

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

NIGERIA

Parents on the frontlines of early grade reading and math

15 July 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned life on its head for Nigerian families, disrupting education and livelihoods across the country. Parents have risen to the occasion, playing new roles in supporting their children to continue learning from home during school closures and are a key force to ensuring their return now that schools have reopened their doors to 9,053,597 learners in pre-primary and 32,420,093 in primary, of whom 20,340,142 are girls.

The switch to home-based learning when COVID-19 shuttered schools had profound implications for parents, especially for those with young children who require the greatest help. Throughout this period, UNICEF worked with the Federal Ministry of Education to develop programming around alternate home- and community-based learning platforms. The programme, implemented through selected civil society organisations and government partners, expands structures and avenues for learning for children. The reading skills of community members and children are being improved through community reading hubs, literacy programmes offered over the radio, storytelling and take-home learning kits. Through the programme, UNICEF and its partners build supportive home environments by providing families with printed learning worksheets that set out simple activities for parents and community volunteers to do with young children to help them to develop early literacy and numeracy skills. It also ensures that children's learning at home is monitored.

The established volunteer-led in-person community learning hubs for small groups of children offers a range of options, including non-formal education programming and bridging programmes designed to bring participating students back into the formal education system now that schools have reopened. Early grade reading and math are a particular focus of these community-based lessons. Parents are involved in two ways. First, they are among the community volunteers who lead lessons in these spaces.

Second, parents serve on the school management committees alongside teachers, school administrators, and other community leaders which are linked to the community learning hubs. As members of the school management committees, parents are called upon to support learning at home and to bring children back to school as these reopen, including children who were already out of school prior to the pandemic – an estimated 9,969,280 children (3,853,297 girls) of pre-primary and primary-age.

UNICEF-supported training for community volunteers and teachers on how to provide mental health and psychosocial support to learners is a critical element of this education programming. The sessions provide tools to deal with the stress of the pandemic, but also broader issues linked to insecurity and attacks on education.

RESULTS

- Volunteer-led community-based learning hubs have provided 540,994 primary-aged children (195,669 girls) with in-person learning opportunities.
- UNICEF has trained 33,000 community volunteers and teachers (just over 13,000 women) on the provision of mental health and psychosocial support, critical for ongoing efforts to get young children back to school and start learning recovery.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Parents play a critical role in their children's learning at home and in ensuring their return to school.** Engaged positively, they can ensure success. For example, parents' fulsome engagement has contributed to greater than anticipated use of community learning hubs.

- **Flexible approaches are key to maintaining parents' greater engagement with the children's learning of basic reading and math.** The pandemic has disrupted education but also household budgets, placing greater strain on families. UNICEF is working to adapt the scheduling of classes offered through community hubs, for example, to accommodate harvesting cycles on family farms to maximise uptake. Establishing a process for engaging the parents and school management committees in such interventions and decision-making will likely increase ownership and improve literacy levels, employable skills, health outcomes, and social capital.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF, the Federal and state Ministries of Education together with other partners plan to scale up community-based learning hubs in number and location. It is also worthy of note that when communities take initiatives, they complement Government's efforts. More so, every community faces different challenges and need local solutions. The process will be participatory aimed at the selection and empowerment of talented leaders and volunteers, as well as discussion to understand and appreciate different perspectives with the aim of eliminating roadblocks to community learning.

Cost effectiveness: To date, UNICEF has invested approximately US \$1.5 million, including valuable contributions from the Global Partnership for Education, on foundational education programming that engages parents with close to two million children aged 6 to 8 years of age, half of whom are girls.

For more information, please contact:

UNICEF Nigeria Country Office: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/contact-us>
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