Transactional Radio Instruction

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Improving Educational Outcomes for Children
in Conflict Zones

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This book is dedicated to the children all over the world whose lives and whose education have been disrupted by the violence of adult conflicts.

Foreword

Transactional Radio Instruction: Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Conflict Zones is a very important addition to the literature on education in conflict zones, and in educationally impoverished areas of the world.

Project TELA (Technology Enhanced Learning for All) was launched in Yola, Nigeria, home of the American University of Nigeria, at the height of the Boko Haram crisis in Northeast Nigeria. With funding from USAID, the project was prompted by the sudden movement of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people fleeing to the relative safety of Yola to escape an expanding Boko Haram insurgency. These people generally lived in the community of Yola rather than in the camps established by the Nigerian government and international donors. Many of those who fled were able to benefit from a unique partnership between the American University of Nigeria and a local peace organization, the Adamawa Peace Initiative, which the university had earlier helped to create. This initiative led to the development of several programs, including Feed and Read, and Peace through Sports. These two initiatives not only kept people alive, but kept youth from joining Boko Haram.

This book highlights TELA, a remarkable initiative that helped displaced children and other disadvantaged kids to keep up with, or in some cases begin, their studies. In a very poor region, TELA engaged the whole community in an effort to improve reading and math. Students, faculty, and staff at the American University of Nigeria prepared the radio-based

and digital lessons while people from the community were trained as volunteer facilitators and assigned learning centers and groups of "students" to supervise. These broadcasts and mobile classroom visits by volunteers were critically important in improving reading and math scores. In a country with a severe teacher shortage and a region where hundreds of schools have been forced to shut down due to violence, TELA's results offer hope that basic widespread literacy can be achieved rapidly and inexpensively, and attitudes toward learning can be improved. It was a huge community effort and it worked. This book documents how it was done.

Professors Jacob and Ensign are to be congratulated not only on this important book, but on the work they did in Yola, which I witnessed firsthand. Dr. Jacob led the TELA project which improved both the reading skills and the lives of thousands of children. Dr. Ensign led both the American University at this time and cofounded and led the Adamawa Peace Initiative. Community-based projects like these provide workable models of how local people and outside supporters can help communities survive, and thrive, in conflict zones around the world.

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PREFACE

Schools are one of the first institutional casualties of war. It is a lot worse when the principal belligerent is ideologically opposed to education. Pupils and teachers, school buildings, laboratories, and libraries, all become the targets of a senseless war.

This has been the tragic case with the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria—a war that has been going on since 2009, and for many years largely ignored by Western media, governments, and policy-makers. It took an attack on a girls' secondary school in the sleepy rural town of Chibok to arouse short-lived international outrage and interest in the violence. Chibok has since remained a byword for the Boko Haram insurgency, and the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped by the insurgents have become the poster-casualties of the war. But beyond the sad faces of the Chibok schoolgirls lies a much more bizarre story.

The Boko Haram insurgency has brutally disrupted education to its very core, not only in Nigeria but also in the broader Lake Chad region—including Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. It will take time, several years if not several decades, for the region to recover from the attack on education. Millions of children have been uprooted from their homes and schools, thousands of teachers have fled, never to return, and thousands of schools have been shut down and often destroyed. Some will never be reopened. Although many displaced persons have now returned home, many displaced children have not returned to school, for their schools no

longer exist. Countless others have lost valuable years and have struggled to cope after being reinserted into school.

This situation is not peculiar to the Boko Haram insurgency. Extremist-inspired violence now accounts for more conflicts around the world than any other cause. Unfortunately, despite a plethora of military and non-military interventions, such violence has become increasingly bold and frequent and is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Education, particularly at the primary level, will continue to be one of the worst social casualties. Providing education for displaced children in situations where schools have been shut down by violent conflicts must draw stronger interest from academics, policymakers, and practitioners, particularly those interested in development and in peace and conflict studies. The responsibility for educating young people during complex emergencies must not be left solely to governments: the capabilities and reach of the state in such circumstances are already severely limited, and unfortunately, education is typically under-prioritized by governments during complex emergencies.

Rather than reinventing the wheel every time we are faced with the crises of education in emergencies, it would be prudent to reflect on what has been done in the past, to see what lessons have already been learnt, and what challenges successfully met. In responding to complex emergencies, however, few have the time or resources to survey the field to look for similar previous cases and interventions. Even when there is time for such a survey, detailed case studies from the field, case studies that provide useable templates for educational interventions, are rare.

This was our predicament when we were faced with the Boko Haram crises at the height of the insurgency in 2015–2016—a time when Boko Haram was capturing territory after territory, including some of the largest towns surrounding our home, Yola, in Northeast Nigeria. At the time, we both worked at the new American University of Nigeria—educating some of Africa's most promising youth.

In the midst of our humanitarian crisis just outside our walls, we did not have the time to survey literature and case study reports for templates and models that we could use in providing some form of education for the tens of thousands of displaced children who had poured into Yola from neighboring towns and villages fleeing the Boko Haram. Even had we the time, there isn't much out there in terms of practical guidelines, templates, or instruments. We needed advice based on real-world experience upon which to draw in order to develop a program of educational intervention for the displaced children, particularly for the girls. These were

children who had been denied access to education not just by the insurgency, but also by religion and culture. The challenges we faced seemed insurmountable.

So we devised our own intervention. It drew heavily on our university—on the scholarship, creativity, and skills of talented faculty, staff, and students. It also drew on the commitment and passion of community members with whom the university had energetically fostered cooperative relations, on local religious leaders and on colleagues abroad who contributed their time and knowledge. All helped us build an educational intervention that was incredibly effective, as evidenced by the results we witnessed within a very short period of time.

This book seeks to provide a model for those working in education in similar emergencies.

Using radio and mobile tablets, we deployed a program of intervention that sought to ignite and sustain an interest in education, strengthen literacy and numeracy skills, and fill the gaps left by the forced shutdown of schools. Within weeks, over 22,000 pupils had enrolled at the 750 learning centers we created in Yola and its environs. In six months, these children improved their literacy and numeracy skills by an average of almost 100% vis-a-vis baseline scores on standardized early grade reading assessments and early grade math assessments respectively. Beyond the assessment data, there were many heart-warming stories that continue to inspire us all.

This book tells the story of the Technology Enhanced Learning for All (TELA) project implemented with funding from USAID between 2015 and 2016 in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The book is a tribute to the faculty, students, staff, learning center facilitators, and community and religious leaders who contributed to the project, and to the thousands of eager students who showed up week after week at our makeshift learning centers. It is also a tribute to the tens of thousands more who joined the programs remotely from hard-to-reach areas via radio.

The conceptual parts of the book describe the Transactional Radio Instruction (TRI) model used in the project. In the absence of schools and teachers, a model of radio instruction that challenges pupils to imagine, engage, and learn is absolutely necessary. A lot has been written about Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) since it was developed by scholars at Stanford University and deployed in hard-to-reach areas of Nicaragua in the early 1970s. However, IRI was designed principally to support teachers within a classroom context; it is severely limited when seeking to get

often traumatized pupils to engage, imagine, and learn in the absence of a classroom teacher. By necessity, we developed the TRI approach specifically for societies where there are no teachers or schools, and where there is widespread apathy, disillusionment, and antipathy toward education.

Building on prior research, TRI aims not only at teaching literacy and numeracy but also at transforming behavior and creating a love for learning. Anchored principally on a constructivist approach to learning, TRI recognizes learning to be a social process and thus seeks to forge a more sophisticated interaction between instruction and the lived experiences of learners. It does this using sound pedagogy, stories, songs, and synchronized workbooks.

What follows is a distillation of this TRI model, how it was developed, how we used it in the TELA program, and how it can be duplicated and deployed. But first, we provide some background and context to education in Nigeria and how we worked to push the frontiers of education in Northeast Nigeria against a brutal insurgency. We tell how, at a time of immense turmoil and chaos, we mobilized youth, women, academics, community, and religious leaders to form an unlikely bulwark against the ravages of one of the most destructive extremist ideologies of the twenty-first century.

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Acknowledgements

This book is our analysis of programs devised and delivered by so many people that a full list acknowledging everyone is all but impossible. Our efforts in Nigeria were collective in the best sense of that word.

Nevertheless, it would be inexcusable not to single out at least some of those who were indispensable for our success.

Our special thanks, then, to AUN faculty and staff members Dr. Fidelis NdehChe, Dr. Grace Malgwi, Audu Liman, Kathi Hamler, Lilianne Ayuktabe, Esi Quao, and Joseph Oladimeji. They were joined by graduate Interns Kene Nwagbo and Zamiyat Abubakar and Youth Corps member Glory Elijah. Special thanks to our radio producer Gideon Musa, music producer Benjamin Yakubu, and videographer Obinna Okoma. As one of our most important funders, USAID was represented by Program Officer—Education in Emergencies Nafisa Ado, and led by Mission Director Mike Harvey. The enthusiasm, expertise, generosity, and goodwill they all brought to our efforts continue to inspire us to this day. AUN was founded by His Excellency Atiku Abubakar and without his generous support for AUN, none of our work would have been possible.

Nor would this have been possible without the hard work of our many AUN students who took the Community Development (CDV) course "Literacy Using Radio" and then pitched in, or without the many volunteer Learning Center facilitators whose only concern was that the children of Nigeria have a brighter future.

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