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A woman teacher engages a class of schoolchildren in the remote coal mining village of Sheer Baz, in the predominantly rural province of Balochistan. Pakistan is one of 25 priority countries identified by UNICEF in an initiative to accelerate girls' enrolment and to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education by the year 2005.

IV - GIRLS' EDUCATION

Total procurement for education: \$71 million

In 2004, for the third year in a row, educational supplies represented UNICEF's second-highest procurement expenditure. This continuing growth is mainly due to emergency responses and special 'Back-to-School' projects in post-emergency countries.

UNICEF is committed to assisting in re-opening schools and establishing teaching and recreational facilities in the first six to eight weeks after an emergency – whether a natural disaster or conflict. In the longer term, educational rehabilitation programmes can span several years and include intense supply procurement and distribution activity.

The School-in-a-Box and the recreation kit have become part of UNICEF's standard response in an emergency. In some countries, the kits are adapted to respond better to local needs and context. The increase in education supplies also reflects UNICEF's special focus on girls' education in 25 countries. In 2004, Supply Division procured enough standard School-in-a-Box kits (including replenishment kits) to send 1.5 million children back to school. In addition, six million primary-aged children in Iraq and 2.3 million children in the Democratic Republic of Congo received educational supplies and kits purchased and packed by Supply Division.

Moreover, since much educational procurement is local, Supply Division plays a significant role in ensuring that the technical specifications, quality of products and procurement procedures are appropriate.

The absence of safe water and separate toilets can be a major reason why girls never attend school – or drop out, especially at puberty. A large amount of the water and sanitation supplies procured by UNICEF are allocated to primary schools, to increase girls' enrolment. Water and sanitation programmes at school are a means to advocate for effective water and sanitation measures at the family and community levels. Parents and local authorities can see the impact of safe water and latrines on children's health, and consequently often build their own facilities.

Accelerating girls' education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), after years of conflict and economic decline, the education picture was quite bleak at the beginning of 2004. The enrolment rate was 48 per cent for girls and 55 per cent for boys, with approximately 4.6 million children out of school (2.5 million of whom were girls).

UNICEF had identified the DRC as one of its 25 priority countries for girls' education. In 2004, one of the objectives was to enrol an additional two million children – at least half of them girls - at the beginning of the new school year in September. A major obstacle to enrolment was the cost of educational supplies –hence it became a focus for the Country Office's efforts.

For many years, the DRC has been the main non-emergency recipient of educational supplies for Supply Division, because it is not possible to find quality educational supplies in sufficient quantities in the country. In 2004, Supply Division, in close consultation with the Country Office, procured over \$2.5 million worth of educational kits for DRC.

At the beginning of the year, Supply Division's education expert visited DRC to help both the Country Office and Government in designing education kits according to their own design, and assist with their supply planning and distribution – a challenge in a country where roads were in bad condition, the railways were unreliable, and fighting was still going on in some regions. It was decided that the kits would be shipped from Copenhagen to three entry points (Goma in the Northeast, Matadi on the West coast and Lubumbashi in the Southeast). From there, the kits would be sent by plane, truck, boat and bicycle to distribution points. Head teachers, teachers and children came to pick up the supplies. Children were there to witness that schools had received their educational equipment.

Based on the specifications developed by the Country Office and the Government, nearly 46,000 student kits and 7,000 teachers kits were packed at the UNICEF warehouse in Copenhagen over a 16 week period. Staff volunteered to pack some of these kits as the order was urgent, and to allow regular warehouse staff to respond to orders from other countries without delay.

At the beginning of September, as planned, 2.3 million children (half of them girls) went back to school with UNICEF supplies. In addition, UNICEF had provided over 54,000 teachers with teaching equipment.

In view of its success, the operation will be repeated in 2005, with a difference: while Supply Division will procure the educational supplies, most of them will be packed in DRC. This approach will allow UNICEF to save funds on freight and increase its collaboration with local entities.

Sending children back to school in Iraq

The biggest educational procurement project ever in UNICEF's history for one single year was the School Project for Iraq in 2004, surpassing even the record-breaking activities of the previous year. Educational materials were supplied for a value of over \$31 million. The time frame from initial discussions on the type of supplies required, to the final distribution of the student kits in Iraq, was a mere nine months. Because of the challenge of returning millions of Iraqi children to school as soon as possible, Supply Division used a comprehensive supply management approach that emphasises the importance of accurate forecasting and timely information provision to all involved – suppliers, forwarders, government departments, and schools. This ensures that no time or resources are wasted and as much preparation as possible is done in advance.

In close cooperation with the new, temporary Ministry of Education in Iraq, UNICEF designed new school kits for six million Iraqi elementary school children – compared to five million children in 2003. The project also included providing teacher kits, recreational kits, blackboards and chalk. Most of the items were sourced in China, where the suppliers also packed the kits. Delivery deadlines for all education kits arriving in 21 directorates in Iraq were set in July. The total volume of supplies shipped for the project was almost 1,000 40 foot-containers.

All deadlines were met. Suppliers kept their promises on delivery times, and on inspection the quality of goods always met the required standards. The freight forwarders and shipping lines gave UNICEF commercial top priority for receiving containers, and providing space on very congested vessels out of China. This was only possible because of the accurate forecasting, and very early and precise pre-advice information on sailing dates and container numbers at each of the receiving ports that UNICEF's freight forwarders had provided.

As the security situation in Iraq was very volatile, the supplies were routed in through two corridors, Turkey and Jordan. On arrival in port, the school kits were immediately loaded onto trucks and transported directly to 21 governorates all over Iraq, where the supplies were received by UNICEF monitors and staff from the Ministry of Education.

In the case of Iraq, a comprehensive supply management approach - ensuring effective cooperation between suppliers, transport companies, UNICEF and the Government - meant that some six million Iraqi children (44 per cent girls) had school supplies and could return to school on schedule.