

**How Global Institutions Matter:
Education for All and the Rise of Education as a Humanitarian Response**

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Abstract (143 words)

This article examines how global institutions contribute to educational change by analyzing the role of Education for All (EFA) in the recent rise of a global field dedicated to Education in Emergencies (EiE). I build on new sociological insights to argue that global institutions like EFA, commonly critiqued as ineffectual or mere vehicles for powerful interests, can nonetheless provide cultural ingredients and workspaces for the construction of new agendas. I draw on documentary evidence to suggest that the EFA framing of education as a human right provided a powerful cultural frame justifying EiE as an area of need, and that EFA workspaces helped consolidate and legitimate key EiE initiatives and activists, especially early on. The article expands our understanding of how global institutions shape educational change and adds to existing analyses of the rise of EiE as a new global field of intervention.

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How Global Institutions Matter:

Education for All and the Rise of Education as a Humanitarian Response

Introduction

Even a casual examination reveals the development of a thick global infrastructure dedicated to education in recent decades. Educational organizations, networks, declarations, and initiatives in the international sphere have increased at an unprecedented rate (Mundy et al. 2016). A particularly dramatic case is Education for All (EFA), which produced a remarkable series of global conferences, proclamations, goals, and monitoring mechanisms (Chabbott 2003; Mundy 2006). In view of this expansion, one may reasonably wonder if these global structures attain any of their ambitious goals. Of course, there are many critiques. Through one lens, they are ineffective, hampered by a lack of political will or technical deficiencies (e.g. Bennell and Furlong 1998; Heyneman 2009). Through another, they are corrupted by economic and political processes that secure powerful interests (e.g. Tota 2014; Tikly 2017).

This article builds on recent work in the neo-institutionalist tradition to theorize the impacts of global educational structures. Neo-institutional sociologists have long stressed the influence of world-level institutions (Meyer et al. 1997), but it is only recently that they have explicitly focused on *how* they generate change (Schofer et al. 2012). A core insight emerging from this recent scholarship is that global institutions provide ‘cultural meanings’ and ‘workspaces’ that supply important ingredients and platforms for the definition and legitimation of new issue areas and their advocates (Hironaka 2014; see also Schofer and Hironaka 2005; Lim 2021). Cultural meanings are understandings about a given issue, usually involving both ontological assumptions about what the world is like and normative beliefs about how it should be. Workspaces are organizational

spaces (such as conference meetings) or discursive structures (such as reports) that can offer scaffolds for agenda setting and advocacy.

I extend these arguments to the education sector and consider the impacts of EFA as a global institution. Sociologists understand the notion of a global institution broadly, encompassing both ideational and structural forms (as suggested by the emphasis on cultural meanings and workspaces). Ideationally, global institutions include cultural rules in the global arena that “may involve normative obligations but often enter into social life primarily as facts which must be taken into account by actors” (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 341). Structurally, global institutions include the embodiment of these rules in world-level organizations and structures, for example the United Nations, international treaties, and international associations (Schofer et al. 2012). As I detail later, EFA encompasses all these institutional dimensions. EFA relays cultural rules that shape the actions of educational stakeholders, perhaps most importantly the belief in education as a universal human right (Chabbott 2003; Mundy 2006; 2007). EFA also sustains institutional structures that codify these rules, such as declarations and conferences, all of which can be conceptualized as workspaces for activists and policymakers.

To illustrate the possibilities for change inhering in these cultural meanings and workspaces I examine the role of EFA in the relatively recent development of a global field dedicated to Education in Emergencies (EiE).¹ Previously, education was understood primarily as a development activity rather than a humanitarian one, and the education of emergency-affected populations was low on the international agenda (Burde 2007; Dryden-Peterson 2011; 2016). Since the turn of the 21st century, however, an organized global field has emerged, focused on educational interventions in conflict- and emergency-affected contexts (Kagawa 2005; Novelli and Lopes

¹ I use EiE as an umbrella term, encompassing various strands like “Education and Conflict.”

Cardozo 2008; Lerch and Buckner 2018; Russell et al. 2020). Existing analyses of this shift emphasize the role of local needs and demands, a changing humanitarian paradigm, and shifting geopolitics (e.g. Novelli 2010; Dryden-Peterson 2011; Burde 2014). I add to this picture by considering the role of EFA. In a nutshell, I will argue that EFA strengthened rights-based conceptions of education, which provided a powerful cultural frame justifying EiE as an area of need, and that EFA-related workspaces helped consolidate and legitimate key EiE initiatives and activists, especially early on. Methodologically, the paper uses descriptive data to chart the growth of global EiE activities and then uses original documents and secondary sources to trace the sequence of EiE initiatives in the field's formative years and their interconnections with EFA.

The article makes two main contributions. It helps explain the rise of EiE as a global concern, a significant shift that has expanded both humanitarian aid and the goals of education, which now stretch from long-term development to emergency relief. More broadly, the article contributes to our understanding of world educational structures, like EFA. There is a tendency to see these in merely technical terms, or as pawns in power struggles. If we *also* conceptualize them in terms of the cultural meanings they relay and the workspaces they provide, we can recognize their contributions to sometimes unexpected educational change.

Theorizing the Effects of Global Institutions: A Focus on Education for All (EFA)

It is primarily since the mid-20th century that a sizeable world-level educational infrastructure has emerged. International organizations have increasingly focused on education, and education policy and advocacy networks now routinely span the globe (Mundy 1998; Ball 2012). Global education conferences have proliferated, spawning world-level declarations, goals, monitoring mechanisms, and policy imperatives (Chabbott 2003; King 2007). The change, of

course, is part of a broader wave of economic, political, and social globalization that shifted many other domains to the global level as well, for example health and gender.

My focus centers on the world-level architecture linked to EFA. The first EFA conference in Jomtien in 1990 represented an unprecedented global attempt to universalize access to basic education and reduce illiteracy. Ten years later, the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar took stock of EFA progress and pledged amended targets. In 2015, the World Education Forum in Incheon re-affirmed global goals for education, now within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to these main conferences, EFA spawned numerous follow-up and preparatory meetings, initiatives, reports, and assessments. When it comes to the impact of these efforts, however, the picture remains unclear. Many years into EFA, universal access remains elusive, leading many to question the extent to which all this world-level activity has improved educational conditions: “what has the result really been?” (Heyneman 2009: 6).

A common assessment is that global institutions are handicapped by technical deficiencies and insufficient political commitments. For example, Benavot and colleagues point to numerous EFA shortcomings, ranging from inadequate resources and capacities to unclear coordination and monitoring mechanisms (Benavot et al. 2016; for similar critiques, see Bennell and Furlong 1998). Other studies highlight international or inter-organizational power struggles that constrain global initiatives and organizations. A recent article, for instance, situates EFA within a global governance system that serves to secure dominant interests in a global capitalist economy (Tikly 2017). Scholars in this tradition rightly point to Western domination of global agendas (King 2007), the often limited role granted to civil society (Tota 2014), and the sidelining of issues that do not mesh with dominant agendas (Robinson 2005).

How Global Institutions Matter

In a departure, neo-institutional sociologists have long maintained that global institutions can produce real change (Meyer et al. 1997; Ramirez 2012). At the same time, the question of how this happens was often not addressed, propelling charges that the theory envisions an “enduring state of hypocrisy” as national and global stakeholders pay lip service to global ideals without effecting change (Schofer et al. 2012: 8). Increasingly, however, neo-institutional work attends to the question of impacts (Shorette 2012). A key point that emerges is that global institutions, once created, can legitimate more activities than originally intended. Instead of focusing “narrowly on a particular policy-outcome link,” we need to attend to the broad, diffuse, and indirect effects of global institutions – in other words, their “institutional effects” (Schofer and Hironaka 2005: 27). Hironaka’s (2014) work identifies three main ways in which global institutions can generate such effects, and I draw on her insights in my case study (see also Lim 2021). The following sections delineate these effects and concretize them for the context of EFA.

Cultural Meanings: EFA and Education as a Human Right

Global institutions establish, change, and reinforce cultural meanings, which can serve as critical ingredients for creating or legitimizing new activities (Hironaka 2014). For example, world educational conferences, organizations, networks, and declarations define what education is, what its goals should be, how it should be organized, and what counts as an educational problem (Chabbott 2003). Such cultural meanings rarely launch change directly or unilaterally, but they can provide building blocks for the definition and promotion of new issue areas. New agendas are more likely to gain traction if they invoke such broader meanings, as the social movements literature shows (Benford and Snow 2000).

Of special relevance to my case is a core cultural meaning embedded in EFA: the idea of education as a fundamental human right. Rights-based notions of course precede EFA and date back at least to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Nevertheless, alternative conceptions of education as serving primarily the national state dominated international discourse for the initial post-World War II decades. Modernization theories linked education with national development and manpower planning subordinated education to the needs of the national state (Fägerlind and Saha 1983). The initial post-war global infrastructure was thus geared “to support national educational development, not universal educational rights” (Mundy 2007: 3).

Contrasting with this state-centric logic, EFA elevated the cultural understanding of education as a human right. The logic of education for development had not disappeared, and discourses of human capital informed EFA alongside human rights (Tikly 2017). Nonetheless, the EFA goal of universal access rested strongly on human rights principles (Chabbott 2003; Mundy 2006; 2007). This reflects a broader shift in the post-Cold War world order, when “rights talk seeped into every nook and cranny of world affairs” (Barnett 2011: 167). Human rights instruments expanded dramatically (Elliott 2011); a good example is the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which lent much support to EFA. Sufficiently “broad in interpretive scope, inclusivity, flexibility, and cultural resonance” to serve as “master” frame for collective action (Benford and Snow 2000: 619), human rights principles were thus invoked in movements as diverse as minority activism and gun ownership.

One neo-institutional insight is thus that global institutions can be transformative by virtue of their cultural messages. I build on these considerations in my case study, arguing that EFA rights-based conceptions of education provided a powerful cultural frame that helped legitimate greater attention to EiE.

Organizational and Discursive Workspaces in EFA

Global institutions generate change not only through their cultural messages. They also provide what Hironaka (2014) calls workspaces: global organizational or discursive structures that offer scaffolds for individuals from different agencies to come together to develop or advocate for new issues. Global educational conferences, for instance, bring together national delegations and non-state groups; they are spaces where frameworks and declarations are generated, networks constructed, standards set, and new educational issues defined. The availability of such workspaces can allow people to organize in ways that otherwise would not be feasible, and to advocate for new agendas that move beyond institutions' original goals (Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017).

EFA greatly expanded the availability of global educational workspaces. It generated numerous global meeting spaces, altogether assembling thousands of participants: plenaries, roundtables, exhibits, and debates accompanying each of the major meetings as well as preparatory consultations and follow-up monitoring activities. It helped catalyze new organizations, such as the EFA Fast Track Initiative, which morphed into the Global Partnership for Education and became a prominent global fund (Tikly 2017). It also produced discursive workspaces: declarations and statements, definitions of goals and targets, as well as assessments and reports, such as the influential EFA Monitoring Report.

Given that much organizing happens outside of official settings, it is tempting to see these workspaces as empty ceremony. But they can shape the possibilities for change by yielding “lasting influence over what sorts of collective action are considered legitimate” (Lim 2021: 9). My case study unpacks these dynamics, suggesting that beyond cultural meanings, EFA workspaces helped consolidate and legitimize the EiE field, especially in its formative phase.

EFA and the Empowerment of Agents and Activism

Finally, global institutions can “empower an army of agents who work on behalf of social problems,” including “government bureaucrats, citizens, social movement groups, political parties, economic entrepreneurs, and a wide range of other roles” (Hironaka 2014: 17). Cultural meanings define various problems as worthy of attention, thereby constituting and legitimating the goals and activities of these agents. Institutional workspaces provide resources and settings that endow agents with authority and enable them to mobilize.

Recent studies highlight these dynamics in the context of EFA. Magrath (2015), for instance, has shown that EFA structures amplified opportunities for civil society advocacy. She argues that civil society organizations came to be seen as increasingly important for reaching EFA, yielding new openings for civil society advocacy, for instance at the EFA High Level Group Meeting, the Working Group Meeting on EFA, and the Collective Consultation of NGOs. Similarly, Vaughan (2019) describes how the issue of gender equality benefitted from the EFA conferences, which offered occasions for activists to network and lobby.

These existing studies point to the usefulness of considering EFA’s role in empowering educational activists and activism. Through this lens, the agency of activists is not taken-for-granted but seen as embedded within broader institutional structures that supply activism with legitimacy. Building on these ideas, a final goal of my case study is to draw out how EFA cultural messages and workspaces helped legitimize advocates for education in conflict and crisis.

Data and Methods

I begin my case study by charting the growth of EiE as a field and evaluating prior explanations for its rise (before turning to my own argument). To show this growth, I collected descriptive and qualitative data along several dimensions, using secondary sources and the

literature: EiE networking and advocacy, standard- and norm-setting, funding and assistance, and professionalization. Expansion along these dimensions signals the growth of EiE as a defined and formalized enterprise, consolidating relevant agencies and individuals into a common field.

My main empirical effort, however, was geared toward understanding the history of the EiE field and I use this empirical dimension to argue that EFA contributed to the rise of EiE on global agendas. I began by reviewing secondary accounts of the history of the field, focusing especially on the 1990s and early 2000s, which others note as a time when EiE became a specialized field (Winthrop and Matsui 2013). Nine secondary accounts proved particularly useful (see online Appendix). They pointed to several EiE meetings and initiatives during those years that were described as important attempts to step up EiE cooperation. This included EiE inter-agency consultations in 1990, 1996, and 2000, a working group called “RAPID ED” formed in 1994, an information repository launched in 1995 that would later be adopted by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), a child protection conference in 1998, and an EiE workshop in 1999 that created a listserv that later also became integrated into the INEE.

I set out to collect original documents from these meetings and initiatives, using the “Wayback Machine,” a digital archive of websites, to review old meeting websites. I was able to collect original documents (such as reports, agendas, invitation letters, attendance lists) for four of these meetings/initiatives (see Appendix). Unfortunately, documents proved hard to find for the 1990 consultation, for RAPID ED, and the 1999 workshop. For these, I collected information from secondary sources (see Appendix).

As I reviewed these documents and sources on accelerating EiE initiatives, I was struck by the fact that several seemed to have occurred in conversation with EFA. I thus collected EFA documents to systematically investigate the interconnections. I concentrated on the main

conferences (Jomtien, Dakar, and Incheon) as well as the 1996 meeting in Amman, which stood out from my sources as relevant for one of the EiE consultations. For these I collected agendas and programs, declarations, reports, as well as conference documents specific to EiE. I also collected a narrower set of documents (reports and/or final statements) from ancillary meetings that followed or preceded those main conferences. I identified EFA documents using the UNESDOC database as well as EFA websites (with the “Wayback Machine”) (see Appendix).

In terms of analysis, I used the original documents and secondary sources to construct a timeline that traced EiE initiatives in the field’s formative years and their links with EFA. I first reviewed the content of all EiE documents and secondary accounts to reconstruct the sequence of key EiE events and initiatives as the field was beginning to gain traction. To tease out points of connection between this accelerating action for EiE and the EFA infrastructure I then extracted (a) all passages referring to EiE issues/initiatives in the EFA documents and (b) all passages referring to EFA proceedings/frameworks in the EiE documents and secondary accounts. This enabled me to produce a timeline tracing the sequence of EiE and EFA events, identifying which EiE events and initiatives related to EFA, and assessing the extent to which EFA frameworks and proceedings promoted EiE issues. The claim of this empirical analysis is not that *all* EiE activities emerged from EFA or that *all* EFA activities were important to EiE. My more modest ambition is to highlight linkages between EFA and the development of the EiE field, especially in its formative phase, and to explore these connections through a neo-institutional lens.

Case Study: Education for All and Education in Emergencies

I begin my case study by charting the overall expansion of global EiE activity. Figure 1 presents an overall timeline of this development of the EiE field, including several EFA-related events that I later discuss as being important for EiE.

[Figure 1]

The Rise of Education in Emergencies as Global Organizational and Professional Field

The surge of global interest in EiE has been astonishing, especially against the backdrop of earlier divisions between humanitarian and development assistance. Humanitarian relief targeting short-term emergency needs is an older practice dating to at least the 19th century when the International Committee of the Red Cross was formed (Dromi 2020). Development assistance in turn is a long-term intervention focused on such varied goals as poverty alleviation, economic growth, and state-building. It arose later, as part of the post-World War II international infrastructure (Chabbott 2003). This arrival of development ushered in a distinction between the two types of aid and beginning in the 1960s “most organizations that provided international assistance began to identify themselves with one or the other or created divisions within their offices” (Burde 2014: 31).

Importantly, education used to be anchored primarily in development. As the development regime consolidated, education became envisioned as a fundamental ingredient, bolstered by modernization and human capital theories (Fägerlind and Saha 1983; Chabbott 2003). In contrast, education was a marginal sector in humanitarian responses. As I explain below, the traditional humanitarian ethos was that relief was supposed to be apolitical; it delivered the necessities for survival and avoided socially transformative activities like education (Burde 2007). Of course, this

does not mean that EiE remained entirely unrecognized. The 1951 Refugee Convention noted refugees' right to education and several UN agencies were tasked with refugee education. But with few exceptions, early global refugee education initiatives were very limited, consisting of small-scale efforts toward self-help and post-secondary scholarships (Dryden-Peterson 2011).

Things changed dramatically around the turn of the 21st century, with the consolidation of a distinct global field dedicated to EiE (Kagawa 2005; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; Lerch and Buckner 2018; Russell et al. 2020). We can observe change along several dimensions:

Networking and advocacy. A critical event was the establishment of the “Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies” (INEE), formed in 2000 by representatives from development and humanitarian organizations to facilitate advocacy and cooperation around EiE. As I recount later, the INEE built on earlier initiatives and was formally launched at a Global Consultation on EiE held in Geneva in 2000. Once established, the INEE made great strides in moving EiE onto the global agenda, especially by developing the first humanitarian standards for education, discussed below. The Network has been at the forefront of EiE advocacy, training, and evidence-gathering and drew a diverse set of agencies and individuals around the world into the endeavor (Mendizabal and Hearn 2011; Lerch 2019). The Network’s phenomenal growth is depicted in Figure 2. By the end of 2018 it had a membership of over 15,000 individuals in 190 countries, based at various international organizations as well as national non-governmental organizations and governments, universities and schools, and the private sector.

[Figure 2]

Standard- and norm-setting. Along with networking and advocacy, recent decades have seen the emergence of global normative frameworks and standards defining education as a

humanitarian need. In 1997, the humanitarian community had launched the “SPHERE” handbook to establish minimum standards in core humanitarian areas, which excluded education. To remedy the situation, the newly formed INEE developed humanitarian standards for education, first published in 2004 and revised in 2010 (INEE 2004; 2010). The standards defined “best practices” and a minimum level of education to be provided when responding to emergencies. They were widely disseminated and earned EiE unprecedented recognition (Bromley and Andina 2010).

Moreover, in 2010 the UN General Assembly passed a historic Resolution protecting the right to education in emergencies and calling for the inclusion of education in all stages of the humanitarian response (UNGA 2010). Subsequent years brought additional frameworks. In 2015, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack launched the Safe Schools Declaration, signed by 103 countries to date (GCPEA 2020). And in 2016, UN member states signed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, setting in motion the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, which dedicated two clauses to refugee education (GEM Report Team 2019).

Funding and assistance. Recent decades have also seen change in terms of EiE funding. Many donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs have increased their attention to EiE as advocates have pushed for more funding (NRC and Save the Children 2015). Examples range from Save the Children’s “Rewrite the Future” campaign, to USAID’s inclusion of education in conflict and crisis as one of three priorities in a recent strategy, to a renewed focus on education in UNHCR. There are many more examples, with EiE moving up on many agencies’ portfolios. Most significantly, the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 launched the “Education Cannot Wait” (ECW) fund, a novel global fund aiming to reach “all crisis-affected children and youth with safe, free and quality education by 2030” (Agenda for Humanity 2016). This heightened attention to EiE in agencies’ assistance programs has been reflected in growing funding. Figure 3 shows the

increase in humanitarian funding for education since 2000, which by 2019 had reached almost 700 million USD (Financial Tracking Service 2020c).² Advocates rightly note that this represents a small proportion of humanitarian assistance and fluctuates considerably. And yet even the share of humanitarian funds going to education has increased: from 1.6% in 2000 (Financial Tracking Service 2020b) to almost 3% in 2019 (Financial Tracking Service 2020c).

Education has also been incorporated into the humanitarian coordination infrastructure. In 2006, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs established education as a core “cluster” in its emergency response system, after coming under pressure for excluding education when the system was created (Anderson and Hodgkin 2010). Subsequently, a global Education Cluster Unit was established in Geneva in 2008 to support national clusters.

[Figure 3]

Professionalization. Finally, recent years have seen a growing academic sub-field devoted to EiE topics. Figure 4 graphs over time trends in the proportion of pages examining EiE-related issues in selected comparative education journals and in the proportion of panels examining EiE-related issues at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) conference.³ For both, there is a clear increase. Moreover, since 2015 the INEE has published the peer-reviewed “Journal on Education in Emergencies,” dedicated to the publication of scholarly and practitioner work on EiE (INEE 2021). With an editorial office at New York University, the journal has published six volumes since its inception.

[Figure 4]

² See Figure 3 for source and measures.

³ See Figure 4 for source and measures.

Though isolated practices of emergency education have evidently existed for a while, recent decades have thus seen a remarkable expansion in world-level structures dedicated to EiE. How might we explain this dramatic shift?

Explaining the Change: Prior Perspectives

The literature offers several answers. One view is that attention to EiE resulted from local pressures, as displaced communities have long prioritized education, often setting up schools while humanitarians prioritized survival (Dryden-Peterson 2011). One explanation is that their demands for education pressured the international community to act, especially among the many needs that arose in the post-Cold War conflicts. Some scholars have argued that this era saw a shift in warfare, with proliferating civil wars and unprecedented civilian suffering and displacement (e.g., Kaldor 1999). These circumstances meant aid workers and agencies had to grapple with the provision of education in crisis, and – spurred by communities’ demands for education – began to pay greater attention to EiE (Dryden-Peterson 2011; 2016; Winthrop and Matsui 2013; Burde 2014).

A further explanation points to a changing humanitarian sector. After the Cold War, the humanitarian sector expanded (Fearon 2008) and moved closer toward development (Slim 2000; Barnett 2005). ‘Old’ humanitarian arguments built around political neutrality emphasized relief but without eliminating “the underlying causes that placed [people] at risk” (Barnett 2005: 724). During the 1990s, however, ‘new’ humanitarians became more influential, advocating a focus on root causes and a coupling of relief and development (Barnett 2005; 2011; Burde 2007). Several factors facilitated these changes: the apolitical approach was seen as protecting perpetrators of violence (Dromi 2020), the international community interpreted the wars of the 1990s as stemming from underdevelopment (Duffield 2001), and a weakening norm of state sovereignty facilitated

more extensive intervention (Finnemore 1996). The divide between development and humanitarianism has thus narrowed, allowing education to make headway on humanitarian terrain (Burde 2007). Indeed, the importance of bridging the relief-development gap has been a core issue for the EiE community (e.g., Mendenhall 2014).

Finally, scholars note the role of geopolitics. In the post-Cold War era, governments became increasingly involved in the humanitarian sector (Fearon 2008). Especially after 9/11, donors learned that “problems of violence and conflict in low-income countries may not end at the borders” and increased their assistance (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008: 475). Through this lens, broadening aid interventions in crisis zones are ultimately linked to security interests (Duffield 2001). In education, Novelli (2010) and others have compellingly situated the growing attention to education in crisis within hearts and minds campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond.

These arguments help explain the rise of EiE, but each of them also has blind spots. To begin, emergency-related needs and affected communities’ emphasis on education were not unique to the post-Cold War era. Refugees were already setting up their own schools in the 1960s and 1970s (see Dryden-Peterson 2011: 13). Moreover, the idea that warfare changed radically in the 1990s has been contested. The shift toward civil wars began earlier, much of the 1990s saw a decline in warfare (Fearon and Laitin 2003), and civilian suffering was not unprecedented (Melander et al. 2009). This is not to say that the wars of the 1990s did not matter; they indeed captivated the international community. But partly this is a story about changing interpretations, with intensifying human rights discourse shifting how war was interpreted (Finnemore 1996). For instance, while emergency-affected communities had long demanded education, these demands carried more weight amidst the post-Cold War ethos of EFA, when “more people globally wanted and expected education” (Dryden-Peterson 2011: 16).

Second, while the broadened humanitarian paradigm opened space for EiE, it is perhaps less helpful in understanding why the issue gained traction in the education community. After all, reluctance to EiE came not only from ‘old’ humanitarians (Anderson and Hodgkin 2010), but also from divisions in education, with development organizations sometimes reluctant or unable to support the issue (see e.g. Sommers 2002: 13/14). Part of my argument is that such resistance lost legitimacy within the EFA rights-based frame. In fact, some scholars have argued that the narrowing relief-development gap is linked to the “(re)discovery in the 1990s that both humanitarianism and development are ‘rights-based’” (Slim 2000: 493). This rights-based approach expanded humanitarian conceptions of human needs at the same time as it linked development objectives to the human individual, narrowing the gap between the two sectors.

Lastly, foreign aid is obviously linked to geopolitics and donor interests have surely colonized EiE in some contexts. And yet not all EiE responses occur in geopolitical hotspots nor is it clear that the impetus for the field came from donors. Instead, the most critical initial advocates for EiE at the global level seem to have been networks like the INEE and individual aid workers who lobbied sometimes-reluctant agencies (Mendizabal and Hearn 2011).

In sum, these explanations certainly help us understand the rise of EiE as a global concern, but their limitations make space for my additional explanation, to which I now turn.

Education for All: Providing Cultural Meanings and Workspaces for Education in Emergencies

My tracing of the history of the EiE field revealed that there were numerous interconnections with EFA conferences, especially early on. I here chronicle these linkages and then turn to theorizing them within my conceptual framework.

Beginnings: Proliferating Initiatives during the 1990s

To begin, it is worth noting that a history of EiE cooperation attempts precedes the field's recent consolidation (Secondary Source 6). For instance, in the 1980s already, a nonprofit dedicated to long distance learning had developed plans for an inter-agency body for refugee education, but a lack of funding stifled the plans (Secondary Source 1).

Jomtien helped provide the impetus for another attempt. The conference itself was barely concerned with EiE. While a few exhibits examined relevant issues, none of the main roundtables were explicitly focused on the topic (Document 4). And although a lack of education in crisis zones was beginning to emerge as an obstacle to EFA, the engagement with the issue was limited. The Jomtien Declaration mentions “war, occupation, [and] civil strife” as “daunting problems” and the Framework for Action lists education for refugees as a priority (Document 1, p.1 and p.18). Similarly, the Jomtien background document notes the needs of refugees and displaced children (Document 2) and sporadic mentions of EiE issues appear in the reports from EFA follow-up meetings in 1991 and 1993 (Documents 8 and 9).

Importantly, however, the conference galvanized another attempt to develop inter-agency cooperation for EiE. As a follow-up to Jomtien, representatives from UNHCR and the World University Service convened a UN-NGO Consultation on the Provision and Co-ordination of Education for Refugees in Geneva in 1990 (Secondary Sources 5 and 6). The Consultation led to the revision of UNHCR's guidelines for refugee education and plans to develop inter-agency coordinating mechanisms and a working group. But the plans soon ran into problems, due to the travel costs of meetings, staff rotation, and the passing of a key participant (Secondary Source 1).

Around the same time, however, several loosely connected inter-agency initiatives focused on EiE began to develop. In 1994, a so-called “RAPID ED” working group was formed as part of

a group based at the International Council for Distance Education, Oslo, and hosted a series of meetings on educational emergency responses (Secondary Source 7). A meeting in Washington in 1995 would prove particularly important. It ultimately led to the creation of an online “information repository on education in transition and crisis situations” including materials to help guide education work in such settings as well as email lists of relevant professionals: the Global Information Network in Education (GINIE) project (Document 40). This was a precursor to later EiE structures: a few years later, as I outline below, the INEE would take over and build on the website and information repository created by the GINIE project.

The mid-decade EFA meeting in Amman in 1996 provided an opportunity to systematize some of these intensifying but ad hoc efforts. In advance of the meeting, UNESCO-IBE organized an Inter-Agency Consultation Meeting on Education for Humanitarian Assistance and Refugees, with a view toward producing an interagency paper that could be presented at Amman (Document 36). The consultation reaffirmed the Jomtien Declaration, noting that “all children, including those affected by emergencies, have a right to education” (Document 35) and facilitated the creation of an inter-agency working group to co-ordinate and improve educational efforts in emergencies (Document 40; Secondary Source 1). Importantly, the group linked up with the GINIE project to collaborate on online resources and a listserv focused on EiE (Document 40). Following this flurry of activity, the EFA meeting in Amman devoted one of its open dialogue sessions to “delivering basic education in situations of crisis and transition” (Document 11) and incorporated these concerns into the Amman Affirmation (Document 10; Secondary Source 8).

In tandem with these EFA activities, this period saw accelerating foci on children’s rights, linked to the CRC. This attention to child rights also catalyzed several initiatives relevant to EiE. In 1996, a landmark UN report was published on “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,”

which recommended that “donors should extend the boundaries of emergency funding to include support for education” (Machel 1996: 59). As a follow-up, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children Norway cooperated with UNHCR to host the Oslo/Hadeland Conference on the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Complex Emergencies in 1998 (Document 38). EiE featured extensively at the conference, which issued a declaration on “Principles of Education in Emergencies and Difficult Circumstances” (Document 38).⁴ A follow-up workshop on “Basic Education in Emergencies and Transition Situations” took place at the World Bank in 1999 in Washington, DC, co-sponsored by several organizations (Secondary Sources 4 and 12). Its goal was to gather EiE experiences and “to establish a network of groups and professionals” (Secondary Source 2). The meeting assembled 120 representatives of UN agencies, NGOs, and donors (Secondary Source 4), participants subscribed their email addresses to a new listserv (Secondary Source 12), and the GINIE project disseminated workshop documents (Secondary Source 3). Again, this was a precursor to later structures; as described below, the INEE later took over the collected email addresses (Secondary Source 12).

The 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar: Consolidation and Launch of the INEE

Evidently, the 1990s saw a proliferation of loosely related EiE initiatives, several of which happened in the context of EFA. But the most striking overlaps between EFA and the development of the EiE field came with the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar.

In advance of Dakar, a group of UN and NGO agencies were invited to prepare a “Thematic Study on Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis” to review the current EiE situation. The study emphasized that “education is the right of the child, and not only a privilege; this means

⁴ EiE was also discussed at the ‘International Conference on War-Affected Children’, another children’s rights conference, held in Winnipeg, Canada, in 2000.

right in the early days of a disaster or after becoming a refugee or being internally displaced” and put forth several recommendations for promoting EiE as part of EFA (Document 16, p.1). Another thematic report on excluded children also dedicated entire sections to emergency-affected children (Document 17). Moreover, education issues in crisis zones were discussed extensively in the global synthesis of the pre-Dakar EFA assessments (Document 15).

At the Forum, a special strategy session was held on basic education in situations of emergency and crisis, attended by ministers of education and representatives from development and humanitarian agencies. The Dakar Framework for Action pledged to “meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability” (Document 12, p.9). In addition, one of twelve EFA strategies focused on “meeting the needs of education systems affected by conflict and instability” (GEM Report Team 2015: 35) and Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis was announced as one of nine EFA Flagship Initiatives (Document 19).

Crucially, a recommendation at Dakar was to formalize the ad hoc EiE working group arrangements developed over the preceding years (Document 41). After the forum, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNHCR therefore convened a Global Consultation on Education in Emergencies in Geneva in late 2000 (Document 39). The invitation letter noted the intimate connections between this consultation and Dakar:

“At Dakar, a Strategy Session was held on Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis. During that session, a recommendation was accepted that UNESCO, UNHCR, and UNICEF, the three UN agencies most closely involved in education work in situations of crisis, conflict and chronic instability, should convene a meeting to agree on mechanisms for improved collaboration at global, regional, and field level.” (Document 39, Annex I)

The Consultation was attended by around 90 participants, drawn from the three convening agencies and other NGOs, donors, and UN agencies (Document 39). It was here that the INEE was formally established to “promote access and completion of education of high quality for all persons

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affected by emergencies, crises, or chronic instability” (Document 39, p.26). Participants agreed that the Network would take over the website created by the GINIE project and the listserv that emerged from the 1999 meeting in Washington (Documents 39 and 42; Secondary Source 10). Other agreements concerned its leadership structure and task teams (Document 39).

Via this formal launch of the INEE, Dakar thus played an important role in helping to consolidate EiE activities at the global level. The INEE formalized, institutionalized, and in many ways continued the initiatives and relationships that had developed in the 1990s (Secondary Source 10) and served as a core inter-agency vehicle for realizing the EFA Flagship Initiative on EiE (Document 19). Overall, and as detailed earlier, the Network’s ambitious advocacy, standard-setting, and training activities were essential to moving EiE up on the global agenda.

Post-Dakar Developments

Before turning to an analysis of these interconnections between EFA and EiE, it is worth noting that EFA structures and discourses continued to serve as amplifiers for the EiE agenda, even beyond the early formative years. For instance, several EFA Monitoring reports examined EiE challenges (2011: “The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education” and 2019: “Migration, displacement, and education: building bridges, not walls”). Moreover, my review of reports/statements from the High-Level Group on EFA, which met almost annually from 2001 to 2011, and from the Global EFA Meetings in 2012 and 2014 found EiE-related issues raised in each reviewed document (for an example see Document 29, p.3). Also noteworthy is the strong focus on conflict-affected and fragile states that emerged in the Global Partnership for Education (see Menashy and Dryden-Peterson 2015).

EiE also featured prominently at the third major conference, held in Incheon in 2015. One of six thematic debates focused on “Education in Conflict and Crisis” and three side events examined relevant issues (Document 34). The Incheon Declaration contains substantial EiE discussions and recommends “significantly increasing support for education in humanitarian and protracted crises” (Document 32, p.v). It is also worth noting that a post-Incheon global conference, the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education for Development, helped support “Education Cannot Wait” (ECW), the new global fund for EiE. A main concern at the Summit was to examine possibilities for bridging humanitarian and development funding for education (Nicolai et al. 2015). Building on these and similar activities (including an INEE global consultation), the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit launched ECW (Secondary Source 11).

Even during this later period, EFA-related workspaces thus provided opportunities to highlight EiE issues. At this time, however, the field was becoming more established and EiE-specific workspaces became available, such as the INEE, the Global Education Cluster, and the Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, likely rendering EFA less significant.

Explaining the Connections: Leveraging EFA for EiE

The documented linkages between EiE and EFA are no coincidence. Instead, they show that global institutions can play important roles in legitimizing educational problems and activists seeking to gain recognition. Culturally, the connections reflect the fact that EFA rights-based frames provided a cultural context that was much more favorable to EiE than the state-centric logics that previously dominated international discourse. Most dramatically, older ideas of education as serving the national state provide a poor rationale for educating refugees in countries of first asylum, given uncertainties about their settlement (see Waters and LeBlanc 2005).

In contrast to such state-centric logics, the universality of human rights offers a powerful rationale for expanding access to EiE. It mandates the protection of education in any situation and makes this a global as well as national responsibility (Bromley and Andina 2010). The EFA rights-based framing thus provided important cultural material for EiE advocacy; over time, as chronicled above, EiE emerged as a main domain where the right to education was at risk, jeopardizing EFA. As highlighted throughout my account, EFA documents routinely invoke the idea of education as a human right in calling greater attention to EiE. This framing was certainly not unique to EFA but reflected the growing normative force of human rights in that era. Of special relevance is the CRC, which helped legitimize EFA and was evidently also important for EiE. My timeline shows that several EiE meetings during the 1990s were linked to children's rights. Still, EFA played a unique role in institutionalizing this rights-based framework in education. With the world ostensibly committed to education for all, EiE advocates could mount a compelling case that it was indefensible that millions of emergency-affected children missed out on an education.

Yet it is also clear from my account that education as a human right, *purely as an idea*, was not enough to catalyze attention to EiE. Rights-based conceptions of education have been globally defined since at least the UDHR. A main reason why EFA gave renewed energy to these long-standing notions is that it constructed an infrastructure that institutionalized this belief and helped authorize agents and activities seeking to turn the universal right to education into a reality. My analysis suggests that such EFA workspaces offered opportunities to advance the EiE initiatives that developed in the 1990s, a time when there were few global spaces dedicated to the issue. Several (though of course not all) of the early EiE meetings were related to EFA activity. The 1990 Consultation took place as a follow-up to Jomtien, the 1996 Consultation ahead of Amman, and the 2000 Consultation, where the INEE was launched, was a follow-up to Dakar. EiE advocates

apparently recognized the importance of using EFA to advance their cause, especially early on as the nascent field was seeking to gain traction.

The workspaces offered by Dakar were especially significant. Dakar officially embedded EiE within world agendas by focusing one of twelve EFA strategies on EiE and subsequently defining EiE as a Flagship Initiative. Even more crucially, it was at the EiE Consultation following Dakar that the INEE was launched, illustrating the role of global institutions in legitimating new actors. While the INEE continued prior initiatives, the embedding of its formal launch in EFA helped legitimate an initially small network with minimal resources. The Network itself stresses these connections: the 20-Year INEE Anniversary Report notes the phenomenal rise of EiE on global agendas and explains that “these changes date back to the 2000 World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, where INEE was conceptualized” (Secondary Source 11, p.7). I am not arguing that Dakar created the focus on EiE from scratch; momentum had evidently gathered through the working groups and meetings of the preceding years. Instead, my argument highlights the ways in which Dakar helped consolidate and affirm these efforts.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on neo-institutional theory, this article has examined how global institutions like EFA can support educational change. I have highlighted the possibilities for change emanating from EFA cultural messages, primarily the idea of education as a human right, as well as EFA workspaces, such as conferences, ancillary meetings, declarations, reports, and even new organizations. My case study revealed numerous links between intensifying global action for EiE and key EFA conferences, especially around Dakar, thus illustrating the role of EFA rights-based narratives and workspaces in scaffolding the EiE field.

I am not suggesting that EFA was the only factor that mattered. Many EiE developments – depicted in Figure 1 – were clearly unrelated to EFA, and the existing literature demonstrates that shifting patterns of crisis and local demands, an expanding humanitarian sector, and geopolitics also played their part. EFA did not determine the outcome, but it offered legitimacy and scaffolds that enhanced the possibility that EiE would gain traction.

The argument also does not imply that EFA concerns with EiE were inevitable. My account shows that the earliest EFA endeavors (Jomtien) were hardly concerned with EiE. Instead, the embedding of EiE within EFA is best seen as a slow and likely messy process whereby EiE advocates leveraged EFA cultural scripts and organizing platforms to push for greater attention to the issue, with EiE ultimately emerging as a key domain that had to be tackled if the world was serious about promoting education for all.

As with any study, mine has limitations. My documentary analysis does not provide insight into the ‘behind the scenes’ work surrounding events, which would need to be gathered by interviewing participants. It is also possible that my approach missed EiE initiatives and meetings that were not mentioned in my sources and documents. In that sense my analysis is exploratory, following similarly “conceptual and exploratory” recent analyses of EFA (Tikly 2017: 23). I am also unable to determine the relative importance of EFA vis-à-vis the other factors shaping the rise of this field. I suspect that different forces matter for different agencies, which could be illuminated via comparative organizational analyses. For instance, rights narratives were likely less significant for donor agencies (and funding patterns), which are especially vulnerable to geopolitics.

Nevertheless, my argument suggests fresh ways of thinking about and acting within global structures like EFA. Perhaps paradoxically, a key insight is that their loosely coupled structure can be a strength. Global institutions are only rarely characterized by tightly coupled pathways linking

goals to outcomes. This can make it difficult to translate goals into real change, but it can facilitate unexpected action around new issues. Improving access to EiE was not originally an EFA goal (as suggested by its absence in Jomtien). And yet the loose structure of EFA allowed for the EiE mobilization to become integrated into EFA proceedings. If EFA had been more tightly structured, such “hijacking” might not have been possible.

This insight complicates our tendency to critique the narrowness of global education goals, which privilege some ends over others. This does happen, but my paper suggests that researchers and practitioners can attend to the opposite as well: ways in which global institutions (can) get stretched over time, as advocates appropriate cultural meanings and workspaces to bring new issues into the fold. Looking ahead, for instance, the global Education 2030 Agenda certainly fixates the world on “sustainable development.” Still, the indeterminate nature of global institutions indicates that the education SDG4 and the various workspaces dedicated to it may be quite pliable, allowing advocates to bring issues into the framework that were initially excluded.

A further insight concerns the interplay between culture and other institutional structures. On one hand, my analysis indicates that cultural meanings can transform the possibilities for educational change. For instance, the shift toward sustainable development in Education 2030 will likely legitimate issues that previously had less resonance. But I also show that cultural meanings do not automatically propel progress. Education as a human right is an old idea, but its force was strengthened when it became institutionalized in EFA. The general insight is that institutional workspaces can sustain cultural meanings and sharpen their teeth. Any given initiative may be unsuccessful, but the build-up of global organization and discourse still matters. While some Education 2030 plans will surely fail, for instance, the expansion in sustainable development workspaces will likely provide scaffolds for new educational issues and movements.

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Tables and Figures



Figure 1. Illustrative Timeline of EiE-Related Initiatives and Relevant EFA events

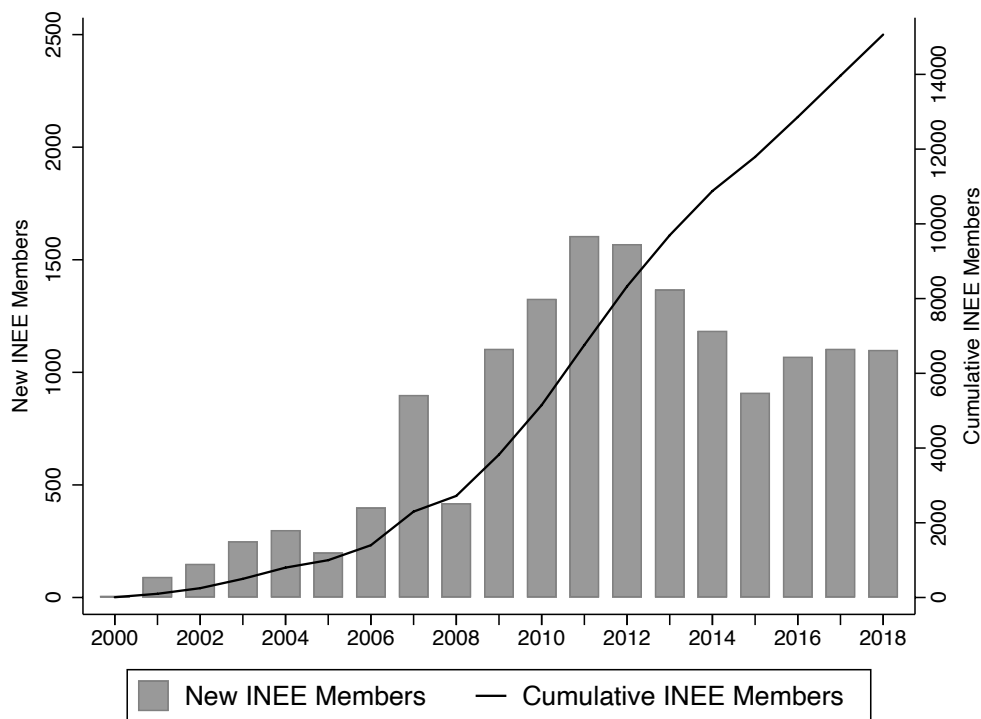


Figure 2. Membership Growth Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2000-2018

Notes: Data from 2009-2014 were kindly provided by the INEE secretariat from the Members Database. Data for the years before are from INEE (2015) and for 2015-2018 from INEE (2018).

Please note the different scales for the two y-axes.

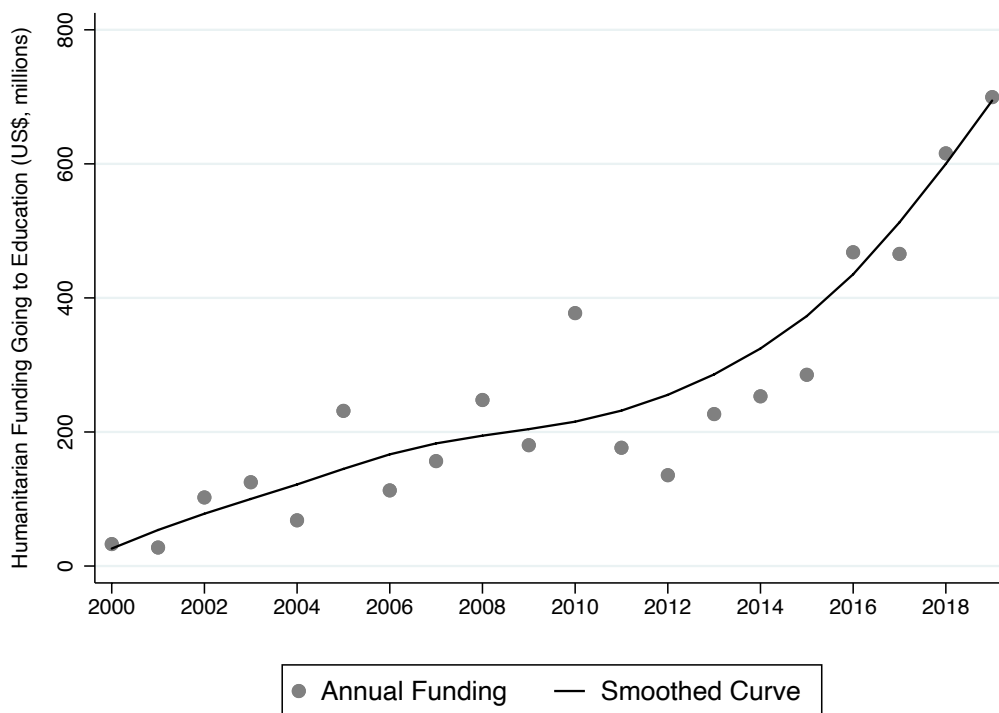


Figure 3. Increases in Humanitarian Funding for Education, 2000-2019

Notes: Data are from Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (2020a). FTS is managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It tracks humanitarian funding flows submitted by government donors, UN-administered funds, UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors, including the private sector. The flows in the figure include commitments and contributions going to the education sector. FTS considers these two flow types as funding; pledges are excluded (see Financial Tracking Service 2012). The numbers likely underestimate actual flows, as the data source does not allow me to disaggregate multisectoral assistance, significant amounts of reported assistance did not specify a sector, and the numbers do not include development funding channeled to education in crisis settings.



Figure 4. Education in Emergencies in select International Comparative Education (ICE) Journals and at the Annual Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference

Notes: The line for “ICE Journals” presents five-year averages of the proportion of pages dedicated to EiE-related topics across an illustrative set of International Comparative Education (ICE) Journals: *Comparative Education Review* (founded in 1957), *Compare* (founded in 1975), *Comparative Education* (founded in 1964), and the *International Journal of Educational Development* (founded in 1981). For each journal, I combed through each year to identify all articles related to EiE by reviewing titles/abstracts for foci on educational issues during or after conflicts, disasters, displacement, and similar. I then summed the page lengths of all EiE articles across all journals for each year to get a measure of the total number of pages dedicated to EiE that year. To standardize this measure, I then summed the page lengths of all articles across all journals for each year and divided the total number of EiE pages that year by that sum.

The line for “CIES Conferences” presents five-year averages of the proportion of panels dedicated to EiE-related topics at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference. I obtained conference programs from the Kent State University Library Special Collections, kindly digitized by Cara Gilgenbach. The conferences began in the 1950s, but programs were available on an annual basis starting in 1970, so that is my starting point. Again, I went through each program by hand and identified all panels where one or more presentations related to EiE by reviewing presentation titles for foci on educational issues during or after conflicts, disasters, displacement, and similar. I then summed the number of all EiE-related panels for each year. To standardize this measure, I then counted the total number of panels in a given conference year and divided the number of EiE-related panels that year by that total.

Online Appendix: List of Documents and Secondary Sources, with Document Key

EFA Documents

World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, 1990:

- [Document 1] Secretariat of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (ICFEFA). 1990. *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*. Paris: UNESCO.
- [Document 2] Secretariat of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (ICFEFA). 1990. *Meeting Basic Learning Needs: A Vision for the 1990s. Background Document: World Conference on Education for All*. New York: UNICEF.
- [Document 3] World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA). 1990. *Proceedings*. No publisher listed.
- [Document 4] World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) Inter-Agency Commission. 1990. *Final Report: World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs*. New York: UNICEF.
- [Document 5] World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA). 1991. *Education for All: Purpose and Context. Roundtable Themes I. Prepared by Sheila M. Haggis*. Paris: UNESCO.
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- [Document 7] World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA). 1991. *Education for All: The Requirements. Roundtable Themes III. Prepared by Douglas M. Windham*. Paris: UNESCO.

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- [Document 8] International Consultative Forum on Education for All (ICFEFA). 1991. "International Consultative Forum on Education for All: Paris 4-6 December 1991. Final Report." No publisher listed.

Second Meeting of International Consultative Forum on EFA in New Delhi, 1993:

- [Document 9] International Consultative Forum on Education for All (ICFEFA). 1993. "Quality Education for All: Final Report Second Meeting New Delhi 8-10 September 1993, International Consultative Forum on Education for All." Paris: UNESCO.

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