



AFRICAN UNION EDUCATION PARTNERS MEETING

COMEDAFVI

21 April 2014-Yaounde , Cameroon

Page | 1

UNICEF'S PRIORITIES IN EDUCATION : 2014-2017

Introduction: Sub Saharan Africa scores poorly even when compared with other lower-middle-income economies, on health, education and enabling environments. The UNICEF Education programme gives priority to Africa because of a real lack of progress in the key issues of out of school children, education in emergency situations and the learning crisis. The children who are out of school tend to face the greatest and multiple disadvantages: they live in countries affected by conflict; the majority are girls; most come from poor families or ethnic minority groups; and most live in rural areas. Many children with disabilities are excluded from school, some dropping out too early and others never even entering school. Despite significant progress in Africa, education for all is still an unfinished agenda.

Just getting children into school is not enough. Mounting evidence shows that children in school are learning very little. Current estimates suggest that children either fail to reach grade four, or are in school and cannot read even at the most basic level. The reasons for such low levels of learning are numerous and systemic, such as irrelevant and outdated curricula, teaching based largely on rote memorization, insufficient multilingual education, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate assessments and standards and shortages of appropriate learning materials. Violence and instability, chronic malnutrition, poor health and discrimination also impede children's learning.

Against this backdrop, Africa's continued investment in education in its broadest sense – from early childhood development, primary through secondary and tertiary and professional skills and training – is increasingly considered the multi-focused lever that can drive the region forward.

UNICEF Education Aims: Through the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, UNICEF's commitment to education focuses on two aims. First, improve **equity**, so that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have equal opportunities in education. At the same time, improve **learning**, helping children to secure basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, and a wider range of social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary to equip them not only to survive but to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. In doing so, UNICEF will boost efforts in **innovations** in education, recognizing that business as usual is not enough in reaching the hardest-to-reach.

Concrete results are sought in four main programming areas, which include:

- (i) **Early Learning:** building essential foundations for the future
- (ii) **Equity:** with a focus on out of school children, **girls' education** and inclusive education
- (iii) **Learning:** child friendly schools and improving learning outcomes
- (iv) **Education in emergencies:** emergency and disaster preparedness and building resilience

On a country by country basis, children with the lowest learning opportunities will be identified and strategies developed to support them into learning, recognising that poverty, rural location, gender, ethnicity or having a disability all remain significant barriers to access to quality education. In countries where girls' education lags behind that of boys, an increased focus is being made on strategies to improve regular attendance and learning outcomes of girls from early childhood through to adolescence, in line with UNICEF's Gender Action Plan.

UNICEF's anticipated results are to reduce the number of primary school age children out of school, improve primary complete rate, and their rate of transition to secondary education. UNICEF aims to support:

- a) Enhanced support to communities with disadvantaged children to start schooling at the right age and attend regularly;
- b) Increased national capacity to provide access to early learning opportunities and quality primary and secondary education;
- c) Strengthened political commitment, accountability and national capacity to legislate, plan and budget for scaling up quality and inclusive education;
- d) Increased country capacity and delivery of services to ensure girls and boys access to safe and secure forms of education and critical information for their own well-being in humanitarian situations;
- e) Increased capacity of governments and partners, as duty-bearers, to identify and respond to key human rights and gender equality dimensions of school readiness and performance;
- f) Enhanced global and regional capacity to accelerate progress in education.

Our strategies: In order to achieve these results, UNICEF will invest in and work at community, national and global level to improve the enabling environment for education, through support to standard setting, policy development, data, knowledge management and capacity building. Engaging with governments and key partners, UNICEF will execute a key set of strategies in diverse country contexts, which include:

- Support to governments in **sector analysis, planning and monitoring**, so that education plans are based on evidence and data, meet the needs of disadvantaged children.
- **Strengthening data and evidence**, with increased emphasis on strengthening the relationship between education interventions and results, and generating robust evidence on innovative, scalable and cost effective strategies for the most marginalized children.
- **Delivering education services** where it is needed most- in targeted disadvantaged areas and humanitarian situations- by working with local partners in areas such as the provision of essential materials, training of teachers and day to day support for formal and non-formal education settings.
- Employing a holistic, **inter-sectoral approaches** towards results in education, including early childhood development, water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, and communications for development in increasing demand for and utilization of education services.
- Increased investments in **innovations**, drawing from UNICEF's ability to develop local solutions to local problems and assess potential against global experience, and supporting to incubate, test, and scale up interventions that deliver better outcomes for education.

- Strengthen and leverage existing **partnerships** to maximize potential results, particularly in UNICEF's leading role in key alliances such as the GPE and UNGEI; and with NGOs and civil society, bilateral donor agencies, UN agencies, the academic community. UNICEF is also committed to supporting regional and sub-regional organizations including the African Union, SADC and ECOWAS to inform the regional agenda for the most marginalized girls and boys. As we approach 2015, UNICEF and UNESCO are co-leading in working with governments to shape an ambitious post-2015 agenda for education -- equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Summary: The challenges highlight the importance of accelerating action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa. UNICEF is committed to continuing to work with COMEDAF on the goals of the Second Decade by promoting and supporting access to quality education for all children with a focus to the most disadvantaged. Education that is relevant and up-to-date, personally fulfilling and able to equip Africa's children and youth to support the social and economic development of the continent.