



Universalising Basic Education

THE World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1991, gave participating countries an opportunity for a critical review of their education systems and a redefining of their goals and strategies. UNICEF assisted many countries in these endeavours and advocated strongly for universal primary education, with emphasis on education for girls and women, early childhood development and non-formal education for those who cannot go to formal schools. UNICEF advocacy and support have been for universalisation of basic education through both formal and non-formal education as appropriate in each country and regional situation.

In some countries, including Algeria, Iran and Turkey, UNICEF co-operation with Ministries of Education started after the Jomtien Conference. It is significant also that the spirit of Jomtien was reflected in new programmes of co-operation some of these coun-

tries, especially with regard to the education of girls and women.

UNICEF programme co-operation in basic education has been mostly catalytic, but following the Conference and the World Summit for Children, activities in many countries have facilitated some reordering of priorities in country programmes for the next cycle.

UNICEF support for early childhood development has continued in many countries, most notably in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Lesotho and Mauritius, where it constitutes the only major UNICEF involvement. Other activities in this area include the development of home-based stimulation and development (Colombia, Venezuela), the provision of equipment (Myanmar, Vietnam), teacher training for day care (Caribbean nations, Nepal, Sudan), needs assessment studies for child care (Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka) and parent educa-

tion programmes (Bolivia, Haiti, Philippines).

Non-formal education:

About 40 per cent of school-age children either do not have access to formal schooling or drop out before completing the primary level. UNICEF has been addressing the need for non-formal education and the needs of girls in particular. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, UNICEF has also been focusing on curriculum reform, teacher training and the provision of education materials for primary grades.

The girls child:

The education of girls and the need to increase their enrolment and retention rates in formal and non-formal schools have been a major focus in the SAARC and MENA regions. Communications efforts have emphasized the education of girls and women as the cutting edge of women's development, and a number of Governments during the year showed new or renewed resolve to deal with this issue. In Bangladesh, the Government declared that the education of girls would be free to grade 8, and that all new primary-level teaching recruits would be female. In Djibouti, the Prime Minister committed himself to a goal of 80 per cent literacy for females under age 25, by 1995.

Adult literacy:

UNICEF continued its support for adult literacy programmes with special attention to the qualitative improvement of teaching and learning materials, training and social mobilization (Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe). Literacy programmes for women have been linked to skill-training and income-earning opportunities in a number of countries. China has combined functional literacy classes with vocational training for young girls. Sri Lanka has combined vocational, marketing and credit management training with literacy activities. Pakistan and many other countries have incorporated literacy and functional education in development programmes for women.

Lessons on health, nutrition, the environment and

sanitation have been included in health education in Benin, Egypt, Mali, Mauritania, Uganda and Zaire, among other countries. In Latin America, *Facts for Life* has been adapted to incorporate the psychosocial component of child development in health and nutrition education. CSD messages have been disseminated through Islamic learning institutions.

Innovation:

Among the innovative approaches which UNICEF continues to support are the Escuela Nueva in Colombia, BRAC schools for older children in Bangladesh, mobile schools with multigrade teachers in the Philippines, education for teachers and students via television and radio in China, India and the Maldives, and education for peace and conflict resolution in Lebanon, Mozambique and Sri Lanka.

An *ad hoc* UNICEF Education Advisory Committee met in New York in July to discuss UNICEF's role and strategies in the achievement of the goal of education for all, and it was agreed that staffing in the education sector should be strengthened at regional and country levels. An effort has been made to develop a training package in basic education for UNICEF staff, and orientation sessions were held for representatives and senior staff in West Africa, East Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

Inter-agency collaboration:

Collaboration among agencies was strengthened at the policy level following the Jomtien Conference. The heads of the four sponsoring organizations — UNDP, UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF — met in New York (July 1990) and in Washington, D. C. (January 1991). All four agreed to increase their financial support for the principal Conference objectives.

The UNESCO-UNICEF Joint Committee on Education (JCE) held its second meeting in Paris (26-27 October), and efforts are being made to improve co-ordination of the agencies' implementation of Conference recommendations. Agreement was reached on major priority areas for joint action.

— (UNICEF)

US\$225. Every student is given a study guide which covers four years of study in the four main subjects of the national curriculum.

Study guides can be adapted to regional and local needs, and are designed to enable teachers to manage more than one grade at a time. They are ordered sequentially so that the progress of a motivated student need not be unduly handicapped by a less qualified teacher, and they are open-ended in the sense that a gifted teacher can enrich the lessons contained in them.

More than 18,000 of Colombia's 28,000 rural schools currently follow the New School approach, and the Government hopes to extend the programme to all remaining schools by 1992.

The challenge to literacy in Colombia is formidable. The enrolment rate in rural areas ranges from 60 to 81 per cent, depending on the province and about 55 per cent of students drop out between first and second grades, leaving the average rural child with just 1.7 years of formal tuition. Between 1968 and 1983, only one in every five children entering first grade completed all five years of primary education.

Results from the New School approach, however, have been promising. Surveys have shown that 89.3 per cent of teachers believe its innovative concepts to be superior to traditional methodologies, and in tests in socio-civic behaviour, self-esteem, mathematics and Spanish language, New School students have scored higher than those in traditional rural schools.

The World Bank has selected the New School as one of the developing world's three best experiences in the application of innovative primary education techniques, and delegations from 13 Latin American and two African countries (Equatorial Guinea, Senegal) have visited Colombia to study its programme. Venezuela is in the process of establishing its own Escuela Nueva.

The Colombian programme is funded by the Government with a loan from the World Bank, and UNICEF helps with materials and training for administrative staff. UNICEF and NGOs, including the Save the Children Federation, are also promoting its introduction to other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.