



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

Good Practice Note 1: Accreditation of Programs and Credentialization

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 Practices: Accreditation of Programs and Credentialization

Accrediting programmes and providing credentials to learners improves their chances of success in continued education and/or at work. When learners can present credentials from recognized programmes with assured quality, they signal to potential employers, other learning programmes, and community members that they have acquired valuable knowledge and skills upon graduation. Perhaps just as importantly, learners with credentials have completed courses or training to develop a knowledge foundation, technical skills, and/or life skills for continuous learning and future growth.

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.

Uganda: Working Toward Credentialing Social Innovation Skills (critical thinking, bidirectional communication, teamwork, and problem-solving)

What: Partnering with a critical national entity while convening the broadest possible coalition of stakeholders facilitates institutionalizing a credentialization system for social innovation

Who: UNICEF Uganda and the Department for Industrial Training of the Ministry of Education and Sport

How: UNICEF Uganda began communicating with the Ministry of Education and Sport about the certification of Social Innovation training adapted from UNICEF UPSHIFT.³ After an intensive collaboration between UNICEF Uganda and the Department for Industrial Training to codify training materials and develop evaluation instruments, the Department for Industrial Training facilitated workshops with the Employers Federation, the Ministry of Gender, the private sector association, civil society, and youth to generate buy-in of the proposed credentialization system.

Why: Working in close partnership, UNICEF Uganda and Department for Industrial Training verified that private sector employers were aware of the usefulness of social innovation skills for individuals succeeding in the workforce. The skills recognition and certification process were accelerated by engaging with the central authority for standards development and enlisting a broad coalition of stakeholders.

The Uganda experience demonstrates the importance of consulting meaningfully with a wide range of stakeholders when developing criteria and processes for accredited multiple and flexible pathways to learning and allocating learning credentials. For accreditation, the first step needed is to gain support from the relevant national body that has the

power to certify programmes and regulate credentials. However, it is also essential to include consultations with and gain approval and support from youth groups of both genders, potential employers, related training and education programmes, and the broader community.

Philippines: Micro-Certificates for Acquisition of Life Skills

What: Certification of learners' proficiency in life skills, essential for employability and continuing education

Who: UNICEF Philippines, the Bureau of Alternative Education of the Department of Education and university partners

How: UNICEF Philippines commissioned a study of the feasibility of micro-certification. Following the positive findings, UNICEF Philippines and partners developed frameworks and instruments to assess proficiency levels in terms of communication skills, teamwork, and cooperation with peers as learning components of the alternative learning system. Leadership and problem-solving skills also were evaluated. As of 2024, the UNICEF Philippines is providing extensive support to the Government of the Philippines to officially establish the first Alternative Learning System Life Skills Micro-Certification, with plans to further roll out the micro-certification nationally.

Why: Many learners who enrolled in the alternative learning system did not receive a certification of completion because they either did not take or failed the Accreditation and Equivalency Test. The lack of formal certificates limited the learners' opportunities to transition into formal schooling or to enter the labour market. The new micro-certification practices allow learners to receive an endorsement of their proficiency in general transferable skills that are valued in society.

3 UPSHIFT is "a social innovator accelerator for young people aged 10-24 years that rapidly unlocks their potential to create real and tangible change in their lives and their communities." (<https://www.unicef.org/innovation/upshift>).

Good Practice Note 1: Accreditation of Programs and Credentialization

The Uganda and the Philippines cases demonstrate that adolescents participating in alternative learning programmes could face severe challenges in transitioning into formal schooling or entering the workforce. In both countries, a programme accreditation and learning certification demonstrate mastery of

foundational knowledge, technical knowledge, and/or life skills; and these practices promise to ease the transition to continued education and work. Also, in both cases youth or employers were active participants during the design and implementation of the accreditation and certification system.

Egypt: Quality Standards for Community Schools for Children from Sudan

What: Developing quality standards for community schools for Sudanese refugee children improves learning and skill development and facilitates the Government of Egypt's recognition of those schools

Who: UNICEF Egypt and community schools for Sudanese refugees.

How: UNICEF Egypt and community schools for refugees created new quality standards, building from existing standards for formal schools. UNICEF Egypt also assessed the pedagogical practices that schools utilized to identify gaps in teaching and learning quality and how to address them in their school improvement plans. UNICEF Egypt also developed a certification programme with a national university to improve the quality of teaching by the teachers in community schools.

Why: While community schools were set up to provide learning opportunities for Sudanese refugee children, Egyptian national authorities initially did not recognize them because the programmes were not accredited, and the teachers were not certified. By implementing quality standards, the UNICEF Egypt and community schools paved the way for the schools to become accredited. Refugee children who completed education in those schools could continue learning in the formal education system.

In Egypt, the schools that Sudanese refugee children attended did not initially meet minimum quality standards. Those schools were not accredited, resulting in many children not gaining the knowledge and skills that learners in the formal education system could acquire. To obtain accreditation, the schools were obliged to develop a plan with specific

requirements, regulations and guidelines to improve their quality. A crucial part of the improvement plan was to provide teachers with various professional development activities. UNICEF Egypt has been working on helping schools gain the capacity and quality standards to receive governmental recognition to become accredited.

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