

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

INDIA

All students back to learning

March 2022

In March 2020, when COVID-19 closed schools in India, it disrupted the education of millions of children. Schools reopened fully two years later in March 2022 following the Omicron wave of infection, but just in the final month of the 2021/2022 school year. There are high hopes that the 2022/2023 academic year, starting in early April 2022, will herald a return to a semblance of normalcy. This milestone reopening will see an estimated 293 million learners, including the 35 million enrolled in public pre-schools, return to school and to learning.

Learning recovery efforts have kicked off with campaigns to ensure that all children return to school, especially the most marginalised groups. To gauge learning losses, the Government will turn to the results of its National Achievement Survey (NAS) conducted in November 2021, which tests learning outcomes of students in Grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. It will also consider the results of the Foundational Learning Study. This second study involves one-on-one testing of Grade 3 students on foundational numeracy and literacy and is slated to take place at the end of March 2022. UNICEF is a technical partner for both learning assessment studies.

The Government has invited UNICEF, as a trusted partner, to provide technical advice on how to approach learning recovery. UNICEF has stressed the importance of tackling the issue as a long-term endeavour, embedded in sector plans and budgets at all levels. It has pressed these key messages in its regular education policy dialogue circles in addition to the Parliamentary Committee on Education, which is the highest advisory body on education in India, in August 2021 and again before the National Human Rights Commission in February 2022. In so doing, UNICEF has had the opportunity to contribute its technical know-how and expertise to the Guidelines on Learning Recovery published by the national Ministry of Education in February 2022 for implementation by the state education authorities in the upcoming school year. Under the Guidelines, the Government has allocated approximately US \$8 per student for more than 5 million students

enrolled in Grades 6 to 10 in government schools as additional funding for learning recovery programmes. The cost for designing and implementing learning recovery programmes for children in Grades 1 to 5 is included in the national mission of foundational learning announced by the Government in July 2021.

RESULTS

- The Government sought UNICEF's advice on learning recovery in multiple high-profile fora, providing it with a privileged opportunity to contribute to the country's national learning recovery efforts being rolled out from the national Ministry of Education through to the state and local levels. These national Guidelines on Learning Recovery are expected to reach 132 million students in Grades 1 to 12 in government schools.
- UNICEF also contributed to the development of national [Guidelines for parent participation in home-based learning during school closure and beyond](#), released by the national Ministry of Education in June 2021. They have been adapted by states in their guidance on distance learning, in manuals for school management committees and field volunteers, as well as in specific programmes aimed at children in vulnerable communities. In some states, they have been adapted for use with resource persons who undertake home visits to support the parents of children with disabilities. An estimated 54 million children aged 3 to 8 years have benefitted.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Plan for resiliency.** With heightened awareness of the risks posed by future variants and other sudden emergencies, one lesson was to plan learning recovery for the long term but using bite-sized, modular plans that are manageable for teachers and parents to support children to get back on track.

- **Learning recovery requires urgent action but must be evidence-based.** Analysis of the 2021 round of the NAS and the upcoming Foundational Learning study will be critical to ensure that learning recovery activities respond in a tailored way to the specific gaps of learners.
- **Mental health and psychosocial supports are fundamental elements of learning recovery.** The COVID-19 public health crisis has piled stress and anxiety on learners, but teachers, parents and others also need support. About a third of the students in Grades 1 to 8, as perceived by their parents, and nearly half of the secondary students felt that their mental health and emotional well-being had been poor and very poor since schools closed.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF will continue to provide technical advice at state level in preparing state-specific plans for and rollout of the national Guidelines on Learning Recovery in the 2022/2023 school year. As a first priority, this will mean efforts to support monitoring with the aim of ensuring that the most vulnerable groups of children and adolescents return to school. This includes early warning systems that track factors linked to increased risk of dropout, such as irregular attendance, behavioural issues, disability and families under stress, among others. UNICEF is also in discussions about how to broaden community-based programmes for children who may not have adequate help at home to make up lost learning and is in the process of training 4,000 master trainers (30 *per cent* women) in 10 states to leverage technology for enhanced education delivery inside and outside the classroom, as well as 350 master trainers (40 *per cent* women) in 7 states for holistic well-being of teachers and for the provision of mental health and psychosocial support to children as they come back to school. These master trainers will in turn build capacity of teachers in their respective states.

Cost effectiveness: UNICEF's investments vary from state to state. However, as an example, in one state, UNICEF invested US \$25,000, which enabled a partner to develop teacher guides and worksheets for children in Grades 1 and 2 for learning recovery, with the Government handling the printing costs. As a result, UNICEF's strategic investment leveraged approximately US \$1,000,000 to reach an estimated 1.6 million children (51 *per cent* girls).

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