Background:
UNICEF Viet Nam has been supporting the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to implement the Adolescent Friendly School (AFS) model since 2007. The whole-school and rights-based approach promoted through the AFS model address fundamental aspects of education, such as access, quality, and the overall learning environment. Besides, it addresses adolescent development issues such as healthy living education including HIV and AIDS which integrated well the school experience's on healthy living and life skills education. Other issues such as protection from abuse, gender equity are also included as part of the conceptual framework, with key indicators to measure progress and school performance. Adolescent participation is among the key thrusts in this initiative, and is fostered through the participatory processes for school self-assessment, development and implementation of school improvement plans. The model focuses on the establishment of a conducive learning environment, quality and child friendly teaching and learning processes, and greater participation of students in school development. This is part of the response to support the government goal of achieving universal lower secondary education.

Purpose/Objective:

In 2011 UNICEF and its partner commissioned an independent consultancy to conduct an evaluation to assess the outcome of UNICEF-assisted model of Adolescent Friendly Schools after four years of implementation. The evaluation aimed to identify examples of good practices, especially if they can be replicated in other schools; and positive effects on individual children; and document lessons learned from the model and provide recommendations to MOET on the incorporation of relevant criteria and indicators into the benchmarks of national school standards for rights-based education.

Methodology:
The evaluation was conducted by a team, comprising representatives of MOET, UNICEF, national experts and an international consultant. Following a review of relevant literature, the team collectively participated in evaluation planning, tool development, data collection and analysis.

Two weeks were allocated for data collection, during which the evaluation team spent 1.5 days in each of five LSS. The schools, selected by MOET, were located in five districts of three provinces, namely: one school in Dong Thap (Mekong river delta region); two schools in Kon Tum (Central Highlands region), and two schools in Ho Chi Minh City. These schools represented i) different geographical areas (urban, rural and rural/remote settings); and ii) different combinations of students by ethnicity and socio-economic status.

Prior to commencement, student understanding of the evaluation purpose / process and their willingness to participate was obtained in writing. A range of activities were conducted to enhance the authenticity of student contribution. Student activities typically began with introductions, informal discussion on interests and talents and singing. Individual student questionnaires were administered. This was supplemented by small group creative activities, whereby students collaborated to develop and present their combined views on different aspects of AFS, employing one or other creative approach.

Information collected was validated, to the extent possible, by using multiple methods and sources. School adolescent-friendly status, for example, was considered on the basis of school records, student feedback (individual and group), separate stakeholder focus group discussions (teacher, parents, community), and direct observation of the school and classroom environment. Transparency was promoted in each school through i) initial plenary meetings with all stakeholders wherein the evaluation purpose, process, criteria and intended use of findings were explained and queries addressed; ii) school final wrap-up sessions where preliminary findings were presented for validation or further comment; and ii) sharing initial findings with stakeholders in Hanoi.

Findings/Conclusions:

**Ongoing school quality improvement processes initiated**

The first key critical outcome of the AFS initiative has been the initiation of school quality improvement processes in all AFS schools – involving development, implementation and monitoring the results of SIPs - focused specifically on the inclusion of all adolescents in a quality lower secondary school education process. Most importantly, it is a school improvement process involving the active participation of parents and the wider community, together with students and teachers, enabling response to the needs of specific children within specific communities. Furthermore, it is a school improvement process that is logical, structured, based on analysis of current school strengths and weaknesses, and referenced to a specific and comprehensive set of ‘adolescent-friendly’ quality standards. Despite the time and efforts required to complete the AFS school self-assessment, all schools found the AFS SSA process a very useful input to the development of SIPs.

**Enhanced ‘Adolescent-Friendly’ Status of Schools**

On the basis of comparison of AFS status in 2007 and 2009, the evaluation identified a tremendous amount of school improvement in all five schools, across the five AFS Dimensions and for the majority of the indicators. A significant number of indicators, across all five schools now score 3 or higher. On a scale of 0-4, these are indeed very positive outcomes.

**Outcomes for Students**

Students were asked a number of open-ended questions which focused on things students do and do not like about school, factors contributing to learning, to learning difficulties and drop-out. Collectively, a wide range of responses were provided by students across the five schools. While student feedback validates the relevance of all existing indicators, various gaps in the current AFS indicators emerge. Students identified a range of positive ‘adolescent-friendly’ practices in their own schools. Significant findings from student responses across the five schools are presented briefly below.

**Outcomes for Parents and Community**

Parents and community representatives, in all schools, had a good understanding of the AFS concept. This resulted from participation in AFS activities (self-assessment, school improvement planning, implementation and monitoring) and school/community advocacy – as opposed to participation in specific training activities as such. Schools took active steps to engage the wider community in the implementation of the AFS initiative. Many stakeholders consulted referred repeatedly to the strengthening of the school-community relationship which has been achieved in AFS schools. Furthermore, the nature of parent/community support was reported to have expanded from material &/or financial support alone to broader involvement in school planning, decision-making and participation in a wider range of school activities. On the whole, parents and community representatives were satisfied with their involvement with AFS, with the AFS model itself, and with progress made at their school. They acknowledged that AFS is an effective way to improve schools, stressed the need to maintain the results achieved and recommended expanding AFS to other schools.
Outcomes for Teachers

Teachers indicated AFS is a feasible model for school improvement aimed at enhancing comprehensive educational quality. Teachers are satisfied with the school improvement achieved thus far. Teachers advocated MOET to institutionalize the AFS approach in legal documents related to all school activities and in pre-service teacher training courses.

DOET Support for AFS Model

Every school expressed broad satisfaction with the timely guidance, training, materials, regular monitoring, motivation, supervision provided by MOET/DOET. DOET leadership and ongoing support for AFS implementation was clearly a significant factor contributing to school achievements to date. In all provinces, DOET representatives were thoroughly conversant with the AFS model and specific activities and outcomes in their schools. DOET praised the efforts and time expended by teachers, staff and educational managers in AFS advocacy and promotion.

Relevance

In broad terms, the AFS concept seeks to promote the universalisation and quality improvement of lower secondary school education in Viet Nam, for all adolescents in Viet Nam, in line with the national goal to achieve the same. This intent was understood by stakeholders and repeatedly emphasised, in all five school contexts. The existing AFS dimensions, criteria and indicators are indeed relevant. However, there are a number of gaps in the indicators, and there is both scope, and need, to enhance the clarity, meaning and measurability of indicators.

Certainly, the participatory approach to school improvement planning has enabled responsiveness to specific needs and priorities, as locally identified within individual school/community contexts. If “implementation approach” is interpreted to include the approach to capacity building, then it could be said that training and material support has not been totally responsive to specific needs of individual schools.

Effectiveness

Support provided through the AFS pilot project has developed the capacities of school communities to plan and implement comprehensive school improvement that is focused on the inclusion of all adolescents in quality teaching and learning activities. A comparison of school self-assessment scores in 2007 and 2009, revealed considerable improvement in all schools for many of the AFS indicators. Thus, it can be broadly said that adolescent-friendly pilot schools have become more inclusive, more participatory, more healthy, safe, protective and more child-centred in terms of teaching and learning methods. The AFS approach was widely reported to have contributed to widespread positive improvements in student learning, development of life skills and in individual self-confidence, contributing to overall improvement in the schools.

The enhanced collaboration between school, parents and teachers was considered by many respondents to be the most significant factor underpinning AFS development. However, the combined leadership, professionalism and commitment of MOET/DOET officers, supported by UNICEF, is without doubt are significant critical factor explaining the significant achievements over a relatively short period of time.

Efficiency

All the schools have been successful in mobilising resources from a range of sources, to enable implementation of school improvement plans. Considerable variation was noted in the quality and/or quantity of AFS enabling quality inputs available across schools (either infrastructure, facilities, teaching learning resources, other). Furthermore, the evaluation team observed significant differences between schools in terms of infrastructure, facilities and resources.

Sustainability

Teachers unanimously reported the AFS model had been advocated and promoted through annual MOET guidelines. Master trainers have been trained, and then provided training to teachers within schools, on a number of topics. Teachers indicated they felt the training was useful, but the time was limited. And more in-depth training is required, especially for ‘life skills education’, ‘active teaching methods’ student assessment, and adolescent psychology. Considerable teacher turn-over resulting from transfer in and out, was noted in a number of schools. Very little formal training has been provided to parents and community representatives. The provision of training courses for community members and local governments was recommended. A foundation has been established upon which a sustainable future for AFS can be constructed. All stakeholder groups separately expressed commitment to the AFS model, and all advocated institutionalisation of the same.

Strengthening the AFS Development Model
The AFS indicators are important for several reasons. Firstly, they highlight critical issues that contribute to or constrain the active participation of students in LSS education. Indicators are an opportunity to flag an important issue. Important issues need to be named and specified. Indicators also provide direction for action and a point of reference for quality assessment, school improvement planning, resource allocation and monitoring progress. For indicators to serve these multiple functions, they need to be clear, specific, unambiguous and measurable. Examination of the existing indicators (and accompanying rubric) revealed a number of limitations. Greater definition is required. For maximum utility the indicators should be accompanied by a checklist specifying 4 (or 5) essential characteristics of practice (in relation to the indicator) that reflect the quality and appropriate quantity aspects.

Recommendations:

1. **Consolidate the AFS Model & Integrate into National Secondary School Standards**
   - AFS conceptual framework provides the foundation for the National Secondary School Standards, wherein ‘Adolescent-Friendliness’ means: ‘quality, inclusive education for all - through the active elimination of every barrier and the reinforcement of every positive factor, contributing to the achievement of the same’.
   - The existing AFS indicators be reviewed and refined, as soon as possible, taking into account the following:-
   - The AFS self-assessment tool be simplified, building in a greater degree of accuracy in the assessment process
   - The revised AFS indicators and self-assessment rubric be disseminated initially to the 50 pilot schools (with a specific assessment of enhanced user-friendliness and accuracy) prior to expansion to other schools.

2. **Institutionalisation of AFS into National Systems**
   - An enabling legislative and institutional environment be created for AFS development, through the integration of AFS principles into normative legal documents covering educational activities broadly, and providing specific regulations on duties and operational rules for relevant organizations, such as Regulation on National School Standards, Regulation of Standards on Teachers, Rule of Parents’ Representative Board, and Rule of Learning Encouragement Association etc.
   - The AFS school model (principals, indicators, practices) be integrated into all pre-service teacher training programs, beginning with an exercise mapping AFS concepts against existing teacher training curriculum

3. **Development & Implementation of AFS Expansion Strategy**
   - a consolidated AFS Training Resource Package be developed, including modules on each of the Core Dimensions, and individual units providing specific guidance on each of the indicators (including case studies and examples) - for use in both pre-service and in-service teacher training
   - an AFS In-Service Training Structure be developed, comprising district and school-based components
   - a plan be developed for the progressive phased roll-out of the AFS model to all LSS over the period 2012-2020.
   - dedicated AFS training be conducted each year for new school principals and vice principals
   - community representatives be included, alongside teachers, in all (relevant) AFS training

4. **Redress Resource Disparities between Schools, with specific focus on Ethnic Minority Communities**
   - dedicated efforts be made to enable rural and remote schools to achieve AFS standards, through the provision of appropriate infrastructure and resources, with priority assistance provided for Water and Sanitation requirements, and School Barding facilities – beginning with an immediate assessment of the water and sanitation needs of rural/remote schools, and the feasibility of establishing appropriate boarding facilities for children from distant communities.
the AFS model be systematically introduced into the schools included in the Asian Development Bank Project supporting LSS in the most disadvantaged regions.

5. Strengthen Ongoing Monitoring, Coordination and Further Study

- that a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy be developed and implemented, to support the ongoing development and expansion of the AFS model in Viet Nam
- a systematic approach to regular school-based peer-monitoring be introduced for teachers to mutually reinforce the effective implementation of new skills (especially those related to new teaching and assessment methods)
- that multi-sectoral AFS coordination mechanisms be established at national, provincial and district levels, with representation of Education, Health, and Social Protection partners, amongst other
- that a number of specific studies be conducted to inform ongoing AFS development – the following topics have been identified as warranting closer analysis:
  - Implementation of active teaching methods – Progress and Challenges
  - Changes in Student Assessment Practices
  - Quality of school boarding facilities
  - Exploration of Strategies to include children in a range of different 'special circumstances'
  - Development of School/Community Child Protection (and Referral) Strategy
  - Implementation of AFS in ethnic minority communities, changes in community attitudes, and impact on girls access to LSS
  - Ongoing Identification of Good Practices

Lessons Learned:

- It is essential to involve all key stakeholders right from the beginning in the school self-assessment and school improvement planning processes.
- Effective collaboration and cooperation between school, family and community can support student learning and holistic development.
- AFS approach has been effective in mobilizing resources.
- The broad-based partnership promoted by AFS has resulted in a stronger culture of joint action for school improvement.
- Local stakeholders require knowledge, skills, appropriate attitudes and motivation to develop and achieve a common AFS vision - requiring appropriate training, resources and support.
- Additional resources are required for particularly disadvantaged schools, especially those in more remote locations, to ensure equality of access to the achievement of common AFS.
- A methodical approach to staff development is essential, combining training, ongoing peer-support within the school, follow-up support rand monitoring visits.
- MOET’s leadership to promote institutional learning about AFS principles, approaches and school improvement experiences has resulted in a review of benchmarks of national school standards.
- AFS development process has enabled stakeholders to 'envision a quality school for all', and to plan and work towards its realization. This is a significant achievement.

Key words: The Adolescent-Friendly School (AFS) programme was launched in Viet Nam in 2006-2007, as a major initiative to support the government's commitment to universal lower secondary school education. This evaluation highlighted the key outcomes of the AFS Pilot initiative from 2007 to 2011, based on a sample of five of the fifty pilot schools. The AFS model was found to have inspired and empowered schools and communities and other local stakeholders to actively participate in an ongoing process of adolescent-friendly school improvement. Significant and wide-ranging improvements were reported in the school learning environment. On the whole, students indicated they were very happy to be at school. Overwhelming support for the continuation, consolidation, institutionalization and progressive expansion of the AFS model to all lower secondary schools in the country was expressed. Accordingly, the overarching recommendation of the evaluation is that MOET consolidate the AFS
model, institutionalize the same, and progressively introduce AFS to all LSS in Vietnam. MOET’s current efforts to develop a comprehensive and coherent set of secondary school standards (receptive to the incorporation of AFS principles) provides an opportunity for the AFS model to be institutionalized and make a national impact. To this end, a number of specific recommendations are made.