CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

CHAPTER 1
Purpose, scope and concept

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND CONCEPT

Significant progress has been made in the past decade towards fulfilling Millennium Development Goal 2 (MDG 2) – universal access and completion of primary school by 2015 – even though the related interim target of MDG 3 – gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 – was not achieved globally. Many countries have scored impressive gains in both enrolment and closing the gender gap in education.

Recent data show a decrease in the number of children not enrolled in school, from 94 million in 2002 to 75 million in 2006. However, far too many children who are enrolled still fail to complete their education, dropping out due to poor school quality and other factors. At any given time, the number of children attending school is far less than the number enrolled, since dropping out of school is not immediately reflected in enrolment data.

An estimated 115 million primary-school-age children were not attending school in 2002 (UNESCO-UIS & UNICEF, 2005), and around 101 million were not attending school in 2006 (UNICEF, forthcoming). In addition to poor education quality, such persistent challenges to school attendance as child labour, HIV and AIDS, civil conflict, natural disasters, chronic environmental degradation and deepening poverty continue to threaten gains in school enrolment and completion rates in many countries.

The challenge in education is not simply to get children into school, but also to improve the overall quality of schooling and address threats to participation. If both quality and access are tackled, children who are enrolled in primary school are likely to continue, complete the full cycle, achieve expected learning outcomes and successfully transition to secondary school.

There is an organic link between access and quality that makes the latter an integral part of any strategy for achieving the education MDGs and Education for All (EFA) goals. School quality must therefore be of central interest to policymakers and practitioners concerned with the low primary education survival and completion rates in various regions of the world. In West and Central Africa, for instance, only 48.2 per cent of the children enrolled in the first grade survive to the last grade of primary school. The comparable survival rate for countries in Eastern and Southern Africa is 64.7 per cent.

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These trends have given rise to concerted efforts to tackle the issue of quality in basic education worldwide, with such agencies as UNICEF intensifying their work to address education quality more systematically. It is in this context that UNICEF's strategy and programming have evolved over time, culminating in child-friendly school (CFS) models as comprehensive ways of dealing with all factors affecting quality.

Like most reality-based innovations, the CFS models are not simply an abstract concept or a rigid methodological prescription. They represent pragmatic pathways towards quality in education that have evolved (and are still evolving), from the principle of education as a human right to a child-centered ideology that regards the best interest of the child as paramount at all times. This makes the child central to the educational process and the main beneficiary of key decisions in education. But it does not mean that CFS models are inflexible ideological blueprints. Because they are grounded in the reality of resource constraints and lack of capacity for designing and implementing ideal solutions (see Chapter 2), they adhere to the principle of 'progressive realization' of children's right to quality education.

CFS advocates are willing to negotiate priorities regarding what is in the best interest of the child and make trade-offs based on what is feasible for schools and education systems to accomplish within a given time frame, using available resources and capacities.

1.2   PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of a CFS model is to move schools and education systems progressively towards quality standards, addressing all elements that influence the well-being and rights of the child as a learner and the main beneficiary of teaching, while improving other school functions in the process. Quality standards should make it possible for all children to access school, survive from grade to grade and complete the cycle on time; they should also provide an enriched educational experience through which students can thrive, develop and achieve their full potential. To this end, CFS models are concerned with harnessing the full involvement and support of all parties in a position to facilitate children's right to a quality education. These parties, or 'duty bearers', include parents, communities, teachers, school heads, education planners and civil society groups, as well as local and national governments and their external partners. Their involvement enables schools and education systems to provide the conditions and resources necessary for achieving the quality standards CFS models envision.

As for scope, CFS models embrace a concept of quality that goes well beyond pedagogic excellence and performance outcomes. The focus is on the needs of the child as a

whole, not just on the 'school bits' that educators traditionally feel responsible for. The scope of a CFS model includes multidimensional coverage of quality and a holistic concern for the child's needs.

In pursuit of quality, therefore, CFS models cut across sectors to address the child's needs comprehensively. Within this intersectoral and holistic framework, CFS models are concerned as much with the health, safety, security, nutritional status and psychological well-being of the child as they are with teacher training and the appropriateness of the teaching methods and learning resources used for schooling. They have as much to do with promoting child participation and creating space for children to express their views and opinions as they do with helping children learn to follow rules and regulations or show deference to school authorities. Quality in these models comes not only from the efficiency of setting the school apart in a special place as a community that pursues learning, but also from the effectiveness of linking the school to a wider community from which it derives its sense of engagement with reality and confirms the relevance of its curriculum.

Against this background, quality needs to be evaluated along several dimensions, including:

(a) How well boys and girls are prepared to start and continue school;

(b) How well they are received by schools and teachers prepared to meet their needs and uphold their rights;

(c) How far their general health and well-being are addressed as an integral part of promoting learning;

(d) How safe the schools are as places for learning and how completely they provide an overall gender-sensitive environment that is conducive to learning;

(e) The extent to which schools and teachers respect the rights of children and operate in the best interest of the child;

(f) The extent to which child-centred teaching methods are embraced as good practice and standard methodology by teachers and the school;

(g) How far child participation is encouraged as standard practice in classroom interaction as well as in the broader operation and management of the school;

(h) The extent to which effort and resources are invested in creating stimulating classrooms that support active learning for all;

(i) The availability of adequate environmentally sustainable facilities, services and supplies that support the needs of the whole child and also of all children;

(j) The use of pedagogy that challenges and dismantles discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or social background

Proponents of CFS maintain that all of these factors, interacting in a dynamic and organic manner, constitute the 'packaged solution' that can be confidently described as a 'child-friendly school'.

1.3   PRECURSORS OF AN EVOLVING MODEL

The evolution of child-friendly schools travelled a practical as well as a theoretical track, and it is important to understand the combination of action and reflection that has culminated in CFS models as the standard for quality in UNICEF's work in basic education. Like other agencies, UNICEF helps countries improve the quality of the education they offer their children. Twenty years ago this assistance involved mainly interventions related to pedagogic factors such as teacher training, supply of text books and learning materials, advocacy for policies on class size and teaching methodology. This 'single-factor' approach to school quality produced improvements, but they were frequently compromised by other factors in the education setting. For instance, teacher training might have produced gains, but a lack of textbooks and materials in schools often undermined these gains. Similarly, introduction of life skills content in the curriculum, including good hygiene practices, was often compromised because many schools did not have an adequate water supply or enough toilets to produce meaningful behaviour change in learners.

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF THE LIMITATIONS OF SINGLE-FACTOR INTERVENTIONS

Single-factor approach	Improvements and gains	Compromising factors
Teacher development	• Number of qualified teachers increased • Better informed teachers	• Irrelevance of curriculum to local context • Lack of materials and learning/teaching aids
Provision of textbooks	• Individual study facilitated • Academic performance boosted	• Not connected to teacher development and culturally irrelevant • Insufficient quantity of textbooks
Hygiene and life skills education	• Awareness of health and hygiene raised in children • Children empowered to participate in caring for themselves and others	• Acute lack of sanitary facilities • Acute lack of safe water for drinking and hand washing • Quality of life skills education often not gender-responsive or age-appropriate
School environment and environmental education	• More schools provided with access to water and sanitation • Renewable energy sources for electricity found • Trees and gardens planted at schools	• Lack of connection to curriculum • Facilities subject to vandalism and misuse • Lack of capacity for facilities maintenance
School as a community outreach	• Partnerships with parent-teacher associations and school governing boards forged • Young people's organizations formed	• Poor capacity development for parents and community leaders • Restricted spaces for young people to participate

Because it is concerned with the whole child and its intersectoral approach to programming for children, UNICEF works to improve water supply and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities; promote good hygiene practices; address nutritional needs through school-based interventions; increase access to energy; and address challenges posed by climate change through improvements in disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capacity. UNICEF also supports measures that help reduce the negative impact of child labour, child trafficking and gender-based violence. These are all child protection issues that have serious implications for education.

Measures taken in school, such as providing water and sanitation, school meals and counselling, have become essential components of overall quality of education. Studies have consistently shown that they influence access, retention and completion. Links between water and sanitation in schools and school access and retention rates are well documented, for instance, as are links between school meals and access and attendance among children in disadvantaged communities. Hindsight suggests that UNICEF's shift from a single-factor approach to a package approach in promoting education quality has been a significant phase in the evolution of CFS models.

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Another important phase has been the shift from targeted to system-wide interventions in education. Addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups often means that UNICEF's work is directed towards specific communities or population groups. Such interventions, typically designed as 'projects', tend to be relatively small-scale or localized and involve innovative 'problem-solving' strategies as well as persistent investment of effort and resources to make them work for the population they aim to help. As a result, UNICEF has been able to report improvements in access, retention or learning achievement in its operational areas, which tend to perform better than the national average for gains in such quality indicators. Such narrowly focused interventions continue to be necessary in some circumstances, but they are not the most efficient way of providing quality basic education for all children.

If education systems are fully inclusive, quality education can be extended to all groups as a matter of routine. Bringing this about requires systems-level interventions. Instead of just 'doing' child-friendly schools in local communities, CFS models are 'sold' as good practice for the entire education system. Shifting to systems interventions supports change across the whole sector and helps countries set standards for quality throughout the education system. This realization has pushed UNICEF to advocate that countries adopt child-friendly schools as a comprehensive quality model in their national education plans and priorities, which in turn has raised the issue of clarity, defining what CFS is and how countries can utilize such a model.

Since there are examples of child-friendly schools in many countries, UNICEF country offices often engage in 'show-and-tell' about CFS models. Far more difficult has been the effort to formulate a definitive package, clearly defining and laying out key parameters of child-friendly schools that could be adopted as an integral part of a national education plan. The package should include cost details and variables that can be projected in any simulation model used to decide on feasible priorities for a given country.

There are two further challenges. First, it is not enough to work with national counterparts to make schools child-friendly. It is also necessary to cultivate local capacity for designing, operating and managing child-friendly schools as part of the national education system. In Kenya, for example, when free primary education was declared, UNICEF successfully advocated for the inclusion of most of its child-friendly interventions and key strategies in the new Education Sector Support Plan. It then became essential for UNICEF to shift from projects that make schools child-friendly towards helping to build Kenyan national capacity to reproduce the CFS model countrywide.

Second, a systems approach implies working more closely with other partner agencies. In this regard, UNICEF engaged with other models, such as the Escuelas Nuevas that originated from work on quality education in Colombia, as well as with other quality frameworks concerned with parts of the picture, such as Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH), which deals mainly with the health

and nutrition aspects of CFS. With different models seeking to achieve similar outcomes in education, quality, clarity and coherence have become critical for selling CFS models as packages that countries can adopt in their national education plans and priorities.

Parallel with these programming changes on the ground, UNICEF has also been investing in theoretical reflection and concept-building related to child-friendly schools. The child-friendly school concept was first used in a systematic way by UNICEF, Save the Children and the World Health Organization in the mid-1990s, largely as the educational equivalent of the 'baby-friendly hospitals' that contributed to quality standards in health. With UNICEF's influence, the concept of child-friendly schools was soon widened beyond health and nutrition issues to include concerns with broader elements of quality in education, such as gender sensitivity, inclusiveness and human rights.

In 1995, UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre held a workshop on the theme 'What is a child-friendly school?' that resulted in an informal summary outlining 13 Characteristics of a Rights-Based School that are essential to the CFS concept. In subsequent working papers, CFS was presented as an 'umbrella' under which the diverse activities and goals of UNICEF's work on schools might be consolidated and rationalized. While these efforts did not produce a formally accepted definition of the CFS model, the idea of '13 defining characteristics' gained currency and continues to be a reference point for the advocacy and implementation of child-friendly schools.

By early 2000, UNICEF was expanding the definition of quality for key elements of child-friendly schools. By the end of 2001, UNICEF emphasized a comprehensive and complex quality package that was nuanced to fit different country realities. This has given rise to variations on the CFS theme within the agency. A global survey of the concept and its application within UNICEF programmes reveals a mixed picture, making it difficult to sell the concept to countries or partner agencies as a coherent model for quality in education. There has been a tendency to overprescribe on child-friendly schools and to underemphasize training and capacity for using the CFS model in education systems. Despite these difficulties, steady progress has been made with the CFS model, and the number of countries in which UNICEF is using the approach increased steadily, from an estimated 33 countries in 2004 to 56 countries in 2007.

The problem, however, is that the emerging CFS models present a confusing picture. They tend to focus on 'defining characteristics', but the number of characteristics varies from as few as 6 to as many as 16 depending on the context. These models also attempt to define child-friendly schools in terms of 'key components', including pedagogy, health, gender sensitivity, community participation, inclusiveness and protection. (See Chapter 2.)

Following recent emergencies there has been an increasing emphasis on the architectural aspects – location, design and construction – of child-friendly schools. This emphasis reflects not only the need to provide physical

facilities, promote good pedagogy and gain cost-efficiency, but also the need to address environmental issues, community participation, the safety of school locations and the provision of 'safe areas' within schools. Most recently, issues of electric power (including solar, wind and other alternative sources) and Internet connectivity are being explored as part of the focus of CFS models. It is likely that, as in the earlier case of water and sanitation, these elements will also become part of CFS models in some countries.

An additional challenging dimension to CFS models is the emerging question of when and where it is appropriate to introduce CFS models. A prime example was seen in Bam (Iran) after the 2003 earthquake. Here and in similar situations, UNICEF expanded the CFS concept to encompass more holistic concerns relating to child-centred homes, child-centred communities and child-centred cities, taking up major environment, health, protection and civic issues as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This is significant in that it highlights the links between schools and communities in a novel sense and gives rise to several questions: Is it necessary to have a supportive environment encompassing the home, community, city and society at large for child-friendly schools to be viable? Is the process of establishing child-friendly schools also an attempt to change standards and practices in homes, communities, cities and society at large? Is it possible to 'build back better' after natural disasters or civil conflict by using child-friendly schools as springboards for change in the wider society? Can risks of

chronic environmental degradation and sudden-onset disasters be reduced through structural improvements, mapping and preparedness activities? These are critical questions for the CFS models, and they highlight links between home, school and community in a way that goes well beyond the conventional sense.

Schools can be designed, constructed and operated in any community. However, if the principles underlying CFS models are taken seriously, questions arise about the type of setting in which schools of this nature are feasible and within which they can thrive. In order to achieve its potential, a child-friendly school may require a supportive social, cultural and political environment. It can be argued that such schools are more likely to be viable and sustainable in societies that are just, democratic, peaceful and tolerant. Embracing diversity through tolerance, inclusiveness and fairness is the starting point for recognizing and facilitating the right to quality education for all children regardless of their background. When there is a social, cultural and political climate open to child participation and respect for children's rights from the level of the family up through the local community and into the wider society, it is more likely than not that a country can develop a policy framework, set national plans and priorities, and make the type of budget allocations that are supportive of child-friendly schools.

Proponents of child-friendly schools suggest that even in the poorest communities, if supportive elements are present, it is possible to make

schools child-friendly, albeit within the restrictions of available resources. On the other hand, proponents also suggest that part of the benefit of making schools child-friendly in any situation is that doing so can result in positive change in homes, communities and the wider society. Either way, child-friendly schools can be seen as a dynamic model that can bring about change not only in schools and education systems, but also in homes, communities and societies.

These considerations suggest that it is counterproductive to regard the CFS model as rigid, with a preset number of defining characteristics or key components. It needs to be understood as flexible and adaptable, driven by certain broad principles that invite dialogue and bargaining, draw on proven good practices and embrace new concerns as the reality of different situations demands. Such is the nature of the model that this manual seeks to explain and outline. It is a model of quality that has taken many twists and turns in its evolution and is richer for that process. It sets out a creative tension around child-centredness that builds on real-world experiences of what works best for children in different circumstances as well as on the theoretical ideals needed to define and promote quality in education. In this regard, a CFS model is not so much about a destination at which schools and education systems can arrive and be labelled successful. It has more to do with the pathways along which schools and education systems endeavour to travel in the quest to promote quality in education.

If the underlying ideology and key principles that drive the defining characteristics of child-friendly schools in different contexts can be harnessed into a comprehensive guideline with illustrative practical examples, the great promise of this approach to quality can be fully realized in the form of a consolidated child-friendly school model. As a tool for planning quality basic education in national systems, this model would greatly enhance the chances of achieving the EFA goals and the education MDGs. A consolidated CFS model also promises a more participatory and comprehensive approach to planning for quality education. For example:

(a) Stronger links between schools and their communities will facilitate the consultative process, a prerequisite for developing credible education sector plans that can attract external support in line with the good governance requirements of the Monterrey Consensus,[1] the Fast Track Initiative and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development;

(b) The same stronger links will make it more likely that communities will identify with and be supportive of their schools, ultimately strengthening the process of providing quality basic education for all children;

(c) A focus on the well-being of the whole child, including attention to the different needs of different groups according to such factors as their gender, physical ability and socio-economic status, will help address disparities that stem from home and community backgrounds, creating a more level playing field for all learners to achieve their full potential through education;

(d) An emphasis on inclusiveness will enable countries to tap and harness the full potential of their human resources;

(e) A more conducive learning environment will help minimize the repetition and drop-out rates that also contribute to poor quality due to internal inefficiency within schools and education systems;

(f) Child-centred pedagogy is more likely to produce independent thinkers who can make constructive contributions to a participatory democracy and adapt to changing circumstances;

(g) Child-centred pedagogy will also enable teachers to improve their professional status as facilitators of learning, custodians of children's well-being while they are in school and authority figures in the management of links between the school and the community;

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[1] The Monterrey Consensus is a compact between developing countries and major donor countries that commits the former to demonstrating political will and good governance in providing education and other services to their population, while committing the latter to funding the financing gaps that prevent these services from reaching the population.

(h) A child-centred, gender-sensitive pedagogy is also more likely to produce school graduates who will be job creators and entrepreneurs rather than merely job seekers;

(i) A focus on the whole child will result in diverse non-educational needs of children, including checks of their health and nutrition status, being addressed through the school system, a particularly important consideration for countries with weak service delivery systems that cannot adequately reach populations across all sectors;

(j) The holistic philosophy of child-friendly schools is likely to produce a major shift in thinking concerning what schools are for and how they can influence change in the wider society through their current child, family and community links and the future activities of their graduates.

If this rich potential of child-friendly schools is to be realized, it is necessary to mount a major advocacy campaign that is evidence-based and backed by countries and major donor partners willing to invest in the child-friendly approach. In this regard, UNICEF and other partner agencies must invest in measures that:

(a) Provide a mapping of child-friendly school types, showing their range and adaptations made to the basic concept in response to different situations;

(b) Formally evaluate the impact of child-friendly schools in a wide range of country contexts;

(c) Support national capacity-building for the use of CFS models to implement quality education standards by providing training expertise and resources such as this reference manual, the e-learning package and a handbook of case studies on child-friendly schools;

(d) Support national capacity to conduct rights-based causality analysis through consultation across sectors to ensure optimal cooperation with health, environment, water, finance and other relevant ministries;

(e) Support the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that include gender-sensitive quality indicators to help countries track progress and make adjustments in the way they use CFS models to improve quality in their education systems;

(f) Help leverage financing for countries that incorporate child-friendly school standards as part of their strategy for building quality in their education systems;

(g) 'Accompany' countries that are in the process of implementing CFS models by providing useful guidelines and working closely with their nationals to set up and operate child-friendly schools in different communities.