

POST
2015
THINK
PIECE

EDUCATION FOR THE MOST MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE

*SOS Children's Villages
Post-2015 Think Piece on Education*



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
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EDUCATION IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A HUMAN RIGHT; A RIGHT THAT IS STILL DENIED TO MILLIONS OF CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD. IN 2011, AN ESTIMATED 57 MILLION CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE WERE NOT IN SCHOOL¹.

Without a quality education, which is inclusive and equitable, children are at greater risk of poverty, stigmatisation and violence. For children who are marginalised, access to quality education can mean the difference between a lifetime of exclusion or becoming an active member of society. It opens up the opportunity of fair and equal access to decent jobs, living wages, and sustainable and healthy livelihoods.

SOS Children's Villages, therefore, strongly believes that securing quality education for all children, particularly for those who are the most vulnerable and marginalised, is essential to eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development, and should be a central element of the Post-2015 agenda.

The Millennium Development Goal on universal access to education (MDG 2) has helped break down the barriers that keep children out of school. The latest report on the MDGs indicates that the number of out-of-school children fell from 102 million in 2000 to 57 million in 2011². However, the rate of improve-



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ment has all but stalled since 2008. If current trends continue, the goal of universal primary education will not be achieved by 2015. This stagnation is partly due to difficulty in reaching the most marginalised children, who remain excluded from education because of factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, loca-

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

In order to strengthen educational opportunities for children and young people without parental care or whose families are at risk of separation, SOS Children's Villages works together with local governments, non-governmental organisations, communities and families to strengthen local schools, provide non-formal education and vocational training, support early childhood learning, and cre-

ate educational opportunities where they do not exist. The outcome of these experiences clearly shows that access to quality education is more than just building schools, but about lifting the social, cultural and financial barriers that stop children and young people from attending schools, while ensuring the highest possible quality of the education for all children and young people.

¹ 2013. The Millennium Goals Report 2013, UN.

² Ibid.

tion, or lack of parental care. Still today, children and young people from the poorest households are at least three times more likely to be out of school than children from the richest households; and girls are also more likely to be out of school than boys, across all age groups and income brackets³.

The Post-2015 development agenda must build on the efforts of the MDGs and continue to work to provide universal access to education, particularly to children and young people who are marginalised. At the same time, the new framework must also look beyond the promises made in the MDGs and take the next step, not only ensuring universal primary education, but rather universal access to quality education, which is inclusive and equitable. It must ensure not only that all children have a chance to learn, but also that the quality of their education gives them equal access to opportunities in the future.

SOS Children's Villages is convinced that to ensure inclusive and equitable education, the new development framework must explicitly target those most



vulnerable and marginalised. Governments must be supported to lift the financial, social and cultural barriers keeping these children out of school and promote other forms of education, such as non-formal learning. Mainly, the Post-2015 agenda should encourage states to design and implement individualised education policies that truly leave no child behind.

PARTNERING TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE START SMALL BUSINESSES

Since 2005, the SOS Children's Villages Vocational Training (VTC) Centre in Lusaka, Zambia, has been working with marginalized young people, teaching them the skills they need to effectively compete in the job market. Despite having acquired skills in their respective trades, however, many graduates feel they still face obstacles, such as limited job opportunities, lack of access to financial assistance, lack of entrepreneurship skills.

To help the students of the VTC overcome these obstacles, SOS Children's Villages teamed up with the organisation, Junior Achievement Zambia (JA), to start the ITS TYME (Immersion Training Strategy: Targeting Young Marginalized Entrepreneurs) Project. With SOS Children's Villages providing the facilities and materials and JA providing instructors and technical know-how, the project helps young people between the ages of 15 and 25 who are not in school to start their own businesses. Through ITS

TYME, young people learn entrepreneurial skills, and they are supported to access microcredits. The project also established a network of alumni, volunteers, government agencies, NGOs and microfinance institutions working collaboratively on youth entrepreneurship programmes.

In 2012, 54 young students of the VTC received training through ITS TYME, thanks to the sponsorship of CITI Bank (Citi Foundation). Mentors from companies like Citi Bank, Airtel, Finca Zambia, and Youth Alive added impetus to the training, after which graduates formed and registered small businesses. In 2013, Junior Achievement also trained two instructors of the VTC to facilitate and conduct ITS TYME training, which will enable SOS Children's Villages to train a further 91 young people at the VTC during 2013.

Thanks to the concerted and collaborative effort of SOS Children's Villages, JA, and the corporate partners, ITS TYME has made, and will continue to make a positive impact on young people who would have otherwise had very little opportunities.

³ 2013. The Millennium Goals Report 2013, UN.

THE MOST VULNERABLE AND MARGINALISED MUST BE TARGETED

One of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of children and young people are those who grow up without the care of their parents or whose families are at risk of separation. Children deprived of a nurturing and protective family face a greater risk of marginalisation, stigmatisation, violence and abuse. They are also less likely to attend school, and those who do are far more likely to drop out. For example, research conducted by SOS Children's Villages found that in The Gambia, children who have lost both their parents are twice as unlikely to attend school as children living with their parents⁴; while in Swaziland, most of the children who drop out of school are girls who have to stay home to take care of sick relatives⁵.

Furthermore, UNICEF data show that in developing countries the proportion of orphaned children going to school is 22% lower than for that of their non-orphan peers⁶. In over sixty years of experience of working with vulnerable children and their families, SOS Children's Villages can confirm that these patterns are similar all over the world.



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Children and young people without parental care and those whose families are at risk of separation are often denied access to quality education, not only because of poverty, but also because of a variety of other interlinking factors. Qualitative studies show that these children face barriers to access and benefit from quality education that are different from those of children living with their families⁷. They might face stigma or frequent migration between homes; they might be forced to work to support themselves

SUPPORTING EARLY LEARNING

The SOS Children's Villages Kindergarten in Mamelodi was established in 1986 in a township on the outskirts of Pretoria, South Africa. From its inception the SOS Kindergarten was recognised as a model pre-school offering quality early childhood education. Realising its potential to play a bigger role in the community, in 1987 the SOS Kindergarten began operating a small outreach programme with the aim of raising the quality of pre-school services offered by neighbouring community centres.

Over time the programme grew, both in the numbers of pre-schools reached and also in the scope and quality of services offered. Two field workers were employed to coordinate the programme and at its peak in 2007, the SOS Mamelodi Educare Programme was reaching 60 pre-schools and crèches.

The focus of the programme has, throughout its existence, been to improve the quality of service provision in early childhood education and care for children living in disadvantaged circumstances. Initially, the field workers offered hands-on support through visits to centres and in-house training to teachers at the SOS Kindergarten, so they could experience quality education and develop their own teaching skills. Over time, the programme evolved to offer more structured responses, individually tailored to the development needs of each participating centre. Since 2009, the SOS Mamelodi Educare Programme has enabled 57 pre-school teachers to graduate with accredited childcare and business management qualifications; and since its inception, it has reached more than 100 early childhood development centres and contributing to the well-being of over 10 000 pre-school children who are without parental care or in vulnerable situations.

⁴ 2009. Child Rights Situation Analysis The Gambia, SOS Children's Villages.

⁵ 2009. Child Rights Situation Analysis Swaziland, SOS Children's Villages.

⁶ 2013. The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities. UNICEF

⁷ 2012. Smiley, A. et al. Orphans and Vulnerable Children: Trends in School Access and Experience in Eastern and Southern Africa. Education Policy and Data Centre.

or contribute to a household income; or they may have to take on additional duties such as caring for siblings or an elderly relative. Frequently, they struggle with trauma as a result of abuse, neglect, armed conflict or natural disasters.

Furthermore, children who lack the care and protection of a family often have limited access to early childhood education; another factor which puts them at disadvantage. Early childhood education has a significant impact on the learning path of a child, independently of socio-economic background. Countless studies link early childhood education to better performance in school, as well as improved social adjustment in adult life; yet, the majority of these marginalised children do not have access. This further hinders their ability to succeed in school, increasing the drop-out risk, and puts them at disadvantage later in life.

For young people who have grown up without the care of their families and who are transitioning out of alternative care, accessing tertiary education or vocational training is a major challenge. During a five-year SOS Children's Villages campaign on leaving care, *I Matter*, young people consistently identified continued education as one of the main difficulties facing care leavers. For example, in the Czech Republic, where less than 1% of the children in institutional care go to



university, numbers reveal that a child who was raised by his family is forty times more likely to access higher education than a child who grew up in alternative care⁸.

SOS Children's Villages has observed similar patterns in countries across the globe: young people who have grown up without the care of their families, leave the care system ill-equipped to compete effectively in the labour market or earn a living with dignity, often becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty.

All these interrelated factors make it difficult for these marginalised children and young people to go to school, finish successfully and continue their education. They inevitably grow up lacking the literacy, numeracy and life skills they need in order to thrive.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT

In the Fulani village of Kpalassi, Togo, most of the children were not enrolled at school. Mostly, they worked in the fields in order to support their family income. At the only school in the village, one volunteer teacher received a maximum of 30 children.

In 2008, SOS Children's Villages helped to revitalize the village development committee and carried out training courses on child rights and the importance of education. Little by little, parents started sending their children to school. The local school, however, did not have the capacity to receive the increasing number of chil-

dren. Therefore, community members, with the support of SOS Children's Villages, built two new classrooms. SOS Children's Villages also provided text books and other learning materials.

In 2010-2011, the school received a total of 145 children, but was facing a chronic lack of teachers. The village development committee decided to take the issue to the district educational authorities and as a result, the school was made into an official primary school and provided with qualified teachers appointed by the government. This support improved the quality of education and changed the lives of the children of Fulani. The success rate of children going to school was 88% in 2010 and almost 90% in 2011.

⁸ 2013. Pazlarová, Hana. Education for Children in Institutional Care in the Czech Republic. *I Matter* Briefing Paper 6: Education. SOS Children's Villages.



ACCESS AND QUALITY

To unleash the potential of education to empower children and young people, the Post-2015 agenda must address the financial, social and cultural barriers that exclude children both from and within education. First and foremost, inclusive education ensures that all children and young people must have access to education, independently of their financial situation, ethnicity,

gender, disability or family background. Consequently, proactive measures must be taken to support the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Nevertheless, mere access is not enough. There is a second step to achieving sustainable change, which is to ensure quality education. If schools are ill-prepared to provide an environment that is supportive and stimulating enough to overcome the obstacles that marginalised children face, the result will inevitably be low school enrolment and high drop-out rates, and the most marginalised will continue to be excluded. Quality education caters to the particular cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of all learners, thus ensuring an equitable educational outcome where all young people are equipped with the skills they need to make the best of future opportunities.

Furthermore, quality education encourages parents, communities and children to take an active role in decision-making, and stimulates learners in a safe and healthy physical environment. It also counts with high-quality teachers and educational staff, who are well trained and well paid. Quality education recognises and includes non-formal initiatives as a means to provide alternative learning opportunities to children and young

INNOVATING IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The SOS Youth House of SOS Children's Villages Finland supports young people aged 13-17 who cannot live with their families. Over the years it was increasingly clear, that many of the young people had such behavioural problems that it was difficult or impossible for them to attend the local public school. In response, the director of the Youth House started a home schooling programme in 2004, so that these young people could learn in smaller groups with an individualized approach, yet following the curriculum of the public school. The idea was that in smaller groups, the young people would get better support so that they could learn more effectively and ultimately be re-integrated into public school.

The home schooling programmes counts with the finan-

cial and professional support of the local municipality, and it also offers temporary home schooling services to young people who are not residents, but who are experiencing difficulties at school. The results of the home schooling programme have been impressive. Since its inception in 2004, all young people who participated in home school services successfully finished the grade and were re-integrated into mainstream school. Some of them have since graduated.

This non-formal educational programme has successfully supported young people during their time in alternative care or during shorter periods of non-institutional care, proving a very effective and inexpensive way to support young people at risk of social exclusion. For young people who may have complicated problems to work through, this individualized, small group approach effectively help decrease drop-out rates, giving them a renewed chance for their futures.

people who cannot access mainstream school. Finally, it includes a component on early childhood education, as it is a powerful tool to reach educational equity.

Without a particular focus on access and quality of education, the Post-2015 agenda will continue to leave marginalised children behind, diminishing their chances to succeed in life and contribute to social development.

If education is to truly reach the most vulnerable and marginalised children, including children without parental care, SOS Children's Villages calls on the new development framework to include the following:

- **Action to ensure access and quality education** for all children and young people;
- **Measures to ensure education is equitable and inclusive**, with clearly defined parameters defining quality education;
- **Levelling-up measures to remove the financial, cultural and social barriers that prevent access to quality education** for the most vulnerable and marginalised children, including children without parental care or whose families are at risk of separation, girls, and children with disabilities, amongst others;
- **A particular focus on early childhood education**, as a mechanism close the gap between marginalised and mainstream pupils and reach educational equity;
- **A focus on access to tertiary education and vocational training for marginalised young people**, as well as mechanisms to support them to enter the labour market;
- Measures to **acknowledge and support non-formal initiatives**;
- **Indicators to measure progress on access to and quality education** for the most vulnerable and marginalised children, including children without parental care; and
- **An overarching component that proactively identifies groups of children and young people who have been systematically and consistently marginalised**, such as children and young people without parental care.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
Nelson Mandela



A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD



SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

A loving home for every child

This paper is part of a series that defines SOS Children's Villages' position on various issues related to the Post-2015 development agenda. Each paper highlights the challenges that marginalised and vulnerable children and young people face, especially those living without parental care or whose families are at risk of separation, and outlines a set of recommendations on how to tackle these challenges within the new framework.

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