

# Field Notes

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## The Rapid Social Response Trust Fund supports a resilience approach to evidence-based policy making

*“Central America and Caribbean Protection of Youth Vulnerable to Violence and Conflict” was a year-long knowledge exchange project supported by The World Bank’s Rapid Social Response (RSR) Trust Fund (February 2012-March 2013). Focusing on the education sector, the project used a resilience approach to address evidence needs on the complex and multivariate risks of violence and the knowledge gaps for relevant and effective response, especially for vulnerable children and youth.*

A resilience lens in education systems seeks to identify the assets and opportunities in difficult contexts to better respond to the adversities that affect schools. It also points to the role that education (and other relevant sectors, such as family and child protection) can play in reducing risks and mitigating exposure of children and youth to them. In violence affected contexts, resilience findings can support a policy dialogue on response, protection and prevention strategies and programs.

In Central America and the Caribbean, the RSR project’s approach was to work with local researchers to build in-country capacity for generating evidence that could contribute to the design and implementation of education policies and strategies to prevent and reduce violence, and to mitigate its impact on children and youth. Applying a resilience lens and drawing from a comprehensive literature review, three “Violence Resilience Research Skills Workshops” were designed. Over a period of 8 months, more than 20 researchers from five Central American and Caribbean universities were trained in how to conduct resilience research. The first workshop took place in Guatemala in March 2012, the second in Nicaragua in May 2012, and



## Violence in Central America and the Caribbean

*Violent internal conflict shook Central America most prominently throughout the 1980s.*

Nicaragua finally negotiated peace in 1998, and El Salvador and Guatemala signed their Peace Accords in 1992 and 1996, respectively. As post-conflict societies, the expectations were for equitable opportunities and long-lasting peace. However, in the post-conflict period new forms of violence emerged in the form of extremely violent youth gangs and organized crime, affecting especially children and youth in poor, marginalized and vulnerable communities. In Guatemala for example—a country with the 4th highest chronic malnutrition rate in the world and more than 50 percent of its population below the poverty line—homicide rates among both youth victims and perpetrators have been on the rise. The World Bank compared the number of homicides between Spain and Central America, both with an approximate population of 40 million: in 2006 Spain registered 336 murders, while Central America registered 14,257 (almost 40 a day). In 2005, a UNDP-financed study estimated that the annual cost of violence in El Salvador was 1.7 billion (or 11.5 percent of GDP). A law enforcement approach, alone, has not been sufficient to stop the tide of growing violence and its effect on children and youth. Nor has the education sector’s comparative advantage been fully understood in terms of its contribution to protection and longer term prevention of violence, alongside other sectors.

the final CREA (Conflicto y la Resiliencia Educativa) conference in October 2012, in Honduras. The workshops supported the implementation of five locally led research studies in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Colombia. Progress feedback from these studies was presented at the final CREA conference, with additional participants from Guatemala and Haiti. The studies are being published in the World Bank's Education Resilience webpage ([www.worldbank.org/education/resilience](http://www.worldbank.org/education/resilience)).

We present here some of the lessons learned in this innovative RSR project linking emergent evidence, that of resilience, to a chronic problem in the region: gang and youth violence.

**Resilience research contributions to gang and youth violence prevention and impact mitigation in Central America and the Caribbean vulnerable children and youth.**

Current research on gang and youth violence in Central America and the Caribbean provides limited policy and intervention options for managing its impact on education systems. Available studies tend to take place at the macro level and focus on the negative impacts of insecurity and criminality and are directed towards the implementation of punitive actions. In the face of

these quickly evolving realities on the ground, resilience research offers a new approach to close existing research-policy gaps.

Resilience is an interactive process between individuals at risk and their environment. Through this dynamic process, individuals seek to make sense and find purpose in spite of the adversities lived. It implies seeking well-being and some level of control in such difficult contexts. Overall, children and youth affected by violence and other adversities search for connection with others, for care, commitment and accountability. These inherent resilience needs can be expressed in either socially acceptable or sanctioned ways. In Central America, for example, many youth seek a sense of belonging, identity and control in gang membership.

Understanding this dynamic resilience perspective can offer governments and organizations in Central America and the Caribbean more opportunities to intervene and better support children and youth living in the chronic state of violence in the region. Especially, relevant and contextually appropriate education services, informed by a resilience perspective, can help vulnerable children and youth navigate the ever present risks. A resilience perspective can also help governments create the conditions for social justice



The **Rapid Social Response (RSR) Program** is a multi-donor endeavor to help the world's poorest countries to build effective social protection and labor systems that safeguard poor and vulnerable people against severe shocks and crises. RSR has been generously supported by the Russian Federation, Norway, the United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden.



**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.



**Workshop on impact evaluation for risk and resilience contexts**

and satisfy basic needs necessary for the well-being of youth, their families and communities.

### **Helping to close the evidence-policy gaps on youth violence prevention: a regional community of practice on resilience and mixed-methods research skills youth.**

The RSR project had several outputs, but three major achievements stood out.

- 1** A Central America and Caribbean community of practice made up of researchers interested in the study of violence, resilience and education
- 2** The design and implementation of training on mixed-methods research on violence and education resilience
- 3** Regional conferences for knowledge exchange

**Community of Practice.** The RSR project intended to harness the inherent value of a regional process of learning, knowledge sharing and capacity development. To this end, several workshops took place over the course of the year to bring together and subsequently consolidate a network of actors researching and working on education resilience in the region; these were Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and the Caribbean Coast of Colombia, with representatives from Haiti joining the process in the later stages for the final CREA conference.

In addition, this exercise supported the creation of tools and the systematization of a process for undertaking locally grounded research to influence public policy and the delivery of pertinent education resilience focused interventions. the creation of tools and the systematization of a process for undertaking locally grounded research to influence public policy and the delivery of pertinent education resilience focused interventions.

**Mixed-Methods Research Skills.** The main objective of the RSR project was to contribute knowledge and evidence to foster the role of the education sector in the protection of children and youth from violence. To achieve this, the project team supported the capacity development of twenty local researchers from the Central American and Caribbean region through the two workshops mentioned above.

The first workshop in Guatemala presented the conceptual and theoretical foundations of violence prevention and resilience, and the second training in Nicaragua introduced a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) resilience research approach to help country research teams to design their own in-country violence and education resilience studies. Today the skills gained are being directly applied to the production of local mixed-method research projects that address varied yet contextually relevant aspects of education related risk and resilience.

**Regional Education Resilience Conferences.** The RSR project supported the first regional conference on violence and education resilience (called CREA), held in Honduras from October 25th-26th. It generated attention to the role of education in protecting youth from violence and in education contributions to prevent the escalation of violence in society emphasizing the following:

- ➔ Promoting the positive resilience mechanisms present among children and youth living in contexts of adversity and linking these to available social services and protection activities;
- ➔ Understanding the contribution of coordinated efforts across social sectors to transform the roots of violence towards peace in communities and schools;
- ➔ Uncovering innovative and available ways to use and adapt education services

## **Risks facing children and young people in Central America and the Caribbean**

While the experience of children and young people differs by context and country, the RSR supported resilience-led studies undertaken revealed several commonalities. In addition to the documented increased in violence exposure, other risks include social exclusion, lack of identity and sense of belonging, the legacy of past conflict and post-conflict societies, intra-family violence, and a proliferation of involvement in criminal and illicit activities in the absence of other socioeconomic opportunities.

Nonetheless, most youth affected by violence maintained an education-related purpose (they wanted to complete their studies and remain in school); many schools and teachers provided a safe space from street violence (which was explicitly recognized by students); and the participation of parents and community members in schools was stated as an asset by the various study participants.

In terms of education system support, recommendations included the need for policies to explicitly recognize the role and contributions of education systems to prevent chronic violence and mitigate its impact on education communities, and to address the combined academic, socioemotional and violence protection needs of children and youth.

in crisis and emergency, and incorporate relevant innovations into the long-term development of education systems.

This initial regional conference on violence and education resilience has already impacted other similar activities. For example, in June 2013, the Inter-American Development Bank

(IDB) conducted a second conference focused on flexible education modalities for youth and a resilience lens to make these modalities relevant in violence affected contexts. An alliance between the World Bank and IDB has been formed around the theme of education resilience in the Central American region.

## What have we gained from the RSR process?

Findings from the implementation of this project cover both content related issues (through the finding of the education resilience studies supported by this RSR project) and aspects of using a resilience approach and being engaged in a capacity building process.

### *Learning about resilience in the region.*

Preliminary progress reports of their resilience case studies were presented at the CREA conference and included the following findings:

➔ Criminalization, the current response to gang violence, has changed many dynamics in schools. Teachers report experiencing fear and feeling overwhelmed by the violence. Schools currently have few coping mechanisms regarding gang violence, and the only solutions seen are criminalization and the management of violence prevention only by security forces. In many cases, actors do not see a role for school communities in

violence prevention, reduction and impact mitigation. These traditional models need to be challenged and unorthodox approaches to service provision considered.

➔ Understanding and assessing the particular context of violence was found to be of crucial importance for all studies. Vulnerable groups differed in their needs and resilient responses.

➔ Hidden resilience in youth and education communities was found across a variety of the case studies, in some instances against all expectations. For example, youth involved in gangs still attend school, since they maintain hope that education would provide them with a more positive life alternative. Parents, especially mothers, are present in schools and are a source of socio-emotional support to students and school staff. These examples of high resilience potential suggests there are still important opportunities for intervening and ensuring schooling



**Facilitator**

**Martha Laverde**  
from The World Bank  
office in Colombia

is made more relevant for youth in contexts of adversity.

➔ Among the key factors found for promoting resilience among students were setting goals and dreams related to their education; celebrating achievements and providing positive reinforcement; promoting self-esteem among vulnerable students; and focusing on both the most vulnerable students but also on the entire education community by stimulating families and promoting non-violent relations in school. Understanding students' family context was especially noted as crucial since family related adversities affected the classroom environment and students' patterns of behavior and attitudes in school. Aligning school access, teaching and learning, and management to these needs was a key priority.

➔ Relationships with supportive adults were also critical for resilience - more often than not, this meant teachers who could provide important emotional support alongside the learning process. Teachers offered



this support in both explicit and implicit ways. However, they in turn required support to be able to do this effectively. Teachers themselves are also affected by the adverse contexts in which they live and work – something that should be better taken into account in teacher training, management and support policies, and education system strategies overall.

### **Learning about the research process.**

Because the project was designed not only to support the implementation of resilience studies but to strengthen the local research capacity, it has yielded several process-related outcomes.

➔ Strengthening the analytical capacity in local universities to understand violence threats and available in-country strengths to overcome them, is an important component for locally collected resilience evidence and a contribution to empower education systems to contribute to violence prevention and impact mitigation.

➔ The capacity building process undertaken through this RSR has allowed the country research teams to establish reciprocal relationships between the communities they are working in, research institutions and ministries. These partnerships have not only been crucial to the ability to conduct the research but have enriched the findings and possibilities of its application.



➔ Research teams have found resilience to present a more sustainable paradigm. This was reflected both in terms of the research content as well as the way that the research allowed for building bridges between academia and public policy within a particular country. As a dynamic concept, resilience research has helped highlight the potential relevance of resilience based interventions provided by education systems and aligned to key transition points in the life of an individual at risk.

➔ Research ethical processes especially for violence affected contexts need to be defined and contextualized further. Understanding and fostering resilience requires a longer term process to build trust and confidence among community members. Especially, since resilience

is not a term that exists for many indigenous and rural communities, resilience related research must take this into account and foster links with local understandings prior to data collection. Research products need to respond directly to school needs and interventions, rather than being just an academic exercise.

*Following the CREA workshops, the participants contributed to a series of follow up events: a workshop between the Ministry of Education of Honduras, the World Bank, USAID and Universidad Pedagogica on policy alternatives to mitigate violence risks in schools; a conference on resilience and flexible education modalities hosted by IDB; the creation of a new course on resilience research at Universidad del Valle of Guatemala, and the revisions to the ERA Program's RES-Research manual and training strategy to be piloted in South Asia in November 2013.*

#### **Facilitator**

**Joel Reyes**  
from the The World Bank office in Washington, DC, facilitates a session on community participation in contexts of risk and violence



# Participants speak up: Comments from the community of practice, and training and workshops participants

*The principle of resilience is very useful for our work as it has allowed us a new perspective on public policies and different programs that could be adjusted to promote resilience. It allows us to bring theory and policy together. We already have strategies for this but the ERA process has provided more clarity about where to go and how to get there. We have also been thinking about how it can be applied to other sectors of our work such as preventing violence against women.*

Xiomara Bello, Technical Advisor: Ministry of Family, Nicaragua

*Overall this process has come at the perfect time – there has been a change in government and associated processes of change are underway. Looking ahead we would like to consider how this applies to the Early Childhood Development sector and more direct work with families as we see this as a universal concept that can bring together the crucial trio of individuals, families and communities. Using resilience better allows us to manage this complexity.*

Guillermo Lopez Lopez, Director, Children and Risk: Ministry of Education, Nicaragua

*This has been a great opportunity and is highly pertinent to our situation. It provides a perspective of hope rather than some of the more fatalistic approaches that research thus far has uncovered. Through a resilience lens we will be better able to engage in public policy debates as we can provide evidence to support the construction of policies – we're not starting from zero anymore. It's also allowed us to better engage with the MoE.*

Suyapa Padilla, Director of Research, UNPFM, Honduras

*It has been very rewarding to be a part of this group and have the opportunity to follow up on the development and implementation processes of resilience research. It allows us to foresee the possibilities in not only to assess resilience but to focus on the more positive aspects of what's in place and the resources that exist already. In the long run this is a better strategy – it's more sustainable and a healthier approach. From a personal perspective to have the opportunity to bring universities into the work has been very valuable and has the potential to have a larger impact for the development of policies.*

María del Pilar Grazioso Rodriguez, Director of Research, Masters in Psychological Health and Mental Health, Universidad Del Valle de Guatemala, Guatemala

*Adopting a resilience questionnaire in the research allowed us to access a lot more information than we may have hoped for otherwise. Now we need to cross-reference this with our goals and objectives. Overall it provides greater direction for the program. Right now we are in phase one during which we are observing resilient attitudes and behaviours: next we would like to contrast this in the schools to see how the institutional framework may be supporting this.*

Oscar Picardo Joao, Director of Science, Technology, Innovation, University Francisco Gavidia, El Salvador

*Resilience is a very useful concept and one they learnt a lot about following the earthquake in terms of response and recovery. But the new elements of resilience that they have learnt about here broadened the concept and can better help them frame their responses. Learning from other participants [during the CREA conference] was also useful – perhaps it doesn't have immediately direct impacts but having the contacts and sharing general experiences will support us over the long run. It was very useful to learn about conducting research.*

Jean Frito Tocel, Professor, Ecole Normal de Fréres, Haiti