How to Certify Learning in a Country Split into Two by a Civil War: governmental and non-governmental initiatives in Côte d’Ivoire, 2002-06

MAGALI CHELPI-DEN HAMER
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT Following political turmoil and rising socio-economic difficulties, Côte d’Ivoire has been split into two since September 2002. The rebellion controls the northern part of the country and the main towns of Bouaké, Korhogo and Man, while the government controls the southern part with Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Daloa and all the ports in the coastal area. At the beginning of the war, civil servants who were in place in the north of the country were called back to Abidjan to be redeployed in government-controlled areas. These included many teachers and education officials, but not all, as some of them chose to stay in the war-affected areas to continue their initial work. This article focuses specifically on governmental and local non-governmental initiatives related to education which were put in place at the onset of the crisis. What type(s) of education have been offered to the children in war-affected areas and to the displaced children in government-controlled areas? What have been the difficulties of organizing national examinations in war-affected areas? How have educational attainments been certified on both sides? The study covers the period 2002-06, and is based on document analysis, grey literature collected on site and interviews with key informants.

Introduction

As scholars and development practitioners give more and more attention to the subfield of education and conflict, they produce a certain discourse, usually centred on strong emotional components, which often overshadows local realities. Such discourse is in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) objectives, and shapes international policy priorities and responses. Unfortunately, it sometimes does so at the expense of more pressing and local educational needs. Promoting girls’ education, having all children complete primary education and rehabilitating schools in war-affected areas may not always come first on the national agenda when a country is affected by a civil war, yet these priorities are brought forward by a range of actors and tend to become the first to be addressed in order of importance. Local initiatives are curiously undervalued by the international community, yet local actors are often the first to act in response to a crisis situation.

The Ivorian case is no exception. Côte d’Ivoire has been split into two since September 2002. The rebellion controls the northern part of the country and the main towns of Bouaké, Korhogo and Man, while the government controls the southern part with Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Daloa and all the ports in the coastal area.[1] The local initiatives that were taken in the educational domain in response to the war and to the split of the country have hardly been mentioned in international documents and, when they have been, information has been missing. In a UNICEF press release dated 28 February 2006, it is stated that due to the ongoing conflict in Côte d’Ivoire, students in the northern part of the country have not been able to complete their schooling with official exams for more than two school years: ‘communities lost confidence in schools in which
classroom learning was no longer officially validated by the standard exam process' (UNICEF, 2006). UNICEF, therefore, applauded the government initiative to organize exams in the north, ‘which represent[ed] positive progress towards normalizing the lives of children in Côte d’Ivoire, and end[ed] the violation of one of children’s most basic rights: the right to an education’ (UNICEF, 2006).[2]

Such statements can be misleading as they suggest that learning had not been certified in the north since the start of the war in September 2002. Yet, at the time the UNICEF press release was issued, schooling had resumed in the north thanks to the goodwill of a few individuals, and examinations had been held in the north in February 2004 (to validate the 2002-03 school year). Another exam session had been planned in November 2004 (to validate the 2003-04 school year) but had to be cancelled as violent conflict resumed between the government and the rebellion. None of these initiatives are mentioned in the UNICEF press release when, despite many shortcomings, local demands for certifying learning in northern Côte d’Ivoire were answered relatively quickly by local practitioners.

In this article, I specifically focus on local governmental and non-governmental initiatives related to education which were put in place at the onset of the Ivorian crisis. Oddly, local approaches were either undervalued or unheard of by international development practitioners on the ground, including international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies. The high staff turnover and the poor archiving systems were not the sole causes for this lack of information. At the beginning of the Ivorian conflict, there was a real disconnection between local and international policy making, and education was quite low on the international agenda. It is noteworthy that I learned more about the Ivorian initiatives related to education and conflict as a sociologist in 2007 than as an international NGO worker involved in emergency education in Côte d’Ivoire in 2003. It is important to understand local governmental and non-governmental approaches at an early stage in order to plan relevant international actions. The more pressing local educational needs have to be tackled first and not necessarily by applying standard blueprints. This article begins by giving some contextual information, before describing the local initiatives that occurred in both the north and south of the country. What type(s) of education have been offered to children in war-affected areas? What type(s) of education have been given to displaced children in government-controlled areas? Were the conditions met for ensuring learning in relatively good conditions? What have been the difficulties of organizing national examinations? Have the more pressing educational needs of Ivorian students been met? The study covers the period 2002-06 and is based on document analysis, grey literature collected in Côte d’Ivoire and interviews with key informants.

**Contextual Information: the fear of the ‘Malian school’**

The Ivorian civil war started on 19 September 2002, three days after the beginning of the 2002-03 school year. Schools closed down in the war-affected areas. Civil servants who were in place in the north of the country were called back to Abidjan to be redeployed in government-controlled areas. These included many teachers and education officials, but not all, as some of them chose to stay in the war-affected areas to continue their work. During the 2002-03 school year, 1771 teachers – out of a total of 14,593 [3] – were reported to have stayed in the Northern Zone of Côte d’Ivoire, despite government injunctions to go and work in their new place of assignment in the south of the country (Ecole pour Tous, 2004).

As people organized in the north in order not to let schooling die, southerners started to question the quality of learning in the so-called ‘rebel’ zones. Did functioning schools in the north meet all the necessary requirements in terms of pedagogic content? Were the teaching staff sufficient in number and properly trained? Could such learning be certified by the delivery of national diplomas? At first, the Ministry of Education (MEN) had serious doubts about the quality of learning in the rebel-controlled areas and this strong reserve was shared by a part of the population. Northern schools were labelled ‘Malian schools’ in the local press, they were perceived as giving a discount education and they mostly inspired general contempt. To understand such negative perceptions of northern education in the south, we have to understand how Ivorians perceive themselves in comparison with their African neighbours. For a long time, Côte d’Ivoire
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has been a model of development in West Africa, and Malians and Burkinabes have migrated there in large numbers to respond to the demand of the plantation economy. In Côte d’Ivoire, they have had many opportunities to make a living as it was much tougher in their own countries. Mali and Burkina Faso were clearly underdeveloped compared to Côte d’Ivoire and, in the popular perception, anything Ivorian was of much better quality than anything Malian or Burkinabe – hence the pejorative nature of the term ‘Malian schools’. If the quality of learning was no longer ensured in the north by the central administration, the assumption was that it would inevitably deteriorate to a lower level. Northern schools were therefore retrogressed into second-class institutions and labelled ‘Malian schools’ as a sign of their decline.

The following section presents a brief account of local initiatives which fostered emergency education in the north of the country. It challenges the negative perceptions presented here by showing that a certain amount of learning took place in the rebel-controlled areas, despite many difficulties.

Educating Children in the North: a struggle driven by local non-governmental initiatives

Since the beginning of the war in 2002, six of the eleven Regional Divisions of Education (DREN) are located in the rebel-controlled areas. These include the DREN of Bouaké, Korhogo, Odienné, Man, Daloa and Bondoukou.[4] At the outset of the conflict, many people expected that things would return to normal relatively quickly, but this was not the case, and a situation of no war no peace has prevailed in Côte d’Ivoire until today. Despite a few improvements, the country is still split into two after five years of conflict. When the schools closed down in September 2002, 590,000 students were enrolled in the primary level in the four DREN of Bouaké, Korhogo, Man and Odienné, and 120,000 were secondary school students (Ecole pour Tous, 2006).

The war started on September 19, 2002. In the beginning we thought that it would only last a few days and that it was a failed coup. Then in October, Bouaké was attacked and the rebellion settled down in the northern half of the country. The government made a call and asked the population to leave the areas under rebel control. Teachers were specifically called back in the south. The argument was that they had to take care of the displaced children in the government-controlled area. All schools were closed down and the children who remained in Bouaké were left on their own. This was a difficult period. There was little to eat, it was difficult to move between one place and another, no one was working, children were playing warlords in the street. (Interview fragment with a DREN representative, Spring 2007)

Many schools reopened a few months after the start of the war, in the first semester of 2003, boosted by local initiatives. The initial objective was to keep the children off the streets and to restore a sense of normalcy in difficult times. It was a rather spontaneous phenomenon. In certain neighbourhoods of Bouaké, teachers and goodwill individuals organized themselves and opened schools. If a teacher could not reach the school where he or she usually taught, he or she stayed and gave a class in a school close to home. The teachers who remained were complemented by a large number of volunteers, ranging from private school instructors to retired teachers, religious groups, local NGOs and former students. As the split of the country was lasting longer than expected, these small-scale initiatives evolved into something more structured. Eventually, a group of teachers and educational officials started channelling the existing initiatives and took care of coordinating the emerging alternative system. This was a rather difficult task, yet it was necessary for two reasons: first, no formal certification of learning could occur if the schools followed no standard in terms of pedagogic content, timetables, teaching staff characteristics and progress measurements. Second, the schools had to keep their credential function in the north so as not to fuel the existing tensions between the north and the south. As a matter of fact, the north was often given less attention than the south by central authorities. Northerners are underrepresented in key occupational positions and some are therefore quite resentful.

For these two reasons, educating children in war-affected areas switched from a logic of custody to a logic of credential (Parsons, 1999), and hence became more ambitious. The main goal was to validate the learning which was taking place in the rebel-controlled areas and to avoid the prospect of a year with no academic progress and no formal certification of learning, the so-called
**année blanche.** Even though the MEN announced an *année blanche* for the north in June 2003, there was a strong willingness to keep a certain unity in the national education system in the rebel-controlled areas and to avoid penalizing northern students more than necessary. The new objective was to go beyond the provision of recreational activities and informal courses (which were aimed to keep children off the streets while maintaining a certain academic level) to favour the provision of a formal type of learning (which aimed to get credentials to keep the door open to a certain form of social promotion). The Ivorian school is still perceived by many parents and students as an important key for social promotion and as one of the best prospects to gain a firm foothold in the labour market. Schooling is seen as a possible way out of a precarious societal position, and families and students invest considerably in order to continue their education. Even if, in practice, schooling has in fact failed to secure jobs for the young people [5], a logic of credential prevails and there is still a strong faith that diplomas help in climbing the social ladder.

Schools did not open everywhere in the north in the first semester of 2003 and, quite expectably, the war has exacerbated existing disparities. Before the war, the Ivorian system was characterized by a structural regional disparity in terms of enrolment rates, use of infrastructure and completion of schooling (Le Pape, 1986; Hugon & Bommier, 2002; Proteau, 2002; Davies, 2004). In 2001, the enrolment rate in primary schools was 40% in Korhogo and 80% in Man. The literacy rate was 60% in Abidjan and 10% in the north, 30% in rural areas and 70% in the urban zones. Five years of schooling was the average in rural areas and fifteen years was the average for the country as a whole (Hugon & Bommier, 2002). The war has exacerbated the urban/rural divide and inequalities between the south and the north. From 2003 onwards, urban schools and schools along paved roads received most of the attention in areas close to the ex-front line and in the north of the country. They were easily accessible in comparison with remote schools and less subject to changing security conditions. Rural schools were left mostly on their own. A study on the impact of armed conflict on the education system showed that the use of the existing infrastructure was uneven from one region to another (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa, 2004). In Man and Korhogo, half of the existing physical structures were used. In Bouaké, one school was used out of every four and, in Odienné, one out of every eight. The rate of use of the infrastructure could vary from 15% to 80% within the same region. In the Man area, for instance, 79% of the schools reopened in the town of Man while only 16% of the schools reopened in the Kouibly area, a rural zone.

In Côte d’Ivoire, the most striking effect of conflict on the education system has been the delinking of many schools from the central administration:

> Since the beginning of the war, we are no longer recognized by the Inspection in Bangolo, our departmental direction. They know that the school is functioning here, in the village, but they do not take us into account. There is no teacher from the state here, there are only two volunteers to teach four grades. If we had a teacher from the state, he could register our school, and we could be taken into account in the regional planning. We could have equipment, school manuals, basic resources. We could have more students and teach more grades. So far, we teach only the first three grades. (Interview fragment with a volunteer teacher, 2006)

A lot of public schools in the north have been deprived of supplies, basic equipment and school manuals. They are no longer taken into account in regional planning and, as a result, their credits are frozen and no official teaching staff can be deployed. Several private schools that used to receive government funding before the war are also deprived of public support in the north. Yet, about a third of the primary schools and half of the secondary schools reopened in the north during the course of the 2002-03 school year and a third of the students who used to go to school in the northern half of the country re-enrolled in the north (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa, 2004; Ecole pour Tous, 2006). Table I presents the change in enrolment rate in the four DREN of Bouaké, Korhogo, Man and Odienné between 2001 and 2006.

The table shows that around 590,000 students were enrolled in primary schools in the north before the war. In 2002-03, there were 186,000 to receive primary education in the rebel-controlled areas, or about 70% less compared to the previous year. This was at the time when education in the north was not yet recognized by the central administration. In 2003-04, the number of students doubled to reach 360,000 (Ecole pour Tous, 2006). This is quite a positive sign. The holding of exams in 2004 and the set-up of a minimal administration in the rebel-controlled areas are likely to
have had a significant impact on the decision of parents to register their children at school. We will return to these two points later. A similar trend can be observed for the secondary students. Before the war, 120,000 students were enrolled in secondary schools in the north. In 2002-03, there were 45,000 (or 60% less compared to the previous year) and, in 2003-04, nearly 58,000 (Ecole pour Tous, 2006).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary students</td>
<td>588,936</td>
<td>186,356</td>
<td>359,894</td>
<td>318,655</td>
<td>329,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary students</td>
<td>119,295</td>
<td>45,371</td>
<td>57,799</td>
<td>68,553</td>
<td>69,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>708,231</td>
<td>231,727</td>
<td>417,693</td>
<td>387,208</td>
<td>399,073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table I. Change in enrolment rate per school year for the DREN of Bouaké, Korhogo, Man and Odienne (Ecole pour Tous, 2006).

On 7 April 2003, a group of teachers and education officials created the Ivorian NGO Ecole pour Tous (EPT) to channel and coordinate the existing initiatives related to education in the rebel-controlled areas. EPT was mainly initiated by civil servants, including DREN representatives, pedagogic counsellors and teachers, who chose not to go to their new place of assignment in the south but stayed in the north to continue schooling activities. They were helped in their work by retired education officials, private school teachers and goodwill individuals. In practice, EPT has acted as a sort of federation. There were many pressing issues on its plate. On the one hand, it was involved in lobbying activities such as putting pressure on the MEN to recognize the teaching done in the north; on the other hand, it was also involved in more practical things like touring the northern regions to encourage the reopening of schools. From 21 to 23 April 2003, EPT held a seminar on the functioning of schools in the rebel-controlled areas. It came out that an increasing number of teachers in the north were receiving official notification for reassignment to government-controlled areas; that many schools still remained closed; that no standard curriculum was in place and that basic equipment was lacking. The seminar also mentioned the lack of trained teaching staff and that teaching was mostly done by volunteers with little pedagogic experience and no formal support structure. In the department of Vavoua, for instance, which was an extreme case, only five teachers were qualified out of the 129 teaching staff (Ecole pour Tous, 2003b).

This last point is worth developing as the lack of trained teachers has emerged as a major concern in times of crisis, the Ivorian situation being no exception. How can local demands for emergency education be answered when there is a shortage of teaching staff? The use of volunteers is often presented as a new phenomenon and volunteer teachers do seem to appear on the educational scene in times of war. It is usually not mentioned in the literature related to education and conflict that such practices had been in existence a long time before the beginning of crisis situations. In fact, it is quite common to find volunteer staff complementing teachers in African schools when the country is not affected by conflict. A pragmatic and common example, for instance, is that if there are six levels in a school and only three teachers assigned by the central administration, it is likely that the school director will hire local volunteers. In this case, the supplementary voluntary task force is financially supported by parents via school fees or via other types of contributions. This practice is particularly common in African rural areas and it is generally accepted. Why, then, denounce such practices in times of war? There are two simple reasons. The first is numeric: the number of volunteers is largely likely to outweigh the number of trained teachers in times of conflict, which might lead certain observers to question the quality of learning. In Côte d’Ivoire, 4465 volunteers and 1767 qualified teachers ran the primary and secondary schools in the north during the 2002-03 school year (Ministry of Education, 2003). Table II presents the main characteristics of the staff who operated these schools.

The second reason why volunteer teachers are more likely to be criticized in times of war is the lack of trust, on the part of the MEN, in an alternative system that is not supervised by an official structure. When the situation is normal, the administration is deployed within the whole territory and the Regional Divisions of Education ensure a certain unity within the school system. The DRENs have a supplier role as they provide the schools with basic equipment, didactic materials and school manuals; they have a reporting role as they centralize the school statistics and coordinate their dispatch to the MEN; and they have a role of control as they assure the quality of
the teaching and as they make sure that schools implement the latest MEN directives. The mere fact that schools use local volunteers to supplement teachers is not an issue as there is a certain level of trust in the system. Teachers and volunteers are supervised by school directors, who in turn are accountable to inspectors and pedagogic counsellors, who in turn must report to the DREN. Within such a framework, volunteers are expected to learn the necessary pedagogic skills from peer training. The chain is assumed to run smoothly and guarantees teaching credibility. Even if the everyday reality differs from the system’s ideal, it becomes even worse in times of crisis. With schools closing and education officials fleeing to the south, the official chain is broken, and regional disparities are even more exacerbated, to the detriment of the north.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of schools</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servants</td>
<td>1495</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private teachers</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired teachers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>3592</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>4465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5336</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>6676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Main characteristics of the staff who operated the schools that reopened in the north in the 2002-03 school year (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Regardless of what is occurring on the ground or what information is being sent to the Ministry from schools in the rebel-controlled areas, this is not taking place through an official structure recognized by the Ministry, and hence is not taken into account by the Ministry. As mentioned before, with the administration gone in the rebel-controlled areas, schools in the north were not taken into account in regional planning at the outset of the crisis. They were deprived of supplies and public funds, and they could only rely on goodwill and humanitarian aid until the administration’s return. From the government perspective, it was as though the areas which were no longer under government control no longer existed. Northern schools no longer appeared in official statistics and the rows were left blank. No official structure was in place to assess and to validate the peer training that went on amongst the volunteer staff. Hence, there was a proliferation of government, media and international statements mentioning that the teaching staff were untrained and unqualified, that no peer training went on, and that northern schools gave a discount education.

Several practical outcomes came out of the EPT’s 2003 seminar. As the start of the 2002-03 school year was postponed in the north compared to the start of the regular 2002-03 school year in the south, 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 between 10% and 35% depending on level and topic. It was decided that sixth-grade, ninth-grade and twelfth-grade students would receive extra attention from the teaching staff as they were enrolled in so-called ‘exam classes’. Timetables were agreed upon and provisional exam dates were set for the end of November 2003. The first semester was supposed to run until 1 August 2003 and the second semester until 7 November. The volume of teaching was adjusted according to the new schedule then dispatched to the schools in the north along with updated timetables and progress measurement tools. EPT attempted to set up a central coordination mechanism in order to harmonize the existing systems and to standardize the curricula. In practice, though, the standardization of learning and the reopening of the schools were very much linked to EPT pace in terms of covering the space with the few means they had. The initiative started in Bouaké then snowballed in other rebel-controlled areas.
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It is not an overstatement to say that EPT was largely on its own when it started lobbying the Ministry to recognize the learning happening in the north. From the Ministry perspective, northern schools were dispatching a learning of low quality a priori and the MEN eventually announced the année blanche for the north in June 2003. Although it was kept informed of EPT initiatives, the MEN waited until the end of September 2003 to send a mission to Bouaké to evaluate the quality of teaching in the northern part of the country. In comparison, UNESCO had already sent two missions in May and July 2003 to assess the local initiatives related to education in the rebel-controlled areas. The mission commissioned by the MEN eventually gave credit to the education system in place in the north: ‘The analysis of the EPT reports and the working sessions with the people responsible for the teaching on September 23-24-25, 2003 allow the delegation to give credit to the teaching provided to the students in occupied zones’ (Ministry of Education, 2003).

The mission acknowledged the use of the national curriculum by the northern schools and noted that progress was regularly measured by tests at primary and secondary level during the course of the school year. It recognized that peer training was done to train and guide the volunteer staff, along with class visits and pedagogic workshops (Ministry of Education, 2003). This was particularly important to highlight given that two-thirds of the teaching was done by volunteers in the rebel-controlled areas. The MEN mission recommended to take the existing initiatives into account, to validate the school year by organizing the 2002-03 exam sessions in a timely manner, and to prepare for the start of 2003-04 school year (Ministry of Education, 2003). Despite many shortcomings, the education system in the north was finally recognized to fulfil enough requirements to be included back in the national educational agenda.

In early 2004, the Ministry sent administrative officials to the north to prepare for the exam sessions. A few months afterwards, it officially set up a ‘minimal administration’ in the north with the objective to reopen the schools that remained closed (the decree was signed on 21 July 2004). In practice, the minimal administration did not solve all of the north’s educational challenges and had quite mitigated effects. It may even have exacerbated existing tensions between the MEN and the education actors in the field, as it neither recognized nor valued the efforts of the teaching and coordinating forces in place. On the negative side, many schools in the north still continue to be disconnected from the national education system. The minimal administration has a limited capacity and is not as mobile as it should be in order to ensure good supervision of teaching. Structurally, there is a lack of logistical means, and the war has made free circulation a problem when public administrators travel in rebel-controlled areas. The DREN of Man, which was initially located in a rebel-controlled area, has been relocated to Duékoué, in a government-controlled area, for security reasons. Another negative aspect is that the minimal administration has little weight to force qualified teachers to go to their new places of assignment in the north, especially if they are assigned to remote areas. On the positive side, the set-up of the minimal administration showed a political will on the part of the government not to exclude the north more than necessary. It allowed for national examinations to be held in rebel-controlled areas (to which we will return shortly) and for the resumption of the state service with responsibilities in the north of the country. This certainly had an impact on the decision of parents to register their children at schools in the north.

This section has shown that educating children in the north was mostly the concern of non-governmental initiatives at the outset of the crisis. In comparison, the state was particularly active in increasing the educational offerings in the south in response to the displacement of students. The following section presents the governmental response.

Educating Displaced Children in the South: a governmental focus

In December 2002, the MEN adopted an emergency programme for education, which aimed to both adapt the education on offer in the south and to find solutions to restore schooling in the north (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa, 2004). The government clearly prioritized the south. Less than three months after the start of the conflict, it quickly adapted to the crisis situation by setting up alternative schools in the south to welcome the displaced students. The écoles relais were created in several regions in the government-controlled areas and a new calendar year started on 6 January 2003 for these schools. A series of ministerial decrees created the
operational and administrative structure of the écoles relais. They defined a new schedule, the dates for the exam sessions, which teaching staff had to be reassigned from the north to the south, and which supporting staff had to be appointed in the new structures (Ministry of Education, 2003). The Ministry showed a relative degree of flexibility in the set-up of these emergency structures. Pragmatism won and in order to minimize time loss and social issues, the usual administrative procedures were relieved. 'Double shifting' became the norm in the alternative schools, which meant that using the same classroom, a group of pupils had classes in the morning with one teacher and another group of pupils had classes in the afternoon with another teacher. The use of double shifting did not appear with the conflict. In fact, it has been frequently used in Côte d’Ivoire since the end of the 1950s as a way to cope with insufficient infrastructure, especially in urban areas (Koukougnon, 2003). In theory, it has the advantage of increasing the enrolment rates while decreasing the number of students per class. In practice, less time is spent in the classroom and students have less time to learn. Instead of spending a whole day at school, students only spend half a day.[6]

Out of the 700,000 students who were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the north before the war, 135,000 students registered in the south to continue their studying (75,000 at primary level and 60,000 at secondary level) (Ministry of Education, 2003). Out of those 135,000, some were quickly absorbed by the existing structures, others stopped going to school, and others joined the écoles relais when they opened in January 2003. The number of displaced students who attended the écoles relais is unknown as registration was done in such a way that it was impossible for the teaching staff or the school directors to know exactly how many pupils came from the war-affected areas. In the end, everyone was mixed together in the classroom, displaced and non-displaced children alike, and it became difficult in practice to distinguish between the two. This situation is not an exception in emergency education (Lanoue, 2007). What is worth mentioning for our case study is the relatively small number of students from the war-affected areas who were affected by the governmental response related to emergency education. In Côte d’Ivoire, out of the 700,000 students who were enrolled in primary and secondary school in the north before the war, it is estimated that less than 10% have benefited from the alternative governmental schools and, for the most part, those who did benefit were secondary school students (Koukougnon, 2003).

At primary level, 75 écoles relais and 516 classrooms were created and, at secondary level, 64 écoles relais and 1,142 classrooms were created (Koukougnon, 2003). The new schools used existing infrastructures and teachers taught in public or private schools. A few extra classrooms were built with emergency funding. Some classrooms in private institutions were provided for free at the beginning of the emergency period, but after a while private schools began asking for rent. The 3,954 teachers who used to be assigned to the northern half of the country before the war were reassigned to the écoles relais (Koukougnon, 2003). They were given a small incentive if they regularly showed up (50,000 CFA francs) but, despite this, 500 teachers did not relocate and volunteers had to be recruited instead. Interestingly, whereas volunteers in the north were called bénévoles, volunteers in the south were called vacataires, and only the teaching skills of the bénévoles were questioned. Yet, not all vacataires were qualified teachers. For the most part, vacataires shared the characteristics of bénévoles with minimum requirements, including the BEPC diploma for teaching in primary schools (equivalent to ninth-grade level) and the baccalaureate for teaching at secondary level (the Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle, equivalent to ninth-grade level) (Koukougnon, 2003; Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa, 2004). The fact that only the teaching skills of the bénévoles were questioned helped fuel the perception that the Ministry was too strict with the northern schools and even unfair, compared to how flexible it was with the écoles relais. This led several observers to suggest that a certain politicization of education was taking place:

Since January 2003, teaching occurs in the ex-war affected areas. Official curricula and timetables are respected and courses are provided by regular teachers and volunteers ... Supervision is ensured by education inspectors, pedagogic counselors, and school directors.

In July 2003, [the MEN] promised to send an assessment mission in August. We are now at the end of August and no mission has yet come. Shouldn’t this be interpreted as a way of blocking schooling in the North for political reasons more than for technical ones? As supporting
evidence, we can mention the changing conditions for validating schooling in the North, ... [and] the obligation to assess the quality of teaching in the North while the quality of teaching in the écoles relais was not evaluated ... In 2004, the écoles relais were able to present candidates to national exams with the MEN indulgence. That was not allowed in the North.

(Ecole pour Tous, 2003a)

We will return to the theme of the politicization of schooling later in the article.

In terms of pedagogic content, certain directives came out of the MEN for the écoles relais, including a 'light' version of the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2002). The adjustments attempted to match the decrease in the number of study hours in the classroom (due to the late start of the school year for the écoles relais and to the system of double shifting) with an acceptable version of the curriculum that would not diminish the quality of learning. However, in practice, the shorter version of the curriculum could not be properly dispatched to the schools. Adjustments were made on a case-by-case basis and the choice of suppressing chapters and topics was left to the board of teachers (Koukougnon, 2003). This was not surprising. There is often a huge gap between ministerial directives and implementation at the school level, and communication is far from being efficient between the many sub-divisions of education in Abidjan and the schools. The war has only worsened the situation. The écoles relais were often opened in a rush. They lacked appropriate materials. School manuals came in late (for some schools, they came in only a few weeks before the final exams) and financial subsidies arrived when the school year was over. These were clearly not the best conditions for the best teaching.

Not only did the Ministry create alternative schools, it also created a whole parallel administration related to the écoles relais, which was outside the regular system. It ranged from specific Regional and Departmental Divisions of Education (DREN relais in Abidjan, Daloa and Yamoussoukro, and DDEN relais in Dimbokro and San Pédro) to specific staff training institutions (CAFOP de relais in Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Gagnoa, Daloa, Dabou, Grand-Bassam, Abengourou and Aboisso) (Ministry of Education, 2003). This parallel administration created certain issues as information was not centralized by the usual divisions of education. In terms of research, it was, in fact, rather difficult to trace back what happened at the time of the alternative schools and to recover documents, as the parallel divisions that managed the écoles relais had disappeared by the time of data collection.

The emergency system which was put in place ran parallel with the usual framework, the ‘Plan National de Développement du Secteur Éducation/Formation’ (PNEF). The PNEF was planned for a 10-year period in line with the MDG and the EFA goals (1997-2007) and aimed at responding to educational needs in a normal situation. It had no contingency plan. Should the context have changed, no single measure could directly be applied to the new situation. 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 with the risk of not being able to stop it should the crisis end. Such an approach remains controversial (Obura, 2003; Kagawa, 2005; Lanoue, 2007). At stake is the question of whether a sound response to an education system in crisis should or should not be conceived outside the existing frameworks. Such aspects must be taken into account in policy making, as maintaining an emergency parallel education system for too long may have an adverse impact on the unity of a national education system. In our case, the écoles relais were closed down quickly and relatively smoothly, yet it is worth questioning whether or not it was necessary to create them in the first place and whether or not they were properly managed.

The écoles relais closed down in August 2003 after the 2002-03 exam sessions took place. One reason for discontinuing them was that the emergency phase had passed and the MEN assumed that students who wished to continue their education would be easily absorbed by the public system. Another reason was a question of finance (personal communication with Ministry officials). Budgets were scarce at the beginning, then subsidies started to arrive (the main donors for the écoles relais were the government of Côte d’Ivoire and Japan) [?7] and, with them, a certain number of claims. Teachers and volunteers who were assigned to the écoles relais were less and less keen to work extra hours in difficult conditions for little recognition; and, as mentioned earlier, private institutions, which had at first offered a few classrooms for free, started to ask for rent. Hence, the
Magali Chelpi-den Hamer

Ministry was not willing to extend the écoles relais more than necessary. However, a similar system was set in place the following year and the écoles de sauvegarde were created in April 2004.

There seems to be no continuity between the écoles relais and the écoles de sauvegarde. The écoles de sauvegarde were initially designed for secondary school students who had not gone to school in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years because of the conflict, and who were children of the military staff and the civil servants who had been reassigned to the government-controlled areas. The écoles de sauvegarde only targeted secondary school students. This is worth highlighting given the usual international focus on primary education. The assumption was that primary school students had either stayed in the north or had already been absorbed by the system. Secondary school students who were enrolled in the écoles relais in 2002-03 did not necessarily enrol in the écoles de sauvegarde in 2003-04 (Ministry of Education, 2005b). The entry criteria were rather vague in practice and, ultimately, anyone could join the new structures, displaced and non-displaced students alike. Students who were following classes in public secondary schools before the war were registered in the national database so it was easy to check where they came from, but a problem arose when students wanted to enrol in the first level of secondary school or when students wanted to switch from the private to the public system. In addition, some students bypassed the system by registering in an exam class without having the academic level required (personal communication with Ministry officials).

In practice, the écoles de sauvegarde shared similar characteristics with the écoles relais. The schools did not make a distinction between displaced and non-displaced children and students were mixed together in the classroom. Table III presents the main characteristics of the écoles relais and the écoles de sauvegarde.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Écoles relais 2002-03</th>
<th>Écoles de sauvegarde* 2003-04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of schools</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of classrooms</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>22,500**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of teachers</td>
<td>3954***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of schools</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of classrooms</td>
<td>1142</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of teachers</td>
<td>3954***</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The écoles de sauvegarde only targeted secondary school students.
*** This number includes the number of primary and the number of secondary school teachers.

In March 2004, 5783 students preregistered to attend the écoles de sauvegarde. Half of them showed up when the schools opened in April and May in Abidjan, Daloa and Yamoussoukro (Ministry of Education, 2005b). Why did so few students enrol compared to what they had previously planned? One explanation is that the start of the 2003-04 school year was so late (spring 2004) that parents and students enrolled in private schools instead. Another explanation is that some students gave up on their studies, tired of wasting their time and money on the uncertainty of completing their schooling.

The écoles de sauvegarde used the existing infrastructure to operate. In Abidjan, there was hardly a need to hire extra teaching staff as enough teachers from the north had been reassigned to the new schools and fulfilled their new function. A few additional teachers were hired, however, because there were not enough teachers to teach the sciences. In Daloa and Yamoussoukro, there were not enough staff for the écoles de sauvegarde and teachers who were already teaching in public schools were recruited to fill the gaps. They were paid between 1000 and 1500 CFA francs per hour of teaching (Ministry of Education, 2005b).[8] The écoles de sauvegarde were initially not included in
any MEN budget plan (Ministry of Education, 2005b). Under special instruction of the Minister of Education, they were eventually allocated basic equipment, didactic material and school manuals, but, similarly to what happened with the écoles relais, the equipment came in late. In Daloa, for instance, the school manuals were delivered on 3 September 2004, only a few weeks before the final exams were held for the 2003-04 school year. Instead of being dispatched to the students, they were sent back to the regional director in Daloa, who returned them to the financial divisions of the MEN in Abidjan (Ministry of Education, 2005b). The écoles de sauvegarde were mostly funded by parents’ contributions. Tuition fees depended on the school and ranged from 500 to 1000 CFA francs per year per student in Abidjan to 10,000 CFA francs per year per student in Yamoussoukro and Daloa (Ministry of Education, 2005b). Outside Abidjan, the Fonds Régional de l’École (FRE) – a regional subsidy – complemented parents’ contributions. When the écoles de sauvegarde in Abidjan were eventually allocated an operating budget from the MEN, they had already been functional for several months (Ministry of Education, 2005b). In terms of national subsidy, alternative schools in the south were partly funded by the frozen funds from the north (personal communication with Ministry officials).

The écoles de sauvegarde operated until October 2004. Then, students who were not in an exam class and who were authorized to go to the next grade were absorbed into public secondary schools. Students who were not authorized to go to the next grade were either authorized to repeat their level, in which case they also entered secondary schools in the autumn, or they were excluded from public education. Students who were in an exam class – i.e. the students enrolled in the sixth, ninth and twelfth grades – took their exam session in December 2004 and successful students were absorbed into the regular system in early 2005. Unsuccessful students were either authorized to repeat their level in the regular system, or excluded from public education.

This section has described the governmental initiatives related to education in response to the split of the country due to conflict and to the distortion of the national education system. Emergency education in government-controlled areas only included around 10% of the students who were enrolled in northern schools before the war and was limited in time (alternative education lasted only two years in the south). As a comparison, emergency education in rebel-controlled areas included about a third of the students who used to go to schools in the north before the war and is more difficult to bracket on a timeline. The educational administration has returned in certain areas, but not everywhere, and, where it has yet to return, alternative forms of emergency education still persist nearly five years after the start of the conflict. The following section explores the mixed outcomes of these different types of alternative education, both in the south and in the north of the country. It also presents the main difficulties related to the holding of national examinations in conflict-affected Côte d’Ivoire.

**Mixed Outcomes for Different Types of Alternative Education**

Given that several types of alternative education were put in place at the onset of the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, it is worth questioning the quality of these governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Were the conditions met for ensuring learning in relatively good conditions? Did these conditions vary between initiatives? The previous sections have described the types of alternative education that have been offered to children in both rebel- and government-controlled areas. Here, we will explore students’ performance in national examinations in order to see how students enrolled in different initiatives performed. As we will see, students enrolled in alternative schools were not amongst the best performers.

Koukougnon (2003) compared the performance of 1200 students enrolled in the écoles relais with 1200 students enrolled in normal schools in the south. Students were tested on French, mathematics and science. Findings showed that 20% of the students enrolled in the écoles relais passed the test and that 80% failed. In comparison, 80% of the students enrolled in normal schools passed the tests and 20% failed. Several reasons were brought forth to explain this situation, and these included psychological, sociological and pedagogical factors. In order to assess the relative importance of psychological factors in the students’ failure, a series of psychological tests were done on 150 students enrolled in the écoles relais who had failed the test. Seventy percent of them did not present signs of trauma. This is rather counter-intuitive if we refer to common perceptions,
yet, in this case, psychological factors appeared to have a limited effect on students’ counter-performance (Koukougnon, 2006). This point is worth highlighting as development practitioners have a tendency to assume that displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to mental health disorders. It is, in fact, commonly taken for granted that refugees and internally displaced people are ‘traumatized’ by the stressful events they encountered before or during their flight. When it comes to children, the tone is rather alarming:

In times of war, children witness and experience terrible atrocities. The physical, sexual and emotional violence to which they are exposed shatters their world. War undermines the very foundations of children’s lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and breaking down their trust in adults. (Machel, 1996)

However, not every displaced child experiences terrible atrocities or presents signs of trauma. Several studies have in fact shown that people react to a stressful event in a very individual way, in accordance with the meaning they give to it (Summerfield, 1995; Terheggen et al, 2001). Western views on trauma should therefore not be exported uncritically to other contexts (Bracken & Petty, 1998).

According to the same study (Fadiga, 2006; Koukougnon, 2006), sociological and pedagogical factors were more likely to explain students’ counter-performance than psychological factors. As for social factors, living conditions were quite difficult for displaced children, who lacked useful contacts in Abidjan to help them cope with daily issues. In terms of pedagogical factors, double shifting was the norm in the alternative schools, with the negative impact that students had less time to learn. The number of lessons had been reduced, but the workload was still heavy for a school year that had been shortened.

Educational programmes remained silent on the war and there was no single mention of what was happening in the country in the curriculum or in extra-curricular activities. This may have been confusing for some students, yet it is not uncommon in times of crisis. Looking at how schools in conflict zones teach about conflict is not yet high on the research agenda (Davies, 2005), however, this level of understanding may facilitate policy makers’ abilities to assess the role of education in the perpetuation or mitigation of conflict (Lanoue, 2006). Applied to our case, schools do not teach about the current war in practice but then should they? The Minister of Education did not issue special instructions to teach or not to teach about the current war. Firstly, the war is not yet over and there is the question of what to teach about the conflict while remaining as neutral as possible. Secondly, the government might have chosen not to engage in the heaviness of another change in the curriculum, which was last changed in 2003 after years of discussion.

Having presented the study’s findings, we have to be nuanced in our analysis. If the students enrolled in alternative schools were not amongst the best performers, they were also not the worst. Table IV presents students’ success rates in national examinations. It covers a four-year period, 2003-06, and it gives a good indication of students’ performance in alternative schools (in both the north and south) and in normal schools in the south.

If we refer to MEN statistics, we notice that the students enrolled in the écoles relais scored above average. The proportion of students enrolled in the écoles relais who successfully passed their sixth- and twelfth-grade exam in August 2003 was higher than the proportion of students enrolled in normal schools who passed their exam in June 2003 (83% vs. 63%) (Ministry of Education/Direction des Examens et Concours, 2007). However, it would be inappropriate to say, based on such results, that the écoles relais provided a better standard of learning than normal schools in the south. The scales being used are so different that we must be very careful in our conclusions. In 2003, 225,537 of the students enrolled in normal schools took the sixth-grade exam. Only 10,829 students from the écoles relais did so.

In the same vein, it would be misleading to compare students’ success rates between the south and the north. Although, in proportion, students’ performances in 2002-03 are quite similar (with a 63% success rate for both groups of sixth-grade students, a 42% vs. 44% for ninth-grade students, and a 33% vs. 35% for twelfth-grade students), the scales are different, and again, the proportions have to be mitigated by looking at the numbers. What is more relevant for research is why students enrolled in the north performed less well in 2004-05 and 2005-06 than in 2002-03. The overall number of students tripled from 2002-03 to 2003-04 in the rebel-controlled areas. The holding of exams in 2004 and the set-up of a minimal administration in the rebel-controlled areas
How to Certify Learning

are likely to have had a significant impact on the decision of parents to register their children at school in the north. Yet students enrolled in the north seemed to perform less well over time (Ministry of Education/Direction des Examens et Concours, 2007). This counter-performance can be explained by several factors. One is that many students bypass the system and take their chance by registering in an exam class without having the academic level required. Another reason is that while the number of students has tripled, the capacity, in terms of infrastructure, equipment and qualified teaching staff, has not, thus, the learning conditions in the north may actually be worse in certain areas than at the start of the crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Baccalaureate (12th grade)</th>
<th>BEPC – (9th grade)</th>
<th>CEPE**** – (6th grade)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2003</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>Southern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>17-20 June 2003</td>
<td>1-2 July 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>33% – 25,390</td>
<td>42% – 50,837</td>
<td>63% – 143,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>39% – 3764</td>
<td>39% – 4279</td>
<td>83% – 8987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd session</td>
<td>Zouhan Hounien</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9-10 December 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7% – 2</td>
<td>17% – 188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th session</td>
<td>Northern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>11-13 February 2004</td>
<td>11-12 February 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>35% – 869</td>
<td>44% – 2539</td>
<td>63% – 11,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>Southern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>22-25 June 2004</td>
<td>6-7 July 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>35% – 30,800</td>
<td>48% – 17,013</td>
<td>77% – 187,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td>Southern Côte d'Ivoire**</td>
<td>24-28 August 2004</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>53% – 2639</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>42% – 360</td>
<td>31% – 997</td>
<td>82% – 5904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th session</td>
<td>Northern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>Cancelled – increasing tensions following the November 2004 bombings in Bouaké and Abidjan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2005</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>Southern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>21-25 June 2005</td>
<td>5-6 July 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>31% – 31,280</td>
<td>25% – 42,037</td>
<td>82% – 180,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td>Northern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>2-3 March 2006</td>
<td>2-3 March 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>24% – 1282</td>
<td>21% – 3321</td>
<td>79% – 25,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2006</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>Southern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>25-29 June 2006</td>
<td>8-9 August 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>40% – 45,177</td>
<td>34% – 69,326</td>
<td>80% – 166,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td>Northern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>31 August-</td>
<td>31 August-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success rate</td>
<td>31 August-</td>
<td>2 September 2006</td>
<td>1 September 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td></td>
<td>31% – 1351</td>
<td>42% – 6314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2007</strong></td>
<td>Southern and northern Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>Only one exam session planned for the 2006-07 school year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This session was planned for the écoles relais.
** This session was planned for the technical baccalauréats.
*** This session was planned for the écoles de sauvegarde. Although they only targeted secondary school students, an extra exam session was held for sixth-grade students.
**** CEPE stands for the Certificat D’Etude Primaire Elémentaire and marks the end of the primary cycle.

Table IV. Dates and students’ success rates in national examinations since the beginning of the war, 2003-06 (Ministry of Education/Direction des Examens et Concours, 2007).

At the beginning of this section, we asked whether conditions were met for ensuring learning in relatively good conditions in the alternative schools. As can be seen, this was not the case. The teaching staff were scarce; basic equipment came in late; there was often no initial operating budget; and communication was not efficient between the central administration in Abidjan and the schools on the ground. Yet a certain amount of learning did occur and, despite many difficulties, many students have successfully passed their examinations since the beginning of the war. Children enrolled in the alternative schools were not amongst the best performers, but they
were also not the worst. We need to be modest in our conclusions. Several types of alternative education were indeed put in place at the onset of the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, yet we cannot rank them, nor can we say that the quality of learning was better in the écoles relais than in the northern schools. What we can do instead is try to understand why there was such difference in support, between north and south, on the part of the government (Lanoue, 2003; Sommers, 2005). Was a certain politicization of the school taking place? The following section presents a number of existing tensions between the MEN and local practitioners.

Toward a Politicization of the School?

Table IV makes it quite clear that the MEN has been dealing with several school years at once since the beginning of the war, and with several national exam sessions per year. Holding different exam sessions in the north and south of the country did not come without difficulties. Beyond the logistical and security constraints, it exacerbated a certain number of existing tensions between the Ministry and actors in the field, and to a certain extent, the certification of education became a political stake.

A first source of tension came from the fact that the governmental response was relatively slow to reach the north compared to non-governmental initiatives and this was interpreted by local NGOs as a deliberate blocking of education on the part of the MEN (personal communication with an EPT representative). Although the mission commissioned by the Ministry in September 2003 had recommended to take action quickly and to validate the school year by organizing the 2002-03 exam sessions, exams were not held until February 2004, nearly five months after the mission released its conclusions. A second source of tension was that the minimal administration which was set up in the north in early 2004 to prepare for the exam sessions scheduled for February neither recognized nor valued the efforts of the teaching and coordinating force in place, while in fact, they were the ones who had succeeded in maintaining schooling in the north at the beginning of the crisis.

From the Ministry perspective, there was a lack of confidence in the education officials who had stayed in the rebel-controlled areas and qualified teachers who were in place in the north were not allowed to grade examinations. Examinations took place in the north but were graded in the south, despite EPT’s repeated requests to have the corrections done in Bouaké.[9] A third source of tension between the MEN and local practitioners was that students were notified at the last minute when exams would take place in the north. They only had a couple of weeks to prepare. This led certain observers to conclude that the MEN wanted the students to fail to prove the argument that northern schools provided an education of lower quality, compared to southern schools (personal communication with an EPT representative). A fourth source of tension came from the fact that the second exam session for the north was cancelled, following violent conflict between the government and the rebellion in Bouaké and Abidjan, but the exam session for the écoles de sauvegarde was not cancelled in the south. Both sessions were initially planned to occur during the same period (November 2004). Exams were eventually rescheduled for the écoles de sauvegarde and took place in December 2004. This contributed to fuelling the perception that the Ministry was too strict with the northern schools compared to how flexible it was with the écoles de sauvegarde.

Conclusion

Two points are worth highlighting from our analysis. First, the war has exacerbated existing disparities, namely the urban/rural divide and inequalities between the south and the north. At the same time, it put the unity of the national education system under threat by distorting the existing structure and by adding parallel institutions. For development practitioners, the challenge is to distinguish between the effects of conflict on the education system that are due to the war and upon which they may have a sound impact in a relatively short period of time (the conjunctural effects), and the effects of conflict on the education system that have exacerbated existing inequalities and that are more complex to tackle within a longer period of time (the structural effects). Examples of conjunctural effects include the closing of schools, the absence of teachers in certain areas, the unprecedented increase in the use of volunteers and the destruction of education
records. Structural effects may increase existing inequalities and exacerbate the north/south divide, the difference between rural and urban areas or the sex imbalance at schools during the period of conflict.

In Côte d’Ivoire, the most striking conjunctural effect of conflict on the education system was the de-linking of the schools from the central administration. Without such a link, schools in the north are deprived of supplies, basic equipment and school manuals, while their credits are frozen and no teaching staff can be deployed, as northern schools are not taken into account in regional planning. Re-linking the schools with their regional administration should be the priority of the educational development agenda, yet it is still not emphasized enough. It is quite remarkable that the re-linking of schools is not mentioned in the PARREN/CI, which is the National Action Plan for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Education Systems in Côte d’Ivoire, and covers a two-year period, 2004-06 (Ministry of Education, 2005a). Instead, rehabilitating the infrastructure and strengthening institutional capacity (including that of a group in charge of promoting girls’ education) are presented as feasible in two years, and as the more pressing needs to address. Policy makers and development practitioners tend to oversimplify the effects of conflict on the education system and they mix conjunctural and structural effects in their analysis. They set too many priorities for emergency action and, sadly, international education priorities often overtake local ones. In order to be able to provide the soundest response to the Ivorian crisis, there is the need to place the most urgent educational needs high on the agenda, and these include re-linking northern schools with the central administration. Promoting education for girls is indeed important, but it is not the number one priority in the Ivorian case.

The second point worth highlighting is that a certain politicization of the school has taken place with the conflict. Interestingly, none of the questions which came up with regard to the northern schools arose in the south with the écoles relais and écoles de sauvegarde. As explained earlier, northern schools were labelled ‘Malian schools’ in the local press and they were perceived as giving a discount education. Credits were frozen [10] and the Ministry was very careful in validating the 2002-03 school year and in authorizing the holding of exams. In comparison, the Ministry was much more flexible in the south. In government-controlled areas, alternative schools had an operating budget – it even benefited from the frozen funds from the north. The decision not to implement certain directives from the MEN was not viewed as leading to a ‘discount education’ but rather as a way to cope with a difficult situation. The shortage of teaching staff was compensated for by hiring volunteers and, in this case, without questioning their teaching skills. Exams were never cancelled in the south, contrary to what happened in the north in 2004.

Acknowledgements
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Notes
[1] See the map of Côte d’Ivoire in the appendix.
This figure is the number of teachers before the war in the four Regional Divisions of Education (DREN) of Bouaké, Korhogo, Man and Odienné. There were 11,234 primary school teachers and 3559 secondary school teachers.

Parts of the DREN of Man, Daloa and Bondoukou are in the government-controlled area.

The transition from school to work is usually quite painful and youth unemployment is a major concern in Côte d’Ivoire, with no exception for educated youth. Besides, the problem is not only Ivorian. In African countries where data is available, only 5% to 10% of new entrants into the labour market can be absorbed by the formal economy. The bulk of new jobs is being generated by the informal economy (International Labour Organization, 2003).

Double shifting was used in Côte d’Ivoire long before the start of the crisis. Its conditions of implementation were formalized in 1993 during a seminar commissioned by the MEN and the French cooperation on the Projet Ecole 2000 (Koukougnon, 2003).

Following a seminar on post-conflict reconstruction of the Ivorian educational system, the financial division of the MEN presented a special budget which funded the alternative schools. It was equivalent to 11 million euros (Koukougnon, 2003).

One thousand five hundred CFA francs per hour is the equivalent of two euros per hour.

For the first exam session in the north, the security and the confidentiality of both subjects and papers were ensured by the UN.

Credits only started to be resumed in 2006 in the northern schools.

References


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MAGALI CHELPI-DEN HAMER is a research fellow at the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. She works on issues related to youth, conflict, reintegration through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, education and technical and vocational education and training in sub-Saharan Africa. She is part of the IS Academe initiative, whose general goal is to bridge the gap between scholars and policy makers by fostering scientific research outputs that are relevant for
Dutch development policy making. Between 1999 and 2004, she worked as programme coordinator for several international NGOs in Colombia, Honduras, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Côte d’Ivoire. Correspondence: Magali Chelpi-Den Hamer, Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDST), Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands (m.l.b.chelpi@uva.nl).