UNICEF Education Strategy 2006-2015

by Cream Wright

UNICEF supports education in all countries with natural disasters and civil conflict. Humanitarian response activities, including in education, are an essential part of UNICEF's work because of its concern with children's rights in all circumstances.

UNICEF is developing an Education Strategy for 2006-2015 to highlight the contribution it can make to education up to and beyond 2015, the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This strategy is being developed through a consultation process with partners and will later be formally presented for approval to UNICEF's Executive Board. The strategy provides a broad vision on how UNICEF can work with partners to contribute to education and gender equality. It serves as a supporting platform and guiding framework for UNICEF's Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) for 2006-2009.[1] The MTSP highlights 'basic education and gender equality' as one of the agency's five focus areas.

UNICEF's education programmes and expenditures in crisis-affected contexts have increased significantly in recent years. Its record in helping to restore and improve education in emergency and post-crisis situations has resulted in a lead-agency role in many countries. It is further strengthening its capacities to work in post-crisis transition and is engaged in discussions around education service delivery in fragile states. Restoring education in emergencies and post-crisis situations and safe-guarding education systems against decline therefore feature prominently in the MTSP. Similarly, the Education Strategy emphasises education in emergencies and post-crisis transition, and makes clear UNICEF's willingness to play a coordinating role under the new cluster system for humanitarian support to countries in an emergency.

The Education and Conflict conference in Oxford provided an important forum to consult on the strategy with actors from the humanitarian and academic communities engaged in education. This article presents an excerpt of the draft strategy, with emphasis on the emergency, transition and post-crisis aspects.
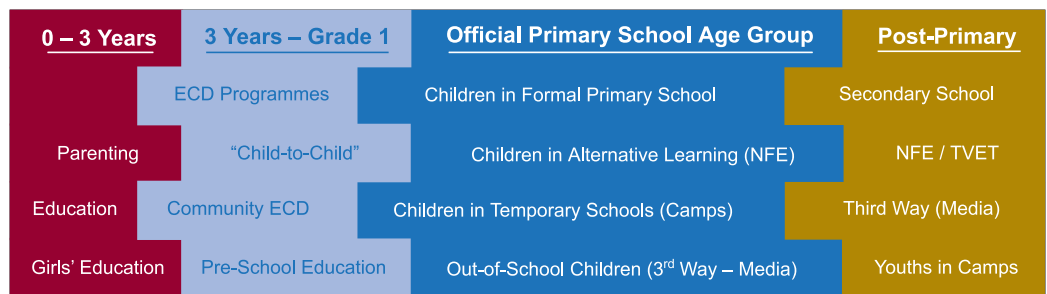
Vision and scope

UNICEF is oriented to children's rights based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[2] It gives priority to the most deprived children in the poorest countries, including those affected by crisis. It advocates for and facilitates education as a right, and uses education to support results in health, nutrition and protection for the realisation of other rights. Its work covers the 0–18 year age range in segments that reflect the life cycle as well as the structure of the school system and alternative forms of education:

- schools are prepared to receive children and resourced to support their learning in conducive environments

- parents are empowered to support children's learning

- children can freely access and complete school

- teachers are competent and well supported

- education systems are accountable, well managed and focused on challenges that affect children.

The chances of achieving this vision are jeopardised in emergency situations, making it essential for education to be an integral part of interventions, before, during and after emergencies. In general, UNICEF's education priorities relate to access, gender, quality, achievement and emergencies and post-crisis transition. It has developed a strong track record in emergency response, including working on complex multi-country emergencies like the Indian Ocean tsunami, earthquakes in India (Gujarat), Iran (Bam) and Pakistan and post-conflict needs in countries like Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Liberia and Sudan.

The Scope of Basic Education in UNICEF's Education Strategy

0 – 3 Years	3 Years – Grade 1	Official Primary School Age Group	Post-Primary
	ECD Programmes	Children in Formal Primary School	Secondary School
Parenting	"Child-to-Child"	Children in Alternative Learning (NFE)	NFE / TVET
Education	Community ECD	Children in Temporary Schools (Camps)	Third Way (Media)
Girls' Education	Pre-School Education	Out-of-School Children (3rd Way – Media)	Youths in Camps

UNICEF's strategy is informed by a vision of good governance in rights-respecting societies, where:

- children are prepared for school and start at the appropriate age

UNICEF has learned much from these experiences to become a reliable leader and capable coordinator for the urgent and complex services required in emergencies.

Building on this growing expertise and experience, UNICEF will continue to be a first responder in education during the humanitarian response phase of an emergency. This role will involve improving staff preparedness and strengthening surge capacity to bring the right levels of expertise to bear on an emergency situation. The agency will be guided by its Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies (CCCs), which defines what UNICEF does for children in an emergency.[3] It will also be guided by the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction.[4] These were developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) – a network in which UNICEF plays a major role.

Apart from improving its emergency response preparedness UNICEF will improve its capacity to help address challenges faced by countries as they make the transition from emergency to reconstruction and development. It will work closely with other partners – such as national governments, the World Bank, UNESCO and international NGOs – as effectively and efficiently as possible. It will focus on defining roles and responsibilities more clearly so learning opportunities can be rapidly restored for affected children. Education needs to be provided within safe environments that offer a wide range of support for children's needs – including nutrition, psychosocial care and support, health checks and protection – which cannot be properly met when institutions, agencies and governance systems are affected by crisis. In supporting countries in transition, UNICEF will work with others, using the principle of 'building back better', to help rebuild the key institutions needed to service a viable education system – schools, teacher training and support institutions, school management agencies, education planning authorities, financial management agencies and inspection and regulatory authorities.

In addition, UNICEF will strongly engage in important new work on the dynamics of change in conflict-affected countries and what this implies for effective and efficient education service delivery. In development work, attention is now more focused on the impact of civil conflict, social violence, health pandemics, natural disasters, breakdown of governance systems and ideological fundamentalism – and no longer simply on economic growth. These factors increasingly determine the ability and/or willingness of governments to exercise full jurisdiction over national territory and to create/maintain the conditions for effective and efficient delivery of education and other services for children. Addressing these problems requires a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience from a wide range of country situations. UNICEF will draw on its knowledge and experience and work with other agencies, civil society, academic and research institutions to support education service delivery and wider social change in such post-conflict and fragile states.

Partnerships are central to UNICEF's work in emergencies and transition situations. It is essential to make the expertise, competencies and comparative advantages of different partners (such as INEE, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, local and international NGOs and national governments) available to support affected countries across

Language teaching for Burmese refugees in Buthidang Township, Bangladesh.

UNHCR/G Schwetz

the spectrum from emergency relief to development and growth. UNICEF will work closely with these partners to support affected countries with a seamless flow of technical expertise to provide support and to build local capacity. Work in this area is in progress through sharing of experience and initiating dialogue with key partners on the theory and practice of evidence-based work in education and conflict.

Access remains a key UNICEF priority. Its strategic intent is to help countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals and EFA goals, with all children prepared for and able to access primary school by 2015 and be on track to complete full primary school education. Priority is given to countries with the highest percentage of children out of school. This includes many affected by or recovering from crisis such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Haiti, Nepal, Sudan and Somalia.

On gender, UNICEF supports international goals to make education systems more gender equitable in order to advance the empowerment of girls and women. Countries that have poor education and gender-related indicators will be targeted. Many countries affected by crisis also have large gender gaps, as girls' vulnerability is increased in crisis situations. Addressing gender barriers to enrolment and achievement in these contexts is an important focus for UNICEF. Typical strategies are targeted gender interventions at local levels and advocacy to ensure gender is integrated in policy and budgets. Technical support to ensure gender is better addressed in UNICEF education in emergency interventions will also be an important part of the strategy, especially through partners in the UN Girls' Education Initiative.[5]

UNICEF's key contribution to education quality is the child-friendly school model, a holistic concept which promotes a safe, healthy and protective environment for learning.[6] This is vital in situations of conflict or after natural disasters, where ensuring education in safe places is a key means of providing psychosocial support and protecting children against harm. The concept also urges development of child-friendly standards for school architecture in order to take advantages of opportunities during the major school (re)construction programmes initiated after natural disasters or conflicts.

Other areas of focus that are particularly relevant to emergency and post-crisis contexts include supporting the right start for children through conventional early childhood development (ECD) programmes that involve parenting

education (for childcare), as well as through institutional provision for pre-school children, and community-based childcare and development initiatives that build on good traditional practices while introducing modern elements of early childhood care and development.

UNICEF promotes inclusive education by targeting excluded and marginalised children. Interventions aim to support education for children in child labour and other forms of exploitation, those from ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, or those in so-called 'fragile states' or countries where governments are unable or unwilling to provide services to the whole population. UNICEF will work with partners to develop innovative models that can benefit national policies and strategies or can be scaled up as good practices for the education system as a whole. These initiatives may include alternative learning centres, distance and accelerated learning. The preference in most cases is, however, to integrate children into existing school systems.

All of UNICEF's work in education is underpinned by a commitment to an inter-sectoral approach. Experience indicates that work in such areas as food and nutrition, safety and security, child labour, child trafficking, water and sanitation all contribute to access, regular attendance, quality of the learning environment, learning and achievement. In return, practitioners in these other sectors expect that education will contribute to addressing major problems relating to their own work. This inter-sectoral approach to education is therefore mutually beneficial and takes on extra significance in emergencies where schools provide an opportunity to bring together services for children in a safe and protective environment.

Cream Wright is UNICEF's Global Chief of Education. Email: cwright@unicef.org

1. Investing in children: the UNICEF contribution to poverty reduction and the Millennium Summit agenda www.unicef.org/aids/files/05-11_MTSP.pdf
2. www.unicef.org/crc
3. www.unicef.se/media/pdf/
4. www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1240
5. www.ungei.org
6. www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_focus_schools.html

Girl does her homework in camp for displaced people near village of Tche, Ituri, DRC

UNICEF/HQ05-1235/Roger Lemoyne