed to identify any reason for this result.

Another stark difference of opinion is found in the responses to the statement “Working with kits gave schools an added sense of investment and responsibility in the program.” Even though schools felt that using education kits gave them a greater sense of investment and responsibility, UN and NGO staff doubted the extent to which this actually took place. The following graphic shows the difference between school staff, for whom the statement was the fourth-most strongly agreed to in the entire survey, and UN and NGO staff, which each ranked the statement eleventh. To justify their skepticism, the UN and NGO staff members cited numerous examples of kit supplies being sold in the markets or being diverted from classes in other ways.

	UN Staff	Schools	NGO Staff	Total
IMPACT				
Kits gave teachers/school directors a greater sense of responsibility or investment in the program.	11	4	11	9

The difference in levels of agreement may lie in the difference between an “interest” in the program and actual “investment” in it. In interviews, UN staff members agreed that kits produced great amounts of interest in education (as was cited above with regard to access) on the parts of children, communities and school staff. However, the extent to which the initial interest generated by the kits actually translated into responsibility and investment is less certain. A regional UNICEF education officer explains that although the enthusiasm generated by the use of kits is a major benefit, the kits themselves do not create any sense of responsibility or investment, arguing that it was his responsibility to ensure a sense of responsibility was engendered.

¹¹ The UNICEF education officer explains that responses of UN staff here were probably influenced by UNICEF’s own internal sensitization of its staff to the dangers of dependency, heightening their perceptions thereof.

D. Relevance

The fourth criterion, relevance, was measured to determine the extent to which the aid intervention has been in keeping with local needs and priorities. Poor relevance has been a criticism of kits across the literature. Reports from Somalia and Tanzania note problems with individual items, and an education officer in Bosnia Herzegovina who chose not to use kits cites the irrelevance of kit materials to that situation as a determining factor in his decision.

In this section, respondents were asked to identify (among suggestions given in a list) the greatest needs of the education sector during an emergency and to prioritize them. In the table below, the raw data of the survey have been aggregated into a ranking system. A ranking of 1 means the item(s) was identified as being of greatest need and priority, 10 means it was accorded the lowest need and priority. These results are presented below for both individual groups of respondents as well as for all respondents (totals). Where the same ranking appears twice, the items were tied for that rank.

Relevance: (Needs and Priorities)	UN Staff				Totals
Physical school structures	9	1	6		5
Textbooks (curricula)	3	2	1		1
Writing materials (notebooks, pens)	4	4	3		3
Teacher recruitment	1	7	6		6
Recreation materials	8	9	8		8
Secure storage containers	10	9	5		10
Teacher training	1	2	4		1
Management training	4	6	1		4
Trauma/Psycho-social care	7	8	9		8
Teaching aids (maps, scissors, tape...)	6	4	10		7

Ranking first for all respondents were teacher training and textbooks. Next in the rankings came writing materials. These, as mentioned above, are at the center of the Somali learning-teaching exercise as it currently is practiced. It is interesting that, although ranked very high, writing materials are mentioned after teacher training and textbooks. This seems to show that, even in an emergency context, inputs that improve pedagogical quality may be put above basic operating needs, such as pens and exercise books. Next highest ranked was school management training. This was particularly a concern of NGOs as they are working most closely with the schools and have first-hand experiences of the problems created by poor management. Because schools (especially in the Center and South zones) are almost entirely run by the communities or local individuals without any ministerial or administrative support, there is a need for school directors to be competent to carry out a variety of tasks.

Overall, this survey did not generally identify the individual items included in the kit as being irrelevant. True, some items, such as small wood blocks for word building, were

never observed in use and most school staff did not even know what they were for. However, the number of items considered to be irrelevant did not reach a threshold where the entire kit was judged to be of little value, nor was any single item so inappropriate that it prejudiced the use of other items included in the kit. Basic materials, such as pens and exercise books, while not identified as the most important needs in an emergency, were ranked highly by all groups.

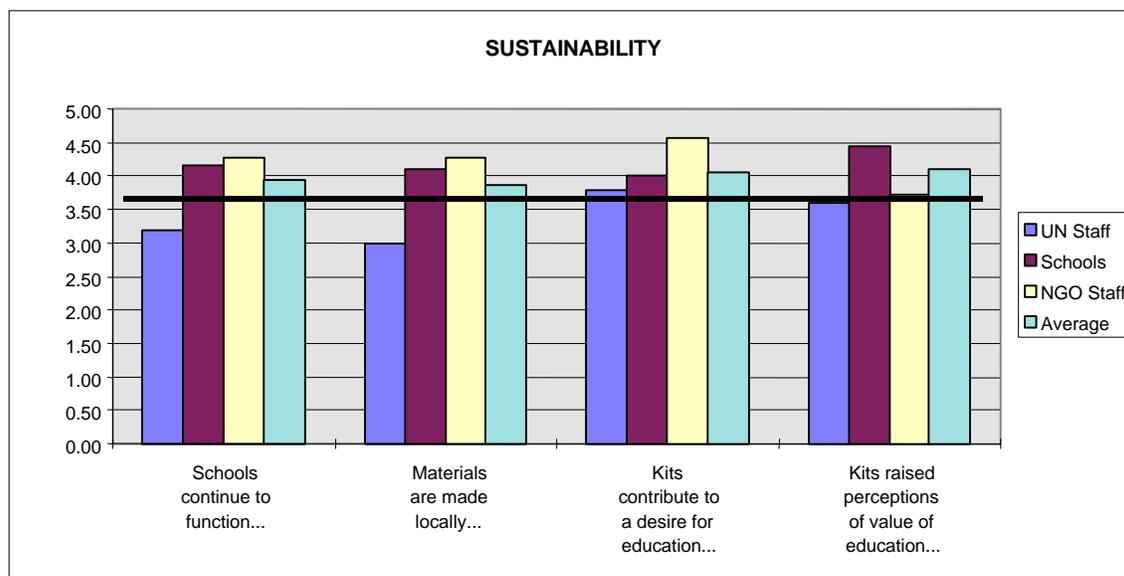
In two categories, there were anomalies across the groups. School staff ranked physical school structure first, while both UN and NGO staff placed it much lower. Likewise, UN staff saw teacher training as one of the highest priorities in an emergency whereas the other groups ranked it lower. A similar discrepancy lies in the importance assigned to teacher recruitment. What all of these discrepancies in priorities point out is the need for a common agenda and strategy supported by all actors involved in education programming.

E. Sustainability

In examining the sustainability of the intervention, the study attempted to determine the likelihood of positive impacts continuing after external assistance has come to an end. Although in many ways it is too early to attempt to measure this, this study attempted to identify elements of sustainability in behaviors and attitudes that would suggest a long term increase in either the supply of or demand for formal education. Four statements were drafted:

1. Schools continue to function after the materials in kits run out.
2. When materials are finished, teachers and parents make their own or find them locally.
3. Kits contribute in any way to a greater desire on the part of the community to see children educated.
4. Experiences with kits have raised parents' perceptions of the value of education.

Overall, the level of agreement with these statements was high and second only to that of effectiveness. Especially highly agreed to were statements that the kit program helped to raise the desire of parents and the community for education. This opinion was not consistent across all groups, however.



Specifically, whereas NGOs felt that kits raised community desire for education, they did not feel that the parents' perceptions of the value of education had been greatly raised. In contrast, schools felt that the kits had been effective in raising the parents' perceptions of the value of education but were less in agreement that kits contributed to the community's desire for children's education. No reason for these differences of opinion was identified in the survey.

Receiving lower levels of agreement were statements related to the sustainability of supply. Here UN staff were most pessimistic about the sustainability of schools in the absence of outside supplies. As with other sections, some of the most interesting findings here relate to the differences between the responses of groups. UN staff give low levels of agreement to the statements that schools continue to function without kit materials and that schools have been successful in obtaining their own materials. It is important to note that the NGOs, which have the closest contact with schools and are most familiar with their histories, have even more positive responses to these statements than the schools themselves. However, this may also be because NGO-supported schools tend to be more community based and therefore more sustainable. Additionally, the UN staff's pessimism may be due to its experience with a wider range of schools, especially with schools that have closed and which this survey did not include.

V. Conclusions

The conclusions here incorporate and build on the data gathered in this survey as well as from the literature on and observations of other emergency education programs. As such, they address both Somalia-specific issues as well as more general ones regarding the use of education kits in emergency programs. It is hoped that this broader perspective will contribute to debates on the use of education kits as a component of emergency response.

The data from this survey show that education kits were most successful in accomplishing their basic goal of providing the necessary materials to support indigenous education activities during emergencies. The materials in kits increased access to schooling, universally raising attendance when provided. While certain items contained in the kits were determined to be not useful, their number did not reach a threshold that would call into question the usefulness of the entire kit.

In contrast to the success of kits in meeting their material objectives, there was a failure of educationists in the UN agencies to develop more substantive, development-oriented programming over time. Most of the criticisms of the kits noted in this survey result more from shortcomings of implementation rather than from problems with the kits themselves. The most salient examples of this are the problems that were noted in the discussion of efficiency. Kits are relatively expensive when compared with bulk materials but, their proponents argue, that is the price of preparedness. Yet, if kits are delivered late or their materials partitioned out because of insufficient supply, they lose their benefits as kits and become an extremely cost ineffective intervention. As a Danida evaluation of the use of UNESCO Teacher Emergency Programme (TEP) kits in Rwanda noted, “Children in Rwanda would have been better served if the international community had focused on rehabilitating the indigenous education system rather than investing scarce resources in the TEP program, particularly so many months after the emergency.”¹²

Exacerbating problems of timeliness has been a lack of adequate follow-up. Neither the UNICEF nor UNESCO kit is intended for prolonged use. Yet for both agencies the kit distributions became self-perpetuating in Somalia, continuing long after their period of usefulness had passed. In part this appears to be because the kit, as a package of essential materials, can be mistaken as coterminous with education itself. Indeed, one version of the kit has been referred to as a “school-in-a-box.” If kits, having been distributed, are perceived to have met all of the needs of the education sector, equally vital aspects such as community involvement and training will have been missed.

Additionally, kits are neither gender sensitive nor do they address the learning needs of those outside the formal system. In providing kits without additional support and without working with recipient communities, benefits are unequally distributed between boys and girls along the lines of existing biases and prejudices. Increased access in Somalia has been disproportionately to the benefit of boys. Likewise, distributing kits to schools does not address those children, particularly adolescents, whose needs fall outside of the formal education system. Older children wishing to complete a basic formal education or seeking to gain specific skills need individual programming that is not accomplished if the distribution of kits is followed by complacency on the part of aid workers.

¹² Danish International Development Agency, “The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience” [http://www.um.dk/danida/evalueringsrapporter/1997_rwanda/b4/c6.asp].

Conflicting UNICEF and UNHCR work strategies also undermined the overall effectiveness of working with kits. As has been noted in previous evaluations of the education program in Somalia, poor coordination between UNICEF and UNESCO led to confusion both in country offices and in the field. Although coordination can be extremely beneficial, it is unlikely to take place until UN agencies can reconcile their individual approaches to education in emergencies. For UNICEF, the kit is a universal and logistical stop-gap tool composed of basic materials largely directed at pupils. UNESCO, on the other hand, sees a pedagogical value to its kits and includes in its version curricula for basic literacy and numeracy as well as teaching aids. These differences point to different strategies envisioned along greatly differing timelines in an emergency. While the UNICEF kit is designed for the first three months of an emergency, a UNESCO education officer in Nairobi claims that its kits take a minimum of three months to be distributed and adapted to local schools.

To be most effective kits should be part of a larger process—neither the first nor the last element of an emergency education intervention. Problems with the education kit program in Somalia occurred when there was inadequate preparation or follow-up on the part of those providing the kits. UN agencies and the NGOs working with them need to take time to develop more process-based education interventions, in which the use of kits is merely one part of a larger overall plan. For such a perspective, agencies should see themselves in the role of facilitating education as opposed to “providing” it. The results can be rewarding. As Lyndsay Bird notes in her report on the “Tanzanian Experience,”

a strong community-based approach to education [was] established from the outset. Thus refugees initiated the process themselves, with minimal support from external sources. Such an approach retained the sense of responsibility and ownership by the refugees for the education of their children. **It was process led rather than supply driven.** [emphasis in original]¹³

Four elements that appear to be most central to a process-based response are: community mobilization, training of education personnel, negotiating political space for education, and providing materials.

In order to support such an approach there is a need to train UN and NGO field staff in the best practices for working with emergency education. If international organizations are to devise more process-based response strategies for education, there needs to be a subsequent training of its staff. In the absence of sufficient educational expertise in an emergency, problems such as those that have arisen in Somalia are likely to reoccur. That is, in the absence of trained staff, kits are likely to be distributed as quick fix solutions and then forgotten about, the assumption being that the needs of the education system have been satisfied. UNICEF appears to be taking steps in this direction, as it is currently

¹³ Lyndsay Bird, “The Tanzanian Experience” [http://ginie.sched.pitt.edu/interworks/word/l_bird.doc].

designing emergency education modules for its staff and designating educational expertise as one of its “core corporate commitments” to education in crises.

A lesson to be derived from this research is that kit design should focus on low-tech materials and avoid trying to be too complete an educational package. When choosing materials to include in emergency response kits, UN agencies should favor those supplies most central to the education process in the country (chalk, exercise books, pens, blackboard paint). Whereas these materials increase access and facilitate the learning process, additional teaching aids and games often go unused and end up merely wasting space. Although there is a tendency to try and make the kits as complete as possible, embellishments to the kits inevitably require extra training, which, as has been noted here, is often poorly provided for. Additionally, to the extent that kits are seen as being a complete “school in a box,” they are more prone to producing complacency in aid workers by giving the impression that all needs are being met.

In order to maintain maximum relevancy, any provision of supplies should be accompanied by constant information gathering and feedback from schools and field staff. When kits are used for longer than their designated life span, problems of dependency and sustainability are heightened if there is inadequate information and feedback from the field. For example, in areas where markets have begun to function, mass distribution of pens and exercise books should no longer be undertaken. Kits are particularly susceptible to such pitfalls because they contain materials that are proportionately allocated to be distributed as a single unit. In contrast to bulk materials, from which a field worker can pick and choose the type and amount to be given to an individual school, kits are more prone to both problems of relevancy because of changing circumstances and increased dependency on outside materials.

Since the time frame considered in this survey (1994-1997) UNICEF and UNESCO have revitalized their education programs. In these new initiatives there are signs that the lessons of the previous interventions are being applied. In the new programs there is a greater emphasis on process, particularly in the focus on information gathering, encouraging community education committees and training local school inspectors. What remains to be seen, however, is whether these agencies will be able to support these programs adequately so that they succeed or fail on their own merits and not because of any “sense of complacency” or “lethargy” on the part of the agencies’ staffs. As a result of low levels of parental education and an overall lack of experience with formal education on the part of the general population, no program in Somalia will ever be self-executing. On the contrary, even the most basic initiatives will require care, attention and maintenance, and a respect for the vital, organic process that constitutes educational development.

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