



LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER IN AFRICA THROUGH HISTORY EDUCATION

Denise Bentrovato

In recent years, remarkable progress has been made in the understanding of the role education plays in conflict and in peace. Yet still little is known about the ways in which this interaction has played out in Africa, a part of the world which, according to the *Human Security Report 2012*, “has been by far the most conflict-prone region in the post-Cold War years” (p.154). The field of teaching and learning history has been particularly neglected in this respect. During the two UNESCO Decades of Education for Africa, which will come to a close in 2015, scholarly and policy-oriented discussions on the theme of “learning to live together” have shown a notable disregard for the role of history curricula and textbooks in African societies and, more specifically, their role in national and regional dynamics of conflict and peace on the continent.

In response to the need to fill this gap, the GEI has entrusted me with designing a new project titled “Learning to live together in Africa through history education: An assessment of current practices and future prospects”. The project will involve two studies as well as the development of practical tools, such as guidelines and training modules on teaching and learning history in contested societies. The plan is to present the findings and results to key educational stakeholders in Africa in 2015. The overall aim will be to inform educational policy and practice by offering analyses, lessons learned and recommendations for reform which could assist in processes aimed at adapting curricula and textbooks to harness the potential of history education to advance the goal of “learning to live together”. The project seeks to support efforts to improve the current state of history teaching in Africa whilst also strengthening the capacity of African countries to reduce the risk of conflict and helping to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation through education.

The principle undertakings for the project in the coming months are as follows:

1. It will review international discourses and practices in history education and social cohesion.
2. It will map the current state of history education in Africa, investigating the status of the subject of history in African national curricula as well as the nature of the content, aims and educational approaches of current history curricula and textbooks. The objective of this part of the project is to assess and compare knowledge, values and attitudes promoted through history education across Africa.
3. It will produce an in-depth analysis of current educational approaches to teaching and learning about sensitive and contentious histories in Africa. Special attention will be paid to examining whether the topics of conflict and peace have been addressed in history lessons, both in relation to the students' own country and other countries on the continent, and if so, how this has been done. Besides scrutinising curricula and textbooks for possible omissions, bias and prejudice, this part of the research aims to identify instances of good practice in the promotion of respect for diversity and inclusiveness, dialogue, mutual understanding and social cohesion through history education.

Ultimately, the project intends to reflect on current practices with an eye to working towards the formulation of recommendations for history education reform as a peacebuilding strategy in Africa. It will thereby attempt to identify possible challenges and opportunities posed by the introduction of a conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented approach into the teaching and learning of African history as well as into overall history education reform processes in African countries.