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Why Certification Matters: A Review of State and Non-State Actions in Côte d'Ivoire for Promoting Schooling for the Displaced

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What education options do displaced children have once conflict uproots them from their homes? How is their learning certified, and how can they make a bridge with their pre-war educational attainments? By drawing on the cases of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire over the period 1992–2007 and recent experiences of primary and secondary school students displaced by the Ivoirian civil war, this article explores the challenges related to the continuity of education. It examines in particular the extent to which Liberian refugees were treated differently than displaced Ivoirians and how non-State providers complemented State action when providing schooling opportunities to the displaced, often acting in parallel with it. The analysis is mainly based on grey literature collected on site, the study of local scholarly work, and semi-structured interviews with key informants.

Keywords: education, displaced populations, refugees, certification of learning, Côte d'Ivoire, Africa

Clarifying the Main Debates

When it comes to formulating a sound educational response to a massive influx of displaced pupils, there are many dilemmas and many actors involved. Educational providers are far from being a homogeneous group, especially in times of emergencies, and include State, private, humanitarian, religious, individual, local and extra-local initiatives that differ widely in scale.

Two points are rather striking when reflecting on education, conflict, and displacement of populations. First, the resilience of a certain form of educational supply, even in the most extreme circumstances. Education usually continues to be promoted by the State, by external agencies, by local actors, profit-making individuals, and sometimes by all of them, concomitantly. New structures are likely to emerge, even if they rarely promote an innovative approach (international agencies increasingly tend to reproduce experimental forms of emergency education tried elsewhere, in other war-affected contexts), and tend to get a privileged room to manoeuvre in matters related to education, sometimes having more voice than existing institutions. The second point worth reflecting upon relates to the persistence of several forms of educational demand despite the situation of extreme deprivation faced by most displaced people. Some educational initiatives are entirely funded by parents' contributions, some are in complete opposition to international forms of educational supply, and one can only wonder how such financial sacrifices can be possible for such a poor and fragmented population. It also raises the question to what extent 'education brokers', such as local NGOs and local teachers, play an active role and are actually listened to, when promoting the continuation of certain forms of schooling among their peers, sometimes at the expense of other forms of supply.

If several scholars have reflected on the concept of 'emergency education', few have clearly pinpointed the questionable assumptions upon which the concept rests.[1] Many are still convinced that well-designed education programmes are uncircumventable keys to mitigate the effects of war and forced displacement, and the mere existence of refugees and internally displaced people is now considered enough to legitimize the supply of external and experimental forms of educational interventions. One effect is to add to the existing number of educational providers and educational systems, complicating the local educational environment even more, and raising obvious issues of certification when navigating from one system to another.

With regard to refugee education, which curriculum to use is the subject of fierce debate among education experts. Should external assistance direct refugees to follow their home-based curriculum, assuming they will repatriate soon, or should they favour the host-based curriculum, under the assumption that they are more likely to stay for some time in the country providing asylum? While UNHCR has taken a clear stand in the case of refugees who settle in camps (promoting the teaching of the home-based curriculum as a norm), the approach is more vague for refugees who settle outside the

camps structures—those who mix on a daily basis with the host population. Academic authors who have reflected on these issues have pointed out that refugees who continue their education in the host country using their home country curriculum are likely to experience trouble having this education recognized in their country of asylum, and may experience more difficulties than others when making the transition from school to work. Alternately, if they receive an education based on their host country curriculum, they are likely to have trouble getting this education certified in their home country and run the risk of failing to secure a decent living in their place of origin should they decide to return (Buckland 2006; Sesnan 1999, 2009).

While certainly not dismissing these arguments, which hold true to certain extents and for certain contexts, they need to be put into perspective to avoid overestimating the potential impact of education. Firstly, and contrary to the widespread notion that using the host country curriculum prevents refugees from returning home, several studies show that education has a relatively low effect on deciding for repatriation (Bird 2003; Sinclair 2002). Secondly, refugees' ability to find work in a local economy rarely depends on which curriculum they followed at school. If they are not extremely well connected, the transition from school to work is usually quite painful in developing countries and youth unemployment is a major concern, with no exception for the educated youth (Atchoarena 2000).

Perhaps a better way to approach the topic of the continuity of schooling for the displaced—especially from a practitioner perspective—would be to frame the question differently, and instead of investigating the pros and cons of using either a host or a home-based curriculum, it would be more useful to explore the range of educational options displaced students have where they are residing, and to find ways of ensuring minimum waste of the education already attained. Framing the debate in such terms has implicit consequences. The first one is that it tends to focus the attention on older students. Not surprisingly, being able to continue going to school AND not being set back a few years in the new system is of particular importance for students enrolled in higher grades and for those at the end of an education cycle. They have already invested quite a lot in their education and do not expect to have done so in vain. In comparison, the certification of the learning attainments of the youngest pupils appears less important. Although one could argue that parents had started to make substantial investments in education, first, second and third-grade students have generally had little time to build a lot of educational baggage and cannot be set back too far in primary school.

A second consequence is that framing the debate in such terms addresses a largely ignored issue in the education and development field, namely, the topic of certification, accreditation, validation and recognition of learning.[2] When transferring mid-cycle, displaced students need to present some kind of documentation from their previous educational institution to ensure that they are enrolled at an appropriate level. This documentation must be valid and recognized in the new structure they enter, otherwise it can result in being barred from entry. While there are not many studies, the literature does provide some anecdotal evidence pointing at obstacles to effective recognition of learning. The UNHCR/UNICEF 6th grade leaving certificate earned by Rwandan refugees in Tanzania in the mid-1990s was for instance neither recognized by the Rwandan government when refugees returned, nor by Tanzanian authorities for the ones who stayed (Bird 2003). Another example is South Sudan, which has been divided for years with multiple educational boundaries, with separate education systems using different curricula (Ugandan, Kenyan, Sudanese). Every year, southern Sudanese schools were therefore facing the challenge of figuring out how and in which country their students could sit for national examinations (Sommers 2005). Not being able to present the required documentation can also put the displaced students at risk of being set back a few years in their education (depending on age, place and for the lucky ones, assessed level of education), and those who fled in the middle of an academic year face the additional challenge of documenting an incomplete year.

A third consequence of reframing the question is that it finally acknowledges the multiplicity of options displaced students have with regard to continuing their education, and the diversity of the educational supply that they can tap into. This is in sharp contrast to a popular view that assumes—despite a lack of empirical evidence—a standard educational trajectory among the displaced (Chelpi-den Hamer 2009). This latter perspective is widely adhered to by international humanitarian agencies, and international support usually takes a single form: with regard to refugee education, there is either support for parallel schools staffed by refugees who teach the home-based curriculum, or there is support for integration into the local schools. The two are rarely supported simultaneously,

despite the multiplicity of educational patterns among refugees and the diversity of educational providers (each with a different motive for involving itself in education, each with a different relationship with the State, and each evolving differently over time (Rose 2007)).

If they do not cross international borders, students displaced by a civil war face challenges similar to those of refugees. If they join an informal school, or if they register in a school no longer recognized by the Ministry of Education, how is their learning going to be assessed when they re-enter the public system? When displaced in the middle of an academic year, are they condemned to an *année blanche*, i.e. a year 'that does not count'? And as for those in the exam classes (Grades 6, 10 and 13 in Côte d'Ivoire), to what extent will they be penalized for sitting national examinations? There are also specific issues pertaining to internally displaced students. Since it is often a country's constitutional duty to provide equal access to education to its nationals, one could seriously question whether this duty still holds when massive displacement takes place within a country. To what extent do displaced students have access to schools in their new dwelling places, which no doubt are already overwhelmed by the normal intake? What happens to the students who remain in areas no longer under government control? Sesnan (2009) rightly points out that States engaged in an internal conflict often cut off 'rebel' areas from their national examination systems and prevent movement of examination papers and examiners. Students, who naturally want to avoid wasting their time and wish to have their school years validated, may have (or not) the option to sit the exam elsewhere, in areas considered 'safe' by the Ministry of Education, until an official assessment is done in the areas which are no longer under government control.

The Role of the State

The primacy of national governments is often brought up when writing on education in emergencies (INEE Minimum Standards, guidance tools, agency policy documents): governments are presented as the main duty-bearer of providing access to education and as the main drivers of educational policy. When there are gaps in provision due to extreme circumstances (a civil war for instance, or a sudden influx of displaced people), it is usually accepted that international and non-governmental associations step in to provide additional capacity.[3]

Although elegantly formulated, the primacy of the State entails little in certain contexts and in practice one notices various attempts by international humanitarian actors to sideline national governments. True, the State has lost its monopoly in decision-making, and discussions on the topic of educational governance in developing countries increasingly stress the diversity of actors involved, the multiple layers of governance, and the relationships that link together the different actors. The educational sector has changed in recent years, and parallel systems have burgeoned in developing countries alongside State-provided education (Davies 2005; Hoppers 2005, 2006; Robertson and Dale 2003; Rose 2007). A detailed mapping is likely to show that the educational terrain is much more complex than it at first seems, and that there is the need to go beyond the popular 'formal' vs 'non-formal' dichotomy when reflecting on education in developing countries (or at least, these categories should be well defined to avoid falling into the trap of analytical oversimplification). Hoppers (2006) points out that the term 'non-formal education' has come to cover so many things (from schools run by community members to NGO-funded schools, literacy projects, youth skills development, peer training, and even group sensitization on certain themes) that it has lost its meaning and relevance because, despite the multiplicity of forms non-formal education takes, the term continues to give the impression that all forms of non-formal education are the same, that they can be manipulated in the same manner, and that there are no similarities with formal education. It is difficult to draw a line between formal and non-formal, yet the two terms continue to be widely used in practice while many educational initiatives in fact show characteristics of both. Pragmatic scholars have therefore moved away from debating too much on the choice of words, to favour approaches that acknowledge plural forms of non-State education. They recognize that these forms have different characteristics, different objectives, different clienteles, and different relationships with the State, with varying degrees of relevance for educational policy (Hoppers 2006; Rose 2007).

If there are many non-State actors involved in education in developing countries, and even more in times of emergencies, it would be wrong to completely turn our back on the State, mainly because in doing so, we would ignore the State's capacity to expand or contract the boundaries of the public educational system, according to the imperatives faced. Hoppers (2006) noted that States

themselves can and do establish non-formal initiatives when it suits the needs of the system; they can also go to great lengths to protect these initiatives from being overwhelmed by procedures and restrictions that normally apply to the formal system. What happened in Côte d'Ivoire is a good illustration of that. In the midst of a civil war, the State created parallel structures in addition to the existing schools, agreed to thin out the curriculum to conform to a school year shortened by conflict, and set up multiple systems in terms of school calendars, curricula and exams, that eventually lasted several years. Another reason not to turn our back on the State, which is linked to the previous point on certification of learning, is that in many cases, non-State educational providers consider it crucial to be linked to the public system. Non-formal curricula validated by the State gain in credibility, and this has a direct impact on enrolment rates and continuation of schooling (for parents and students receive a certain guarantee that they are not investing their time and money in vain).

The Ivoirian Case Study

Côte d'Ivoire is an interesting case because it faced both mass refugee influx and internally displaced people in the same period. The Ivoirian State was therefore confronted by many of the challenges described above. When collecting data on refugee education, former refugee students were interviewed, as well as parents, school directors (from both refugee and Ivoirian schools), local educational authorities (including retired staff who were working in the 1990s) and representatives of local and international NGOs involved in education. UNHCR was also approached in Abidjan and Tabou, and the local representatives authorized the study of internal correspondence and archives. When collecting data on the impact of civil war on the Ivoirian education system, the Minister of Education gave written authorization to approach the following divisions: the Direction des Écoles, Lycées et Collèges (DELC); the Direction des Examens et Concours (DECO); the Direction Régionale et Départementale de l'Éducation Nationale (DREN and DDEN); the Inspections de l'Enseignement Primaire (IEP); and the Direction de la Pédagogie et de la Formation Continue (DPFC). This was especially helpful in collecting statistical information and internal correspondence between the central divisions of the Ministry and the decentralized educational authorities. Other interviews were done with the founder of the local NGO Éducation pour Tous, which had played an important role in restoring primary and secondary education in the rebel-controlled areas, and with some of the teaching staff of several schools visited in western Côte d'Ivoire.

Context

The country has been split in two since September 2002, with rebel forces controlling the northern half of the country. A direct consequence for the national educational system has been the delinking of six educational districts from the Ministry of Education (two districts were partly in the government-controlled area so only became partially disconnected), which deprived many schools of funding, supplies and basic equipment in 2002–2003, 2003–2004, and 2004–2005. During that period, the functioning of the schools and the holding of the national examinations were severely disrupted in the North and in areas close to the frontline. Schools were no longer taken into account in regional planning, their credit was frozen and no professional teaching staff could be deployed. At the beginning of the war, schools closed down (during the first trimester of the school year, completely) and teachers and education officials in the northern half of the country were called back by the Ministry of Education to be redeployed in government-controlled areas. Despite the government injunction to go and work elsewhere, not everyone left, and about 12 per cent of the educational staff stayed in the war-affected areas and resumed work. It is estimated that a third of the primary schools and half of the secondary schools reopened in the North in the first semester of 2003, and that one third of the pre-war student intake registered in school (Chelpi-den Hamer 2007; Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa 2004). In December 2002, the Ministry of Education adopted an emergency programme for education, whose main goals were to strengthen the formal system in the South to absorb the influx of displaced students, and to find solutions for the North (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa 2004). The emergency programme ran parallel to the usual framework.[4]

As civil war was still raging in western Côte d'Ivoire, 40,000 Liberians crossed the border in 2003 following resumption of fighting in Liberia, and settled in the region of Tabou, in south-west Côte d'Ivoire. The area had already been home to Liberian refugees in the 1990s (325,000 in 1996)

and setting up refugee schools using the Liberian curriculum had been the initial response of the international humanitarian actors. With the end of the first Liberian war in the late 1990s, the bulk of the refugees repatriated to Liberia, notably encouraged by a large-scale UNHCR repatriation programme. Refugee schools closed down at primary and secondary level and refugee students remaining in Côte d'Ivoire were invited to register in Ivoirian schools (Chelpi-den Hamer 2009).

The Response of the State towards its Citizens

Faced with the split of the country, the Ivoirian State has demonstrated its capacity to expand and contract formal systems in various ways: it created parallel structures in the main towns controlled by the government to help absorb the displaced students; it thinned out the curriculum used there, and also in the schools that continued to operate in the war-affected areas; and it allowed different school calendars and different national examination sessions to exist side-by-side for several years (Chelpi-den Hamer 2007).[5] The impact of State action should therefore not be downplayed.

The Creation of Parallel Structures

The Ministry showed relative flexibility in setting up emergency schools in the main towns that hosted the displaced students (*écoles relais*), and pragmatism ruled in order to minimize time loss. The bulk of these institutions used existing infrastructures to operate, the system of 'double shifts' was the norm to accommodate students within the limited space, and 4,000 teachers were reassigned to the new schools, of whom 3,500 effectively relocated. Where there were not enough teachers for the number of students, volunteer staff were temporary recruited by the State. The *écoles relais* started in January 2003 in the South (four months after the formal schools) and ran for a year.[6] At primary level, 75 *écoles relais* and 516 classrooms were set up. At secondary level, there were 64 schools and 1,142 classrooms (Koukougnon 2003). They closed down in August 2003 after the national examination sessions took place for grades 6, 10 and 13 (*examen d'entrée en 6ème (CEPE), Brevet des Collèges (BEPC)* and *Baccalauréat*). A series of ministerial decrees had set the operational and administrative framework for these structures by defining a parallel calendar, and providing other dates than in the regular system for sitting national examinations. Some of the teaching staff who used to work in the North were reassigned to the *écoles relais* and it is estimated that these structures absorbed 10-20 per cent of the displaced students from the North (Ministry of Education 2003). 135,000 students from the North registered in the South to continue their education (out of 700,000) and it is believed that a majority of the displaced students got absorbed into the normal schools.

Not only did the Ministry create these parallel schools, it also created a whole parallel administration to manage them, which included specific Regional and Departmental Divisions of Education (*DREN relais* in Abidjan, Daloa and Yamoussoukro and *DDEN relais* in Dimbokro and San Pédro) and specific staff training institutions (*CAFOP relais* in Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Gagnoa, Daloa, Dabou, Grand-Bassam, Abengourou and Aboisso) (Ministry of Education 2003). The main disadvantage of having created such a parallel administration system was that the *écoles relais* were not reporting to the usual Divisions of Education, which created certain operational issues and a very quick loss of institutional memory once the structures were abolished a year later.

If some figures are sometimes given, the number of displaced students that attended the *écoles relais* is in fact unknown. Registration was done in such ways that it was impossible for the staff to keep an exact count of how many pupils had come from the war-affected areas, and how many were students who were simply using the new structures as an opportunity to resume their education and to re-enter the public system. There were no strict entry criteria. If the origin of students enrolled in a public or private secondary school before the war was relatively easy to ascertain (students are usually registered in the national database upon their entry into secondary education), assessing their academic levels was less simple, unless they had just sat a national exam. The central register keeps track of their registration year, but does not keep track of their academic progress and is not updated each time a student passes a level. This gives room to various misuses of the system, and the *écoles relais* provided an opportunity to readmit students formerly excluded from school, and to allow some to register at a level without having the academic level required (personal communication with Ministry officials).

The Thinning Out of the Curriculum

The *écoles relais* used a light version of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education had made certain adjustments to match a decrease in the number of study hours due to the system of double-shifting and the shortening of the school year (the *écoles relais* ran from January to August 2003 while the other Ivoirian schools in the areas under government control ran from September to June). In practice, the light version of the curriculum could not be dispatched to the schools on time and adjustments were made on a case-by-case basis. Since teaching the full programme was impossible with the shortened school year, the choice of leaving out a number of chapters and topics was left to the teachers. The *écoles relais* were often opened in a hurry and lacked appropriate materials to operate effectively. School manuals arrived late and in many cases, State funding for the schools materialised when the school year had ended.[7]

In the rebel-controlled areas, many schools reopened a few months after the start of the war, boosted by local and small-scale initiatives. It was a somewhat spontaneous phenomenon, initially intended to keep children off the streets. As the conflict was lasting longer than expected, a group of teachers and educational officials started to coordinate the existing initiatives to create a more structured system. The main goal was to have the Ministry of Education recognize the education being given in the North to avoid the prospect of an *année blanche* (a year with no formal certification of learning and no acknowledgement of academic progress). The schools therefore had to meet certain standards in terms of pedagogic content, timetables, teaching staff characteristics and progress measurement; and no formal educational certification could occur without this. Consequently, the curriculum was thinned out to match a 25-week school year instead of a 40-week school year, and the number of hours was reduced by 10–35 per cent depending on level and topic. Timetables were agreed upon and provisional exam dates were set for the end of November 2003. The first semester was planned to run until 1 August 2003 and the second semester until 7 November. The volume of teaching was adjusted to the new schedule, then dispatched to the schools in the North with updated timetables and progress measurement tools. It was decided that students in exam classes would receive extra attention from the teaching staff.

What is striking in the war-affected areas is that these decisions were made by non-State actors. If the core of this group consisted for the most part of education civil servants (DREN representatives, pedagogic counsellors, retired education officials, and professional teachers who had chosen to stay in the North to continue schooling activities despite government injunctions), the Ministry of Education completely cut itself off from the North for a whole year, maintaining they were not willing to validate a 'discount' education. Responding to pressure from different sources (including UNESCO), the Ministry eventually commissioned educational experts in September 2003 to assess the quality of learning in the North, which ultimately gave credit to the education system in place there. The evaluation mission acknowledged the effective use of the national curriculum, noted that progress was regularly measured by tests at all levels, and recognized that to compensate for the lack of trained teaching staff, effective peer training was done through class visits and pedagogic workshops by trained teachers and pedagogical counsellors.[8] It therefore recommended taking the existing initiatives into account, quickly validating the 2002-2003 school year by organizing the exam sessions as soon as possible, and preparing for the start of the 2003-04 school year (Ministry of Education 2003).

The Set-up of Different School Calendars and Examinations

Even though the Ministry of Education had announced an *année blanche* for the North in June 2003, there was a desire to keep a certain unity in the national education system and to avoid penalizing northern students more than necessary. Following up on the evaluation mission's recommendations, the Ministry sent administrative officials to the North to prepare for having national examinations held in the war-affected areas. A few months later, it set up a minimal administration and regained partial supervision control. Table 1 shows the multiplicity of formal educational systems that existed side-by-side for several years.

[Table 1 near here]

But holding different exam sessions in the North and South of the country did not go without difficulties. There were various logistical issues: the preparation of the exam centres; the registration of the candidates in the central exam register (in the absence of a school administration); ensuring the security and dispatching of the exam subjects; ensuring the security of the staff sent by the Ministry of Education to monitor the exam sessions. The marking was also a problem: who to use and where to do it? The first year (2002–2003), exams were held in the North and graded in the South in early 2004. The local NGO, *École pour Tous*, that was then trying to coordinate isolated educational initiatives in the North, registered all candidates and paid everyone's exam fee. The second year, due to increasing tension between the belligerents, no exams were held in the North to validate the 2003–2004 school year. In contrast, there were two examination sessions in 2006, one to validate the 2004–2005 school year (in March) and one to do so for the 2005–2006 school year (in August). For these sessions, the UN took over some of the logistical tasks, including providing security for the monitoring staff sent by the Ministry of Education, dispatching the exam subjects and safeguarding the exam centres.

Different Zones, Different State Attitudes

The State's attitude was very different depending on who it was dealing with, and not surprisingly, more lenient with the parallel systems in government-controlled areas than with the ones in rebel-held territories. While the Ministry of Education cancelled the exam session for the North in 2004, it merely delayed it for one month in the South. While it openly questioned the teaching skills of the volunteers who were staffing many schools in the North, it never questioned the ability of the volunteers who taught in the *écoles relais* even if in both areas, volunteers shared similar characteristics (though it was not strictly applied in practice, those teaching in primary schools were required to have the BEPC diploma and those teaching in secondary schools to have the baccalaureate). Lastly, the quality of education was never assessed in the *écoles relais*, while educational experts were commissioned by the Ministry to evaluate the quality of learning in the northern schools. Given that the *écoles relais* were also largely staffed by non-professional teachers, this was a serious omission.

If these are harsh criticisms of the State, it should not draw attention away from the fact that the Ivoirian State showed a relative openness in the ways it managed an educational crisis within its territory. Although the Ministry of Education is sometimes criticized for not having responded immediately, it nevertheless succeeded in less than 18 months in elaborating different strategies to minimize disruption of schooling for many students displaced in the South, and to build on local initiatives in areas no longer under State control. If one could regret the 2003–2004 *année blanche* in the North, one has to acknowledge that enrolment rates tripled there in 2004, as the result of a minimal State administration being instituted, and of national exams being finally held in February.[9] Clearly, local non-State providers were the main drivers of change in the rebel-controlled areas; yet if the State had not quickly embraced their initiative, schools would not have lasted for long in the North. Parents, who were funding most of the operational costs of the schools when they got cut off from the central administration, would have been increasingly reluctant to continue to do so if the State had gone on disregarding such education. Instead, by officially recognizing that the northern schools were meeting high enough standards to be allowed to reintegrate into the public system, the Ministry of Education opened a door, which allowed certification of learning under circumstances which were far from being standard.

The Response of the State towards Refugees

While the Ivoirian State played an active role in providing formal schooling opportunities to displaced Ivoirian students and to those remaining in rebel-controlled areas, it adopted a strikingly low profile on educational matters concerning Liberian refugees having entered its territory. International humanitarian assistance was clearly the driving force behind the bulk of assistance and the main decision-maker with regard to matters related to refugee education (Chelpi-den Hamer 2009). At the peak of the refugee influx, the Ivoirian government anticipated difficulties in integrating school-aged refugees into the existing infrastructure. Since there were already too few schools for the Ivoirian residents in the areas hosting the most refugees, the Ivoirian State was not opposed to setting up a parallel system that would use the Liberian curriculum and that would mainly be administrated by international assistance (UNHCR and implementing partners).

From a Parallel System of Refugee Schools to Local Integration into Ivoirian Institutions

In the early 1990s, most primary and secondary refugee education was being undertaken by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), UNHCR's implementing partner for refugee education in south-west Côte d'Ivoire. Schools were free, teaching the Liberian curriculum and staffed by refugee teachers who were mainly composed of skilled teachers from Liberia and of non-professional volunteers. If the majority of refugees attended these schools, this was not the only educational path and some refugees registered their children in Ivoirian schools directly. This was the case of a refugee teacher I met, who told me he had enrolled his children in a local school in the mid-1990s because his plan was to stay long term. Interestingly, he did not consider it a contradiction to have started his own private refugee secondary school at the beginning of the 2000s, from which he derived a large part of his income.

Although various educational patterns existed among refugees, a large majority were attending refugee schools when they were still free. In the late 1990s, with the end of the Liberian civil war, many refugees repatriated to Liberia and international funding was drastically cut. The option of repatriation was promoted by UNHCR, as it always is, and the remaining refugees were invited to enrol into Ivoirian public schools. Between 1999 and 2001, the Ivoirian State and many refugees resisted the idea of abolishing refugee schools; the former because it knew that there was not enough infrastructure and teaching staff to ensure a smooth integration of refugee students into the existing Ivoirian schools, and the latter because it meant serious equivalence issues for many refugee students and might lead to a certain form of acculturation.[10] When it was clear that integration into the local schools would ineluctably happen, both the Ivoirian State and refugee leaders lobbied for a gradual phase-out over several years. In the first year, Grade 1 pupils would be absorbed in Ivoirian schools and refugee schools would continue teaching Grade 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6; the second year, refugee schools would only teach Grade 3, 4, 5 and 6, etc. The Ivoirian government's central argument was that parents should not be forced to opt for local integration and if some were willing to continue their education under the Liberian system, the Ministry of Education suggested that the existing refugee schools could be taken over by private Liberian schools, provided that these schools were officially registered by the Ministry (Ministry of Education 2001b; UNHCR, 2001). These suggestions were unfortunately never implemented and when UNHCR stopped supporting refugee schools, a parallel system emerged from individual initiatives, locally labeled *écoles clandestines*, which perpetuated refugee schools in some locations without authorization from the Ivoirian authorities (they were known about locally and tolerated by the decentralized educational administration).

UNHCR and the Ivoirian government signed an agreement protocol in August 2001, under which the Ivoirian State committed to support the local integration of refugee students into the Ivoirian primary schools by integrating the youngest in Grade 1 (depending on the absorption capacity) and by placing the more advanced children in the appropriate levels (Ministry of Education 2001a). In practice, there was no standard by which to assess refugees' levels and ad-hoc equivalence was the norm. The bulk of refugees were therefore put directly into Grade 1 and Grade 2 in the Ivoirian schools, regardless of the number of years of primary schooling they had had in the refugee system. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, students transferring mid-cycle were often restarting their schooling from scratch.

Certification of Secondary Students

Strikingly, no plan was made for secondary school students. Direct integration in the Ivoirian schools was not an option as no agreement protocol had been signed between the Ivoirian government and UNHCR for secondary education, hence international support for secondary education ended quite abruptly. Between 1999 and 2001, it was downsized to a minimum and limited to help students enrolled in the exam classes sit the West African Examination Council (WAEC) exam (those enrolled in grades 9 and 12 in the Liberian system); students enrolled in other grades received no attention. For refugees relatively advanced in their schooling, options were limited if they wanted to continue to go to school in Côte d'Ivoire. Not surprisingly, the *écoles clandestines* came as a relief to many Liberian students who had already invested a lot in their education. The schools were not receiving external assistance and were mainly funded by parents' contributions, but they did offer a unique opportunity

to continue secondary education using the Liberian curriculum and not to be set back many years, or worse, be forced to drop out.

The Ivoirian State was conspicuously absent in discussions concerning refugee secondary education. UNHCR and the *écoles clandestines* were the ones negotiating with the WAEC central registrar about having 9th and 12th-grade students sit the exam (UNHCR, 2002), in sharp contrast with what happened in Guinea, for instance, where the Guinean Ministry of Education played a leading role in negotiating with its Liberian counterpart to make sure refugee students continue to benefit from receiving an Anglophone education on Guinean territory (Kirk 2009).

Adjusting the 'Carte Scolaire'

If the Ivoirian State was hardly proactive in educational matters concerning Liberian refugees, it would be wrong to assume that it did not build on non-State initiatives, even if this remained small-scale. Perhaps the most relevant example is the adjustment that took place with the *carte scolaire*. While no change had occurred in the 1990s despite a significant increase in the number of school-aged children in the areas hosting refugees, three former refugee schools were 'formalized' in 2007 and taken over by the Ivoirian State (one of them completely and two partially, at the time of data collection). The three schools were located in rural hubs that had developed as a consequence of the refugee influx (the villages of Gozon, Néro Village, and Yéouli). The schools were providing education to both refugee and Ivoirian residents, and there was a relatively large proportion of Ivoirians enrolled. Following the advice of local educational officials who had checked the quality of infrastructure and the education content in these schools (at the instigation of an international NGO), the Ivoirian Ministry of Education allocated one teacher to the school of Yéouli in 2006. The other two schools were asked to comply with a certain number of requirements, and if they did, it was implicitly agreed that they would become part of the Ivoirian public system with all the related implications: the schools will then be staffed, equipped and subsidized by the State, for the most part. Until then, the schools were informally recognized at the local level, which meant that students were able to sit the Ivoirian national examinations and that from 2006 onwards, the teaching staff would receive peer training and supervision from local educational officials (personal communication with local educational officials, spring 2007).

Concluding Remarks

When conflict uproots them from their homes, displaced children can follow more than one path to pursue their education. As they are likely to start in one system and continue in another, the challenge is to create bridges between the different types of education and systems of grade equivalence, to allow them to shift between educational systems without losing the benefit of previous learning (Kirk 2009).

Framing the debate in such terms and exploring the issues of education, conflict and displacement using certification as the main entry point, has the merit of acknowledging the wide range of actors intervening in the educational field, from small-scale non-governmental initiatives to more structured interventions. At the same time, it is an invitation to reflect on the notion of education as a public good (Blundo and Le Meur 2009). So many actors participate to the financing, regulation, and administration of educational systems, to different degrees, that it raises the question whether some kind of normative framework exists, that enables the actors to coordinate the multiplicity of such interventions. If there are some international standards, at least on paper (INEE norms), they are subject to multiple interpretations at the local level and are constantly negotiated and reshaped by contextual dynamics and social interactions. In war-affected contexts, the first initiatives that promote the continuity of education are often developed at the micro-level and on a very small scale; it is only afterwards that they become institutionalized and scaled up. Sometimes, educational initiatives are completely created from scratch, for 'humanitarian' purposes; other times, they clearly derive from existing institutions.

The case of Côte d'Ivoire illustrates both the complementarity of the State and non-State actors and where and when tensions have existed between them, over time. The State has never 'done it all'. The Ivoirian government has demonstrated its resilience by expanding and contracting the formal educational system in various ways: faced with the split of the country, it created parallel structures in the South to help absorb the displaced students, it thinned out the curriculum, and it

allowed different school calendars and different national examination sessions to exist side-by-side for several years; faced with the refugee influx and the presence of UNHCR, it was surprisingly diffident, and has hardly succeeded in bringing forward its views on educational matters concerning Liberian refugees (the gradual transition, not forcing parents to opt for local integration, transforming some refugee schools into private structures registered by the State, etc.). Yet in both cases, the State had to build on local non-governmental initiatives. There was no way around.

1. Several scholars have stressed the main pitfalls in the concept of 'emergency education', namely pointing out the fact that the concept rests on a number of questionable assumptions (Chelpi-den Hamer *et al.* 2010). It is posited that education can contribute to 'save' lives by creating safe places where children can be protected. If this is regularly called into question by tragic events and a number of empirical studies (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Sommers 2005), the idea stays rather popular in the humanitarian sphere and many are still convinced that well-designed education programmes are essential tools to mitigate the effects of war and forced displacement. In such a view, the school is presented as an ideal place, 'depoliticized', autonomous from the broader social field, going to school is described as a fundamental right, in line with the Education for All discourse - this is a position quite difficult to attack since it conveys the politically-correct idea of moral egalitarianism. Another controversial assumption rests on the belief that socio-political instability evolves in sequential 'phases' (conflict/post-conflict, emergency/development), according to some kind of segmented, technical and mechanical process; planned interventions are expected to follow the same pattern. This position is in sharp contrast with the anthropological approach, which does not impose a sharp categorical distinction between the concepts of 'war' and 'peace' but instead, talks of a continuum (Cramer 2006; Duyvesteyn and Angstrom 2005; Richards 2005), and which considers planned interventions as a non-sequential process and as constantly reshaped by contextual dynamics and social interactions (Long 2001; Obura 2003).
2. If we keep the definitions simple, *certification* is a proof of learning (for instance the provision of a formal certificate that recognizes a student's achievement). *Accreditation* occurs when the process of certification is done within an official programme recognized by a Ministry of Education. *Validation* is the process by which the authenticity of the accreditation is ascertained and takes place at different moments: for instance, upon entry into a new school at a different level (e.g. going from primary to secondary school) or entry into a new school in a new jurisdiction (e.g. when a displaced student is seeking entry to an institution in the place of asylum). *Recognition* is the acceptance by an outside party of a certificate's worth and validation. It is the desired result of the validation process (Kirk 2009).
3. One main pitfall of this idea is to tend to give the impression that a homogeneous group steps in, speaking with one voice. It is far from being the case and international non-State actors display very different characteristics and agendas (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; Paulson 2007; Paulson and Rappleye 2007).
4. The *Plan National de Développement du Secteur Education/Formation* (PNEF) covered a 10-year period, was in line with the MDG and the EFA goals (1997–2007) and was aimed at responding to educational needs under normal circumstances. It had no contingency plan. When the government adopted the Emergency Programme for Education in December 2002, it created the contingency plan that was lacking, but it also created a whole new parallel system, with many overlaps with the existing one, and the risk of not being able to curtail activities when the crisis ended (Kagawa 2005; Lanoue 2007; Obura 2003).
5. The situation has improved in recent years and 2007 marked the return of a single date for the start of the school year and the end of multiple examination arrangements. The return of the professional teaching and pedagogical staff has also accelerated in the war-affected areas.
6. Eight months after the *écoles relais* closed down, the *écoles de sauvegarde* were set up in the spring of 2004, for one year (Chelpi-den Hamer 2007). They were aimed at secondary school students whose education had been disrupted by conflict in the previous two years, and at children of military staff and civil servants who had been relocated south. While they functioned roughly like the *écoles relais*, there was no continuity from one school to another.
7. The *écoles relais* and their replacement, the *écoles de sauvegarde* were partly funded by subsidies that were initially allocated to the North (personal communication with Ministry officials).
8. Records indicated that 4,465 non-professional staff ran the school along with 1,767 trained teachers, and until the State set up a minimal administration, they were doing so without formal supervision (Ministry of Education 2003).
9. Exams being held in 2004 and the set-up of a minimal administration in the rebel-controlled areas had a significant impact on parents deciding to register their children in school. In 2002–2003, there were 186,000 receiving primary education in the rebel-controlled areas, 70 per cent less than the previous year. In 2003–2004, the number doubled and reached 360,000 (Ecole pour Tous 2006).
10. Liberian children were expected to switch from English to French as the language of instruction, which raised serious concerns of grade equivalence for students in advanced grades. For a detailed account of the challenges faced and the ways they were addressed, see Chelpi-den Hamer 2009.

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Table 1

Dates of National Examinations Since the Beginning of the War 2002–2003 to 2006–2007

		Location	Baccalauréat (13th grade)	BEPC (10th grade)	CEPE (6th grade)
2002–2003	1st session	Southern CI	17–20 June 2003	1–2 July 2003	24 June 2003
	2nd session	Southern CI*	26–30 August 2003	20–21 August 2003	August 2003
	3rd session	Zouhan Hounien	-	9–10 December 2003	9 December 2003
	4th session	Northern CI	11–13 February 2004	11–12 February 2004	5 February 2004
2003–2004	1st session	Southern CI	22–25 June 2004	6–7 July 2004	29 June 2004
	2nd session	Southern CI**	24–28 August 2004	-	-
	3rd session	Southern CI***	23–27 November 2004	23–24 November 2004	10 November 2004
	4th session	Northern CI	Planned in November 2004 but cancelled due to bombings early November		
2004–2005	1st session	Southern CI	21–25 June 2005	5–6 July 2005	28 June 2005
	2nd session	Northern CI	2–3 March 2006	2–3 March 2006	14 March 2006
2005–2006	1st session	Southern CI	25–29 June 2006	8–9 August 2005	1 August 2005
	2nd session	Northern CI	31 Aug.–2 Sept. 2006	31 Aug.–1 Sept. 2006	12 September 2006
2006–2007		South and North CI	Only one exam session planned for the 2006–2007 school year.		

Source: Ministry of Education (MEN) / Direction des Examens et Concours (DECO) (2007)

* This session was planned for the *école relais*.
** This session was planned for the technical baccalauréats.
*** This session was planned for the *école de sauvegarde*. Although they only targeted secondary-school students, an extra exam session was hold for 6th grade students.