Triple Nexus and the case of Education and Health Systems in the Syrian Opposition-Held Areas

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Literature Review

Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus

As reconstruction is embedded directly within the development sector, for past several decades, donors and international organisations attempted to integrate the two sectors of emergency response and development. The European Commission, as one of the biggest institutional donors, attempted to establish the philosophy of integration, particularly to respond to the conflicts and food crises that affected Africa during 1980s (IOB, 2013). It was called at that time Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development LRRD concept, which also considered the most opportune time for moving from humanitarian assistance to development and reconstruction (IOB, 2013). This integration is always a challenge for donors and organisations, although the two sectors have similarities, vast differences have also existed. Donors and organisations proclaimed a mandate for supporting fragile communities especially those that are facing armed conflicts through alleviating the suffering and to enhance the daily life of the vulnerable people. Nevertheless, their humanitarian response is framed within the humanitarian principles. At the same time, the development intervention is more politically driven, the bureaucracy of the UN system, the overlap in the activities for some UN agencies and the focus on the conflict impacts more than the root causes that have all prevented the efforts of the linkage to being achieved (Stamnes, 2016). A new attempt from the UN General Secretary to revive this integration concept was made during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 under the name of New Way of Working (NWoW) or the Humanitarian/Development Nexus, that was later changed to become Triple Nexus after adding 'peace' to its two pillars (ICVA, 2017). According to the UN and the eight agencies who signed it, (which includes WHO, and UNICEF as well as World Bank and IOM endorsements) the NWoW is a commitment "*that meets people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability as proposed in the SG's report "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility*" (WHS, 2016). This new approach is not exclusive to the UN agencies that signed it, and it was widely encouraged to include NGOs and Red Cross and Red Crescent -RCRC movement through the IASC Humanitarian/Development Nexus Task Team by working together to agree on the approach, minimising the barriers that affect its implementation and strengthen the field level

integration between both sectors (ICVA, 2017). Stamnes (2016) suggested designing, planning, allocating resources and implementing in a single model that combines humanitarian and development actions to ensure the success of the NWoW. Each UN agency and international organisation tried to translate the NWoW approach to match its strategy. WHO (2016) built on Stamnes' suggestions by adding that early recovery should be implemented in the humanitarian responses, as well as the localisation for the health service in addition to enhancing the quality of the health system in the conflict areas through development interventions. WHO (2016) suggested improving health governance, particularly at the local level, as a way of linking 'humanitarian' with 'development'. For UNICEF, the same ideas of integration as WHO were suggested but with a more detailed approach. The ways that they recommended to coordinate the 'humanitarian' with 'development' from short to long term education interventions should be to engage with local education authorities, to adjust institutional ways of working, bridging data gaps, reflecting and planning together to result ensure good quality of education by qualified teachers through a robust system (Mendenhall, 2019). OCHA (2017) has highlighted the same proposal as WHO and UNICEF for shifting from short term emergency response to more sustainable services through strengthening the existing local systems and technical governance and not to replicating their role. OCHA (2017) suggested enhancing the operational capacity of those local technical governances for a smooth hand over for the services provided. In conclusion, it is clearly noticeable that governance is one of the key elements that agencies and donors should look for when supporting and enhancing the shift from emergency response to the reconstruction phase.

Governance

According to UNDP (2012), Governance is the practice of power in the political, economic and demonstrative aspects for the whole country. UNICEF define governance as the "roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and partners to design, coordinate, fund, implement, and monitor of the services" (Britto et al, 2013). While, according to DFID, the way the government bodies manage the services provided to the public as well as the connection between citizens, civil society and the private sector (Khalaf, 2015). DFID and UNDP's definitions are applicable during steady and ideal governmental situations which might not be applicable during armed

conflicts. As Khalaf (2015) clearly described the governance during conflicts to the shift of power from the national government to other local actors such as NGOs, religious, or tribal leaders, as well as international actors such as institutional donors, or intentional organisations to fill this gap. The initiatives that are led by those non-state actors to build some sort of governance can be either be the top-down or "Governance from the top" approach which means that they are driven by external actors, the bottom-up or "Governance within" approach which means that they are driven by grassroots groups or a mixture of both (Alzoubi et al., 2019, Khalaf, 2015). Regardless of who the driver for the establishment of the governance and the institutions related to is, the main objective of those approaches is to develop a type of management for essential services to manage the daily life of the affected communities more appropriately. Those essential civil services can be the health system, the education, the water and sanitation as well as the housing, shelter and property management. Apart from the direct outputs from enhancing the governance of local services such as ensuring the quality of the services provided, the coordination between the providers and the protection of the citizens. According to UNDP (2012), there are other outcomes as well such as the establishment of a strong foundation for the transition phase, consolidating Peace, and localising the ownership of the state institutions. To evaluate whether UN agencies, donors and international organisations have made their best to achieve the commitment of the New Way of Working Concept particularly the localisation and sustainability of governance for civil services, a review for the Syrian context will be made and a comparison between the efforts made on the health and education systems by the various stakeholders.

The Syrian civil Institutions during the war

The vacuum that the absence of the regulatory governance on the public services in Opposition-held areas in Syria created as a result of the conflict has allowed local and international actors to fill it, such as grassroots organisations, NGOs, local councils and others (Khalaf, 2015; Alzoubi et al., 2019; Douedari and Howard, 2019). As several stakeholders intervened in the governance of the public services, there was no unified structure, method or system for the development and reconstruction of the civil services institutes (Alzoubi, Et Al.,

2019). Some donors were encouraged to support the health system through local NGOs while others preferred to support the local councils, education system and police system through international profit organisations. This ununified way of support has increased the state disintegration and resulted in variance in the outputs and achievements for each project (Alzoubi, Et Al., 2019).

Syrian Opposition-held areas health governance

Starting with the health system, during the initial spark of unrest in the country, doctors from around the state have been encouraged to respond to needs within their private clinics, or hidden secured places, to ensure the protection of the civilians who were injured during the protests. Those activities were organised within the local community through local coordination committees. They did not reach the national level until the establishment of the health directorates in each governorate fell out of the control of the Syrian Regime (Alzoubi et al., 2019; Douedari and Howard, 2019; Ekzayez, 2018). Some of those health directorates were formed in a community participatory way such as the Idlib Health Directorate to shape the bottom-up governance model (Ekzayez, 2018) while others were established by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) that was based in Turkey to shape the top-down governance model (Alzoubi, et al., 2019). The community participation during the formation of some of those health directorates allowed local NGOs and medical staff to believe in the ownership of those institutes and the continued commitment to the development of their capacities as a way of the reconstruction for the state. Some local medical NGOs started linking the humanitarian response with the developmental response prior to the UN NWoW's existence, by forming the Code of Conduct (CoC) for NGOs working in the Syrian Medical Humanitarian Affairs in 2015. This CoC encouraged NGOs to fully coordinate and mobilise their resources mutually to support the health system and unite the standards with increase the quality assurance services of the health directorates (Alzoubi, Et Al., 2019). This formal relationship allowed the local medical NGOs that signed the CoC to work closely with the health directorates to secure vital funds to implement the committed CoC in 2016. In 2017, two of Syrian medical NGOs, SAMS and UOSSM, were successful in securing the funds needed to enhance the directorates as a technical body whilst avoiding tension with the health cluster and the Syrian Interim

Government (Alzoubi et al., 2019). As in any humanitarian response, the health cluster that combines medical-focused local and international NGOs led by WHO is the formal coordination body that its mandate is to share information among the responders and coordinate their response to utilise the resources. WHO was not an easy stakeholder that accepted the presence of the health directorates that was forced by local NGOs, as WHO always viewed those Health Directorates as a political body that is linked to the SIG, whilst according to WHO (2016), the NWoW can only be implemented through the strengthening of the health system and governance. But under pressure from local and some international NGOs, despite their contradictions between their published strategy and their actions, WHO allowed five of the health directorates to be participants members in the health cluster as of June 2018 with some caveats (Alzoubi et al., 2019; Douedari and Howard, 2019). With the funds received from institutional donors, particularly Germany and France, through SAMS and UOSSM to enhance the capacity of health directorates and the engagement with the medical actors through the formal channels, the health directorates' power increased as a governance body for the health system. This protected them from the interfere of armed groups in the medical system (Alzoubi et al., 2019) and increased their likelihood for sustainability, even when the funds were forced to close in late 2019.

Syrian Opposition-held areas Education Governance

Although education is another essential public service, unfortunately not all of the institutional donors are of the same understanding of its importance as DFID and Scandinavian donors such as Norway. Within the Opposition-held areas the education system's challenges were different than those of the health system. According to a multisectoral needs assessment made by Syria Relief (2016) for north of Aleppo, only 8% of the assessed schools have less than 20% of their staff as qualified teachers. This indicator has been recognised in several locations within the Opposition-held areas that showed, after a deep investigation, that the Syrian Regime was still paying salaries for the qualified teachers that were contracted and forced not to provide any educational activity in any school under threat that their salaries, that were mostly funded by UNICEF, would be reduced. This absence from the education system has forced the local councils to re-open accessible and secured schools with the resources available to allow

unqualified teachers to work alongside those that ignored the orders from the Syrian Regime in order to provide the essential education needed for the next generation. This commitment, as well as the belief in the importance of education, has encouraged DFID to support the education system since 2015 within a multiyear funded program called "Governance through Education" (GTE) (DFID, 2015). Within the GTE program there were several activities divided between short term, such as the provision of salaries for teachers to ensure the continuation of teaching in the Opposition-held areas as well as long term activities through the building and enhancement of the education system through the SIG to ensure the sustainability of the service and the strengthening of the public service institutions (DFID, 2015; Chemonics, 2017). While reviewing the DFID business case for this program and other relevant reports it can be clearly seen that for DFID this program was more politically driven than humanitarian (DFID, 2015; Adam Smith International, 2019). DFID tried to integrate this program with other governmental and public institutions programs such as "*Tatweer*" which was designed to enhance the capacity of local councils (DFID, 2017). The GTE program was divided into three projects; the most significant two were implemented through two international development companies and not NGOs; Adam Smith International (ASI) and Chemonics (DFID, 2016). GTE program has had many successes as documented in the annual review that DFID has been publishing up until 2019, when Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) gained control of most of the Opposition-held areas in NW Syria, except for those that were under the control of Turkish forces. Before that, both ASI and Chemonics have attempted to separate the education governance from local council management in order to be under the newly formed education directorates that were officially under the supervision of the SIG Ministry of Education (DFID, 2017). DFID, through ASI and Chemonics, has invested so much in the education directorates by the salaries paid for thousands of staff members; the training conducted to enhance their capacities and the rehabilitation of the educational infrastructure to ensure proper spaces for students (DFID, 2017). This success did not last long as HTS has fully controlled most of the opposition-controlled areas in North West Syrian since early 2019, forcing DFID and other donors to suspend their stabilisation funds including GTE. Later on, DFID partially resumed the funding for the GTE for only a few objectives that are linked directly with the schools and

eliminating the reconstruction component of the program which is the supportive of the educational institutions as they became affiliated by, the classified armed group, HTS. With this change in the program, education directorates have lost most of its legitimacy and power as funds, coordination and capacity development do not exist anymore.

Conclusion

A pertinent question to be asked, as both health and education directorates faced the same challenge after the control of HTS of Opposition-held areas, is 'why were education directorates more fragile, vulnerable and negatively affected than health directorates even though the there was more donor investment into the capacity of health directorates?' The reasons behind this are a combination of mistakes and lack of commitment of the NWoW concept and other standards. Even though the INEE standards (2012) clearly show that education authorities are these ones who are mainly responsible for the coordination of the education response, and that international humanitarian actors should support and develop their capacities, the role of UNICEF , who translated the NWoW concept as a means to support the local governance and other International NGOs, was not supportive at all for the education system. Two interviews were conducted with two education program managers from an international and a local NGO for this particular essay clearly illustrated that health directorates were not considered a member of the education cluster thus hundreds of schools that were supported by Chemonics were not reported in the cluster reporting mechanism, and communication with education directorates were only limited to the signature of the traditional MoU that just honorific than an obligation commitment. The justification that was provided by UNICEF and INGOs is that education directorates were considered more political than technical committees, unlike health directorates. The donor, as well, has unintentionally increased the fragility of the education governance through the top-down approach that was used to develop the education directorates compared with the bottom-up approach for health directorates, as well as solely working through international development companies and not local NGOs that could be the frontier's defenders to protect the education directorates against any interference from armed groups as was the case of the health directorates (Alzoubi et al., 2019). This exclusion of any

humanitarian NGO has resulted in the isolation of the biggest education response in that area from the formal coordination mechanism which is the education cluster (Alzoubi et al., 2019). It is worth mentioning that there are two main hidden factors that either weakened the support for education directorates or attracted armed groups; they are the lack of protection that education actors receive whilst working in conflict areas under the International Humanitarian Law comparative to health actors and the community-level propaganda-benefits that armed groups can achieve through controlling the education system.

However, the main question remains; 'is this NWoW concept that supposedly integrates humanitarian and reconstruction actions really different from the previous LRRD or it is just an attempt by leaders of UN agencies to request funds when trust from institutional donors decreases?'

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