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Notes

[Archives: CF/NYH/SP/SUM; Folder: S0355.] Contents: Section 1: Members of the Planning Committee - Schedule of (remaining) meetings and activities; Section 2: Schedule and Programme of the World Summit for Children; Section 3: Draft Declaration of the World Summit for Children - Draft Plan of Action; Section 4: Report of Meetings: - 1st, 2nd, 3rd Meetings of the Planning Committee - Meetings of the Working Group on Format - ~~Meetings of the Working Group on the Declaration - Statement of Agreement of the six Initiating Governments -~~

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Attached find the final version of the learning paper. You will see that much of it is also found in the background and framework of the education and learning section of the basic social services paper being prepared for the Global Agenda. The attached paper has additional detail and a more comprehensive discussion of the process of learning.

I want to thank all members of the team who contributed text to various parts of the paper and those who commented on earlier drafts.

Sheldon



learning.wpd

The Global Agenda for Children: Learning

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The Global Agenda for Children: Learning

1. Learning: global context, challenges, and needs

1.1 Challenges of the future

In order for the world to survive and prosper in the new century, people will need to learn more and learn differently -- and live more peacefully with one another. A child moving into the new century will likely face more risks, uncertainties, and stress and will need to gain more knowledge and master more skills than any generation before.

The "ations" and "isms" challenging the world at the cusp of the 21st century are an impressive (and largely depressing) lot: urbanisation and globalisation; population expansion and environmental deterioration; terrorism, sexism, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism -- with the addition of ethnic conflict and political instability, corruption, disease, and poverty.

But the end of this century has also brought with it technological and scientific development at a rate greater than at any previous period in human history -- in health, in agriculture, in production, and especially in the fields of communication, mass media, and information. As the 21st century begins, the opportunities to learn have been expanded in more ways than most people can imagine. Libraries of information are being transported into homes and schools around the world, making ideas and knowledge available to more people than ever before. Transportation has also improved the access of people to goods and experiences never before possible.

In many places, these advances have contributed substantially to economic, social, scientific, and cultural development and to the ability of people to create communities where diversity is valued and where a vibrant civil society works with government to solve problems for people. But these same advances have also led to a growing polarisation between societies sufficiently affluent and educated to benefit from the new technologies and those, through poverty, ignorance, and discrimination, denied such benefits.

As the Delors report put it in 1996, the world facing the new century is fraught with tensions: between the global and the local; the universal and the individual; tradition and modernity; the spiritual and the material; long-term and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; and the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and of human beings' capacity to assimilate it (**Learning: The Treasure Within**, UNESCO, Paris).

1.2 The response of education

As part of the global rebuilding following this century's two world wars, societies delegated to schooling expanded responsibilities for both educating more children and transmitting to them much more than the traditional "basics". Public schools were viewed as the major institution for mass education, leading to gainful employment, and

formal education became widely accepted "as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war" (**Learning: The Treasure Within**, p.13). More and more over the recent decades, this has been reflected in increased budgetary allocations to basic education, compulsory schooling legislation, and widespread media attention to education and development issues.

Thus, as the world has become more complex and often more threatening, school systems have expanded, in both size and complexity. The sheer number of children in these systems has grown, probably at a rate faster than the growth of population; net primary enrolment in developing countries grew from 50% in 1970 to 76% in 1990 and 82 per cent in 1995 (SOWC 1998). And most systems have stretched themselves to more systematically cover children of pre-school age, adolescents, and adults; literacy rates in developing countries, for example, grew from 43% in 1970 to 65% in 1990 and more than 70 per cent in 1995 (SOWC 1998). Such expansion is largely the result of increases in the quality of schooling, greater attention to schooling by governments and the international community, and the continued value attached to schooling by families both in its own right and as a supposed panacea to the everyday challenges they face (although the stagnation of enrolments in some countries shows contrary evidence).

But as the new century approaches, more and more people -- educators and economists, politicians and development workers, community leaders and parents -- are debating about what children should learn, how, and where. It is easy to conclude from this debate that **education systems are generally not keeping up with the challenges of today, let alone preparing themselves for the challenges of the new century**. In a world characterised by accelerating change, parents and young people are questioning the relevance of what schools teach. In addition, too many schools throughout the world are characterised by high teacher absenteeism, poor use of available instructional time, and negligible attention to the interests and abilities of individual learners -- and often by their relatively high cost. It comes as no surprise that in such schools, where children may be getting little useful knowledge and much of their time is spent in rote learning, many children reject what education systems offer. Among those students who continue in school, many do not acquire elementary skills in analysing and applying school learning to life-relevant tasks.

In many parts of the world, the result of these conditions is increasing skepticism and frustration with formal, uniform systems of education. People see growing disparities and gaps -- in costs, quality, achievement, and certification -- and this has led to a "crisis of confidence" in public schooling throughout much of the world.

There are many reasons, however, why education systems and individual schools have not met many of the expectations placed upon by them. In most countries of the world, these systems and institutions have long been -- and remain -- underfunded. Facilities, materials, and books are often in short supply, teachers are often undertrained and underpaid, and curricula are outdated. Also, education systems are often designed to maintain the status quo -- for example, of social and economic inequality -- rather than promote change. And expectations, reflected in inflated targets for enrolment and overly ambitious mandates for schools, have often been unrealistic.

Despite this fact -- and often against great odds -- there are many more schools and students in the world now than 10 years ago, and everywhere there are innovations and reforms, promoted by parents and teachers willing to sacrifice for children, that have succeeded in making schools better places to learn.

Schools will remain the most effective and efficient way to transmit the knowledge and skills, and promote the values, needed for the new century. As a major part of what should be a unified system of diversified approaches to education (including alternative forms of basic education for those unable to go to school), they must continue to be expanded in quantity and improved in quality. UNICEF must continue to help in this task.

But given the increasing complexity of the world, at both national and community levels, and the increasing amount of learning that takes place outside of the classroom, a single focus on schools and even on the basic education system is no longer enough. Strengthening the other critical environments in which children learn -- the family, the community, even the workplace -- must also become a major and more explicit focus of development.

2. The conceptual framework of learning

2.1 The expanded vision of education

A gap exists between the kind of education now being provided by most school systems of the world and the kind needed for the 21st century. 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. It requires, most of all, 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".

A new approach is needed where it is recognised:

- that building and supplying more schools (with teachers, new curricula, and texts), while important tasks in themselves, do not automatically lead to more positive learning outcomes;
- that learning takes place not only in schools (in fact, not only mostly in schools) but also in other environments -- in families and communities, with peers and through the media; and
- that the strengthening of these environments as places where children learn must also be the concern of UNICEF.

Such a shift can come about by taking more seriously two important documents written at the beginning of this decade: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Jomtien Declaration on Education For All (EFA). (See Appendix I for relevant parts of their texts.) A very significant development for UNICEF has been the worldwide consensus, through ratification of the CRC, that every child, regardless of resources and circumstances, has the right to a quality, relevant, basic education.

But the CRC has it only partly right. The basic right of the child is not only to education as in Article 28, but to learning and to the opportunity to learn -- to have access to enabling and supportive learning environments -- which will help children gain both access to other rights and the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, and values needed for continuing, lifelong learning and for life itself.

Some of the current impetus for renewed interest in education can be traced to the World Conference on Education For All held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. An expanded vision and a renewed commitment to basic education for all were articulated, and delegates of 155 governments endorsed a plan of action. The "expanded vision" of basic education which the Jomtien Declaration promotes includes universalising access and promoting equity; focussing on learning acquisition; broadening the means and scope of basic education; enhancing the environment for learning; and strengthening partnerships -- to be achieved within a supportive policy context by mobilising resources and strengthening international solidarity.

As part of the ultimate goal of meeting the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults, the Conference proposed that countries set their own targets within the dimensions of:

- Expansion of early childhood care and development activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children;
- Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as "basic") by the Year 2000;
- Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e.g., 80 percent of 14 year-olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement;
- Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the disparity between male and female illiteracy rates;
- Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity;
- Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels including mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural change (**World Conference on Education For All, Framework for Action**, 1990, p. 3).

The World Declaration on Education For All approved in Jomtien has many insightful and future-oriented analyses and recommendations which, when articulated within the

context of the CRC, results in a very powerful tool for advocacy and programming. **The importance of meeting basic learning needs -- in the post-CRC world, the right of ALL children to gain access to the opportunities and environments required to meet these needs -- is at the heart of EFA.**

2.2 What learning is: the five pillars

Cutting through the debate about "what is learning" is an important document published by UNESCO in 1996 entitled **Learning: The Treasure Within**. It introduces four "pillars" or categories of learning, summarised and slightly amended here.

- **Learning to know:** to master the instruments of knowledge -- the essential learning tools of communication and oral expression, literacy and numeracy, and problem-solving; to gain both a broad general knowledge and an in-depth knowledge of a few areas; to understand obligations and rights; and, most important, to learn how to learn
- **Learning to do:** to gain occupational skills and social and psychological competencies to make informed decisions about diverse life situations; to function in social and work relationships; to participate in local and global markets; to use technological tools; to meet basic needs and improve the quality of one's life
- **Learning to work together:** to understand, first, oneself and then other people and one's interdependence with them; to manage conflict; to respect pluralism, diversity, and differences (e.g., in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, and culture); to work with others toward common objectives; to actively participate in community and national governance and development; to create, nurture, and enjoy a healthy and harmonious family
- **Learning to be:** to develop one's personality and be able to act with greater autonomy, judgment, critical thinking, and personal responsibility; to develop all aspects of one's potential -- memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, spiritual values, physical capacities, and communication skills; to be healthy and enjoy play and sports; to value one's own culture; to possess an ethical and moral code; to speak for and protect oneself; to be resilient

To these a fifth is added, to make more explicit the need for:

- **Learning to transform oneself and one's society:** to know, reflect upon, and act on reality not only to comply and cope with it, accommodate and adapt to it, but also to transform it; to protect the environment and work toward a gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory society; to develop social solidarity and a conscience to serve others; to feel and be "empowered"

2.3 How people learn

Just as there are different categories of learning, there are also different ways of learning. How people learn is a process that differs greatly by age, culture, context,

and individual preference. People learn in all areas of life, at different stages of their development, across cycles of their life, formally and informally, alone and in interaction with others

There are many theories that try to explain how people learn. Behavioural learning theory focuses on learning through the demonstration of appropriate responses to stimuli. Cognitive learning emphasises more exploratory learning derived from processes and structures operating within the learner. Constructivist learning occurs when the learner interacts with the message in a more active and participatory way and constructs a personal and unique interpretation of it. And socio-cognitive learning stresses the learning that occurs in the company of others.

A relatively recent and promising approach to learning is one provided by Howard Gardner in his approach to learning styles or "multiple intelligences" (a concept which forms an important basis of UNICEF's education work in Bangladesh). This approach outlines seven different ways in which people learn:

- verbal/linguistic -- thinks and learns through written and spoken words
- logical/mathematical -- thinks deductively, deals with numbers, and recognises abstract patterns
- visual/spatial -- thinks in and visualises images and pictures (e.g., visioning)
- musical/rhythmic -- learns through rhyme, rhythm, and repetition
- body/kinesthetic -- learns through body movement, games and athletics
- inter-personal -- learns in groups; can develop relationships with other easily
- intra-personal -- likes to work alone

Children have different learning styles that correspond to the intelligences in which they are particularly strong. Some children learn best through reading and taking notes, others through visual stimulation, still others through the rhythms and tempos of body movement or musical activities. Some like to work on problems individually while others like to interact with others to find a solution. And boys learn differently from girls. **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.**

2.4 Learning, schooling, and education

Learning is not the same as schooling and education. The concepts, of course, are inter-related, but their differences are significant, both in themselves and for UNICEF.

Schools are organisations that provide structured learning experiences -- institutions of a particular structure associated with formal, organised, usually time-bound and graded activities designed to instruct learners in defined content, skills, values, and behaviours.

Education is the explicit action or process of being taught something (not necessarily in a formal situation such as a school) and results in some clear evidence (and often certification) that something has been learned. **A focus on education more often**

puts the educator -- the teacher -- as the centre of, and principal actor in, the learning process.

Learning is the more inclusive concept -- the act or experience of increasing human capacity, of gaining knowledge, understanding, and skills by study, instruction, or experience. Thus, it does not require formal, organised activities to occur -- although it often does so (e.g., learning to read) -- and it does not necessarily require any evidence of change. Learning occurs almost all of the time; people learn from whatever they are doing, through everyday observation, interaction, and practice. **A focus on learning puts the learner as the centre of, and principal actor in, the process.**

All the environments in which children (and adults) find themselves are essentially learning environments. Learners learn both positive or negative things and may or may not demonstrate what they have learned immediately. Learning of many kinds, of course, does occur in schools (though not necessarily in ways intended by the teacher, curriculum, and system), but schooling may not result in much explicit education if the teaching-learning process is of poor quality or if there is no evidence that something intended has been learned.

It is the differences among these concepts that make learning and learning environments so important for UNICEF's work. As an organisation, UNICEF is committed to the right to education for all children. It has largely operationalised this commitment through support to the expansion and improvement of primary schooling. It has also understood (and occasionally programmed for) the fact that education of good quality can take place outside of a environment in alternative basic education programmes. It must now work to ensure that its efforts focus as well on expanding the opportunity to learn and on improving the quality of the many environments in which children learn.

3. UNICEF and learning: opportunities, experiences, and comparative advantages

Building schools, providing textbooks and other materials, and getting more children to enrol in school are programmable activities which most governments and development agencies can readily understand. Reforming education systems, promoting stronger school-community linkages, and improving the quality of school curricula, teachers, and teaching are somewhat more complex processes that most, if not all, UNICEF offices are willing to encourage. Promoting something called "learning" is a greater challenge because it is above all a process, not easily amenable to quantitative goals or even observable, let alone measurable impact.

So why "learning" for UNICEF?

1) The longer-term impact of what UNICEF does -- on helping to transmit knowledge and skills and on changing the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the new adults and parents of the new century -- will be sustained and strengthened to the extent that children in this decade not only go to school but also learn better: to know, to be, to do, to work together, and to change the world

around them.

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

2) At the same time, much of UNICEF's success in the shorter-term -- lower infant and maternal mortality rates, fewer children in need of special protection, etc. -- depends on changes in behaviour resulting not from schools and other basic education programmes but from other channels of learning; e.g.,

- parent education programmes (e.g., for mothers, on child health, nutrition, and psycho-social stimulation),
- social mobilisation and advocacy campaigns (e.g., for families, on child rights and school enrolment), and
- socialisation in informal learning environments (e.g., for adolescents, in families and peer groups, on life skills and risk avoidance).

The development of more effective learning processes in a larger variety of learning environments increases the likelihood that the various groups at which UNICEF aims its principal messages will hear and actually internalise these messages.

Thus, because schools represent only one place in which learning occurs, 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.

3.1. Opportunities

The time is opportune for such a re-focusing of effort. The United Nations as a whole is returning to its original focus on peace, justice, and human rights. Within this context, child rights and human rights -- at least their rhetoric, if not their internalisation -- are important issues again, more forcefully and persuasively, on the development agenda.

The importance of partners and the practice of partnerships -- across nations, within communities, between institutions of civil society and governments, across sectors -- are now better understood. Such partnerships, although often difficult to put in place, are vital for the new focus on learning.

Likewise, the process of decentralisation -- the re-balancing of centre and peripheral power, the transfer of authority down the system and out to civil society -- is growing apace (though often for the wrong reasons and with inadequate preparation). But especially when combined with the notion of providing greater autonomy to local communities and the social sector agencies which serve them, this process offers an opportunity for creative approaches to learning.

3.2. Validated programme approaches and key lessons

Through years of experience, UNICEF has gained experience, learned lessons, and

validated programme approaches which should facilitate the promotion of better learning and more supportive learning environments. These include the following:

Education goals are often elusive and difficult to measure. The Mid-Decade review of Education For All in Amman showed that even progress in primary school access and adult literacy were shadowed by doubts about the quality of data and the failure to document within-country variability; by the elusiveness of the more challenging goals of appropriate education for adolescents and behaviour changes related to life skills; and by the lack of information about learning achievement. More care and attention need to be paid to clarifying and measuring indicators of learning.

Development takes time. Schools may be built and textbooks printed and distributed in a few months, and curricula revised in the life of a country programme, but improving the actual quality of what goes on in a classroom and enriching the environments for learning in families, schools, and communities, require sustained commitment beyond the life of a five-year programme or the tenure of its senior management.

Process is often as important as product. The organisation of training courses and the provision of books and resource centres are often essential elements in educational innovations, but they are not sufficient for the innovation to be sustained. They must be accompanied by a process that ensures the internalisation of the innovation in the minds and actions of decision-makers and programme implementers -- a lesson even more appropriate for the promotion of better learning.

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 even where seriously implemented -- and require both some kind of central oversight and a continuing focus by UNICEF on building capacity and on helping central governments to define their new roles and to improve national policies, structures, and standards.

Many countries have moved to a greater or lesser extent to some form of decentralisation in governance. This has been reflected in the decentralisation of responsibility for schooling to authorities closer to communities. In some instances, this decentralisation has not been matched by a transfer of resources and accountability, inevitably leading to confusion and a perception that central authorities seek only to push some of the costs and responsibilities on to communities. For many authorities in contexts that thrive on manipulation, exploitation, and corruption, devolving resources to lower levels of the system also threatens power. Decentralisation, in other words, is a two-edged sword, and UNICEF should work to sharpen the "good" edge.

Perhaps a key lesson from the 1990's, therefore, is that decentralisation involves some "letting go" and a sense of trust in those who will manage community facilities and programmes. Where genuine devolution of responsibility, authority, and resources has taken place in education, there has been an understandable sense of pride and ownership in the vision, the processes, and the environment of schooling.

Partnerships and networks are needed at all levels of the system. The promotion of such partnerships at the community level often produces little success if the major

sectoral and political forces of society do not support them, and sectoral collaboration at the top of the system does not necessarily translate into easy networking in fractious, heterogeneous communities.

Integrated and multi-sectoral approaches to learning are essential. Treating “pieces” of children and families separately, through vertical, sectoral services, often means that important aspects of child and family survival, development, and protection get neglected. While often still needing to work functionally and sectorally with existing structures, UNICEF must show greater creativity and skill in working holistically, across sectors.

Good practices and examples of “positive deviance” must be carefully analysed and promoted, and models of good practice must be creatively used. People change their behaviour because they find something immediately and concretely useful and because they actually see change occurring.

Diversity, not standard solutions, must be the norm. Generic models of effective learning are probably finite in number but their necessary adaptations to local conditions and needs are infinite.

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.

3.3 Comparative advantages

The comparative advantage of UNICEF in helping 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. This mandate is unique among UN agencies and is based on a history of work within the framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

UNICEF has a broad knowledge of and practical experience with families and communities around the world and has gained non-partisan credibility with a global constituency of governments and non-governmental organisations to act on behalf of children at all levels in policy formation and reform, programme and service and delivery, advocacy, and social mobilisation.

UNICEF can be successful in fostering learning, in the broadest sense, because we view ourselves as members of the learning communities we serve, whether it is among children, in the village, or with representatives of our partners, both from government and civil society.

This success is increased to the extent we take a holistic view of children (of their care, survival, development, protection, and participation), promote and practice inter-sectorality, and use our considerable experience in educational innovations and in

behaviour change.

For both children who are born and raised in small, rural, poor villages and the increasing number brought up in large, poor, even dangerous urban areas, **UNICEF's field advantage can help assure that new learning processes are concrete and practical** so that children acquire all of the necessary enabling skills of language and numeracy, *critical thinking*, and *psycho-social and life skills* both to protect themselves and to continue to learn throughout life, whether in a traditional or modern context.

4. Recommended results for children and specific priority areas

The above discussion of learning needs and environments leads to two major priority areas for UNICEF in regard to children:

- **the definition of the information and skills, the values and attitudes, needed for living by children in the new century, and**
- **the development of positive and supportive environments in which such information and skills can be learned.**

4.1 What children should learn: the definition of needed information and skills for living

There are many ways to look at what children should learn. One approach focuses on specific **domains of learning** which are often used for developing educational objectives, curricula, and assessment instruments. According to a well-known classification, these domains include:

- **the cognitive domain:** the acquisition and use of knowledge -- comprehension, analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation
- **the affective domain:** emotions, attitudes, appreciations, beliefs, and values
- **the psychomotor domain:** fine and gross motor skills including perceptual, physical, and expressive abilities.

More concretely, and given the growing interdependence of the world's societies and people, more and more attention is now being given to **the set of minimal, essential, core "information and skills for living" which all children in the world should learn and understand, internalise and practice**, so that they are able to respond appropriately to the most critical economic, environmental, and social challenges in human and world development.

The learning of the fundamental skills and underlying concepts of literacy and numeracy -- of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics -- must come first. Without these enabling skills, the more complex, advanced set of knowledge and skills for living cannot be attained.

This more complex set includes both the essential facts and information needed for

survival (such as those found in Facts For Life) and life skills broadly defined. Life skills enable children and young people 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). Life skills help people interact appropriately with other people and situations to achieve positive outcomes. These skills may include developing critical understanding, controlling one's own behaviour, acquiring further knowledge and skills, establishing mutually rewarding relationships, and modifying one's own physical, social, and symbolic environment.

Life skills most commonly included in education programmes are co-operative teamwork, negotiation and communication, decision-making, non-violent problem-solving and conflict resolution, resisting peer pressure, work and entrepreneurial skills, critical and creative thinking, coping with emotion and stress, assertiveness, recognition of risk, self-awareness, and empathy. Related to these are values and competencies focusing on non-discrimination and respect for diversity; equity, democracy, social inclusion, and solidarity; environmental protection and "voluntary simplicity," and internationalism ("Integrating Life Skills into the Primary Curriculum," Mariella Baldo and Elaine Furniss, UNICEF, 1998).

4.2 Where children learn: the development of enabling learning environments

Learning in ways which will have a more likely chance of producing positive outcomes (e.g., of gaining needed information and skills for living) requires the development of positive and supportive learning environments both formal (e.g., within public and private education systems, schools, and other basic education programmes) and informal (e.g., within the home, community, and society as a whole). Such environments should start from what children already know and from how they perceive the world around them; they should also prepare children not only for the future -- for school, to be adults -- but also for the present -- to be children.

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 three most important such environments for the child are the family, the neighbourhood/community, and the school. For many children, the workplace, for good or bad, is another place to learn, and the media present another alternative which can facilitate, or hinder, a child's opportunity and ability to learn.

4.2.1 The family

The home and family -- particularly the mother-child dyad -- are the first environment of learning for the young child -- where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and values first begins. A child's ability to learn through direct interaction with people and through the manipulation of objects and the testing of cause and effect begins at birth within the family.

Children learn best in secure, stable, loving families which can guarantee a child proper care -- adequate nutrition, good health and hygiene, appropriate psycho-social stimulation -- all leading to better growth and more holistic development: physical,

cognitive, social, and emotional.

Children learn best in strong, resilient families where parents, especially mothers, are healthy, literate, freed of exhausting physical labour, economically self-sufficient, no longer exploited because of gender, and fully participating members of the community.

Children learn best in educated families where parents and grandparents, siblings and other caregivers, across generations, have enough knowledge and skill to feed their acquisitive minds; to exercise and adequately nourish them; to laugh and explore new ideas with them; to help them develop all manner of skills and loving, inquisitive, open, and joyful attitudes; and to encourage them to attend and do well in school.

But families -- both extended and nuclear -- are under increasing stress at the end of the century. Poverty, migration, conflict, disease, and many other threats make it difficult for many families to provide the supportive environments their children require, let alone to become learning (and empowered) "beings" in themselves.

UNICEF must recognise families as the major caregivers and teachers of children; work with governments and communities to support them with information, facilities, and resources for better child care and learning; and help to strengthen families as positive, inter-generational learning environments.

4.2.2 The community

The immediate neighbourhood and larger community surrounding the child are natural environments for learning physical, cognitive, and social skills. It is here where play with peers and the child's first experiences outside of the home take place. Communities provide the collective experience and social milieu that welcome the child into the use of language and into the world of tradition, values, and matters of the spirit; prejudices, myths, and mores; and the roles and functions of men and women as community members. It is here that children begin to compare their family and themselves to others and to learn about their natural and economic environments, the division of labour and property, the distribution of power, fairness (or the lack of it), and rights.

Children learn best in communities that encourage openness and mutual help -- that are equitable and free of prejudice, governed transparently, and open to guidance by those governed; where the exchange of information and ideas, including those of children, is encouraged; where people learn together and solve problems through mediation and consultation; and where all community members have enough resources to be safe, housed, and healthy. Communities that value children allow them enough time to learn through play and to contribute to family welfare through tasks that help them learn and are in keeping with their physical and mental development. They also set up mechanisms to track and track children and families at risk -- the poor and the ill, the abused and the exploited.

Communities that value children also support early childhood care programmes, especially for those children who need them most, which are integrated and comprehensive in nature, focus on the needs of the whole child, and result in better

child growth and development. Such programmes place a heavy emphasis on supporting families and also on identifying and assisting children with disabilities.

Communities that encourage learning are also likely to value, plan, and support for quality basic education and schooling for children and adults. Members of these communities pay attention to the development of school-aged children and assist in the delivery, supervision, and maintenance of basic education programmes. This helps children develop their innate capacity to learn their language and the needed range of life skills and mathematics and science concepts; to adapt and apply these concepts to their everyday life; and to use new skills to learn on their own from books and from exploration. Members of the community help children use their new-found skills to learn from the collective wisdom of their culture.

The supportive community also encourages and supports adolescents to build on their basic knowledge and to acquire and use both specialised knowledge in science, technology, and vocational fields and the life skills needed to face the particular challenges and risks of this age group. Artistic ability is also encouraged by the community. Biological and emotional maturing begins, a process guided by social sanctions that keep children safe but allow them the necessary freedom to interact with each other and to learn new information about their bodies and the expected responsibilities that come with the growing ability to love another. Peer learning is especially important at this stage of development.

The diversity and even conflict often found in communities sometimes make difficult the development of common efforts in such areas as child care and schooling. And many communities, like families, are facing increasing stress arising from social and economic changes happening around them.

In this context, UNICEF, with its partners, has several important tasks in the new century:

- **working with communities to assess how children are supported and cared for, what gaps exist in such support and care, and what new knowledge is needed to adapt cultural practices and community norms for better child care and development;**
- **harnessing the community's diversity and resources to create networks of community stakeholders all concerned with the well-being and rights of children and their families; and**
- **promoting some kind of "common community curriculum" about the care, protection, and development of children, internalised by all of the community's members.**

4.2.3 The school and alternative basic education programmes

The primary school is meant to provide structured, systematic learning for several hours a day and for several years out of the child's life. As such, it can have profound consequences on how and what children actually learn. Many

schools do this well, but there are also schools, which, while teaching reading and writing and other aspects of the formal curriculum, actually inhibit the kinds of learning needed to gain the information and skills for living.

The challenge for UNICEF is to be concerned both with getting more children into school and with developing schools which, in fact, are friendly to children and offer an education of good quality. These two parts of the challenge are not a choice or a dichotomy -- an either/or. Children won't gain the benefits of education if a school (or an equivalent programme) is not accessible or if they do not enrol in it. But they will also not gain its benefits if the education provided is of such poor quality that they leave the programme or learn nothing from it.

The Jomtien "principles of action" encouraged countries to innovate, share experiences, and document lessons learned. Perhaps one of the most exciting features of the 1990's has been experimentation with new approaches to basic education both inside and outside the context of formal schooling. Results of these innovations and the accumulated knowledge gained from experience of the last decade and longer has led to quite concrete knowledge about what works and why with regard to educational quality. There are now some common elements that are seen as reflecting quality education and positive learning and come together in what can be called "child-friendly" schools -- schools which are healthy (both physically and psychologically), effective, and right-based.

1) A child-friendly education system

Meeting this challenge requires the development of child-friendly, child-centred systems and schools which are effective, healthy, and based on the principles of the CRC. Child-friendly education systems recognise and respect children's rights and responsibilities, provide the enabling environment to realise these rights in schools or alternative education programmes, and help ensure such an environment in the community and household.

More specifically, a child-friendly education system:

- **acts to realise the rights of every child**, cooperating with other partners to promote and monitor the well-being and rights of all children and defend and protect all children from abuse and harm
- **is concerned with what happens to children before they enter the system** (e.g., their readiness for school in terms of health and nutritional status, social and linguistic skills), **and once they have left the classroom** -- back in their homes, the community, and the workplace
- **is diverse and flexible**, to meet the differing learning circumstances and needs of all children
- **is child-centred**, encouraging child participation and considering the needs of children over the needs of the other actors in the system
- **provides equality of learning opportunities** regardless of a child's ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status
- **provides education that is affordable and accessible**, especially to children and families most at-risk

- **promotes a structured, child-centred curriculum and teaching-learning methods** appropriate for the child's developmental level, abilities, and learning style
- **is able to transmit the knowledge and skills required for living in the new century**, including the values of peace, democracy, and acceptance of diversity
- **ensures that its teachers have sufficient training, support, status, and income**
- **encourages parents, local government, community organisations, and other institutions of civil society** to participate in the management as well as the financing of education
- **explores new educational concepts and innovative and better adapted forms of education**, including the use of new technologies
- **is a learning system in itself**, analysing and learning lessons from its own experience and practices.

Within the context of such a system, schools that are child-friendly -- health-promoting, rights-based, and, above all, effective -- must also be established. Such schools and other alternative education programmes aim progressively to achieve the following objectives, adapted, as needed, to differing contexts:

- **to promote quality learning outcomes**
 - children actively and cooperatively participate in teaching and learning processes and work together to solve problems and achieve learning objectives
 - children are encouraged to think critically, ask questions, and express their opinions about school
 - content and methods are learner-centred -- age-appropriate, life-relevant, and sensitive to the culture, gender, and the learning styles of the individual learner
 - schools take advantage of available educational technologies
 - children understand clearly the competencies they are expected to master and are able to demonstrate competency in the essential enabling skills of *writing, reading, speaking, listening, and mathematics*
 - schools ensure fair, transparent, and regular assessment of children's learning strengths and weaknesses, with regular feedback to parents and remedial or accelerated work as needed
- **to provide positive experiences for all children and promote their psycho-social well-being, self-esteem, and self-confidence**
 - schools assist in a smooth transition from the home and early childhood care programmes to the first years of schooling through appropriate content, language, and teaching-learning methods
 - schools support children's creativity through rest and recreation and through *music, dance, arts, and drama*
 - clear guidelines exist for regulating conduct among students and between students and teachers (e.g., schools prevent bullying and other forms of violence, and teachers use non-aggressive styles of discipline instead of physical punishment)
 - schools help children to learn to value themselves and their achievements

- (e.g., teachers avoid publicly ranking children on the basis of performance so as not to humiliate poor performers)
 - schools provide psycho-social support (e.g., through counseling and peer groups) to children in difficult circumstances
- **to promote equality, respect, non-discrimination, and inclusiveness for all children**
 - equality exists between girls and boys; between children of different ethnic, religious, and social groups; and between working and non-working children, with culturally- and gender-sensitive interaction at all times
 - materials used by children do not contain gender, racial, ethnic, or religious stereotypes and biases and promote respect for diversity
 - schools ensure that no children (e.g., children affected by HIV/AIDS, pregnant girls) are systematically excluded from enrolment or group activities
 - children with disabilities are included into regular classrooms and provided additional help as needed
 - schools help to reintegrate child victims of armed conflict, torture, neglect, maltreatment, and other forms of exploitation
 - special attention is paid to girls, the largest group that is excluded and in need of protection
- **to provide education based on the reality of children's lives**
 - curricular content responds to the learning needs of the children as well as the general objectives of the education system and of local families and communities
 - school calendars and timetables are adapted to the economic and seasonal schedules of the community
 - the school develops projects which provide assistance to the community
 - children are allowed to use their first language during the school day, at least during initial instruction
 - examples and applications of concepts are clearly linked to the local context
- **to have teaching and administrative staff with high competence, morale, and commitment**
 - teachers have mastered the content and methods of their subjects, have opportunities for regular in-service training and professional support, and are encouraged to share experiences with colleagues
 - teachers have the support of the community in helping children stay healthy, enroll, learn, and remain in school -- and in protecting them from difficult circumstances
 - staff share goals and values and have mutual respect and positive relations with students (and with each other)
 - teachers attend regularly, take pride in the achievements of their students, and use innovative and creative strategies in their classrooms
 - teachers are respected and supported by head teachers, supervisors, and academic advisors

- **to promote good health, sanitation, and nutrition education, practices, and environments**
 - teachers both teach about and demonstrate healthy life styles
 - schools have adequate water and sanitation facilities for both boys and girls and supplementary feeding programmes where needed
 - schools have healthy, safe, secure, caring, attractive, and joyful environments

- **to help children, parents and teachers establish harmonious, collaborative connections between school and family life**
 - parents know what their children should learn and do and are invited to regularly talk with teachers about the learning experiences and achievements of their children
 - parents are helped to encourage their children to study at home and to put into practice at home what is learned in school
 - teachers seek to understand the home and family environments of their pupils and are kept informed of major changes in these environments
 - schools serve as a venue for other activities of importance to families and to the community at large

- **to strengthen school governance through a decentralised, community-based approach**
 - important decision-making authority is devolved directly to the level of the school
 - schools, in collaboration with the surrounding community, have the autonomy to assess and design solutions to their own needs and improve themselves
 - parents are involved in decisions about school activities, budgets, and policies
 - other community stakeholders in education (e.g., local government, CBOs, religious and cultural groups, private business) are encouraged to work as partners in supporting the school, leading to a sense of local ownership of the school

- **to respect and help realise the rights of children**
 - the school is a sanctuary against abuse and harm, both demonstrating adherence to child rights inside the school and promoting the realisation of rights outside of school
 - the school cooperates with other sectors and actors in the community to monitor the well-being and rights of children -- first, to ensure that all children are enrolled and stay in school and then to help trace, track, and protect families and children at risk and in difficult circumstances (e.g., from violence, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, hazardous labour, sale and trafficking)

Making schools and other basic education programmes more available to more children must remain an important objective for UNICEF in the new century -- but UNICEF must also ensure that the education provided in these programmes is of

good quality and that they have an environment both friendly to children and supportive of learning.

4.2.4 The workplace

For more and more children, pushed out of school from sheer boredom and repeated failure or pulled out for economic or other reasons, the workplace, formal or otherwise, is another important learning environment. At work children can experience positive learning, gaining both generic work habits and attitudes and more specialised skills. But the workplace is also often negative and even hazardous in nature -- unsafe, unhealthy, exploitative, psychologically traumatic, and often deeply disruptive of learning.

Another objective of UNICEF is to work to eliminate hazardous and exploitative work environments and to ensure that work does not hamper learning and that workplaces, when children must work, promote useful child learning.

4.2.5 The media

Finally, the media represent another, very public way to learn. The content and styles of the media, as with other learning environments, can be both negative -- teaching hate and intolerance, making risks appear attractive and violence exciting -- and positive -- providing important information and promoting messages of peace, conflict resolution, enjoyment, healthy living, and self-worth.

A further UNICEF objective is to use its traditional links to the media to promote mobilisation, advocacy, and information activities more focused on positive learning.

In summary, A commitment to the CRC and to the Jomtien Declaration means that 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. This commitment, however, also means that 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, have access to, and grow and develop in, positive, supportive, enabling environments, in families, communities, schools, and the workplace, so that they can gain the 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..

Appendix I

"States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (1) **Make primary education compulsory and available free to all:**
- (2) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education....

"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;**
- (2) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...;
- (3) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own:
- (4) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (5) The development of respect for the natural environment." (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29)

"Every person -- child, youth, adult -- shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning." (World Declaration on Education for All, Article I)

"The diversity, complexity, and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth, and adults necessitates broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education to include the following components: Learning begins at birth....The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling....The basic learning needs of youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems....All available instruments and channels of information, communications, and social action could be used to help convey essential knowledge and inform and educate people on social issues." (World Declaration on Education for All, Article 5)

"Meeting basic learning needs...involves action to enhance the family and community environments for learning..." (Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs: Guidelines for Implementing the World Declaration on Education for All, Paragraph 10)