EFFECTS OF ARMED ETHNIC CONFLICT ON EDUCATION OF CHILDREN: A CASE OF NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out the effects of armed ethnic conflict on education of children in Nakuru County and the implication for peace education. The study objective were to find out, ways conflict affected education of children in Nakuru County. The study adopted a case study based on qualitative procedures. The population of the study was ethnic communities in Nakuru County which included children, teachers, and parents,’ leaders and other stake-holders. The sample size comprised a total of 18 children, 9 Head teachers, and 18 class teachers for the study. It also comprised 18 parents and guardians for both male and female-headed households. The study also had as its sample: 9 gatekeeper’s (opinion leaders), 9 administrators (Chief, DO, and AEO), and 9 religious leaders in its sample. Four instruments were used to collect data: an interview schedule, open-ended questionnaire, Focused Group Discussions and essay writing. Data was collected using open ended questionnaires, interview schedule and written essays. Coded data was analyzed using atlas soft ware. Themes emerged which were presented using simple description. With the quantitative part of the data manually coded. The study revealed; people were maimed, killed, displaced, and lost property. The study also established that, teachers fled schools, learning resources were burnt down, children dropped out of schools, there were also emotional repercussions amongst the children and this affected their education. The study therefore recommended any NGO, CBO, working in an area to train people from the various communities to pass peaceful values and enhance good relations, peace education to be integrated in the subjects within the school curriculum as remedy for conflict.
Armed Ethnic Conflict and Education of Children
International and Local Perspectives

Armed conflicts have negative impact on education both in the conflict-ridden countries and neighbouring states (Blumar & Buttlan, 2007). According to Otunnu (2002), an estimated 90% of global conflict related deaths since 1990 have been civilians and 80% of these have been women and children. The European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict adopted in (2003) confirm that, over the last decade, armed conflicts are estimated to have claimed the lives of over 2 million children, maiming 6 million, orphaning 1 million and creating up to 20 million child refugees worldwide making it the greatest cause of their suffering (MacDonald, 2007).

Armed conflict alters the lives of children such that, even if they are not killed, they are abducted, raped, or left with emotional scars and psychological trauma from direct exposure to violence, dislocation, poverty or loss of loved ones (Nathan, 2000). According to UNICEF (2007), 80% of the World wars fought in Africa and Asia leave more than 27 million children and youth without access to formal education. A study by World Bank (2003), on Breaking the Conflict Trap says that, conflict constitutes a major obstacle to the achievement of Education for All (EFA), Dakar Goal of ‘Primary Education for All’ by 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially the sector goals of universal completion of primary education and achievement of gender equality in primary and secondary education.

All individuals have a right to education. This right is articulated in many international conventions and documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); the Geneva Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). According to Kalem (2003), the Dakar World Education Forum Framework for Action (2000) makes it clear that education is important from early childhood to adulthood and that there should be inclusion of all stakeholders in preparing a national plan for education for all. However, at the world education forum held in Dakar in April 2000, it was recognized that one of the barriers to attaining Education for All (EFA) was the existence of countries affected by current or recent conflict (INEE, 2004).

Due to these conventions, developed countries have made substantial efforts to meet the challenges that conflict poses for children. Among them are, the 1996 report by Gracha Machel on the obstacles encountered in protecting children from conflict, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the International Coalition to Ban Landmines in 1997, and The Anti-War Agenda of 1996 set out by UNICEF appalled by the plight of children in conflict situations. Adopted at the United Nations General Assembly on May 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted and enforced in 2002 which forbids the forced recruitment of any child below 18 years in armed conflict confrontation is also amongst them (UNICEF, 2005).
According to Machel (2001) the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), article 22 states that, state parties shall undertake to respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflict which affect the child. They shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities, from recruiting any child and take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict.

In spite of all these policies and Kenya being a signatory of these conventions, armed ethnic conflict continues and has become a recurrent feature along generation lines. To prevent continued cycles of armed ethnic conflict, peace education should be employed and it should seek to promote peace and tolerance. Since children are the most affected during conflict, they should be used as zones of peace that are capable of pricing open vital areas of humanitarian space even in the most tangled conflicts. In an effort to strengthen, co-ordinate, and integrate various conflict management initiatives, the government of Kenya and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) jointly established the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (NSC) (Government of Kenya, 2010). As a multi-agency organization, NSC is mandated with the co-ordination of all peace related activities in Kenya. It also doubles up as Kenya’s Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit (CEWERU) for the implementation of the Conflict and Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) protocol acceded to by Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) member states (Government of Kenya, 2010). However, armed conflict continued for example, the 2008 conflict that occurred even after the NSC had been established. Most education programmes in armed ethnic conflict situations are run by international agencies and cover only a small part of the education needs of the community affected by conflict and the country as a whole. Moreover, the few communities where peace negotiations are in operation, lack of norms, values and principles to guide interventions, had in certain situations exacerbated conflicts.

Psychosocial Effects of Armed Conflict on Children

In recent years, there has been a wider recognition that, programs designed to assist war-affected children need from the onset to include considerations of the psychosocial effects of war (Otunnu, 2006). The unfolding tragedies in many parts of Kenya has provided evidence that, the country is not yet able to offer children the protection from armed ethnic conflict to which they are entitled to.

According to Smith & Vaux (2003), children in conflict have special needs and in a climate of fear and instability, it is hard to create an atmosphere of confidence conducive to learning. They might have witnessed persecution or massacre of their family or community members. They are physically and psychologically damaged. Their attention span may be reduced; they may become more emotionally demanding, to their parents and teachers, they have difficulty concentrating and memorizing concepts and may be overanxious, irritable and fearful.

A small proportion of the children affected by conflict may also experience symptoms of acute, long term distress. Often the teachers, themselves similarly afflicted, do not know how to manage the psychosocial effects or have the education tools to do so (Opongo, 2006). Tawil
& Harley (2004) also reckoned that, a climate of impunity prevails during armed conflict, when the protective social institutions, in this case, schools, collapse, leaving children particularly exposed to danger. War drives people out of their homes as they flee battle zones or direct attack, leaving behind not only their property, but also their family and friends.

As they flee conflict, families may become separated and when children leave their homes, it is usually seen as a temporary situation. All too often, however, the period of exile runs into years or even decades and they become refugees or internally displaced children (IDPs) and it is harder for the humanitarian community to assist internally displaced persons since, national governments often view this as ‘interference’ (Tawil & Harley, 2004).

Sexual violence is often a consciously deployed weapon of war. It can include rape, mutilation, exploitation and abuse. This is common especially among children who have been separated from their families and communities. All these factors tend to increase the likelihood of HIV transmission in conflict zones while the breakdown of school systems inhibits safeguards that could counter these risks. In addition, the hopelessness of life in a war affected area can foster risky behavior among young people (Mohammed, 2001).

Even after a war is over, children are often threatened by what war leaves behind. Explosive remnants of war, that includes abandoned explosives, weapons and unexplored ordinances that kill and maim thousands of children every year. They can also hinder access to schools for whole communities, causing deprivation long after hostilities are ceased. Children are at great risk since they tend to be curious about strange objects, and may be attracted to their colorful designs. In addition, many children are responsible for herding animals and fetching water, which involve traversing large tracts of countryside that may include mined areas (Sommers, 2002).

According to Smith & Vaux (2003), there are advantages for using schools for psychosocial measures since the structured routine learning environment of school provides a sense of stability and continuity for children and this is seen as vital in psychosocial adjustment. Teachers can form a significant resource in psychosocial interventions; they are the first to recognize symptoms of severe distress in children. Many know the children well and are in a good position to notice personality changes.

However, there are some serious constraints in school based psychosocial schemes. Class size is one and the poor self esteem and emotional problems of teachers. However, sometimes even if educational opportunities exist in war-torn areas, parents may be reluctant to send their children to school. They may be afraid that the children will not be safe while they are on their way to and from school, or during classes (UNESCO, 2006). (Tawil & Harley 2004) reckon that, when children have been forced to leave their homes and are crowded into displaced persons camps establishing schooling system as soon as possible reassures everyone, by signaling a degree of stability and a return to normal roles and relationships within the family and the community.
World Bank, (2003) pointed out that children affected by conflict can also be very disruptive in school, alienating both staff and fellow students. Teachers can be trained to identify children with serious learning or emotional problems and, assuming that a referral system exists, seek specialist help, knowing when and where to refer a child is crucial. Even without specialist care, teachers can have an impact on psychosocial well being by using learning techniques and improving the school environment for example, and when possibly working with community members and other specialist to provide pastoral care (Mohammed, 2001).

Schools can be prepared in advance for emergencies, ensuring a speedy and appropriate response. Educational personnel can minimize fear, prevent children from panicking and give information countering rumors and propaganda (UNESCO, 2006). There are many things teachers can do to help children recover from distressing experiences, such as giving concrete and symbolic representation of the event and legitimizing children's concerns and fears. Tawil & Harley (2004) said “the most important thing a teacher can do is talk to distressed children, listen to what they say, and take their communication seriously”. They also need to understand the value of learning about children backgrounds and working with parents or other key care giver when children have difficulties at schools. As Kriesberg (1998) put it when possible, teachers need to make them available to talk privately with children, preferably at a regular point in the day or week.

Since parents can play a vital part in managing psychosocial distress in children, it is important to explain to parents how to recognize and respond to children's psychosocial distress at home. There is need to create a sense of normalcy for children in conflict zones. For example, familiar routines, tasks and to create a sense of security, purpose and meaning for them. This allows the children to start functioning again as fully as possible given their circumstances as pointed out by (Marques & Bannon, 2003). In addition to family routines, organized activities especially educational ones are important for children. Even without a school building, lessons and play groups can be held and sports and games organized, songs, and storytelling to benefit the overall well-being of children (Marques & Bannon, 2003). The proposed study sought to find out the effects of armed ethnic conflict on education of children.

**Study Methodology**

In line with the qualitative nature, the study adopted a case study approach. The location of the study was Nakuru County in Njoro, Kuresoi and Molo districts which were purposively arrived at. The sample comprised of 18 children randomly selected, arrived at by default 9 Head teachers, and 18 class teachers who were purposively selected and 18 parents. The study also had as its sample: 9 gatekeeper's (opinion leaders), 9 administrators (Chief, DO, and AEO), and 9 religious leaders Data was collected using open ended questionnaires, interview schedule and written essays. Coded data was analyzed using atlas ti soft ware. Themes emerged which were presented using simple description.
Findings and Discussions

As conflicts persist, economic and social conditions suffer and educational opportunities become more limited or even non-existent. Data was therefore collected by the researcher in order to find out the effects of armed ethnic conflict on education of children in Nakuru County. The discussions under this theme were supported by brief quotations from the accounts made by participants during interviews, open ended questionnaires and essay writing. The teachers, children, Head teachers and parents’ responses are explained in Tables below.

Table 1 Armed Ethnic Conflict and Closing Down of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>HT N=9</th>
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<th>T N=18</th>
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<th>FGDs N=3</th>
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<th>CH N=9</th>
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From Table 1, 3 (33.3%) Head teachers from Kuresoi, 3 (33.3%) from Njoro and 3 (33.3%) from Molo indicated that some schools were burnt down together with their infrastructure and this lead to their closing down thus affecting education of children in Nakuru County. Six (33.3%) teachers from Kuresoi 6 (33.3%) from Molo, and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also said that armed ethnic conflict affected education since many schools were closed down due to burning, looting and insecurity. The 3 (100%) FGDs reported that some schools were closed down due to burning, looting, and insecurity while other schools became camps for the IDPs rendering delivery of education services to the schools impossible.

Further probing from 3 (33.3%) Head teachers, from Kuresoi, 3 (33.3%) from Njoro and 3 (33.3%) from Molo revealed that some teachers fled the area living some few functioning schools understaffed. Six (33.3%) teachers from Kuresoi, 6 (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also said schools were understaffed as teachers fled the area. Six (33.3%) children from Kuresoi 6 (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro said most of the teachers had left due to the fighting. From the above finding, it was conclusive to say that due to ethnic armed conflict, schools were understaffed and teachers fled the area and this affected education of children in Nakuru County. Building from the above findings the researcher probed further on effects of armed ethnic conflict on education. The responses are summarized in Table 2 below.
Table 2 Armed Ethnic Conflict, Absence and Dropout from schools

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<tr>
<th>Division</th>
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<th>Teachers N=18</th>
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<th>FGDs N=3</th>
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<td>Totals</td>
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From Table 2, 3 (33.3%) Head teachers from Kuresoi, 3 (33.3%) from Molo and 3 (33.3%) from Njoro responded that children were absent from school and there was high school dropout rate due to armed ethnic conflict. Six (33.3%) teachers from Kuresoi, 6 (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also complained of high absence of children from school and dropout rate. Six (33.3%) children from Kuresoi (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also said that most of the time, they were absent from schools and most of their friends had dropped out of school due to the insecurity caused by the conflict between the different ethnic communities. A Head teacher from a school in Molo recounted the following:

*Due to the fighting, some families were left without parents. The older children dropped out of school so that they can work to provide basic needs for their siblings and this led to creation of child-headed households. Some of these children were absent from school for long periods as they sought means of survival and to them, school is no longer a priority and it has greatly affected their education.*

From the analysis of that finding, a conclusion was reached that armed ethnic conflict affected education of children in Nakuru County. To find out more on the effects of armed ethnic conflict on education, the researcher addressed the teachers, Head teachers FGDs and the children. From the results, 3 (33.3%) Head teachers from Kuresoi, 3 (33.3%) from Molo and 3 (33.3%) from Njoro revealed that majority of the students did not sit for their standard eight national examinations since they were not registered by Kenya National Examination Council. Other children could not be traced for the exercise due to displacement, as others were not well prepared to sit for the exams due to absence. Some of the children in other lower classes did not sit for their terminal examinations to enable them to proceed to the next classes while other children had dropped out of school due to insecurity during the conflict.

Six (33.3%) teachers from Kuresoi, 6 (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also said that children did not sit for their examinations. They further responded that, due to the poverty that followed, many parents did not pay the examination fees so that their children could be registered to sit for the national examination. Eighteen children from the three divisions responded that they did not sit for their terminal exams while others did not proceed to the next class. Some students were also forced to repeat classes due to inadequate coverage of the
syllabus as the children responded. Parents from the 3 FGDs from the 3 divisions also said that some of the children were forced to repeat classes and others did not sit for their end of term exams. This discouraged some of the children and as a result they dropped out of school. A Head teacher from Elburgon in the interview narrated the following:

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Ethnic conflict affected the education of children in that many of them were displaced and went to camps, and they did not attend schools as usual. Other children never went back to school after the conflict as the problems of the displaced people were numerous like lack of basic needs and education was no longer a priority.
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Another theme that emerged as an effect of armed ethnic conflict from children narratives and teachers open ended questionnaires, FGDs and Head teachers’ interviews is discussed in Table 3.

### Table 3 Armed Ethnic Conflict and Psychosocial Effects

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<th>Division</th>
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<tr>
<td>Njoro</td>
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Presented in Table 3, 3 (33.3%) Head teachers from Kuresoi, 3 (33.3%) from Molo and 3 (33.3%) from Njoro said the children were psychologically affected by the conflict and this affected their education since they could not concentrate in class. From the results 5 (28%) teachers from Kuresoi, 6 (33.3%) from Molo and 6 (33.3%) from Njoro also revealed that the children suffered emotional and psychological trauma due to the conflict and it affected their education as they could not concentrate in class. One (5.4%) teacher from Kuresoi had no response.

The 3 FGDs of the parents, reported that the children suffered emotionally due to the atrocities of killings, maiming, burning of property and shouting they had witnessed and they were therefore not able to learn well in schools. The 18 (100%) children from the 3 divisions also said they suffered emotionally and were unable to cope with the demands of schooling. To support the above theme, Paul, a pupil from Kuresoi division narrated the following:

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I still hear shouts and screams from my siblings as we were beaten up. My father’s hand was chopped off. I cannot concentrate in school. I fear they will come back. The teacher is from a different tribe I fear him. I heard some girls and women were raped, some of my classmates got babies.
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To further confirm the theme was Jane, a teacher from Molo who wrote the following story in her open ended questionnaire:

Janet is 16 years old and in class 8, before the violence she was doing well in class. Even though she was silent, her behavior has been erratic. She returned to school as soon as it was opened, she was completely silent. Other days she is rude to the teacher and her classmates. She has been seen in the playground fighting with other children. When I ask her why she is behaving that way, she complains of headaches, stomachaches and dizziness. The other children accuse her of instigating the numerous fights. Almost everybody in the school including teachers suffered during the violence, losing homes and loved ones. Nobody has much patience with her and her behavior is distressing other students. The mother refuses to come and discuss her child’s problem. The father is always drunk.

To further confirm the effects of armed ethnic conflict on education of children, the researcher addressed the children’s narratives and gathered that children were traumatized by the conflict and could not learn. The following narrative from James a pupil in class 8 at a school in Elburgon revealed it all:

I lost my two brothers in the violence, I felt bad. The teachers try to talk to me I feel even more sad they cannot bring my brothers back to life. Sometimes I vomit when I think of what happened to them. I do not tell my parents they are already hurt without me adding more pain to them. Many children dropped out of school and some abused drugs to forget the pain. Many teachers do not attend school regularly some girls from my class are having sex for money to buy food. My message is please all Kenyans let us bring peace in our country. Peace makes children happy because they enjoy life. Children let nobody choose the tribe because it affects our education.

From the above findings, there was an indication that due to armed ethnic conflict, children suffered psychologically and emotionally which might have affected their education. The 9 sampled Head teachers’ responses in the interviews with the researcher further supported the finding as they revealed that armed ethnic conflict was more precarious for school going children whose fundamental right to education was disrupted as arsonists’ destroyed homes, churches and schools. The 9 head teachers further revealed that the magnitude of violence did not spare the teachers as they received threats to vacate their homes. Students were also stuck in their home areas as roads were barricaded and transport to and from school was made insecure by gangs armed with crude weapons. It was particularly unsafe for the girls to travel to and from schools and that affected all community members including children psychologically.

The research findings therefore indicated that armed ethnic conflict affected education of children among the different ethnic communities living in Nakuru County. Galtung (2000) warned that the effect of violent conflict should not only be seen in terms of costs, casualties, displaced persons and material loss. Invisible effects like traumas and myths of trauma may be important in the long run. Galtung (2000) also advised that consequences like bereavement, hatred and addiction to revenge and victory should be explored as part of any prognosis exercise used to deter violence. In the light of that argument, it was imperative to develop a peace education model to be incorporated in the school curriculum to teach peace to the young
generation to prevent cycles of continued ethnic conflict. This is because lasting behaviour change in children and adults only occur over time; peace education is therefore a long term process, not a short term intervention. Peace education should therefore be based in schools, other learning environments and also involve the entire community so as to realize lasting peace.

Discussions

Research findings showed that, armed ethnic conflict led to burning, looting and closing down of some schools. Other schools became camps for the IDPs rendering delivery of education services impossible. Some teachers fled the area due to the insecurity of conflict leaving some few functioning schools understaffed.

Due to teachers’ absence, children absence and dropout rate was high. Some of the students did not sit for their standard eight national examinations since they were not registered while others were affected by the family separation and displacement due to the conflict. Again, due to the poverty that followed, many parents did not pay the examination fees so that their children could be registered to sit for the national examination. Some students in other classes were forced to repeat due to inadequate coverage of the syllabus. Class repetition further aggravated the problem of school dropout thus affecting education of children. Low enrollment and dropout rate in ethnic armed conflict areas can be partially explained by the damage to schools and property. Students are also likely to drop out if their classes are overcrowded and their quality expectations are not met by the schools. Parents are also concerned about older girls who would be harassed or abused by soldiers on their way home as clearly put by Blattman (2006).

Due to armed ethnic conflict, children also suffered emotional and psychological trauma and were unable to cope with the demands of schooling and this might have affected their education. Many children affected by conflict reported levels of distress associated with post traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety. The levels of distress were directly linked to the severity of trauma or event children experienced during the conflict. While the levels of distress decline over time, many children remain severely affected for a long period of time (Blattman, 2006). However, conflicts’ are the result of learned attitudes and behavior and, it is possible to change both through educational interventions (Aron, 2003). Otunnu (2006) suggested that, peace education programmes should seek to counteract children's exposure to violence by instilling peaceful values and equipping them with skills needed to resolve interpersonal conflicts without result to violence.

According to Opongo (2006) peace education should emphasize the concept and language of multicultural and interfaith tolerance and encourage non-violent behavior by teaching methods of conflict resolution, mediation, problem identification, negotiation and problem solving. That view disagreed with the present findings as we see community members resulting to violence to solve disputes held over the past. So as to instill a greater understanding of other cultures and to reduce negative stereotypes and promote diversity and universal
values, the principles of democracy, sharing and equity should be taught in schools. In addition, observance of human rights, including children's rights should be encouraged. At the same time discriminatory or prejudicial values should be confronted and challenged and indoctrination and egocentricity discouraged. Awareness should be raised of any social issues that have a bearing on the conflict in question and to take the experiences of children, which they have already drawn conclusions, and turn them into the starting point for discussions. In line with the literature reviewed, it was important to develop a model of peace education to be incorporated in the school's curriculum to prevent future reoccurrence of ethnic conflict along generation lines. According to the Constitution of Kenya (2010), every person has the right to education and armed ethnic conflicts experienced in Nakuru County denied the children that very basic right.

Conclusion

Due to armed ethnic conflict, schools were burnt down together with their infrastructure; others became camps for the armed forces and homes for the IDPs rendering delivery of education services impossible. Educational resources could not reach the schools as roads were barricaded and teachers fled the region for fear of their lives. Teacher pupil ratio was low, there was school dropout and high rate of absenteeism as the conflict created child headed households. Some children repeated classes due to inadequate coverage of the syllabus due to closure of schools, absence and lack of teachers. The children also suffered emotional and psychological trauma due to the experiences of ethnic conflict which affected their learning and performance in class.

Recommendations

Early investment in rehabilitation of schools and classrooms should be carried out by donors with the support of national government and local communities. Perpetrators of acts in breach of criminal laws, be it attacks on schools, learners and educators, rape or similar atrocities may be charged and convicted. International NGOs and the government should introduce an accelerated learning programme designed to allow children who missed some months or years of education to complete a full primary cycle with less than the stipulated time to compensate for lost time. In addition, the government should get children away from zones of conflict to improve their immediate prospects of protection and normalcy. Community based rehabilitation programmes that combine psychosocial support with education and skills training should also be extended to other community members and those who dropped out of schools. Peace education should be integrated in the school curriculum to counter ethnic conflicts.
References


