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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 2: Embracing Local Communities as Expert Partners

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.¹ 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.² Analyses were guided by the [2020 Secondary Education Guidance: Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#).

UNICEF Good Practice: Embracing Local Communities as Expert Partners

The involvement of local communities in implementing and sustaining multiple and flexible pathways to learning can facilitate programme success in terms of participation and content relevance. For example, community engagement can successfully inform about responses to learners’ and communities’ specific needs; improve access to educational resources; help overcome specific causes of exclusion; and rely on the support of community leaders and their social connections.

Local communities can contribute to a programme in diverse ways, for instance, identifying context-relevant strategies; defining operational plans; and rallying to increase community participation, support, and ownership. By elevating the knowledge and experience of local communities, initiatives can optimize their impact while building trusting relationships between local community members and educational institutions.

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.

Guatemala: Establishing Non-Formal Education Centers (CEEXs) in Remote Areas

What: Local communities' strategic role in identifying the most convenient locations for the CEEXs ensures that these centers maximize accessibility and enrolment from nearby villages

Who: UNICEF Guatemala, municipal authorities and remote communities

How: UNICEF Guatemala conducted a study to pinpoint ideal locations to establish CEEXs to benefit a maximum number of learners. Community members actively participated in convening meetings as key informants, providing valuable information on selecting the best locations for centers. They also played the role of teachers, providing education services (conducting home visits), advocating to encourage school enrolment and providing administrative support (gathering attendance data as part of an early warning system).

Why: Establishing CEEXs in remote areas expands the coverage for out-of-school learners. Initially, there was local skepticism regarding the validity of these centers. However, working collaboratively with community members helped overcome community distrust and enhanced educational opportunities for out-of-school learners.

The Guatemala case demonstrates the importance of recognizing community members' knowledge and expertise regarding their histories, realities and experiences. Their knowledge of geographic accessibility

provided information to build the CEEXs in convenient locations to serve their surrounding communities and increase their reach.

Colombia: La Casita, A Community-Based Initiative to Increase Access to Primary Education

What: Community members create learning spaces so Venezuelan migrants can gain basic literacy skills to enrol in primary schools

Who: UNICEF Colombia, UNICEF municipality offices,³ and displaced communities in emergency areas

How: Community mothers come together to teach young Venezuelan children reading, writing and comprehension. Although mother-teachers follow a literacy curriculum, they adapt their teaching plans (e.g., instructional goals, learning activities, and teaching approaches) to respond to local realities. UNICEF Colombia supports this community-based initiative by providing pedagogical training, educational materials and linkages with financial organizations.

Why: Community-driven initiatives such as La Casita improve children's literacy skills to help pass a literacy screening test, a mandatory requirement for school enrolment. The sustainability of this initiative depends on the voluntary efforts of community members. The transformative potential of community-based initiatives could diminish if they aren't recognized by the Ministry of Education and other territorial authorities as a formal alternative path to education.

3 Countries have different political organizations. Colombia is a centralized country organized in 32 departments with providencias and municipalities. In The Philippines, the municipality offices are equivalent to field offices.

Bangladesh: Establishing Community-Based Pre-Primary Learning Centers in Remote Areas

What: Community-based learning centers were established in hard-to-reach areas to provide education opportunities for pre-primary school-aged children

Who: UNICEF Bangladesh, the Bangladesh central government and partners in local communities

How: Learning centers were established in areas where government schools were unavailable. Pre-primary education (PPE) facilitators were competitively recruited and selected from among women in the community. UNICEF Bangladesh ensured the quality of PPE facilitators by providing training courses on child psychology and pedagogy, as well as learning packages and assessments. The community-supported centers' teaching and learning materials are aligned with the national curriculum. The Government recognized that graduates from PPE centers could transition to primary schools. PPE centers have significantly expanded since 2019 to several areas of Bangladesh.

Why: The coverage of government-funded PPE schools was approximately 65 per cent to 70 per cent in 2023. One of the most critical barriers to increasing coverage was the accessibility of the centers. This intervention responded to robust evidence indicating that pre-primary graduates are more likely to be ready for and complete primary education as well as to continue to higher levels of education.

The Colombia and Bangladesh cases illustrate the diverse roles that community members can play during the design and implementation of multiple and flexible pathways to learning. In Colombia, community mothers organized learning spaces for young Venezuelan migrants and became teachers so learners could be school-ready. In Bangladesh, community members provided valuable information to decide the location of the centers and, more

importantly, became instructional facilitators, serving as teachers and liaisons between centers and communities. When communities are recognized as powerful agents of change, they are framed as equal partners whose participation in multiple and flexible pathways to learning could be a key determinant of success. Equally relevant, multiple and flexible pathways to learning are recognized as programmes that 'belong to' the community over time.

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