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The National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme
Towards post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation in Syria - *by* Syrians, *for* Syrians

Education Sector Policy Paper

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I. Education Sector Vision

This paper is a Policy Gap Analysis (PGA) of the Education sector within the NAFS inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding approach in Syria post-agreement. The Education Policy Gap Analysis (Edu-PGA) paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the conflict in Syria on the Education sector by using year 2015 as a baseline and the vision of Syria 2030 as a benchmark, in order to highlight the growing educational challenges and identify the potential opportunities that can help pave the way for peacebuilding in Syria.

The vision for the Education sector for the year 2030 as developed in NAFS 2015 is divided into five pillars: i) Societal Agreement (التوافق); ii) Sectoral Position (المكانة القطاعية); iii) National Curriculum (المنهاج الوطني); iv) Structure and Governance of the Educational Institutions (بنية وحوكمة المؤسسات التعليمية); v) The Educational Force (الجهاز التعليمي). Each of these pillars defines a vital component in shaping the overall Education vision that reflects the vision of Syria for 2030.

Accordingly, the Education sector is considered a vital sector when addressing peacebuilding, and one of the priority sectors that need to actively engage toward reaching that objective. However, in looking at the impact of the conflict on the Education sector since 2015, we realize that the Education Response to Syria's humanitarian crisis by the United Nations and donor agencies and governments, has remained until today and after seven years+ of a protracted conflict, restricted to a humanitarian response. Despite the launch of the *No Lost Generation Initiative* (NLGI) in 2013 and its claims to expanding access to learning and psychosocial support, strengthening social cohesion and peacebuilding, and restoring hope for the future, and despite all the asks for strategic shifts and the subsequent pledges for supporting Syria's education crisis stipulated at Donors' Conference on Syria in UK (2016), Brussels I (2017) and Brussels II (2018), Education remains extremely underfunded and inefficient, with clear discrepancies between claims and concrete implementations. Comprehensive, strategic, and result-based approach remains absent and fails to address most critical challenges that affect children's and youth's access to quality education, and the urgent need to bridge the humanitarian-development divide.

It is very important to clarify in this context the distinct difference between the "emergency and

humanitarian" approach of the Education Response as adopted by the donor agencies and international communities, and the "emergency and humanitarian" as defined by NAFS within the context of peacebuilding phase (SPAF, p. 30). The latter is a comprehensive concept associated with reintegration, reconciling, income generation, basic services and social protection among others through a balanced and inclusive approach. Whereas the first one gives priority to access to formal education and school enrollment for primary age group at the expense of quality, sustainability, inclusiveness and contextual needs and priorities. As a result, none of the most critical and alarming educational issues are addressed in a comprehensive and sustainable way, such as the continued bombardment and attacks against schools; the high number of school dropout rate namely among youth age group, and the lack of relevant and training opportunities alternative solutions for them; the absence of accreditation and certification of the amended Syrian curriculum by all international and regional governments and the UN with the exception of the Government of Turkey; the emergence of multiple versions of curricula and its impact on the fragmentation of Syrian children and society; the marginalization of the Syrian teacher and shortage of training and support for Syrian teachers, and the absence of disruptive and innovative solutions in order address both access and quality education in the context of conflict. Beyond perceiving education as mere social service, Education sector is addressed in this paper as a powerful means for social cohesion, peacebuilding and development.

In *Tunisia, An Arab Anomaly* (Marsri, 2017), the author explores the factors that have shaped Tunisia's exceptional experience and led it to overcome brutal repression, humanitarian disasters and civil war that ravaged some of its neighbors and other countries in the Arab region namely Syria. Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution generated "a peaceful transition to a functioning democracy. Within four short years, Tunisians passed a progressive constitution, held fair parliamentary elections, and ushered in the country's first-ever democratically elected president." **The author attributes the "anomaly" of Tunisia to its long history of reform in education, women's rights and to the relationship between Islam and society** "arguing that the seeds for today's relatively liberal and democratic society were planted as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century." On Education, the author attributes the progressive education reform to Bourguiba's visionary policies.

However, Syria is far from being compared to Tunisia. It is highly important to realize that in the context of the continuous brutal civil war in Syria and with no clear prospects or signal as to when it will end, it is extremely difficult to make lucid projections at a policy level within this scope of uncertainties and this magnitude of humanitarian crisis.

What this paper attempts to achieve and based on the sectoral priorities as defined by SPAF (p. 39), is to highlight the vital role that Education can play, within the available constraints and opportunities, in paving the way for peacebuilding at this critical time in the history of Syria.

II. Nexus 1: Current Situation and Policy Gaps in Emergency Response, Relief and Humanitarian Work

Nexus 1-a: Voluntary Return, Reintegration and Local Response

This section will focus on Lebanon as an example of host countries' s policy trends on forced migration and Syrian refugees' vulnerability, followed by an overview on the situation of return and reintegration inside Syria.

In 2017, the funding required to provide adequate support to Syrian refugees in Lebanon was estimated at US$ 2.035 billion. By October 2017, those needs were only 30% funded. Insufficient funding is threatening food assistance, health care and access to safe water among other constraints. The VASYR report, jointly issued by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP demonstrate that **economic vulnerability has worsened,** with more than half of refugees living in extreme poverty, and that food insecurity rates are stable, but remain high (VASYR, 2017). With such funding cuts and increased vulnerability, it is the education of children that gets affected the most, failing to reach out to 40% of the children that remain outside of school, and failing to support non-formal education programs that work on school retention, psychosocial support and recreational activities among others.

On return and forced migration, it is worth noting that although Lebanon does not recognize refugee status as defined by international law (1951 Convention), it is bound by treaties not to return people to countries where their lives would be in danger, a principle called "non-refoulement." However, according to recent report by Human Rights Watch, at least 13 municipalities in Lebanon have forcibly evicted at least 3,664 Syrian refugees from their homes and expelled them from the municipalities with no alternatives, while another 42,000 refugees remain at risk of eviction. The mass evictions of Syrian refugees have caused refugees to lose income and property, and the interruption of their children 'education or their drop out from school. According to a study conducted by the University of St. Joseph, it is t**he lack of legal status** of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (over one million as per UNHCR) that proves to affect most their security and vulnerability. The lack of legal residency leaves refugees exposed to an increased risk of arrest, hinders their ability to register their marriages and births, and makes it difficult for them to work, send their children to school or access health care. Moreover, for most refugee households, only informal employment, mainly in agriculture or construction, is available which leads to increased rate of children's dropout from schools and increased child labor and early marriage. The USJ study concluded by highlighting that **96% of Syrian refugees surveyed said they will go back to Syria if things go back to normal and if security conditions permitted.** For those who did not want to return to Syria and wanted to immigrate to another country, Canada was their first choice. In summary (USJ, 2017)**.**

While policies on forced migration of Syrian refugees remain very blurry and unsettled in the host

countries, the situation inside Syria appears more alarming and dire. There are no clear policies and regulations stipulated by the Syrian regime guaranteeing the safety of the returned Syrian refugees, nor to the secured ownership of their homes and lands. To the contrary, legal experts flag the critical impact of the newly Decree No.10 issued by the Syrian regime, on the return of refugees and IDPS. "Syrian lawyer and human rights activist Michel Shammas confirmed that Decree No. 10 of 2018 on the reorganization of the territories opened the door wide to the demographic change and legalized the expropriation of the property of millions of displaced people, refugees and displaced persons from the Syrian people in order to prevent them from returning to their homes." The most worrying is Syrian regime's continuation of exerting forced displacement, which is a flagrant violation of human rights with no accountability. **Therefore, any discussion of safe return of Syrian refugees and IDPS to their homes and the projection of possible plans in education provision and other services remain totally implausible and unsound in such conditions and context.**

Nexus 1-b: Local Response

According to Syria Crisis Education Strategic Paper, London 2016 Conference, "the conflict has so far a tremendous effect on children's access to education and protection. Children in Syria suffer protracted and multiple displacement, continuous exposure to violence, family separation, chronic psychosocial distress, recruitment into armed groups and economic exploitation. Severe child-rights violations continue to be documented, including the killing of children and attacks on schools. In host countries, refugee parents' lack of access to legal, safe and decent employment affect their ability to meet their children's needs, with negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and early marriage." Accordingly, nearly 3 million children today are out-of-school in Syria and in host countries. A total of 5.4 million Syrian children and youth (aged 5-17 years) inside Syria of whom 2.1 million are out school; and 1.4 million Syrian refugee children and youth (aged 5-17 years) in the five host countries (50 percent of whom are out of schools) are in need of educational assistance. As a result, systemic challenges along with policy barriers undermine the provision of education due to security issues, severe shortage of learning spaces, overstretched human capacities, depleted resources and short-term and insufficient financing which are some of the chronic hindering blocks to education access. Figures show that number of children enrolled in education inside Syria has decreased overall (London 2016 Conference)

1-b-1: In Syria

the situation in Syria is best depicted in the report of the ACU's Information Management Unit on Schools in Syria (May 2017) which highlights the impact of the Syrian conflict on education by using a rigorous research methodology including quantitative and qualitative methods. In covering 3,373 schools distributed in 90 sub-districts in 10 governorates that ACU has access to, the report initiates the study by differentiation the "**non-functional schools**" amounting to

1,383 (90% of which are located in ISIL-held areas), from the **"functional schools"** which amounted to 1,995 (most of which are in NSAG-controlled areas). Below are the most critical educational challenges resulting from the conflict in Syria.

Security

The functioning schools rely on various factors, one of the key determinant factors, is the security situation of schools. The report provides an **assessment of the security situation** of the schools by classifying **the security severity** into four categories: **41%** of assessed schools were **safe** as they were in areas that were not bombarded; **29%** of the schools were r**elatively safe** as they have never been bombarded before; **6%** were **unsafe** in areas subjected to bombardment 2-3 times a week; and **24%** were **very high risk schools** in areas where schools had been targeted by bombardment or during clashes. Most of these high risk schools are in the eastern countryside of Aleppo, rural Damascus, the besieged part of Aleppo countryside and Hama countryside.

Security is also associated with the types of control forces under which the functioning schools are operating. "It is noteworthy that the highest number of functioning schools was **in Idleb Governorate, the only governorate under complete control of moderate opposition factions**" and amongst the most cooperative and supportive to civil actors and organizations managing the schools (ACU, p.13). **Most of the remaining functioning schools** were in the sub-districts of the governorates of Aleppo, Homs, Daraa, and Rural Damascus area **under the control of NSAG**, exerting no complications or obstruction to the educational process. In Al-Hasakeh Governorate, **38% of the assessed schools were functioning schools and under the control of Kurdish forces** who are concentrated in the sub-districts of Qamishli, Al-Malikeyyeh and Jawadiyah among others (ACU, p.13). Whereas the **lesser functioning schools,** up to **2%** of the total assessed schools, were located in the governorates of Al-Raqqa and Deir-Ezzor, due to **the hegemony of ISIL** and its total interference in the educational process.

School Building Status

Another key factor affecting the functionality of the schools is related to **the school building status**. ACU noted an increase of 15% in the destruction of the assessed schools from 2016 to 2017. The destruction was of varying degrees amounting to a total of **1,252 partially destroyed schools, and 252 totally destroyed schools** (ACU, p15). The report identifies as well the **types of the functioning schools** and the new ones that emerged to cope with the volatility of the security situation in many of the areas that were covered such as "**Safe Educational Places (SEP)**", which do not meet the proper schools criteria but are just safer for students and are typically located in some houses' basements or caves mostly in Deir-Ezzor, Rural Damascus, Homs, and Hama (ACU, p.17). Another type of schools is the "**Temporary Schools**" which emerged with the growing needs of IDPS for temporary educational spaces such as tents, prefabricated structures, or a single room in a house. The report summarizes the numbers of functioning schools by their types: **1,618**

regular schools; 207 rural schools, 111 SEP, and 59 temporary schools. One of the huge impact of the conflict on education is **the deterioration of the education continuum**. 50% of the functioning schools were for primary level (grades 1-6), 38% for lower-secondary level (grades 7-9), and 13% only for upper-secondary level (grades 10-12). The crisis is affecting the **education continuation of youth age group** and exposing them to high risks and threats such as recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking, early marriage among others, due to the interruption of their formal education and to the absence of education alternatives and solutions addressing their specific needs, challenges and priorities. **Youth, is one of most vulnerable categories affected by the conflict and yet is the least prioritized in terms of protection, learning opportunities and support by Syria's humanitarian response**.

Curriculum

A consequent impact of the conflict in Syria is reflected on the fragmentation of the national **curriculum and the emergence of multiple versions** that children are exposed to, depending on which and where control forces are located. Most importantly, children are increasingly exposed to **politicized and radicalized content from all contending powers as a result of the growing divisiveness and exclusion** among all implicated parties, including the Syrian Regime. According to ACU report, there are five major curricula being used in Syria today. The percentage of schools that teach each of the different curriculum are: **42.9% for the curriculum of the GoS; 43.3% for the amended Syrian curriculum; 10, 4% for the Kurdish curriculum**; **3.0% for ISIL curriculum, and 0.4% for other factions' curricula** (ACU, p, 22).

The amended Syrian curriculum: Regarding the curriculum of the Syrian Interim Government (GIV), the major change that has occurred to the curriculum of the GoS is the removal of the National Education subject and the deletion of some phrases that glorify the Syrian regime. "Large number of copies of this "modified curriculum" were printed and distributed in the NSAG-controlled areas and electronic copies were sent to the besieged areas. The Syrian Interim Government was not the only entity to produce this revised version of the Syrian curriculum, which was referred to as the "amended Syrian curriculum" associated to the Syrian Opposition" (ACU, p.22). However, according to the EDF paper (2017), students in NSAG-controlled areas remain subject for a counter-regime indoctrination through celebrating the revolution and the rebels, while religion is given a prominent importance and score level (EDF, 2017).

ISIL curriculum: Following the expansion of ISIL into large Syrian territories, ISIL enforced a totally different curriculum by removing most of the subject matters and focusing mainly on Shari'a and jihad education. All schools that refused to implement ISIL curriculum were closed and others were closed due to the refusal of parents to comply with ISIL curriculum.

Kurdish Curricula: The Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) worked as well on expanding its hegemony by enforcing a Kurdish curriculum, called the Rojava curriculum, and integrating

Kurdish language as a core subject taught to students in addition to a history subject about the heritage and the government of Rojava. According to the paper by EDF, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) has also introduced a new curriculum at the beginning of 2015/2016 fueled with ideological and totalitarian content. Hence, the situation of the Kurdish curricula and the degree of its expansion remains unclear. However, ACU mentions that PKK Kurdish curriculum have faced rejection from non-Kurdish families and major challenges in finding Kurdish speaking teachers to maintain the schools, which explains the low percentage of schools applying the Kurdish curriculum. Finally, it is noteworthy that 44% of functional schools in the NSAG-controlled areas and 83% of those in the Kurdish-held areas, continue to teach the curriculum of the GoS because their teachers continue to receive salaries from the GoS.

Curriculum of GoS/Syrian Regime Curriculum: According to UNICEF's paper "Education Dialogue Forum" (EDF, 2017), the GoS has issued a reformed curriculum for all grade levels in 2012/2013", and another reformed curriculum has recently been rolled out with a controversial content over the problematic subject of History. Sami Moubayyed, a young Syrian historian instigated a national debate by publishing an open article accusing the Syrian Government of falsifying the history of Syria and making flagrant mistakes in the subject of History for grade 12 of the latest curriculum issued by the GoS.

Moreover, ACU' report highlights that the **majority of the schools were able to cover more than 75% of their curriculum** (428 schools teaching the amended Syrian curriculum, and 522 schools teaching the Syrian curriculum). The schools that were unable to cover beyond 25% of their curriculum (58 schools teaching the amended Syrian curriculum, and 11 teaching the curriculum of the GoS) were those concentrated in areas that are subject to constant bombardment or severe security situation such as the southern and northern country sides of Aleppo, Harasta in Rural Damascus, and Al Rastan in rural Homs among others (ACU, p.25).
As a result, one of the biggest challenges that schools in NSAG-controlled areas face today, is the **acute students' need for copies of the curriculum.** ACU estimates that the **need for copies of curriculum is around 217,519 copies** while highlighting that this estimation applies to the amended Syrian curriculum or to the curriculum of the GoS given that both curricula contain the same scientific content and resources. Other curricula, such as the Kurdish and ISIL curricula were excluded from this calculation and it was considered that all students in those areas are in need of new curriculum copies.

<u>Educational Certificates</u>

The school certificate, normally issued by the Ministry of Education, is the only official document that proves the educational level reached by the student, and guarantees the continuance of his education to the next and higher levels. However, due to the conflict in Syria and to the emergence of various versions of curricula issued by different forces outside the control of the GoS, the certification and accreditation of these curricula is consequently affected by such fragmentation

and creates serious challenges on the education progression of Syrian students and the choices they have in pursuing their education in the context of a protracted conflict.
In areas under the control of NSAG, examinations and certificates for Grades 9 and 12 are regulated and provided by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG). Nevertheless, many students in NSAG-controlled areas were willing and eager to cross lines and sit for grades 9 and 12 exams in GoS areas, but due to shortage of exam centers and to lack of accommodation spaces for students in addition to the **failure of UN agencies to ensure a safe and consistent crossing of students to exam centers in GoS areas**, especially for students in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, fifty percent only of the estimated 20,000 children, travelled and took the official exams in June 2017 (EDF) while others abstained because of security issues especially for girls. At the same time, **the GIS certification** was only recognized and accredited by the Government of Turkey, while international efforts to ensure wider accreditation of the SIG certification failed due to the highly politicized nature of the conflict (EDF, 2017). **This issue remains highly debatable due to the great similarity between both curricula, the amended Syrian curriculum and the curriculum of the GoS.** According to ACU (2017), both the Syrian curriculum and the Syrian amended curriculum contain the same scientific content across all subjects which means that 86,2% of the working schools teach curricula containing the same scientific content as the curriculum of the GoS. Moreover, in the context of education in emergencies, six subjects are given priority, which are: biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics (geometry & algebra), mother tongue language/Arabic, and foreign language/English. Problematic and highly sensitive subjects such as history and geography are waved until post-conflict, and considered of lesser impact on the academic performance of students in subsequent years. ACU findings demonstrate that the assessed functional schools that teach the Syrian curriculum of the GoS and those that teach the amended Syrian curriculum, both cover all six basic subjects in high percentage (80.2% for the amended curriculum, 91.6 % for the GoS curriculum). Whereas those subjects are banned in ISIL's curriculum and replaced by Islamic faith subject, and in Kurdish-held areas, the six subjects are not fully covered due to shortage of qualified Kurdish speaking teachers, and to the enforcement of a new Kurdish content focusing on Kurdish language and history instead.
ACU report sums the proportions of certificate awarding by the main three entities at play: **The Syrian Regime grants certificates to 61% of functional schools, while 37% of schools are granted certificates by SIG, and 3% schools are granted certificates by the Kurdish Autonomous Administration.**

Learning Assessment

One of the most complex and difficult educational components to assess in the context of conflict, is the **quality of education** and the actual learning of children. Due to the overwhelming humanitarian crisis and to the lack of qualified resources and a reliable monitoring system, most of the reports issued by the UN agencies, international organizations or local NGOs acknowledge this gap while highlighting the acute need of children for psychosocial support as one of the main

factors that alleviate the learning hindrance. At the very same time, "quality education" is considered by most donors' governments, agencies and organizations a much less priority due to the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis and to the need to focus mainly on supporting and funding the enrollment of children inside safe classrooms. Yet, even protection, which is the most basic condition for any educational process to happen, is at high stake and not secured in many areas as mentioned above.
According to ACU assessment, **shortage in stationary** (including copies of curriculum and notebooks) **and insufficient income are among the highest factors and challenges keeping students from receiving education**. However, these are factors hindering children from schooling.

The enforcement of outdated teaching methodologies which relies on rote learning and memorization at the expense of nurturing and fostering meaningful learning and equipping children with relevant skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, is amplified by the absence of a holistic and contextualized approach that addresses the specific needs of children and youth, which in the end contributes to further delay, deterioration and obstruction of learning. It is worth mentioning that a large number of schools in NSAG-controlled areas provide psychosocial support activities for children through theater performances and acting, motivational competitions, music and art activities. These activities are implemented in 92 schools in Idleb, 126 schools in Aleppo and 119 schools in Rural Damascus among others, while these activities are banned in ISIL-held areas, and ignored in the Kurdish-held areas (ACU, p.44). However, the same report states in a different section that teachers in 73% of schools did not receive training on psychosocial support.

Furthermore, ACU reports that 77% is the passing percentage of students from one grade level to another, while acknowledging that due to student's repeated failures at final examinations, they are transferred to the next grade level by default in order to avoid their subsequent dropouts and to avoid keeping them with younger children which would delay their educational and mental growth (p.28). Passing from one grade to another is not an indication that the student has necessary learned enough to pursue his education path. This is one example of many others that depicts the level of complexity that assessment of learning undergoes in a context of conflict, humanitarian crisis, displacement and deprivation. **What defines learning is totally different from what defines schooling. It is the learning, and not only schooling, that is highly affected by the conflict and which remains un-measured by most of the reports and studies conducted by donor's governments and agencies.**

Syrian Youth Crisis (in Syria and in host countries)

One of the most vulnerable group and most affected by the conflict in Syria is the Syrian Youth. Yet, it is one of the least studied and addressed due to the magnitude of the crisis and to the

complexity of the challenges this age group endures and struggles with. United Nations defines "youth" as young persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. In the context of conflict, strict age classification become blurred and youth can start as early as 12 years old. The most direct impact of the conflict on Syrian youth is the interruption of their education and dropout from schools. A total of 3.7 million Syrian youth are estimated to be inside Syria (1.1 million aged 15-17 years and 2.6 million aged 18-24 years). In the five host countries, they were estimated over 800,000 registered Syrian refugees aged 15-24 years (London, 2016).

Low access rates to post-basic education is a concern inside Syria and in the five host countries. The lack of quality data to inform evidence-based programming continues to be a major challenge for more systematic focus on youth. The Syria Crisis Education Strategic Paper indicates that 55 percent of the London target inside Syria was achieved in TVET enrolment, comparing to a 26 percent in the five host countries. Additionally, the paper reports estimated enrollment rate in tertiary at 1% in Turkey, 6 % in Lebanon and around 8% in Jordan compared to 20 percent in pre-crisis Syria. According to OCHA figures (2016), 30% of Syrian youth have access to formal schools in Syria, while 70% of Syrian refugee youth in neighboring countries (Jor, Leb, Iraq) are without adequate quality education and training opportunities. Recent estimates inside Syria indicate that minimum of 100,000 of the total pre-war student population has been affected. Barriers to post-basic education, including formal secondary, TVET and tertiary education in the host countries, include the lack of residency permits, documentation, and recognition of prior learning, different language of instruction, and the high cost of higher education among others. Regarding the latter point, tertiary education provision remains severely overlooked and did not feature at the London conference despite the emphasis on youth education. The gravity of Syria crisis is such that higher education, vocational education and alternative tracks, do not constitute a priority for emergency relief, humanitarian provision or development support. Higher education is deemed beyond the scope of designated ministries and international agencies (UNHCR designated for humanitarian assistance and emergency relief of refugees; UNICEF concerned with the welfare of children and women; UNESCO mandated to address the quality of education rather than building schools...etc.). Yet, vocational and higher education, and alternative innovative solutions, are critical to the building of human capital that affects growth directly in the post-conflict and future of Syria.

Yet, none of these reports or papers provide any qualitative assessments that address the specific needs, interests and aspirations of youth in a growing volatile and complex context. Socio-economic and financial challenges constitute a serious barrier to education continuity for many young students, many others loose incentive to engage in any education that is not relevant or does not provide an accredited certification to secure a future employment. Many young students'' academic skills and dispositions are depleted due to the distressful circumstances, and more are increasingly exposed to all kinds of threats of recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking, exploitation and child labor, and early marriage increase.

The provision of alternative learning pathways, that are rapid, cost-effective, certified and focused on relevant skills (digital literacy, English language, life skills) for the job market are among the

most effective interventions and lifesaving opportunities for youth, which remain untapped and under-funded today.

Syrian Teachers

In terms of figures, the impact of the conflict on the Syrian teachers is estimated by UNICEF (2015) to a loss of 52,500 teachers, 22% of the teaching work force, and 253 (18%) of school counsellors in Syria. The lack of opportunities for professional development along with the recruitment of unqualified teachers on a temporary contractual basis is seriously impacting the provision of quality education (London 2016 Conference Paper). ACU report dedicates a special section for teachers in Syria with valuable data. Teachers are highly affected by the difficult circumstances of the education in Syria, namely in NSAG-controlled areas. Interruption or shortage of salaries, lack of materials and teaching aids, coping with different grade levels and ages within the same class, these are some of the challenges Syrian teachers continue to struggle with. An interesting comparative assessment between 2016 and 2017 shows the direct impact of the conflict on the distribution of the teachers within the NSAG areas due to the increase of IDPs who were forced to evacuate from Rural Damascus, from al Wa'ar in Homs, and from Aleppo city suburbs and relocate in Idleb governorate. As a result, the numbers of students and teachers increased in Idelb governorate, while number of teachers in the evacuated areas dropped, especially in Aleppo and Hama governorates (p.28). The report shows that there is an increase of 5,020 teachers in the assessed functional schools (**from 32,723 in 2016 to 37,742 in 2017)** due also to the increased coverage of schools, namely in Dara'a which was not covered in the previous report, while number of teachers dropped tremendously due to the interruption of the education in ISIL-controlled areas, and to the totalitarian educational approach in the Kurdish-held areas. The ACU study provides a valuable illustration of the qualifications of the teachers, 81% of whom are classified as "regular teachers" and 19% are volunteers, while 50% of total regular teachers were female, while numbers of male volunteer teachers were twice higher than those of females. "Regular teachers" are those who were teachers before the current events and had permanent contracts with the Syrian Directorate of education. These teachers are considered to be qualified to teach. In addition, the Free Directorate of Education of the SIG, established an institute to train and graduate novice teachers due to the high need for teachers. Those holding a Baccalaureate certificate in education, or university students whose education was interrupted, were employed as "volunteer teacher' (p.39).

Moreover, a large number of teachers have fled to host countries and became refugees as well. Syrian teachers in Turkey are mobilized as volunteers in camps and host communities and are given standardized incentives since 2014. However, in Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian teachers are not employed by the public systems nor given an official permission to contribute in supporting the education of Syrian refugees. Syrian teachers in these countries are mostly mobilized by local NGOs and private sector despite the many constraints of their employment. What doesn't count

into this estimation is the critical and growing phenomena of the "de-professionalization" of the Syrian teacher over the course of seven years of conflict and the loss of one of the most vital human capital for Syria's recovery. As summarized by Smyth & Kum (2010), **"when they don't use it, they will lose it"** in reference to the skill and ability of teaching when teachers are deprived from their profession for an extended period of time.
Extensive research in Education attests that teacher development is identified as one of the keys to school improvement. Yet, Syrian teachers are until today timidly mentioned in the reports of Donors' governments and UN agencies and international organizations when it comes to addressing Syria's Education Response. UNESCO highlights that, apart from the traditional Education In Emergencies framework (focused essentially on providing access to schooling), capacity building of local actors including teacher training and professional development, are amongst the most necessary areas of assistance for achieving the SDG4 and for bridging the humanitarian-development divide and supporting acute protracted recovery stages of Syria crisis. Moreover, one of the substantive outcomes of the UK Donors' Conference for Syria in 2016, is the issuance of London Education Strategic Paper (2016) which brought together all NLGI partners within the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and Humanitarian Reponses Plan (HRP) to improve programming and reporting around the **three core shifts and tracks that were identified: i) Access, ii) Quality Education, iii) System Strengthening.** Each of the three tracks is divided into several programs areas with matching output indicators and activities in order to develop a coherent system for assessing and monitoring the humanitarian response across Syria and the five host countries. Accordingly, **the support of teachers appear under the Quality track** as a major program area to improve the quality of formal and non-formal education. However, none of the output indicators and related activities address the **Syrian teachers in clear terms,** as the reference to teachers in the context of humanitarian response in the six countries, include to a large extent especially when it comes to funding, the teachers who represent the public sectors of the host countries and who are non-Syrian. Additionally, UNICEF's Education Strategic Paper on Syria's Crisis, mentions again **Syrian teachers as a fundamental resource that needs to be optimized**, and calls for the strategic shift from short-term to long-term solutions including building the capacity of Syrian teachers, improving their status and addressing the issues of recruitment, employment and payment of Syrian teachers in all host countries (2016). Yet, due to the continuous funding cuts and the shortfalls of Donors' governments pledges to support and cover all promised shifts and programs, and due to massive pressure exerted by the host countries on the international communities to commit to funding the support of the ministries of education and the enrollment of Syrian refugee children in formal education in the host countries, **those programs that fall under Quality Education and System Strengthening for Syrian teachers and non-formal education actors remain the least funded while allocating the available funding to the Access component inside Syria and in the host countries.** Most essentially, Syrian teachers suffer from being marginalized as key players in driving the education process, and from receiving consistent financial support and empowerment through training and technical support inside Syria and in the host countries.

Another perspective **The most updated figures by the donors' governments, UN and international organization son on Syria's education crisis is found in the recent Brussels Conference Education Report "Preparing for the Future of Children and Youth in Syria and the Region through Education: London One Year On) issued last month (April 2017)**.

The Brussels report gives a very positive overview on the progress achieved in the areas of system strengthening, policy development, access and quality inside Syria, **while acknowledging the remaining gaps in:** 1) providing education support to children particularly in besieged and ISIL-controlled areas; 2) the continuance lack of safety and security which constitutes the greatest barrier to education, with schools under attack and occupied by parties to the conflict; 3) the increased poverty, unemployment and the lack of accreditation and certification in some parts of the country which discourage families from sending their children to school; 4) the lack of permission from authorities and limited access have impacted on the ability of the sector to assess needs, identify out-of-school children and scale up the education response; 5) the continuance of under-funding and short-term funding which impede access and quality of education, and disrupt continuity of interventions" (p.17).
Opportunities are summed up in a wishful list of six actions: 1) the need for a more strategic and harmonized sector engagement in addressing political and bureaucratic bottlenecks, poor communication and low learning outcomes; 2) the implementation of a new Curriculum Framework which will be critical to enhance quality and relevance of education, as well as diversify learning pathways through a policy framework for NFE; 3) a capacity-building strategy is being prepared to ensure that all education actors are equipped for implementing coherent and relevant education activities; 4) the education sector will continue to invest in the expansion of NFE programs (including vocational training) and in social protection schemes (including vouchers assistance programs and school feeding) as insecurity and poverty continues to push children out of education; 5) Systematic investments will be made in teachers' professional development with the aim of improving learning and measuring learning outcomes; 6) More attention will be given to youth and employment needs (p.17)

1-b-2: Host Countries

This section is will only cover the countries of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan due to the higher importance of their roles in the education response, and will rely essentially on the Brussels report (April, 2017).

In December 2016 there were 1,580,792 registered school-age Syrian refugee children in the five host countries, which represents an increase of 12 per cent from the same month in 2015 While the London target was not reached, there was a 15 per cent decrease in the number of out-of-school children, from 630,417 (45 per cent) in December 2015 to 534,272 (34 per cent) in December 2016 (Brussel Report, 2017).

Turkey

"**Turkey has made progress in reducing the out-of-school children rate from 60 per cent in December 2015 to 42 per cent in December 2016**.Despite intense efforts in scaling up the provision of education, the enrolment of students in middle and secondary education remains low. The main challenges are insufficient Turkish language proficiency, low socio-economic conditions of Syrian families and the unavailability of appropriate catch-up programs for adolescents who have been out of school for more than one year. Other challenges include insufficient school buildings (26,000 additional classrooms are needed) in high-density refugee-hosting areas; bullying; and limited options to access informal and certified NFE opportunities for out-of-school children; and limited number of scholarships to meet the high demand for higher education, among others." (Brussels, 2017).

Lebanon

"**Lebanon has made progress in reducing the out-of-school children rate from 40 per cent in December 2015 to 34 per cent in December 2016.** Key challenges remain such as increased poverty, lack of livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugee families, and safety concerns in remote areas which are deterrents to children's enrolment in school. To improve participation and retention in education, key structural barriers need to be addressed: limited capacity of education personnel to cope with multi-age/-level students, who are traumatized by the crisis; violence and bullying in and around school, and at home; and differences in language of instruction. On the other hand, several opportunities to improve access and quality of education are on the agenda of MEHE and its partners, including scaling up of NFE to reach the remaining out-of-school children and youth and a shift towards a more inclusive education." (Brussels, 2017). From a scholarly perspective on the intricacies in policy-making in refugee contexts, the research paper by Buckner, Spencer and Cha (2017) offers a different outlook from the donors 'reports and INGOs reports, by studying closely the education gaps between policy and practice in the case of education provision for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The research argues that a starting place for understanding education policy implementation is to understand the often competing sources of state and non-state authorities that affect decision-making at the local level and have direct implications on the policy-practice gap and on the quality of the education delivery. "When implementing educational policy and programming at the local level, the important question is not 'what is the official policy, but rather who has the authority and legitimacy to make educational decisions on behalf of refugees?' Findings indicate that in many cases, "local actors compete with the authority of the central government while being viewed as legitimate actors who possess authority from their personal relations, proximity to refugee communities or technical expertise."

Jordan

"**In Jordan, the number of Syrian school-age refugee children and the out-of-school rate remained similar between December 2015 and December 2016**. Challenges continue to exist

both on the supply-side (teacher training, unsafe and poorly maintained school environments, and limited access for non-eligible students aged 13+ years) and on the demand side (transportation, economic barriers, child labor, early marriage, and perceptions of education). Within tertiary education, Syrians face difficulties related to placement procedures, high school fees and lack of TVET opportunities. Although the Jordan Compact allowed for the issuance of work permits for refugees, some sectors remain closed to them. Further efforts, including the introduction of more flexible access to a wider range of economic opportunities is desirable. English language and other preparatory support, such as computer literacy critical to access tertiary education, also need further support." (Brussel, 2017)

Summary

The Brussels report provides an overview (similar to the one on Syria) on the progress achieved in each of the five host countries in the areas of system strengthening, policy development, access and quality education with a conclusion section on the remaining challenges and opportunities in each of the countries. It is worth mentioning that the adopted contextual approach in analysis and assessment in each of the host countries is a notable progress. However, the areas that the report continues to focus on, across all host countries, remain **restricted to enrollment figures in formal education and to logistical, structural and financial barriers with no reference to qualitative assessments, no indication to the role of Syrian teachers in the education response, and to restrictive the role of NFE to providing support for children's enrollment in formal education**. No reference is made either to the need for innovative solutions and to the role of technology in accelerating learning and in bridging quality gaps. The report **measures education achievements by highlighting the decrease in the number of out-of-school children,** inside Syria, from 2.12 million (40 percent) to 1.75 million (32 percent) between 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 school years; and in the five host countries, a 15 percent decrease in the number of out-of-school refugee children, from a total of 630,500 in 2015 to a total of 534,500 in 2016. **Education measures of children's learning, education attainments, rates of dropouts, and percentage of youth's enrollment in skills-based and training programs remain absent.**

In terms of funding requirement, the report considers that **the US$618 million** received from donors for the education sector, representing **71 per cent of the total requirement** and an increase of US$158 million from 2015, **an achievement**. More importantly, the report **praises the effective education response and attributes** it to the London education strategic shifts translated into a framework divided into **three pillars, (system strengthening, access, and quality)** to ensure that interventions occur along an emergency-to-resilience continuum and represent longer term 'investments for the future' while addressing the immediate needs related to the crisis. The Brussels report claims that the strategic shifts are in line with the Sustainable Development Goal Four on education (SDG#4) in order to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Yet, despite the three pillars framework, strategic and long-term interventions as well as the SDG#4 are very far from reach as long as the

education response in the host countries continues to remain subject for the interests of the governments of host countries at the expense of a bilateral approach that takes into accounts the interests, needs, and priorities of the Syrian refugees, the Syrian teachers, and the Syrian civil society actors.

Finally, the report acknowledges that despite all progress, substantial challenges remain:
"**Around 2.3 million Syrian children and youth are still out of school and a large number are at risk of dropping out. Vulnerable families draw upon negative coping mechanisms which impact on girls' education. Low access rates to post-basic education, including technical, vocational education and training and tertiary education, are a grave concern. Syrian youth aged 15 to 24 years lack perspectives of meaningful livelihoods. The provision of quality education with a focus on attendance, learning outcomes, life skills acquisition and social cohesion, together with safety and security, remains timid and scattered. Multi-sectoral approaches to education need more attention. Funding to education continues to be far from the London US$1.4 billion ask and needs to be further sustained, predictable and timely."**

III. Nexus 2: Current Situation and Policy Gaps in Building a Legal Framework and Institutional Rehabilitation

As described in the above "Local Response" section, the political and military situation on the ground have resulted in serious and alarming impact on the Education sector. This impact translates into the following situation and policy gaps:

- Absence of a unified, comprehensive and systemic educational strategy that safeguards Education sector from depletion and deterioration, and prevents it from further totalitarian and divisive forms of apprenticeship.
- Critical deficiency in education financing due to the magnitude of the crisis, to an increased donors' fatigue, to the lack of investment in alternative cost-effective and disruptive solutions, and finally due to the absence of an overall political agreement over a funding strategy based on priorities' consensus and on transparent assessments of donations' outputs.
- Weakened and impoverished education system with over 25% of destroyed infrastructure.
- Critical deterioration and decline of literacy and numeracy in Syria and in host countries due to the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis and to the impact of the growing socio-economic predicaments.
- Absence of cost-effective, non-traditional/innovative and scalable solutions to address the high rates of school dropouts and absenteeism.
- Fragmentation of the national curriculum and the propagation of multi-ethnic and sectarian-based curricula based on the geographical hegemony by various authority forces which has a direct critical impact on social cohesion and national unity.

- Endangered young generation and in peril of being lost due to the protracted conflict and lack of effective and specially-catered solutions and certifications.
- Major deficiency in human capital, namely the Syrian teacher who is either weakened and deprived of means of empowerment and support in Syria, or marginalized and de-professionalized in the host countries (neighboring countries and others).
- Absence of assessments that measure learning and the quality of education rather than measuring school enrollment and distribution of school material only.
- Vocational education, a major educational track and highly relevant in times of conflict, is outdated, obsolete and does not meet the aspirations of Syrian youth nor the needs of the job market and employment.
- Absence of representation at the international sphere and in the decision making of Syrian stakeholders such as practitioners, experts and active local educational organizations, and consequently lack of coordination among themselves to mobilize their respective efforts, knowledge and grassroots experience in order to voice them into asks and recommendations to the international and donors' communities.

IV. Nexus 3: Current Situation and Policy Gaps in Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

This section builds again on the extensive description of the impact of the conflict on the education sector as mentioned in the above "Local Response" (Nexus 1-b).
The conflict-related division in the Syrian society has affected the education sector by engendering the following critical repercussions:

- **Multiplicity of curricula** inside Syria is leading to divisive identities, amplified by politicized teaching, allegiance building and rote learning methodologies, obstructing any space for exerting critical thinking, for constructive dialogue and peacebuilding (EDF, 2017).
- **Teachers** in Syria (namely) are not trained nor have the capacity to address the context of conflict and its implications on the thinking and attitudes of children. According to the above figures (Nexus 1-b), Syrian teachers barely receive any training especially in psychosocial support, and have no authority either to challenge the form of indoctrination that are enforced in schools. Consequently, teachers and children are directly affected by the lack of space for critical thinking and freedom of thought which diminishes the possible arenas for dialogue and peacebuilding.
- **Armed recruitment** of young children who dropped out of schools due to the acute financial burdens and to parental pressures, and to the irrelevance and inefficiency of education in responding to their needs. However, no figures were found to assess the magnitude of this phenomenon but it is commonly heard through local anecdotes and vaguely mentioned in the reports of international organizations and UN agencies.

- **Absence** from the discourse of various factions and from the overall political discourse the conveyance **of shared human values** that bring Syrian people together which translates into lack of awareness and communication of citizenship values and education in schools.
- **Impunity and lack of accountability** of all the parties who continue to perpetuate crimes against humanity and violate international resolutions lead to the exacerbation of hatred, revenge, and divisiveness among the Syrian societies and young generations who are mostly affected by armed conflict.

Additionally, the Education Dialogue Forum (EDF) concept paper "What Type of Education For Syrian Children" (2017) recommends the mainstreaming of *Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE)* Initiative as an integral component in the education response inside Syria, and as an educational tool for promoting peacebuilding and social cohesion.

On the other hand, *The Agenda For Peace* (1992), published by the UN Sec Gen Boutros Boutros Ghali, defined Peacebuilding as "the medium to long-term process of rebuilding war-affected communities. It defined Peacebuilding as an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse to conflict" (Murthi, 2009). Over time, the definition of peacebuilding has expanded to address violent conflict at different phases of the conflict cycle. Peacebuilding therefore includes the process of rebuilding the political, security, social and economic dimensions of a society emerging from conflict. **At a fundamental level, peacebuilding involves addressing the root causes of the conflict and the call for social and economic justice as well as the establishment reform of political structures of governance and the rule of law**. These activities are ultimately striving to bring about the healing of a war-affected community through reconciliation. Reconciliation, however, is not sustainable without socio-economic reconstruction and development, neither of which can be reached without the enforcement of human rights. In fact the three known fundamental pillars of the United Nations are: i) Human Rights; ii) Development; iii) and Peacebuilding. No peacebuilding is possible in the absence of human rights, or human rights without social justice and development, or development without peace, and so on. All three constituents are deeply intertwined and correlated. Hence, when it comes to address reconciliation and social cohesion in the context of war-affected societies in Syria and beyond, the questions that need to be raised: Are we ready to address accountability, transitional justice and human rights issues as well as the root causes of the conflict? Are we able to address social justice, income inequality, and social exclusion, poverty if the aim is to re-unite in order to contribute in re-building the country and its economic recovery and development? What are the enabling political factors that can permit such dialogue and peacebuilding process to take place? It is believed that Education sector is indeed a strategic and vital sector in promoting social cohesion and peacebuilding through its structural nature, unifying content, and scope of access. However, Education sector is also heavily affected by the lack of enabling factors that can hinder and limit its endeavors towards peacebuilding, reconciliation and social cohesion.

V. Nexus 4: Current Situation and Policy Gaps in Rehabilitation of Physical and Social Infrastructure

To avoid redundancy, please see section "Local Response" (Nexus 1-b) for the impact of the conflict on the infrastructure of the Education sector, and section "Sixth" on fiscal policies and available opportunities to address this gap.

VI. Institutional framework governing the Education sector

Same comment as above: The response to this section is mainly found in the "Local Response" in Nexus 1-b and in section Sixth on policy recommendations with regards to the institutional framework governing the Education sector.

VII. Human rights and gender-related gaps in the Education sector

Human rights and gender parity represent the core values and mission of the education sector.
The impact of the conflict has indeed tremendously affected issues of human rights and gender within the education sector: This impact can be summarized in the following points:

- Violation of human and children's rights by the schools attacks and bombardment in the NSA-held areas as mentioned in the above section of "Local Reponse".
- Violation of human and children's rights by besieging highly populated areas with civilians (such as Eastern-Ghouta for many years) which deprived children from access to nutrition, medicine and the consequent ability to learn and pursue education.
- Propagation of high level of trauma and psychosocial needs for children and teachers as a direct result of the protracted conflict and its impact on the wellbeing and educational performance of both children and teachers.
- Higher rate of school dropout for youth-age girls due to the increasing insecurity and vulnerability of refugees living conditions in the host countries.
- Increase of early marriage threats due to the continuous escalation of the acute economic situation of refugee and displaced families.

VIII. Analysis of main actors in the Education sector

Main actors that have direct and indirect impact on the education sector are:

- State: Syrian Government (referred at as "Syrian Regime" in many sections of this paper) represented the Ministry of Education, Education directorates and municipalities in the government-controlled areas and governments
- Opposition to Syrian Regime: Syrian National Coalition, the Syrian Interim-Government
- Military and political groups and warlords:

- Free Syrian Army: loose coalition of defectors from the Syrian army and groups not affiliated with Al-Qaeda
- Ahrar Al Sham
- Ibn Zenki movement
- Jaish el Islam
- Failaq el Rahman
- The Southern Front
- Tahrir el Sham (ex- Nusrat)
- Kurdish Armed Groups: Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and YPJ
- ISIS

Local leaders, tribesmen and women: Syrian Local Councils (SLC) are one of the most organized and established groups in the NSA-held areas.

- Civil society: represented by registered NGOs or community-based initiatives highly active in education provision for children and youth in NSA-held areas in Syria and in the host countries despite the provision of formal education of the host countries' ministries (Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) which prove to be insufficient.
- Private Sector: has either been a silent or anonymous supporter through private financing and donation to the above listed NGOs, or a passive and a risk-averse player. No indication to a strong presence and role played by the Syria private sector yet. An exception to this is Ayman Asfari, who is a Syrian-UK businessman, based in UK and who has been openly engage in supporting Syrian opposition-led groups and Syrian civil society groups across various sectors through his Asfari Foundation.
- Other Education Sector Related:
  - Donors' governments: UK (DFID), EU, Canada, US (USAID), Qatar, Saudi Arabia among others
  - UN agencies: UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, WFP among others
  - International organizations and donors' governments: ICRC, Red Cross, Save the Children, IRC, NRC, World Vision, Qatar Foundation among others
  - Civil Society Room (led by special envoy for Syria crisis, Stephan De Mistura)

IX. Policy Priorities and Recommendations to address Education Sector Policy Gaps

A. Short term policies recommendations addressed to all relevant governments, UN agencies and INGOs taking part in Syria's Education Crisis and Response:

To acknowledge that Education is a vital sector for Syria's recovery and peacebuilding which requires a major shift from short-term to long-term solutions, and to work aggressively on bridging the humanitarian-development divide though adopting a comprehensive, contextual and sustainable approach that prioritizes the following actions:

1. Active and committed contribution in improving the education sector in Syria:

- High pressure on donors and international governments to increase funding for education and allocate it towards responding to the priorities and strategic demands of Syrian children and societies.
- To ensure that schools are safe zones
- To increase the number of exam centers around and inside close to hard-to-reach, and in besieged areas, and ensure that students in those areas are able to sit for the official exams and get certificates that entitle them to pursue higher education;
- To advocate for a multi-stakeholders process to develop a uniform Syrian curricula approved and recognized by the Syrian people
- To aggressively lobby for approving and accrediting the "amended Syrian Curriculum" in order to mitigate the crisis caused by the absence of school certifications, and until the uniform curricula is developed and out.
- To address educational outputs and showcase the assessment of attainment and learning, and not only educational inputs in the reports issued by international agencies and donors' governments.
- To support and fund Non-Formal Education (NFE) programs that comply with education objectives and quality standards and disseminate best practices.

2. The need to recognize that "building the **Syrian human capital**" is more critical and urgent than "rebuilding infrastructure", and start attributing serious attention to empowering and supporting Syrian professionals, workers and local communities and civil society actors from most relevant fields inside Syria and in host countries. "Syria's human capital - defined as the accumulated stock of education, knowledge and skills - is currently dislocated, dispersed and virtually unaccounted for (Deane, 2016). No peacebuilding or reconciliation can be ever reached if human capital is not placed at the forefront of the stabilization process and economic recovery.

3. The provision of **quality education for all Syrian children and young adults** by enforcing education standards and innovative solutions that address relevant skills-based education, vocational training and specific needs of youth for employment.

B. Recommendations for midterm-to-long-term Education Policies in Syria post-conflict

Reform of Formal Education Sector

Background

First of all, it is worth noting that the root cause of the current educational crisis in Syria is not a result of the humanitarian crisis only, but has predated the war in Syria mainly due to the weakened and inflated system, to the sole focus on access at the expense of quality, and to the wide discrepancy between education outcomes and employability. According to UNESCO (2011; 2015), Arab states made progress at the level of access and gender parity, but **quality education** remained deficient and the primary impediment for an effective and sustainable progress in Education. Moreover, the most critical shortcoming in Arab education systems is **the missing link between education and employability** (UNESCO, 2015-2016). Unfortunately, that same restrictive and linear approach is being repeated today in the name of a humanitarian response. The real challenge when it comes to the Education response in the context of a humanitarian crisis is of two folds:

I) First: How can Syria's education system reboot in order to provide equal opportunities for inclusive and quality education for all children, as per SDG#4, which does not exclude refugee and displaced children?

II) Second and most critically, how can these goals be achieved especially in times of conflict?

1. Social Justice Approach

The research paper of Tikly and Barret (2011) elucidates and critiques the two dominant approaches that currently frame the debate about education quality, namely, the **human capital** and **human rights** by revealing the limitations of each in today's global context, and setting out an alternative approach based on the theory of **social justice and of capabilities**. It positions the **issue of education quality as a political issue** related to socio-economic structures and barriers that impede equal distribution and recognition, and outlines from a social justice perspective, the three inter-related dimensions and conditions for quality education to be reached: **Inclusion, relevance and democracy**. It defines quality education as an "education that provides all learners with the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being" (p7). More importantly, **capabilities are not restricted to the acquired skills and knowledge, but to the freedom and opportunity that individuals** have to convert any of these resources into achievements and outcomes of their choice. Reimers addresses the paradoxical relationship between education poverty and educational inequality by highlighting that "educational inequality continues even as more poor [vulnerable] children gain access to education" and stipulates that the Global Education For All (EFA) has mostly dedicated attention to educational access and attainment and has barely "addressed the nature of the pedagogical experiences that empower students in suggesting that teachers are an important determinant of the quality of an education system" We quote (Reimers, 2015):

If we are going to make progress in advancing a world that is more just, where all people not only have the opportunity to be spared the most abject forms of educational exclusion but the opportunity to come together with others from different social origins, to have the skills to

participate as equals in the public sphere as was imagined by those who created the intellectual foundations of a world ruled by ordinary people and by human reason, and to collaborate in reducing human suffering, then we will have to become more ambitious and overcome the poverty of our own aspirations for the education of the poor. ***Only with this audacity […] we may move forward toward a world of greater justice and peace.***

2. State Policies Analysis

The following section on education policy is devoted to study and draw best learning lessons from Corrales' policy paper "*The State is Not Enough: The Politics of Expanding and Improving Schooling in Developing Countries*".
Corrales begins his paper by stating that developing countries [even more those in conflict] have no sufficient institutional capacity nor the political accountability to establish on their own universal primary and secondary educational coverage. The entry point for making a change is to augment the weak **incentives and pressures** with extra help, funding and involvement of both external and societal actors. This paper looks beyond resources and economic inputs by examining the politics of improving educational access and quality. Research on the development of states argue that incentives and pressures emanate from 3 sources: i) the international arena; ii) the state; iii) the society.

International Level:
"International capitalism is neither a strong nor positive force for education expansion; it seems less powerful than domestic variables in determining educational spending.
Other source of international pressure are the World Bank and IMF. Prior to the 1990s, World Bank's advocated policies had disastrous side effects on educational expansion. World Bank structural adjustment was proclaimed as "the enemy of human development" (p.9). "However, poor domestic fiscal health is the worst enemy of education than any external actor. Countries in fiscal trouble require the intervention of external doctors (IMF/WB) whose medicines (structural adjustment) may depress social spending at first. However, once recovery occurs and financial crisis is over, international organizations recommend that states expand and reform social services including education" (p.11).

State Level:
One of the very critical issues that needs to be considered from early stage is the allegiance building through education by the emerging post-civil war state. Citizens would pledge their allegiance to a government that could provide new social services, including education. By fomenting nationalism, the new government would gain legitimacy and exert its hegemony. (p.15). the more a state is control-seeking, the more it will pursue education expansion, but not quality education. In fact, improvements in quality education prove to depend less on state-based incentives (which

are weak in democracies) and more on the strength of societal demands which apply in the rising democracies in Latin American and Asian countries (Corrales, p.18). Therefore, it is imperative to counter-balance the hegemony of an emerging totalitarian new government and break the allegiance's paradigm by empowering and recognizing the vital role of all stakeholders, non-state actors, civil society, teachers and practitioners, private sector and philanthropists in the re-building phase. Another fear resides in the hesitation of the emerged postwar states to extensively expand education out of fear to generate more instability due to the subsequent crisis of the educated class or the "Educated-Unemployed-Gramsci "phenomenon as a result of un-coordinated rapid education expansion with higher education and employment policies. The other question that comes to mind: would clientilism and patriotism with corruption as a default consequence, remain as forms of state-funding for social services in postwar Syria? According to Corrales, those are the most intense political forces that push states to expand education because they perceive education as a huge investment in infrastructure and business opportunity. It goes without saying that clientilism and patronage are not quality-driven unless quality education constitutes the competitive advantage for private schools. But qualitative studies indicate the close connection between clientilism and inefficient education systems (Corrales, p. 20). In this case, the one possible incentive for states to increase efficiency (quality) in education is the desire to create savings (p.21) which leads us to address one of the key determinants of Syria's education, the **fiscal policy.** In the context of Syria, a country torn and destroyed by armed conflict and civil year for the past seven years, resulting into the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II and into devastating economic crisis, it is expected that the fiscal policies of each sector will be a source of debate and controversies due to the competing priorities set by decision makers, whom are not fully defined yet. In postwar time, research shows that the dynamics of politics pushing for efficiency involve conflict at state level between three main cabinet-level actors: i) savings-oriented ministers of finance who tend to block education spending; ii) ministers of education who advocate for more spending for increased efficiency; iii) patronage-seeking ministers who care less about generating savings than about keeping important political constituents satisfied (Corrales, p.22). What will further determine the education fiscal policy is the country's available resources, overall GDP compared with the unit cost of education (measured in terms of spending per student)? In the case of Syria today and in post-conflict, there will be massive need for financing with very high education unit cost due to the destroyed infrastructure and depleted education system. Corrales' research shows that in such cases, policies opt for costs cutting, stimulating growth, borrowing money and spending more. Obviously, cutting costs for education will not only generate internal political conflict, but creates a great incentive to start looking for cost-effective, creative and disruptive solutions to ensure that education is not under-funded.

<u>Society Level</u>:

It's very important to note that state expenditure on education alone is not sufficient to produce universal coverage. And more important is to realize that **education is a "society-driven" sector**, in the sense that it reflects the immediate needs and aspirations of societies. Therefore, it is crucial

for societies to assume their natural role of demand and pressure, a phenomena that Corrales calls "**society's bargaining capacity"**, at this re-building phase in the making of Syria post-conflict. Corrales identifies five factors that shape societies' pressures on state: **income, organization, information, ideologies, and competitive politics**.

- **Income** is in fact one of the most significant factors that affects communities and societies' relationship with education today, as low-income parents may not only reconsider the actual cost of schooling but also the opportunity costs, such as the foregone income from child labor. Lack of livelihood opportunities and income, both in Syria and in host countries, is a major obstacle to educational expansion and to exerting further pressure for education. Interestingly, where education is of poor quality, parental reluctance to send children to school increases (Corrales, p.25), which means that quality education is a factor for school desertion and for winning low-income parents' demand for education. What is more interesting and highly relevant for Syria, is the major cultural shift that societies undergo in the context of revolutions, civil war and such life-shaking and transformational experiences. Parents stop perceiving children as assets (source of income), and begin considering them as a source of hope and liabilities. Research proves that this awareness is further fostered when owned by women. When women literacy increases, birth rates decline which is a signal that parents are willing to send children to school. This is an indication that female empowerment and literacy play a key role in education expansion.
- **Organization** is another factor that interplays in societies' pressure on government's policies. Case study in Indian state of Kerala proves that even materially deprived citizens can force states to provide services if they become politically organized in any form of organization (political party, labor union, parents/communities-based organizations...etc.). This applies so well in the context of Syria. Local councils, NGOs, civil society and community-based initiatives, academics in various sectors are all forms of organized groups of active Syrians that have been heavily engaged in service provision, who exert high level commitment for the public good and represent key players in exerting pressure on governments and shaping the new policies including education policies.
- **Information** is a key determinant to come up with proper and fair evaluations, diagnoses and recommendations especially at time of crisis and fund deficiency. Accountability requires information without which demand for more and better education will remain shaky. Moreover, information is needed on more than inputs such as enrollment and attendance, but on measuring outputs such as academic attainment and quality of learning. One region worth learning from is the Latin America region which has made significant progress in measuring student performance and disseminating information on education outcomes since 1990s (Corrales, p.32).

- **Ideology** is a powerful tool that educated elites, activists and academics can use as a powerful weapon in political struggle to advocate and call for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations to access quality education.
- **Competitive politics** is a wishful stage whereby societies exert pressures for more and/or better education in a democracy set-up and when education becomes a key electoral issue based on which societies make their choices and votes.

Corrales summarizes the five major impediments to achieving universal primary and secondary education from the government's standpoint: 1) weak societal demand; 2) supply-side failures; 3) inefficient use of resources devoted to education; 4) opposition by those who bear the costs reform; 5) weak accountability mechanisms for improving the performance of education system. Accordingly, five counter-policies are suggested to address these challenges and risks that affect the **government's incentives and pressures** with regards to endorsing universal basic and secondary education.

A. Boost the societal demand through:

- Provision of free public education includes textbooks, school supplies and school fees
- Provision of small subsidies for low-income parents to send their children to school
- Remove barriers to education completion by expanding access to secondary education
- Enhance quality of education to reduce high repetition rates in primary and dropout rates in secondary
- Create the space for engaging the parents in decision making through parents-teachers committees and schools meetings.

B. Bolster the state's political will by improving state expertise and state-society links:

The political will to reform education involves strengthening and working on two simultaneous levels:

- state capacity by strengthening internal links and structures, and fostering cross-sectoral alliances
- Societal inclusion by forging strong ties with civil society, experts, education reformists, and building a coalition for the support of education reform.

C. Improve efficiency by generating more performance indicators:

- Shift from being a mere service provider to becoming a disseminator of information
- Address indicators assessing student performance and system's efficiency and not only educational inputs

- Empower and engage teachers in participatory action research (PAR) as part of teachers' capacity building and empowerment process, and mechanism for data collection and analysis from grassroots level.
- Avoid the resistance of stakeholders to the dissemination of education data by adopting formative assessments as an on-going monitoring process, and fostering a culture/practice of reflective and self-corrective mechanisms.

D. Contain opposition and compensate threatened actors:

In this case of Syria, the opposition front will mostly come from those who are threatened to receive less funding and donations, namely the host countries when attention of international donors will shift toward supporting education in Syria. Politically speaking, international governments and donors are maintaining very well a "funding containment policy" with the host countries due to the high sensitivity of the refugees' issue and to the high price and burden that the host countries are incurring and bargaining for through high political pressure. However, the threatened actors in Syria by a reformist education plan are those who represent the "old regime" and who still maintain power and authority, and represent a high risk of sabotaging attempts for change and reforms. The" new government" of post-conflict Syria will be a key determinant with regards to handling the reminiscences of the old regime. In less complex and sensitive context, Corrales suggests that threatened actors can be controlled through compensations and salaries adjustments based on years of service, while salaries increases will be based on criteria related to merits and performances.

E. Boost accountability and develop new model of state-society cooperation

The armed conflict in Syria is not over yet. However, this is the time for setting the stone for future change and for planting the foundations for peacebuilding and education reform. International support to assist states in the delivery of education as proven in post-war 20th century helped in many ways but was not enough to achieve universal education. "The only other prospect for assistance is from civil society" as denotes Corrales who highlights that state-society partnerships have very promising and positive impact on the educational expansion despite the complications and risks such partnerships may carry (p.39). The major change that needs to happen is in the relationship between the government and society.

At this point, we believe that the most urging and critical educational component that should result from an established state-society cooperation is the **issuance of a uniform national curriculum that reflects the acceptance and aspirations of all Syrian people irrespective of their socio-economic ,political, religious, or ethnic background**. This massive educational endeavor will constitute the blueprint of peacebuilding and national consent translated by a joint state-societal mission to promulgate a national curriculum that reflects the vision for a recovered democratic Syria. Although this may appear unachievable at this time, but planning and setting a process with well-defined and phased steps need to start from now. This process will necessitate relevant

international players to help push and support the advancement of this challenging mission without exerting any interference or influence on the output but rather playing the role of the guarantor for the 100% Syrian ownership. It is worth mentioning that The Education Dialogue Forum (EDF) in collaboration with the ESCWA has started initiating such attempts. It is recommended to resume these attempts and engage Syrian education experts from the civil society and from the Syrian opposition as well as government' stakeholders and decision makers in the dialogue in order to form a coalition and start the advocacy work toward the achieving of a highly critical mission that will determine the future and sustainable peace in Syria.

Corrales concentrates on two types of major inputs that can regulate the state-society cooperation in an education system: **i) school management; ii) education finance**.

An extreme set up is where state involvement is at highest level and society's involvement is at the minimum level, which in other words represents a statist monopoly in totalitarian regimes. The other extreme is when the state involvement is at lowest level against highest level of society' involvement which translates into an ultra-capitalist model that promotes private education at the expense of poor students' education. In order to move toward universal primary and secondary education expansion, it is recommended "to consider a model of state-society cooperation in which neither exclusive state provision nor exclusive private provision of education predominates". One of the best state-society model that Corrales offers in his paper is the "self-managed schools" model that emerged in El Salvaldor, Brazil, Columbia among few others in the 1990s. "Data show that self-managed schools carry social and academic promise: i) they boost societal demand for schooling; 2) they expand access especially in rural areas because state funding guarantees free tuition and parents can support or provide the infrastructure if no schools are built yet; 3) they empower civil society".

The variables that regulate this model are: funding, ownership of establishment, spending autonomy, personnel autonomy (hire and fire teaching staff) and pedagogy autonomy. The most workable model that can be built on for Syria is the self-managed schools funded by the state (no tuition fees), operating in public establishment or through concession to NGO, holding spending autonomy over infrastructure maintenance and improvement of equipment's, as well as personnel autonomy but with no authority over the curriculum which remains enforced by the state as a uniform national curriculum. Although the latter model may appear bit advanced and controversial in Syria's context today, research show that these cases happened in most vulnerable, conflict-based zones and post-war countries. The ultimate aim is to be ready to **advocate for policies with balanced state-society cooperation represented by an increased level of society's role in school management and spending autonomy, with a state funding and low level of state's school management**. However, for this model to succeed, first the socio-political situation must have matured enough to permit the implementation of such a model; second, a system of monitoring, accountability with well-trained staff and performance standards must be put in place; third, a pilot implementation is launched to assess the feasibility and soundness of this model in Syria's context. At this stage, the suggested model can start at a realistic level based on today's resources and circumstances:

- **Society's increased involvement** is represented through parents-teachers committees, parents volunteering in remedial education support, communities' contribution in school infrastructure, computer labs and libraries donations...etc.
- **State's controlled involvement** through promoting decentralized management, enforcing a uniform national curriculum revised and accepted by the Syrian people, setting up the criteria for school and teachers performances; provision of schools' 'textbooks and stationary for children of low-income households...etc.

Consequently, what needs to be further identified and tested is the multitude of variables that interplay in the education trajectories in order to determine what works and what doesn't in the context of rebuilding a country.

Role of the Syrian Teacher today and in re-building the future of Syria

It is a common perception that education attainment is determined by family background or by the socio-economic factors. Moreover, education attainment is largely associated today to the impact of Syria's humanitarian crisis. Research shows on the other hand that attainment is largely influenced by the quality of teaching and by the length of instruction and not just by family background. Yet, since the beginning of Syria's humanitarian crisis, all education responses addressing the education of IDPs and Syrian refugee children were mainly focused on access at the expense of quality and sustainability. One of the big shortfalls of this emergency approach is the marginalization of the Syrian teacher and his/her vital role in times of conflict and post-conflict. While in Syria, the support for Syrian teachers has been limited to covering basic salaries' compensation with limited ad-hoc training opportunities, engaging Syrian teachers in the education provision for Syrian refugee children continues to be a controversial issue in the host countries, namely in Lebanon and Jordan. Today, after seven years of protracted conflict, one of the imperative areas that needs uncompromising support is the investment in the Syrian human capital, and namely Syrian teachers for Syria's education recovery and reform. Syrian teachers are an indispensable capital for any educational solution that aims to pave the way for re-building Syria and shaping its education system. Accordingly, it is highly recommended to start supporting programs that work on training and capacity building of Syrian teachers based on high and accredited standards. The Syrian Teachers Academy (STA) is a newly established program that serves that purpose and addresses the Syrian education crisis from a strategic perspective, going beyond an Emergency Response approach.

Role of Non-Formal Education in times of conflict and post-conflict.

The enormous scope of the crisis and its impact on Syrian refugee and displaced communities necessitates that decision makers and donors explore sustainable, innovative and disruptive

solutions rather than complying to conformist interventions only. It also entails the need to capitalize on the existence of all relevant players, namely the local NGOs and civil society groups engaged in NFE provision.

Given the continuous and growing number of out of school children and of school dropouts, **it is evident that not one single party can handle or cover on its own the entire educational needs of Syrian refugee and IDPs in time of conflict and post-conflict.** Based on recent research, NFE proved its effective role in outreach and trust-building among refugee and IDPs communities, in complementing Formal Education through retention and learning acceleration programs, in bridging quality and innovations gaps, and in providing recreational and psycho-social support in response to the specific needs of IDPs and Syrian refugee children. Most importantly, NFE was a pioneer in addressing the most difficult and vulnerable age group, the Youth who constitutes the largest group of school dropouts, and who is most exposed to child labor and exploitation as a result of severe socio-economic circumstances, lack of inclusivity and integration in the host countries, and of their inability to enroll again in lengthy educational paths.

However, this argument does not aim to promote by any means the "NGOization" of the education provision to Syrian IDPs and refugees children. **This recommendation is rather to underline the vital role of NFE as an indispensable complementary to Formal Education in times of conflict and post-conflict in Syria, and the need to empower and engage local actors and civil society for that purpose.**

The Master thesis of Urias (2016) conducted in the context of conflict in Medellin, Columbia, demonstrates **the key role of non-formal education in peacebuilding** when aimed at building of the self and community cohesion through transformative social programs. Non-formal education is a grassroots form of education with direct access to local communities, offering an open and enabling space that fosters social exchange and dialogue, community engagement and social cohesion. The author relies on Freire's theory of Conscientization and Pedagogy of hope as a framework for building people's liberation, self-consciousness, and critical thinking in the process of peacebuilding. For Freire, critical consciousness is a sociopolitical educative tool that empowers learners with knowledge and skills and engages them in questioning their historical and social situation, a process Freire called "reading the world", in order to deepen their understanding of their surrounding world, construct meaning and take actions as self-determined and informed citizens for the purpose of public good and democracy. For Freire, any period in history is a time of possibilities especially at a turning point in history.

Hence, it is highly recommended to look at NFE as an integral component of Syria's new Education system and from an institutional perspective. For that to happen, key steps need to be addressed:

- Advocate for the Recognition of the NFE as an integral component of Syria's "reformed" education system (See UNESCO, 2016).

- Validate NFE through the development and enforcement of educational criteria and standards
- Integrate NFE as a constituent in the national education agenda with an allocated budget from the education's fiscal plan.
- Build on best practices and most effective models of NFE adopted by the local communities and NGOs in Syria and in the host countries for scaling and strategizing purposes.

Fiscal policies recommendations to contribute in education **costs cutting and Efficiency increase:**

1. Engage the local and expatriate communities, civil society, and private sector in a national re-construction program of destroyed schools. Not only this will cut the huge cost from the education's budget but will constitute a paradigm shift in the way communities are involved in the education of their children and will be a form of ownership and peacebuilding. It is suggested that a program of that scope involves Syrian architects, education experts and entrepreneurs to design an ideal, scalable and cost-effective school model that can be endorsed by private sector, entrepreneurs and local and expatriate communities who wish to contribute in rebuilding their respective cities and villages.

2. Adopt and disseminate technology-based solutions to provide access to all children, namely most vulnerable and school dropouts through online/offline certified and accredited content by the Syrian government. It is imperative in today's acute educational needs to make best use of technology and leverage on existing models and success stories. Access to such e-learning platform will not be restricted to schools, but provided in learning centers, local organizations and at homes in order to disseminate literacy campaign at the widest level, provide learning and accredited opportunities for youth age group, and bridge the huge gaps accumulated in the last seven years. Two success stories from the host countries are worth mentioning and building on:

    a) **Tabshoura program,** part of the Lebanese Alternative Learning (LAL) organization, is a multi-award winning program that converts the Lebanese national curriculum (K-9) in a highly cost-effective way into a free interactive interface and e-platform that works online and offline and which children in Lebanon can access to. The program is currently is in its expansion phase and is a highly relevant model for providing a technology-based model for expanding free e-learning for Syrian children.

    b) **EDRAAK**, is a pan-Arab online free education platform from k-12, initiated by Queen Rania Foundation based on three Arab national curricula (Syria, Egypt and Jordan). The platform aims to provide accredited content to all Arab young learners wherever they are in order to help them pursue their education on their own pace

and for free. Is has already launched the math subject and is due to be completed by 2020.

c) **ECCE Home Schooling**, is a concept that combines the **empowerment of women**, namely mothers, to contribute through "home-schooling model in the dissemination of basic literacy and numeracy (BLN) and in the education and care provision for the early childhood age group (ECCE); an age group that needs the most a safe space that offers care, play and learning. Education recovery is at its best when women are trained and engaged in the education provision, which has direct result in in the decline of fertility rates decline and in improvements of education outputs (Corrales).

More specifically, ECCE refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support and aid in the holistic development of children, from birth to age 8 years. This period is considered a critical window of opportunity for optimizing children's development through the combined impact of education, care, health, nutrition, protection and stimulation. Research proves that children who have participated in ECCE acquire tremendous gains in their overall social, cognitive and intellectual development which has direct impact on children's later school performance and retention. ECCE is also included and highlighted in the Education For All (EFA) framework, as goal1 ***"expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged childre***n" (UNICEF, 2012). Moreover**, ECCE contributes in breaking the cycle of poverty and servers as an entry point for improving social equity and inclusion.**

3. Non-Formal Education is a key complementary to Formal Education and helps reduce wastage and high bureaucratic and operation costs in the Formal sector by allocating needed remedial education and innovative, cultural and recreational learning to NFE. It is beyond the capacity of public schools today to immediately convert its educational model into a 21st century interactive, pedagogical and innovative learning model. This aimed process will take years of reform and requires first investing in system strengthening and in teachers' capacity building before seeing any concrete change and results in the outcomes of schools' performances. Hence, the role of NFE is absolutely a vital one, not only to accelerate learning and bridge quality gaps but in doing so in a cost-effective way.

Vocational Education

Research argues that the biggest shortcoming of Arab countries including Syria, with 60% of its population are under the age of 30, is the overlooking of the value and importance of vocational education. While Vocational education in Syria is outdated, does not respond to the aspirations of the youth and no longer responds to the needs of the job market, the vocational education in

developed countries is proving to be highly rewarding for youth, with promising career paths and opportunity for growth. In the context of Syria's construction, vocational education becomes more of a crucial need to mobilize a productive workforce that can help reboots the economy. Yet, vocational education remains one of the most neglected sector by the humanitarian education response leaving such an opportunity untapped and missing on a solution for youth dropout, uncompleted education and increased unemployment.
Most important recommendation is to conduct an assessment study on best models of vocational education across the world and allocate special attention to the countries that have undergone wars and conflicts such as Germany and Japan to learn about their innovative models and leverage on their know how and expertise. Subsequently, Syria's vocational education would need to go through a major structural change and reform, bringing about a new curriculum based on contextual relevance and job market needs with a special focus on core skills such as digital literacy, life skills and language among others.

Quality Education, as a guarantor for stability and sustainable peace

"Expanding education without worrying about what or whether students learn is tantamount to merely providing day care" (Corrales, p.44). This is affirm again and again that as much as the temptations to focus only on school enrolment at time of conflict and recovery and post-conflict, it is imperative to address both Access and Quality as two simultaneous tracks that work side by side and not the one subsequent to the other. While starting to address Syria's recovery and reform education plan, it is essential to highlight that quality education is the most critical factor in closing the skills gap, one of the most important in determining a child's future success, and proving to be a transformational factor on the lives of most vulnerable, displaced and refugee children. Children and young adults are dangerously falling behind not only because they don't have access to education but because education is no longer relevant to them and because they lost faith in education as a gateway for a better future or as a source for hope. If inequality in education persists, the implications for global stability are also dire. Unrest is likely to be greatest where the gap between youth expectations and realities is widest. Where economic, technological, demographic, and geopolitical trends collide with weak education systems, the risks of instability, radicalization, and economic failing are at their greatest.
Most importantly, quality is achievable once it becomes inherent within the state's education vision. It is applicable across all forms of education (formal and non-formal) with the right fiscal policy, with defined quality criteria and standards, and with monitoring and evaluation system. Meeting the staggering challenges facing Syria today in order to build the steps for reaching peacebuilding, recovery and development, will totally depend on how all Syrian stakeholders, with the support of the international community, can work towards reshaping the Syrian education systems from an absolute system to a transformational quality-driven system.

Citizenship Education

How can Syria overcome one day the divisive societal hostilities that have resulted from political, religious and ethnic fundamentalism over the past seven years of unprecedented violence? This is not to give a political description of the conflict in Syria, but to highlight that people in Syria today struggle from the lack of acceptance and respect of differences, and from the lack of shared values to re-build their societies on solid ground. It is also worth mentioning that transitional justice and accountability are imperative to enforce the rule of law and rebuild the trust among people and communities. Although this course of actions seems unattainable yet in the near future due to the political dynamics at local, regional and international levels, what urgently needs to be addressed is the fight of increased radicalization through the re-enforcement of the societal shared values and principles. Against the various allegiances that each authority force imposes on its constituents, citizenship education provides the best tool to mitigate indoctrination and divisiveness, and works for reaching peacebuilding. Citizenship education is recommended to replace the subject of "national education" and "religious education" in various curricula and become a core subject taught across all subjects' disciplines and an integral component in the uniform national curriculum that all parties must endorse.

Conclusion

At this turning point in the history of Syria, it is essential to remind ourselves of the essence and purpose of Education, of how to turn the situation of despair into an opportunity, and how to transform the "pedagogy of the oppressed" into a pedagogy of hope and change as per Freire's terms. It is pressing to realize, while still in conflict, that Education is not only a humanitarian matter, nor is it only a matter of right only, but rather a matter of social justice and the way Syrian people choose to shape the future of their societies. Sustainable Development Goal #4 (SDG#4) claims that ALL children have the right to access inclusive and quality-based education, and does not exclude refugee and displaced children. Today, as the Syrian conflict enters its 8th year, Syrian children and young adults need more than ever an education that revives their hope in the future; a relevant education that addresses their specific needs, challenges and aspirations; an education start making the shift from Aid to Development, and that works towards the respect and enforcement of human rights, social justice, social cohesion and peace-building by engaging and empowering Syrian actors, practitioners and educators in re-building their country.

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