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# Multiple Flexible Pathways as a Mechanism to Increase Learning and Skill Development for Out-of-School Children and Adolescents

## Good Practice Note 3: Aligning Priorities to Local and National Level Stakeholders', to Increase Enrolment

### UNICEF Analytical Framework: Multiple and Flexible Pathways

The [Secondary Education Guidance: Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#) identifies three different modalities of Multiple and Flexible Pathways:



Accelerated **education programmes** that target **out-of-school children and adolescents** and over-aged adolescents and youth who did not complete their education or are lagging several years behind their peers.



**Short-term alternative education programmes** (e.g., catch-up, bridging, reintegration programmes) and second chance education targeting those who never attended schools.



Alternative programmes that use **technology in remote rural communities** without access to schools.



The specific configuration of these modalities is highly diverse, as they need to be responsive to local contexts. While the only global-level UNICEF guidance on Multiple and Flexible Pathways is on secondary education, UNICEF work in this area does include initiatives that offer alternative learning opportunities to pre-primary, primary, and secondary school-aged out-of-school children.

## Introduction

Multiple and flexible pathways to learning are defined as skills development alternatives for children and adolescents who dropped out of school or have never enrolled, usually operating in non-formal educational settings.<sup>1</sup> Generally, these alternative learning programmes aim to be responsive to the diverse needs of targeted populations and the realities of local communities, including the needs of business and productive sectors. In many cases, these programmes also seek to increase education opportunities for learners by removing barriers to learning when the traditional education system has failed them. They also aim to capitalize on local resources, expand educational services and entrepreneurial training, and help learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to return to formal schooling and/or to transition to work.

This document is one in a series of four interrelated and complementary notes featuring *good practices for designing and implementing* multiple and flexible pathways to learning. The topics presented in the good practices notes include:

1. accreditation of programmes and conferring of recognized credentials on learners (sometimes referred to as credentialization);
2. embracing local communities as authentic partners;
3. integrating transferable skills into multiple and flexible pathways to learning curricula; and
4. alignment with local and national levels stakeholders for increasing enrolment.

These good practice notes are produced as part of the "Evaluation of UNICEF Contributions to the Reduction of Out-of-School Children and Improving Access to Multiple and Flexible Pathways," which took place between September 2023 and May 2024. Evidence presented in this document comes from the data gathered and analysed for that evaluation.<sup>2</sup> Analyses were guided by the [2020 Secondary Education Guidance: Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#).

## UNICEF Good Practice: Aligning Priorities to Local and National Level Stakeholders', to Increase Enrolment

Limited coverage and irregular attendance by participants are some of the most significant challenges that multiple and flexible pathways to learning face daily. In many remote areas, there are multiple reasons out-of-school children and adolescents cannot access or do not enrol (either as full- or part-time) in multiple and flexible pathways to learning. These include family responsibilities, work-related barriers and distrust of official institutions, among other factors.

One way to potentially increase enrolment and participation in multiple and flexible pathways to learning is to align efforts with local and national governmental organizations' activities to maximize any efforts to expand educational opportunities. By doing this, UNICEF country offices can utilize their convening power through partnerships with local communities and governmental stakeholders. The Zimbabwe and Philippines cases provide examples where priorities are intentionally aligned to reach a common goal of increasing enrolment.

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1 UNESCO defines non-formal education as "education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider;" the defining characteristic of non-formal education is that "it is an alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals." A few multiple and flexible pathways supported by UNICEF were part of the formal education sector; however, even those operated in both formal and non-formal settings.

2 Primary data collected included key informant semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with representatives of UNICEF regional and country offices, government institutions (e.g., Ministries of Education), and implementing partners (e.g., local CSOs, universities). Observation and primary collected data were collected from countries visited in-person, including Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, the Philippines, and Uganda. Secondary data collected included programme documents and data as well as relevant policy documents. For additional methodological, data collection and analytical details, refer to the full evaluation report.

## Zimbabwe: Engaging with Governmental Institutions to Encourage Enrolment in Multiple and Flexible Pathways to Learning

**What:** The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education partnered with diverse government institutions, including a network of district learning support services centers, to identify out-of-school children and adolescents and motivate them to return to traditional schools or enrol in alternative learning centers.

**Who:** UNICEF Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

**How:** A total of 288 district centers were established to provide learning support services in 72 districts. UNICEF and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education then partnered to work with local and national governmental organizations to provide technical support, training and strategic activities. At scheduled Integrated Community Service Fairs (a community-based platform) stakeholders came together to find context-specific solutions to improve the attendance of children and adolescents at risk of dropping out as well as for those already out-of-school. Stakeholders included members of school-based child protection committees, staff of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, health providers, Ministry of Labour and Social Security personnel, local police, as well as male and female students.

**Why:** The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education identifies and addresses the causes of dropout and positively impacts attendance to multiple and flexible pathway to learning initiatives through community engagement and school-based committees. The Ministry notes that engaging with a cross-sectoral approach to service-provision (i.e., teachers, social protection officers, gender specialists, vaccination and health) could significantly impact positive attendance at multiple and flexible pathways to learning. Providing out-of-school children and adolescents with concrete information on the services that can be offered and anchored at school was associated with positive school attendance in the longer term.

## The Philippines: Forming Alliances with Local Education Stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to Increase Enrolment in Multiple and Flexible Pathways to Learning

**What:** Multi-agency alliance at the local level, including education agencies, formed a Youth Development Alliance to facilitate referral mechanisms for young people who are out of school or never enrolled, to exchange information and to access learning and skills development opportunities in the Alternative Learning System

**Who:** UNICEF Philippines, local education stakeholders (i.e., local government unit and the local administration unit of the Department of Education), local civil society organizations (i.e., a local university partner and civil society organizations that provide alternative learning services to young people), and teachers.

**How:** UNICEF Philippines worked with local-level stakeholders to establish the Youth Development Alliance. UNICEF consulted with young people, teachers and other stakeholders to devise a strategic plan for the Alliance. The strategic plan defined the main goals and objectives that served as basis to developing actionable programmes. The strategy also described the resource mobilization requirements to ensure the sustainability to respond to the specific needs of young people in the locality, with a focus on children out of school. To complement these efforts, UNICEF developed a social and behavioural change strategy, and rolled out campaigns to increase awareness of the benefits of multiple and flexible pathways to learning. Spaces were created for information exchange not only on learning, but also employment, entrepreneurial and volunteering opportunities. UNICEF also supported the Alliance in improving alternative learning services by adapting teaching and learning materials to local contexts, improving learning centers, and optimizing the utilization of mobile classrooms to deliver educational services in hard-to-reach areas.

As a result of these efforts, enrolment in multiple and flexible pathways to learning increased.

**Why:** The engagement with teachers, local authorities and civil society organizations improved strategic coordination to elevate education issues into the local government's agenda. This experience encouraged UNICEF Philippines and the Mindanao Field Office to implement activities that regularly engaged communities and widened young people's access to learning alternatives. The involvement of local civil society organizations significantly improved teachers' capacity as well as that of school division and regional office staff to work collaboratively with young people, educators and local authorities. They also secured funding to continue their work after the completion of the UNICEF-supported project.

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