

## **The UNICEF education strategy: oral report**

### **Background note**

#### **Context**

1. Agencies providing support for education and development need urgently to adapt to the rapidly changing and increasingly complex operational environments as well as the new aid architecture and emerging partnership opportunities and challenges. It is therefore critical to review, clarify and refocus attention on the normative role, competencies, capacities and comparative advantage of UNICEF in education.

#### **Timing**

2. In the decade since the Executive Board approved the last education strategy paper, there have been major changes in (and a significant refocusing of) the international goals agreed for education and development. The Education for All (EFA) goals set in Jomtien (1990) were reappraised at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, resulting in the "Six Dakar Goals" for education. Later in 2000, two of these goals (on primary school completion and gender parity in education) were reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, as part of the shared development aspirations for the twenty-first century.

3. As the United Nations agency for children and guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF is fully committed to these goals, which have profound relevance and implications for the rights of all children. These goals were reflected in the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) for 2001-2005, which included a focus area on girls' education as the entry point for leveraging quality education for all children. The MTSP for 2006-2009 accentuates the link with the Millennium Development Goals through a focus on basic education and gender equality. It is now important to outline the strategy through which UNICEF will work to ensure progress towards these internationally agreed goals and targets on education and gender equality, in line with its clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

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\* E/ICEF/2006/1.

## **The role of UNICEF in education**

4. In addition to the refocusing of international goals for education, there have been significant changes with respect to the new aid architecture and its modalities. The ongoing harmonization and simplification efforts within the United Nations system have created further opportunities for greater cooperation at country level, through joint programming within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The Monterrey Consensus has provided further opportunities to leverage resources for development, and the EFA Fast Track Initiative has evolved as a practical application of this consensus for the education sector. Implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness has implications that will have an impact on options for the allocation and use of resources for development. Generally, these changes in the aid architecture will have significant impact on the role of UNICEF as a partner in education and development, as an advocate and facilitator of children's right to education, and as a champion for girls' education and gender equality in education. They will also affect the way in which UNICEF leverages policy and resources to benefit children through improved education outcomes in all circumstances.

5. The operational environment for education is increasingly complex and expectations for what can be achieved through education are extremely challenging. Education is a critical part of humanitarian response in emergency situations, just as it is an integral part of early recovery and longer-term reconstruction in disrupted societies. Education is an essential service in "fragile" States, just as it is vital for communities/countries threatened by HIV/AIDS, persistent drought, food insecurity, social violence or deepening poverty. Education is integral to initiatives and policies for community/national development. All of these situations require different types of operational competencies and capabilities for achieving educational goals. It is important to outline and clarify the role of UNICEF in education in these different circumstances that both define the operational environment for education and generate expectations of what can be achieved through education.

6. In these different circumstances and changing environments, UNICEF participates in and contributes to the formulation of policies and partnerships for implementation of strategic interventions in education. For example, it supports and participates in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, where partners agreed to cluster roles and accountabilities at global and country levels and UNICEF is considered a key partner at country level, ensuring education in emergencies is achieved in line with the Core Commitment for Children in Emergencies. Along the same lines, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has initiated work on service delivery in "fragile" States and UNICEF is leading the work stream for education. This should be seen as an integral part of the knowledge-building and intellectual leadership role for UNICEF in education.

7. At the other end of the spectrum UNICEF has played a lead role in several countries (more than any other agency) in the process of reviewing and helping to revise credible national education plans prior to endorsement by local donors for funding and support under the EFA Fast Track Initiative. UNICEF is also working to ensure (through the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) that issues concerning gender and girls' education are in the mainstream of sector-wide processes in education. All of this is in addition to the diverse range of education programmes in over 150 UNICEF country programmes, through which it supports countries and helps to facilitate the right of all children to quality education.

### **Components of the new education strategy**

8. UNICEF will review the links between its work in education and in other sectors in a comprehensive manner to strengthen its internal synergy and intersectoral partnerships. Expectations on the contribution of education to work in the areas of HIV/AIDS, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, and health, etc., will help to define resources, staffing and operating priorities for education. Similarly, expectations of contributions from other sectors to enhance work in education will shape these elements for those sectors.

9. Capacity in terms of staffing profiles and staff numbers across the organization will be reviewed and overhauled to strengthen the vital niche competencies and comparative advantage that UNICEF has demonstrated it can offer in education. Capacity will also be enhanced as a critical determinant of the ability of UNICEF to fulfil expectations arising from the promise it has shown in addressing challenges in education and gender under all circumstances. Capacity is not limited to educational expertise but embraces the full spectrum of technical and related expertise in allied fields that complement work in the education sector, in line with the roles and responsibilities of UNICEF.

10. The engagement of UNICEF with other agencies in partnerships and networks will be reviewed, rationalized and revitalized to strengthen the "value added" of its contribution to overall efforts for achieving the education and gender goals/targets. Special focus will be given to the UNGEI, led by UNICEF, as well as the EFA movement, coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the EFA Fast Track Initiative, anchored by the World Bank. Other networks to be given attention include the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies and the Inter-Agency Task Team on HIV/AIDS and Education.

## **Guiding principles and approaches for the strategy**

11. In formulating the strategy, UNICEF will be guided by its core principles and mandated role and responsibilities, as well as by evidence from research and evaluation of good practices and proven models in education. A key guiding principle is that of education as a right for all children. This often makes it necessary and even imperative for UNICEF to focus on disadvantaged population groups, using specific project interventions to promote and facilitate education as a right. Other guiding principles and approaches pertain to the quest for effectiveness and efficiency in facilitating the right to education. For example, the principle of intersectorality recognizes that success in education depends on contributions from other sectors to address access, retention, completion, quality and learning achievement. Similarly, the principle of reciprocity affirms that investments in education come with expectations that education can contribute to solving problems in other sectors. Principles of good partnership strengthen synergy and coherence of support for education as a right, while the principle of country leadership helps to focus attention on relevance, legitimacy and sustainability.

12. Taken together, these and other related principles create a tension for UNICEF in how it approaches education as a right. There is often a need to focus on specific interventions for excluded, marginalized and disadvantaged groups. It is through such interventions that we learn valuable lessons of what works under certain conditions. At the same time, however, it is clear that in the long run the right to education is best served within quality education systems that include all groups, provide equitable opportunities and experiences, deliver learning effectively and efficiently, and are also robust and sustainable. Lessons from small-scale work are invaluable, as rights-based programming and strong advocacy for “education as a right” often imply mainstreaming successful interventions and scaling up proven models to help countries develop “rights promoting” education systems. The strategy paper will be based on extensive review and consultation at global, regional and country levels across the organization and with key partners. Full account will be taken of the implications of trends in the environment for education policy, planning and service delivery, as well as the emerging architecture and operational frameworks that influence and will eventually govern the business of development assistance to education.