Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change and is one of the world’s most disaster-prone countries. Every year, due to floods and cyclones, schools close for months, affecting children’s education and resulting in learning loss for several million children. However, it was only when all schools were closed for over 20 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic that the Government of Bangladesh, supported by UNICEF, developed a strategy to provide remote learning during future emergencies, ensuring continuity of learning and building resilience in the education sector.

Realizing that the digital divide could create further barriers, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, the Government employed a range of modalities using technology-based delivery platforms (TV, Online, Radio, Mobile Phone) and non-technology-based approaches such as home visits and distribution of paper-based lessons and assignments. UNICEF supported the Government in planning and introducing these multiple remote learning mechanisms throughout the COVID-19 school closures.

Despite these efforts, the UNICEF-supported National Survey on the Education of Children highlighted that less than a fifth of children accessed remote learning during school closures, leading to increased dropouts and learning losses and exacerbating learning poverty: an alarming 56 percent of children in Grade 5 were not reaching the minimum proficiency levels in reading, and the most marginalized children in Bangladesh were disproportionately affected.
While preparing for safe school operations and future emergencies as well as learning recovery, the Government, along with UNICEF and other development partners, used lessons learned during COVID-19 remote learning to agree that:

- High-quality standardized materials should be developed for use in education response and learning continuity during emergencies;
- Materials should cover core curricular areas, prioritizing foundational learning as well as grade-specific standards;
- Content and presentation of materials should adhere to all rights-based elements, including gender responsiveness and inclusion;
- Materials should be prepared through a participatory approach involving all stakeholders—particularly children and teachers—to ensure ownership and sustainability; and
- Materials can be used in emergencies and as a catch-up or remedial education source.

In 2022, UNICEF provided technical assistance and developed and disseminated large-scale, multi-modal digital content for television, radio, and the internet as well as printed kits for children in remote areas with limited or no access to technology. These digital content and printed materials aimed to cover the entire curriculum for all core subjects from pre-primary through to Grade 10. In addition, printed learning kits comprising workbooks, games, and cards were also developed for students from pre-primary to Grade 5, based on an abridged syllabus. The Government took leadership in the development and planning of all content and materials, with teachers and students actively engaged in the process along with education experts and government officials.

RESULTS

- UNICEF helped prepare 2,683 television lessons, 1,056 radio lessons, and 1,558 digital lessons for the internet under the project. While the television and radio lessons will be broadcast periodically on national television, they will also be made available on social media platforms to broaden their reach. These lessons are expected to benefit several cohorts in the coming years.
- The printed learning materials will be distributed to 150,933 children from the most marginalized groups in 842 schools to support their learning recovery. These printed materials will support education continuity in several disaster risk-related emergencies, especially during floods or cyclones when children lack digital access.
- Through the process, UNICEF helped build the capacity of more than 400 experts and teachers in preparing materials and lessons.

LESSONS LEARNED

- To ensure sustainability and effective uptake by the government, national stakeholders need to take ownership of the process as well as the outcomes, and remote-learning initiatives should be co-created using a participatory approach from the planning stage to the execution stage. This approach not only supports local capacity development but also fast-tracks the process by leveraging established government systems.
- Turning a challenge into an opportunity, COVID-19 response plans aimed at ensuring continuity of learning during school closure have evolved into a robust remote-learning program that can also double up as remedial and catch-up programs for children as well as providing a digital repository for blended learning.

NEXT STEPS

The Government of Bangladesh is developing a comprehensive national blended learning master plan. Additionally, the supplementary printed material for children in remote areas will be piloted for national scale-up, where each student in primary grades can receive this material in addition to their regular textbooks.

Cost effectiveness: In 2022, UNICEF, with support from the Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank, invested US$ 4.7 million to develop 2,683 television lessons, 1,056 radio lessons, and 1,558 digital lessons for the internet, which will benefit approximately 24 million children. The funding was also used to print and distribute learning materials to 150,933 children from the most marginalized groups in 842 schools to support their learning recovery.