STABILIZING SYRIA: THE CONTRIBUTION OF ADULT EDUCATION

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In an increasingly interconnected world where boundaries are blurring, researchers and policymakers in the separate fields of international relations, development studies and education can find themselves with shared interests. A recently completed study considered the education/security intersection and sought to determine whether adult education was a stabilizing response to conflict. This paper highlights how adult education might contribute to international efforts to help stabilize Syria as it emerges from conflict.

Recent research examined how adult education can be part of an international response in societies recovering from conflict, which can stabilize rather than de-stabilize, thus enhancing security. The guiding hypothesis was that there has been a failure to recognize the contribution adult education can make in building a secure society, resulting in policy vacuums and under-funding of the sector. There were five research questions:

1. What were the links between adult education and security in societies following recent conflicts?
2. Where do policy makers and funding organizations focus their attention?
3. Has the new security context changed our understanding of the role of adult education?
4. On a more philosophical level, whose values are embedded in policy decisions regarding adult education provision?
5. What is the potential for adult education to stabilize the situation in societies recovering from conflict?

Using a case oriented approach that is common to educational research and international relations, adult education that was provided during international interventions in post-conflict Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq were considered. The study relied primarily on documentary research, but also on opportunistic data collection during periods of work in each of the three countries. The resultant understanding of the links between adult education and societal development underpin a new framework for adult education in post-conflict societies, which balances short-term security issues with community values and the longer-term requirements of society, reducing the potential for future conflict. The framework is applied through an analytical tool and a checklist for practitioners to use when designing adult education programmes.

The paper illustrates how the analytical tools, checklists and findings from the research might be used to increase the chance that any investment in adult education in Syria as it recovers from conflict will be worthwhile and effective in enhancing security.