



## Rebuilding higher education institutions in post-conflict contexts: Policy networks, process, perceptions, & patterns



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### ABSTRACT

This research explored the rebuilding of a public university, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in the West African nation of Côte d'Ivoire, destroyed as a result of a highly contested Presidential election. We began by viewing rebuilding as the result of policy networks, a pantheon of interdependent actors cooperating and competing to address policymaking. Then we investigated the characteristics of these efforts, focusing on the policies that result from the complex interplay between university stakeholders and government bodies and the subsequent implementation of policy into practice. The study resulted in a preliminary understanding of one institution's rebuilding efforts.

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### 1. Introduction

Conflict has had a devastating impact on education in sub-Saharan Africa. Educational institutions are often considered a legitimate target in conflict because of affiliations with the government or are seen as opportunities to destabilize communities (Reimers and Chung, 2010). Between 2009 and 2012, armed combatants in over 28 countries used universities for military purposes, destroyed facilities, and targeted students and faculty (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014, p. 54). In Côte d'Ivoire, following the 2010 election, combatants engaged in fighting on campus, injuring, and killing students and staff affiliated with oppositional political groups, forcing many universities to close their doors indefinitely (2014).

Yet the rebuilding of higher education institutions has been largely unsuccessful due to unsuitable reconstruction policies and mismanaged planning by actors working in concert or at cross-purposes (Zoepf, 2006). Additionally, evidence suggests that rebuilding efforts are often underfunded, ineffective, and/or derailed by more exigent national needs (McLean Hilker, 2011). As vehicles for development (Ashcroft and Rayner, 2011), the rebuilding and reopening of postsecondary institutions should be of paramount importance to governments and development

agencies funding the reconstruction of civil society in recovering nations. Moreover, effective rebuilding may have implications for sustained peace and the developmental capacity of nations in fragile contexts (UNESCO, 2011).

Using a qualitative case design, this research explored the rebuilding of a public university, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in the West African nation of Côte d'Ivoire, destroyed as a result of a highly contested Presidential election. The study was driven by three research questions: How do actors interact during rebuilding? What happens during this process? How are post-conflict policies negotiated and manifested in the practice of rebuilding a university? We began by viewing rebuilding as the result of policy networks, a pantheon of interdependent actors cooperating or not cooperating to address to policymaking (Klickert et al., 1997). Then we investigated the characteristics of these efforts, focusing on the policies that result from the complex interplay between university stakeholders and government bodies and the subsequent implementation of policy into practice. Findings relate to the nature of interdependencies and relational patterns among policy actors in the rebuilding process, with a focus on process norms as they emerged from participant descriptions. As a result of these relational patterns, key decisions were made about rebuilding. However, perceptions of these policies, including fixations on certain decisions, demonstrated a lack of congruence in policy communication flows and, at times, mismanagement of the meaning-making process inherent to policymaking and implementation. The study resulted in a preliminary understanding of rebuilding during post-conflict reconstruction.

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## 1.1. Higher education and development

Higher education serves a critical role in the development process, worldwide. This role is often considered a given in the Global North, particularly in the United States. 'Nowhere has the connection between higher education and . . . development been more clearly drawn than in the United States' (Hodges and Dubb, 2012, p. 3). Considerations of the newly established global 'k-economy' can be found in Asia and Europe alike, where the knowledge produced by universities has significance for all sectors, both private and public (Marginson, 2011). Yet the role of higher education in development has been critically reexamined in developing nations. Many problematize 'development' as rhetoric often pursued by techno-managerial elites (Roe, 1995) without consideration of the contextual nature of higher education in developing nations (Johnson, 2013a).

In sub-Saharan Africa, 'International donors and partners regarded universities, for the most part, as institutional enclaves without deep penetration into the development needs of African communities' (Cloete, 2012, p. 137). Despite the very real capacity challenges many higher education institutions face, a burgeoning body of scholarship demonstrates that tertiary education has positively impacted development (Kimenyi, 2011), particularly traditional economic development indicators, such as per capita income (Gyimah-Brempong et al., 2006). Moreover, growth in the higher education sector has sought to attenuate many of the inequities, those that constrained development, formerly associated with the university in sub-Saharan Africa (Ashcroft and Rayner, 2011).

### 1.1.1. Higher education and conflict

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this growth and change, educational organizations have been besieged by armed conflict in many African nations, undermining their developmental capacity. In 2013, there were 97 ongoing conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for more than 25% of all conflict, worldwide ('Conflict Barometer', 2014). Educational institutions are often targets of conflict, destroyed by combatants, or turned into military encampments (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014; Reimers and Chung, 2010). Universities are particularly vulnerable in many parts of Africa, due in part to a history of political interference on campus (Aina, 2010). As a result, institutions have been the site of conflict, often damaged and destroyed as a statement on national elections, subsequently weakening the role of higher education in development efforts.

Educational expenditures drop catastrophically during conflict, by 3.1–3.6% each year a nation is engaged in civil conflict (Lai and Thyne, 2007). The closing of institutions, targeting of educational stakeholders, diverting of resources from education, and inhibiting access to employment affiliated with education has a significant impact on development (O'Malley, 2010). Conflict also corrodes a country's developmental infrastructure, diverting resources from social sectors, like education (Novelli and Lopes-Cardoza, 2008). 'Fewer years in school translate into slower economic growth, diminished prospects for poverty reduction, and more limited gains in public health' (UNESCO, 2011, p. 136). Conversely, Thyne (2006) found that investment in and equitable distribution of education in fragile states lowers the overall incidence of civil conflict. Education affords a way out of the 'war trap' and the resulting poverty plaguing many nations at risk for conflict in sub-Saharan Africa (Poirier, 2012).

## 1.2. Post-conflict reconstruction

Of 37 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2005, 70% mentions education (Dupuy, 2008). Educational references in

peace agreements tend to correspond with activities such as implementing the right to education, resuming educational services, and contending with the challenges created by conflict in the education sector (2008).

Providing education in a post-conflict context helps national reconstruction, in a different and more profound way than meeting only basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. Furthermore, an education that promotes human rights and civic values can go a long way in helping the next generation to work toward a self-sustaining and peaceful society. For precisely these reasons, development aid must also focus on education once the conflict has ended, and provide the assistance for it to be used as a tool for national reconstruction. (Acedo, 2011, pp. 181–182). The provision of education is critical to reconstruction, but what of the rebuilding of the institutions themselves?

Many supranational and international organizations have developed frameworks to address post-conflict reconstruction, that is the 'medium and long term process of rebuilding war-torn communities . . . rebuilding the political, security, social, and economic dimensions of a society . . . promoting social and economic justice' (Muriithi, 2006, p. 17). In 2006, the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) developed their post-conflict policy framework that addresses the need to rehabilitate education, under the aegis of humanitarian assistance, human security and rights, socio-economic development, and capacity-building. At no point in the framework is higher education addressed, which reflects a larger, historical trend toward primary and secondary education as the foundations of development in the African context (Bloom et al., 2006). Also, it is noteworthy that reconstruction is focused on broader developmental efforts related to the outcomes of social institutions, than on the actual process of rebuilding those institutions.

## 1.3. Networks in higher education rebuilding

As demonstrated above, post-conflict reconstruction is a complicated affair, necessitating the involvement of many actors, not unlike higher education policymaking in general in Africa.

Common sense suggests that the environment in which African organizations must operate is highly complex—a reflection of colonialism, non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, governmental agencies, and traditional practices, in tandem with one another. Higher education organizations thus must exist in multiple, heterogeneous fields and negotiate the competing values of each. (Johnson, 2013a, p. 443)

The work reported here echoes this view: that many government, quasi-governmental, and non-governmental actors play a role in the rebuilding process, as a function of post-conflict reconstruction policy, due to interdependencies inherent to higher education in Africa. Policymaking on higher education has included the participation of many groups, including associations, international agencies, regional self-organizing educational networks, regional coordinating agencies, regulatory, and supranational organizations, among others. Policymaking in higher education is a messy and complex effort on the continent, without strict or clear boundaries, roles, or goals.

Networks are characterized by complex exchanges between government bodies (at various levels), and other institutions and configurations (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000). These organizations and actors participate in a complex interplay of coordination, negotiation, alliance-making, adjustment, and problem-solving (O'Toole et al., 1999) to create policies addressing rebuilding. Moreover, the policymaking arena elucidates 'how actual

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