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The Global Agenda for Children: Learning

Objective: To support and promote positive, enabling environments, in families, communities, schools, and the workplace, that enhance the learning of children.

Summary:

Linking the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the World Declaration on Education For All provides a powerful argument that children have a right not only to education but also to the opportunities and environments that will help them to learn -- to gain the enabling knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, and values critical to their own future and to the social and economic transformations needed to ensure the health of the planet into and through the next century.

1. The context and challenges of learning

For an individual moving into the new century, much more knowledge needs to be gained, and more risks, uncertainties, and stress need to be faced and overcome. People need to learn more, learn differently, and live more peacefully with each other in order for the world to survive and prosper.

In recent years, school systems have expanded, both in size and in complexity. But disparities and gaps are growing -- in costs, quality, achievement, and certification. There is a "crisis of confidence" in the content, processes, efficiency and effectiveness of public schooling. Despite this, schools will likely remain the most effective and efficient way to transmit the knowledge and skills needed for the new century.

A gap exists, however, between the kind of education needed for the 21st century and the kind now being provided by most school systems of the world. Filling this gap requires: (1) significant changes in the way policy-makers make policies, planners plan systems, teachers teach, communities participate, learners learn -- and development agencies function, and (2) a broadening of thinking and attention away from an almost exclusive focus on the more formal structure and output orientation of "schooling" to greater concern for the more broadly defined process of "learning".

2. Definitions and a conceptual framework: what and how people learn

Learning includes learning to know, learning to do, learning to work together, learning to be, and learning to transform oneself and one's society.

All children in the world should learn and understand, internalise and practice a set of minimal, essential, core "facts and skills for living".

How people learn is a process that differs greatly by age, culture, context, and individual preference. People learn in different ways, in all areas of life, at different stages of their development, across their life cycle, formally and informally, alone and in interaction with others. The issue for educators is to ensure that children are taught

and are allowed to learn according both to their individual stage of physical and mental development and to their preferred learning style.

3. Learning environments -- families, communities, and basic edcatuion programmes

Learning in ways which will have a more likely chance of producing positive outcomes requires the development of positive and supportive learning environments.

The family -- particularly the mother-child dyad -- is the first environment of learning for the young child where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and values first begins. UNICEF must recognise families as the major caregivers and teachers for children; work with families and support them with information, facilities, and resources for better child care and learning; and help to strengthen families as positive learning environments and inter-generational learning units in themselves.

The community surrounding the child is its natural physical and social learning environment. UNICEF must work with its partners and the community to harness the diversity and resources of the community; create networks of community stakeholders all concerned with the well-being and rights of children and their families; and develop some kind of "common community curriculum" about the care, protection, and development of children, internalised by all of the community's members.

The primary school is the space meant to provide structured, systematic basic education -- the essential tools and content of learning -- for several hours a day and for several years out of the child's life. To do this best, it must be of good quality and accessible to all; ensure that children learn the enabling skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and the basic functions of mathematics and science; provide the information and promote the life skills necessary for children to remain healthy, well-nourished, safe, and able to protect themselves; and provide skills for accessing and using information.

An education system which recognises and respects children's rights and responsibilities, provides the enabling environment to realise children's rights in the schools and alternative programmes, and helps ensure such an environment in the community and household is child-friendly.

Child-friendly schools promote quality learning outcomes; provide positive experiences for all children and promote their psychosocial well-being, self-esteem, and self-confidence; have staff with high morale, commitment, and competence; promote equality, respect, and inclusiveness for all children; provide education based on the reality of children's lives; help children, parents and teachers establish harmonious, collaborative connections between school and family life; support children's creativity; and promote good health and nutrition education, practices, and environments

4. UNICEF: experiences and opptorunities for learning

UNICEF must re-double its commitment to the expansion and improvement of basic education programmes, in and out of school, with an even greater focus on the quality

of the learning environments and processes found within them. UNICEF must now be concerned as well with the broader, more inclusive concept of learning. It must therefore work to ensure that children, especially the most disadvantaged and excluded, grow and develop in positive, enabling environments, in families, communities, schools, and the workplace

UNICEF's work in education and schooling needs to be reviewed, assessed, and refined so that it not only helps more children to go more schools but also ensures that children learn more, in better educational environments, and through better, more child-centred methods.

At the same time, much of UNICEF's success also depends on changes in behaviour resulting not from schools but from other channels of learning such as parent education programmes, social mobilisation and advocacy campaigns, and socialisation in informal learning environments. Thus, UNICEF must address the quality of learning environments and the outcomes of learning in all of the various behaviour-change activities it supports -- not only those of the Education Programme.

5. Goals and targets

In focusing on learning, UNICEF's ultimate goal is to create and assure children's access to more supportive, enabling learning environments within families, communities, schools, and workplaces -- and within ourselves and our partners -- so that children can develop themselves and contribute to their societies according to their unique and diverse potential.

Long-term goals and targets   (2010)
1) The strengthening and enriching of learning environments
2) The achievement WSC goals in regards go to basic education
3) The enhancement of the quality of education
4) The development of child-friendly institutions
5) An increase in (and more accurate measurement of) learning achievement

Short-term targets -- by the year 2000 (2006)
1) Increase enrolment and completion in primary schools and other basic education programmes.
2) Work with governments to define, by country, the competencies needed to be learned by children for the new century.
3) Work with governments (and with individual communities and schools) to define characteristics of supportive, enabling learning environments and processes (e.g., child-friendly schools).
4) Review and adapt available tools and mechanisms for measuring achievement (including life skills).
5) Review UNICEF programmes focusing on behaviour change to determine the effectiveness of their learning processes.

The Global Agenda for Children: Learning

Convention on the Rights of the Child

"States Parties recognize the right of the child to education...

(1)   Make primary education compulsory and available free to all...

"States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(1)   The development of the child's personality, talent, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential...

World Declaration on Education for All

"Every person -- child, youth, adult -- shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs."

"The diversity, complexity, and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth, and adults necessitate broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education."

"Meeting basic learning needs...involves action to enhance the family and community environments for learning..."

Learning: context and challenges

<u>The challenge</u>

For an individual moving into the new century, much more knowledge needs to be gained, and more risks, uncertainties, and stress need to be faced and overcome.

In order for the world to survive and prosper, people need to:

- **learn more**

- **learn differently**

- **live more peacefully with each other.**

The response of education

- School systems have expanded, both in size and in complexity.

- But in many countries, disparities and gaps are growing -- in costs, quality, achievement, and certification.

- Schools will remain the most effective and efficient way to transmit the knowledge and skills needed for the new century.

- UNICEF must continue to help expand the quantity and improve the quality of basic education.

- But a single focus on schools is no longer enough. Strengthening the other critical environments in which children learn -- the family, the community, even the workplace -- must become a more important and mor explicit focus of our work.

The conceptual framework of learning

A gap exists between the kind of education needed for the 21st century and the kind now being provided by most school systems of the world. Filling this gap requires:

- significant changes in the way policy-makers make policies, planners plan systems, teachers teach, communities participate, learners learn -- and development agencies function

- realising that the basic right of the child is not only to education as in Article 28 of the CRC, but also to the opportunity to learn.

What learning is: the five pillars

Learning to know:
- to master the essential learning tools of communication and oral expression, literacy and numeracy, and problem-solving
- to learn how to learn

Learning to do:
- to gain occupational skills and social competencies
- to function in social and work experiences
- to use technological applications
- to take care of basic needs and improve the quality of one's life

Learning to work together:
- to understand ourselves and other people
- to manage conflict and respect diversity
- to work with others toward common objectives
- to actively participate in community and national life
- to create and nurture a healthy and harmonious family

Learning to be:
- to be able to act with greater autonomy, judgment, and responsibility
- to develop all aspects of one's potential
- to be healthy and enjoy play and sports
- to value one's own culture
- to possess an ethical and moral code
- to be resilient

<u>Learning to transform oneself and one's society</u>:

- to know, reflect upon, and act on reality in order to transform it
- to protect the environment
- to work toward a gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory society
- to develop social solidarity and a conscience to serve others
- to feel and be "empowered"

What children should learn: facts and skills for living

-- a set of minimal, essential, core "facts and skills for living" which all children in the world should learn and understand, internalise and practice

Life skills:

- enable children to translate knowledge (what one knows) and attitudes and values (what one feels and believes) into action (what to do and how to do it)

- help people interact appropriately with other people, objects, and processes leading to positive outcomes.

- include co-operative team work, negotiation and communication, non-violent problem-solving and conflict resolution, dealing with peer pressure, entrepreneurial skills, critical and creative thinking, coping with emotion and stress, assertiveness, recognition of risk, and self-awareness

- strengthen values and competencies focusing on tolerance, non-discrimination, and respect for diversity; equity, democracy, social inclusion, and solidarity; environmental protection and "voluntary simplicity"; and internationalism.

How people learn

-- a process that differs greatly by age, culture, context, and individual preference.

People learn:

- **in different ways**
- **in all areas of life**
- **at different stages of their development**
- **across their life cycle**
- **formally and informally**
- **alone and in interaction with others**

Educators must ensure that children are taught and learn according both to their individual stage of physical and mental development and to their preferred learning style.

Now: UNICEF is committed to the right to education for all children

- through support to the expansion and improvement of primary schooling

- through alternative basic education programmes

In the future: UNICEF must:

- re-double its commitment to the expansion and improvement of basic education programmes, in and out of school

- place an even greater focus on the quality of school environments, processes, and outcomes

- be concerned with the broader, more inclusive concept of learning

- work to ensure that children, especially the most disadvantaged and excluded, grow and develop in positive, enabling environments, in families, communities, schools, and the workplace.

Learning environments

Learning in ways which will have a more likely chance of producing positive outcomes requires the development of positive and supportive learning environments:

- formal (e.g., of public and private education systems, schools, and other basic education programmes)

- informal (e.g., of the home, community, and society as a whole).

Supportive, enabling learning environments or "spaces" not only promote positive learning. They themselves are learning entities, seeking new information and experience, observing and listening to others, developing the capacities of their members.

The family

The family -- particularly the mother-child dyad -- is the first environment of learning for the young child where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and values first begins.

A child learns best:

- in a secure, stable, loving family -- which can guarantee proper care leading to better growth and more holistic development

- in a strong, resilient family -- where its parents, especially its mother, are healthy, literate, free of exhausting physical labour, economically self-sufficient, no longer exploited because of gender, and fully participating members of the community.

But families -- both extended and nuclear -- are under increasing stress at the end of the century.

UNICEF must work with its partners to:

- recognise the family as the major caregiver and teacher for the child

- support families with information, facilities, and resources for better child care and learning

- help to strengthen families as positive learning environments and inter-generational learning units in themselves

The community

The community surrounding the child is its natural physical and social learning environment.

A child learns best in a community:

- that has supportive structures of governance and environments for learning

- that supports early childhood care programmes which are integrated and comprehensive in nature

- that values, plans, and supports quality basic education and schooling for children and adults

But diversity and conflict often make it difficult to unite the community around concepts such as child care and learning.

Many communities, like families, are facing increasing stress arising from social and economic changes happening around them.

UNICEF must work with its partners to:

- harness the diversity and resources of the community

- create networks of community stakeholders concerned with the well-being and rights of children and their families

- develop some kind of "common community curriculum" about the care, protection, and development of children, internalised by all of the community's members

A child-friendly education system

- recognises and respects children's rights and responsibilities

- provides the enabling environment to realise children's rights in schools or alternative education programmes

- helps ensure such an environment in the community and household

Such a system --

- has at its core a cadre of committed teachers and facilitators who have sufficient training, support, status, and income

- works best when its paramount outcome for all children, including those with disabilities, is to be competent in essential enabling skills for living

- promotes environments which are flexible and reflect respect for diversity and sensitivity to gender concerns

- recognises that children, parents, community members, local governments, and other institutions are important stakeholders in the education process

- is governed through a decentralised, community-based approach

- promotes a child-centered curriculum

- explores new educational concepts and innovative, more relevant forms of education

- provides (and assures the quality of) education which is affordable and accessible

- is a learning system in itself

Child-friendly schools

- promote learning outcomes of good quality

- provide positive experiences for all children and promote their psychosocial well-being, self-esteem, and self-confidence

- have staff with high morale, commitment, and competence

- promote equality, respect, and inclusiveness for all children

- provide education based on the reality of children's lives

- help children, parents and teachers establish harmonious, collaborative connections between school and family life

- support children's creativity

- promote good health and nutrition education, practices, and environments

The workplace

For more and more children, pushed out of school from sheer boredom or pulled out for economic reasons, the workplace, formal or otherwise, is another important learning environment. It can be:

- positive -- teaching both generic work habits and attitudes and more specialised skills

- negative -- hazardous, unsafe, unhealthy, exploitative, psychologically traumatic, and often deeply disruptive of learning

UNICEF must work:

- to eliminate hazardous and exploitative work environments

- to ensure that work does not hamper learning

- to ensure that workplaces, when children must work, are promoting useful, positive child learning

The media

The media represent other, very public "spaces" for learning, both:

- positive -- providing important information and promoting messages of peace, conflict resolution, healthy living, and self-worth

- negative -- teaching hate and intolerance, making risks appear attractive and violence exciting

UNICEF must use its strong, traditional links to the media to promote mobilisation, advocacy, and information activities more supportive of positive learning.

UNICEF and learning:
Opportunities, experiences, and comparative advantages

So why "learning" for UNICEF?

1)   **The longer-term impact of what UNICEF does will be sustained and strengthened to the extent that children in this decade not only go to school but also learn better.**

   UNICEF's work in education and schooling needs to be reviewed, assessed, and refined so that it:

   - **not only helps more children go to more schools**

   - **but also ensures that children learn more, in better educational environments, and through better, more child-centred methods.**

2) Much of UNICEF's success in the shorter-term depends on changes in behaviour resulting not from schools and other basic education programmes but from other channels of learning:

- parent education programmes

- social mobilisation and advocacy campaigns

- socialisation in informal learning environments (e.g., peer groups)

UNICEF must address the quality of learning environments and the outcomes of learning in all of the various behaviour-change activities it supports -- not only those of the Education Programme.

Validated programme approaches

Education goals are often elusive and their achievement, difficult to measure.

Educational change takes time -- and does not follow the health paradigm.

Process is as important as product.

Decentralisation and autonomy are important tools in the promotion of community-centred solutions to the problems of women and children -- but they are not panaceas for underdevelopment.

Partnerships and networks are needed at all levels of the system.

Integrated and multi-sectoral approaches to learning are essential.

Best practices and examples of "positive deviance" must be carefully analysed and promoted, and models of good practice must be creatively used.

Diversity, not standard solutions, must be the norm.

Mobilisation and advocacy, at all levels, are essential. Policy-makers, teachers, and parents, for example, must understand the importance of schooling and the indicators of positive learning.

Comparative advantages

The comparative advantage of UNICEF to realise the right of all children and families to life-long learning stems from our organisational mandate and commitment to children, their well-being, and their development.

UNICEF has a broad knowledge of and practical experience with families and communities

UNICEF can be successful in fostering learning, in the broadest sense, because we view ourselves as members of the learning communities we serve.

This success is increased to the extent we take a holistic view of children.

UNICEF's field advantage can help assure that new learning processes are concrete and practical.

Goals, targets, and strategies

General goal: to help create and assure children's access to more supportive, enabling learning environments within families, communities, schools, and workplaces so that they can develop themselves and contribute to their societies according to their unique and diverse potential.

Long-term goals and targets

1) **The strengthening and enriching of learning environments**
   - families
   - communities
   - schools and other basic education programmes
   - workplaces

2) **The development of child-friendly institutions**
   - education systems
   - schools and other basic education programmes

3) **The achievement of WSC goals for basic education**
   - enrolment -- universal basic education
   - completion -- 80% completion (entry into grade 5)
   - gender equity

4) **The enhancement of the quality of education**
   - the learning environment
   - the learning process
   - what is learned

5) **An increase in (and more accurate measurement of) learning achievement**
   - the essential tools of literacy and numeracy
   - life skills

Short-term targets

1) Increase enrolment and completion in primary schools and other basic education programmes.

2) Work with governments (and with individual communities and schools) to define, by country:

   - the skills and competencies needed to be learned by children for the new century

   - characteristics of supportive, enabling learning environments and processes in families, communities, schools, and workplaces

3) Review and adapt available tools and mechanisms for measuring achievement (including life skills).

4) Review UNICEF programmes focusing on behaviour change to determine the effectiveness of their learning processes.