

UNICEF Education and Equity Strategy

A. The concept of Equity

- For UNICEF, equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias, or favouritism. This interpretation is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which guarantees the fundamental rights of every child, regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location, or other status.¹
- Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling access to and failure to achieve school outcomes helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes lack of access and quality outcomes.²
- UNICEF's approach to equity in education involves removing barriers, within and outside education systems to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all, with particular attention to marginalized children. The focus on equity strengthens education as an empowering and transforming influence challenging the reproduction of commonly accepted values and social norms that may be antithetical to human rights. Significantly this entails working across communities – and in particular sustaining the commitment and capacities within schools and communities.

B. Why focus on Equity in Education

- Education plays a key role in determining the course of one's adult life – a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health, and a longer life. By the same token, the long-term social and financial costs of educational failure are high. Those without the skills to participate socially and economically generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and social security systems. So a fair and inclusive system that makes the advantages of education available to all is one of the most powerful levers to make society more equitable.³
- New research proves that human capital formation (a population's education and health status) plays a significant role in a country's overall economic development. Better education leads not only to higher individual income but is also a necessary (although not always sufficient) precondition for long-term economic growth. Broad based secondary education and universal primary education is likely to give poor countries the human capital boost necessary to bring large segments of the population out of poverty. A single year of primary school increases the **wages** people earn later in life by 5-15%. For each additional year of secondary school, an individual's wages increase by 15-25%.⁴

¹ UNICEF Equity Q andA

² Simon Field, Małgorzata Kuczera, Beatriz Pont. 2007. Education and Training Policy. No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education. Paris: OECD; Commission of the European Communities. 2006. Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems Brussels.OECD. (January, 2008).

³ OECD (February 2008) Ten Steps to Equity in Education.

⁴ International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis - Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Education Proves Key, IIASA Policy Brief # 03.

- The transformative potential of education with regard to poverty is also noted. Evidence from Indonesia, which is applicable elsewhere, shows that for **urban households**, the education level of the household head is one of the strongest determining factors that affect both transient and chronic poverty. Secondary and higher education of household heads matter more in reducing household's probability of being poor. Education of the head not only enables the household to move out of chronic poverty, but would cause the households to better weather transitory shocks.⁵
- Investing in education also has undeniable important **social returns** - 5 to 9 % - and is fundamental for a sustainable fulfilling future for all. Education contributes to better health and longer life expectancy; education reduces social costs of health, criminal justice and social security; education contributes to social participation and social cohesion.⁶

C. Equity and the Education Challenge

- Very significant gaps remain in basic education coverage, predominately among children from the poorest households, in rural and remote areas, and from socially excluded groups. About 67 million children of primary school age currently do not attend school, as well as a larger number of children of lower secondary school age (another 74 million). Yet, we do know what tools are needed and what models are proven to work and also the cost - approximately \$16 billion per year – which is minuscule compared with the enormous benefits such education would bring for health, economics, women's empowerment, and basic human dignity.⁷

D. The Programmatic Implications of an Equity Focus in Education

- Equity-based approaches to education involve removing barriers to education, within and outside education systems, to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all. This requires particular attention to excluded children, for example through removing barriers to girls' education and expanding the support services available to girls, especially at the secondary level, with particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable girls.
- With regard to policy and programmatic intervention, equity based approaches to education require a more nuanced analytical foundation, based on robust data and evidence, that takes account of the multiple and interconnected factors that contribute to disparities in access and attainment. Such an analytical foundation provides the basis for appropriate evidence-based measures to reduce disparities. These include: abolishing school fees; scholarships for girls ;providing school meals, subsidies and cash grants to make "9+1 years" of basic education (including one year of early childhood education and lower secondary) available, accessible, and affordable to the most marginalized children.
- Educational outcomes for all children, in particular the most disadvantaged, depend on teachers. Efforts to increase the number and quality of teachers need to address issues of recruitment, retention, professional development, and employment and teaching conditions.

⁵ Alisjahbana and Anshory Yusuf. 2003. Poverty Dynamics in Indonesia: Panel Data Evidence, University Center for Economics and Development Studies. Bandung, Indonesia.

⁶ Lange and Tope. 2006. "The social value of Education and Human Capital." Handbook of Economics of Education Volume 1, p. 459-509; J. Huang, H. Maassen van den Brink and W. Groot. 2009. "A meta-analysis of the effect of education on social capital." *Economics of Education Review* 28, p. 454-464.

⁷ UNESCO (2011). Global Monitoring Report 2011. Paris, UNESCO

These efforts also need to be specifically tailored to the specific challenges of providing quality education access and outcomes to the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Equity considerations must also be incorporated into education responses to humanitarian and post-crisis situations, including efforts at disaster risk reduction (DRR).

- Given the circumstances of the most disadvantaged, issues around transition to post-primary, post-basic and secondary education, vocational training, and lifelong learning can become more prominent in the context of an equity-based approach, given the socioeconomic relevance of post-primary education as well as the importance of the transition from post-primary education to the job market.
- An increased focus on equity must also be integrated in partnerships for education. This includes aligning the efforts of non-state providers, including NGOs, communities, volunteers, and the private sector, with those of national systems to encourage a coherent and coordinated approach to equitable gains in education.

On-going and new work to support Equity in Education:

At country level, UNICEF currently employs many strategies to address the issues of marginalised children both in advocating for strategies in sector plans, supporting district or provincial level implementation and piloting interventions in the field.

Based on UNICEF experience and on-going work in education the following are key areas and strategies to focus on in order to remove barriers, both outside and within education systems to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all. This work, at country level, will sharpen analysis and define strategies and interventions for inclusion in national and subnational sector plans and decentralized action. At global level it will inform UNICEF's contribution to global initiatives such as the FTI, advocacy on EFA, and coalitions around conflict and emergencies.

1. Making the Invisible Visible in Statistics - Improving the ability to gather information disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, disability, age and other features associated with exclusion is a basic step for governments in promoting inclusion. Such information is critical for better program design and for more effective targeting and program evaluation.
2. The School Fee Abolition Initiative - The aim of SFAI, led by UNICEF in collaboration with the World Bank and diverse partners, is to develop a knowledge base on school fee abolition and other strategies to reduce cost barriers to education (such as social protection schemes), and to provide support to countries (30+ to date) in developing and implementing school fee abolition policies and strategies within education sector plans and reforms.
3. Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI): led by UNICEF in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), to improve statistical information and analysis on OOSC (starting with 25 countries), to scrutinize factors of exclusion from schooling and existing policies that enhance participation, to develop a systematic approach to address the problem of OOSC, and to develop guidance for education sector reforms.
4. Bottleneck analysis in education: to develop a country-level methodology for measuring disparities, analyzing bottlenecks, and identifying cost-effective equity-focused strategies to reach the excluded and marginalized within education sector plans and reforms.
5. Initiative on quality teachers for the marginalized: to develop guidance to countries to address the challenges around teacher recruitment, deployment and training for marginalized regions and groups. The work will be drawn from successful examples in 3 countries, initially.

6. School readiness and learning - Supporting the adoption of policies and standards for early learning and expanding the provision of early learning opportunities beyond formal centre-based services, to target those who are excluded.
7. Intensifying focus on removing barriers to girls' education, including by providing scholarships, cash transfers and eliminating user fees; expanding the support for girls, especially at the secondary level, and in particular for the most vulnerable girls; and to accelerate interventions that support countries moving beyond gender parity towards gender equity and the empowerment of girls and women.
8. Social norms - The goal is to develop an analytical framework and guidance to countries on addressing social norms in relation to education and work on a strategy for gender empowerment. This effort will be undertaken within UNICEF's cross-sectoral work on the issue.
9. Child-Friendly Schooling - The goal is to refocus UNICEF's child-friendly school (CFS) intersectoral approach to encompass a more holistic approach combining equitable access, quality and learning outcomes, as well formal and non-formal paths, climate change and environmental education, and teaching and learning methods. Includes a focus on Learning assessments and using the results to improve tracking and learning for all, based on robust data collection and analysis. *Early childhood education, particularly in the form of school readiness, will eventually be part of this.*
10. Education in crisis and post-crisis situations: Strengthening the equity focus in large-scale interventions and pilot innovations to restore services and enable system reconstruction, including pilots in transition funding mechanisms. Based on a UNICEF on-going education and peace building project, the objective is also to facilitate linkages between peace and education programming and the broader Peace building Initiative(s).
11. Innovative strategies and multiple pathways to learning - Greater priority to the transition to post-primary/basic and secondary education, vocational training and lifelong learning taking into consideration the cost-effectiveness, equity and inclusiveness and transition from post-primary education to the world of work. Particular emphasis on open and distance learning.
12. Partnerships to ensure sustainability and predictability of support and funding for national education systems by maintaining adequate national education budgets and by scaling-up education aid programmes. In this regard, supporting the comprehensive reform of the Education For All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) and exploring innovative approaches to education financing and in particular attention to equitable allocation of resources.

The Way Forward

As a global organisation with decentralised programming and management, the Education section is working on the Equity strategy with regions and countries.

Best practice in countries is being monitored through an equity tracker, a global reporting mechanism across the organisation, and a knowledge platform will be created to share these.

The following are a few examples:

- The West Africa Region is trialing the **bottleneck analysis**. EAPRO region is trialing **bottleneck analysis** at the local level using also local MICS data
- The Out-of-school Initiative is well advanced in 25 countries in all regions which not only contribute to the global approach but will have information to address their own needs.

- A **geographical approach to intersecting inequalities** has been tried as a tool of analysis in Cambodia and will also be used elsewhere.
- Lao PDR, with EAPRO and HQ, will be developing a more **equity-focused Child friendly schools** approach (one of UNICEF's main strategies in the field at policy and school level) to inform a revised global guideline, which will use the evidence generated by the analytical tools.

These initiatives will be shared at the Annual education officers' meeting with external experts to assist us to review the methodologies for the purpose of developing a global approach which is robust in analysis with a menu of analytical tools and agreement across the organization on how to achieve results in the Strategic Result Area. Work at global advocacy level, country policy and sector level as well as at school and community level will be informed by these discussions.

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