

The building of partnerships in child friendly schools



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Introduction

Multi sectoral collaboration in education has never been more important than now when education systems are confronted by the multiple threats of HIV and AIDS, increasing numbers of children who are orphans, conflicts and poverty. In an increasingly uncertain world, planning and management of education is required to be adaptive. What is needed are partnerships that forge inter-ministerial and multi sectoral linkages in order to catalyse a wide array of partners to work together to achieve national and global goals.

Child friendly schools

In child friendly schools (CFS), multi sectoral partnerships are needed to accelerate the delivery of services to schools to facilitate children's learning and to invigorate management systems. Child Friendly Schools encompass multiple dimensions of quality, including: safe, healthy learning environments that are inclusive, gender sensitive, effective and efficient and provide school-based health and nutrition services, safe water and sanitation; an ethos that fosters equality, respect for human rights and the participation of all children; instructional programmes that promote relevant life skills such as HIV/AIDS prevention and good health and nutrition practices and a child-centred style of teaching and learning.

Therefore, the CFS is a very broad approach that UNICEF is adopting as a way of promoting quality education in schools. Child friendly schools are child centred and rights based, that is why around fifty Asian, Latin American and African countries adopted the approach to facilitate the mainstreaming of human rights into education. CFS are challenging the developmental rationale and showing that development has to be balanced with the realisation of rights.

In order to walk the path of a child friendly school it is important first for a school to undertake a causality analysis of the reasons why schools are unsafe, insecure and therefore unfriendly to children.

Manifestations of inequality

Unsafe and insecure environments in schools

Unsafe and insecure schools lead to a breakdown in trust, which can have far reaching effects on children. This type of school damages the psyche of the child; it interferes with learning and more than anything, it erodes the *potential* that schools can have to make a positive impact on society at large. The lack of safety

and security at school is one of these conditions. While children may be exposed to danger on the way to and from school, much more disturbing is the recognition that when they are at school, they may encounter lack of teachers, inadequate water and sanitation, suffer from hunger, ill health or violence.

Danger zones

A seven country study of violence in schools in the Middle Eastern and North African regions found many shortcomings in the physical environments of schools, ranging from damaged spaces and furniture to a lack of basic hygiene (Payet, 2005). In studies where children have been asked to 'map' (through photography, transect maps and various other tools) the danger zones or safety zones of their school and playgrounds (Prosser, 2002; Leach and Machakanja, 2000; Leach et al, 2003), they have been very adept at representing where they feel safe and not so safe.

Latrines/toilet areas come up repeatedly in the literature as a particularly dangerous area of schools. Most sexual abuse, for example of very young children in day care centres, takes place in toilets (Finkelhor and Williams, 1988). There are numerous studies that refer to toilets as danger zones in schools (UNICEF, 2005). Other studies found that when teachers supervised the toilets that were located a great distance from the school, the incidence of gender violence decreased (Brookes, 2003). Toilets also tend to be danger zones for drug dealing and drug consumption, both closely related to violent behaviour in schools. School buses and public transportation to and from school represent an additional site of violence because of the peer aggression and bullying that takes place out of sight of teachers.

Gender inequality

Classrooms are often sites of socialisation where male pupils learn to 'be a man' and female pupils learn obedience, modesty and making oneself 'attractive to men' thus maintaining the targeted 'gendered order' (Connell, 1987). In countries with high HIV infection rates, gender inequality that results in coerced or forced sex places girls at greater risk of infection and has resulted in especially high HIV prevalence rates among adolescent girls. While girls may be active co-agents in the construction of adolescent notions of sexuality and gender identity which place them in a weak position relative to boys and men, their greater vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse and to physical violence, cannot be ignored.



Management and discipline

The way the school is organised and managed will, to a large extent, be decided by the capacity of the school leadership to organise the school effectively and provide a management system that prevents violence. The association between schools and 'discipline' is a pervasive one, particularly discipline that curtails personal movement and violates bodily integrity.

At the same time school partnerships are hampered by stakeholders who view the school as an institution of learning where other government ministries should not be involved. The school should not partner with other government ministries to deliver services like de-worming, school feeding or care and support because this takes away from the purpose of schooling, namely learning. Other partners view the delivery of social services to children through schools as overloading teachers with more work when their capacities are already limited. There is also a tension between national governments and local authorities on the one hand and civil society organisations (CSO) on the other hand regarding the role of CSO in schools,

The path toward a child friendly school

Partnerships

Partnerships are integral to child friendly schools because their comprehensive approach to transforming schools requires partnerships and networking at school, community, local government and national government levels. It is through collaboration, networking and advocacy that schools can change from being unsafe and insecure to becoming protective environments within which children can learn and access quality education. CFSs are proactive and include a strong dimension of protection; that is why this type of school promotes safety and security for both the child and the teacher in the school. Such schools already operating in parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa demonstrate the capacity for providing protection, care and support of all children in order to alleviate the effects of insecurity and lack of safety.

Partners

Within countries, ministries of health, social welfare, water affairs, agriculture, local government and the National AIDS Councils (NACs) collaborate with the ministry of education to create spaces for the care and support of children affected by AIDS; giving priority to the safety and security of girls in and around schools; organising school gardens and school feeding; and establishing school health initiatives that include de-worming and water and sanitation when required.

Furthermore, in places like Malawi and Zambia inter-ministerial collaboration facilitates the packaging and integration of interventions such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) into CFS. In Uganda, Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH) is also fitting well into the CFS model. Partnerships for creating protective environments in, and around, schools requires governments, their ministries of education, parents and care-givers to take on their respective responsibilities.

Equally, schools and other educational settings should regard themselves as being fundamentally about transformation towards a peaceful existence. CFS is a comprehensive approach that can strengthen teachers' use of non-violent ways of discipline in the classroom and also build leadership skills in order to develop schools and communities free from violence.

Role of civil society organisations

Collaborating with civil society organisations (CSO) is essential to ensure that schools are secure and protective environments, children have a 'safe haven' from many of the problems which are far more difficult to solve such as structural violence vis-à-vis poverty; sickness and death; armed conflict; violence on the street and in the home. At both national and community levels government partnership with CSO such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) does contribute to schools flowering into 'safe havens' where children and young people can learn to solve problems in their everyday world outside the school. Much more dialogue and collaboration between governments and CSO is required in schools but that has to be linked to strengthening governments' role to coordinate CSO.

In 2005, 13 ministers of education from Eastern and Southern Africa released a communiqué (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) on *Essential Services for Children: Care and Support in Schools*. These ministers made a strategic partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNICEF and UNESCO to support the forum where the communiqué was developed. UNICEF then took up this challenge and made Learning Plus (Schools as Centres for Learning and Delivery of Essential Services for Children) one of the three bold initiatives in its Medium Term Strategic Plan.

Care and support in schools – essential services for children

Introduction

The goal of this bold initiative is to intensify the systematic use of schools as centres of learning and for the delivery of other social services for children (including care and support), in circumstances where the normal provision of these services by family and community has come under increased threat from major challenges. This multi sectoral initiative has emerged from the search by countries in Eastern and Southern Africa for feasible solutions to the challenges posed to education due to poverty, the impact of HIV/AIDS and violence.

In communiqué the ministers of education committed themselves to taking the necessary measures to strengthen their education systems, to making schools and alternative learning centres viable primary channels through which essential services are provided for children. Included in this commitment is collaboration and co-ordination between sectors and government ministries for the delivery of services such as de-worming, school feeding, water and sanitation, birth registration and care and support of children



affected by AIDS in schools. Also working at improving the way schools are staffed, funded, equipped, supported, organised and managed to ensure that schools retain their core integrity and viability as centres for learning, while also serving as places where children are provided with essential services.

These interventions require a regional assessment, operational guidelines and capacity development at all levels. Learning plus will contribute significantly to the quality of learning in schools because it will make school systems robust through facilitating inter ministerial and inter sectoral collaboration.

Teachers, parents and communities

An important aspect of protective environments in schools is providing support to teachers through involving other professionals and para-professionals in the community as well as hiring non-teaching staff in school to address violence. In South Africa specially trained personnel called police education officers are assigned to schools to work with teachers, to interact directly with children to promote a positive relationship between children and the justice system and to follow up on cases in the community. The involvement of the police in the care and support of children in school is another illustration of inter-ministerial collaboration.

Partnerships also require that schools be decentralised and empower parents and communities. Through school governing bodies and parent-teacher associations, parents and the community have a role to play in ensuring that the places where their children spend from three to seven or eight hours every day are safe. Countries that have mounted capacity development programs with, and for, parents and community members like chiefs and religious leaders on school governance, financial management and so on must also ensure that they also receive training on how to ensure safety at school.

Conclusion

Child friendly schools depend on pro-active partnership and alliance building at all levels including the evolving aid architecture. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) supports partnerships for girls' education, which is why it is a key element of CFS. Schools have to provide spaces for child participation through children's movements like Girls, Boys Education Movement (GBEM). GBEM in Lesotho is directly linked to the (UNGEI) secretariat in the Ministry of Education. The Ministry, with the support of UNICEF, funds and manages a nation wide HIV/AIDS prevention peer education initiative by GBEM.

Collaboration with children and youth at classroom and school levels is important because they can develop child-focused interventions for addressing hostile environments in and around schools. In-school and after-school programs in Brazil are organised with the knowledge that it is important to keep children busy, artistically and physically engaged and off the streets.

One example that stands out for its creativity, affordability and immediate impact as a monitoring device is an intervention within the girl friendly school initiative in rural districts in the Gambia (see also Mitchell and Sowe, 2005). There a select number of schools have developed a school-based visual data scheme for charting the attendance of children. On the wall of the office of the head teacher are large and inexpensive flip charts which provide a visual map of who is at school and who is not, on a monthly basis. The charts, which are sex disaggregated, offer a straightforward visual analysis of attendance based on the village that children come from, their age, sex, grade, and distance from the school.

Partnerships and multi sectoral collaboration in CFS emphasise achieving synergies and improving coherence in schools' contribution to educational change within the context of EFA and MDG goals. Getting on a path towards a child friendly school begins with promoting and institutionalising learning, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and the safety and security of children through a series of packaged, inter-sectoral interventions. This is done with the participation of children themselves, teachers, school management, parents, the community, local authorities and the national government.

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Biographical notes

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