

Field Notes

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Education Resilience Research Training in South Asia: Building on local higher education capacities

The RES-Research training module, designed by the ERA Program, builds on the capacities of academics and education practitioners in fragile, conflict and violence affected contexts to undertake locally relevant and rigorous education resilience research. Following a pilot in Central America, another 9 month-long training was delivered in South Asia. The first workshop took place in November 2013, in Delhi, India, and the second workshop took place in April 2014, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Despite important overall progress, as 2015 approaches critical challenges remain to achieving global education objectives, especially in countries affected by violence and conflict. Currently 77 percent of the gap in primary education completion (an MDG goal) is in conflict-affected countries (UNESCO 2011) and 50 percent of the 56 million children out of school live in situations of fragility and adversity, including chronic violence (GPE 2012). The imperative to address this is even more pressing when we consider that 90 percent of conflicts this century have occurred in countries with other conflict episodes in the last 15 years (WDR 2011). In other words, in spite of humanitarian and development support, the end of conflict has not transformed violence into long-lasting peace.

Yet the picture is not entirely negative. These countries also show important examples of resilience—individual and group strengths, community opportunities and support, and institutional services that protect children and youth from risks and that help them achieve educational outcomes in the face of great adversities. One such resilience ‘asset’ is Higher Education (HE). Even in contexts of seemingly



What is RES-Research?

RES-Research is a 9 to 12 month training module targeting higher education professors, graduate research students and the professional Development Evaluation community working with humanitarian and development agencies in conflict and violence-affected contexts. The training is structured around face-to-face workshops and a practical component designed to ground research knowledge and skills. During the practice phase, RES-Research provides local researchers with ongoing technical guidance and ‘seed’ financial resources to undertake a pilot education resilience study. In addition to enriching the learning experience, these studies then become part of a growing base of international education resilience evidence.

Photos: Jo Kelcey / World Bank

Education Resilience Approaches



The World Bank

The ERA Program is a World Bank program that offers a systematic process to collect evidence that can support local efforts to improve education services in violence and conflict affected contexts.

Field Notes Series

The Field Notes series is produced to share lessons around this process in an effort to disseminate ERA's support for the collection of global evidence on resilience in contexts of adversity.

overwhelming adversity, HE institutions continue to train the professionals, intellectuals, and researchers who seek to understand the path towards peaceful development and poverty eradication.

With this in mind, HDNED's Education Resilience Approaches Program (ERA) offers a RES-Research training module ("Resilience in Education Settings Research") that builds on the capacity of local researchers to collect relevant evidence to inform policy and programming for education systems in situations of violence and conflict.

To date, RES-Research has been implemented in the Central America (2012-13) and South Asia (2013-14) Regions. This Field Note includes the rationale for the RES-Research approach, as well as the feedback and insights on the value added of the program from the South Asia participants and facilitators.

Evidence for education policies... and positive social transformation in contexts of adversity.

Supporting locally-led research aligns to a foundational principle in applying Resilience theory: namely the importance of identifying local strengths and capacities that can

RES-Research Sessions

Phase 1

Phase 2

- Resilience Theory and Learning To-Date
- Transformative Mixed-Methods Research
- Research Questions for Education Policy
- Community Participation and Ethics
- Sampling and Data Collection in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-Affected Contexts
- Field-Based Resilience Research Feasibility
- In-Country Education Evidence for Policy Capacity and South-South Knowledge

- Qualitative Data Analysis and
- Quantitative Data Analysis and Interpretation
- Translating Research to Policy and Practice
- Writing an Education Resilience Report
- Current Debates Regarding Resilience
- Engaging with External Organizations
- Social Justice and Giving Back to the Community

contribute to and sustain the complex needs of countries experiencing great adversities.

In contexts where violence and other adversities have become chronic, higher education research is a key transformative asset—through its role in evidence collection, policy advice, program design, and on-going learning and advocacy. RES-Research supports these higher education assets, whether it's a PhD cohort at the University of Juba or Kathmandu University, or committed local evaluation professionals in Nepal, Bhutan or Afghanistan.

Ultimately, RES-Research brings together the domains of research and policy influence within countries that are in fragile, conflict and violence-affected situations. This is because resilience not only relates to the ability of vulnerable and at-risk individuals,

communities and institutions to recover and perform positively in adversity, but it also points to responsibly supporting this process with relevant services and resources (Ungar 2008, 2011, 2012). Local researchers and evaluators are called, therefore, to undertake systematic, rigorous and locally relevant research for public policy and practice in their own countries, with a lens towards the transformation of conflict and violence.

With this in mind, a particular strength of RES-Research is that it combines theory and evidence on resilience with a systematic and rigorous mixed methods approach premised on a Transformative Paradigm (Mertens, 2009). This is a methodological approach focused on research and evaluation with vulnerable populations.

Lessons learned from the South Asia RES-Research.

After the first RES-Research application in Central America and Colombia, the second application took place in the South Asia region. It brought together participants from Nepal, India, Bhutan and Afghanistan with an additional participant from Lebanon / Syria (included in light of the ongoing crisis in that region).

The South Asia RES-Research workshops targeted 25 participants including University professors, PhD research students and evaluators from WHO (Afghanistan), UNICEF (Bhutan), UNDP (Nepal) and Amaltas Consulting (India). The first workshop was conducted in

RES-Research participants from Afghanistan take part in a Resilience navigation and negotiation exercise led by facilitator Michael Ungar





New Delhi, India (see Field Notes Issue No. 5, November 2013) and the second in Kathmandu, Nepal. This Field Note focuses on the latter.

The two workshops covered the topics listed in the box on the previous page, and were complemented with a pilot education resilience study running throughout. This practical approach supported the sharing of lessons learned within and across country teams. Each research team worked through an institution on the

ground (either a university or an NGO), coordinated by one team member.

As part of the practical component of the training, each country team selected a topic for their pilot education resilience study. These are listed below:

- ➔ The learning process of vulnerable displaced children living in urban slum areas (Nepal)
- ➔ Improving access to school in vulnerable remote rural communities (Bhutan)
- ➔ Improving access young women into higher education (Afghanistan)
- ➔ Improving access for female doctors in post-graduate medical degrees (Afghanistan)
- ➔ The influence of supportive peer interactions for Syrian refugee youth living in host communities (Lebanon)
- ➔ Exploring education related resilience processes of gender minorities (India)

In addition to discussing mixed methods approaches that bring together qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis and interpretation, participants considered the implications of translating research findings to policy and practice, accounting for the political economy and ethical considerations in their country contexts.

Especially important during the second workshop was the discussion of how resilience research can contribute to social transformation, to bring about long-lasting positive changes for vulnerable communities.

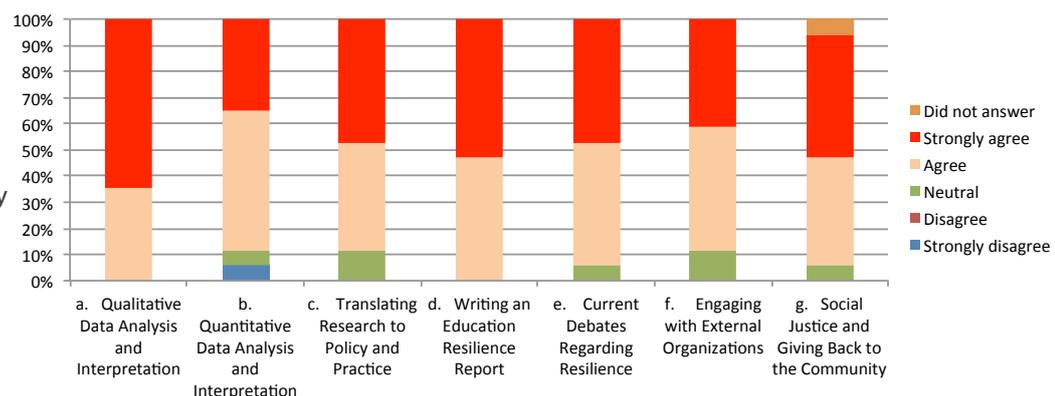
In general, conducting research in contexts of adversity presents a host of challenges—operational, political and ethical in nature. RES-Research recognizes these challenges and addresses them through its training content and process.

The Department of Education employees... are [many of] the regular students of Kathmandu University, School of Education. If we bring these [Transformative Resilience] issues into the classroom as formal and informal discourses they will... think about the relevance of this kind of research in their plans and policy work.... If [the students] can at least think about these issues from the beginning it may gradually bring change.

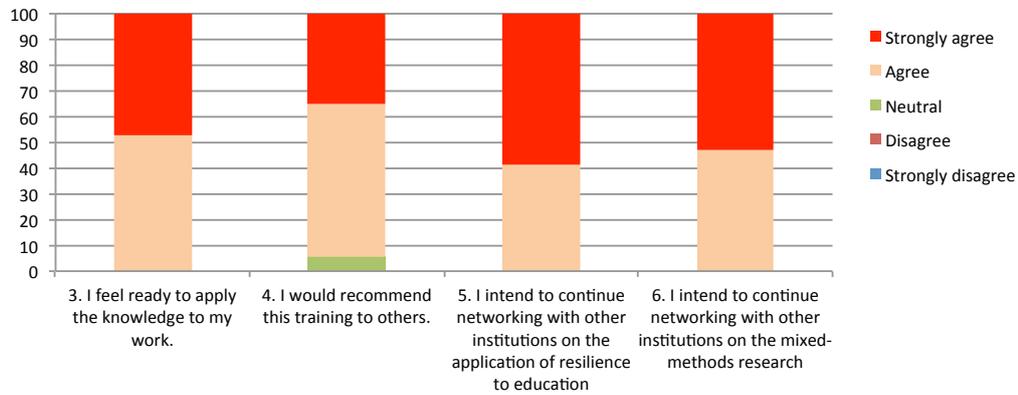
Suresh Gautam. PhD student at Kathmandu University School of Education. Member of the Nepal Country team. (Picture on last page, left.)

RES-Research evaluation and feedback from participants

Feedback from participants was elicited throughout the training as well as through a post workshop evaluation form that gathered both quantitative (what worked well and to what extent) and qualitative (why things worked and what could be improved) feedback.



- All participants agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (59%) that the training met its objectives.
- Over 50 percent of participants strongly agreed that they would pass on their newly acquired knowledge and skills (theoretical and methodological) through their professional networks.
- The most appreciated sessions were those on “qualitative data analysis” and “writing an education resilience report”.



- Participants demonstrated a high level of readiness to apply new skills and knowledge to their work.
- Over ninety percent of participants reported they would recommend the training to others.

Written feedback.

In general, participants welcomed the education resilience framework that integrated theory, research, policy and practice, especially through a mixed-methods approach and with a transformative aim. The challenge will continue to be on providing a meaningful training to participants from diverse backgrounds. This can range from experienced researchers in either qualitative or quantitative methods, to more junior evaluators and students. The practical methods of how to design,

conduct and report research in difficult situations is an important demand from local researchers in fragile, conflict and violence-affected contexts (see detailed qualitative feedback below).

The following quotations come from participant feedback forms.

How participants plan to change their work as a result of the training:

- By networking more with policy and practice

- By more explicitly raising voices in hidden corners. So many youth deal with risks and this approach can give them opportunities to change their communities and society for the better
- [By] applying this approach to my Agency evaluation work
- By advocating for the resilience framework and the importance of the transformative research paradigm

What was the most useful content?	What would you change?	What would you have liked more of?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having everything together in one education resilience ‘framework’ that combines theory, evidence and methodology The relationship of risks and assets in resilience theory The mixing of data collection methods and analysis: specifically the transformation of qualitative to quantitative data Getting the right messages to the right audience Translating research to policy and practice advice and influence Blending qualitative and quantitative analysis Data analysis and interpretation within a mixed methods paradigm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants came from diverse backgrounds and different levels of knowledge therefore it would have been better to include some basics instruction on research and statistics Researching in these contexts is unpredictable and the workshop could have been longer or could have been organized through three face-to-face meetings. This would help to stagger the content as it is difficult to think about final report writing while in the middle of data collection More practical sessions as these worked very well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data coding and interpreting data with an education resilience lens How to mix qualitative and quantitative in analysis Resilience in theory and practice Using this approach for evaluation Quantitative analysis Writing the education resilience report The “theories” associated with MMR research

- By exploring assets among risks (not just risks)

How the training has changed participant's approach to research:

- I've shifted my worldview on how research should be done to mixed

Why resilience research led by local HE actors is a sustainable approach for evidence-informed policies in contexts of conflict and violence

Higher education institutions train teachers, engineers, health care professionals and future leaders. They also places where intellectual leaders are trained and hosted to collect evidence to inform key public policy discussions and debates. Along with development organizations and civil society they offer spaces and opportunities for dialogue to occur, and they often implement and offer services and opportunities for vulnerable communities.

The post-2015 MDGs agenda is calling for renewed support to higher education, as well as to fragile, conflict and/or violence-affected contexts. These two goals can be integrated. Universities, for example, can support both the national and international development agenda, especially in the education sector. The issues to be addressed are complex and require on-going learning, best sustained by local actors: researchers, evaluators, policy makers, program designers and implementers.

Thus, increasing the production of knowledge within universities in the global South is an imperative for any post-2015 development education agenda.

methods. I'll use this approach in further research.

- I hope my work will be robust and credible through the mixed methodology. I also hope it will have more potential to be transformative
- I am willing to look at different aspects of a situation now
- I want to do much more research
- I hope to do more research because lecturers should be producers of new knowledge
- I'm interested in applying more theories to my work and the analysis of data

How participants plan to build on the skills and knowledge gained over the two workshops:

- I will definitely be reading more about resilience theory and its critics
- I'll definitely be engaging more with MMR and resilience literature; I also hope to apply these skills in other contexts
- I will continue to do more studying and networking with relevant experts and institutions

- I will build the capacities of others
- [I will do this] through engaging in more research
- I'll use resilience perspectives in my PhD research exploring the opportunity and challenges of urban youth of Kathmandu
- I'll look into partnerships with the university, (I)NGOs and other funding agencies that could use this approach
- [I think] the tools provided were really helpful to apply in any kind of transformative research

Facilitator's conclusions.

When the first RES-Research application took place, the ERA team had few of its own studies to draw upon. As Education Resilience becomes increasingly used in both development and humanitarian arenas, the ERA team will utilize actual education resilience findings to inform content. Real examples generated by the research undertaken in South Asia will be instrumental in refining education resilience theory through concrete examples.



In their words: Comments from the South Asia workshop participants

Participants also spoke about the impact that they hope their resilience research will have. For Indra Mani Rai, a PhD student at Kathmandu University School of Education and member of the Nepal Country team, this requires recognizing the role of individual academics and HE institutions and actively supporting them to meet their potential:

I'm planning that at one of the levels I am conducting my PhD research, resilience will be the main aspect. Then I would like to build up my expertise in this field because it's new for us in South Asian countries and we don't talk much about resilience. Also we can guide our students to conduct research on these aspects, because it's a new and interesting area and can help us to explore the risks and how people are coping and how they can solve problems themselves. Also it goes beyond this to policy makers and making community members aware. That's why it's interesting for us ...The University needs to be seen as one level of stakeholder...We can try to publish our study in local journals and through the university and, well, as many journals as we can! If we can achieve a certain standard of work then we can advocate through additional medias and at the international level as well.

Indra Mani Rai, PhD Candidate at Kathmandu University School of Education (Pictured right, below)

This potential was underscored when the University of Kathmandu School of Education hosted an additional half-day conference on Resilience theory and Transformative mixed methods following the main RES-Research workshop. The sessions, facilitated by the ERA team and the Nepal country team, reached a much wider audience of Masters and Doctoral students, most of who also work in the education sector while completing their studies. Ramesh Neubane, MPhil student in Curriculum Management and Instruction, and Ushakiran Wagle, MPhil student in English Language Education, participated in this conference and had the following to say about the utility of the topic and approach for their professional development:

I'm writing my research proposal right now so learning about ontology, epistemology and all those things, as well as how to apply that in my research was really helpful for me. Especially on the question of how to 'know' my participants: I learned a lot from this. I think the idea of resilience will work [for my research] because I'm planning to conduct my research on teacher training and how knowledge and the discourse that is being generated in training halls will affect learning after they are teachers. So the theory of resilience is very useful.

Ushakiran Wagle, MPhil Candidate at Kathmandu University

Whenever we try to include 'context' in our research we see the value of this. It works much better than 'one-size fits all' coming from the centre ... Even here in Nepal, if we are sitting in Kathmandu planning for



RES-Research participants Indra Mani Rai (right) and Suresh Gautam (left), PhD Candidates at Kathmandu University School of Education.

Jumla Humla [an area in Nepal] that won't work! So the most important thing for me is that if I want to plan for Jumla Humla I have to go there and be with the local people, hear their voices and afterwards bring together all those ideas they have before implementing the plan I have made. That theoretical lens—the histories of the area—is most important.

Ramesh Neubane, MPhil Candidate at Kathmandu University