



# IMPROVING EDUCATION QUALITY IN SOUTH ASIA (I):

A REVIEW OF UNICEF'S EFFORTS





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It is hoped that this report does justice in capturing the rich experiences and insights shared with me, and that its findings will prove useful to the many efforts of UNICEF and its partners to provide an education whose quality enables every child in South Asia to thrive and learn in preparation for a meaningful and contributing life. Any errors in this report are my own.

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# ACRONYMS

ABL	Activity-Based Learning
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CFA	Child-Friendly Approach (Sri Lanka)
CFEP	Child Friendly Education Programme (Sri Lanka)
CFS	Child-Friendly Schools
CFSS	Child-Friendly Schools and Systems
CP	Country Program
CO	Country Office
COAR	Country Office Annual Report
DP	Development Partner
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EGRA/ EGMA	Early Grade Reading Assessment/ Early Grade Math Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EO	Education Officer
ES	Education Specialist
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
MGML	Multi-grade Multi-level (pedagogy)
ML	Multi-level (pedagogy)
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTR	Mid-term Review
NAFA	National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEAS	National Education Assessment System (Pakistan)
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OOSC	Out of school children
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
SCR	Social Cohesion and Resilience
SDP	School Development Plan
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
U-DISE	Unified District Information of School Education
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current mapping was envisioned in light of the learning challenges in South Asia, the urgent need for improving teaching and learning quality and lack of clarity around the same, a desire to map UNICEF's efforts in this area to better understand what works, and to inform UNICEF South Asia's ongoing efforts and further research in this area. The mapping involved a desk review of available documentation, online surveys, and skype interviews with key informants from UNICEF Country Offices, Field Offices, and key NGO/government partners. Findings were captured in the form of the present Report, a PDF Brief, a Powerpoint presentation, and a taxonomy listing UNICEF-supported quality interventions in South Asia. Findings regarding key challenges, success drivers, potential leverage points for enhancing teaching-learning quality, and UNICEF's unique strengths and limitations as an organisation, were gathered from surveys, interviews, and the limited evaluations available. These were analysed in order to glean specific recommendations for UNICEF South Asia. Insights emerging from the analysis of findings can be summarised in these five key messages:

## **1. UNICEF's quality initiatives have had positive impact on children's access to quality learning environments, yet they have focused more on quality inputs than outcomes. There needs to be a shift in focus to changes in teaching and learning.**

Despite the many challenges to education quality in South Asia, recent citizen-led assessments indicate some positive trends in Pakistan and India, including potential improvements in learning at pre-primary and primary levels (ASER Pakistan 2015, ASER India 2016). Indeed, the mapping findings indicate that UNICEF's efforts over the past decade have contributed to improvements in children's participation in school and in school facilities. However, a clear message emerging from the mapping is that the call of the day is to focus more explicitly on learning outcomes than has been the focus thus far. It was felt that talking only about quality may or may not lead to improved learning, whereas focusing on learning outcomes will inevitably streamline other interventions necessary for quality. Even with programmes like CFS, the goal should be not simply to implement the programme properly – but to enable students to achieve learning outcomes. Though many COs are indeed attempting to include a greater focus on learning in their new Country Programmes, executing this is especially challenging given that many South Asian countries lack the needed political and financial support or strong systems for measuring learning, as well as global lack of clarity on how to improve pedagogy and learning outcomes. In this context, UNICEF can play a key role in helping identify what works, and advising governments on the most strategic investments for improving learning. It was felt that UNICEF could increase its impact by defining a long-term vision and strategy for improving teaching-learning outcomes, and prioritising just a few key areas where it can show results, since improvements in learning are the ultimate gauge of impact on education quality.

## **2. Redefine CFS for South Asia: from child-friendly environments to learning-centred education**

Research on the impact of CFS in Nepal, Sri Lanka and India indicates that CFS has made a positive contribution to improving learning environments, children's participation, and awareness around children's rights. CFS initiatives in South Asia have predominantly focused on promoting inclusive welcoming environments, relevant learning materials, and a few on strengthening supportive systems. However, while these are certainly important components of quality education, they are not sufficient for ensuring changes in learning processes and outcomes. Activity-based learning (ABL) which UNICEF has supported in India was the only model to show evidence of improvements in child-centred learning processes and increased learning outcomes – though ABL itself was initiated by the government and inspired by an NGO model, rather than by UNICEF's CFS model. Given that CFS as a concept has already gained much

traction in South Asia, perhaps there is need to redefine what CFS means for South Asia, with a greater articulation of how to improve teaching-learning outcomes within this context. Rather than pushing for ‘child-friendly’ education which has been found to sometimes raise barriers in a South Asian cultural context, perhaps the focus should be more on ‘learning-centred education’ – designing a contextualised teaching process that can best support learning, in keeping with basic principles of learning.

### **3. There is need to showcase good working models on the ground**

While there may be a few pockets of innovation in different sectors, these are often not on the radar of the government or even of UNICEF. Demonstrating good working models of what learning-centred pedagogy could look like for different subjects, and also of transformative teacher training models that are able to bring shifts in teachers’ beliefs and practices, could be an important and much-needed resource for building teachers’ capacity for improving learning. UNICEF could create or identify such islands of excellence within the system, glean findings from existing evaluations or reviews conducted by other partners, help to showcase these as demonstrations of what could work, and flag these as potential models for upscaling or partnership. Connecting such outliers with each other would help build a platform that could gain enough momentum to create a viable alternative to the status quo. It could also analyse and help evaluate such outliers to identify lessons and key leverage points for enhancing learning.

### **4. Our strategies need to take into account regional challenges and leverage them for success**

Models that have worked well in other contexts may not necessarily succeed as intended in South Asia, given its unique regional challenges such as its prevalence of conflict and disasters, weak systemic capacity, poor governance and politicisation of teaching, low-skilled teachers and weak teacher training, and strong exam culture. These are not likely to change in the near future, thus our strategies need to build on and leverage these to make them contribute to our success (an example of this is the recommendation below of using an existing constraint of the exam culture dominant in the region, and leveraging that for success by changing the way national assessments are designed). Given the prevalence of fragile contexts in the region, we also need to think of setting learning standards that are appropriate for such fragile contexts.

### **5. Complex challenges in South Asia require exploring creative new options for capacity-building of teachers, systems, and UNICEF’s own staff**

This is an important area for UNICEF specially given that one of its strengths is its access to international resources, and that one of its limitations identified is its lack of technical expertise in the area of improving learning quality. The magnitude of need for building capacity at all levels requires moving away from traditional options of training workshops or conferences, to exploring out-of-the box options that tap into technology and latest thinking on leadership development.

## **What could quality mean for South Asia?**

Based on a review and critique of existing definitions of quality, this mapping proposes a new definition of quality focusing on six dimensions seen as integral to education quality: ensuring thriving learners, welcoming learning environments, relevant learning materials, learning-centred processes, universal learning outcomes, and supportive systems. UNICEF’s education programming in South Asia for the past decade has made important contributions in the first, second, third, and sixth, but has had less explicit focus on the fourth and fifth which are central to education quality. An analysis of findings from the mapping suggests that perhaps a more achievable conception of ‘quality’ for South Asia at this point in time may be to develop learning-centred education systems, that are able to ensure that the majority of children are able to achieve basic competencies appropriate to their grade level – compared to the mere one-third of children currently achieving this. In particular, in a South Asian context a discussion of improved

learning outcomes cannot be divorced from a discussion of how to bring pedagogical shifts from teacher-centred classrooms: pedagogy and learning outcomes must go hand in hand. Based on an analysis of interviews, surveys and document review, the mapping was able to identify some potential leverage points likely to contribute to improved outcomes for teaching and learning, though these need to be substantiated by further research:

- 1. Empower teachers as professionals to engage with basic principles of learning**, through both short-term strategies of providing effective in-school teacher coaching, and long-term strategies of developing vibrant teacher education systems that allow teachers to experience and internalize basic principles of learning (like attempts to restructure teacher education systems in Odisha and Maharashtra, India).
- 2. Structured pedagogical interventions designed to strengthen teaching and learning**, by organising materials, training and supervision around a specific pedagogical model designed to change students' learning experiences, and adapt teaching to student learning levels (like Activity-Based Learning in India).
- 3. Generate political will to clearly define and measure desired learning outcomes**, ensuring these are regularly monitored through both large-scale learning surveys and classroom-based formative assessments (like Afghanistan's attempts to develop national assessment systems, while also training teachers to implement formative assessment).
- 4. Build capacity of education stakeholders to discuss and use learning assessment data to inform decision-making at all levels**, including both education planners and managers for allocating resources and efforts at sub-national levels, and teachers for allocating time and attention to individual children or specific competencies (Education monitoring systems in Punjab province, Pakistan is one example of analyzing data and ranking districts' performance on key quality indicators in order to prioritize action).
- 5. Empower parents to demand and support improved learning**, for example through developing a simple list of key outcomes every child should know at each grade level, to empower parents to hold schools accountable for ensuring all children learn (like efforts in India to display grade-wise learning objectives stated in simple terms on school walls for parents to know what to demand).
- 6. Strengthen governance of learning by building stronger transparency**, accountability, and efficiency at different levels right to school management (like Nepal's Data Must Speak initiative).

## **Recommendations for UNICEF COs and ROSA**

Though learning is the call of the day, it is also the most difficult and a relatively new area for UNICEF South Asia. Much more is needed in generating evidence, showing good working models, strengthening systems, and developing UNICEF's own technical capacity and resource pools in this area. Keeping in mind the challenges and successes identified, as well as what people felt were UNICEF's key strengths and limitations in working for quality improvement, five preliminary recommendations are made whereby UNICEF may strategically contribute to improving quality:

- 1. Advocate with governments to shift the focus to learning as a right of children**, through strong evidence-based advocacy and research.
- 2. Show good working models on the ground for improving pedagogy and learning**, through a combination of piloting innovative strategies, and identifying and leveraging outliers within the current system that have been able to show results, from across sectors.
- 3. Help shift national assessments from testing memorization, towards testing competencies**, as a way of leveraging the strong exam culture to create pressure for teacher training and systems to ensure a shift towards learner-centred pedagogies.


4. **Build systemic capacity at all levels to analyse and use data for improving learning**, leading to informed decision-making for bringing changes in pedagogy, teacher support, curriculum reform or review of materials, all with the view to leading to enhanced learning outcomes.
5. **Strengthen accountability for learning**, by empowering parents to demand and support quality improvement, or working with teacher unions to strengthen teacher accountability.

Based on the above recommendations for COs, ROSA could provide support in helping identify key leverage points for improving teaching-learning outcomes, and in creating a database of good test items measuring children's understanding and competencies for countries to draw from. It was felt that ROSA could facilitate regular opportunities to document and share good work happening on the ground, harvest findings from existing evaluations or reviews conducted by other partners, organise capacity-building opportunities for COs around improving teaching-learning quality, and build capacity of senior government leaders around learning enhancement.

In terms of further research on the impact of CFS programmes on teaching-learning outcomes, this mapping suggests that many of the CFS programmes in South Asia may not have explicitly aimed at bringing changes in teaching and learning outcomes, and thus may not be able to show significant impact on learning (for example in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan). Rather, the study suggests four areas of research that ROSA could potentially facilitate, to help UNICEF learn from and identify what works for improving teaching and learning quality, and which could present a first step towards redefining what CFS could look like within South Asia:

1. **Deeper analysis, discussion and dissemination of findings** from existing evaluations of CFS in South Asia (particularly from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal).
2. **A self-evaluation exercise of UNICEF's quality initiatives** in each country, to enable UNICEF and partners to collectively reflect on the impact and gaps of UNICEF's quality programming
3. **Mapping of existing outliers** from across sectors that have been able to show improvements in teaching and learning, to look at what works for bringing change on the ground.
4. **More rigorous evaluations of 3-5 of the key outliers** identified in the mapping that may not have already been evaluated, to isolate their impact on teaching and learning outcomes.





# FROM SCHOOLING TO LEARNING

## CONTEXT: THE LEARNING CRISIS IN SOUTH ASIA

South Asia is home to some of the largest populations of children and adolescents aged 0-18 (over 600 million), which presents both a demographic opportunity, and some of the most complex challenges for providing quality education for every child. Tremendous efforts have been made to get all children enrolled in schools, yet ensuring that these children learn has been an even bigger challenge. Recent reports by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017) and World Bank (2018) signal a global 'learning crisis': that a staggering 617 million children and adolescents worldwide are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. Among these, Central and Southern Asia has the second highest rate in the world next to Sub-Saharan Africa, with 81% of children aged 6-14, or 241 million, not learning (UNESCO 2017).

The sad part is that two-thirds of the children who are not learning are in fact in school, sitting in classrooms. Of the children who attend primary and lower secondary school in Central and South Asia, only 19% manage to attain minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics (UNESCO 2017). In India and Pakistan, with two of the most developed and decentralised education systems in South Asia, citizen-led assessments indicate that only 46% of children in Pakistan public schools and 48% in Indian public schools can read a Class 2 level text by the time they reach Class 5 (ASER Pakistan 2015, ASER India 2016). In countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, less than half of students leave primary school with the basic foundational skills one would expect them to

have after completing primary school.

The poor quality of education in turn contributes to the highest drop-out rates in the world, creating a compounding vicious cycle of poor learning levels. Consequently, over half of students complete secondary school – not counting the ones who drop out or fail – without the requisite skills they need to succeed in life. The magnitude of this crisis can only be fully understood where there are nationally-representative examination systems that capture the status of learning across the board. However, a lot of countries in South Asia are still investing in developing rigorous national assessment systems.

At the heart of this crisis in learning lies the teacher-centred pedagogy that still dominates the majority of classrooms in South Asia. A poorly-skilled, poorly-motivated, inadequate teaching workforce compounded by a dearth of quality teacher training programmes has meant that many classrooms in South Asia remain characterised by rote-based exam-oriented teaching, corporal punishment, and discrimination. What we do know is that trying to shift traditional pedagogies towards child-centred, inclusive classrooms is not easy, and it will not happen quickly. And the discouraging part is that many countries are not quite sure how to bring a change in the quality of teaching and thus in learning.

This paints an alarming picture of the population of adolescents leaving South Asian schools. If over half of children leave school without the basic skills they need to become



productive members of society or contribute to their economies, ten years from now it will lead to a stunting of these nations' economic growth and development. Governments and citizens alike need to acknowledge the seriousness of these implications not only for these children's future but also for their nations' future.

In light of this sober reality, it is becoming all the more important and even urgent to invest

in dramatically improving education quality in South Asia. We need more teachers, better training, better teaching, and ultimately better learning – which when translated into millions of classrooms on the ground, is a massive undertaking. Pausing today to take stock of the impact of our efforts and to redirect our investments more strategically, becomes essential in order to avoid a bleak future tomorrow – for every South Asian nation, and for every South Asian child.





## UNICEF'S GLOBAL RESPONSE: **STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS TO STRENGTHEN LEARNING**

UNICEF has been working with governments across South Asia to improve the quality of education offered by national education systems. To improve the quality of teaching and learning, UNICEF has been supporting governments in introducing Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) principles into national policies and standards, and to shift schools towards child-friendly environments and practices. UNICEF has also been partnering with national and sub-national governments to strengthen curriculum, learning materials, teacher training programmes, teacher support, and learning assessment systems.

UNICEF's current education work in South Asia is influenced by certain key recent shifts in UNICEF's global approach in education. The first is a shift in focus from trying to ensure children's 'right to education' to trying to promote children's 'right to learn'. This is based on the fact that in many South Asian countries, the focus was first on getting all children to school, and then getting them to continue in school by making schools a more child-friendly place for all children. After considerable progress has been made in these areas of improving access and retention in education, the focus is now turning towards improving the quality not only of teaching, but also of children's learning outcomes. Though this is a relatively new area of work for UNICEF South Asia on which much clarity is still needed globally, many South Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are starting to integrate this renewed

focus on learning outcomes into their UNICEF Country Programmes for the coming years.

Related to this shift is an attempt towards broadening the definition of learning, to include a focus on skills beyond basic foundations of literacy and numeracy – skills that would contribute to personal, communal and societal flourishing. Personal skills necessary for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society would include lifelong learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship. Skills that would contribute to communities thriving may include interpersonal social skills, active citizenship, gender equality, peace and social cohesion. There is also an emerging focus on transversal competencies or 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to help societies thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, such as global citizenship, innovative thinking, and media and technological literacy. In general, developing skills is a new, complex area of focus for UNICEF that will require building evidence, expertise and capacity in this area.

A third global shift that informs UNICEF's education strategy in South Asia is a move from more 'downstream' delivery of services such as trainings or material development, towards more 'upstream' influencing of policy and strengthening the capacity of government systems to themselves deliver these services with quality. UNICEF is increasingly moving away from directly delivering these services on the ground, and towards partnerships

with government systems or other non-governmental partners who can implement on the ground. In relation to improving learning, an emerging area of focus has been around strengthening assessment systems for measuring learning, as well as improved use of assessment data to improve teaching and learning across South Asia. Finally, given that South Asia is a particularly conflict- and disaster-prone region, UNICEF South Asia has also focused on providing education in emergency or sensitive situations. While more needs to be done in this area, two clear priorities that stand out are the development of rapid assessments of learning applicable in emergency situations, and a more widespread understanding of the role of non-academic learning outcomes such as resilience and tolerance.

UNICEF's primary initiative for improving education quality both globally and in South Asia has been the CFS model, which could provide one possible way forward in this emerging priority area of improving teaching-learning quality. However there has been very limited evidence available on the impact of CFS programmes on improving learning quality – both globally, and also in South Asia (besides a few rigorous evaluations like the one of ABL programmes in India). Moreover, research has been scarce in general on the impact of UNICEF's recent quality efforts on improving teaching-learning quality. It is hoped that the current mapping could provide the groundwork for further potential research in this area.



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## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS MAPPING

The current mapping was envisioned in light of the context described above of the growing importance of efforts to improve teaching-learning quality in South Asia, lack of clarity around the same, and a desire to map UNICEF's efforts in this area to better understand what works, and to inform UNICEF South Asia's ongoing efforts and future research. This mapping is intended to review all initiatives supported by UNICEF in the previous and current country programmes (especially in the past 5 years) to improve education quality in government schools in South Asia. The mapping includes those South Asian countries that are covered by SAARC, which form the focus of the work of UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The mapping generated 4 separate outputs: the present report, a Brief synthesising the main findings of the mapping, a Powerpoint presentation of key findings that can be adapted and used by UNICEF South Asia offices, and a taxonomy that can be developed in the future into a searchable online database accessible to UNICEF staff, Development Partners (DPs) and others working to improve education quality in South Asia. Specific objectives for the mapping include:

1. To create an updated evidence base on UNICEF-supported initiatives for strengthening education quality in South Asia – including any available evidence of their impact, sustainability and relevance –

2. To review existing programmes to identify good practices, lessons learned, and preliminary recommendations for UNICEF's work to improve education quality in the region.
3. To make broad recommendations for further research by UNICEF ROSA, such as a potential formative evaluation of child-friendly education, or other research to better understand the contribution of quality interventions to improving teaching-learning outcomes.

ROSA will utilise the mapping to promote evidence-based programming and to strengthen linkages between country offices (COs) and other institutions engaged in the development of programme strategies to successfully improve learning quality for children in the region. The current report is intended to serve as a basis for sharing information with and between COs and partners, and to identify promising practices on improving teaching-learning quality in the region. Given that this is a relatively new area for ROSA support to UNICEF Country Offices in South Asia, it is hoped that this mapping will contribute towards developing a shared understanding among COs of how they can contribute to improving the quality of teaching-learning in South Asia.

The methodology used for the mapping included a combination of desk review of relevant documents, surveys as well as



interviews with key informants from UNICEF and major partners in the 8 countries. In the initial stage of the mapping, the author conducted a desk review of all relevant documentation and evaluations of quality initiatives that could be gathered from the 8 UNICEF COs, from ROSA, and from Internet searches. These were used to compile the taxonomy in the form of an Excel sheet, for which a template was developed in consultation with ROSA. This was followed by the creation of an online questionnaire administered to UNICEF CO staff and field colleagues, as well as a shorter questionnaire customised for NGO/government partners who have worked closely with UNICEF on quality initiatives (with a total of 18 respondents from UNICEF COs and field offices, and 12 respondents from partner

organisations). In the final stage of the mapping, the author conducted skype interviews with 18 key informants from UNICEF COs, field offices, consultants and other partners (interviews covered similar topics but were customised for individual respondents). Further details about the surveys and interviews are included in Appendices 1, 2 and 3, including a list of respondents, questions used for surveys and interviews, and highlights of key survey responses. Data from all three stages was analysed to inform the insights captured in the current report. However since there are few impact evaluations available of UNICEF's quality programming in South Asia, the mapping relied more heavily on qualitative analysis of people's responses in surveys and interviews, and to a lesser extent on internal UNICEF reports and on the few available evaluations (findings from evaluations of CFS programmes in particular are discussed in more detail in Section III.4). At every stage of the mapping, ROSA was closely involved in discussing objectives and strategy, sharing feedback on proposed templates, as well as providing detailed comments on drafts.

The author has spent the last decade working on reforming government schools in India, through work with the Indian Government, UNICEF India, and independent research. Thus insights from these experiences have also informed the analysis for this report. While an attempt was made to capture data from all 8 South Asian countries during the 3 phases of the mapping, the author's prior experience may generate a bias in terms of in-depth country knowledge and greater field examples from India. While it is acknowledged that lessons from India cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all South Asian countries, it helps that the diversity in context between different states in India reflects some of the diversity in context between different countries in South Asia. The lessons and recommendations in this report are made primarily keeping in mind the larger countries in the region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan), although it is hoped that the findings would present lessons that may also prove relevant for the smaller three countries in the region (Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka).



## RE-DEFINING QUALITY

Part of the challenge in examining UNICEF's initiatives to improve education quality in South Asia, is that UNICEF globally does not have a systematic guideline on what are the definitions, indicators or standards that UNICEF as a whole is striving for as part of 'education quality'. This lack of clarity has contributed to very divergent programming in each country in terms of quality initiatives. This was part of the motivation for the current mapping: to gain a stronger understanding of what is happening where and what works in terms of improving education quality. Thus it was felt that a first step of conducting the present mapping was to state clearly the definition of quality being used while reviewing different quality initiatives and their impact.

In order to arrive at such a definition, various definitions of education quality used in recent years were reviewed. The present definition is particularly influenced by UNICEF's document on 'Defining Quality in Education' (UNICEF 2000), and by UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools framework (e.g. UNICEF 2009). However some limitations were found in these frameworks, which the present definition seeks to address and build upon. First, available definitions sometimes tend to use vague or overlapping categories that may communicate similar ideas (e.g. UNICEF 2000). Thus the present definition attempts to use more specific qualifying labels for each category, and to define clearly what each category includes so as to make them conceptually distinct from each other and to

avoid repetition of ideas or overlapping of categories. Second, the categories frequently used do not always acknowledge or apply to diverse levels including school, systemic, and policy levels. Several focus primarily on what happens inside the school (e.g. UNICEF 2000), but not on the systemic conditions that support or hinder learning quality in the school. Or on the other hand, frameworks may use complex jargon that might make sense to educational planners or researchers, but may not find as much relevance to school practitioners. The present document attempts to define education quality using categories that would find relevance at various levels, acknowledging the roles of both schools and systems in supporting learning.

For the purpose of this review, quality education is defined as an education that enables all children to thrive and learn in preparation for a meaningful, contributing life. In this view, quality education involves the following dimensions:

- 1. Thriving learners:** Healthy, well-nourished children with positive early learning experiences, their rights respected, and supportive involved parents
- 2. Welcoming learning environment:** An environment that provides appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for every child's learning.
- 3. Relevant learning materials:** Availability of curriculum and materials that are relevant to students' understanding, diversity, communities, and futures.

4. **Learning-centred processes:** Processes that empower both students and teachers through democratic practices geared towards enhancing learning.
5. **Universal learning outcomes:** Holistic child-appropriate learning objectives are defined, and regularly assessed through classroom formative assessments as well as large-scale assessments, in order to support every child to achieve them.
6. **Supportive systems:** School leadership, administrative systems, education systems and governments that prioritise and support children's learning.

Thus the Quality Mapping sought to review any interventions that seek to directly influence one or more of the above dimensions, thereby directly contributing to all children being able to thrive and learn while attending school. Each of these six dimensions is explained in more detail in the table that follows.

While the above definition attempts to lay out a comprehensive conceptualisation of quality encompassing the different factors that may affect the quality of students' learning experiences once in school, the current review focuses specifically on those interventions that have been supported by UNICEF's Education programming. There are some aspects of a quality education that have been supported by sections of UNICEF programming other than Education – for example, nutrition, water and sanitation, early childhood development, or child protection. Such interventions are integral to education quality but are beyond the scope of the current review.

Further, the detailed explanations listed in the table 1 below under each dimension of quality education reflect challenges faced by education systems of many developing countries, but with specific relevance to the South Asian context. For example, while there is much global literature on the pedagogical move towards 'learner-centred' education, the current document uses the term 'learning-centred' to attempt to move



beyond dichotomies of 'teacher-centred' vs. 'learner-centred'. Many South Asian cultures value the role of didactic teaching styles, and rather than entirely rejecting such processes, the challenge is to find appropriate pedagogies that honour the culture yet best support learning. Mention is made of the need for teacher education to focus on fostering a belief in and commitment to every child's learning, given that in many South Asian countries, cultural beliefs and social norms uniquely hamper the belief that every child can learn. Conflict situations and corruption are challenges faced by many countries, but that particularly affect education systems in South Asian countries. Similarly, the role of strong sub-national political leadership committed to improving education quality has been found by several South Asian countries to be particularly important to the success of certain child-friendly pedagogic interventions, such as the Activity-based Learning programme of Tamil Nadu, India.



TABLE 1  
Definition of 'Quality Education' used in the present mapping

Dimensions of Quality Education	What that Includes
<p><b>1. Thriving learners</b> Healthy, well-nourished children with positive early learning experiences, their rights respected, and supportive, involved parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthy, well-nourished children:</b> Schooling system supports good health and nutrition of all students</li> <li>• <b>Positive early childhood experiences:</b> Parents are equipped for how to build a strong foundation for learners before they enter formal school</li> <li>• <b>Children's rights respected:</b> Schooling system takes efforts to ensure children are free from exploitation, violence, labour and other damaging situations that violate their rights</li> <li>• <b>Home-school-community partnerships</b> to ensure children's regular attendance, participation and progress in learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Welcoming learning environment</b> An environment that provides appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for every child's learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Physical infrastructure</b> built to support children's health and learning (Eg. water &amp; sanitation, small class sizes, accessibility)</li> <li>• <b>Emotional environment</b> that is safe, secure, and non-violent</li> <li>• <b>Psychosocial support</b> to identify children's individual special needs and to promote children's emotional wellbeing, particularly in emergency or conflict situations</li> <li>• <b>Socially inclusive ethos</b> that values and respects every learner's dignity and identity, including their gender, community, home language, and special needs (with special consideration for those from traditionally marginalised groups)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Relevant learning materials</b> Availability of curriculum and materials that are relevant to students' understanding, diversity, communities, and futures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student-centred:</b> Learning materials are easily comprehensible, and appropriate for students' levels of understanding (rather than strictly determined by age).</li> <li>• <b>Respectful of diversity:</b> materials use language and examples that affirm students' different genders and backgrounds</li> <li>• <b>Contributing to community:</b> developing knowledge, values and skills that enable students to contribute to improving their communities (eg. equality, service, non-violence, HIV/AIDS prevention, emergency situations)</li> <li>• <b>Equipping for future:</b> imparts relevant literacy, numeracy, and other life skills necessary for preparing students to become contributing members of society</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Learning-centred processes</b> Processes that empower both students and teachers through democratic practices geared towards enhancing learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Empowered students</b> actively engaged in meaningful learning tasks</li> <li>• <b>Empowered teachers</b> who have positive working conditions and ongoing support to develop into competent professionals</li> <li>• <b>Democratic relationships</b> in a loving and fear-free environment</li> <li>• <b>Learning-centred teachers</b> who believe all children can learn, are committed to ensuring every child learns, and design diverse methods to support each child's unique learning needs</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Universal learning outcomes</b> Holistic child-appropriate learning objectives are defined and regularly assessed in order to support every child to achieve them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Holistic outcomes:</b> Curriculum and pedagogy go beyond developing basic skills to prepare students as lifelong learners, confident decision-makers, and responsible global citizens</li> <li>• <b>Child-appropriate objectives:</b> Systems and teachers define clear learning objectives based on curricular goals and students' current learning levels</li> <li>• <b>Assessment for quality improvement:</b> Classroom formative assessment and wider-scale summative assessments are regularly analysed in order to identify and address barriers to learning</li> <li>• <b>Additional support for lower-performing students</b>, especially those from disadvantaged groups, to reduce learning disparities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Supportive systems</b> School leadership, administrative systems, education systems and governments that prioritise and support children's learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Democratic school leadership and management</b> that involve teachers, parents and students in decision-making and collective efforts for improving school quality</li> <li>• <b>Efficient governance and administrative systems</b> that are free of corruption, and use technology to decrease rather than increase disparities</li> <li>• <b>Learning-centred educational systems</b> (planning, teacher development, monitoring) that constantly self-reflect how they can improve to better support children's learning</li> <li>• <b>National and sub-national political leadership that prioritises education</b>, providing supportive laws, policies, financing, and political will for strengthening learning systems</li> </ul>



# 2

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **INITIATIVES FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION QUALITY**





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A key challenge in any discussion of education quality in South Asia is the vast divergence in contexts in the region, and the diverse challenges faced by different nations in the region. This complicates any attempt to compare countries in the region, to draw lessons with relevance across countries, or even to group countries together to target recommendations to different groups. For example, the region is home to some of the most severe poverty globally in countries like India and Bangladesh, in contrast to emerging middle-income economies like the Maldives or Sri Lanka. Afghanistan and India are among the top ten countries with the highest number of reported disasters due to natural hazards and conflict, making it increasingly difficult to deliver quality education services to their children. Unique in the region, Afghanistan with its precarious security situation faces added challenges in rolling out education programmes on a national scale.

Many of the larger poorer countries in the region are still struggling financially with getting sufficient resources to even sustain the education system required for their vast populations, and still struggling with basic challenges of getting large numbers of out-of-school children enrolled in school. In contrast, the smaller countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan have been able to achieve universal primary school completion, and thus are in a better position to be able to focus more on issues of quality. Different countries

have very different education structures, with countries like India and Pakistan with increasingly decentralised education systems, while some like Bangladesh still having highly centralised systems, and others like Nepal being in a state of transition from a centralized to a decentralized system.

These diverse contexts make it difficult to have lessons and recommendations that are relevant to countries across the region. Yet while the sheer magnitude of numbers and diversity of needs and circumstances demand a variety of strategies targeted to specific contexts, sharing what has worked well in different contexts can spark ideas and possibilities that could be explored in different countries, even if needing to be adapted to account for diversity. This is what the current section attempts to do. The section begins with a broad look at UNICEF's focus areas and overall contributions to improving education quality in South Asia. This is followed by an overview of each country, presenting the key UNICEF-supported quality initiatives undertaken in that country in the past decade, UNICEF's key contributions and current focus areas, some of the biggest challenges to quality, and listing available evaluations conducted of quality initiatives in that country which could be accessed during the mapping. Findings reported throughout Section 2 are taken from what people stated in the surveys and interviews, as well as to some extent from documents reviewed for the mapping.

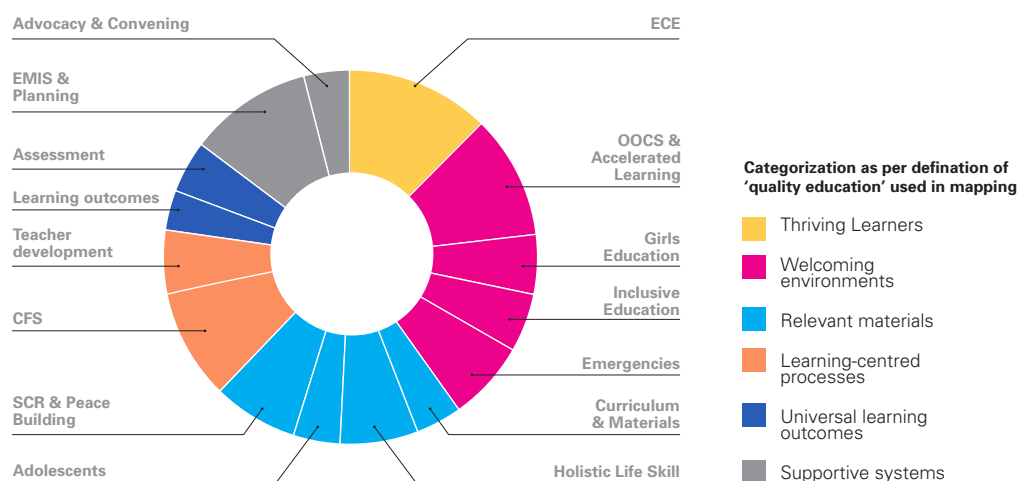
# OVERVIEW OF UNICEF'S QUALITY SUPPORT IN SOUTH ASIA

UNICEF's support for improving education quality has ranged across a diverse set of initiatives in different South Asian countries. UNICEF-supported initiatives have spanned across the six dimensions identified in the definition of quality being used for this mapping, with different focus areas emphasised by different countries. Appendix 4 presents a table that lists the types of quality initiatives emphasised by different South Asian countries in recent years that were included in the taxonomy, organised according to the six dimensions of quality as defined in this mapping. The table is by no means exhaustive of all UNICEF quality-related activities in recent years, and lists only the most prominent initiatives that were highlighted in the documents reviewed for the mapping and in the surveys and interviews conducted during the mapping. The types of initiatives listed in the table were counted and presented as a pie chart shown in Figure

1. This counting is only indicative since not only does it potentially leave out initiatives not captured by the taxonomy, but it also assigns an equal value to every initiative regardless of its size or intensity, which may not be accurate. Nevertheless, Figure 1 presents an indicative picture of the types of initiatives that been the focus of UNICEF's education programming in South Asia in the past decade. As reflected in the pie chart, UNICEF's education programming in South Asia has made important contributions in the first, second, third, and sixth dimensions of education quality as defined in this mapping, which are indeed important components of education quality, but has had less explicit focus on the fourth and fifth dimensions – learning processes and outcomes – which are central to education quality.

In terms of UNICEF's key contributions to improving education quality in South Asia,

FIGURE 1  
**Overview of UNICEF's education programming in South Asia**



many of the people interviewed and surveyed highlighted CFS as perhaps the biggest area of contribution. CFS has provided a coherent structure for converging a lot of diverse interventions around children's rights and the essential elements needed for creating a positive learning environment in schools. It was felt that CFS programmes have significantly contributed to improving the quality of learning environments, both in terms of infrastructure and resources, but also in promoting relationships in the school that are more democratic and inclusive. Several countries highlighted that CFS has been integral to shifting the direction of policy, programming and collective mindsets towards child-centred education. For example, the India UNICEF team pointed out that while 15 years ago child-centred pedagogy may have been a contested concept, today nobody will deny that it is an essential and effective model for promoting children's learning, especially at the primary level. Admittedly, this was not entirely a UNICEF-initiated effort since in many ways UNICEF built on what the Indian government was already trying to promote, but UNICEF's contribution cannot be undermined in terms of its consistent advocacy, capacity-building and demonstration around holistic child-centred education.

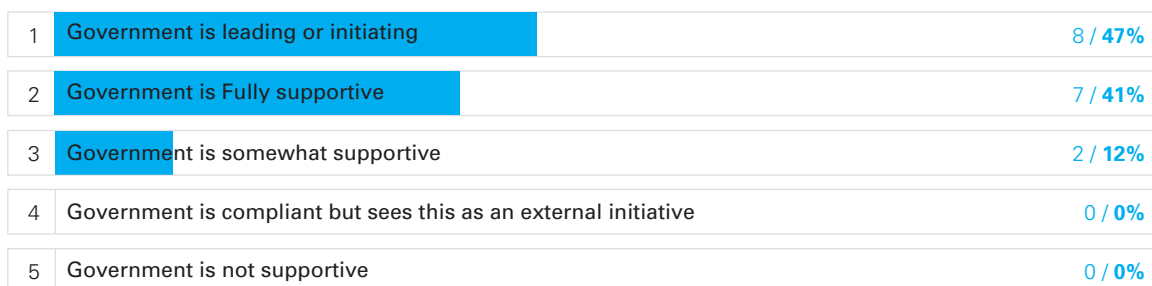
A second key area of UNICEF's contribution to quality education has been its focus on strengthening systems to deliver quality. Many countries reported a shift towards more upstream, systemic work rather than one-off initiatives that are less sustainable, or from more UNICEF-led delivery of services to strengthening the capacity of government systems themselves to deliver quality. In many countries this has meant a focus on strengthening of Education Management Information System (EMIS), promoting data analysis, as well evidence generation, for more informed decision-making and planning in the sector. UNICEF has also been shifting towards more Sector-wide Approaches (SWAp) in many South Asian countries, which has helped promote greater convergence and focus in UNICEF's efforts. UNICEF has been engaging in more high-level advocacy in order to build government ownership of different quality initiatives, aligning them more

closely with government priorities. Figure 2 provides an overview of survey responses of both UNICEF staff and partners regarding to what extent people felt UNICEF has been able to contribute to influencing national policy on quality aspects of education, building government ownership of quality initiatives, and building government capacity for implementing large-scale quality programmes.

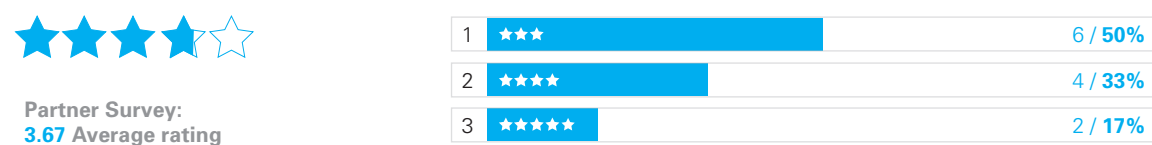
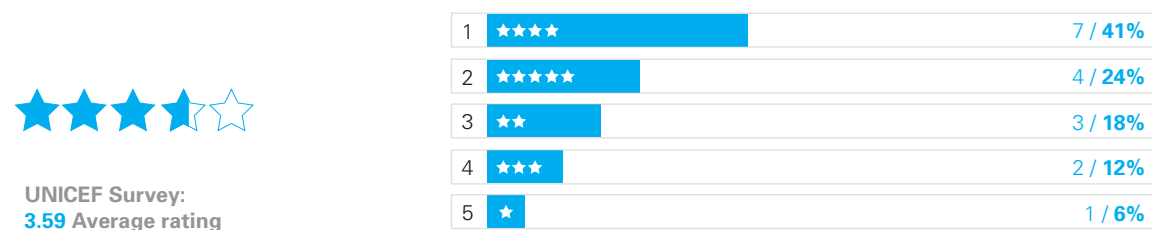
Another key contribution highlighted in the Mapping has been UNICEF's efforts towards strengthening national assessment systems. Many South Asian countries are still investing in developing strong nationally representative assessments, and UNICEF along with other technical partners has been supporting countries like Afghanistan to develop robust national assessment systems (more details provided in the Afghanistan Country Page later in Section II). In Pakistan, the UNICEF CO with ROSA support has been working with the national institution National Education Assessment System (NEAS) to strengthen analysis, dissemination and use of learning assessment data, to identify disparities across locations or communities and better target resources to the most disadvantaged groups. When asked in the survey to what extent they feel UNICEF has contributed to strengthening government capacity to analyse and use assessment data to strengthen learning, out of 17 UNICEF respondents, the average rating was 3.12 on a scale of 0-5 (Seven respondents rated 3, five rated 4, while three chose 2, and one each chose 5 and 1). UNICEF India mentioned how a key milestone of progress has been that before, learning outcomes, national assessments and teaching-learning processes were happening somewhat in isolation. Now there are clear linkages between the three: the country has been able to define desired learning outcomes, national assessments are geared towards assessing these not just in terms of content but also competencies, and there is a move towards analysing assessment findings to inform interventions for strengthening teaching-learning processes. Field colleagues confirmed that this shift towards analysing assessment data to see how they can be strengthened by informing pedagogical

**FIGURE 2**  
**Overview of survey responses on UNICEF’s systemic impact**

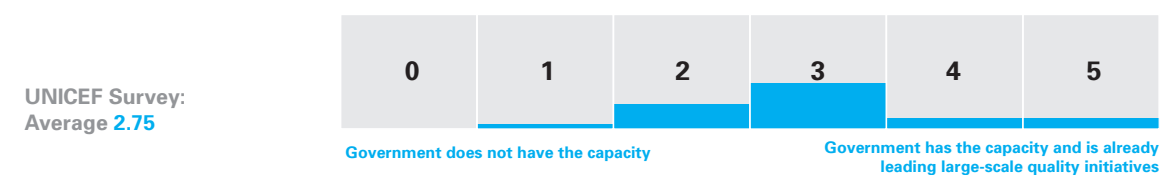
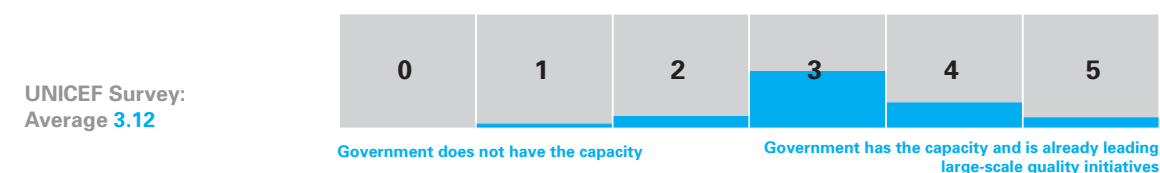
Regarding the highest-impact initiatives you listed earlier, to what extent has the government taken ownership over these initiatives? (UNICEF Survey)



In your opinion, how successful has UNICEF been in influencing policy development on quality aspects of education? (For example, has UNICEF’s work been able to significantly shape key strategies in the Government’s Education Sector Plans?) (1 = Not very much; 5 = Highly)



In your opinion, to what extent does the government have the capacity to implement large-scale or national initiatives for improving the quality of education and learning?



interventions has reached to the state and sub-state levels. In Bangladesh too, largely on account of efforts under the Each Child Learns (ECL) initiative under PEDP3, the Class 5 primary completion exam is now mostly geared towards assessing competencies rather than just content. In countries like Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh, UNICEF's support has also extended to strengthening classroom-based formative assessment, by developing guidelines for this or including capacity-building on this within teacher training programmes, training teachers to analyse and use assessment data for improving teaching-learning processes.

The other biggest contribution from UNICEF programming highlighted in the Mapping has been to promote more equitable, holistic education for all children. UNICEF teams across the region felt that UNICEF has played a key role in promoting education for the most marginalised, and promoting equity-based planning for specific deprived groups. Figure 3 shows which groups UNICEF teams felt have been the most benefitted by UNICEF-supported quality initiatives in recent years: the most prominent of which have been girls,

out-of-school children, and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The category 'other' could include groups such as undocumented immigrants or rural vs. urban populations which were not explicitly mentioned in the list of options provided. Implicit in this list is that UNICEF and partners have more specifically targeted certain groups, and this list reflects this targeting. Countries like India also highlighted initiative such as Sports for Development which has had a significant influence in promoting holistic all-round development of children. Moreover, efforts like promoting mothertongue education for children whose main language is different from the medium of instruction, has been key in improving learning for all children. Finally, UNICEF's focus on strengthening early childhood education in different South Asian countries was also noted as significant for building a strong foundation to enable learning for all children once they enter formal schooling. The consequences are far-reaching: strong early childhood development has been found to improve school preparedness and early socialisation, increase on-time enrolment, decrease the likelihood of early drop-out, and improve overall learning outcomes.

**FIGURE 3**  
**UNICEF survey reponses on disadvantaged groups most impacted by UNICEF initiatives**

1	Girls	15 / 83%
2	Out of school children	12 / 67%
3	Communities with low socio-economics status	10 / 56%
4	Children affected by confilct or emergencies	8 / 44%
5	Children with special needs	5 / 28%
6	Historically oppressed communities (e.g. low caste, etc.)	5 / 28%
7	Refugees or internally displaced peoples	5 / 28%
8	Children at risk (e.g. orphans, street-children, child laboures)	3 / 17%
9	Ethnic or linguistic minorities	3 / 17%
10	Others	2 / 11%



# AFGHANISTAN

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Capacity-building of Primary Teachers on Assessment for Learning (AfL):** In 2015-16, in close collaboration with the government Teacher Education Department (TED), a UNICEF consultant developed training materials for AfL to help teachers to use assessment information to improve teaching and learning. The package included a Facilitator's Guide, a Teacher's Reference Manual, innovative multimedia to support teachers, and a cascade training plan to reach 1,500 CFS schools and 1,600 community-based schools. To date the programme has reached over 10,000 teachers and will now be integrated into pre- and in-service teacher training. It has been well received by the TED who has asked UNICEF to support upscaling in all 34 provinces.

**Child-Friendly Schools:** UNICEF dedicated support to intensive teacher training to improve quality learning based upon Child Friendly School (CFS) principles. 1,500 CFS schools have been set up in all ten focus provinces. A baseline assessment of these schools was conducted in 2013-14, and a follow-up study is yet to be conducted.

**Curriculum Reform:** A curriculum renewal process has begun in 2017, led by UNESCO and with technical support from UNICEF. It's an exciting opportunity to lighten the currently over-crowded curriculum, to ensure the new curriculum is adequately responsive to students' needs, and to bring in key elements of social cohesion, sanitation, and other priority areas into the curriculum.

## Advocacy for child-friendly principles in policy and planning:

UNICEF was able to contribute to infusing child-friendly principles and quality standards into the National Education Sector Plan 2017-21, which has quality education as a forefront pillar for the first time. A policy on 'inclusive and child-friendly education' has been implemented.

## Harmonised 'School Improvement Plan' Guidelines:

SIP is a participatory school-community plan developed jointly by school staff, students, parents, and community, to focus their ideas and actions for improving the quality of the school. A harmonised set of SIP guidelines seeking to build on and bring together MoE, with representatives from UNICEF and other bodies.



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- Upstream work in capacity building for effective assessment and curricular development.
- Teacher training programme regarding CFS
- The participatory approach to sector wide planning.
- Providing access to basic education has remained a key focus of UNICEF Afghanistan's Education Programme, especially for girls and for children in conflict situations through Community-Based Schools and Accelerated Learning Pathways.

## Current UNICEF focus areas

### Curriculum reform, and development of National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan (NAFA):

The Ministry of Education (MoE), with support from development partners is currently undertaking a reform of the primary and secondary national curriculum, as well as the development of a National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan (NAFA). The NAFA aims to provide strategic direction for establishing learning assessment in Afghanistan by 2021 in line with the National Education Strategic Plan (III), with the long-term goal of moving towards a world-class assessment system. UNICEF is providing technical assistance for the development of the NAFA through the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) which is supporting the MoE, as well as providing two National Technical Advisors based in the office of the Deputy Minister of General Education. A Technical Working Group on Learning Assessment was constituted to serve as a steering body for the initiative.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- **Provision of basic education:** According to the Afghanistan CO, 55% of schools in Afghanistan still lack buildings, and an estimated 3.5 million children are still out of school, 75% of which are girls. Afghanistan continues to face various challenges in providing basic education, including issues of conflict, security, and mass displacement. Although it is commendable that the national ESP focuses on quality, urgent focus is still needed on access to education for all.
- **Lack of textbooks** still remains a big issue across the country, and UNICEF has had to print textbooks for community-based schools that do not have access to these materials.
- **Lack of government capacity and funding** for providing quality education remain issues
- **Getting female teachers has proved difficult**, which poses a key barrier to girls' education. To address this, UNICEF has been supporting the 'Girls Access to Teacher Education' (GATE) programme, in line with the Government's drive to recruit female teachers.
- **Teacher availability:** high teacher-student ratios, shortage of female teachers and all-girls schools, more than half of teachers do not meet qualification standards, and low quality of learning (MTR 2017)

## Available evaluations

- **Baseline survey of Child-friendly Schools** in 10 provinces of Afghanistan (2013), carried out by the Society for Sustainable Development of Afghanistan (SSDA), to assess the current status of schools as per the CFS minimum package standard, identify priority areas of improvement, and develop an effective support strategy
- **The Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects (ALSE)** is a multi-year (2014-2017) study of community-based education (CBE) in Afghanistan, funded by USAID. ALSE operates as a randomised control trial using mixed quantitative and qualitative outcome assessments and measurements. The evidence produced by the comprehensive multi-year impact evaluation provides ongoing information enabling policymakers to ensure that both girls and boys across Afghanistan have lasting access to a good- quality primary education.
- **Assessment for Learning Pre- and Post-Test:** Preliminary results show the training to be effective in changing knowledge & attitudes of participants. Anecdotal feedback from government partners and teachers clearly supports Assessment for Learning.





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# BANGLADESH

## Key recent quality initiatives

### Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) 3 and 4:

PEDP 3 is a six-year (2011-2017), sector wide programme covering Grades 1 through 5 and one year of pre-primary education (PPE). It aims to establish an efficient, inclusive and equitable primary education system delivering effective and relevant child-friendly learning to all Bangladesh's children from PPE through Grade 5 primary. UNICEF played a strategic role as the Chair of PEDP3 Development Partners Consortium. PEDP4 (2017-2022) will build on the achievements of PEDP3, with a greater focus on qualitative improvements of classroom practices supported by refined teaching and learning materials.

**Each Child Learns (ECL)**, a flagship initiative under PEDP3, was intended to bring pedagogical changes in primary classrooms

to ensure acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy by each child in grades 1-3. Teachers are trained in ECL through a combination of centre-based training with prolonged classroom practice in different phases. ECL teachers are also taught the importance of focusing their support on the most disadvantaged and marginalised children.

**Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd)** is an in-service 18 months foundation training course for teachers. UNICEF supported for development of course framework, contents and modules and capacity development of Faculties of National Academy for Primary Education under PEDP-3. The DPEd programme was designed to replace the Certificate-in-Education (C-in-Ed) programme, which did not take an integrated approach to developing teachers' knowledge and understanding.

### School and Classroom Based Assessment (SCBA)

Was a UNICEF-supported intervention under PEDP-3 to support strengthening of the assessment system. It involved the development of School/ Classroom based Assessment Methods and Tools for 12 subjects during 2012-17. This resource material was developed using as context, the findings of the review of current assessment in Bangladesh supported by UNICEF BCO, which was guided by internationally accepted research on the changing nature of assessment.

**Child Friendly School/ School Effectiveness** training was provided to 3,967 trained cumulatively, and has been a key contribution to improving education quality, by attempting to change the school culture, make the school attractive, and develop the child holistically.





## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- Both ECL and DPED are promising innovations for improving teaching-learning quality, and promoting assessment-based teaching targeted to students' learning levels.
- The Education programme supported the Government in its efforts to increase effective coverage of pre-primary and primary education, and in achieving significant changes in school completion and drop-out rates.
- UNICEF's Education interventions in partnership with the Government resulted in positive evidence generation and policies, including studies on out-of-school children, review of the primary education stipends programme, assessment of Each Child Learns, Quality study for PEDP3, and the approval of policy on early childhood development.
- UNICEF's programme focus and results in recent years were integrally linked to PEDP3 and have contributed to the scale-up of teacher training programmes, the enlarged scope of innovative interventions (Each Child Learns, Second Chance, Activity-based Learning) and the integration of new methods (e.g. School and classroom-based assessment, "Better health Better education" and inclusive education) into ongoing interventions.

## Current UNICEF focus areas

UNICEF's focus will be in the areas of mainstreaming inclusive, Second Chance and alternative education; strengthening professional development of teachers; curriculum and assessment reform; and enhancing early-grade literacy and numeracy. The overall strategy will be 'whole school' development, following bottom-up planning and using evidence-based tools such as School Level Improvement Plans, Upazila Primary Education Plans and Child Friendly Schools. Priority also will be given to systematic improvement of evidence-based planning, from school to Ministry level, to universalise primary education. The new PEDP 4 programme (2017-22) will build on the achievements of PEDP3, with a greater focus on qualitative improvements – on the effectiveness of classroom practices and refined teaching and learning materials. PEDP4's 3 priorities are 1. improving the quality of teaching-learning practices, 2. learning environments that promote universal access and participation, and 3. strong governance, adequate and equitable financing, and good management. Adolescents and secondary education is also an important priority in the new education SWAp.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- The quality of education remains a central issue, with many poorly qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure, poor nutrition and food security affecting learning. Many schools are overcrowded, and most run double shifts.
- Teacher supervision, monitoring and accountability require particular strengthening
- The CO team felt that the stipend programme perhaps put pressure on teachers to give fake attendance and liberal promotion, and that textbooks are sometimes too complicated for both teachers and students

## Available evaluations

- The PEDP3 Mid-term Review (2013-14) was a joint stocktaking by the Government and DPs participating in PEDP3. It included an internal evaluation and 5 independent studies.
- A longitudinal study on the implementation of Each Child Learns was completed by Maxwell Stamps Ltd in 2017. Findings suggested that the implementation of ECL did not progress as originally anticipated, since pedagogic transformation could not be achieved without wider structural changes.
- An Impact Evaluation Study of the 'Reaching Out of School Children' (ROSC) Project of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (2014), was conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) the Bangladesh Government.



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# BHUTAN

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH)** is a nationwide reform programme initiated by the MoE from 2009-13, for looking at learning from a more holistic perspective, making it more enjoyable and relevant. Training was provided to principals and in-service teachers to infuse GNH, the national philosophy guiding Bhutan's development. As GNH was all about creating an enabling and a conducive environment for children, Educating for GNH was directly linked to the concept of Child Friendly School (CFS) as a strategy to improve access and quality of education. Another key step that followed was the development of a new GNH-based criteria, indicators, and guidelines for all schools in Bhutan. The CFS indicators were used for monitoring the progress of the Educating for GNH program.

## Strengthening Early Childhood Care & Development (ECCD)

has been a strong focus of UNICEF Bhutan. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in opening ECCD centres in various parts of the country. Special attention was paid to setting minimum quality standards of infrastructure and resources to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment. UNICEF supported in developing a framework for a two-year Diploma course leading to a Degree programme in ECCD, and in developing an ECCD Investment Case Study outlining options with related costs of scaling up ECCD centres effectively and with quality.

**Inclusive Education:** UNICEF supported the MOE to undertake a 'knowledge, attitudes and practices' study on disabilities, and in identifying schools catering for special educational

needs. It also developed standards for inclusive education endorsed by MoE for implementation in schools across the country. In 2016, UNICEF began supporting work towards launching a Masters in Inclusive Education.

## Education in Emergencies:

UNICEF has also supported in various initiatives for expanding the scope of Disaster Risk Reduction in the country, with a special emphasis on the safety of children with disabilities and young children during disasters. For example, in 2016, UNICEF supported training of 158 non-formal education instructors, ECCD facilitators, teachers and government officials in Education in Emergencies. UNICEF also contributed to the development of an Education Sector Disaster Management (DM) plan that embeds Core Commitments for Children and a contingency plan, and plans to support in rolling out this sector plan.



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- o The CO team pointed out that partly due to UNICEF's contributions for strengthening ECCD, from 2 ECCD centres in 2008, the country now has 250 centres, providing education to 18% of the early childhood population.
- o The country has now opened up 12 schools where children with disabilities can study.
- o Pilot School Rationalization initiative for rural education
- o In-service teachers training for capacity development, especially for inclusive education.

## Current UNICEF focus areas

- o While UNICEF has already been supporting the MoE on ECCD initiatives, in the coming years it plans to promote ECCD from both state-funded and UNICEF resources.
- o UNICEF is working closely with Teacher Training Colleges, and is supporting launching a Masters in Inclusive Education.
- o Although Bhutan has basic schools and materials in place, ensuring learning outcomes is still a relatively unexplored area, and the country has mostly been looking at proxy-indicators of quality like pupil-teacher ratio, internet connectivity, school facilities, with less focus on teaching-learning processes and outcomes. However the government has expressed strong political will around focusing on improving learning quality in its 12th 5-year plan starting in 2018. UNICEF plans to support the government in this area in a more focused manner.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- o The main challenge facing the education sector as a whole is how to increase the proportion of students achieving the expected learning outcomes specified for different stages of school education.
- o By and large, pedagogy is still based on lecture teaching and rote learning. The country has only 2 teacher training colleges, which are still rather traditional in their pedagogy.
- o While Bhutan has adequate number of teachers and sufficient teaching materials, the quality of teachers graduating from their Teacher Training Institutes needs improvement.
- o The deployment of trained female teachers to remoter parts of the country is an issue that affects the quality of learning.
- o Lack of standard learning outcomes for national assessments
- o Parental involvement is very minimal – because education is free, parents feel entitled and take less interest in questioning what is happening in the classroom.
- o Lack of accountability: government teachers' guaranteed job security makes them reluctant to go the extra mile in ensuring quality teaching-learning.

## Available evaluations

The Institute for Management Studies conducted a study on 'Training on Educating for 'Gross National Happiness'' in 2014. The study attempts to gauge the effectiveness of Educating for GNH training, document early signs of positive change in the school and the classroom practices, and identify challenges in the overall implementation of the programme as a school-wide approach for quality education. The assessment reveals that the overall effectiveness of the training is good and has contributed in bringing about a positive behavior change in both the teachers and students. For instance, 71.6% of the teacher respondents report that the training was effective while both the teachers and students (85.59%) said that the programme has brought a positive change on the conduct of the students and on the classroom and school practices of the teachers. However the follow up and support mechanism was rated as just fair, with 47.1% of the teacher respondents reporting it as ineffective.





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# INDIA

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Child-friendly Schools and Systems (CFSS):** For the past 15 years, UNICEF has been working to bring in child-friendly principles and practices through its advocacy and work in different dimensions of building quality systems. In 2014, UNICEF India developed CFSS guiding principles along with documentation of best practices from the field. Technical support has been provided for capacity development of education stakeholders as well as for demonstrating model schools in various states.

**Activity-based Learning (ABL)** is one model found to closely align with CFSS principles. ABL developed in the early 2000s in South Indian government inspired by the NGO Rishi Valley. ABL gained prominence when different DPs including UNICEF began to notice and support it as a promising model for improving

teaching and learning processes. UNICEF has subsequently helped to adapt, pilot and upscale this model in different versions in at least 13 states in India, as a means of promoting child-friendly education. Each state has come up with their own versions of ABL – for example ‘Laher’ in Rajasthan has been able to demonstrate improved learning processes and outcomes for children.

**Strengthening performance of teacher support systems:** One initiative was Advancement of Educational Performance through Teacher Support (ADEPTS), implementing performance standards and self-assessment for teachers and teacher support institutions. Considerable support has gone in recent years to strengthening education monitoring systems, now termed the Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE). UNICEF provided technical support for implementation of U-DISE as well

as capacity-building in analysis and use of data for improved planning.

**Promoting Girls’ Education** has been a key area of UNICEF’s work in India. UNICEF has been working closely with the Indian government to strengthen the implementation of special government-run schemes for providing education to girls. UNICEF has facilitated national and regional consultations to develop a Vision and Roadmap for Girls Education, and has supported integration of life skills, vocational awareness, self-defense and physical education into curriculum for girls education.

**Sports for Development:** UNICEF helped introduce Physical Education Coordinators to promote physical and cognitive development of young children, and worked through community initiatives that led to develop a cadre of community coaches who have emerged as youth leaders to forge community linkages and reduce differences among various groups in the community.



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- o It was felt that UNICEF's biggest contribution: has been to push national and state systems towards seeing child-centred pedagogy as an integral part of quality education.
- o UNICEF advocacy has contributed to some extent towards shifting the focus towards learning outcomes – defining them and measuring them, as a necessary step for using learning outcomes as a mark of accountability. In 2017, the government amended its Right to Education Act to ensure that all states define and monitor learning outcomes.
- o Evidence generation in areas such as mapping out of school children
- o Upstream work linked with downstream community-level initiatives

## Current UNICEF focus areas

- o Continuing to strengthen accountability for learning, including by empowering parents to know and demand learning outcomes appropriate for each class level.
- o Helping strengthen systems for conducting, analyzing, and using large scale assessments for feeding back into initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- o Strengthening teacher education systems and programmes, including restructuring of teacher education systems in states like Odisha and Maharashtra.
- o Helping implement classroom-based formative assessment through guidance, research and demonstrations of effective models of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- o High number of vacancies remain at all levels, from school and teacher support institutions to senior education institutions.
- o Changing priorities and inconsistent strategies with changes in government leadership affect the continuity and long-term vision required for seeing results, especially for changes in teaching and learning quality.
- o Challenges in educational governance and teacher management.

## Available evaluations

- o Evaluation of Activity Based Learning programmes in 7 states (2016), supported by UNICEF and carried out by Educational Initiatives.
- o Review of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) in 6 states of India (2016), supported by UNICEF India and carried out by an independent consultant
- o Review of Educational Governance in Maharashtra (2017), supported by UNICEF Maharashtra and carried out by an independent consultant on the classroom and school practices of the teachers. However the follow up and support mechanism was rated as just fair, with 47.1% of the teacher respondents reporting it as ineffective.





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# MALDIVES

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Support to the development and implementation of the new national curriculum (implemented in 2015):** UNICEF supported in the development and review of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and accompanying materials. Support was provided in 2015 to strengthen the institutional capacity of the National Institute for Education (NIE) to develop clear standards at the end of key stages and for various subjects. UNICEF also supported the NIE in initiating a longitudinal study to assess the ongoing implementation and impact of the new curriculum. UNICEF also supported in training teachers on implementation of the new curriculum, and in the development of a system for monitoring and reporting of the national curriculum at the national and subnational levels.

**Child friendly schools initiative (CFSI):** From 2005- 2012, UNICEF began the CFSI initiative post-tsunami as a recovery programme to introduce child-friendly learning environments. The programme focused on building capacity of schools to undertake school self-reviews and school improvement initiatives. Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) were set up in 20 atolls, to act as decentralised support mechanisms for more cost-effective teacher training and technical support.

**School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (SIQAAF):** UNICEF Maldives and the Government supported the development of child-friendly school quality standards framework and indicators, which were later revised into the SIQAAF with World Bank support. The SIQAAF provides a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the new

national curriculum at the central and subnational levels. UNICEF's contribution to the implementation of the SIQAAF was the support provided for development of preschool quality standards, and the development of a hygiene education programme for schools to create a child-friendly learning environment.

**Life Skills Education programme:** From 2011 to 2015, UNICEF Maldives supported the MoE to develop and implement Life skills education to boost students' competence to resist risky situations involving drugs, HIV/AIDS, sexual health and others. UNICEF support also aimed at strengthening institutional capacity at the MoE and schools to roll out LSE in secondary schools across the country.

**e-learning platform for teachers' capacity-building:** UNICEF supported the NIE in establishing



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

UNICEF Maldives played a pivotal role in advocating for the importance of early childhood education and the transition to secondary education. Higher secondary education, which was not previously accessible in all the islands across the country, will now be made accessible to all adolescents, especially on remote islands. UNICEF supported in all stages of ensuring effective development and roll-out of the new curriculum.

an e-learning platform to improve teacher capacity for classroom instruction aimed at improving learning achievements of children. The platform targeted especially teachers in far and hard-to-reach islands, given the high cost of training teachers in the islands dispersed across the Indian Ocean. The e-learning platform offered an innovative and viable solution to overcome resource challenges.

### Current UNICEF focus areas

In the current country programme (2016-2020), the Maldives Country Office is strongly focusing on learning. A number of interventions have been initiated, including:

- o Development of a strategy and tools to monitor the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework, including support to operationalise SIQAAF
- o Capacity development of teachers for effective curriculum roll out.
- o Development of WASH school health policy, school behavior management policy
- o Development and implementation of a strategy to promote inclusive education
- o Development of a national strategy and standards for literacy and numeracy.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- o Limited resources and limited technical capacity
- o Limited capacity to scale up and institutionalise initiatives, and weak monitoring
- o Maldives has 213 government schools scattered across many islands – providing quality education to all of them is very expensive.
- o There is low capacity of staff both at national and island levels, and low presence of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the country, more so at the island community levels.
- o Despite the steady progress made in implementing the curriculum, challenges continue related to the training of teachers and school managements on the shift in pedagogy and assessment brought by the new curriculum, and enabling parents and students to understand this shift. Furthermore, coinciding the restructuring of the NIE with the curriculum roll-out poses risks to sustain the institutional capacity to implement the curriculum.

## Available evaluations

- o A review of the life skills education programme was supported by UNICEF Maldives through an external consultant in 2016. The study found that the concept of LSE is well understood and valued by policy makers as well as by the different school stakeholders. The quality of training provided to LSE facilitators was high and had a good coverage. However, the LSE curriculum was found to have limited coverage of issues of drug abuse and child abuse, which are increasingly faced by adolescents in the Maldives. Further, there are no clear operational guidelines or standards used in implementation of the LSE programme, there was limited monitoring / assessments of the LSE programme, and the programme is overall not getting high results for its inputs.
- o Baseline study for Longitudinal study on the impact of Curriculum Reforms, 2012-13: National Institute of Education (NIE) with support from UNICEF undertook a longitudinal study to examine the existing curricular practices, teaching and learning process and the impact on student learning outcomes identified in the new National Curriculum. Learning levels of Maldivian students was found to be lower than average international levels, and than those in private schools in India.
- o Development of a strategy and tools to monitor implementation of the new NCF: The UNICEF/NIE (2016) review involved a brief 'snap-shot' research exercise undertaken by researchers at the Maldives National University and an independent UNICEF consultant. It was intentionally limited in scope, and stood as an initial document to inform a more comprehensive review. The study found lack of resource potentially impacting curriculum implementations, lack of understanding, lack of parental engagement, and broad receptivity and optimism potentially undermined by a lack of understanding and capacity. Potential concerns were raised over the assessment practices adopted within the new curriculum.





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# NEPAL

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Child-friendly Schools Initiative (CFSI):** Since the early 2000s UNICEF supported a wide range of interventions working with Government and NGO partners to make schools more socially inclusive, gender sensitive, child-centred, healthy, safe and protective. The CFS Initiative elaborated the characteristics of an effective child-friendly school under a series of “minimum and expected indicators” concerned with safety, health and security, acceptance and accommodation of individual learners and engagement with parents and children as partners in learning.

**Early Grade Reading and Early Grade Learning programmes:** UNICEF has been working on early grade reading since 2013 and was closely involved in the development of the government’s strategy in this area. Some of the initiatives included a National

Children’s Literature Festival held in some of the country’s most remote districts, along with a comprehensive programme including the provision of training, orientations and materials development and provision. Moreover, through the ‘Equity in Education’ programme supported by UNICEF, World Education is working in 400 schools to improve Early Grade Learning (Early Grade Reading and Early Grade Mathematics) in four districts.

**Schools As Zones of Peace (SZOP):** The SZOP project aims to prevent schools from being closed due to civil unrest and political activities, and to promote safe, violence-free schools. Implemented in nine districts of the Terai covering 614 schools (more than 0.2 million students), SZOP focuses on promoting child friendly environment in schools for quality education, and developing and implementing codes of conduct (CoC) at various levels.

16 districts have now mainstreamed Schools as Zones of Peace framework in their Annual Strategic Implementation Plans.

**Strengthening Early Childhood Development (ECD):** UNICEF is working closely with the Ministry of Education to improve quality and equity in early childhood education. Initiatives have included development of reader-friendly pictorial guidelines, technical support to update the ECD curriculum guidelines, strengthening of ECD Centres with ECD Kits in the most disadvantaged districts of the country, as well basic and refresher training to ECD Facilitators.

**National Education Equity Strategy and Equity Index:** With leadership and technical support of UNICEF, the first ever consolidated Equity Strategy was developed in 2014 to target existing strategies and programmes at the district level ensuring access, participation, and learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged students. The Strategy involved developing an





## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- o UNICEF's support, particularly through the CFS initiative, has contributed towards creating better learning environments, necessary for producing good learning outcomes. The 2014 review of CSFI found the programme to have had an influence on teachers' awareness of child-centred attitudes and practice and on children feeling welcome in the classroom.
- o Out of School Children mapping, an effective means to ensure 100% enrollment of children especially from marginalised communities, has now been replicated and scaled up at the district level. UNICEF is supporting in continuing to help keep in the education reform agenda access to education for most marginalised groups, including disabled, girls, minority and disadvantaged castes.
- o As the development partners' focal point in Education, UNICEF supported the Government in the development of the School Sector Development Plan for 2016-2023. UNICEF advocated to place issues of equity front and centre of education policy and programming, as well as ensuring that learning outcomes are an important part of the SSDP.

Equity Index identifying five districts with the lowest education outcomes, rationalisation of strategies to provide second chance education to out of school children, and reduction of disparities in participation and learning outcomes.

## Current UNICEF focus areas

- o The current Country Programme Document (2013-17) focuses on working with the Ministry of Education and SWAp partners to analyse system data, sector evaluations, and feedback from schools and districts to promote greater gender and social equity in national education policies, strategies and budgets.
- o In targeted districts and municipalities, support is being given to increasing young children's access to holistic developmental opportunities through parental education and child-friendly pre-primary education for improved school readiness.
- o Working closely with the adolescent development and participation (ADAP) programme, efforts are being made to mobilise families, communities and service providers to ensure that out-of-school children and adolescents have increased access to and complete quality alternative-learning opportunities.
- o Efforts are being made to shift the focus from improving access and infrastructure, to improving learning outcomes, starting with the CFS Initiative.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- o A key issue highlighted is that teachers are a strongly political group, which makes issues of teacher management and accountability difficult.
- o The other key barrier identified was the difficult in changing teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, from teaching a classroom to teaching individual students.

## Available evaluations

- o Review of Nepal's Child-Friendly School Initiative (2014), commissioned by UNICEF and undertaken by an international consultant
- o Final Evaluation (2010) of UNICEF Supported Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP) Project 2008 – 2009, by Management Innovation, Training and Research Academy (MITRA) Pvt. Ltd
- o Report on Baseline Early Grade Reading Assessment Of Achham, Bajura, Kalikot and Mugu Districts (2016)
- o Nepal Assessment of Child-Friendly School Interventions (2009), conducted by the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) at Tribhuvan University, in collaboration with an independent consultant.
- o Scaling Up Early Child Development in Nepal: A study report submitted to UNICEF Nepal by Sadananda Kadel Bal Mukunda Mahat Consultants (2011)
- o An 'Analysis of Menstrual Hygiene Practices in Nepal: The Role of WASH in Schools Programme for Girls Education', was commissioned by UNICEF Nepal in collaboration with the Health Research and Social Development Forum (HERD) in 2016.



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# PAKISTAN

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Capacity-building around child-friendly education:** UNICEF supported institutional capacity development as part of a long-term approach in engaging with education departments, institutes and stakeholders at national and provincial levels to scale up Child Friendly Education. Technical engagement with teacher training institutes helped the institutes design need-based in-service training programmes, including school based mentoring packages which supported teachers, head teachers and managers in child centred pedagogies.

**Strengthening monitoring and accountability:** For the first time in Pakistan, the Baluchistan provincial government with UNICEF support established

a cluster-based approach to the Baluchistan Education Management Information System (EMIS) which includes profiles of individual children and schools (including madrassahs and private schools) and indicators related to enrolment, retention and completion, to guide planning, monitoring and reporting on education reforms.

**Simulations for Equity in Education (SEE):** The Simulations for Equity in Education (SEE) was piloted in Islamabad and Baluchistan in 2015 to estimate the cost of education interventions and measure potential improvements in school outcomes as a result of these interventions. School entry, retention, completion and learning outcomes are projected for different targeted disadvantaged groups, allowing

comparisons of different scenarios. The model serves as a planning guide for formulating cost-effective and pro-equity education policies.

**Social Cohesion and Resilience (SCR) program:** This was jointly undertaken by Education and Child Protection sections to build awareness and enhance practice of duty-bearers and right-holders regarding peace-building. District SCR action plans were developed in consultation with stakeholders including Peace Committees.

**Strengthening of Early Childhood Education (ECE):** Policy advocacy and technical assistance led to finalized ECE policies in Sindh and Balochistan, with high-level policy discussions ongoing on ECE standards, strategies and scale-up models in various provinces especially Punjab.



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- o Technical support for improved delivery of content provided to teacher training institutes, Bureau of Curriculum and School Education Departments, Non-Formal Education and Literacy Directorates
- o Focused capacity building for teachers and head teachers for improved teaching and learning practices
- o Facilitated coordination among examination commission, text book board and Education Department
- o Supporting strengthening of national assessment systems (an initiative that started recently, and is still evolving)

## Current UNICEF focus areas

- o According to the MTR 2015, UNICEF's strategic focus in the second half of the Country Programme 2013-17 are as follows:
- o A strategic shift from child friendly schooling to improving the quality of learning – shifting the focus from Education for All towards Learning for All, providing the basic, social, emotional and cognitive skills to thrive in increasingly complex environments
- o reducing the number of primary school aged children who are out of school
- o Improving equity, so all children have equal opportunities in education regardless of their circumstances
- o UNICEF will participate in the joint education sector review process so as to engage in further discussions on integrating components into the EMIS data system.

## Biggest challenges to quality

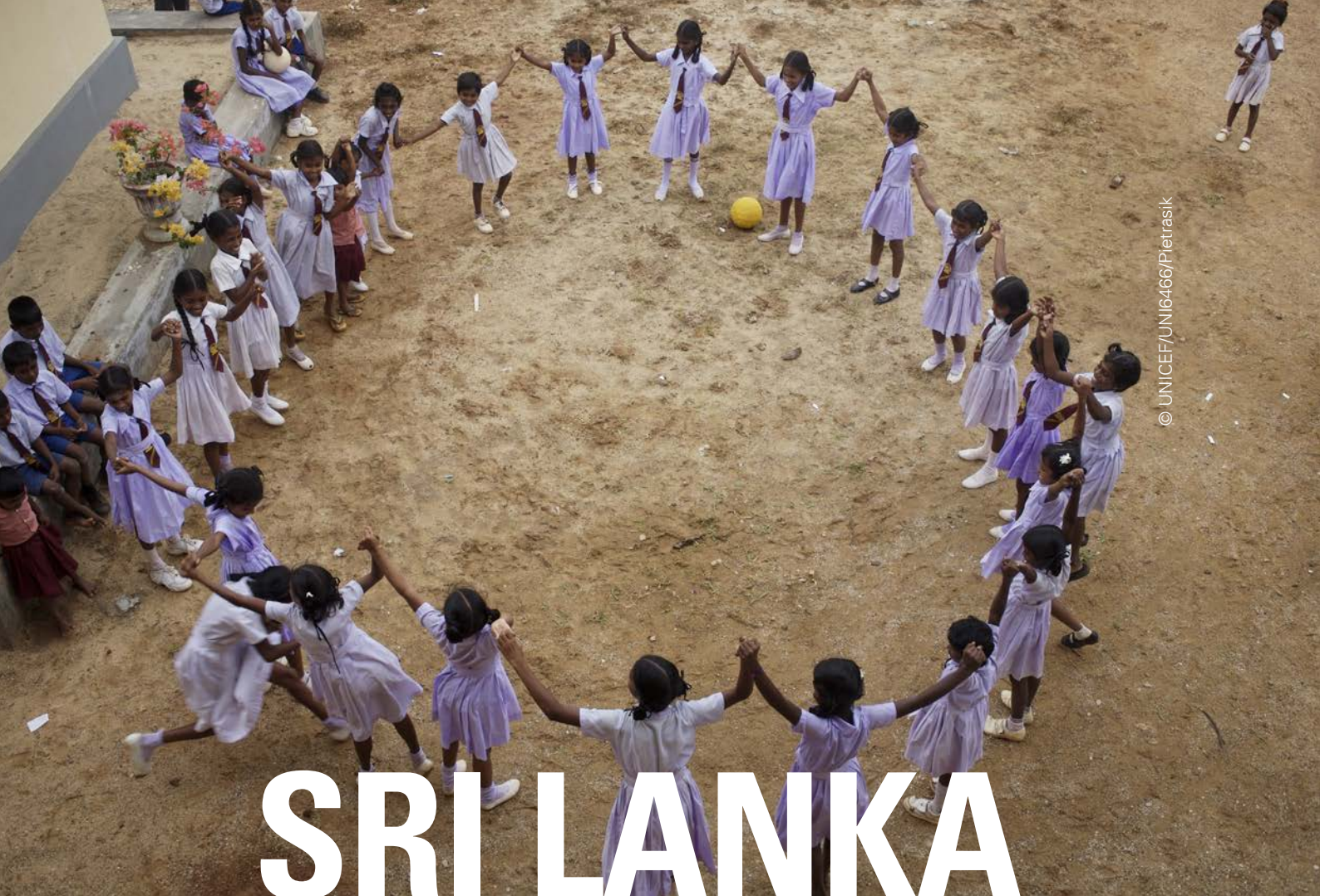
Key challenges highlighted in surveys and interviews are:

- o Limited government capacity, resources, and limited evidence for replicating and scaling up existing initiatives.
- o Political upheaval, natural hazards, security and resource allocations during emergencies
- o There is still a strong need to develop more relevant teacher training material and to strengthen links among teacher and student performance.
- o Poor governance is a key issue highlighted, which was felt to be significantly hampering progress in improving education quality in Pakistan.

## Available evaluations

- o A 'Review of Alternative Programmes in Pakistan' was supported by UNICEF Pakistan in 2015.
- o A Third Party validation report based on the 'enrollment and out of school children' data of universal primary education campaign in Punjab, was conducted in 2011 jointly by the Directorates of Public Instructions (Elementary and Secondary Education), School Education Department, Bureau of Statistics, and UNICEF.
- o UNICEF supported a study on 'Using portfolios to assess teachers' implementation of the National Professional Standards (NPST)' in 2012, involving a longitudinal study of 6 schools each in 6 districts of Punjab.
- o An endline study of the Social Cohesion and Resilience (SCR) programme (implemented from 2012 to 2016), was conducted in 2016 by Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) in collaboration with UNICEF Pakistan





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# SRI LANKA

## Key recent quality initiatives

**Child-Friendly Approach (CFA)** first began as a pilot in 2002 with UNICEF support, and was later mainstreamed nationally. Having six dimensions based on global CFS dimensions, CFA is being implemented in all programme districts. Various strategies have been implemented including advocacy, capacity, development of a CFA framework and materials, and trialling multi-level pedagogy. CFA has covered various programmes implemented with support from UNICEF, donors and NGOs, including the Basic Education Support Programme (BESP); Human Development through Quality Education (HDQE) and the Child Friendly Education Programme (CFEP).

**Multilevel pedagogy** has been trialled as part of CFA. The model was inspired by an exposure to the Rishi Valley Institute in India which was also an inspiration for

Activity-Based Learning in India ML pedagogy was piloted in the Eastern Province in 2016 in 124 schools. A similar programme was replicated in the Northern Province from 2017, and another is planned in Uva and the Central Provinces next year. While the impact of ML pedagogy is yet to be measured, informal classroom observation suggests that the methodology has had a positive impact on classroom processes.

**Child Friendly Education Programme (CFEP)** was implemented in 2013 –2016 with support from the Australian Government. CFEP aimed at improving learning outcomes and reducing inequalities in education in eight targeted districts, in 300 schools in the Eastern and 500 schools in the Northern Provinces, through the CF approach. As part of CFEP, UNICEF focused on i) developing quality teaching/ learning materials; ii) establishing teacher standards; iii) integrating

child-friendly principles in primary curriculum; iv) piloting multi-level pedagogies; v) improving attendance and learning; vi) school planning and development and vii) integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

**Inclusive Education** has also been a focus in the past decade. UNICEF supported the MoE to develop an 'Inclusive Education Toolkit', and to build capacity of teachers around inclusive education. UNICEF also commissioned a documentary/ research study on the challenges faced by disabled children with learning difficulties, which led to recommendations for future programming priorities.

**Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding:** In collaboration with the MoE, UNICEF supported review and implementation of the national policy on Education and Social Cohesion and Peace, which involved developing action plans, strengthening coordination among



## UNICEF's Key Contributions

- o CFA has contributed to setting up enjoyable learning environments for boys and girls in schools, increased community participation in schools improvement plans, active participation of community in bring back the schools drop outs, safety and protection of school children and improving health and nutrition levels.
- o CFA has been instrumental in creating awareness around child rights
- o The Child-friendly Education Programme has helped to shift the focus to the quality of teaching and learning.
- o During national emergencies such as floods and landslides caused by unprecedented heavy rainfall across the country in 2016, UNICEF was able to provide educational support in addition to basic water, sanitation, child protection and health services to the severely affected people.
- o UNICEF Sri Lanka has been able to play a convening role in promoting inter-agency and multi-sectoral coordination, leveraging funds and promoting partnerships

agencies, and integration of critical elements into curricular and co-curricular activities. UNICEF also leveraged external resources to strengthen capacity of newly nominated social cohesion coordinators in schools.

## Current UNICEF focus areas

- o According to the latest Mid-term Review in 2014, in collaboration with key government ministry, UNICEF assistance is geared towards improving access and quality of education through the existing national policy and Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP-II).
- o UNICEF support to education sector includes strengthening of Child Friendly Approach (CFA), increasing access and quality education to all children up to grade – 9. Programme has also prioritised focus on enhancement of learning outcomes of all children, especially, the disadvantaged.
- o In addition, support to curriculum reform and institutionalisation of Child Friendly Approach, promoting peace education and integration of social cohesion in primary and secondary curriculum and in school activities, standardising approach to early childhood education constitute key features of education programming.

## Biggest challenges to quality

- o Shifting teacher attitudes from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies has been a challenge
- o Exam-oriented competition and pressure, specially the 5th grade scholarship exam.
- o Many children move to next level without mastering expected competencies.
- o Lack of a specific national policy framework for primary education, which has not been sufficiently prioritized compared to secondary education.

## Available evaluations

- o Evaluation of Child-Friendly Approach (2016), supported jointly by the Government of Sri Lanka and UNICEF.
- o Review of the 'Human Development Through Quality Education' supported by UNICEF and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) (2016)
- o Review of the Child Friendly Education Programme (CFEP), supported by UNICEF and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2016)



# 3

## LESSONS: **HOW CAN WE IMPROVE LEARNING IN SOUTH ASIA?**





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Despite diverse challenges and limitations, the strongest factor that South Asia has on the side of improving education quality is a strong aspirational energy on the part of both parents and students to seize education as a means for reaching higher standards. This desire is matched by an expressed willingness on the part of governments to improve educational access and quality, especially in the context of increasing pressure for public education reform in the face of growing private competitors. In light of the above, the following section reflects on the lessons that emerge from the current mapping for improving education quality in South Asia: particularly in terms of key challenges and

successes, lessons learned, the status of CFS programmes, and key leverage points identified for bringing improvements in the quality of both teaching and learning outcomes. Once again, insights presented in this section emerge directly from surveys and interviews, and also from documents reviewed where cited. Throughout this section, separate boxes are included listing examples of positive practices that were highlighted during the mapping, although these are based on reports from UNICEF staff and have not necessarily been subjected to a third party evaluation (a full list of boxes is included in the Contents page).

## REGIONAL BARRIERS TO LEARNING

While South Asian countries face many similar challenges to those faced by most developing countries around the world, there are some challenges that particularly affect education systems in South Asia, and that present barriers to sustained efforts to improve teaching-learning quality in the region. Some of these issues may be impacted by local or national level action, while others like the need for strong assessment systems would benefit from regional level initiatives. The issues captured below are regional not in the sense that they are true of every single country in the region, but these were the challenges most frequently cited by many of the COs interviewed.

### **Regional prevalence of conflict and natural disasters**

Political instability, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis – all of these pose a severe challenge to the long-term educational vision and planning needed for bringing the systemic reforms and mindset changes required for improving teaching-learning quality. More immediately, they impinge on children's ability to access basic education services in the face of political insecurity or emergency situations that have affected many of the region's countries in the last decade. In such fragile contexts when access to basic education is at risk, complex questions of pedagogy and learning are understandably a far cry. Political tensions between countries like Pakistan and India further complicate cross-national sharing and learning.

### **Systemic limitations: Inadequate stability, priority, resources & capacity for quality improvement**

Frequent changes in government leadership and priorities pose a strong threat to the continuity, upscaling and sustainability of interventions for improving quality. Political pressure to show quick results leads to

initiating of new projects, hasty upscaling of successful pilots, or doing away with a previous government's initiatives, without a long-term vision. It is easier to show visible results such as building schools or other supply-driven interventions, than to pursue an inherited long-term strategy for education quality. Most South Asian countries still have low capacity among government systems and institutions for successfully implementing and monitoring a quality programme on a large scale. Resources for education are limited in many countries in the region, with basic challenges in providing adequate schools and teachers.

### **Poor governance and politicization of teaching profession**

Issues of governance and corruption present a key barrier to improving learning in many South Asian countries. Weak monitoring, delays in funds release, and poor coordination between different government bodies hamper the efficiency of quality initiatives. Unreliable data and reluctance to show a bleak picture make it difficult to get a true assessment of the bottlenecks in order to reach the most vulnerable children. Assured government tenure and low accountability for results affect performance at all levels of the system. Political equations and opposition from teacher unions present challenges to teacher management and deployment. This is coupled with high numbers of vacancies at various levels of the system.

### **Low quality of teachers and teacher training**

Many South Asian countries have a teaching workforce that is for the most part poorly skilled and poorly motivated. Most countries either have low-quality pre-service teacher education programmes, or none at all. There is often no systematic and coordinated mechanism for providing support to



working teachers, and no systematic school governance mechanism for monitoring teachers, so changes in pedagogy are difficult to sustain. The government functionaries who are technically responsible for providing on-site teacher support and monitoring often do not have the needed educational understanding or skills to do so; thus trainings typically have little impact on changes in pedagogy or learning. In particular, teachers have a hard time shifting from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies because the pedagogy used in teacher education classrooms are typically highly teacher-centred, thus teachers have never experienced the new paradigm for themselves.

### **Lack of strong systems for measurement of learning**

Countries like Afghanistan do not yet have a system for conducting large-scale national assessments of learning, though it is currently in the process of setting one up. Even in countries that do, assessment data is rarely analysed and used effectively for addressing learning issues. Part of the challenge is poor coordination between four key government departments: Curriculum, Assessments, Teacher Training, and Directorate of Education. This makes it difficult to implement systems such as in developed countries, where national assessment results are analysed and communicated to all relevant departments to inform teacher training, school communications or curriculum revisions. This is true not only at national/ sub-national levels, but also at classroom level: currently, learning outcome data analysis is not part of teacher training in any South Asian country. Teachers are not adequately equipped to implement formative classroom-based assessments, to analyse findings, and use them for modifying their pedagogy.

#### **BOX 1:**

### **Restructuring teacher education in India**

Sparked by the Government's Joint Review Missions of Teacher Education (TE) which UNICEF helped support, states such as Odisha and Maharashtra initiated a restructuring of their TE systems. Odisha set up a think tank with state and national experts to guide the process of TE reform in the state. UNICEF Maharashtra conducted a study of TE in the state, facilitated a series of consultations to discuss the study's findings, and is now supporting a process of restructuring and capacity building of TE systems.

### **Socio-cultural barriers to universal learning**

Issues like child labour, child marriage, and restricted mobility for older girls prevail in the region and hamper the ability of all children to participate in learning. Moreover social inclusion of all learners has been difficult to promote given long-standing discrimination against particular communities, especially in countries like India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

### **Focus on exam results versus learning**

Attempts at pedagogical innovation are thwarted by the high pressure among all stakeholders to ensure high examination results, especially for a few top-scorers. This is in contrast with a low focus on or accountability for actual learning for all children.

## KEY DRIVERS OF SUCCESS FOR QUALITY INITIATIVES

For those quality initiatives that have been implemented well, below are some of the key factors that were felt by survey and interview respondents to have contributed to their success.

### Government ownership

Across countries, the most successful initiatives in improving the quality of government schools have been those that have had full buy-in from Government leadership. Government has been in the front seat driving every phase of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the initiative, with UNICEF simply offering technical support. Having the highest levels of government leadership pushing for quality has been key, at both national and sub-national levels. Supportive educational policies have been key drivers of success, along with high-level advocacy and keeping the most senior authorities in the loop.

### Empowering teachers as the drivers of change

Rather than top-down solutions, it was felt that what can work better is empowering teachers to feel they can make a difference, trusting their experience, and equipping them with the tools to make the change happen (For example, see 'Teacher-led CFS Network in Chennai, India' described in Box 4). Teachers should be entrusted with the responsibility for bringing change and coming up with their own solutions, but also then also monitored to ensure that the changes happen.

### Local empowerment of schools and communities

A key driver for success has been treating the school as the unit of change, empowering local actors to come up with local solutions to local barriers to universal learning. It helps when training and continuous support is given to all school stakeholders rather than only to a few teachers or Head Teacher,

since it is the school as a team that can bring change. Empowering community ownership in school improvement plans and various aspects of improving school quality has been a key success factor, as found by UNICEF Afghanistan in its 'School Improvement Plans' initiative. One Education Specialist suggested that rather than getting teachers or the Education Department to orient parents for token participation in school management committees, UNICEF could partner with an organisation experienced in engaging community groups, to really empower parent groups to take ownership in planning for school improvement.

#### BOX 2:

#### School self-assessment in Nepal

UNICEF Nepal found self-assessment by schools to be a critical part of their CFS programme, to allow school stakeholders to recognize their status and let them bring the change by themselves. They found that where the school self-assessment was well conducted, there have been significant changes.

### Strengthening systems

According to respondents, efforts to reform and strengthen the education system, improving education governance with a focus on accountability measures (for example, linking teacher promotion to performance), and extending quality technical support to the Government in conceptualisation, planning, implementation and monitoring of the programme, have all been found to improve the success of Quality Initiatives.

**BOX 3:**

**Strengthening educational governance in Maharashtra, India**

In an effort to strengthen education governance, identified as essential for implementing any new policy or reform, UNICEF Maharashtra with government support facilitated a study on governance issues. The 4-month review aimed at finding feasible solutions to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of educational governance. Recommendations were made regarding enhancing ownership of the reform agenda among all stakeholders, improving planning processes, human resources, management information systems, administration and legal matters.

**Resource support from experts**

It has helped to draw technical expertise from NGOs, INGOs or other institutions to work as partners. Creating technical pools or think tanks to steer the initiative helps ensure that the initiative is not reliant on one committed individual or a few motivated people, and helps sustain the capacities developed and institutional memory after individuals change.

**Convergence in advocacy from development partners**

Consistent push and support from DPs for improving teaching and learning has been found to help, as well as implementation of performance-based management system by DPs which gets the Government to focus on those reform areas.





## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The interviews and surveys highlighted various lessons learned over the years of what could be done differently in the future to strengthen the impact of quality initiatives – some of which are captured below.

### **There is need for a long-term vision and advocacy strategy**

Such a long-term vision can be based on identifying key strategic areas for strengthening teaching-learning quality. One needs to invest the time needed for seeing change, and not be in a rush to evaluate. Some felt that it may take at least 5 years before an intervention will begin to show results.

### **Strategies need to be matched with local ground realities**

Innovations need to be adapted to suit the real ground situation, keeping in mind local constraints and capacity levels. For example, while textbooks and other teaching-learning materials should be of global standards, they should be simple enough for students to understand and for teachers to deliver given their low capacity levels.

### **Explore creative out-of-the-box options for capacity-building**

One Education Specialist gave her own example of how what most helped her to grow as a professional was not attending workshops, but times where her supervisors gave her new responsibilities and trusted her to rise to the challenge. Similarly, whether for senior government officials, mid-level functionaries, or teachers, there is need to think of new creative options for their capacity building that go beyond attending workshops. Exploring new options for e-learning, video clips or animation films may be crucial for helping teachers and others in the system and community to understand what is the pedagogical paradigm shift desired. One respondent suggested that teachers of

different grades should be enabled to access online forums, test item banks, or existing lesson plans created by teachers who have developed fun ways to teach a certain topic. It was also suggested that tapping in to the latest innovative practices in leadership development and teambuilding may be useful in this regard. At all levels, individuals need to feel like they have an essential contribution to make, be entrusted with the responsibility for bringing change, and be supported with the tools they require to do it – applying this basic principle would help improve performance at different levels.

### **Strong documentation and evidence generation is needed for sustained advocacy**

Respondents felt that quality initiatives must be monitored and evaluated from beginning to end, in a timely manner – it is that evidence that becomes the springboard for confident advocacy. Advocacy should not be seen as a one-time event, but a sustained process with all key agencies after a careful mapping – similar to how the WASH programme has been able to involve diverse stakeholders from media to commissions to semi-judicial bodies. One Specialist pointed out that advocacy involves not only meeting with senior officials, but also when UNICEF's own leaders visit and endorse good work happening on the ground. Without this, sometimes opportunities may be missed – such as in the case of the Activity-Based Learning programme in Tamil Nadu, India – it was years before UNICEF began promoting it, after other DPs first appreciated and drew people's attention to it as a good model. There needs to be a well thought-out plan for proper documentation and dissemination, with an impact evaluation design embedded from the beginning if possible, and it was felt that one needs to allow for and document failures as well as successes. For any innovation, process documentation is very

important to allow people to understand the principles behind it rather than being caught up with superficial impressions.

### **Showcasing islands of excellence to demonstrate working models on the ground**

Bringing to light NGO initiatives and Individual efforts of committed teachers and officials can create islands of excellence that help expose others to these good practices, such as the

model of STIR Education in India which is attempting to identify individual 'Teacher Changemaker' outliers and showcase them as examples to promote wider innovation in the system. Similarly, several people felt there is need for more good working models on the ground to show people that the kind of pedagogy and quality improvements being discussed are indeed possible in the given context.



## STATUS OF CFS IN SOUTH ASIA

The Child-Friendly School (CFS) framework was first operationalised in Thailand in 1997, and subsequently launched as a global UNICEF initiative in 1999. It became UNICEF's flagship programme for quality education promoted at global, regional and country levels. By 2009 it was being implemented in at least 95 countries (UNICEF 2009), and is still being promoted today in countries around the world. Ensuring the right of all children to a basic education of high quality is at the heart of CFS initiatives. CFS initially focused on single factor interventions for school quality (e.g. teacher development, provision of textbooks, life skills education). This gradually evolved into whole-child and inter-sectoral approaches ensuring that the educational environment is safe and healthy, and provides appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning. CFS originally consisted of five dimensions: inclusiveness; effectiveness (relevance and quality); health, safety and protection; gender-friendliness; and involvement of students, families and communities. The model evolved over the years, and its latest framework revolves around 4 key principles common across countries: child-centredness, inclusiveness, democratic participation, and protection. The core model has been adopted and adapted in various forms in countries around the world, and varies within and across countries. CFS has been implemented in all countries in South Asia, in different forms and on different scales.

### The Many Faces of CFS in South Asia

Different countries in South Asia have placed emphasis on different dimensions of CFS and have implemented different intensity of programming, depending on their country's context and priorities. For example, In keeping with its post-conflict environment, UNICEF Sri Lanka focused more on aspects like dialogue, parent interaction, and promoting peaceful

school environments with reduced violence against children – which may have been less the focus in other countries like India. Some countries have focused on promoting CFS as a specific intervention model in a selected number of CFS schools (e.g. Nepal, Sri Lanka), while other countries have focused on infusing CFS principles across all areas of their quality-related work with the government, such as education planning, curriculum development or teacher support systems (e.g. India, Afghanistan). In some countries, rather than initiating separate CFS programmes, UNICEF chose to leverage and support existing government-led programmes that were found to closely align with CFS principles, such as 'Educating for Gross National Happiness' in Bhutan, or ABL in India.

In terms of the six dimensions of the definition of quality being used in this review, most CFS initiatives in South Asia have focused on promoting welcoming learning environments and relevant learning materials, and a few on promoting child-friendly supportive systems. For example, in Bangladesh and Maldives, CFS initiatives have focused on encouraging collective planning for school improvement. UNICEF Afghanistan has focused on developing CFS quality standards, infusing CFS principles into the Education Sector Plan, and giving a 7-day training to teachers on CFS principles. Countries like Nepal and Pakistan have focused on making schools into more supportive, child-oriented learning environments in order to improve enrolment and retention in primary schools. In general, relatively less emphasis has been placed on structured pedagogical interventions to facilitate a shift to learning-centred pedagogies, or on ensuring universal learning outcomes. India and Sri Lanka are two countries that have implemented structured pedagogical interventions that aimed explicitly at shifting teaching-learning processes in the classroom. In both countries this was done








through piloting a structured multi-grade multi-level (MGL) pedagogy termed 'Activity-Based Learning' in India (with different names and adaptations in different Indian states), and 'Multi-level Pedagogy' in Sri Lanka.

All these different versions have meant that when we talk about CFS in South Asian countries, even though we may be talking about the same model, the actual programme

on the ground may look quite different from how it was originally conceptualised or from how it may be implemented in other South Asian countries. Often, countries or even states have chosen to focus on those CFS dimensions that they find most relevant to their context, rather than adopting the model as a whole. Table 2 below presents brief overviews of what CFS programmes have looked like in each South Asian country.

TABLE 2  
**CFS Initiatives in different South Asian countries**

	<p><b>AFGHANISTAN</b></p> <p>CFS was implemented since 2013 in 10 focus provinces, centred on five thematic components: similar to the original global model 1. inclusiveness; 2. effective teaching and learning; 3. safe, healthy and protective environment; 4. gender responsiveness and 5. participatory decision-making. In 2016, UNICEF successfully advocated for CFS quality standards and they have been included into the National Education Sector Plan 2017-2021 Quality Sub-Working Group and the new Curriculum Reform proposal being led by UNESCO. At the request of the MoE, UNICEF dedicated support to a 7-day teacher training for 17,000 teachers to improve quality learning based on CFS principles.</p>
	<p><b>BANGLADESH</b></p> <p>CFS was implemented since 2013, with 3,967 teachers trained on CFS focusing on School Effectiveness. It involved school-based planning and implementation involving all stakeholders to ensure whole-school development. The programme is continuing under the new CP 2017-2020.</p>
	<p><b>BHUTAN</b></p> <p>Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH) is a nationwide educational reform programme initiated by the MoE in 2009, for looking at learning from a more holistic perspective in an effort to restore the true essence of education, to make the curriculum and learning more enjoyable, pleasurable, and relevant. Clear similarities were found between principles of Educating for GNH and CFS, both geared towards transforming the quality of education. This encouraged UNICEF to support the Educating for GNH Programme as a strategy to scale-up the CFS approach nation-wide.</p>
	<p><b>INDIA</b></p> <p>In India, CFS evolved into the 'child-friendly schools and systems' (CFSS) approach, with UNICEF working with different states over the past decade to infuse child-friendly principles into policy, planning, teaching and materials. UNICEF India in 2014 developed a set of guiding principles for CFSS, including suggested strategies and a self-assessment checklist for schools, and documentation of best practices from the field. One model that was found to most closely align with CFSS principles has been ABL, which gained traction in the state of Tamil Nadu in the early 2000s. UNICEF has subsequently helped to adapt, pilot and upscale this model in over 13 states in India, as a means of promoting child-friendly education.</p>
	<p><b>MALDIVES</b></p> <p>CFS started as part of the 2005 Tsunami recovery and reconstruction of schools, under the theme "Building Back Better". The initiative focused on introducing child-friendly teaching-learning environments in those schools where the physical infrastructure of the schools enabled such learning. The initiative entailed building capacity of schools to undertake school self-reviews and school improvement initiatives and establishment of Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) in 20 atolls. These TRCs acted as decentralised support mechanisms (resource hubs) for cost-effective teacher training and technical support to schools for school improvement.</p>



### NEPAL

The CFS Initiative elaborated the characteristics of an effective child-friendly school under a series of 'minimum and expected indicators' concerned with safety, health and security, acceptance and accommodation of individual learners, and engagement with parents and children as partners in learning. Symmetry was found between these and the strategic concerns identified in the government's School Sector Reform Programme (2009-16) to create harmonious schools, engage teachers in learning, map out-of-school children and include CFS standards in School Improvement Plans (SIP).



### PAKISTAN

UNICEF supported the Child-Friendly Schools project in Punjab, Pakistan's largest province, as well as in Balochistan. The programme aimed at improving enrolment and retention in primary school, especially for girls, by creating a supportive and child-oriented environment. In Punjab, UNICEF worked with the Lahore-based Ali Institute, piloting 150 CF schools in 6 districts in 2004, increasing to 300 schools in 2008.



### SRI LANKA

The 'Child-friendly Approach' (CFA) was first piloted in 2002 with UNICEF support, before being nationally mainstreamed. A CFA framework with 6 CFA dimensions and guidance tools were developed, focusing on access, gender equity, quality, health and protection, participation of children and communities, and systems strengthening. Strategies to mainstream CFA have included advocacy, training for principals and teachers, targeted funding (e.g. for SDP implementation); resource development (e.g. teaching and learning materials); and policy development (e.g. CFA implementation guidance; inclusive education guidelines). As part of CFA, multi-level (ML) pedagogy was piloted in the Eastern Province, inspired by India's ABL/ Rishi Valley approach. This approach targets changes in pedagogy, student-driven formative assessments, a clear 'learning path,' and learning materials in-line with the 'learning ladder'. To ensure sustainability and scale-up, 'champions' were identified at national/provincial levels of government, and a dedicated resource team was set up to lead the development and implementation of ML pilots in another three provinces (The ML model has not yet been evaluated).

## What does research show on the impact of CFS initiatives in South Asia?

There have been a few studies looking into the impact of CFS programmes in South Asia, of which only one in India involves a randomised control trial attempting to isolate the impact of ABL on learning outcomes (making it the most rigorous and robust evaluation in the region of the impact of CFS models on learning outcomes, and one of the few in the world to examine this question). In general, the limited research available shows a mixed picture of the impact of CFS on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Table 3 provides an overview of the available studies on the impact of CFS programmes in different South Asian countries, listing their objective and scope, as well as their key findings, which are synthesised after the table.

Overall, the available research indicates that CFS has indeed made a positive contribution to improving learning environments, children's participation in schools, and awareness regarding child-centred education. For example Nepal's CFSI evaluation noted positive behavioural changes among teachers and students, with wall displays and book corners leading children to feel more welcome in classrooms and teachers to be more aware of child-centred practices. Sri Lanka's CFA evaluation reported that factors that worked well included infrastructural improvements, school attractiveness inputs, reducing violence in schools, improved classroom climates, and greater awareness among teachers and parents of children's rights. India's ABL evaluation indicated the greatest changes in students' experience in classrooms, reporting greater child engagement and autonomy, and more fear-free classroom environments.

**TABLE 3**  
**Evaluations of CFS programmes in different South Asian countries**

Country	Evaluations conducted	Findings
<b>1. Afghanistan</b>	None	A Baseline Study was carried out in 2013 by the Society for Sustainable Development of Afghanistan (SSDA), to assess the current status of schools as per CFS standards, and to serve as a baseline for measuring impact of the CFS programme on enrolment, retention and learning achievement. A subsequent Impact assessment has not yet been conducted.
<b>2. Bangladesh</b>	None	
<b>3. Bhutan</b>	Institute for Management Studies conducted a study (2014) to gauge the effectiveness of Educating for GNH training, document early signs of change in school and classroom practices, and identify challenges in implementation. The study used both qualitative methods (literature review, focus groups, interviews, observations), and quantitative methods (surveys). The study covered 3250 students and 1227 teachers.	The assessment reveals that the training is effective and has contributed to positive behavior change in teachers and students. For instance, 71.6% of teachers report that the training was effective, while both teachers and students (85.59%) said that the programme has brought a positive change on the conduct of students and on the classroom and school practices of teachers. The follow up and support mechanism was rated as just fair: 47.1% of teacher respondents reported it as ineffective.
<b>4. India</b>	Education Initiatives with UNICEF support undertook a comprehensive evaluation of ABL programmes in 7 Indian states (2016), to assess the comparative impact of ABL vs. traditional teaching methods on cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes and on the nature of classroom relationships, to identify areas for further strengthening, and to build systems' capacity to assess and strengthen their own ABL programmes. Data collection involved review of ABL materials, interviews with different stakeholders, learning achievement surveys before and after a period of intervention in ABL and non-ABL schools, teacher surveys, classroom observations, and a smaller in-depth qualitative study of the highest- and lowest- performing ABL classrooms.	The study found that ABL is indeed associated with positive classroom indicators and better learning outcomes. 27% of classrooms in the study had a child-friendly, learning-centred environment and 11% of classrooms were implementing ABL as intended by the original state models. Frequent changes in the design and implementation of the programme have often led to confusion among teachers and have resulted in low adoption of ABL. Weak adoption is also associated with lower quality of implementation (adequate training & support, material supply timelines, etc.). Teachers' understanding of the underlying principles of ABL and buy-in into the state's ABL model are critical for successful practice of ABL. The sustainability of ABL programmes has been affected by its rigid structure, and greater focus on procedural aspects of ABL rather than its underlying principles. A research-based systematic approach to evolving the programme was lacking in several states.
<b>5. Maldives</b>	None	
<b>6. Nepal</b>	A review of Nepal's Child-Friendly School Initiative (2014) was commissioned by UNICEF and undertaken by an international consultant, to review ongoing work on CFS in Nepal, to examine implementation and perception of CFS in a sample of districts and schools, identify best practices, opportunities and challenges to inform the ongoing efforts of the Government in strengthening CFS. The review involved multiple tools to gather qualitative and quantitative data on inputs and activities, outcomes and indicators. A relatively small sample size, and use of primarily qualitative data with limited corroborating quantitative data meant the analysis and conclusions were indicative rather than definitive.	The review found the CFS programme including the 15-day child-centred pedagogy training, wall-display materials and promotion of book corners have had an influence on teachers' awareness of child-centred practices, on children feeling welcome in classrooms, and in parents' and students' general satisfaction. Field data was somewhat contradictory as to the degree of change CFS has produced, some schools reporting no difference and others modest change – though many of these were inputs not outcomes e.g. carpeted classrooms, the effect of floor-sitting on children's learning. There were no CFS-oriented baselines against which to assess progress. However, Early Grade Reading Assessment/ Mathematics Assessment (EGRA/EGMA) tests conducted by the review, could not find any significant difference in scores of CFS and non-CFS schools. Recommendations emphasise mainstreaming, rather than scaling-up, through development of an overarching CFS Policy and, from that, refinement and application of a Master Plan building CFS as a whole, through its dimensions contextualised and owned by districts and schools.

7. Pakistan	None	An internal UNICEF review of CFS in Punjab province (2008) indicated that 4 years into the project, the original 150 CFS schools were demonstrating higher enrolment, learning environments and integration with their communities. Newly inducted schools were also performing well and progressing quickly, visiting older schools and learning from their experiences.
8. Sri Lanka	The CFA evaluation (2016) was a joint Government of Sri Lanka and UNICEF initiative. The purpose was to provide empirical evidence on changes in primary education resulting from CFA interventions. A mixed methods approach was used, including a desk review, interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observation, and case studies.	The empirical results have been very mixed. Accordingly, it has been difficult to identify what works well in all school contexts. Training for principals and teachers on child rights seem reasonably effective, while teacher training in child-centred teaching was found less effective. Regarding impact on teaching and learning outcomes, in general it was found that child-centred teaching is not yet standard classroom practice. The provision of reading corners and books was a positive contribution to learning, but a comprehensive approach for strengthening early grade reading is still needed. It was found that a substantial number of children are still failing to reach mastery level in early grades in CFA schools.

### Challenges and critiques of CFS

For the most part, all the people interviewed for the mapping had positive things to say about the CFS programme in their country, in terms of it generally being well received, and helping to improve learning environments and school climates. However the mapping also brought out some critiques and challenges faced by CFS programmes in South Asia. For example, UNICEF Bangladesh found that although CFS has been implemented since 2013, the government did not truly own the programme. This was partly because the government officials responsible for implementing CFS were also engaged with many other things. There are already 28 different types of training programmes organised for teachers each year – so CFS was simply seen as yet another training to be checked off the list. UNICEF Maldives shared how CFS originally began with UNICEF resources as part of the post-tsunami recovery programme, but once UNICEF decreased its investment the government found it difficult to replicate with their limited resources. Another challenge highlighted is that there was no clear global guidance provided when UNICEF shifted its focus from child-friendly schools to child-friendly systems. Similarly, CFS is mainly focused on promoting child-centred pedagogy in the first few grades, and by the time children reach grade 4 there is a sudden shift to more traditional teacher-centred pedagogy –

with no clear guidance given for smoothening this transition. One Chief highlighted how the term itself presented a barrier in a South Asian cultural context, where government counterparts did not necessarily believe schools needed to be ‘friendly’. Even though UNICEF had been successfully advocating for years to bring in child-friendly elements into policies, once UNICEF started calling it ‘child-friendly’, the government started backing off from a term they viewed as perhaps frivolous and more suitable for donors.

One of the major critiques that emerged is that CFS programmes tend to have less focus on bringing changes in pedagogy or learning outcomes – the focus has often been more on the inputs rather than the outputs of quality. One CO mentioned that the predominant focus on infrastructural dimensions of CFS led the concept of ‘child-friendly schools’ to be jokingly called ‘tile-friendly schools’, referring to the ceramic tiles used on the floors of CFS schools. UNICEF Nepal found that the government had indeed owned the concept of CFS, but the pedagogy seen in most classrooms still tends to be ‘talk and chalk’. And this may be partly because of the way the programme was designed, with more emphasis placed on making schools child-seeking and inclusive, and less on bringing pedagogical changes in classrooms. They noted that even though UNICEF has tried



to bring up discussions on pedagogy, the change doesn't happen suddenly, and requires much time and effort. It may have been that the CFS programme had simply too many aspects it was trying to cover – which made the focus go to the more visible and more easily-implementable dimensions such as improving the school environment, while other less visible and more difficult dimensions such as pedagogy and learning tended to get less focus.

In general, it has been assumed that improvements in teaching-learning outcomes will happen as a result of improved learning environments – an assumption which may not be substantiated. Or even if they have tried to include a focus on improving pedagogy, some CFS programmes have assumed that a one-time training workshop may be sufficient for bringing the needed shifts in pedagogy and learning – which experience has proved to be an incorrect assumption. Sure enough, UNICEF Nepal mentioned that because the CFS initiative had not been able to show visible improvements in learning outcomes, government ownership began dwindling, and shifted more towards implementing an Early Grade Reading and Learning programme to improve learning outcomes. This led to losing some of the momentum and achievements gained in the CFS initiative. In general, it was felt that CFS was able to contribute towards children's holistic development or non-cognitive learning, but it was not able to show significant changes in cognitive learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This became the biggest challenge in convincing the government for the expansion of the CFS programme.

The tendency for CFS in South Asia to focus more on quality inputs than outputs may be partly shaped by South Asia's own historical context of education. Sankar (2015) points out how education systems in South Asia have historically been more focused on inputs than outcomes, based on the assumption that inputs are the most important predictor

of quality education – for example, whether there is a school nearby, whether the school has a building and adequate classrooms, how many years of schooling a child was able to complete. The inputs approach is easier to measure and show visible results, and understandably favoured by governments.

But part of CFS' predominant focus on learning environments over learning processes and outcomes could also be UNICEF's own global lack of clarity on how CFS is intended to impact changes in learning processes and outcomes. UNICEF's global CFS evaluation (2009) noted that a great emphasis of CFS programming (67% of UNICEF's CFS budget) had focused on infrastructural aspects, but what truly make the school climate child-friendly are less tangible aspects such as child-centred processes and democratic relationships. Indeed, the Global Evaluation Report as well as guidelines for assessing CFS schools developed by the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (2006), do have one of the 5 criteria for a school to be considered a CFS that it should be 'effective for learning'. Yet the indicator suggested for 'quality learning outcomes' is for the school to have defined learning outcomes, and suitable ways of assessing them – with no discussion about the kind of teacher support needed for ensuring quality learning processes, or the systems needed for the school being accountable for learning outcomes. The main outcome variable looked at in the CFS Global Evaluation (2009) was school climate – whether the school climate was inclusive, child-centred and democratic. This lesser focus on ensuring quality learning processes and outcomes as an integral part of quality education could be seen reflected in some of the views of UNICEF COs in South Asia. When asked to define quality education, many of the definitions proposed discussed different inputs involved in quality education, some talked about the desired outcomes, and only a few outlined the types of processes entailed in quality education.

## LEVERAGE POINTS FOR SHIFTS IN PEDAGOGY

A McKinsey study on 'How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top' (Barber 2007) found that the only way to improve learning outcomes is to improve pedagogical instruction and the quality of the teacher-student interaction. They found that the most important way to improve the quality of education systems is to ensure that teachers and systems are motivated and equipped to deliver the best possible instruction for every child – regardless of the culture or context in which they operate. A more recent World Bank study (2018) also highlighted that teacher training that is repeated and targeted around a specific pedagogical shift is the top measure that developing countries can pursue to improve learning. However the Mapping suggested that shifting teachers' pedagogy from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches has been a very difficult challenge for all South Asian countries. Interviews and surveys, as well as recent CFS evaluations in Nepal (2014), India (2016) and Sri Lanka (2016), all suggested that despite some shifts in policies and efforts, classrooms on the ground are still predominantly dominated by teacher-centred pedagogy. However, the mapping suggested some principles and areas that could potentially be key leverage points for shifting teachers' pedagogy to better support learning, though these still need to be substantiated by further research. These preliminary leverage points are listed below.

### **Shift cultural beliefs about education**

Perhaps part of the challenge in bringing a shift towards child-centred pedagogies is that such approaches gained prominence largely in Western contexts, where there was already a foundation of widespread cultural beliefs in the equality of all children and in democratic relationships – which made it relatively easier for child-centred pedagogies

to take root. However in many South Asian countries, as several people pointed out, widespread cultural or religious beliefs may contradict the assumptions of child-centred pedagogies – which presents a greater challenge for inclusive, democratic pedagogies to take root. Learner-centred programmes often get reduced to a focus on the procedural aspects of such pedagogies, which as pointed out by the study of ABL in India (2016), affects the quality of implementation and the long-term sustainability of such programmes, without a deeper internalisation of the beliefs and principles underlying such pedagogies. Since most teachers have never experienced such democratic processes and relationships either in their own schooling or in their training, this requires deep mindset shifts. It requires transformative learning opportunities that enable teachers to experience such relationships and to challenge their existing beliefs about teaching, learning, and inclusion. One Specialist pointed out that shifting such deep-rooted cultural mindsets about education requires a mass campaign targeted not only at teachers but also at parents, mid-level functionaries, and in fact all educational stakeholders. He felt that out-of-the-box strategies such as mass media, video clips, short animations, creative films, or other digital solutions could be important components of such a wide-scale movement. Although this issue was highlighted by several respondents, very little research has been done on this in a South Asian context, with only a few studies examining cultural beliefs that may be hindering the shift to learner-centred pedagogies (e.g. Brinkmann 2015, Clarke 2001), and India's ABL evaluation being the only one that looked at the impact of CFS programming on teachers' beliefs.

### **Empower teachers as professionals to engage with basic principles of learning**

Interview respondents pointed out that central to shifting teachers' pedagogical practices is to

build teachers as professionals, equipping them with the needed beliefs, knowledge and skills to shift their pedagogical practices. As highlighted by one Education Specialist, terms like 'child-centred pedagogy' are often used loosely without a deeper internalisation or understanding of their underlying principles. She noted that teachers end up asking to simply be given a list of activities they can use to implement 'child-centred pedagogy', which actually goes against the very spirit of such an approach. Another Specialist from India argued that rather than insisting on one specific methodology or pedagogical model like ABL, teachers should be enabled to engage with principles of learning, and then be presented with options that they can creatively choose from. This implies shifting the focus from child-centred pedagogy to learning-centred education (discussed more in Section 4). Learning-centred education is not about implementing a set list of activities, but involves working from a different set of assumptions about teaching and learning, to design whatever strategies best support

learning within that context (Brinkmann, 2019). This could at times involve playing a game, or in other cases even giving a lecture or telling a story in an engaging manner. The point is less about whether the specific method being used is more teacher-centred or child-centred, and more about whether different strategies are being used to ensure that every child learns. Learning-centred pedagogy (as opposed to 'child-centred' pedagogy) is based on basic principles of learning that apply equally to adult learning and thus to the pedagogy of teacher education programmes. Building teachers as professionals would require in the short term, nurturing teacher groups to come together and engage with basic principles of learning, to discuss their successes and challenges, and to design their own solutions (similar to the teacher-led CFS Network in Chennai, described in Box 4). In the long-term, it requires establishing strong teacher education systems able to develop teachers as professionals to experience and internalise basic principles of how children learn, so that they can design context-

#### BOX 4:

#### Teacher-led CFS Network in Chennai, India

An inspiring nascent example of a localized teacher-led quality initiative is the Chennai 'Teachers' Network for CFS' that began as a self-evaluation exercise 2 years ago, and has now grown to 500-700 active teachers. Using the India Country Office's CFSS guidelines as a launching pad, teachers started coming together on holidays to discuss and brainstorm their own solutions around CFSS principles and practices such as specifics of non-discriminatory behavior or collaborative work in classrooms. Discussions are geared around a preselected set of readings, film or book on children or teaching, and the discussion flows from there. The ultimate goal is for teachers to evolve CFS markers in their own context: one school created a toy room because children in that neighbourhood do not have toys; while another decided to stay open from 7am to 7pm with volunteer teachers or college students interacting with children, so that the children

remain in a safe space until their working parents return to pick them up. Teachers designed a poster listing why their school is considered a CFS where they promise things like 'we will not discriminate against any child, we will work with the parents and community', and so on, which a school displays only after a peer evaluation. The astounding part about this initiative is that though it embodies much of the vision depicted in national guidelines, this initiative is entirely initiated, led and owned by teachers, with UNICEF and an NGO coming in later to provide support as an overarching umbrella. Despite busy workloads, teachers themselves organize their own sessions, and contribute their time, effort, funds, and even food. Every summer teachers have pooled their resources with UNICEF's allocation in order to come together for 3 days. UNICEF's allocation is for 90 people yet this year there were 130; and many wrote in their vouchers 'no need to provide Travel Allowance' money. The Education Specialist who described this initiative felt that this type of model is the most sustainable path to teacher development, in addition to a systemic teacher education plan and promotional ladder.

specific teaching practices based around these principles.

### **Promote on-site coaching for teachers and an overall shift in the way teachers are treated**

The most consistent approach in CFS programmes for bringing changes in teaching and learning has been short-term teacher training workshops, such as a 7-day training in Afghanistan's CFS programme or a 15-day training in Nepal's CFS Initiative (CFSI review 2014). However, for teachers to be able to fully internalise and practice principles of learning-centred pedagogy, perhaps even more important than one-time training workshops is the role of continuous on-site mentoring around these principles, by mentors who themselves believe in such principles. This requires targeted efforts to shift beliefs and practices of teacher support systems. Targeted training and on-site coaching around specific pedagogical practices was found to be the highest-impact initiative for improving learning by World Bank's (2018) global study. In some cases, providing teachers' guides for different subjects also helped provide the scaffolding support teachers require for improving teaching-learning processes. Unless teachers are supported to make changes in their pedagogy, monitored and held accountable for implementing such changes, it is always easier for teachers to fall back on the

traditional pedagogies they have seen and enacted their whole lives.

### **Target teacher motivation through incentives, career ladders and positive work conditions**

Low teacher motivation is a key issue highlighted in many South Asian countries, partly due to few professional incentives, limited options for career progression, and poor working conditions. Several global reviews of factors that most contribute to improving learning in developing contexts (Evans & Popova 2015, Murnane & Ganiman 2014, World Bank 2018) highlighted that well-designed incentives for teacher effort – whether implicit or explicit – can increase teacher motivation and performance at least in certain contexts, especially if teachers' capacity is simultaneously built to be able to perform the incentivised actions. They cited studies (such as Muralidharan and Sundararaman 2011 from India, cited in World Bank 2018) that showed that students performed better in primary schools that provided teachers with financial incentives for higher reading and mathematics scores. However both Murnane & Ganiman (2014) and World Bank (2018) caution that the kind of incentives and how they are implemented matter, since some merit pay programmes led to dysfunctional responses such as 'teaching to the test' or students copying answers. A study of what works for improving education quality in Pakistan (Campaign for Quality Education 2007) also found that developing a system to provide recognition of teachers' achievements in improving their practices can both motivate improved performance, and help in retrieving the right individuals to support schools. Teachers being monitored and held accountable has also been found to increase teacher motivation and performance, whereas lack of accountability has been found to contribute to many teachers not seeing themselves as responsible for their students' learning.

#### **BOX 5:**

#### **On-site coaching of teachers in activity-based learning programme, India**

The recruitment of 6000 Block Resource Teacher Educators who were young, fresh and motivated, was critical to the success of the Activity Based Learning programme in Tamil Nadu.



## LEVERAGE POINTS FOR ENHANCING LEARNING

A clear emerging message from this review is that a key role UNICEF can play in improving education quality is to advise governments on what are the most strategic interventions they should prioritise to yield the greatest impact on improving learning outcomes. The challenge is that there is very little research evidence available on this especially from a South Asian context, and the few available evaluations have not been adequately analysed and discussed. Even across UNICEF COs, people are not quite sure what are the interventions that can have the greatest impact in improving learning, and this is a key area that requires further research. For now, this section synthesises the anecdotal evidences and insights shared by UNICEF staff from across South Asia during this review, as well as the limited global evidence available on what works to improve learning outcomes in developing countries.

In recent years there have been several systematic reviews or meta-analyses that have attempted to synthesise a range of studies to examine what interventions improve learning outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (for example, Evans & Popova 2015, Krishnaratne, White & Carpenter 2013, Murnane & Ganiman 2014 – funded by World Bank, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, and National Bureau of Economic Research, respectively). While these reviews generally included only a few studies from South Asian countries, they present at least a useful starting point. Although the reviews sometimes show divergent conclusions about what does work to improve learning (some examples are discussed below), it is interesting to note what types of interventions many of them found did not have a significant impact on learning. For example, Murnane & Ganiman (2014) found that although many countries have focused on providing additional resources to schools (e.g. teaching materials, computers, smaller class sizes, or

more instructional time), these interventions for the most part do not increase learning outcomes if they do not result in changes in teachers' pedagogy and consequently in children's daily experiences at school. This finding has important relevance to CFS programmes, many of which have focused more on creating child-friendly environments, and less explicitly on bringing changes in pedagogies and relationships in the school. The factors identified below present a possible lens for prioritisation of quality initiatives so as to have maximum impact on learning outcomes. In terms of the 6 dimensions of quality in the definition used in this mapping, it suggests prioritising dimensions 4 (learning-centred processes), 5 (universal outcomes), 6 (supportive systems), and 1 (parent engagement), and placing relatively less focus on dimensions 2 (welcoming learning environment) and 3 (learning materials), on which there has already been considerable progress and which may have less direct impact on learning outcomes.

One thing is clear: there is no silver bullet that will undoubtedly transform learning outcomes. The areas listed below are simply the ones people have found tend to be more likely to contribute to improved learning outcomes, based on interviews, surveys, and documents reviewed for the current Mapping, though these still require to be substantiated by further research.

### **Empower teachers as professionals by prioritising high-quality teacher education, on-site coaching, and well-designed incentives for improving teaching-learning outcomes**

The number one intervention for impacting student learning highlighted across the board by both UNICEF staff and research is empowering teachers with the professional beliefs, understanding, skills and motivation

needed to shift their pedagogical practices. The previous section has already discussed in detail potential interventions that could most contribute to bringing a shift in teachers' pedagogy.

### **Structured pedagogical interventions designed to strengthen teaching and learning**

Structured pedagogical programmes that organise materials, teacher training and supervision around implementing a specific pedagogical model have been found to improve learning outcomes when implemented well. Some examples are the ABL programme adapted in several states in India, and Multilevel Pedagogy in Sri Lanka. However a recent evaluation of ABL in India found that exclusive focus in some cases on following procedural aspects of the model rather than getting teachers to understand its underlying principles of learning has led to challenges in effective implementation and sustainability of the programme. Evans & Popova (2015) note that all of the systematic reviews of measures to improve learning outcomes in developing countries found that pedagogical interventions must change students' learning experiences. Evans & Popova and World Bank (2018) also found that teaching needs to be pitched to students' actual learning levels in order to avoid learners falling behind to the point where they cannot catch up.

### **Clearly define and measure what are the learning outcomes we want to see**

Respondents felt that a necessary precondition for improving learning outcomes is to generate political will to first establish clear benchmarks for learning. These benchmarks then need to be constantly monitored through large-scale and formative assessments. Thus a key strategic intervention is to strengthen the capacity of national and sub-national systems for implementing effective learning assessment systems, ideally that test not only content but also competencies.

### **Discuss and use learning assessment data to inform decision-making at all levels**

Capacity of education planners and managers needs to be built to analyse data to identify specific districts or groups that are struggling in learning and require more focused support. It was also felt that getting teachers together to look at assessment data to analyse what they need to do differently has potential to bring changes in teaching-learning outcomes, though at present most South Asian countries do not have systems to facilitate this. Studies reviewed by Murnane & Ganiman (2014) from India and Liberia suggest that giving teachers diagnostic information about their students' performance with general tips on how to help them improve has had little impact on student learning, unless it is combined with clear and specific guidelines on what they need to modify in their teaching. Finally, teachers must be enabled to identify which students in their class are struggling and require individual support.

#### **BOX 6:**

#### **Building systemic capacity for analysis and use of learning data in Pakistan**

UNICEF Pakistan with support from ROSA is currently working to strengthen capacity of the national institution NEAS to analyse, disseminate and use learning data more effectively. The initiative aims at building capacity to visualize learning outcomes better, disseminate results, and advocate for more targeted support based on equity and geographical disparities identified. It seeks to use all possible platforms to influence the shift from the most 'politically visible' interventions (such as building schools), to less visible interventions that might be more impactful on delivering better learning outcomes.



### **Empower parents to demand and support improved learning**

Part of the reason schools do not feel accountable for learning outcomes is that there is little demand from parents for the same. Murnane and Ganimian (2014) found providing parents and students information about school quality and returns to schooling generally improves student learning outcomes, especially in contexts with increasing competition from private schools. They cite an evaluation from Pakistan of an initiative providing parents of third graders in public and private schools with school- and child-level learning 'report cards', which found a positive impact in improving students' learning levels. They also cite a study from India that found that low-income students performed better after a capacity-building initiative for parents on how to stimulate their children's learning at home, as well as adult literacy classes for mothers.

### **Strengthen governance of learning**

Governance at both school levels and systemic levels was highlighted as a key factor either facilitating or hindering improvements in education quality. Having a school that is well-organised with clear roles and responsibilities, and clear procedures and systems to be followed at different times and in different situations, can significantly affect a teacher's ability to focus fully on teaching and learning

#### **BOX 7:**

### **Empowering parents to demand quality learning in India**

UNICEF India shared an initiative they are currently working on with the Government to develop a very simple list of key outcomes every child should know at each grade level that will be displayed on school walls, to empower parents to hold schools accountable for ensuring their children learn at grade-appropriate levels.

#### **BOX 8:**

### **Strengthening accountability through monitoring in Nepal**

The Data Must Speak initiative in Nepal has been a positive move towards bringing greater accountability and equity-based planning. The initiative, begun in 2014, involved developing an Equity Strategy for the School Education Section in Nepal, with 2 key components: 1. Developing an Equity Index at district and sub-district level, and 2. consolidation and further targeting of current strategies deployed by the Government, DPs and I/NGOs. School and district level report cards help to promote greater school accountability by encouraging transparency and communication with parents and the larger community. They also contribute to raising community awareness and demand for education.

outcomes. UNICEF Nepal found that their biggest successes have been when they included a strong governance component in their initiatives, which contributed to tangible improvements in school quality.



# **4** RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNICEF'S EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN LEARNING IN SOUTH ASIA





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This section discusses the implications of the findings presented in previous sections for informing UNICEF's work to improve teaching-learning quality in South Asia. It presents the author's analysis of the findings of the mapping presented in Sections 2 and 3 – the views expressed by UNICEF staff, partners, and reports on UNICEF's efforts to improve education quality in the region. The section begins by reflecting on UNICEF's unique positioning in terms of its distinctive strengths and limitations as an organisation, based on the key points highlighted in the surveys and interviews. Understanding this helps to inform what could be UNICEF's most strategic contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning in South Asia. Recommendations for Country Offices are divided into two parts – five that relate

to identifying UNICEF South Asia's strategic role in improving quality, and five that relate to suggestions for strengthening its modus operandi or internal ways of working based on recommendations made during the interviews and surveys. The following sub-section lays out five recommendations for what could be ROSA's strategic contribution to supporting COs in the area of improving education quality. The final sub-section discusses the implications of this mapping for further research that could contribute to furthering the quality agenda in South Asia. It should be kept in mind that these are only preliminary recommendations based on insights emerging from the mapping, and needs to be elaborated by further field research, as recommended below.

# UNICEF'S UNIQUE POSITIONING: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

## UNICEF's strengths

Across the people interviewed, it was felt that UNICEF has a unique and important role to play in the development agenda of providing quality education for all. Some of UNICEF's top strengths that were highlighted in surveys and interviews are captured below.

### 1. Trust and credibility in its convening role around children's rights

Across countries, UNICEF is seen as a trusted and reliable partner, respected by government and non-government bodies, local and international partners alike. Whether DPs, governments or individuals, people want to route their funds through UNICEF: One partner from Nepal mentioned how after the Nepal earthquake, if asked who people could give to in order to help, her immediate answer was: Give to UNICEF. People know that if UNICEF is advocating for something, it is in the best interests of children – and they listen. Because of its long-term commitment to children's rights, UNICEF is seen as a leader in education, and always has a seat at high-level government meetings, despite offering limited financial resources compared to other DPs. It is able to play a convening role with a diverse set of partners from Government, DPs, academic institutions, NGOs, INGOs, and grassroots workers.

### 2. Field presence and on-the-ground experience in working for quality

A unique strength of UNICEF is its presence not only at national policy levels but also on the ground: as one respondent put it, 'we can speak with authority because we have a head with the government and a foot on the ground'. UNICEF's global experience working to improve teaching-learning quality with the CFS programme, alongside its national field experience with government and NGO partners, add credibility and

strength to its advocacy and capacity-building efforts, different from most other DPs.

UNICEF's credibility is also strengthened by its willingness to work in tough localities (whether geographically or politically) and among marginalised communities where other partners may be less willing to work. However it was felt that UNICEF's field expertise is perhaps not always adequately exploited, and could be leveraged more by spending more time discussing ground experiences with high-ranking national or state officials, being part of Government-led review missions, or a having a clearer plan for transitioning to Government ownership of UNICEF-initiated programmes like CFS.

### 3. Access to international resources, ideas and expertise

Although UNICEF's financial resources may be limited, its ability to leverage funds around quality is tremendous. Its brand value and trusted status puts it in a strategic position to leverage funds from international donors to be able to carry out various projects on the ground. UNICEF's international connections extend not only to financial resources but also technical expertise: UNICEF is able to reach out to a wide network of international experts and technical resources for strengthening national initiatives. UNICEF is able to bring a wide range of national and international experts together, and is able to hire professional staff, disseminate international research and organise exposure visits to build the capacity of national government systems.

### 4. Close working together with the government

It was felt that because UNICEF closely involves government systems in all its initiatives, its work is more sustainable in the long run than perhaps some of the more donor-driven initiatives like community-based

education. UNICEF's ultimate goal is to build government capacity and ownership for quality initiatives. This close working relationship also puts UNICEF in a key position for advocacy, and for helping implement results-based financing partnerships with donors that can help hold governments accountable.

### 5. Evidence-based advocacy

UNICEF has been able to generate evidence in the interest of equity, analyze ground realities from a rights-based perspective, and use this evidence for sustained advocacy. While the government may not be able to invest in longitudinal studies to yield a deeper understanding of ground realities, UNICEF is in a better position to do so. UNICEF's support in generating evidence has been not only in supporting research and evaluation, but also in strengthening the government's own educational monitoring systems, and analysing and using this data for informing its advocacy for pointing out gaps.

### UNICEF's limitations

Notwithstanding its strengths, people were honest in acknowledging that UNICEF does have its limitations, both on account of its size, scope and the nature of its relationship with the government, and also specifically when it comes to making an impact in the area of improving education quality. The top responses are synthesised below.

#### 1. Constrained by government's expectations and approval

A key limitation highlighted by COs is UNICEF's tendency to want to maintain good relationships with the Government, which can constrain its ability to push the boundaries needed. UNICEF's tendency to work with existing systems can be both a strength and a limitation, in that it is not always positioned to be out-of-the-box or innovative in its thinking and practices. UNICEF often ends up following the government's agenda or joining what others are already doing, rather than setting its own agenda. It was felt that UNICEF has the potential to be one step ahead of the government in presenting ideas that are better and more productive than what the government thinks of – which doesn't always happen. Its desire to please the government

#### BOX 9:

#### Generating evidence to support equity-oriented advocacy in Pakistan

UNICEF Pakistan with ROSA support is working with the Institute for Social and Policy Studies to advocate for greater equity in education budgeting by producing four different papers aimed at documenting equity gaps in existing education budgets. These papers use evidence to point out that certain current practices in education budgeting may inadvertently be worsening equity gaps.

makes it less willing to take risks – which is especially needed when working in difficult or crisis situations as in South Asia. It also makes UNICEF officers less willing to critique the government or say difficult things, such as pointing out when the Government is adopting a strategy that is incoherent, shortsighted or ineffective. One specialist suggested exploring out-of-the-box strategies for saying difficult things even if not publicly – whether through building personal relationships and having open one-on-one conversations with government officials, communicating certain messages through NGO partners, or drawing from the skills and experience of UNICEF's advocacy section in expressing difficult messages.

#### 2. Lack of clear, long-term strategy and focus for improving quality

Several Specialists and Chiefs commented that sometimes UNICEF is involved in too many things for trying to improve education quality – which can be a recipe for disaster. Trying to do everything makes it difficult to show clear results at the end of the day. There is lack of clarity either at country level, regional level, or even global level on what is UNICEF's long-term strategy and key strategic focus areas for improving the quality of teaching-

learning outcomes – based on evidence of what works. Because much of UNICEF's focus thus far has been on improving access to education, it does not yet have the same kind of clarity, strategy or expertise in the area of bringing changes in quality. This contributes to conducting short-term support and activities that do not contribute to a clear longer-term plan. Related to this is a lack of a clear process for transitioning or exiting from pilots. UNICEF is strong in initiating pilots, but less strong in seeing them to their logical conclusion: either recommending and supporting its upscaling, building government ownership over the initiative, or acknowledging that the pilot needs to be terminated. There is limited understanding of the political economy of upscaling, and when and how a promising pilot can be successfully upscaled.

### **3. Limited technical expertise in the area of quality improvement**

It was felt that UNICEF does not necessarily have the required technical know-how regarding improving teaching-learning quality. Because most UNICEF staff are overloaded and overworked, there is little room for UNICEF's own professional development. One Specialist lamented that UNICEF offices do not even have access to international journals, let alone the time to read them. For this reason, it was felt that UNICEF may be losing its cutting edge and its ability to engage in policy dialogue in a convincing way. This lack of technical capacity may be contributing to UNICEF officers' tendency to follow the government's agenda rather than setting its own agenda, as highlighted earlier. One Education Chief felt that UNICEF offices should dare to bring in the needed technical expertise when making hiring decisions, even if it may require more work and more courage.

### **4. Organisational processes that can be bureaucratic and compartmentalised**

A limitation pointed out by both staff and partners is that UNICEF is a large global organisation whose processes can sometimes be bureaucratic, slow or inefficient. It was understood that some of these processes are needed to ensure the quality of UNICEF's procurement and implementation, but at times the fact that it is a large organisation can result in UNICEF not being as quick as it could be in responding to the needs of children. Several specialists mentioned that the fact that they are sometimes buried in paperwork leaves little time for strategic and innovative thinking or their own professional development. There can also be a tendency towards compartmentalisation in the way UNICEF implements programmes, especially since UNICEF's sections are organised by line ministries, with as little interaction and synergy between different UNICEF sections as there typically is between government ministries.

### **5. Need for stronger monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination of UNICEF initiatives**

Several people pointed out UNICEF's weakness in monitoring results from its own programmes or activities. Specific initiatives often do not have a strong monitoring and evaluation plan from the start of the initiative. Findings of crucial studies are sometimes buried unused either because of UNICEF's failure to disseminate it well, or because the government is not keen on publicising the results. Even UNICEF's own work is often not well documented or shared with others – whether governments, partners, or even other UNICEF offices.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNICEF COs

The recommendations listed below flow directly from the findings of the mapping regarding the biggest challenges faced by quality initiatives, their success drivers, the lessons learned, countries' difference experiences with CFS, and the potential leverage points identified for bringing changes in pedagogy and for improving learning. Keeping these in mind, an attempt was made to identify what are the areas where UNICEF could utilise its strengths to have the greatest impact, given its constraints. All of these together yield five recommendations for areas where UNICEF could most strategically contribute to improving teaching-learning quality in South Asia, followed by five recommendations of ways to strengthen UNICEF's internal ways of working so as to maximise its contribution.

### **Most strategic potential UNICEF contributions for improving learning in South Asia**

#### **1. Shift the focus to learning**

A clear message that emerged from the mapping is that the call of the day is to focus on learning outcomes. As one Education Chief pointed out, if we talk only about quality, it may not necessarily lead to learning, whereas focusing on learning outcomes will inevitably streamline all other interventions necessary for quality. It is a matter of not confusing the means with the ends: with programmes like CFS, the goal is not simply to implement the programme properly – but to enable students to achieve learning outcomes. Since political support has been found to be such an important driver for the success of quality initiatives, and given UNICEF's trusted status and close government relationships, UNICEF is well positioned to advocate for learning as a right of children. UNICEF's advocacy and discourse must be strong in this area, particularly at senior policy levels – so that even if political leadership changes, new

leaders will know that ensuring learning is the priority. UNICEF can point to research that shows that countries that invest not only on educational inputs but also on producing good learning outcomes, have higher rates of future income and economic growth (Greaney & Kellaghan 2008, Hanushek & Woessmann 2007). Given its strength in evidence-based advocacy and its international resource base, UNICEF could also help to identify what works for improving learning, and to advise governments on the most strategic investments that can yield results in improving learning. Though learning outcomes is the call of the day, it is also a difficult and unexplored area. If UNICEF South Asia decides that it wants to make learning its primary agenda – for which it sounds like there is willingness across COs – then much more is needed in generating evidence, showing good working models, strengthening systems, developing its own technical capacity and resource pools in this area, and forging new strategic partnerships (discussed later).

#### **2. Show good working models on the ground for improving pedagogy and learning**

At present, South Asian governments are struggling with how to improve pedagogy and learning outcomes. Even globally, there is poor understanding of what interventions can actually lead to enhanced learning in developing countries, and even more so within a South Asian context. A key strategic contribution UNICEF South Asia could make is to identify or create islands of excellence, of working models that are successfully able to bring changes in pedagogy and learning within the government system. This could involve a combination of piloting innovative strategies, and also identifying outliers within the current system who have been able to show results – whether from government, civil society, private, academic or international actors. Rather than trying to bring in a

new model from outside, it may be more successful to build on the good that's already happening within the country. UNICEF could help to legitimise such outliers by showcasing them to the government as demonstrations of what could work, and flagging them as potential partners to the government. It could connect these outliers with each other to build a platform that could gain enough momentum to create a viable alternative to the status quo. It could also analyse and help evaluate such outliers to identify lessons and key leverage points for enhancing learning, and to highlight innovative models that could be worth upscaling. Finally, especially in a South Asian context, a discussion of improved learning outcomes cannot be divorced from a discussion of how to bring pedagogical shifts: pedagogy and learning outcomes must go hand in hand. Demonstrating good working models of what learning-centred pedagogy could look like for different subjects, and also of transformative teacher training models that are successfully able to bring shifts in teachers' beliefs and practices, could be an important and much-needed resource for building teachers' capacity.

### **3. Help shift assessment towards testing competencies**

Another strategic contribution UNICEF could make is to help shift national assessments away from testing memorization of content, and more towards testing understanding and skills. This is similar to what UNICEF India has been trying to facilitate, to build the capacity of national institutions to design test items that assess competencies. Given that the strong exam culture has been identified as a key constraint to bringing learning-centred pedagogies, and given that it is not very realistic to expect that to suddenly change, this could be one way to use that strong exam culture in contributing to the shift towards learner-centred pedagogies – by changing the exam system in such a way that it necessitates more learning-centred pedagogy to adequately prepare students to succeed in exams. In a similar example, one incentive that a few countries like Bhutan and India noted for a renewed national interest in integrating skills as part of learning, is that

their governments are interested in taking part in PISA in 2021 – and they realise that students will need to be much stronger in competencies to be able to succeed in these international assessments. Shifting national assessments could be a key leverage point for bringing changes not only in classroom pedagogy but also in teacher training pedagogy – forcing training programmes to change to adequately equip teachers to prepare students to succeed in competency-based examinations. UNICEF could simultaneously help identify good models and resources for building skills among students, which would be more sought after if national assessment systems were to shift towards testing competencies.

### **4. Build systemic capacity to analyse and use data for improving learning**

While many South Asian countries are moving towards strengthening their national assessment systems, perhaps even more important than conducting regular assessments is to build government capacity at all levels to analyse and use assessment data for strengthening learning interventions. At present, most national assessments are approached as mere data collection exercises for reporting information to senior officials, rather than as a tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning (Sankar 2015). A clear roadmap is needed for how analysis of assessment data can lead to informed decision-making to bring changes in teacher training, teacher support, curriculum reform or instructional materials, all with the view to enhancing learning outcomes. This requires better collaboration between key departments of the Ministry, and UNICEF is well placed to play a convening role to improve this. When assessment results show either improvements or decreases in specific subject areas, grade levels or geographic localities, this needs to be analysed to understand the reasons and implications for differential programming. Perhaps UNICEF can demonstrate and help build systematic capacity to disseminate assessment results to different stakeholders through simple user-friendly brochures, dialogues, media, etc., which should be adequately planned and budgeted for.

## 5. Strengthen accountability for learning

Another area highlighted for UNICEF's contribution, given its close working relationship and respect with the government, is to help strengthen government accountability for ensuring learning. One way of doing this could be to empower parents to demand learning, and to raise their awareness that they have a right to demand this for their children. An example is UNICEF India's efforts to help the government share with parents simple learning objectives that their children should be able to demonstrate at each class level, so that parents can hold schools accountable for learning. As one Specialist pointed out, UNICEF tends to work on the supply side of providing education quality, without raising the demand for it. Another initiative that has been found to increase accountability has been to strengthen government education monitoring systems to provide educational data in the public domain. Further, since teacher accountability is a key issue highlighted given the politicisation of the teaching force in many South Asian countries, perhaps one area UNICEF could explore is to work with teacher unions on ways to strengthen teacher accountability. One Specialist, after acknowledging that this would be a very difficult area to work in, posed the question: If not UNICEF, then who?

## Modus operandi: Recommendations for UNICEF's internal ways of working

The recommendations below are made responding specifically to the limitations and challenges identified, and synthesising key areas for potential improvement that were highlighted in people's interview responses – so as to maximise the contribution that UNICEF can make to improving education quality.

### 1. Redefine CFS for South Asia: Learning-Centred Education

As this mapping has shown, the focus of quality initiatives in South Asia has been more on the inputs of quality – which are certainly important, but not sufficient for ensuring outcomes. The CFS model in its very design was perhaps focused more on promoting inclusive, child-centred and democratic school

climates, rather than on how to ensure child-centred pedagogies or improved learning outcomes. This raises a question regarding whether CFS should be the predominant model promoted by UNICEF in South Asia, where the learning crisis is so deep and where any discussion of improving education quality must explicitly articulate how to improve teaching and learning outcomes. However, just because most CFS programmes thus far may not have explicitly targeted changes in teaching-learning outcomes, this does not mean that CFS does not have the potential to do so. Since CFS as a concept and term have already gained much traction and momentum in South Asia, perhaps there is need to redefine what CFS means for South Asia, with a greater focus on and articulation of how to improve teaching-learning outcomes within this context. Rather than pushing for 'child-friendly' education which has been found to sometimes raise barriers in a South Asian cultural context, perhaps the focus should be on 'learning-centred education' – designing a contextualised teaching process that can best support learning in this context, according to basic principles of learning. These include having an inclusive and democratic learning environment – so those positive dimensions of CFS which are also essential components of quality education should certainly not be lost. But the goal is not merely to create an inclusive and democratic environment as the ultimate end – but to create a democratic and inclusive environment that successfully contributes to children's learning. An important caution is that an overemphasis on merely cognitive learning outcomes measured by test scores can sometimes lead to dysfunctional responses such as student copying, teachers 'teaching to the test', or officials modifying data. The focus needs to be on a holistic view of learning that includes knowledge, skills and values – which must be measured in more holistic ways than merely a single test score.

### 2. Conduct a systems thinking analysis to identify the key leverage points where UNICEF can have the greatest impact for showing changes in classrooms

A clear message that emerged from the mapping is that bringing change in education quality is highly complex, and years of effort

have brought limited change. Systems thinking is an approach that has been found useful for analysing highly complex systems, seeing the big picture, understanding how different components interrelate with each other, how some of our proposed solutions might sometimes create greater damage, and how to identify the most strategic leverage points to target for change. Identifying different factors that impact on learning as done in the current mapping is only the first step. The next crucial step is to conduct a thoughtful systems thinking analysis to map what is the relationship between factors like political instability, weak systemic capacity, poor governance, poor teacher support, and so on, to identify which factors may be driving the others, and where are the points where UNICEF can most impact the system for change. Often, separate efforts are made for improving each different government body that impacts on learning quality (for example, departments in charge of assessments, curriculum, teacher training, and Directorate of Schools). A systems analysis would analyse the interplay between these different departments and could point UNICEF towards the most strategic entry point for systemic change, keeping in mind the system as a whole and how activities of one organisation would impact another. Such an exercise could perhaps be facilitated by ROSA for the South Asia Education network, and would help address a key UNICEF limitation highlighted in the review: its tendency to try and do everything, and ending up showing limited results. Identifying UNICEF's most strategic impact areas from a systems thinking perspective would help UNICEF to identify just a few areas for it to focus on, enabling it to have a coherent voice and greater impact in policy advocacy by harping on a few consistent messages as an entire country team.

### **3. Leverage global resources for internal and external capacity-building**

This is an important area for UNICEF given that one of its strengths is its access to international resources, and that one of its limitations identified is its lack of technical expertise in the area of improving learning quality. Perhaps half a day could be set aside

by Education teams at regular intervals for their own professional development, to keep up with latest research and thinking on educational topics relevant to their work. COs could also explore creative ways to expose senior government decision-makers and institutional leaders to latest international thinking and best practices in education. Current inter-agency work on Sustainable Development Goal 4 such as the starting collaboration between UNICEF and UNESCO on capacity development needs of relevant ministry staff in education, presents a timely opportunity for this. This can provide a platform to identify capacity gaps in planning, budgeting and monitoring of education quality interventions, and training modules could then be developed to address those gaps.

### **4. Define standards and strategies that are appropriate to contextual ground realities**

It was felt that in UNICEF there is need for a shared understanding of the importance of defining learning standards and their measurement if the goal is enhancing learning outcomes – but to be able to define these keeping in mind the contextual challenges. For example, given that many countries in the region face basic issues of insecurity and disasters, there is need to think of setting learning standards and strategies that are appropriate for such fragile contexts. Given the unique challenges that South Asia faces with issues like political instability, disasters, low teacher capacity and motivation, poor governance, or corruption, what works in other contexts may not necessarily work in this context. How do we design strategies that take into account those limitations, and that build on the constraints and leverage them for success? (An example of this is the recommendation of taking the constraint of the exam culture prevalent in the region, and leveraging that for success by changing the way national assessments are designed).

### **5. Build more diverse strategic partnerships for improving teaching-learning quality**

Another recommendation that emerged from the mapping is the need to explore a totally new range of partnerships, and to look for good practices beyond UNICEF initiatives. Several people mentioned the need for





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UNICEF to facilitate learning to flow from the private sector to inform the public sector – the government may reject something that comes directly from the private sector, but if UNICEF is the one to present it they are more open to accepting it. It was felt that there is need for a deeper analysis of why the private sector, using the same local teachers who are products of the same system, are able to produce results in terms of learning outcomes that are sometimes comparable to global standards. Private schools are often seen as competitors rather than partners, and there is need to bring in their expertise especially given the scale on which one must deliver results. The private sector is playing an increasing role in many South Asian countries, with provinces like Punjab in Pakistan exploring the feasibility of subsidising low-cost private schools. In this context, ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in low-cost private schools becomes an important part of ensuring equitable inclusive education for all children. It was also surprising to note from the survey how little

UNICEF engages with its sister UN agencies, compared to its engagement with NGOs (see survey responses in Appendix 3). One respondent noted that there sometimes tends to be a competitive spirit rather than sitting together to determine what is the comparative advantage of each DP and how we could possibly split some of the areas rather than overlapping initiatives. Identifying key priority areas for improving quality (as suggested in recommendation 2) may help in identifying where are the areas UNICEF may be less strong in and may require collaboration with private, academic, DP or civil society partners. For example, in order to meet its challenging target of reaching 100,000 previously out-of-school 8-14-year-olds, Second Chance Education in Bangladesh explored a variety of effective NGO models to partner with for reaching the hardest to reach children in different contexts. Perhaps a variety of effective models can be similarly identified and partnered with for improving learning in diverse contexts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROSA SUPPORT

Across the board, COs were appreciative of the role ROSA has already been playing in supporting their work, and felt that ROSA has an important role to play in ensuring the success of their work. Stemming directly from the recommendations for COs, several key contributions that could be made by ROSA are listed below.

### **1. Support in identifying key leverage points for improving teaching-learning outcomes, through research, knowledge management, and technical support.**

Given the lack of clarity across COs and governments on what are the key investments that could yield the greatest results in improving teaching-learning quality, this was identified as a key area where ROSA could provide guidance for improving quality. A key part of this could be through facilitating research and evaluations around this area, as discussed in the next sub-section. In addition to direct investments in knowledge production, ROSA and a good partner could keep scanning the external professional literature for relevant items, thus harvesting existing research for useful insights. It was also felt that ROSA could provide technical support (either directly or through international partners) to COs in designing and implementing quality initiatives that can really impact teaching-learning outcomes. One Specialist pointed out that ROSA could help mobilise greater resources (both technical and financial) for improving learning across grades. Since learning is a relatively 'invisible' area, more funding often goes to the more 'visible' impact areas such as education in emergencies or social cohesion.

### **2. Create database of good test items that countries can draw from, especially items measuring children's understanding and competencies**

A recent landscape analysis on learning assessments in South Asia (Sankar 2015)

found that although most South Asian countries are moving towards establishing large-scale assessment systems, the assessment tools are largely designed by individuals without the needed expertise in designing quality test items for a system-level assessment. While it was felt that having a regional assessment as done in some other regions may not be feasible for South Asia given political tensions, what could work is to have a regional database with test items for measuring specific learning objectives at different grade levels, which countries could draw from in designing their national assessments. This would both raise the quality of national assessments, and would save the costs needed for each country to develop high-quality test items.

### **3. Regular opportunities to document and share good work happening on the ground**

A key area for ROSA support highlighted in both surveys and interviews was support in documenting and sharing best practices across countries, specifically around improving teaching-learning quality. When survey respondents were asked to rank on a scale of 1-5 how well they felt their country's quality initiatives have been documented and disseminated, the average response was 2.9. Within the network, one option could be something as simple as ensuring that all countries' planning documents are updated and accessible to each other on Sharepoint. It was felt that documentation should capture both the successes and failures, so that others can learn from it and avoid similar mistakes. UNICEF teams felt that though there is good work happening on the ground, UNICEF's contribution has not been captured well. They themselves do not necessarily have the time or skills needed to write about and publish it to showcase it at national, regional and global levels. Sharing of 'best practices' cannot be of self-proclaimed best practices – it requires some external review and validation

of whether they are indeed best practices, so that other states or countries can learn from those that are indeed best practices and potentially replicable in their contexts. Several Specialists expressed that they found the interviews conducted as part of the current Mapping to be quite enriching and motivating – to get a chance to step back and reflect on what has been UNICEF's contributions in their country over the years, and to get a global or regional perspective on their work. They felt that perhaps this is an exercise that ROSA could facilitate periodically.

#### **4. Organise capacity-building opportunities for COs around improving teaching-learning quality**

Given that focusing on teaching-learning outcomes is a relatively new area for most COs, ROSA could play a key role in building the capacity of COs in this area. ROSA can help expose COs to the latest thinking and international expertise around relevant educational topics, present these in synthesised, reader-friendly ways that can be easily digested by over-stretched UNICEF staff, and disseminate it in ways that are contextualised to South Asian countries. Another option could be to organise monthly teleconferences with Education teams across South Asia around a specific complex topic related to improving learning (e.g. shifting pedagogy, making assessment data more usable, and so on). This could provide an opportunity for different COs to discuss what have been their successes and challenges, and to brainstorm together for how to have an impact in that area. One Chief commented that we need 'laser-like focus' on specific

topics, and it would help to focus on a single topic for an extended period of time – not just one conference – to be able to go deeper into how to make a dent in that area. One Specialist pointed out that even if a particular CO or field staff does not already have capacity in a specific emerging topic, there should be avenues for them to build their own competence in that area.

#### **5. Build capacity of senior decision-makers for enhancing learning**

Another area highlighted by both surveys and interviews was that ROSA could facilitate building capacity of government leaders and potentially DPs in the area of improving teaching-learning quality. A specific area highlighted was building the capacity of national systems to analyse and present findings from national assessments in ways that can be used to inform teacher preparation or support, so that the data better contributes to improved learning outcomes (like the workshop ROSA recently helped facilitate with NEAS in Pakistan). ROSA could provide technical or financial support for involving experts (whether consultants or agencies) to support governments in this area. Another option could be to expose senior decision-makers to global best practices either through international experts, exchange seminars or through organising international learning trips (like exposure visits UNICEF facilitated for teams from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to India's ABL programme, which contributed to inspiring programmes like Multi-level pedagogy in Sri Lanka and Each Child Learns in Bangladesh).



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since targeting changes in teaching-learning outcomes is a relatively new area for UNICEF and also globally, it is an area that requires much further research and evidence generation. Even in the recommendations listed in the current report, there are some assumptions being made that would benefit from further research. For example, is there any evidence that conducting Large-scale Assessments can help to improve learning? If so, under what conditions is this the case? From the online survey, the majority of UNICEF respondents (56%) felt that while some evaluations have taken place of their country's quality initiatives, there is need for more robust evaluations. 28% of respondents felt that there have been almost no rigorous evaluations conducted in their country, while only 17% felt their country's quality initiatives have been well evaluated. As UNICEF launches into this relatively new area of enhancing teaching and learning outcomes, having a strong monitoring and evaluation plan in place from the start of these initiatives will be all the more important to identify what interventions do or do not lead to improvements in teaching-learning outcomes.

One thing is clear: measuring interventions' impact on learning is no easy task. All sorts of complications arise, as seen from recent evaluations conducted in the region of ABL in India and CFA in Sri Lanka. CFS models may vary considerably in their implementation even within the same country, and the same model in different contexts may show insignificant impact on learning outcomes, depending on a variety of other factors. This makes it difficult to evaluate from a research perspective, given the challenges in separating the impact of contextual intervening variables from the impact of the intervention. Control groups are often not completely independent or neutral, given the unanticipated effects of the intervention even on non-project schools in the same locality.

Moreover, a single evaluation may not be equally impactful for different audiences. Before conducting a certain type of research it would be advantageous to think through who is the research intended to influence: whether senior government leaders, field practitioners, UNICEF staff, educationists – and then design different types of research and their dissemination mechanisms accordingly.

Relevant to the question of whether it may be beneficial to invest in conducting a larger regional evaluation of the impact that CFS programmes in South Asia have had on improving learning outcomes, this mapping suggests that many of the CFS programmes in South Asia may not have explicitly aimed at bringing changes in teaching and learning outcomes. The few countries that did have a greater focus on pedagogy and learning and may be already able to show changes in these indicators, have already had evaluations conducted in recent years (India, Sri Lanka, and to some extent Nepal and Bhutan). A deeper analysis, dissemination and discussion of these studies' findings within the region may be an important first step. The other four countries in the region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan) have not really had large-scale structured CFS interventions that were targeted explicitly at bringing changes in teaching and learning outcomes – thus it may be unrealistic to expect them to show such changes. Thus a large-scale regional evaluation to isolate CFS's impact on learning through collecting student learning data may not be the most strategic use of time and resources. However a much smaller-scale self-evaluation exercise for UNICEF and other stakeholders in different countries may be useful in reflecting on the progress achieved and gaps that need to be addressed.

Another strategic use of resources at this time may be to invest in identifying, studying and



leveraging islands of excellence in different countries in the region, from across sectors – not just UNICEF-supported initiatives. This could involve a mapping of any initiatives that have had an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning, or at least show the potential to do so even if not yet measured – whether supported by UNICEF, the government, DPs, NGOs, INGOs or private partners. While in recent years an increasing number of systematic reviews or meta-analyses have been conducted to examine what interventions improve learning outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (Evans & Popova 2015), results have been inconclusive, and few of these have focused specifically on South Asia. Moreover, systematic reviews typically depend on reviewing existing evaluations based on randomised control trials, and not on reviewing promising models on the ground that may not yet have been evaluated. UNICEF's field presence makes it ideally positioned to conduct such a mapping, in contrast to other DPs who may not have a presence on the ground.

Studying such initiatives would help UNICEF learn from what are the lessons and principles that can inform its own strategy and advocacy in this area, and to create a database of proven best practices that work for improving teaching-learning quality. It can also help leverage these initiatives by bringing them to the notice of governments and DPs as potential models for upscaling, or as potential partners in quality initiatives. Moreover, connecting such innovative outliers with each other can also help generate momentum in creating viable alternatives to the mainstream, which would increase pressure on public systems to reform. Perhaps an initial mapping of such initiatives could involve interviews, focus groups, online surveys, and some site visits to the innovative models in different countries. This could perhaps be followed by a few smaller-scale field evaluations of a few of the promising initiatives identified, if there has been no evaluation conducted of those initiatives to date. Identifying what has worked for improving teaching and learning quality within the region, could present a first

step towards redefining what CFS could look like within South Asia. Such a review would also fit within UNICEF's larger global agenda of generating contextualised evidence on what promotes improved equitable learning outcomes in different regions.

To summarise, this mapping suggests four recommendations for further research that could be facilitated by ROSA for advancing the agenda of quality education in South Asia:

1. **Working with COs to facilitate deeper analysis, discussion and dissemination of findings** from existing evaluations of CFS in South Asia (particularly from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal).
2. **Self-evaluation of UNICEF's quality initiatives in each country**, for key stakeholders from UNICEF and other partner organisations to collectively reflect on the positive achievements and gaps of UNICEF's contribution to improving education quality (focused on CFS as well as other major programmes targeting improvement in education quality). This could involve a combination of reflection workshops, questionnaires, analysis of existing data, and a few site visits.
3. **Mapping of existing outliers who have been able to show improvements in teaching and learning**, to look at what actually works for bringing change on the ground. These examples could be chosen from across different sectors, and the mapping could build on the current mapping but involve a greater focus on only those initiatives that demonstrate impact on teaching and learning outcomes. It could involve some field visits in addition to document review, questionnaires and interviews with different stakeholders.
4. **More rigorous evaluations of a few key outliers identified in the above mapping** that may not have already been evaluated. This could involve field data collection using a randomised control trial model to isolate the impact of these initiatives on learning processes and outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

It is sometimes assumed that the challenge of providing universal quality education in a region like South Asia is one of financial resources. Experience has shown this not to be the case. One Education Officer stated that the problem is no longer just one of lack of funds – it is now a problem of not knowing where to invest the available funds so as to yield improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The efforts of the last decade show that achieving universal enrolment or even improving school environments to make them more inclusive and child-friendly is not automatically translating into learning.

Perhaps in a region like South Asia with millions of first-generation learners, a poorly-skilled teaching workforce, poor-quality teacher preparation, a deep-rooted culture of teacher-driven pedagogies centred around examinations, and various conflict and natural disaster crises, 'quality' may mean something different than in high-performing education systems like those of South Korea or Singapore. The high progress of these educational systems have been the result of decades of system-wide reforms including defining clear learning standards, developing

curricula well-aligned with these standards, regularly assessing student mastery of these standards, and designing quality teacher training that attracts a talented pool of students who are motivated to teach the demanding curriculum effectively (Murnane & Ganiman 2014). South Asia may have a long way to go to reach this level of effectiveness in its education systems.

However what might be a more achievable conception of 'quality' for South Asia at this point in time is to develop learning-centred education systems, able to ensure that the majority of children are able to achieve basic competencies appropriate to their grade level – compared to the mere one-third of children who are achieving this right now.

The global drive for improving the quality of learning, especially in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4, creates an opportunity to leverage both technical and financial resources for fresh interventions for improving the quality of teaching and learning outcomes in South Asia – and to rethink what can be UNICEF's strategic contribution in this endeavour.



# APPENDICES

## 1. PEOPLE SURVEYED AND INTERVIEWED FOR THE MAPPING

### UNICEF Surveys – Countries Represented:

1	India	7 / 41%
2	Afghanistan	2 / 12%
3	Nepal	2 / 12%
4	Pakistan	2 / 12%
5	Bangladesh	1 / 6%
6	Bhutan	1 / 6%
7	Maldives	1 / 6%
8	Sri Lanka	1 / 6%

### Position of respondents:

1	Educational Specialist	13 / 72%
2	Educational Officer	5 / 28%

### Partner Surveys – Countries Represented:

1	Bangladesh	4 / 33%
2	Afghanistan	3 / 25%
3	Nepal	3 / 25%
4	India	2 / 17%

### Organisational affiliation of respondents:

1	UNICEF	4 / 33%
2	Development Partner	2 / 17%
3	Government	2 / 17%
4	NGO/INGO	2 / 17%
5	Other	2 / 17%



### List of persons interviewed:

1. Afghanistan CO: Aisling Falconer
2. Bangladesh CO: Md Qausar Hossain
3. Bhutan CO: Bishnu Bhakta Mishra
4. India CO: Euphrates Efosi Wose, Ramachandra Rao Begur
5. Maldives CO: Mazeena Jameel
6. Nepal CO: Marilyn Hoar, Dipu Shakya
7. Pakistan CO: Sadaf Zulfiqar
8. India Field Offices: Froagh Ahmad Jami, Sulagna Roy, Reshma Agarwal, Aruna Rathnam, Binay Pattanayak (former staff)
9. Partners: Helen Sherpa (World Education, Nepal), Manzoor Ahmed (Consultant for ECL, Bangladesh)
10. ROSA: Ivan Coursac, Urmila Sarkar

## 2. TOOLS FOR SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

### Survey for UNICEF Staff

1. What country do you represent?
2. What is your position?

#### Reflections on quality initiatives

3. Please list what you think are the major (3-5) UNICEF-supported initiatives aimed at improving education quality in your country in the past decade? (For example, you could include key initiatives aimed at strengthening pedagogy, assessment, equitable outcomes, supportive systems, etc.)
4. Of the initiatives listed above, which would you say have had the biggest impact improving each of the following (please indicate separately): a. the quality of teaching/ pedagogy (to make it less teacher-centred and more child-friendly)? b. the quality of learning outcomes?
5. In your own words, how would you define 'quality' within education? How would you measure progress in this area of work in general?
6. What is your understanding of 'Child Friendly Schools' (CFS)?

#### Systemic impact

7. Regarding the highest-impact initiatives you listed earlier, to what extent has the government taken ownership over these initiatives?
8. In your opinion, how successful has UNICEF been in influencing policy development on quality aspects of education? (For example, has UNICEF's work been able to significantly shape key strategies in the Government's Education Sector Plans?) (1 = Not very much; 5 = Highly)
9. In your opinion, to what extent does the government have the capacity to implement large-scale or national initiatives for improving the quality of education and learning?
10. To what extent do you feel UNICEF has contributed to strengthening government capacity to analyse and use assessment data in order to strengthen learning?
11. Which of the following disadvantaged groups do you feel have been most benefitted by UNICEF-support quality initiatives in your country?

#### Partnerships

12. Which of the following types of organisations has UNICEF closely partnered with in your country?
13. Regarding the organisational categories listed in the previous question (Government, other UN agencies, NGO/INGO, private sector, academia, public institutions), please answer the following: a. Which of these has UNICEF partnered with most closely in your country? b. Please list specific names of organisations in your country that UNICEF has closely partnered with.

#### Looking back...

14. What works: a. What in your opinion have been some of the strengths of learning initiatives in your country, or what has worked well? b. From your experience, what do you think are the key drivers that help improve quality?
15. What do you think have been some of the biggest challenges faced by learning initiatives in your country?
16. How do you think UNICEF's focus in your country in terms of quality-related initiatives has changed in recent years?
17. What are some of the key lessons learned in implementing these initiatives?

#### Looking forward...

18. What do you think are the most promising innovations in your country in the area of improving teaching-learning quality, which would be worth documenting?
19. What are the potentials and challenges regarding the upscaling of any promising initiative(s) currently in pilot phase?
20. In your opinion, have quality initiatives in your country been adequately evaluated to determine whether they are successful and cost-effective?
21. To what extent do you think the results of your country's quality initiatives have been adequately disseminated/ communicated?
22. What kind of external or regional support, if any, would be useful in implementing, evaluating or disseminating these initiatives? What do you think ROSA or HQ could do better to support CO-level work on education quality?

## Survey for Partners

1. What country/ region do you represent?
2. What type of organisation do you represent?

### Reflections on UNICEF's quality initiatives

3. What do you feel has been some of UNICEF's biggest contributions to improving education quality in your country?
4. Please list any specific UNICEF-supported initiatives that you feel have had an impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning in your country.
5. What do you see as some of UNICEF's strengths?
6. What do you see as some of UNICEF's limitations?

### Systemic impact

7. In your opinion, how successful has UNICEF been in influencing policy development on quality aspects of education? (1 = Not very; 5 = Highly)
8. In your opinion, to what extent does the government have the capacity to implement large-scale or national initiatives for improving the quality of education and learning?

### Looking back...

9. What do you feel are some of the biggest challenges for improving teaching-learning quality in your country?
10. From your experience, what do you think have been key drivers that have helped improve teaching-learning quality in your country?
11. What are some of the key lessons learned from efforts to improve education quality in your country?

### Looking forward...

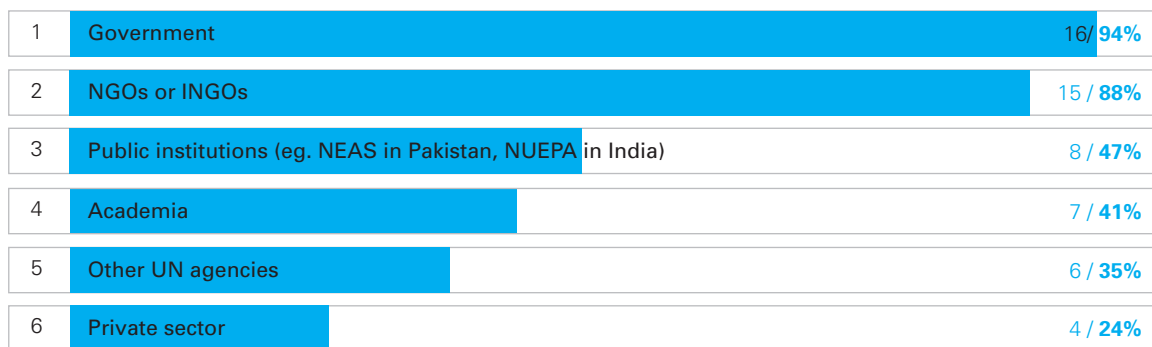
12. What do you feel could be UNICEF's strategic role in the coming years in improving education quality in your country?
13. What recommendations do you have for strengthening UNICEF's contribution towards improving education quality in your country?
14. Are there any promising UNICEF-supported innovations in your country in the area of improving teaching-learning quality, which would be worth documenting or upscaling?
15. In your opinion, what are some need areas or gaps for improving teaching-learning quality in your country, where UNICEF may be able to contribute?

## Broad interview questions (customised for each respondent):

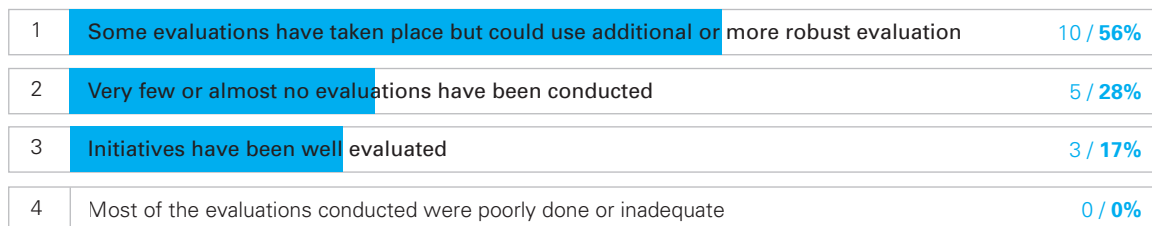
1. What do you feel has been some of UNICEF's biggest contributions to improving education quality in your country?
2. What do you think were the biggest strengths of these quality initiatives? What made them work well?
3. What do you think are the biggest bottlenecks to improving education quality in [country]? What do you see as the way forward in addressing these challenges?
4. What do you see as UNICEF's biggest strengths?
5. What do you see as UNICEF's biggest limitations?
6. Regarding the shift from teacher-centred teaching to more child-centred pedagogy which many south Asian countries are struggling to bring about
  - a. Where do you feel most teachers in [country] are at in terms of this shift? What areas have they progressed in, and what more needs to happen?
  - b. What do you feel are the biggest barriers hindering this shift, and
  - c. What do you feel could most help – what is the way forward?
7. Non-UNICEF initiatives: Are you aware of any non-UNICEF-supported initiatives (either in the government, NGO or private sector) that have worked really well for improving the quality of teaching and learning?
8. From your experience, what do you think have been key drivers that have helped improve teaching-learning quality in your country?
9. In your opinion, what are some key gaps for improving quality where UNICEF may best be able to contribute? What do you feel could be UNICEF's strategic role in the coming years for improving education quality in [country]?
10. Do you have any overall recommendations for strengthening UNICEF's contribution towards improving education quality in [country]?

### 3. SAMPLE RESPONSE OVERVIEWS FROM UNICEF SURVEYS

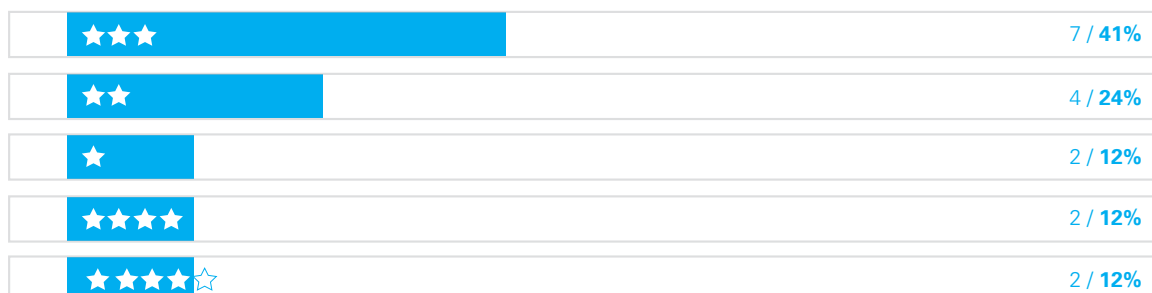
Which of the following types of organisations has UNICEF closely partnered with in your country?



In your opinion, have quality initiatives in your country been adequately evaluated to determine whether they are successful and cost-effective?



To what extent do you think the results of your country’s quality initiatives have been adequately disseminated/ communicated?



★★★★☆  
2.88 Average rating



## 4. EXTRACT OF SAMPLE ENTRIES FROM THE TAXONOMY

The table below displays the categories that were chosen for creating the taxonomy of recent UNICEF-supported quality interventions, and also provides examples of two sample entries. The current taxonomy has been compiled into a separate excel sheet, which could be used to create a future searchable online database of quality initiatives in South Asia.

Categories	Description	Sample entries	
<b>Country</b>		Afghanistan	Nepal
<b>Area</b>		Assessment; Capacity-building	Monitoring
<b>Name of Initiative</b>		Capacity Building of Primary Teachers on Assessment for Learning (Formative Assessment)	Equity Strategy and Equity Index
<b>Brief Description</b>	< 150 words	This project within the CFS project focuses on the second component of CFS, Effective Teaching and Learning. AfL is defined as the process through which assessment information is used by teachers and students to increase achievement and improve teaching practices. Certain components of AfL had begun to be developed by the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Teacher Education Department (TED), but the complete system had not yet been integrated into the education system. In close collaboration with the TED, a UNICEF consultant developed training materials for AfL, including a Facilitator's Guide to AfL, a Teacher's Reference Manual (TRM) on AfL, innovative multimedia to support the TRM, and a cascade training plan to reach 1,500 formal schools and 1,600 community based schools and accelerated learning centres.	Nepal's consolidated Equity Strategy has a two-fold approach: it captures both the institutionalization and use of a planning and programming tool (the Equity index) and the rationalization of strategies being applied to provide second chance education to out of school children (OOSC), as well as reduction of disparities in participation and learning outcomes. With the technical support of UNICEF and in line with the Education Sector Plan, the index was developed to capture district level disparities on access, participation and learning outcomes in basic and secondary level education. At national level, the index allows ranking of all districts based on educational outcomes with a strong equity lens: priority districts are identified, along with the educational component in need of support, as well as the main drivers of inequity in each district. At district level, the "unpacking" of the equity index value allows better targeting of interventions for the most disadvantaged and is intended to lead to greater efficiency of resource allocation in the future.
<b>Source documents</b>	Author, Date, publisher, web link (internal/public)	Manning-Riley (2016). 'Capacity Building of Primary Teachers on Assessment for Learning (Formative Assessment). UNICEF Afghanistan	COAR 2015, 2016 (internal); Nepal CO.
<b>Funding partners</b>		Japan, USAID	Thematic, HQs
<b>Implementing organizations</b>		MoE	Ministry of Education, Department of Education
<b>Start Date</b>		2016	2016
<b>End Date</b>		2017	Ongoing
<b>Duration</b>		Over 2 years	
<b>Completed or Ongoing</b>	C or O	O	O

<b>Type of Intervention</b>	Downstream/ service delivery, or upstream/ policy level	Downstream	Upstream
<b>MoRES Categories</b>	Demand, Supply, Quality, Systems	Quality, systems	Systems
<b>Quality Categories</b>	Learners, Environ- ment, Materials, Processes, Out- comes, Systems	Universal outcomes	Supportive systems
<b>Target Group</b>	Students, Teachers, Schools, System, OOSC, CWSN, Community	Teachers	System
<b>Coverage</b>	National/states/dis- tricts (with names); Numbers	At the time of this report, 2,678 participants had com- pleted the training, about 25% of all planned participants (18 provinces)	5 districts identified for Equity strate- gy implementation based on ranking of districts following equity index
<b>Budget</b>	Total cost, with breakdown		USD 71500
<b>Cost per child</b>			
<b>Equity dimensions</b>	Focus on girls, boys, minorities, Dalit, refugees, CWSN, IDPs, children at risk or in crisis		Equity-based planning; Equity-based monitoring
<b>Existing evaluations</b>	Brief description, methodology, analysis, impact variables		
<b>Key findings</b>	Overview of results, Major strengths & chal- lenges	Preliminary results of the Pre- and Post-Test show the train- ing to be effective in changing knowledge & attitudes of par- ticipants. Anecdotal feedback from government partners and teachers clearly supports Assessment for Learning.	
<b>For further information</b>	List of links, docu- ments, or source of further information	See Manning-Riley (2016). 'Capacity Building of Primary Teachers on Assessment for Learning. Contact Afghanistan CO	Contact Nepal CO

## 5. OVERVIEW OF QUALITY INITIATIVES LISTED IN THE TAXONOMY, LISTED BY COUNTRY AND ORGANISED BY 6 QUALITY DIMENSIONS

The table below displays the categories that were chosen for creating the taxonomy of recent UNICEF-supported quality interventions, and also provides examples of two sample entries. The current taxonomy has been compiled into a separate excel sheet, which could be used to create a future searchable online database of quality initiatives in South Asia.

Focus Area	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>1. Thriving learners</b>								
<b>Early childhood education</b>		Early Learning for Child Development Project (ELCDP), Development of PPE curriculum, Development of Teachers training module and Teachers Guide; Development of Activity Books & storybooks for pre-primary students	ECCD Investment Case Study; Opening early learning centres; Setting up ECCD centres for urban vulnerable groups; Minimum quality standards for ECCD centres;	Strengthening Early Childhood Education	Advocacy towards an integrated ECD policy framework;	Advocacy around early childhood development; Integrated district ECD plans; Developing ECD materials; Training to ECD facilitators; Strengthening socio-emotional learning in ECD centres	Policy advocacy on ECE; Demonstration of ECE models + systems strengthening; Monitoring of ECE indicators	Support in developing a common national Early Childhood Education curriculum framework; Multisectoral implementation mechanism for ECD; Support in drafting national ECE standards for pre-school facilities, curriculum & teaching standards, and school readiness rapid assessment toolkit
<b>2. Welcoming learning environment</b>								
<b>Out-of-school children, children at risk &amp; accelerated learning</b>	Community-based education/ Accelerated Learning Centres; "Let Us Learn" ALCs programme; Child-friendly Spaces	Accelerated Ability Based Learning (AABL); Second Chance Education		Out-of-school study	Development of policy framework for provision of alternative education programmes	Out-of-School Children Study; Strengthening EMIS to include reporting on OOSC; Bridge classes for mainstreaming adolescents into formal schools; Alternative Learning Pathway study.	OOSC Study; National Plan of Action to Accelerate Education; Every Child in School Communication Strategy; Integrated package in communities at risk of child labour; Assessment of displaced children's educational needs; Comprehensive review of ALP in Pakistan	Development, coordination and monitoring of OOSC Action Plan; Establishing a divisional level inter-agency mechanism to address issues of out-of-school children
<b>Gender equality</b>	Teacher training on gender equality; Afghanistan Girls' Education Initiative; Policy advocacy for girls' education and Community-based education	Gender Toolkits Training Guide for Teachers	Teacher training on understanding gender	Development of Gender Atlas; support for residential programme for upper-primary girls from minority communities		Support to Gender and Girls' Education Network Group (GEN); Let Us Learn Evaluation		

Focus Area	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>Inclusive education</b>		National Conceptual Framework on Inclusive Education	Knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) study on disabilities; Diploma Programme in Inclusive Education; Identifying schools catering to special educational needs; Standards for Inclusive Education	Guidebook on making schools accessible for children with disabilities	Development of strategy to promote inclusion of children with disabilities in schools; Support in development of behaviour change communication strategy for inclusion of children with disabilities; Establishment of a Braille Education classroom	Piloting IE in 40 schools of 4 districts under Early Grade Reading program, including an early detection toolkit for screening of students, training of teachers, and distribution of materials prototypes for children with disabilities to all 40 schools.		Documentary/research study on the challenges faced by disabled children with learning difficulties
<b>Education in emergencies</b>		Distribution of education kits to flood-affected schools	Capacity-building on Education in emergencies; Development of courses on ECCD in emergencies and Emergency Education for non-formal education learners; Development of an Education Sector Disaster Management (DM) plan		Establishing Disaster Risk Reduction and climate change education in schools	Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs); Post-Earthquake structural safety assessment of schools; Back to School public information campaign; Post-Earthquake Rehabilitation; Cluster response to national emergencies.		Post-flood Rehabilitation; Post-conflict Rehabilitation
<b>3. Relevant learning materials</b>								
<b>Quality curriculum and materials</b>				National Multilingual Education (MLE) Resource Consortium; National Conference on MLE; Illustrated MLE storybooks in Assam; MGML cards in tribal languages in Chhattisgarh; MLE forum in Jharkhand	Support in development and review of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and accompanying materials		Capacity-building of textbook developers	
<b>Holistic learning and life skills</b>		Life skills education	Integrating sexuality education in the national education system; Life skills education	Life skills education	Life skills education (LSE); School-based psychosocial support programme; Building institutional capacities to deliver environmental education through the national curriculum	Training on psychosocial support; Child Social and Financial Education (CSFE); Taskforce for development of 'ladderised' qualifications framework for vocational education; Environmental education initiatives		School-based entrepreneurial assistance projects
<b>Adolescents</b>			Capacity building for adolescents; Strengthening NGO capacity to deliver youth-friendly and vocational educational services; Curriculum on resilience building of vulnerable adolescents	Sensitising principals on issues regarding adolescent girls; Establishment of girls' collectives	Assessment study on the situation of migrating adolescents		Youth Participation Strategy; Initiative on adolescents	



Focus Area	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>Social cohesion &amp; resilience (SCR), peace-building</b>			Better psychological support through resilience building programmes			Guideline for peace education for socio-emotional learning; "Peacebuilding in early childhood" project; Schools as Zones of Peace	SCR pilots; SCR programme; SCR analysis	'Education for SC Policy Review; Support to implementation of the national policy on Education, SC & Peace; Capacity-building of SC coordinators; Supporting Govt's Peacebuilding Priority Plan; High-level symposium on Education & Sustainable Peace; Using music for SC
<b>4. Learning-centred processes</b>								
<b>Child-friendly education</b>	CFS programme in selected schools; CF quality standards; Teacher training based on CFS principles	Training of teachers on CFS; Child-centred Method/ Activity-Based Learning; Promotion of positive discipline practices	Training on Educating for GNH; Access to child-friendly environment for child monks and nuns	'Child-friendly Schools and Systems' (CFSS): Guiding Principles'; Capacity-building for CFSS implementation; Activity-based Learning	Child-friendly School quality standards; Child-friendly Story-books		Child-Friendly Schools project in Punjab; Capacity-building and advocacy around Child-friendly Education	Child Friendly Approach (CFA); Launch of Multi-sectoral CFA Action Plan
<b>Teacher development</b>		Diploma in Primary Education (DPED) Course for Teachers development.	Multi-grade teaching strategies	Revamping teacher education (TE) systems and curricula; Training of untrained teachers; Capacity-building of resource teachers and teacher educators; Odisha Think Tank for TE; Maharashtra Restructuring of TE System	Support in capacity-building of teachers and in implementation of new curriculum; e-learning for teacher capacity-building	Development of Teacher Activity book		
<b>5. Universal learning outcomes</b>								
<b>Learning outcomes</b>		Each Child Learns (ECL)		Early grade reading and numeracy programmes; Roundtable Discussion on Enhancing Teaching-Learning Outcomes	National strategy and standards for literacy and numeracy	Gap analysis using the Global Initiative on Learning Metrics Taskforce (LMTF) consultation report ; Early Grades Reading Programme		
<b>Assessment</b>	Capacity Building of Primary Teachers on Assessment for Learning; Development of a National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan (NAFA)	School & Classroom Based Assessment (SCBA)		Review of Continuous & Comprehensive Evaluation; Rajasthan CCE scale-up model; Support in conducting large-scale assessments; Support in analysis and use of assessment data		National Assessment of Student Achievement		

Focus Area	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>6. Supportive Systems</b>								
<b>Strengthening education monitoring &amp; planning systems</b>	Establishment of a cohort tracking system in schools			Monitoring of child-friendly education; Monitoring implementation of Right to Education Act; Unified District Information of School Education (U-DISE); Systems capacity-building for analysis of U-DISE data; EduTrac	Developing strategy and tools to monitor implementation of the new NCF; Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (SIQAAF); OpenEMIS; development of the EMIS	Monitoring & Evaluation framework; Support in developing Education Sector Plans (ESPs); Equity Strategy; Equity index; Consultation on Equity in Education	Ureport Platform, EduTrac; Using EMIS to promote local accountability in Balochistan; Support in Joint Education Sector Reviews; Simulations for Equity in Education	
<b>Policy advocacy &amp; convening role</b>	NESP co-lead of access group, involved in quality group, co-lead EIE working group, ECD working group, Girls' Education and OOSC Steering Committee. Newly appointed coordinating agency for the education sector.					Development of the School Sector Development Plan for 2016-2023; Facilitating donor coordination and partnerships with the Govt; Advocacy for inclusion of equity issues in the MTR of the School Sector Reform Programme; Coordination of the Education SWAp	Coordinating agency for Global Partnership in Education (GPE); Consultations on UN SDG 4	Establishing Presidential Secretariat to support the Child-friendly Approach

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