



CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

CHAPTER 4 School and community

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CHAPTER 4

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Ambohitnibe, Madagascar, 26 March 2007 – In the middle of an isolated community, an hour's walk from the nearest road, there is a primary school that is setting the standard for child-friendly education in Madagascar.

In the past five years, enrolment at the Ambohitnibe School has gone from 155 to 207, graduation rates have almost doubled and drop-out rates have been reduced sharply. The reason for this success? A contract signed between parents, teachers, school administrators, local community members and students to keep children in a quality school.

Since the contract was signed, parents committed to their children's education have renovated the school building, opened up a canteen, constructed solar panels for hot water and provided learning tools to help students with arithmetic. Soon, the parents will begin work on a library and football field.

Source: <www.unicef.org/infobycountry/madagascar_39221.html>

4.1 SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LINKS

How child-friendly schools are linked to their communities is critical. Schools are communities unto themselves and child-friendly schools in particular promote a strong sense of community. But schools do not exist in isolation. They reside within the communities they serve and must cultivate relationships with them. In addition to the immediate community, usually a geographical catchment area, schools also can have links with a more diffuse community, such as former students and alumni associations, youth groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, faith-based organizations or language groups associated with the school.

The links between schools and their communities can vary in pattern and intensity. At one extreme are schools that simply have a physical presence. They are not linked with, dependent on or accountable to their communities in any serious sense. Other schools, especially child-friendly schools, are organically linked in multiple ways. It is essential to understand the basis of this rich linkage.

In emergency situations where schools have been destroyed, community links can be major factors in restoring normalcy and rebuilding education. These relationships are bridges that can help communities create safe,

child-friendly learning spaces during emergencies, and the creation of such spaces helps communities recover more quickly from catastrophe.

What follows is an analysis of the interactive nature of the school as a community and its linkage to the larger community around it. The analysis highlights ways in which schools can reach out to their communities and draw them into their world.

Learning does not begin when children walk through the school doors nor does it end when they exit for the day. It takes place all the time and everywhere, throughout life. There is a pedagogic dimension to the links between schools and homes and localities. Children bring to school their family and community beliefs, practices, knowledge, expectations and behaviours. Similarly, when they return from school they bring back to their homes and communities new forms of knowledge, practices, behaviours, attitudes and skills. Children are engaged in a continuous, dynamic process of bridging the world of school and the world of home and community. They learn from both worlds, facilitated by teachers, family members, neighbors and others. Linking schools and communities is widely recognized as good pedagogic practice.

There is an economic dimension to these links as well. A wide range of costs is involved in the provision and uptake of education, and these costs are borne by various parties. Unit cost (per pupil) is based on the amortized cost of facilities, furniture and equipment, teachers' salaries, operational overheads, learning and teaching supplies, transport, school fees, uniforms and other services,

such as school meals. There are also opportunity costs to families, because children are not available to perform household chores or engage in income-generating activities.

Viable school financing depends on the links between schools and homes and communities to determine how these costs are shared. At one extreme, as is the case with self-help schools, all costs may be borne by homes and communities. (See Box, page 3.) Sometimes governments support community efforts by financing teachers' salaries. At still other times, governments, central or local, bear all the costs, with opportunity costs borne by homes. School officials tap into these different funding sources in order to operate viable, sustainable education programmes, and in the course of operations, they may seek supplementary funding from governments or levy additional charges on pupils' families or communities to meet additional costs. In all cases, viable, sustainable school financing depends on a healthy link between schools and the communities that they serve.

A third sense in which schools are linked to homes and communities is the sociopolitical or developmental dimension. In highly centralized political systems, government control of schools is usually strong, with minimum community involvement beyond contributing local resources. Schools serve primarily to achieve national development goals, such as cultivating human resources for economic growth, modernizing society or instituting cultural change. Teachers and school authorities are accountable to a central ministry rather than to their communities.



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Decentralized political systems call for reduced school oversight by the central government and for strong local control and active community involvement. Teachers and school authorities are likely to be accountable to their local communities, and while there may be some emphasis on contributing to broad national goals, the school's focus will have more to do with local realities and aspirations.

School-community links generally are based on a combination of pedagogic, economic and socio-economic dimensions. Many good schools have a strong link to the communities they serve, influenced by one or more of these factors. For child-friendly schools, these are also important factors. But there is a more fundamental sense in which child-friendly schools are linked with communities – the child's right to quality basic education. Therefore, school and community links are not optional. They are a defining imperative of the child-friendly school.

KENYA: HARAMBEE SCHOOLS

Community financing has been a prominent aspect of Kenya's educational system, dating back to the *harambee* schools. *Harambee* means 'let us pull together'. During the colonial era, local communities established these independent schools. Their independence stemmed from local community support in contrast to the support of the colonial government or local missionaries, the two groups then most responsible for educational development.

In the early post-independence period faith-based organizations, eager to quench the thirst for education and put their imprint on the *harambee* movement, encouraged local communities to continue to raise funds for schools. With support from local dignitaries, the *harambee* movement developed a distinct political character, as local politicians carried favour with their constituents by funding new schools and sustaining existing ones. As a result, failure or success of the *harambee* schools depended not on religious groups' sponsorship but instead on local politicians' skills in attracting local and international funding.

Source: Mwiria, K. 'Kenya's Harambee Secondary School Movement: The contradictions of public policy', *Comparative Education Review*, 1999

A rights-based approach to education means that governments are the ultimate duty bearers, with a responsibility to ensure access to quality basic education for all children. However, parents and communities are 'first-line' duty bearers, responsible for accessing available opportunities for their children and for supporting quality education in their community. Parents and communities have a duty to lobby their government for schools that can provide quality education for their children. In the absence of such government provision, parents and communities still have a duty to their children and need to establish schools that can provide quality education. This is the essence of community schools.

Even where the government provides schools, communities that feel alienated or judge these schools to not be in the best interest of their children may decide to establish more appropriate schools. This is why ethnic, religious or language minorities sometimes set up schools they believe

are more suitable. Instead of creating separate schools, however, they can try to change existing schools to better address their children's needs.

When a rights-based approach to education is taken seriously, as with child-friendly schools, parents and communities must be closely involved in all aspects of the school and must be prepared to support it by shouldering the fair and reasonable costs required to promote quality education. Parents should have a vested interest in what schools offer and in the outcomes of the education process for their children and communities. In turn, schools have an obligation to be sensitive to the communities they serve, to care for and protect the children entrusted to them, and to be accountable to the local community in their governance and management. School boards and parent-teacher committees are the governance and management mechanisms through which this linkage and accountability are manifested.



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4.2 THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

While learning takes place all the time and everywhere, schools are specially designated institutions dedicated to the purpose of learning. They represent societies' efforts to concentrate resources and skills for quality education within a prescribed curriculum that includes effective, efficient teaching and learning modalities. Some basic characteristics

of schools as learning communities are highlighted in Table 4.1 below. These characteristics provide an operational framework for understanding schools as learning communities and are the skeleton on which other aspects of community life are built. The extent to which schools become true learning communities depends on the richness of additional elements.

TABLE 4.1: BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Characteristics	Outline of basic characteristics
Location specific	There is a specifically prescribed place or location (school) in which the learning/teaching process is designated to occur.
Time bound	Learners and teachers assemble at the location at designated times and stay for prescribed time periods (day/term/year) for learning to take place.
Time structured	School day is structured into periods in which different subjects or curriculum areas are covered. School year is structured into terms, with a prescribed number of weeks.
Learner structured	Learners are usually grouped by age (cohorts) and channelled into levels, classes or grades that correspond to age and the prescribed learning for that age group.
Programme structured	Prescribed learning is structured into subjects or disciplines that are taught separately and that together constitute a programme for a given grade, level or education cycle.
Prescribed learning	Curriculum reflects national goals and priorities, possibly open to regional/local/community variations, and involves set standards evaluated through tests and examinations.
Sequenced learning	Curriculum is sequenced so that objectives are achieved at one level before learners progress to the next level.
Specialist staffing	Staffing consists of qualified, trained professionals (teachers) with knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogic skills, etc.
Specialist resources	Standard furniture and equipment are unique to schools and part of defining characteristics (desks, blackboard, etc.).

The school community includes children of different age groups (cohorts), teachers, the school head and non-teaching staff. Roles, responsibilities, rules and procedures govern how a school functions. These relate not only to learning, but also to the safety, security and well-being of the learners, the status and authority of the teachers and school head, the relationship between learners and teachers, and the scope of the links with outside parties such as the community or government ministry. Over time, schools generate norms, values and standards that become part of the school culture and contribute to its traditions and institutional ethos, giving it a unique character as a community.

A first layer of institutional character is a school's reputation for promoting learning as its core function. This reputation may come from a track record of excellent examination results or a history of success in preparing students for the next

level of education. Some schools may choose to focus on a niche academic area, such as mathematics or social studies. Other schools may build a reputation on consistently taking in children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and helping them become successful learners.

Additionally, many schools develop a reputation for a second layer of institutional character by cultivating such attributes as being a safe, reliable place for children to learn, a champion of sports, a place for building young people's morals and character, a beautiful, well-kept institution with modern facilities, or a place where children are treated fairly and properly cared for. Child-friendly schools usually develop a reputation for being inclusive. They admit children from different backgrounds and treat them all fairly, regardless of their status, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender or disability.



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Aside from a school's reputation, there are basic forms of behaviour that define the school as a community, such as the rituals and routines children and teachers engage in (prayers in the morning, flag-raising, singing the school song or serving a midday meal) and the common rules and values to which everyone subscribes. Over time, schools cultivate an ethos or 'organizational ambience' that gives further depth to the sense of community. A school with a good ethos is usually characterized by student and teacher cohesion, high expectations of students, positive teacher attitudes toward students, a stress on rewards and consistent, shared values, norms and standards. Such schools are more likely to develop students who perform well academically, have self-discipline and high attendance records than schools with a poor ethos, which tend to create opposite student behaviours.

In a sense, all these characteristics and attributes are 'fenced' within the school as a community and help determine a way of life within the school boundaries. For instance, children may behave negatively outside of school, but clearly understand that such behaviour will not be tolerated in school. The child-friendly school fences in positive attributes and fences out negative qualities, much the same way it fences in safety and protection and fences out risks and dangers.

However, since the child-friendly school exists in and serves the wider community, the attributes cultivated within the school will also influence that wider community. For instance, children who bring to school disrespectful or violent behaviour

learned at home will hopefully replace that behaviour with the more positive conduct promoted within the school, adopting such values as non-confrontation and peaceful negotiation. In the process, they will help change the negative behaviours in their homes.

Transmitting school attributes into the larger community is not always simple for child-friendly schools. In some areas, issues of discipline may be conditioned by community values and practices that regard corporal punishment as desirable for building character and self-discipline. In contrast, child-friendly schools believe that discipline is necessary to help children learn correct behaviours and to maintain classroom order, but their key attributes are nonviolent discipline and protecting the rights of children. Within child-friendly schools, teachers learn appropriate, respectful approaches to discipline through in-service training and mentoring by the school head, and they implement effective discipline that respects children's rights and contributes to a positive learning environment. (See Chapter 6 on classroom discipline.) As children learn and succeed in school in the absence of corporal punishment, parents will come to accept the school's approach and may gradually shift their thinking.

4.2.1 Role of the school head

A sense of community within child-friendly schools is cultivated by the school head, whose leadership determines whether a school takes a child-friendly path or not. The school head's decisions and style are excellent barometers of a school's child-friendliness.

Adherence to admissions rules that are fair and transparent can help ensure the inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, mentoring and support by the school head for the appropriate training and continuous professional development of teachers raise classroom standards and foster improvement in teaching methods. Adequate planning by the school head, with appropriate involvement of teachers, learners, parents and the community, can raise curriculum standards and help the school meet learning achievement goals and successfully implement other important policy directives or targets.

The school head must respond to increasing student diversity, including issues of gender, disability and cultural background, must manage partnerships and networks with other schools and the wider

community, and must work closely with government agencies and other organizations that serve children. In addition, the school head must be able to adjust the internal workings of the school to cope with rapid changes and developments in technology, school financing, school size and teachers' conditions of service.

The school head serves as a custodian of child-friendly school values and is a mentor, supporting the staff's professional development and helping to cultivate the most appropriate behaviours and teaching practices. As a leader and team builder, the school head guides the school as an institution and plays a pivotal role in creating and maintaining its ethos. The school ethos and character are considered so important that many institutions recruit alumni or teachers who previously taught there to become the school head.



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In a child-friendly school, the school head is a friendly, accessible person who encourages students' participation in school life and promotes links between the school community, parents and the wider community. Under the school head's direction, the school also provides a protective environment where children are free of corporal punishment, violence, gender stereotypes, bullying and stigma.

The head of a child-friendly school will also ensure that the school is managed in a fair, equitable and transparent manner. School rules and regulations will be just, clear, available to all and applied in an open manner in all cases. Student participation will be encouraged, as appropriate, in various aspects of school life, including the application of fair rules and regulations.

Evidence suggests that school heads who become successful leaders concentrate their efforts on four broad goals:

- 1. Promote powerful learning-teaching processes that facilitate educational achievement for all children.** This occurs when school leadership sets realistic, but high expectations for both children and teachers, in the classroom and throughout the school, and provides various ways for them to pursue learning through the active participation of the learner and the reflective guidance of the teacher. The school leadership can make or break this type of transformative pedagogy by the goals that are set and the resources that are made available. More importantly, the school head needs to encourage teachers and learners to confront obstacles that affect progress, seek out available guidance and make the most creative use of limited resources.
- 2. Cultivate a strong sense of community that embraces all who are part of the school.** The school head is the driving force that shapes the character of the institution and its ethos. He or she is the prime gatekeeper of the school's traditions and reputation. Maintaining the school culture requires a management style that encourages the entire school community to share the common values and rules that support good practices within the school. In a child-friendly school, the ethos is rooted in the rights of children and staff to fair and equal opportunities and treatment within the school community.

The school head must address threats to this sense of fair and equal treatment, because failure to do so will undermine the school's community spirit. The school head's style must reinforce the tradition and culture of the school through such actions as giving daily or weekly talks to the whole school, emphasizing care and respect for the school grounds and surrounding environment, encouraging extracurricular activities and strengthening rituals by, for instance, selecting a school song or holding a founder's day or a thanksgiving parade.
- 3. Value and expand the proportion of children's social capital.** Children are not empty vessels to be filled with information, but young people with personalities, names and knowledge to share. The new knowledge they acquire in school builds on their learning from home and the community. Children's participation in the classroom and school is facilitated by school leaders who invest in children's capabilities. (See box, page 11.)

- 4. Cherish and encourage the development of families' educational cultures.** A culture of learning is important throughout the life cycle of a child, from early childhood through all levels of education. In poor, rural communities, many parents are illiterate and the school leadership has to reach out to them to help them benefit from and encourage their children's schooling.

4.2.2 Role of the teacher

Teachers are pivotal to effective and efficient learning. They are vital, along with the school head, to promoting a sense of community within the school and to building links to the

wider community. A school and its pupils benefit most when teachers are committed to cultivating a learning community with a strong sense of belonging and caring among all children and adults.

Unlike the school head, who manages the entire school, teachers facilitate learning, handle the classroom and help their students transfer what they have learned in the classroom to non-school settings. They also work with the school head in laying a solid foundation and providing a model of a better future for all. Successful teachers in child-friendly schools strive to improve their performance, take advantage of learning opportunities, create new connections and promote collaboration among teachers.

4.3 THE SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY

There are many ways in which the community can be drawn into the school, beginning with community involvement in the initial decision-making on the design, building (or renovating) and maintenance of school buildings and grounds, to ongoing transparency, accountability and participation in management and decision-making. Additionally, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), by allowing the participation of and communication with parents, create openness that encourages parents to track their children's progress.

School heads and teachers assume the critical role in building school-community links by reaching out to the community and drawing it in. But parents, other community members and children themselves have crucial parts to play as well.

4.3.1 Role of school heads and teachers together

School heads provide school leadership and must initiate the support and involvement of family and community. The more willing they are to recruit parents and community members for school tasks, to listen to their views and share decision-making, the more likely school-family partnerships are to take hold. Management and administrative support can be provided to carry out school programmes through district or local authorities' budgets, materials, space, equipment or staff.

School managers are instrumental in making sure that teachers receive the professional development they need to be engaged in family and community involvement. Ensuring that all school



staff acquire the necessary skills for working with parents and families is critical to effective partnerships.

The school district, cluster or education system should offer professional development for teachers on:

- Collaborating with parents, families and communities;
- Family dynamics and non-traditional family structures;
- Communication between the school, family and the community;
- Reducing barriers to family and community involvement in school;
- Environmental education for sustainable development, including access to water for drinking and washing, clean household energy, food security;
- Appreciating and working with diverse cultures.

The school governing bodies or PTAs should help identify volunteers who can help teachers and other school staff develop sensitivity to students' families and the community. This can be accomplished, for instance, by having

KENYA: CHILD-SEEKING AND PARTICIPATORY SCHOOLS

Even with Kenya's declaration of free primary education in 2003, some 1.7 million children and adolescents are still out of school. Building on the principles of child participation, a 'child-to-child' census was designed to seek out children not in school, determine why they were out of school and bring them back in. Schoolchildren and their teachers were trained to go into their neighbourhoods to ask children why they were out of school. The most frequent answers to these surveys were poverty, lack of school uniforms, domestic work and distance from school. Solutions were discussed and, through community dialogue and support, some 7,000 of the 9,000 out-of-school children in one of the three pilot districts – half of them girls – were brought back into school. This approach highlighted the power and potential of children's participation to such an extent that it has been included within the national education sector plan.

volunteers take teachers on community walks that introduce them to the neighbourhood and their pupils' lives outside school.

Another possible approach is to involve school staff and pupils in participatory action research. This may include small teams of teachers and students who meet monthly to study school-family-community relationships, discuss the challenges and opportunities that arise in involving families and the community in the school and devise interventions to build active community participation. Kenya and Uganda have conducted child-to-child surveys using this approach.

Once the groundwork has been laid and there is two-way communication between the school and the family and community, schools can establish partnerships by creating an action team committed to developing a comprehensive family-community involvement programme. Members of the team bring their own perspective, experience and skills to the initiative. The action team is responsible for a baseline study – developing goal statements, identifying strategies to meet the goals, establishing implementation plans and using evaluation tools.

Strengthening teacher capacity in the area of family-community collaboration can be supported by providing teachers with incentives to engage in these relationships.

4.3.2 Role of families and caregivers

A child-friendly school is a family-friendly school. It builds relationships with parents and caregivers who have primary responsibility for the well-being of children at all stages of their development. An informed, caring family can be the most stable,

reliable and unconditionally supportive agent for learning, so the engagement of families in the promotion and strengthening of children's learning can be among the most effective and lasting of interventions. This is particularly critical in the case of families made vulnerable by poverty, disease, conflict, lack of water, fuel or other resources, or by domestic violence; in families in isolated communities not reached by limited government services; and in ethnically marginalized or excluded families (EAPRO, 2005).

Parents who feel positive about school and are involved in its life are likely to be the best advocates for the school's values, policies and practices at home, whether by encouraging homework, promoting anti-harassment or supporting cooperation with others. Where there is no contact between home and school, problems in the child's life may go unrecognized by the school and will not be properly addressed. Even in underprivileged families, high levels of parental

UGANDA: COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD REGISTRATION

In rural Uganda, investing in a community-based birth registration (CBR) system provided effective tools for monitoring various children's rights, including enrolment in early childhood care activities and primary schools. The system places emphasis on registering children from poor and marginalized households and children living in child-headed and female-headed households. These children are then issued birth registration cards that ensure their enrolment in primary school at the appropriate time. With this low-cost intervention, more than 500,000 children were registered in just two years.



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support and a positive school climate foster self-confidence and self-esteem.

Families and caregivers have particular roles to play in preparing their children for a child-friendly school and supporting and providing guidance to the school. In a child-friendly school:

- Parents and households have regular, meaningful two-way communication with the school;
- Parents have an integral role in assisting school learning;
- Parents are full partners in decision-making about education outcomes for their children;
- Parents are welcome in the school and their support for children's learning is sought.

Often families and households do not feel empowered to take on these roles, nor are schools prepared to support them. Therefore, it is important to involve families in their children's education and establish community-school links at the earliest stages. Families are children's first teachers

and have a critical role to play in preparing them for school. Early childhood is a time of developmental leaps; it provides the greatest opportunity for change, but too often it is the time when services are fewest. Parenting styles and the number of resources available for children will either help young children develop the skills, attitudes and behaviours required to flourish in a school community or thwart their abilities to actively participate.

An effective way to prepare parents and caregivers to nurture school-family connections is for communities to develop and organize early childhood centres. Through their involvement, parents begin to understand how to manage a centre and participate in the centre's decision-making. In such community-based centres, families learn essential skills and their attitudes change as they see first hand how their participation can make a difference. The early childhood centres are not only important in readying young children for school, but also in preparing families, particularly women, for their role with schools. (See Box, page 14.)

NIGERIA: UNICEF AND PARTNERS CREATE A MODEL CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL

Model Primary School in New Owerri, Nigeria, is a bold testimony that initiatives to make schools child-friendly can succeed. Before 2000, it was a neglected primary school with buildings in various states of dilapidation and a population not very different from those of schools in similar conditions. The school's turnaround began in 2002, when it was classified by UNICEF as child-friendly. Since then, a vigorous partnership between UNICEF, the Imo State Primary Education Board and the school's PTA has blossomed, making all aspects of the school welcoming to children.

A large compound provides ample playing space for the school's 1,136 pupils. Girls outnumber boys, with girls' enrolment at 53 per cent and boys' at 47 per cent. The students are spread over 52 classes, each with one assigned teacher. Twelve other staff members perform various roles in the school. Demands for admission continue unabated, as the school is the first choice of many in the community. But only 16 classrooms are currently available, and the large student population has stretched the school's facilities.

School and community work hand in hand

The key strength of the school is its active PTA, which is involved in many of the ongoing projects, including construction of 10 new classrooms. It also helped beef up security in the school by installing burglar-proofing on doors. The PTA takes its role seriously. According to P. M. Okoro, the association's vice-chairman, the

group meets three times each term and other times as needed.

Sir Sam Iheakama, second vice-chairman of the PTA, points out that the World Bank Estate where the school is located is a community unto its own, where residents share common, strong sentiments about their children's education. He reports that PTA meetings are always well attended, with over 80 parents at each meeting. According to Iheakama, the community has a positive view of the Model Primary School and "parents all wish their children should pass through this school."

Improving water and sanitation

The PTA has improved personal hygiene among the pupils by providing washbasins and stands for each of the school's 16 classrooms, as well as soap and toilet paper rolls for the latrines.

Model Primary School has a full complement of ventilated improved pit latrines for both boys and girls. The water supply is adequate; the State Primary Education Board provided two water drums that are constantly refilled. During break time, excited pupils, their plastic cups and bowls in hand, run to fetch drinking water from the handpump-equipped borehole provided by UNICEF in collaboration with the State Rural Water Supply Agency. The borehole, a key component of making the school child-friendly, benefits more than the pupils and teachers in the school. Since it is the most regular source of water in the vicinity, the World Bank Estate also depends on the borehole



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for its water supply. Community members have praised its usefulness and have expressed their appreciation to the school staff, especially the headmistress.

Some 1,360 titles are housed in the school's well-stocked library, many of them provided by UNICEF. A full-time librarian trained in library management for primary schools oversees the collection.

"UNICEF's presence is manifesting in our school," says Eugenia Chima, the school's current headmistress. She noted that in efforts to make it child-friendly, the school had received desks, chairs, books, library equipment, sanitation materials, a borehole, early childhood care, first-aid kits and other items. She said that running the school has changed her life: "The whole community calls me 'blessed mummy' because of the school. Even if I retire now, I feel fulfilled."

A good start through reading and play

Some 120 children are enrolled in the school's early childcare section. Here, the emphasis is on psychosocial stimulation of the youngsters, who play and learn in an environment filled with pictures and toys. Emelia Onyekwere is the section's head teacher. Along with four other teachers, she leads her charges in classes that include singing, dancing, body movement and observation, especially of the age-appropriate objects located indoors and outside the classroom. Three out of five school days, the PTA provides midday meals for pupils in the early childcare section. For some of these children, this is a rare opportunity to eat a nutritious meal, and with their teachers' help, they also learn how to eat properly.

Source: <www.ungei.org/infobycountry/nigeria_321.html>

Strengthening links:

- The school has a PTA that meets and communicates regularly, and involves parents from all backgrounds (not just the elite);
- The PTA has a plan of action coordinated with school authorities to develop, implement and monitor annual school plans;
- The school promotes parents' participation in discussions and decision-making on school policies and activities;
- The school utilizes various communication tools to reach out to parents;
- The school provides information to parents on its reforms, policies, goals;
- The school invites parents to discuss concerns about their children and provides regular opportunities for them to inform school authorities about events at home or in the community;
- In case of illiterate parents or those who are not speakers of the majority language, the school provides oral messages or translates communications into parents' language;
- The school hosts events that involve children and families, such as inviting parents for an evening of music, drama or poetry reading that demonstrates the lessons their children are learning;
- The school provides the space for environmental and community gardens where PTA members can support food security;
- The school head may present awards to children or teachers – such as best attendance, most improved, special helper, star of the month, sports awards – at an event involving the community.

GHANA: CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS WITH PARENTS

At Zangum School in the northern region of Ghana, the head teacher realized that the parents of his students had little understanding of what their children were learning in school. To help them understand their children's education process, he organized an afternoon each semester to celebrate the students' achievements.

The activities at these afternoons varied from the younger children's reciting the alphabet, singing songs or acting out a drama to teach malaria prevention, to older students' reading poems or stories that they had written while other children translated them into their parents' language. The head teacher used these events not only to recognize achievement, but also to highlight important messages regarding the school, and the events were highly anticipated by the community, the students and the teachers. Through these activities, parents, many of whom had never been to school themselves, discovered what their children were learning, the value of their children's education and how they could support it. Discipline in the school improved, and attendance and participation in the PTA grew.

GHANA: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PTAS

Kparigu, a remote rural village in Ghana, had regular PTA meetings that were well attended by fathers but rarely by mothers. The headmaster was concerned about the lack of women's involvement and especially wanted to ensure that girls' issues were well represented. Therefore, he made a point of talking with the mothers on his walks around town, at the market and at church, always subtly bringing up the subject of involvement in the PTA. In the course of these discussions, he learned that most women had not been to school, so they thought they would not be able to contribute. They also thought the PTA was 'men's business'.

Talking about these concerns on a one-to-one basis and later at a PTA meeting, he found out the biggest stumbling block for women was the timing of the meetings. The headmaster generally held the meetings in late afternoon, when the sun was not too hot but it was not yet dark, but this, he learned, was the women's busiest time of day, when they return from market and prepare evening meals. The headmaster changed to a suggested time: "Fridays right after prayers because both Muslims and Christians don't go to farm on those days and it is before cooking begins."

Engaging the community women and changing to a more suitable time for them allowed the women gradually to become a much stronger presence in the PTA. They enriched the dialogue not only on gender issues but also on a range of topics affecting all children.

4.3.3 Role of education bodies and other local authorities

Child-friendly schools promote broad-based alliances among communities, local governments, civil society and the private sector. With the need for a cross-sectoral perspective, different actors must be fully appreciated and accommodated to ensure that the child-friendly school concept is implemented.

Local school authorities have obligations and responsibilities towards schools in their municipalities. It is their duty to provide resources and funding for teachers and administrators, to provide quality learning materials

and to monitor school planning and progress. Both local and national education authorities monitor the performance of specific schools.

The local education authorities are responsible for supervision of teachers, school managers and headmasters/headmistresses and for the allocation of learning spaces, tools and instruments. They are accountable to the community for resource allocation. In decentralized government systems, community members, parents and children have greater opportunities to participate in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating child-friendly education activities and governance.

A child-friendly school is an integral part of the community and proactively reaches out to it, both seeking its support in improving child-friendliness and in turn supporting community development. Such interlinkage is especially important in areas mired in poverty.

Learning takes place in a variety of circumstances in the child's wider environment – at home, after school, in religious institutions and in interactions with other community members. (See Box, this page.) Child-friendly schools are sensitive to the knowledge, values and traditions students bring from the larger community; at the same time, children acquire new knowledge and skills that they take back into the community. The school can extend its outreach by sending children home with take-home messages that convey information on the importance of hygiene, HIV and AIDS prevention, environmental sustainability and other topics. In this way, the school contributes to community development.

Establishing such a dialogue gives the community a sense of school ownership, so that the school is not seen as something outside the community. This dialogue across boundaries is what distinguishes child-friendly schools from other schools. They often become oases for the wider community, sometimes providing the only space for town or village meetings and festivities. These links anchor the school as a supportive, attentive and relevant community institution.

BRAZIL: NEIGHBOURHOOD AS SCHOOL PROJECTS

A new concept of education has been developed in Vila Madalena, a small district in Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. Known as 'Neighbourhood as School', it is conducted by a non-governmental organization, Cidade Escola Aprendiz, which since 1997 has been turning squares, alleys, cinemas, ateliers, cultural centres and theatres into classrooms.

The Neighbourhood as School, an extension of formal school education, aims to expand learning spaces in the community, creating a pedagogic laboratory in which learning is knowing oneself and socially intervening in the community through communication, art and sports.

The success of the Neighbourhood as School concept is driven by a partnership among schools, families, public authorities, entrepreneurs, associations, craftspeople, non-governmental organizations and volunteers – indispensable powers in community education. Everybody educates; everybody learns at qualification centres, so the experience helps educators and social leaders nourish the learning systems.

Child-friendly schools reach out beyond their confines, seeking partnerships with other actors who contribute to the school's effective implementation of all aspects of child-friendliness. These include health care and social welfare professionals and institutions that contribute to child health and nutrition. Child-friendly schools need



accommodate different communities (various religions, races or political affiliations). The sense of solidarity and shared identity created by building ethos and teaching peaceful coexistence, negotiation, nonviolence and care for the environment can influence larger-scale nation-building.

Strengthening school outreach:

- School sets up a specific plan for school-community collaboration;
- School sends messages regularly to parents and school committee members on school activities and children's progress;
- School and community establish parent-teacher-community associations that meet regularly;
- School encourages students to participate in community activities;
- Parents and community participate in school improvement projects;
- School invites other local agencies (ministries), the private sector,

these partnerships, as they often lack the resources necessary to provide all the elements to be fully child-friendly.

The child-friendly school's outreach can go beyond the geographical community. Many schools

GHANA: STUDENTS TEACHING COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT MALARIA

In Kparigu, in the northern region of Ghana, children in the senior primary classes completed a module on malaria prevention. As part of their lesson, they were encouraged to inform their families and the community about their project as it progressed. This project combined skills from their science, art, music, woodworking and life skills classes. The children developed and enacted a play for younger children and family members about the life cycle of a mosquito and transmission of malaria. They went into the community and identified sources of standing water. Using techniques learned at school, they created proper drainage and minimized sources of standing water.

The community was extremely interested. When the adults saw the children out in the community, they asked about the project and how it would reduce the incidence of malaria. Enthusiasm was high, and community members joined in the efforts and continued to implement the strategies long after the event. As a result, standing-water sources in the community have been significantly reduced, contributing to the control of malaria. The community learned in a concrete, relevant way how children's education contributes to the well-being of all.

- community leaders and parents to participate in planning and school management;
- School networks with community to increase school access for excluded children, especially girls, domestic workers, children with disabilities and minority children;
- School engages community in volunteer programmes (facility and environment maintenance) and recruits people with special knowledge and skills as classroom resources;
- Teacher assigns homework (take-home messages) that requires children to interact with their parents;
- School partners with local private sector, non-governmental and community-based organizations to assist schools and families;
- School health and nutrition programmes are planned and implemented jointly with health and social welfare workers, teachers, parents and others;
- Students are taught songs and poems with health and safety messages and are encouraged to share them with their younger siblings and family members.

UGANDA: CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS SUPPORTED BY THE GIRLS' EDUCATION MOVEMENT

Girls' Education Movement (GEM) members are active in child-to-child methods for reaching out to non-enrolled children. Using proceeds from their income-generating activities, GEM members purchase learning materials for needy pupils, a pragmatic approach to addressing retention. GEM clubs also promote girl-friendly practices and develop ways to bring out-of-school girls back to class, such as purchasing sanitary towels for them. GEM members also engage community members, strengthening school-community partnerships and interaction.

MEXICO: INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

Child-friendly schools have been promoted since 2000 in Chiapas and Yucatan, Mexican states characterized by large indigenous populations and high rates of marginalization. Child-friendly schools are critical in generating participation among children, teachers and parents and in achieving sustainable development in the context of indigenous culture. Child-friendly schools improve learning through intercultural and bilingual teaching, active involvement by students, families and community, and civic education based on democratic values, respect for diversity and promotion of equity, cooperation and participation. They also work towards a healthy, clean and friendly school environment. A parallel initiative, Community Participative Learning, promotes civic education and activities where families and communities learn about children's rights in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner and are encouraged to participate in the organization of community life around the school. Similar efforts under the All Children in School initiative seek to ensure basic quality education for all boys and girls. As a result, schools have higher student achievement, better trained and more motivated teachers, an improved school environment that includes toilets and water facilities, increased community participation in education and a heightened sense of cultural identity, which contributes to higher self-esteem.



Child-friendly learning spaces are often, but not always, established in situations of emergency and crisis to compensate for the lack of adequate, safe and supportive learning environments. In chronic emergency and rehabilitation situations, they can play an important role in providing basic social services, representing points of continuity and stability.

Besides functioning as learning spaces, child-friendly areas may also serve as a place for play and stimulation, recreation and life skills activities, and for cultural and sports events. During a crisis, children need psychosocial support, counseling and safe places where they can participate in learning and recreation to regain stability in their lives. The child-friendly spaces seek to provide children with this normalcy through regular activities necessary for their development.

In all circumstances, child-friendly spaces call for the increased participation of children, parents and communities in decision-making about children's education, recreation and play. These spaces also can serve as community centres that strengthen adults' coping skills and provide a venue for feeding, health care and distribution of relief and rehabilitation items.

4.5.1 Organizing learning opportunities

Child-friendly learning spaces are essential during emergencies and other situations where children fall outside formal school settings. Although governments and education authorities are obligated to provide learning

opportunities for all children, parents, families and communities often take a greater role in developing learning spaces during emergencies.

Local authorities are usually responsible for identifying such spaces; however their establishment and operation are more likely to fall to parents and the local community. Although their focus is on learning, child-friendly spaces may include integrated social services, such as health, nutrition and social welfare. Learning may also take place in local houses where children come together for complementary or after-school activities that are school-related but more voluntary in purpose, content and application.

Local community participation, often through civil society organizations, is key to the success of learning in child-friendly spaces, because it is usually parents and community volunteers who take the initiative to operate the learning activities offered in these spaces. Also, because these are alternative learning spaces, for children who fall outside formal, mainstream institutions, it is often necessary to mobilize children to participate. To effectively integrate marginalized children, learning spaces need to be trusted by the community, and those in charge have to have the know-how to engage in effective social mobilization and communication with young people.

Community contributions to child-friendly spaces, such as tools, equipment, land and direct teaching or administration, are essential to foster a sense of belonging and ownership by children and their families. Like the formal school system, child-



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educational centres combining libraries and Internet access, part of the city's Lighthouses of Knowledge project, are located next to schools to bridge learning between the formal school system, the local community and families.

Strategic steps:

- Identify spaces within the community where learning can take place;
- Involve the school management and PTA in the selection process;
- Create and implement alternative learning programmes for all children, including those out of school, through outreach and collaboration with non-governmental and faith-based organizations;
- Develop and introduce life skills, HIV and AIDS prevention programmes and ways to adapt to changing environments through formal and complementary education activities for children in and out of school;
- Identify meeting places where out-of-school children can be mobilized for inclusion in both formal and non-formal learning activities;
- Utilize existing resources and identify new resources inside and outside the community;
- Collaborate with the private sector to equip alternative and complementary learning spaces;
- Join forces with sports, leisure and cultural organizations;
- Identify community members and volunteers with the skill and time to support learning activities in child-friendly spaces.

friendly spaces must be safe, healthy, protective and inclusive. The education system must oversee these informal spaces to ensure that they meet all requirements.

Alternative spaces for learning can be set up just about anywhere, in churches, mosques, temples, community halls, rooms within the community chief's office, libraries, a compound, allocated land, an unused room in a private house, even a boat. In the Maldives, for instance, madrasas were used for learning activities other than reading the Koran when it was agreed that children also need to read other literature and learn about the world outside their communities.

In Nicaragua and Iran, mobile libraries represent not only opportunities for children to learn but for their families and the larger community as well. In Curitiba, Brazil, lighthouse-shaped

4.6 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The changes recommended to make learning environments child-friendly imply a substantial change in accountabilities, monitoring systems, training, curriculum, school admission practices, the structure and content of schools and early child centres, and the role of families and civil societies. Unless these changes are backed by strong policy commitments and specific means of accountability, they will not occur and children's rights will not be realized. Therefore, political support at the highest level is required

for this standard of schooling. To ensure viability, child-friendly schools must be evidence-based, supported by a system of continual monitoring, evaluation, feedback and advocacy. (See Chapter 8.)

Many developing countries implement child-friendly schools through an accelerated process of school reform. The entire school community works collaboratively towards a shared purpose by meeting, talking and learning from each other's experiences.

4.7 SUPERVISION AND OVERSIGHT

Approaching education and learning from a CFS perspective requires a different form of supervision and management of schools and learning activities. Few education systems, especially in developing countries, have effective supervision and performance appraisal systems for teachers and administrators, and implementation of such systems is almost always under constraints.

The introduction of the child-friendly education and learning framework therefore provides an opportunity to review and change the way teachers and administrators are supervised and managed. It also provides an opportunity to establish and strengthen the monitoring and oversight systems and mechanisms to improve accountability for resource allocation and utilization.

VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEES: ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

In many communities, oversight for education and teacher quality falls to the Village Education Committee, which may have different functions and different levels of responsibility depending on the community. Important roles include monitoring children within the community, assessing the quality of education, identifying rights abuses and locating children who are not in school. However, the power vested in the group and who is represented on it make a major difference in its functioning. The committees monitor schools and serve as a forum for parents' and children's decision-making.

Family and community involvement in the monitoring of learning activities is crucial in a child-friendly learning model and must be integrated into the model from its inception. Governing bodies at all levels must be invited to discuss how the child-friendly school will be regulated. Children's voices must be included via open forums throughout the process to strengthen their influence and participation. Hotlines and other forms of reporting systems should be formulated and agreed upon.

Strategic steps:

- Review education management systems to determine how education is perceived and managed;
- Establish a code of conduct for teachers and child-friendly education managers and a community monitoring system for appraisal and reporting;
- Develop a child-centred management system that builds on the principles of child-friendly education and children's rights;
- Establish an effective, transparent feedback system on resource allocation and utilization with opportunities for community input through the PTA;
- Develop a hotline or other method for reporting abuse and exploitation of students.

EGYPT: THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL MODEL

In the rural hamlets of Upper Egypt, where primary schools were previously non-existent and girls were particularly deprived, community schools have been established as a means of providing children with a quality education. Modelled after the BRAC experience in Bangladesh, the schools are located in the communities and are free, with no hidden costs. Local ownership is a key feature, with communities donating space, ensuring that children come to class and managing the schools through a local education committee in each hamlet.

Young women with intermediate degrees are recruited locally and trained as facilitators to provide quality education through interactive techniques and locally relevant educational content, including health, the environment, agriculture and local history. Graduates of community schools are eligible to take the government schools' standardized exams at the end of grades 3 and 6.

The project serves as a catalyst for development and, given the emphasis on girls and the involvement of women facilitators, for change in gender roles and expectations. Lessons learned from the quality components of the community school model are being mainstreamed through the Girls' Education Initiative and the model itself is being extended through the establishment of additional girl-friendly schools.

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