

LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

SOS Children's Villages Position Paper



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



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Foreword

SOS Children's Villages supports and advocates for children without parental care or at risk of losing it. We work in 134 countries and territories, reaching over 1.5 million children, young people, families and caregivers each year.

Our experience around the world, as reflected in this paper, shows that the children and young people we work with are highly disadvantaged when it comes to education and do not achieve as well as their peers in school. Many interrelated factors make it difficult for them to receive adequate early childhood care, complete primary school, continue their education at secondary and tertiary levels, access quality vocational training and successfully enter the labour market.

These children are confronted with a number of constraints in their family at psychosocial, cultural and economic levels. Can a hungry, working or traumatised child be successful at school? Can deprived, overburdened or marginalised parents afford the costs of education, claim education rights and convey a sense of self-confidence? Can young people who have dropped out of school successfully integrate into the labour market?

Since SOS Children's Villages pioneered family-like alternative care in 1949, the development and education of disadvantaged children and young people has been a core part of our efforts. We have witnessed that material poverty with insufficient nutrition, family income or housing, and psychosocial factors such as the absence of a caring family environment often combine, leading to insufficient support for a

child's education. To truly succeed in sustainably reducing social inequalities and poverty, we have to focus on supporting children and young people and addressing the root causes of child vulnerability and family separation.

At SOS Children's Villages we have a vision: Every child belongs to a family and grows with love, respect and security. Our holistic approach to learning and education embraces all dimensions of child wellbeing. It accompanies children individually from birth onwards to develop their own potential and strengths. Each individual's educational path then contributes to the sustainable development of society as a whole.

We work through alternative care, family strengthening, and various educational activities, including in preschools and schools, all over the world to support parents and communities in providing a caring family environment, improving their socio-economic living conditions and promoting the active participation of children and young people. It is through empowerment and knowledge that children, young people and parents successfully claim their right to a quality education.



Siddhartha Kaul
President
SOS Children's Villages
International



Wilfried Vyslozil
Executive Chairman
SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit

Executive summary and recommendations

Education is a fundamental and enabling human right, and it must be realised for all children in order to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of exclusion, poverty, violence, inequality and family breakdown. Education is key for a life of dignity and respect and for advancing inclusive and fair human development. Moreover, education has an important accelerating role for areas such as health, gender equality, peace and democracy, and decent employment.

This paper sheds light on the complex social, cultural and financial barriers that hinder learning and access to quality education for millions of children without parental care or at risk of losing it. Poverty, conflict or natural disaster, violence and exclusion, HIV/AIDS, child labour and other hardships experienced during developmentally sensitive childhood and adolescence affect young people's ability to learn. The trauma they suffer harms their resilience and coping skills and can lead to developmental delays for which the education system does not effectively compensate.

A holistic, inclusive, child-centred and relationship-based approach to quality education and learning can support children in overcoming deficiencies and delays and encourage them to develop their individual strengths and build coping skills, self-esteem and resilience. Targeted and trauma-sensitive mentoring and coaching from a lifelong learning perspective encourages children's life skills and personal capabilities relevant to local social, cultural and economic contexts. It empowers them to promote their independence and equal participation in social and economic life.

This paper highlights concerns in essential education areas such as early childhood develop-

ment, primary and secondary schooling, professional integration of young care leavers, and education for parents:

- Children without parental care or at risk of losing it often lack the stable, nurturing and stimulating environment essential for their development. Early childhood development programmes can lessen these deficits, essentially supporting healthy child-caregiver relationships and promoting children's physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development. Evidence shows that children from poorer, less educated and rural areas have less access to these services than their peers.
- Children without parental care or at risk of losing it are disproportionately excluded from the formal education system. About 124 million children and adolescents were not able to enter or complete school in 2013. Selective, underfinanced and deficit-focused education undermines equitable access and reinforces inequalities for these children, leading to low basic skills levels and high drop-out rates.
- Young people without parental care or at risk of losing it, including care leavers and young people not in education, employment or training, are often politically, socially and economically excluded and even more marginalised from the labour market than their peers. They are forced to become independent too early, often with low qualifications, few life skills, and a lack of support and guidance. Early support measures, trust and personal mentoring and coaching towards employability further their social inclusion and professional integration.
- Positive parental attachment, care, protection, stimulation and support set the foundation for children's learning success. Where parents lack the resources to promote their

children's education adequately, holistic adult education and training helps them to develop their psychosocial and economic capacities, increase their knowledge and skills for caring and supportive child-caregiver relationships and encourages them to successfully support their children's education.

SOS Children's Villages outlines possible informal, non-formal and formal education interventions in each area based on our practical experience of accompanying children and their families on their lifelong educational journey to successfully navigate the education system and overcome the obstacles and barriers that disadvantage them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For education to truly reach the most disadvantaged children, including children without parental care or at risk of losing it, SOS Children's Villages calls upon all stakeholders in the field of education, development, humanitarian aid and social services. In particular, it calls on national governments as primary duty-bearers for education, on policy-makers, international institutions, NGOs and civil society groups, donors, schools and other relevant service providers, educators and media, to consider, support and implement the following recommendations:

1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be implemented to achieve accessible and quality lifelong education for all. The necessary investments should be made and indicators set to measure progress.
2. The existing cultural, social and financial barriers and rights violations that exclude children and young people from education should be tackled. The inclusion of accessible and reliable disaggregated data on these children in national and international monitoring systems would close existing data gaps, including monitoring of school drop-outs and young people not in education, employment or training.
3. Measures should be set to ensure education is inclusive and holistic, child-centred, relationship-based, and fosters the development of individual talent and resilience of each child. The inclusion of children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it, including children in alternative care,

should be supported through holistic and cross-sectorial policies and measures.

4. Safe and child-friendly trauma-sensitive spaces and learning environments, on-going trauma support and counselling should be put in place to promote the education of children without parental care or at risk of losing it. Education systems should recognise the needs and situation of traumatised children and adequate rights-based training and supervision of involved staff and educators assured.
5. The quality, coverage and equal access to holistic early childhood care and education for children without parental care or at risk of losing it and their families should be assured and substantially and continually improved.
6. Education systems and practices should be reformed and sufficiently resourced for equitable, effective and relevant quality education, empowering and trusting children and young people, promoting human rights, employability and sustainable development.
7. Political, social and economic frameworks are required to reduce youth unemployment and end insecure, low paid, precarious and exploitative working conditions. Employment and formal and non-formal education opportunities for young people, including those without parental care or at risk of losing it, need to be prioritised.
8. Parents need to be supported in their children's education through adult education and training, including social and economic support services, literacy classes, employment opportunities and legal frameworks for appropriate social and labour market conditions.

Education for a life of dignity, respect and independence



SOS Children's Villages recognises that education is the foundation for healthy development and wellbeing, and is key for a life of dignity, respect and independence. With a focus on children who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care, we want to ensure that every child has the opportunity to develop to their full potential and become self-supporting active members of society.¹

Education is a fundamental and enabling human right, supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,² and as such it is each government's duty under the Convention to ensure that it is realised for every child. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ call on governments and education providers to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for

all," recognising that this is a foundation for a healthy developed society.⁴

Quality education provides young people with the skills to make sound decisions, participate in political and social life, stand up for their rights, and take advantage of opportunities for decent employment.⁵ By empowering individuals, education has a broader impact on society, promoting social, economic and political progress, stability and welfare, and advancing inclusive and fair human development.

Education is an important tool for combatting poverty,⁶ as it has the potential to uplift the most disadvantaged children and disrupt the inter-generational transmission of exclusion, poverty, violence, inequality and family breakdown.⁷ Global research suggests that education has a

¹ SOS Children's Villages International (2009a)

² Art. 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Art. 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations (1948), (1989)

³ The SDGs were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations' Member States. They formulate 17 global goals to end poverty in all its forms, reduce inequalities and protect

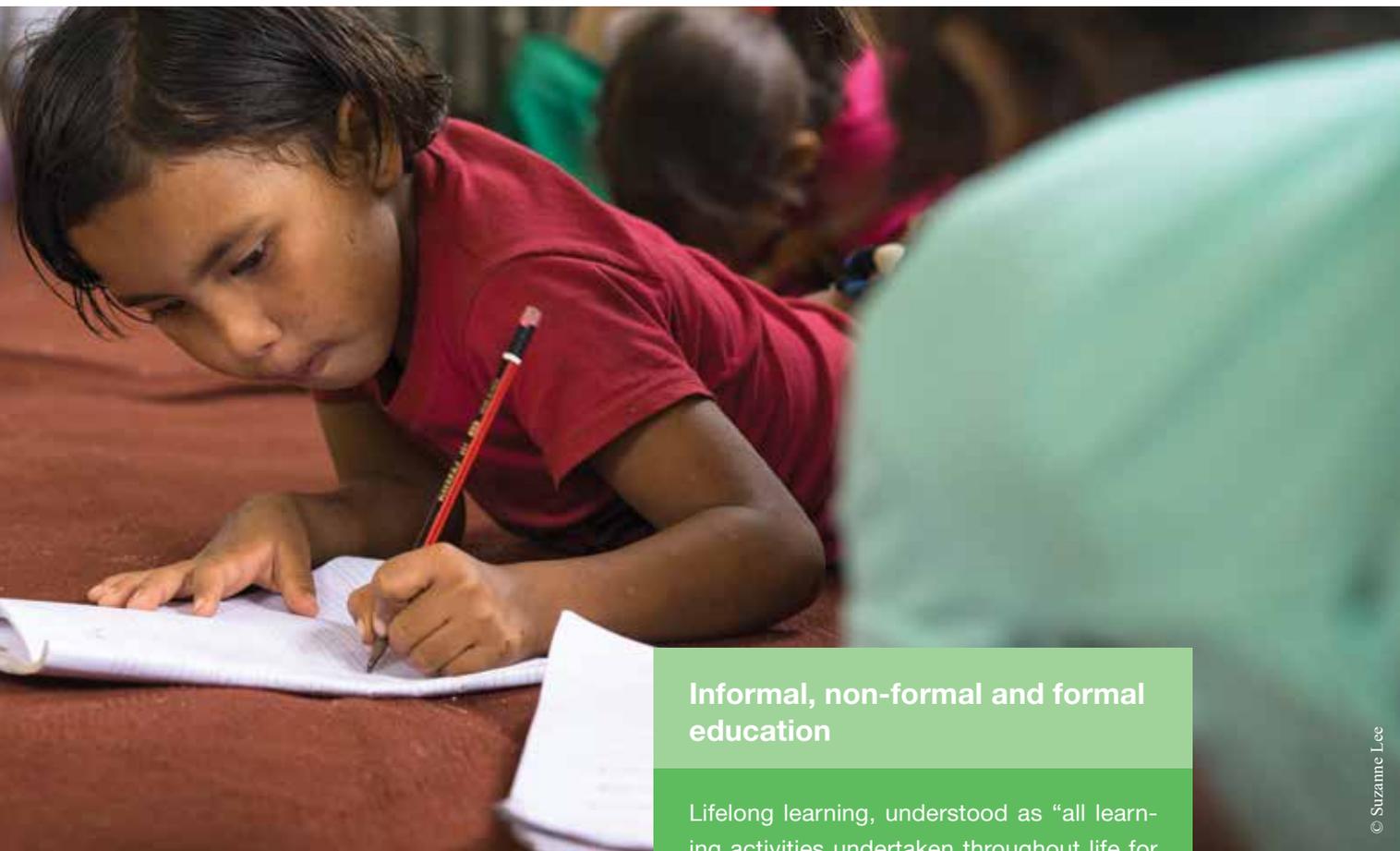
the environment by 2030. United Nations (2016)

⁴ UNESCO et al. (2015)

⁵ SOS-Kinderdörfer Weltweit Hermann-Gmeiner-Fonds Deutschland e.V. (2013)

⁶ SOS Children's Villages International (2013a)

⁷ SOS Children's Villages International (2008)



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Informal, non-formal and formal education

Lifelong learning, understood as “all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications,”¹² defines education as a comprehensive continuum of informal, non-formal, and formal education.¹³

Each individual learns informally and often unintentionally in continuous interactions with their environment, through daily social experience, work and play, in relation with family, neighbours, peers and through educational resources such as new media.

Formal education refers to the structured, systematic, monitored and evaluated teaching and learning processes provided by public and private institutions, based on formalised curricula.¹⁴

Non-formal learning refers to organised educational activities with set learning objectives and leadership outside the established formal system.

strong positive association with increasing economic development. The knowledge and skills acquired through a quality education correlate positively with economic growth for society,⁸ as does improvement in equity through better access to education for poor and marginalised groups.⁹ Education has an important accelerating role for areas such as health, gender equality, peace and democracy, to decent employment. Across the world’s least developed countries, about 47% of the population is under the age of 18;¹⁰ so a focus on child and youth education is imperative for sustainable development.

Our approach

SOS Children’s Villages supports families, children and young people to participate in formal, non-formal and informal education activities. We provide services only when we are best placed to do so,¹¹ and we assist partners such as community organisations, schools and local au-

⁸ Hanushek, E. and Woßmann, L.. (2007)

⁹ Castelló-Clement, A. (2013)

¹⁰ Compared to 31% worldwide. UNICEF (2016)

¹¹ SOS Children’s Villages International (2009a)

¹² UNESCO (2015a)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ SOS Children’s Villages International (2008)

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES FACTS AND FIGURES

SOS Children's Villages runs programmes that affect education across all dimensions of child and family life, including care and protection, health, psychosocial and material wellbeing, economic security and community participation.

Our **family strengthening services** currently benefit around 400,000 children and caregivers and 91,700 families, with 49,000 children and young people joining in 2015 alone.

Alternative care and support is provided to more than 84,000 children and young people in families, foster families and other care services.

Over 700,000 **emergency services** to children and adults were provided in 2015.¹⁷



thorities to provide high quality education and invest in quality childcare professionals.

We work to increase the awareness of caregivers and communities about the importance of quality education for their children's lives and mobilise them to demand their own and their children's right to education. Based on their experience, we advocate for education as a public good and responsibility, and we appeal to governments as primary duty bearers to improve the quality of their education services. We support governments and international donors to remove the financial, social and cultural barriers to education.¹⁵

Our interventions have real and positive impacts for young people. In an assessment of six SOS Children's Villages programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa and one in Asia, young care leavers confirmed that the educational opportunities they had received were a key to transforming their lives.¹⁶

RECOMMENDATION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which adopt a lifelong learning approach, should be implemented to achieve accessible and quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education; free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education; and affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education for all. The necessary investments should be made and indicators set to measure progress and ensure the most disadvantaged children and young people, including children in alternative care, get free access to inclusive quality education.

¹⁵ SOS Children's Villages International (2009a); (2013a)

¹⁶ SOS Children's Villages (2016a)

¹⁷ Data was taken from LUCY, SOS Controlling System database, in August 2016. SOS Children's Villages International (2016b)

Barriers to access quality education



SOS Children's Villages is committed to preventing the loss of parental care for disadvantaged children and providing quality alternatives where necessary.¹⁸ Approximately 140 million children across the globe have lost one or both parents;¹⁹ of them at least 13 million have lost both parents,²⁰ and most of these children live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their rights should be promoted and safeguarded, including but not limited to, access to education, as the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children reiterate.²¹

Without a stable and caring family upbringing, children are deprived of their first and most important learning environment; weakening their educational potential right from the start. The pressures on families increase through risk factors such as deprivation, unemployment, migration, parental or child illness or delinquency, exclusion and discrimination. These social challenges compromise children's learning and access to quality education.

Child poverty

Many children at risk of losing parental care are among the estimated 569 million children in developing countries who live in extreme poverty with less than \$1.25 a day.²² Many more live without their basic developmental needs being fulfilled; 30 million children grow up in poverty in the most industrialised countries alone.²³

Poverty is a stress factor which can contribute to instability and family breakdown. It also affects the resources and support available to parents and caregivers, who often also have low levels of education, and their ability to provide educational support to their children.

Yet, research indicates that parents living in poverty can have strong resilience and coping skills,²⁴ so being poor does not necessarily mean that children are at an increased risk of losing parental care. Rather than poverty itself, it is the lack of secure attachment and positive family role models which detrimentally affects their learning abilities.²⁵

¹⁸ SOS Children's Villages Programme Policy (2009a)

¹⁹ UNICEF (2016)

²⁰ UNICEF (2015)

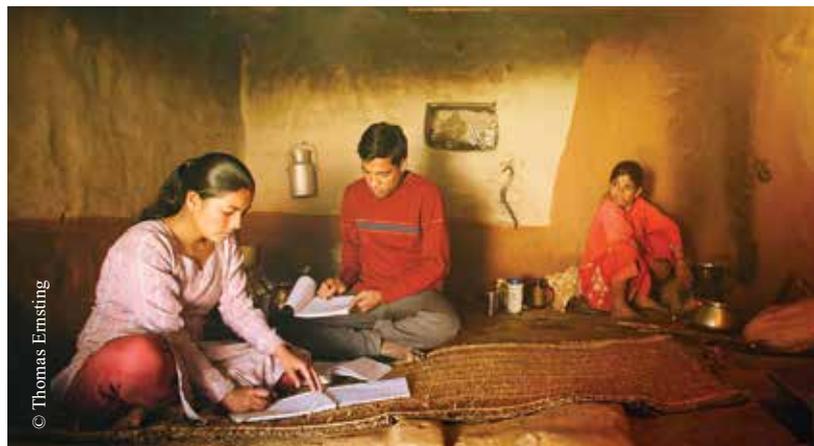
²¹ Art. 16 of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. SOS Children's Villages International (2009b)

²² UNICEF (2014a)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Katz, I. et al. (2007)

²⁵ Moullin, S., Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2014); Roth, G. (2015)



Domestic violence

Growing up with violence in the home is a devastating reality for approximately 275 million children across the world.²⁶ As it is a common taboo there is a lack of data on its full extent and impact, but we know that exposure to violence is highly detrimental to children's emotional, psychological, cognitive and social well-being. Previous experiences of abuse or neglect of children in alternative care were found to impact negatively on their educational outcomes.²⁷

It can be devastating for children's development potential and educational attainment. Child victims of violence often display behavioural problems and are more likely to have literacy and numeracy problems. They are at higher risk of absenteeism, dropping out of or frequently changing school and they tend to obtain lower grades. They are twice as likely as their non-abused peers to need special education or be suspended from school.²⁸

Emergencies

Children in conflict-affected countries represent 20% of the world's primary school age children but 50% of the world's out-of-school

children.²⁹ In emergency situations following armed conflict or natural disasters, children are often forced to move repeatedly or migrate with or without their displaced families.

Many live in temporary refugee camps, with damaged infrastructure or disrupted service access, and remain out of school for long periods of time. Continuous exposure to traumatic events and distress, insufficient basic needs coverage, a loss of social networks and a lack of emotional support and safety put these children at risk of falling behind their peers without ever catching up.

Gender-based discrimination

Children without parental care face numerous forms of discrimination due to social status, gender, disability or ethnic background. They often have weak social support networks and so have to fend for themselves, which can interrupt their schooling. Among the 43% of the world's out-of-school children who will never go to school, there is a considerable gender disparity, it concerns 48% of girls compared with 37% of boys.³⁰ Girls' already lower enrolment rates further drop at secondary school age.³¹ Boys are then more likely to leave school early, 26% compared with 20% of girls.³² The highest gender disparities are found in the more expensive tertiary education.³³

Girls are generally more vulnerable to gender discrimination, which affects their access to education: they often work as maids or are excluded from school due to traditional practices and sociocultural beliefs and boundaries. Girls are also more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, physical harm, adolescent pregnancies,³⁴ unsafe abortions, early marriage³⁵ and maternal mortality, and they are more likely to pass vulnerability and gender disparities on to the next generation.

²⁶ UNICEF (2009)

²⁷ Berrige (2007)

²⁸ UNICEF (2014b)

²⁹ UIS and UNICEF (2015)

³⁰ UNESCO (2015a)

³¹ UIS and UNICEF (2015)

³² UNESCO (2015a)

³³ United Nations (2015)

³⁴ The World Health Organisation estimates 16 million girls aged 15 – 19 give birth every year; 95% of these births occur in low- and middle-income countries. WHO (2008)

³⁵ If current trends continue, 142 million girls will be married off during the period 2011-2020. This means 39 000 every day. UNFPA (2012)

HIV/AIDS

In families and communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS or affected by other severe sicknesses, some children, especially girls, take on the household responsibilities such as caring for sick parents and raising younger siblings at the expense of their own education, or become involved in child labour to contribute to the household income or fend for their own survival.

Child labour

Child labourers often suffer from stress and trauma when risking their lives, health and education. For child labourers attending school, work may result in lower attendance rates and difficulties concentrating in class, or lead to school-drop-out: In 32 mostly sub-Saharan African countries, at least 20% of school children are not expected to finish school.³⁶

While girls are more likely to become victims of trafficking, boys might be forced to become child soldiers or pushed into other hazardous forms of child labour.³⁷ Some children may work because education is simply seen as unaffordable, inaccessible, or irrelevant.

Our approach

There are multiple and complex barriers preventing children from developing, learning and attending school. In cooperation with partners, SOS Children's Villages' programmes aim at strengthening the capacities and resources of children and caregivers, focusing on prevention, awareness-raising and early intervention services for high-risk families and communities. This includes parental counselling and the provision of social, emotional and trauma support to prevent the long-term consequences of violence, abandonment and neglect.



We provide children with the psychosocial support, stability and routine needed to strengthen their resilience, with a focus on children's rights and protection management in emergencies. We offer income generating initiatives such as saving clubs and small business development to prevent child labour, support HIV/AIDS affected families, and help children without parental care and teenage mothers to continue their education.

RECOMMENDATION

The existing cultural, social and financial barriers and rights violations that exclude children and young people from education should be tackled. This includes creating more responsive and effective social protection and welfare services for children and families at risk, supporting their economic empowerment, setting adequate social and legal frameworks and awareness-raising measures, combating any form of discrimination, building inclusive teaching and school facilities, and furthering sexual and reproductive health education. The inclusion of accessible and reliable disaggregated data on these children in national and international monitoring systems would close existing data gaps, including monitoring of school drop-outs and young people not in education, employment or training.

³⁶ UNESCO (2015a)

³⁷ SOS Children's Villages International (2014a)

Our approach to education: Build positive relationships for child-centred learning and development



The family is a child's first and most influential learning environment. SOS Children's Villages is convinced that children develop best in a loving and caring family.³⁸ Development is a lifelong process, from birth to adulthood, encompassing all areas of life; physical, intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual.³⁹

Children without parental care or at risk of losing it are often deprived of the stable attachments, protective experiences and coping skills they need to counterbalance chronic stress and family instability. They need support in their local context to overcome the obstacles and barriers that prevent their access to education and hamper their ability to learn.

This requires a holistic approach to learning and education. Collaborative and participatory child-centred learning is based on reciprocal relations that allow children with prior experiences of unstable relations, neglect and vulnerability to gain confidence and build resilience.

Building resilience through child-centred education

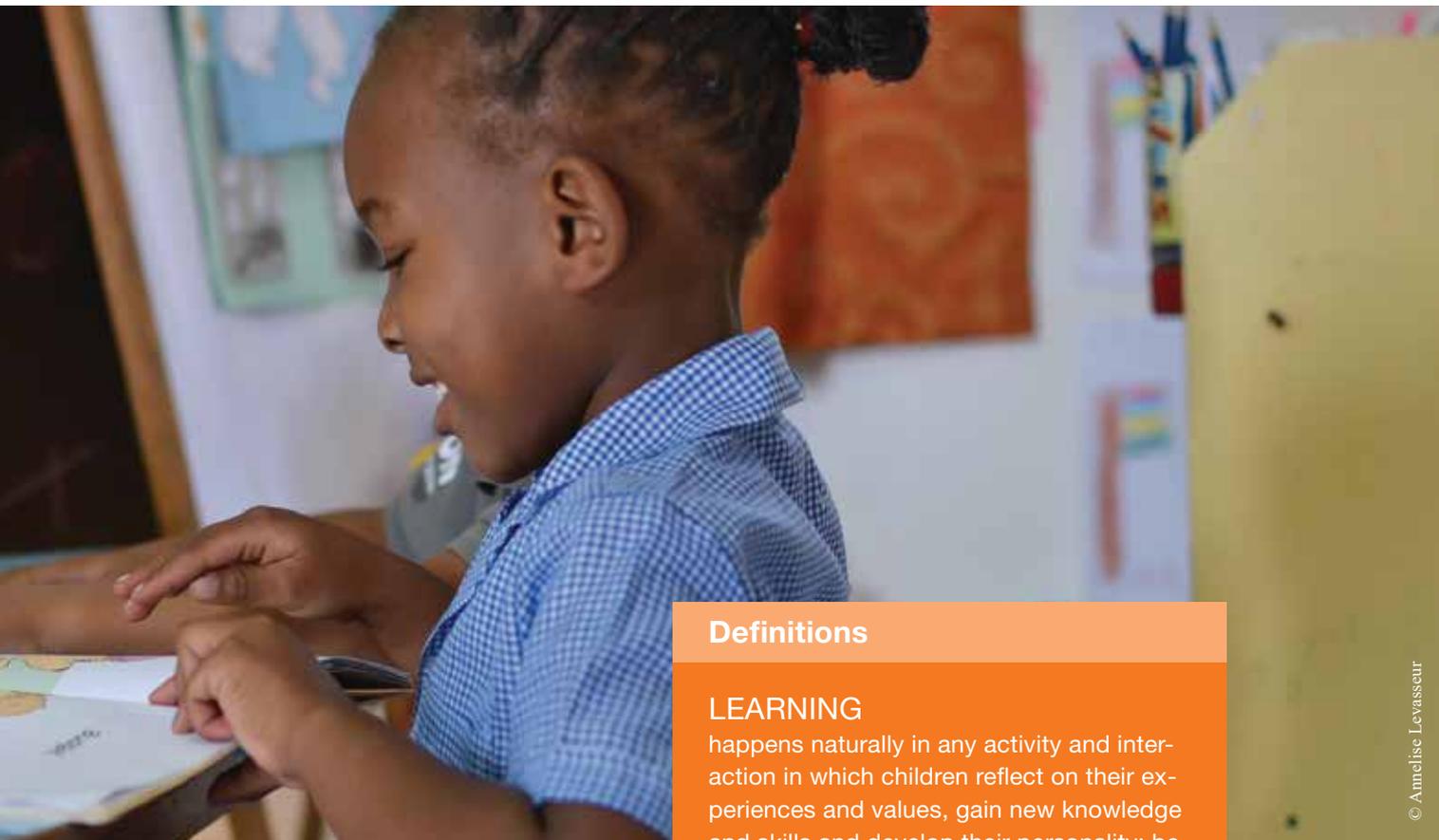
Children without parental care or at risk of losing it often have particular cognitive, social, emotional, and physical learning needs and delays.⁴⁰ Through child-centred learning, they are motivated to define their own learning goals, explore their autonomy, voice their views and needs, make choices and reflect on values and attitudes. They build and strengthen their resilience and self-esteem through developing personal capacities such as trust, cooperation and self-reliance, positive attitudes, regulating emotions and welcoming change.

Children are empowered to trust in their own personality and strength, develop a positive sense of self and take adequate and informed decisions. These are key skills for children and families who have experienced powerlessness to become active agents, and have the right and the ability to participate actively, independently and responsibly in the social, political and economic life of their societies.

³⁸ SOS Children's Villages International (2008)

³⁹ SOS Children's Villages International (2009a)

⁴⁰ SOS Children's Villages International (2013b)



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A stimulating environment promotes resilience through social support, role models, stability and safety. Coping skills can be learned through supportive relationships, adaptive and self-regulatory skill-building, mobilising sources of faith, hope and culture and creating positive and stimulating experiences.

Holistic and inclusive learning relevant for tomorrow

A projected 65% of children at primary school-age will probably work in jobs that have yet to be created or imagined in a globalised and rapidly changing labour market.⁴¹ The key competencies that these children will need as adults are unknown, but social and emotional skills, such as effective communications, taking the initiative and displaying creativity, self-initiative, curiosity, collaboration and adaptability are likely to be key.⁴²

These skills are not only important for employment, but they also contribute substantially to

Definitions

LEARNING

happens naturally in any activity and interaction in which children reflect on their experiences and values, gain new knowledge and skills and develop their personality; be it through play, practice, family discussions, teaching or simply having new experiences.

EDUCATION

is the process of facilitating learning; it structures the acquisition and application of new knowledge, skills, competencies and values. It introduces children to society and culture and profoundly shapes their capacity, identity and life chances.

RESILIENCE

involves the mental, physical and emotional ability to overcome serious hardship and adapt well to changing conditions. Research suggests that the single most resilience-building factor for children is to have at least one stable, reliable and committed relationship with a supportive parent or caregiver.⁴³

The way and extent to which learning and education are supported, resourced and organised affects children's development and profoundly influences their vulnerability or resilience.

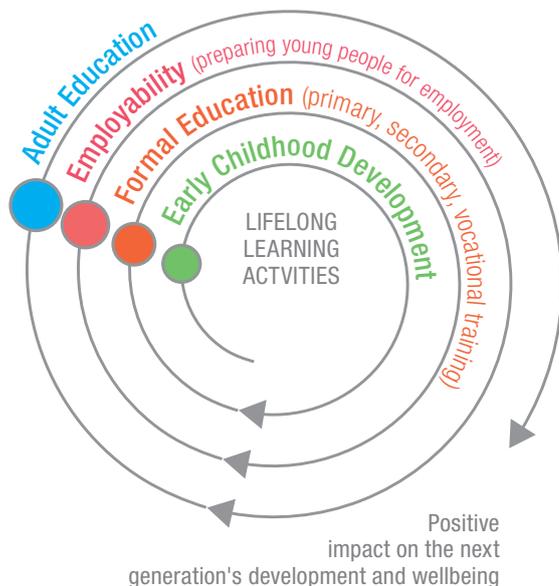
⁴¹ Davidson, C. (2013) in: *World Economic Forum* (2016)

⁴² *World Economic Forum* (2016)

⁴³ *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University* (2015)

LIFELONG LEARNING

Learning activities undertaken throughout life to gain competencies and qualifications are the foundation of healthy development and wellbeing.



balanced and secure identities and resilience for children without parental care or at risk of losing it. These children require intensive and sustained mentoring and coaching to build these skills, gain stability, hope and a feeling of control over their future, and develop the practices of lifelong learning and development.

Furthermore, these children often face discrimination based on their social or economic status or due to gender, faith, ethnic and linguistic differences, health or disability. This profoundly affects their opportunities, self-image and often undermines their right to education.⁴⁴ A holistic child-centred approach enables children to experience safety, bonding and an appreciation for their cultural and social backgrounds and difficult personal life history.

Family, kindergarten and schools that offer holistically stimulating educational environments where reciprocal relationships foster children's mental health, strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities essential for the healthy development of disadvantaged children. Cooperation with parents and caregivers is also important to support resilience and create an encouraging learning environment. Informal and non-formal play-based learning strategies promote an active and creative approach to formal learning⁴⁵ and give children unscheduled time to explore and learn without rules or pressure.

Our approach

SOS Children's Villages' holistic approach to child-centred education addresses children's individual needs and situations, and supports their personal capabilities with relevance to their local social, cultural and economic contexts.

We accompany children and their families on their lifelong educational journey and help them to successfully navigate the education system. We promote resilience and child-centred quality education focusing on building positive relationships and putting the child as a resourceful individual with unique skills and capabilities at the centre of our work.⁴⁶

We support and create inclusive learning environments that are non-discriminatory, non-violent, inter-cultural and gender-sensitive. An education fostering diversity and social cohesion is sensitive to difference, and respects, protects and promotes children whatever their background and situation, which ultimately contributes to building peaceful and sustainable societies.

We work with local partners, service-providers and community-based organisations, to devel-

⁴⁴ UNESCO (2015b)

⁴⁵ World Economic Forum (2016)

⁴⁶ SOS Children's Villages International (2008)



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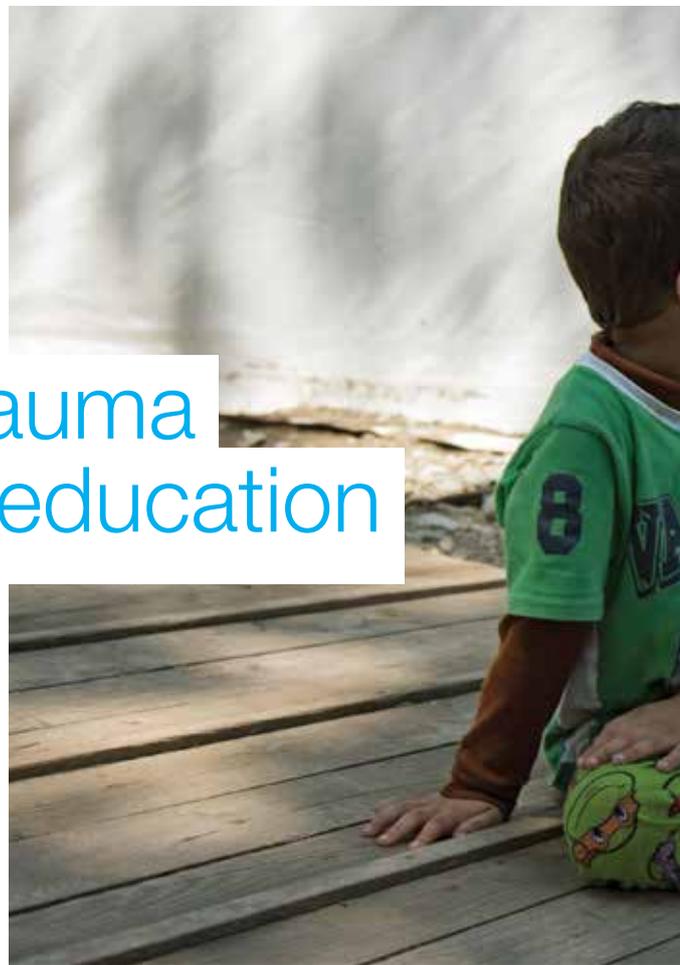
op and strengthen programmes that holistically connect informal, non-formal and formal learning activities. We are witness to their mutually inspiring influence in the acquisition of knowledge, competencies and comprehensive cognitive and psychosocial life skills.

By accompanying children and their families in their lifelong educational path, we embrace all dimensions of human development. We facilitate a close link and smooth transition between parental capacity-building, early childhood care and pre-primary school programmes to primary, secondary and tertiary education or vocational training. We support mentoring, coaching and other measures to develop life skills and entrepreneurial abilities to foster employability and promote children's and young people's independence and equal participation in social and economic life.

RECOMMENDATION

Measures should be set to ensure education is inclusive and holistic, child-centred, relationship-based, and fosters the development of individual talent and resilience in each child. The inclusion of children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it, including children in alternative care, in the education system should be supported through holistic and cross-sectorial policies and measures, such as accessible community-based learning practices, play-based non-formal activities, community networks and ongoing mentoring to empower them for integration in society and the labour market.

Coping with trauma and disrupted education



The hardship faced by children without parental care or at risk of losing it during their developmentally sensitive childhood and adolescent years can be traumatic and harmful to their social, emotional and cognitive development.⁴⁷

When children are subjected to intense, frequent or prolonged distressing environments or treatment as a result of among others disaster, war, poverty, violence, abuse or discrimination, their resilience and capacity to cope can be severely hindered. The experiences leave traces in children's lives or in the family or community history. When these events are coupled with the profound trauma of losing their closest caregivers, children from disadvantaged families also need to cope with the distress, shame and grief that goes along with it, which can have long-term and negative effects on them.

Recurring traumatic and adverse events can lead to an over-reactive stress system that puts children in a permanent state of emergency and directly affects the development of their brain and social functioning. Developmental delays in terms of language, social and motor skills affect their ability to learn, comprehend and express themselves.⁴⁸ They are likely to have greater gaps in basic literacy and numeracy skills than their peers and are at a greater risk of repeating grades or dropping out of school altogether. They are often weak in problem solving, organising educational materials or attending to classroom tasks; and parents, teachers and care professionals might have lower educational expectations for them.⁵⁰

Traumatised children often require support throughout life to strengthen their weakened resilience and coping skills. They need safe and

⁴⁷ McInerney, M. and McKlindon, A. (n.d.)

⁴⁸ Dwyer, J. et al. (2012); Cole et al. (2005)

⁴⁹ Cole et al. (2005); UNICEF (2014b); Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011)

⁵⁰ Cole et al. (2005); Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011)



reliable relationships from which to take first steps towards their recovery, learning and development.

Our approach

SOS Children's Villages creates informal safe and child-friendly spaces and trauma-sensitive learning environments. We build the capacity of social and education professionals to incorporate rights-based trauma and resilience sensitive approaches into their work with children, families and communities. We work closely with partners and community schools to ensure equitable, safe and trauma-sensitive quality education for all children. We support remedial education services and extra-curricular activities to children whose education has been disrupted by traumatic events. Addressing their specific learning needs and skill-building allows them to close their educational gaps and to catch up with their peers.

RECOMMENDATION

Safe and child-friendly trauma-sensitive learning environments, remedial education opportunities and on-going trauma support and counselling should be put in place to promote the education of children without parental care or at risk of losing it and their caregivers. Education systems should recognise and be sensitive to the needs and situation of traumatised children; specialised training material and courses should be developed and adequate rights-based training and supervision of involved staff and educators assured.

"We have to see a child as a whole and differentiate learning problems from psychological problems, which may occur simultaneously or separately and influence each other."

Melinda Varga, child psychiatrist



A new chance for teenage mothers: The Back to School Initiative in Malawi

“I was 14 years old doing my final year at primary school when my friends pressurised me to have a boyfriend. After a few months, I found myself pregnant and my parents chased me out of home. I was then made to live with my boyfriend’s parents.

My boyfriend continued with his education while I was home nursing our baby. The relationship between my mother in-law and myself was not good and my boyfriend no longer cared for me at all.

It was a Mother Group in our community that rescued me. They tried to convince my parents that they should accept me home, but my parents did not want to waste their hard earned money to pay for my school fees. The Mother Group also encouraged me to complete my education and liaised with SOS Children’s Villages Malawi, which sponsored my secondary education. After sitting for my Malawi School Certificate of Education I have qualified for the public university selection.” (Brenda 17).

The Mother Groups Brenda mentions are groups of women established as part of a government initiative to help girls who have

left school due to early pregnancies. SOS Children’s Villages Malawi works with these groups to support girls’ access to education; currently with over 20 Mother Groups in four districts.

Mother Groups make home visits to encourage girls to re-enrol in school and liaise with head teachers to make this possible; they also help with income-generating activities to support girls with school fees and educational materials.

SOS Children’s Villages Malawi has provided some funds for school fees and provided Mother Groups with bicycles to help with home visits and materials for recording their work. They have facilitated training in counselling and lobbying skills, as the majority of groups had not received any form of training. Other activities include sponsoring community awareness meetings on the importance of educating girls, providing them with moral and psychosocial support to ensure they can complete their education, and challenging the practice of early marriage.

As a result, over 100 girls have gone back to school, 17 girls have completed their secondary education and seven are in universities and technical colleges. Soon, Brenda will be one of them.

Traumatic experiences and their consequences

An interview with child psychiatrist Melinda Varga

What effect can traumatic experiences have on a child's development and learning ability?

Melinda Varga (MV): Risk factors such as the neglect of parents, malnutrition, lack of motivation, and different types of stressors faced before and after birth have a serious negative impact on the emotional development of a child which results in lack of self-esteem, lack of motivation, mistrust and inability to mobilise internal strengths. These factors also influence cognitive development and can cause learning difficulties, including attention deficit, working memory impairment, decreased logical and analytical thinking and decreased creative capacity, which may be the origin of school failure.

A child may face trauma effects even where a child watches and is exposed to parents' trauma symptoms, faces the consequences of untold stories, or where parents expect too much from a child to cover their failures, which makes a child feel guilty.

Research and our experiences show the significance of early preventive and therapeutic interventions on children in need and their environment. During our work at SOS Children's Villages in Rwanda, Burundi and Djibouti, school failure was the main cause of consultation. Test results showed that among 180 pupils, 95% were facing learning problems with or without psychological problems (psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, behaviour disorders, complicated grief, not knowing or accepting his/her past).

What kind of support do children with traumatic experiences need to balance the drawback caused by these experiences?

MV: We have to see a child as a whole and differentiate learning problems from psychological problems, which may occur simultaneously or separately and influence each other. Focusing on a child's own needs means we also have to

address his/her environment through sensitisation, training, consultation and therapies. Children who are in need of curative care require a complex problem diagnosis and adequate interventions in individual and/or group therapies, re-education, and that all obstacles for the child's healthy development are removed. Preventive care includes sport and developing creativity through tales, music, drawing, arts, and dance.

How did your work with SOS Children's Villages look?

MV: My work was based on interrelated components, starting with trauma diagnosis through to psychological and learning tests for children, followed by individual and group therapy, including psychodrama. We consulted with SOS Children's Villages' caregivers and collaborated with teachers. We initiated a re-education⁵¹ project in partnership with the University of Turin and individual re-education with a speech therapist. We partnered with Creative Planet, a Hungarian NGO, to include creativity in preventive care. We trained psychologists who worked with children and staff.

During my work in SOS Children's Villages, I met children with serious psychological problems such as lack of self-esteem, mistrust, hopelessness towards the future, inability to express feelings and show emotions, lack of capacity to solve problems and overcome obstacles. There are many who have learning difficulties, although they have potential, non-mobilised capacity and obvious internal values.

⁵¹ Children with learning disabilities need special occupational therapy provided by a special needs teacher. In contrast to tutoring which helps acquire the missing knowledge, re-education helps to improve the learning abilities. Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A. and Hertzman, C. (2007)



OUR EXPERIENCE

A touch of normality: Educational activities for young refugees in the Balkans

SOS Children's Villages is committed to helping refugee children find normality in its Child Friendly Spaces at refugee centres in Macedonia and Serbia; a safe place to rest and to take part in games or educational activities. Around 200 people including 90 children are currently staying at the refugee centre in Tabanovce, Macedonia; and at the refugee centre in Preševo, Serbia, an average of 100 people, about 40% of them children, attend the centre each day.

SOS Children's Villages and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy Macedonia, have developed an education programme for young refugees. The activities are based on basic psychosocial support guidelines, using expressional art therapy techniques: painting/drawing, use of toys, clay work, origami, working with recycled and recyclable material, music, movement and theatre.

For cognitive development, basic maths classes and logical games are provided and language classes are held. SOS Children's Villages has engaged Farsi and Arabic teach-

ers. Aya is an Arabic translator in Macedonia and as a refugee herself, was moved to start an Arabic language class. She realised that many of the children stranded in Tabanovce were missing out on school, as she had done when she fled Syria in 2012.

In Preševo, children and young people constantly occupy the Computer Corner and although many of them seek distraction when using the computers, in daily computer classes about 120 children and young people learn how to use MS Office and other useful applications.

In May 2016, SOS Children's Villages opened a Family Room in Preševo to offer psychosocial support for families through workshops, creative and educational activities and board games. Within two weeks 290 people had used the Family Room. In addition, a Youth Corner within the Family Room provides a safe place for children between the ages 14 and 18 and focuses on psychosocial support with the help of qualified educators. Within its first two weeks the Youth Corner had 72 users.



Early childhood: The foundation of lifelong learning

The early years of childhood can lay the foundation for a child's entire life.⁵² As children undergo rapid growth during these years, from before birth until the start of school, it is important to support their physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and language development.⁵³ Children who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it are highly vulnerable to developmental delays. They are often also excluded from adequate early childhood care and education. Evidence shows that the most disadvantaged children are less likely to attend preschool than their peers, especially those from poorer or rural areas and with less educated parents.⁵⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals call for all children to have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.⁵⁵

Neglect and inadequate stimulation affects early development

Young children without parental care or at risk of losing it often do not have stable, responsive and nurturing relationships with parents or primary caregivers and as they grow older

this can affect their relationships with others in their communities such as teachers, siblings and peers. Their development is often restricted by an environment that does not provide adequate nutrition or health care, does not value or encourage play-based early learning and exploration⁵⁶ and applies inappropriate violent discipline.⁵⁷ In many countries, a substantial number of children under five are left with inadequate care, for example alone at home, in the care of another child under ten or are taken to work and exposed to unsafe working conditions.⁵⁸

The quality of care that young children receive substantially influences their brain development. Positive experiences cause new sections of the brain to connect and new abilities to develop, such as walking, talking, and eventually doing more complex things like arithmetic, planning and reasoning. Delays in the development of cognitive, language, fine motor and socio-emotional skills can manifest themselves later as difficulties with learning, emotional development and the management of anxieties.⁵⁹ Investing in early childhood is essential for

⁵² Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A. and Hertzmann, C. (2007)

⁵³ Tanner, J., Candland, T and Odden, W. (2015)

⁵⁴ Siraj-Blatchford, I., Woodhead, M. (Eds.) (2009); UNICEF (2016)

⁵⁵ United Nations (2016)

⁵⁶ Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A. and Hertzman, C. (2007)

⁵⁷ UNICEF (2014c)

⁵⁸ UNICEF (2014c), p. 6; Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A. and Hertzman, C. (2007)

⁵⁹ Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016)



OUR EXPERIENCE

Raising preschool education: Mobile Kindergartens in Bosnia & Herzegovina

SOS Children's Villages Bosnia & Herzegovina implemented the first free "Mobile Kindergartens" in Goražde in 2004, followed by Mostar in 2006. Mobile Kindergartens aim to prepare children from rural areas and disadvantaged families for primary school and to raise the proportion of children attending preschool education, which currently stands at only 13%.

SOS Children's Villages employed teachers and a project coordinator. Schools in Goražde and Mostar offered classrooms, cleaning, electricity, water, toilets, and cooperation with school staff.

The Mobile Kindergartens focus on formal and informal education. They prepare children for primary school and co-operate with teachers to support children and follow their progress once they enter school. They also

help children to express their emotions, and teach them to articulate their opinions, make decisions and solve problems.

Using individual assessments and follow up measures, it was found that children had benefitted in terms of being better equipped to start school without problems, and that their communications skills and self-confidence had improved. Parents involved in the programme had also better understood their children's needs and they were provided with materials to use at home to help their children with the challenges of primary school.

Despite a Law on Obligatory Preschool Education, preschool education is not obligatory in all parts of Bosnia & Herzegovina. If the relevant law were implemented and responsibility taken by the government, SOS Children's Villages would be ready to offer cooperation and service provision to the state.

healthy families and sustainable communities. Many studies show that healthy development during early childhood helps children from disadvantaged backgrounds build resilience to cope with adverse experiences and adapt to change, thus creating more equal opportunities.⁶⁰ It improves their readiness for school and their ability to learn, and lowers the likelihood of them being enrolled in special education programmes or in age-inappropriate classes.

It can also mitigate the risk of poor physical and mental health in later in life and facilitate individual development, participation in society, employment opportunities and economic independence.⁶¹ One study suggests that every dollar spent on enrolling children in preschool education results in six to 18 dollars of higher wages in adult life.⁶²

Our approach

Our experience shows that healthy early childhood development and early learning succeeds when all dimensions of child wellbeing are addressed and children experience positive bonding and attachments, a cognitively stimulating environment, nurturing and stable relationships and encouragement from their parents or caregivers.⁶³

SOS Children's Villages works directly with disadvantaged families and communities, and in cooperation with partners such as national and local authorities and childcare providers to empower them to provide effective early care and education. Programmes are always adapted to the specific local context and respond to the abilities and needs of each individual child.

We support, and in some cases run, day care centres, mother and child centres, parent clubs, kindergartens, community childcare centres and other early childhood development programmes, preschool learning facilities, training

resilience to cope with adverse experiences
 child-centred approach
 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES
 ADAPT TO CHANGE responsive child-parent relationships
 adequate nutrition
 ENCOURAGEMENT FROM PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS
 and health
 NURTURING, STABLE RELATIONSHIPS
 positive bonding and attachments
FREE OF VIOLENCE development of cognitive, language, fine motor, socio-emotional skills
 cognitively stimulating and safe environment
HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

sessions and continuous support for parents, caregivers, relevant community members and childcare professionals. We assist parents and caregivers to provide regular nutritious meals, go to child medical check-ups, and sensitise them to the importance of play and exploration.

Providing child-friendly safe spaces, we support parents to have positive experiences with their children and build up responsive parent-child relationships free of violent physical or emotional disciplining. We support community child development centres through teacher training and other interventions to improve the quality of their services and strengthen their child-centred approach.⁶⁴

RECOMMENDATION

The quality, coverage and equal access to holistic early childhood care and education for children without parental care or at risk of losing it and their families should be assured and substantially and continually improved. Providers, care professionals, parents and caregivers should be supported and receive rights-based training to build their capacities in adequately and holistically supporting children's early development.

⁶⁰ Jukes, M., Drake, L. and Bundy, D. (2008)

⁶¹ Tanner, J., Candland, T. and Odden, W. (2015); UNICEF (2016)

⁶² Engle, P. et al. (2011)

⁶³ See also: Roth, G. (2015)

⁶⁴ SOS Children's Villages International (2013b)



OUR EXPERIENCE

Improving parent-child relationships: Parents' Clubs in Russia

SOS Children's Villages Russia has developed a range of services for parents and young children. In six programmes nearly 400 parents from vulnerable communities have received training and counselling to stimulate child development, improve parental skills and strengthen family bonds.

Through Parents' Clubs parents can access advice and support from professionals – including paediatricians, therapists and neurologists – on social and health issues. The programme's approach is varied, with opportunities to discuss issues openly and constructively, watch training videos and attend training sessions. Lectures and workshops have been held on childcare, breast-feeding and the importance of hygiene, as well as avoiding HIV transmission from mother to child and acquiring techniques for developing healthy interactions with children to nurture attachment.

More structured sessions with children are offered as well, including game and art therapy, family therapy and professional observations of family dynamics and relationships. Since 2013 innovative work has included the "Theatre with my mum"

project, which uses fairytales and theatre performances to help parents teach their children communications skills, build up empathy and develop long-lasting healthy parent and child relationships.

After leaving the programme families are evaluated on observed changes in their behaviour and the emotional state of the parents and children. The programme has found that in most cases after three months children's development improves and parents have a better understanding of their thoughts and emotions and so interact bet-



ter and spend more time with their children. Most significantly, none of the families that have attended the programme have subsequently suffered a family breakdown and with support have been able to maintain the care of their children.



OUR EXPERIENCE

Self-directed learners: LEGO Early Childhood Development Programme

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programme was a pilot project facilitated by SOS Children's Villages Denmark and supported by the LEGO Foundation. It ran from September 2012 to March 2014 and used LEGO to promote age appropriate development in early childhood in the East Africa region.

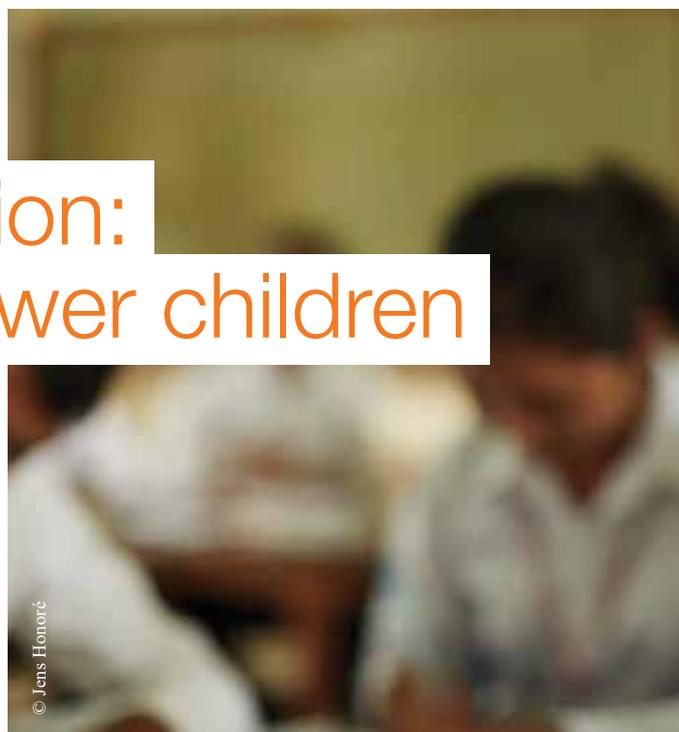
The programme focused on preschool education for vulnerable children in Kenya, Rwanda and Somaliland. In each of these countries, despite acknowledging the importance of early childhood development it had not been prioritised by national governments. Most preschool care is provided by NGOs, community-based and religious organisations and individual entrepreneurs. All SOS Kindergartens in the three countries participated in the programme, along with a number of informal day care settings and other kindergartens: 66 kindergarten teach-

ers were trained, reaching a total of 1,074 children.

The programme aimed to train teachers to empower children to be self-directed learners, with the ability to develop curiosity, define and set goals, evaluate progress, negotiate in groups, show confidence and share results. It also aimed to facilitate and adapt this approach to local practices and raise awareness of the importance of holistic child-centred education.

The participating kindergartens introduced a new playful learning approach into daily routines and curriculum using LEGO, initiating a process of change from a teacher-centred classroom tradition to a child-centred approach with a perception of children as self-directed learners. The teachers' role has become more facilitative and in the words of one of the trained teachers: "I have been surprised to see how much the children can actually do by themselves and how smart they are."

Formal education: Schools empower children



Formal primary education is both free and compulsory in most countries and the Millennium Development Goals pledged universal primary education.⁶⁵ However, approximately 124 million children and adolescents were not able to enter or complete school in 2013, including around 59 million primary school age children and 65 million of lower secondary school age.⁶⁶

Children without parental care or at risk of losing it are disproportionately excluded from the formal education system. In the least developed countries, the number of children attending school aged 10 to 14 who have lost both parents is 12% lower than for their peers living with at least one parent.⁶⁷ Children in the poorest households are four times more likely not to go to school than children in the richest households.⁶⁸ Research in five European countries has shown that children who have been in public care are less likely than others to progress to upper secondary level and complete their education, for example they attend higher education five times less than young people overall.⁶⁹

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children call for access to formal, non-formal and vocational education in local communities.⁷⁰ The Sustainable Development Goals call for free and equitable access not only for primary but also secondary education as well as affordable and equal access to technical, vocational and tertiary education.⁷¹

Child rights violations weaken educational outcomes

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often exposed to environments that do not encourage their learning and inhibit their school attendance and educational outcomes. They might not be able to learn free from distractions at home, or receive inadequate support from parents or caregivers, who may not be able pay for school uniforms, equipment, fees, transportation or regular, nutritious meals.⁷²

Damaging experiences and developmental deficits occurring in early childhood, such as abuse and neglect, can resurface as learning weakness-

⁶⁵ Considerable progress was made, however. The primary school net enrolment increased from 83% in 2000 to 91% in 2015. United Nations (2015)

⁶⁶ UNICEF (2016)

⁶⁷ UNICEF (2013)

⁶⁸ According to UN survey data from 63 countries.

United Nations (2015)

⁶⁹ Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011)

⁷⁰ Art. 85 of Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. SOS Children's Villages International (2009b)

⁷¹ United Nations (2016)

⁷² Jukes, M., Drake, L. and Bundy, D. (2008)



es and affect educational outcomes.⁷³ In many countries, the education system is highly selective and deficit-focused, undermining children's development opportunities and reinforcing inequalities.⁷⁴ It fails to provide equitable access and learning outcomes for children in alternative care,⁷⁵ or marginalised and disadvantaged children living with their families of origin.

The schools these children attend are often weakly governed, under-funded and suffer from inadequate infrastructure and learning materials, out-dated curricula and poorly trained, paid and motivated teachers.⁷⁶ Disadvantaged children often face discrimination from their teachers and their peers. The stigmatisation of being considered at risk, slow learners, weak or even bad reinforces stereotypes and further exclusion. All of this can result in learning difficulties, educational gaps, low basic skill levels, absenteeism, grade repetition, placement in age-inappropriate classes and high drop-out rates.⁷⁷ An estimated 130 million primary school age children worldwide are not able to adequately read, write or count after four years in school.⁷⁸

⁷³ Berridge, D. (2007)

⁷⁴ UNICEF (2016)

⁷⁵ Berridge, D. (2007)

⁷⁶ UNICEF (2016)

⁷⁷ SOS Children's Villages (2008); UNESCO (2012)

⁷⁸ UNESCO (2015b)

OUR EXPERIENCE

Ubuntu: Teaching universal values and community spirit to students in Austria and Germany

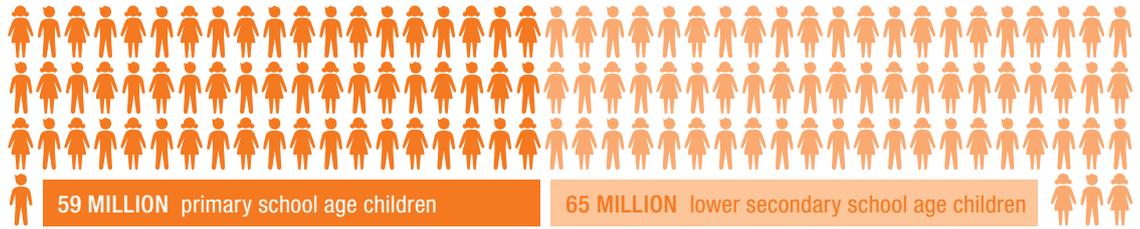
"Ubuntu goes to school" is a SOS Children's Villages teaching programme developed by the Hermann Gmeiner Academy and the Hermann Gmeiner Fund Germany. It is offered across Germany and Austria to primary and secondary school classes, and others such as university education departments, nursing colleges, youth living arrangements and homes for people with mental disabilities. Over the course of nine years, approximately 70 school classes have been reached in Austria alone.

The programme is derived from Ubuntu, a philosophy originating from southern Africa, based on universal human principles such as trust, responsibility, (self-) respect, solidarity, accountability, community spirit, self-actualisation and dignity. In two to three hour sessions, young people are encouraged to question all aspects of education and learning and re-discover their curiosity.

Through drama, attentive listening, role-playing, applied arts and developing exhibitions on topics such as children's rights, equality or social justice, the programme sparks understanding that respect, self-respect and self-worth are inherent in every person and young people are encouraged to reflect on what this means for them individually.

Ubuntu goes to school has had a transformative effect on children and their views on education. To have a future generation of socially responsible and self-sustaining individuals, the present generation must be encouraged to embrace universal values and attitudes for the collective good.

124 MILLION CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS worldwide are not able to enter or complete school.



Education for disadvantaged children: Hermann Gmeiner Award winner Maya Dhal from India

Maya Dhal (24) grew up in the SOS Children’s Village Bhubaneswar in Eastern India. “The love and support of my SOS family motivated and enabled me to excel academically and get a good job,” she says. Maya studied hard to enter a Bachelor of Science programme in hotel and hospitality management and with pride she describes her appointment as a management trainee in a prestigious hotel and convention centre; she was chosen out of 800 other students.

She is convinced that giving a child an education does not necessarily require many resources, but rather commitment. Her be-

lief that every child should have the same opportunity has led her to the slums to teach school drop-outs and help them return to the classroom. As a college student Maya used her own pocket money to buy books and other teaching material for 27 children living in a slum in Bhubaneswar.

Most children returned to school after Maya had worked with them in group lessons or individual tutorial classes. “A basic education helps us in creating our identity”, Maya says. “The challenge was to convince poor parents to make the children educated but finally I succeeded in convincing them.” Jayanti Dash a teacher in the school is thankful for Maya’s commitment: “After Maya came, children became more motivated to study and also take extra lessons.”

Education systems are rarely designed to cope with the complex interplay of social, cultural and financial barriers that vulnerable families and children face and fail to provide adequate education for many, especially those in alternative care.⁷⁹

Our approach

SOS Children's Villages works with disadvantaged children, their parents, caregivers and communities to help them navigate the education system and successfully complete an education that meets their aspirations and needs. This includes primary and secondary school, technical and vocational training and a range of higher education options. We cooperate with education authorities, schools and community organisations to support them to ensure free and equitable access to quality education that equips children with values and skills that strengthen their resilience.

Our experience has shown that the most disadvantaged children benefit substantially from well-qualified and well-meaning teachers as attachment figures who provide supportive learning relationships, encouragement and advice, and who believe in them. We engage with schools to improve the quality of teaching and teachers' qualifications encouraging child rights-based training to better respond to the individual learning needs and abilities of students.⁸⁰

In cooperation with national and local partners, we promote the development of talent for disadvantaged children to follow their vocations. Where necessary, we cover the costs of primary and secondary school or vocational training, or provide scholarships for higher education. We advocate for the secure (re-)admission of children who have been excluded from school for reasons such as unpaid fees, missing school uniforms or teenage pregnancy, and facilitate

reintegration and extra learning support. We assist families to provide school uniforms and other supplies to help children back into formal education.

We promote child and youth participation in school committees and boards and parents' participation in teacher/parent associations. We use information and communication technology for innovative, interactive and participatory teaching to reinforce children's digital, social and cognitive competencies. To foster a functioning public school system, we strengthen the existing education structures, systems, resources and capacities of the communities with which we work.

RECOMMENDATION

Education systems and practices need to be reformed and sufficiently resourced for equitable, effective and relevant quality education, empowering and trusting children and young people, promoting human rights, employability and sustainable development. Priority measures include investing in remedial education for children, whose education has been disrupted, and the qualifications and rights-based training of teachers to foster inclusive child-centred and participatory quality education.

⁷⁹ Berridge (2007)

⁸⁰ SOS Children's Villages International (2008)



OUR EXPERIENCE

Together with the community: Developing sustainable education services in Togo

In 2008 most children in the Fulani village of Kpalassi were not enrolled at school, and instead worked in the fields to supplement their family income. At the only school in the village, one volunteer teacher taught a maximum of 30 children. In response to this, SOS Children's Villages helped to revitalise the Village Development Committee and provided training on child rights and the importance of education.

Parents started sending their children to school, and with the increasing intake building additional classrooms became a priority in the community development plan. SOS Children's Villages supported this with construction materials and by mid-2009 two classrooms had been built with capacity for about 120 more children. SOS Children's Villages also provided reading and arithmetic books and other essential educational materials.

In 2010-2011, the school taught 145 children. However, they faced a chronic lack of teachers and so, supported by SOS Children's Villages, the Village Development Committee went to the district educational authorities. The school was made an official primary school with qualified teachers appointed by the government and as a consequence the rate of children going to school went up to almost 90% in 2011. Today the school is managed by the Pupils Parents Association and the Village Development Committee, and SOS Children's Villages often visits for post-programme follow-up.

A mobile library launched by SOS Children's Villages in 2014 supports children in their school performance. It consists of relevant books and a reading session of two hours twice a month under the supervision of teachers. It helps pupils from vulnerable families to master basic language and learn to read. It gives teachers the opportunity to detect student difficulties in reading and develop strategies to provide better support.

Employability: Young people on the path to decent work and life



The Sustainable Development Goals recognise decent work is a building block of development⁸¹—work that embraces dignity, equality, a fair income and safe conditions.⁸² Young people need support to prepare for a competitive jobs market where the most disadvantaged are likely to be left behind. In 2015, the global youth unemployment rate stood at approximately 13%, accounting for 73 million unemployed young people.⁸³

In particular, young people without parental care or at risk of losing it are often politically, socially and economically excluded and more marginalised from the labour market than their peers.⁸⁴ They often lack social support networks, encouragement and guidance. Irregular school attendance, drop-out and few qualifications can result in low self-confidence. These young people often lack resources and are forced to become economically independent earlier than their peers, at the expense of higher level training and education that could lead to more satisfying careers.⁸⁵

The findings from a study of five European countries showed that care leavers have much lower qualifications than young people in general.⁸⁶ With low or insufficient skills and qualifications, and little access to support services, they find transitioning from school to work and independent life challenging. An assessment in six SOS Children's Villages programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa and one in Asia revealed the difficulties young care leavers experience in getting jobs, as education often fails to meet labour market demands or they lack previous work experience and personal contacts to secure adequate formal employment.⁸⁷

A holistic set of skills to support employability

Acquiring the skills, competencies and qualifications needed to find a decent job starts in the early years of childhood, fostered by continuous learning. Supporting young people from the beginning enhances their abilities to benefit

⁸¹ United Nations (2016)

⁸² ILO(2016)

⁸³ ILO (2015)

⁸⁴ SOS Children's Villages (2010a)

⁸⁵ Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011)

⁸⁶ Cameron, C. (2016)

⁸⁷ SOS Children's Villages (2016a)



Improving young people's employability: The GoTeach partnership

The GoTeach programme began in 2011 as a pilot programme in four countries and has since expanded into an international partnership of over 26 countries across Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe engaging 7,000 young people. Run by SOS Children's Villages and Deutsche Post DHL, its mission is to improve the employability of disadvantaged young people and early school leavers by connecting them to the world of work.

DP-DHL Group employees at every level volunteer their expertise and time to provide support and guidance to young people, ranging from weekend workshops to serving as year-long youth mentors. All the activities are based on the needs of the young people in that specific country, which gives space and flexibility to adapt the programme. The activities can be roughly clustered into three categories:

JOB ORIENTATION: Volunteers offer career guidance.

ACCESS: Volunteers provide information on application and recruitment procedures

and train participants to apply for jobs and succeed in interviews.

EXPOSURE: The programme enables young people to experience a professional working environment through internships, apprenticeships and other opportunities.

The impact of GoTeach on young people and volunteers was evaluated in 2013 and 2015.

It is an outstanding mentoring system for young people, with corporate volunteers and participants finding their job confidence, self-motivation and resilience enhanced.⁸⁸ Young participants learn what it is like in a working environment, and what is expected of employees. One young person from Brazil described his experiences as: "I used to be a reserved person, now I love taking life head on. I have learned to be a part of a group and be proud of my uniqueness. I have learned to focus and have goals. I feel positive about my employability – the hours I've put in are paying off. I feel confident that when I am done with my studies I will be able to do my dream job successfully."

⁸⁸ de Graaff, D. (2015)

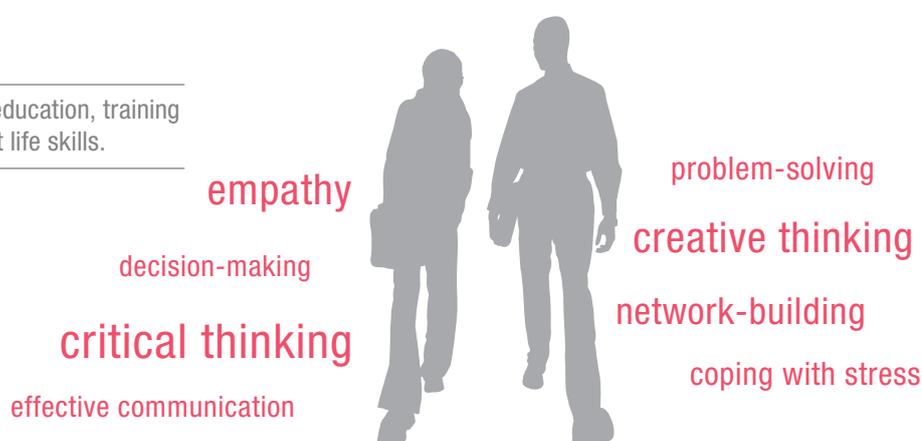
from later education and training opportunities. This increases the likelihood of securing and retaining suitable work, progressing within companies, and coping with changing technology and labour market conditions.⁸⁹

Employability requires specific education, vocational training, job experience or entrepreneurial activity, as well as building less tangible but equally important life skills, including decision-making, problem-solving, critical and creative thinking and effective communication, network building, empathy and coping with stress. Early preparation and support for young people striving to engage in entrepreneurial activities is especially important in countries that have weak formal economies and few jobs for well educated young people.

Equipping disadvantaged young people with the skills, competencies and qualifications to increase their employability helps their social inclusion and addresses some of the risk factors associated with abandonment, exclusion, discrimination, neglect and poverty. Employability measures can help to overcome institutional and personal barriers to education and address underemployment and insecure or exploitative employment conditions. A cross-sectorial policy approach is important to allow young people to access different support or services from social, health, education, employment and other sectors.

LIFE SKILLS

Employability depends not only on education, training and job experiences. It is also about life skills.



Guidance to build talents and life skills

The provision of orientation on education and career options, as well as encouraging self-reflection and the development of individual interests, talents and opportunities, is fundamental to ensuring young people make positive choices about their futures. The awareness and capacity of parents, caregivers and care professionals is crucial to coaching and guiding young people in their personal, educational and professional decision-making.

On the journey to self-reliance and decent work, disadvantaged young people need to gain confidence in their potential and talents, build social and life skills and fill gaps in their education. It is crucial to equip them with both social and market-related skills to find employment or become self-employed. This can be secured by ensuring their access to relevant vocational training, and by introducing entrepreneurship programmes into training curricula. Besides formal education, a range of non-formal education opportunities (open learning forums, e-learning, community-based programmes, mentoring and coaching, etc.) can strengthen young people's lifelong learning, starting from their individual needs and moving at their own pace.

⁸⁹ ILO (2004), paragraph 1.2 (d)

Our approach

SOS Children's Villages supports young people on their way to independence and prioritises holistic skill-building for social and professional inclusion in children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it. We empower young people to participate in the decisions affecting their lives and strongly encourage the role, capacity and responsibility of parents and caregivers in supporting their path towards employability.

We assist with accessing networks and opportunities for practical work experience through job shadowing and internships, which help enhance skills and work ethics. We emphasise mentoring and coaching through care professionals, peers with a similar care history, or individuals in a particular career or sector, for inspiration and support to sustain contacts and build on existing strengths. We strengthen equal access

to communication technologies and languages and technology training, identified by young people as crucial yet particularly weak skills in their portfolios.

We have entered into partnerships with the private sector, NGOs and government organisations to promote employability. The Go Teach programme (detailed above) has been replicated through a global YOUTH CAN! partnership bringing together corporations, NGOs with training expertise and young people. In Sri Lanka, the government cooperates with SOS Children's Villages in vocational training centres, providing training for many occupations including bakers, electricians, mechanics and welders. Participants are provided with a National Vocational Qualification and as these courses are government recognised, leading companies appreciate graduates and offer them on the job training and thereafter employment.



RECOMMENDATION

Political, social and economic frameworks are required to reduce youth unemployment and end insecure, low paid, precarious and exploitative working conditions. Employment and formal and non-formal education opportunities for young people, including young people not in education, employment or training and those without parental care or at risk of losing it, need to be prioritised. Targeted cross-sectorial support measures should promote relevant skills-building, mentoring, fairly paid internships and on-the-job learning opportunities, vocational training, social integration and equitable access to tertiary education for young care leavers and young people at risk.



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OUR EXPERIENCE

Exploring opportunities: The SOS Youth Leadership Development and Career Orientation programme in Palestine

With high unemployment in Palestine, and youth unemployment in Gaza reaching 60% in 2014, SOS Children's Villages Palestine ran a project to explore youth employment opportunities and to build young people's life and social skills.

The project took place from September 2014 to August 2015. It was based on an SOS Children's Villages needs assessment and was supported by the US Department of State and the Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative. In cooperation with the Institute for Community Partnership at Bethlehem University, it provided 24 workshops for 40 high school students on a range of issues, such as the role of women, children's rights and unemployment, and skills, such as leadership, creative thinking, teamwork and confidence building.

As part of its career guidance component, guest speakers spoke on the opportunities

of higher and vocational education; and individualised counselling and assessment explored young people's potential. There was the chance to visit relevant institutions and programmes, take part in site visits to companies and NGOs, and spend two practical days in employment sectors of interest.

Mohamed, 19, discovered an interest in becoming a chef. By the end of the project he had been admitted to Talita Kumi – one of the best schools for culinary arts – and is now employed at a hotel in Bethlehem.

Hiba, 16, dreamt of becoming a television presenter, but was too shy to speak in public. The programme helped her to conquer her fear – she participated in a TV show and conducted a live interview. She now has the confidence to pursue her dream.

"These young boys and girls have a huge potential and great ambitions ... but they need encouragement and motivation to reach their goals. This project facilitated that."

*Charlie Zeidan,
Institute for Community Partnership*



OUR EXPERIENCE

Improving access to the employment market: The E-Learning Centre in Djibouti

The E-Learning Centre* in Balbala in Djibouti City is a centre for computer-based learning and reading. It includes a teaching area equipped with computers as well as a digital library. It is a multi-functional place for meeting, learning and education to improve the employment and integration chances of young people.

In Balbala, the few schools often accommodate up to 70 students in each classroom, and although the school enrolment rate is 74.3%, many children leave school at 12 or 13 years old. Basic knowledge of computers and software is scarce and so young people lack the skills that would enable them to access the employment market. In 2010, the unemployment rate for young people under 20 was 80%.

Each term 150 children and young people between 10 and 25 years old attend classes at the E-Learning Centre. They have access to the digital library, online newspapers

and other websites. Through educational games, early school leavers from disadvantaged families can learn intuitively how to use computers. The E-Learning Centre is also open to members of the local community who pay a small fee, ensuring a certain degree of financial sustainability and shared responsibility in the community.

Following a 2013 study on the local employment market and its training requirements, SOS Children's Villages developed an inter-disciplinary education programme combining basic vocational knowledge (ICT, languages, business practices) with industry-specific knowledge in popular professional fields, such as logistics relevant for employment in the popular maritime sector. A career counselling service also supports young people in choosing course modules and finding an internship.

Further, the centre teaches behaviours that are essential for a future career to children and young people who have not attended school for a long time, such as punctuality, mandatory course attendance and teamwork.

* Supported by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the German Shipowners' Association



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Strengthening parental and caregiver education: Support for children's learning

Strong families make strong children.⁹⁰ Children's readiness to learn, their resilience and their ability to reach their full potential is fostered by secure attachment and adequate attention to their developmental needs.⁹¹ Parents and other primary caregivers are the first and most important educators of children, but where they lack resources, knowledge and skills it is critical to support them through adult education. The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children remind states to help families in meeting their responsibilities towards the child, addressing the root causes of child abandonment.⁹²

There are at least 750 million adults, two thirds of them women, who do not have even rudimentary literacy skills.⁹³ The educational attainment of parents and children is closely correlated; and children whose parents attended school are also more likely to do so.⁹⁴ Parental education, particularly the education of mothers, has positive effects on other developmental areas; reducing early childhood mortality, improving children's health⁹⁵ and helping provide children with cognitive and language skills, which in turn contribute to early success at school.⁹⁶

Parental resources, skills and knowledge for children's learning

Adult education refers to on-going learning processes where adults develop holistic abilities, knowledge and professional qualifications to meet their own needs, and those of their children and society.⁹⁷

To provide good care and a positive learning environment for their children, parents and caregivers must make sound decisions about their children's protection, stimulation, learning and development. This means acting as positive role models, respecting and standing up for their children's rights and fulfilling their individual needs, as well as having the capacity to help them overcome traumatic experiences and protect them from abuse, harm and violence.

Findings from seven programme locations in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia show that a substantial number of parents and caregivers still struggle to generate enough income to adequately support their families.⁹⁸ Informal employment, irregular, low or insecure income, loan repayment or lost stock can cause chronic stress and affect parents coping and caring abilities.

⁹⁰ SOS Children's Villages (2010b)

⁹¹ Moullin, S., Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2014)

⁹² Art. 32 of Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. SOS Children's Villages International (2009b)

⁹³ UNESCO (2015a)

⁹⁴ UNICEF (2016)

⁹⁵ Robinson-Pant, A. (2005)

⁹⁶ Burchfield et al. (2002)

⁹⁷ UNESCO (2013)

⁹⁸ SOS Children's Villages International (2016a)

750 MILLION ADULTS don't have rudimentary literacy skills



OUR EXPERIENCE

“I want my children to be educated”: Strengthening family capacity in the Gambia

Hassantou, a single mother, could not afford to enrol any of her six children in school. She was illiterate and solely depended on farming, dry season vegetable gardening and fruit selling to raise income for her family. Instead of going to school, the children supported their mother to make ends meet.

In their hut Hassantou shared her bed with her two youngest children aged four and one. The four other children slept on a piece of cloth. The kitchen roof was partly blown off

and there was no toilet. None of the children had a birth certificate. Due to their poverty, the family had been largely excluded from decision-making at the community level.

SOS Children’s Villages supported Hassantou with her short-term basic needs to provide space to strengthen her long-term capacity and become self-reliant. The support included a three-year education package. Hassantou agreed to participate in capacity building on ideal parenting and income generation, and received financial support. She was also offered counselling and psychosocial support services to stabilise the children and improve the family’s emotional wellbeing. These services were highly welcomed by Hassantou: “My objective is to have my children be educated and have our living condition and family situation upgraded.”

Today, all school age children in the family are attending school. Hassantou has received basic training on micro-enterprise development and management as well as financial capital from the programme to set up vegetable selling as a source of income for the family. She has been able to provide her family with three square meals a day, some household money, access to health services and educational materials for the children.

Educated parents are likely to be more knowledgeable of child rights and needs, and better equipped to claim their rights and those of their children. They have better opportunities to generate a stable income and may be more equipped with the skills, knowledge, resources and confidence to provide their children with a supportive and stable family environment, as well as the protective and caring relationships that promote their children's learning and development.

Our approach

Supporting the implementation of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, SOS Children's Villages helps parents and caregivers to develop their psychosocial and economic capacities to ensure their children's healthy development. We provide parenting skills training and psychosocial support in group sessions, family home visits and individual counselling. Social workers from SOS Children's Villages and community partner organisations teach practical childcare strategies to parents and other caregivers to strengthen their parenting skills, foster nurturing and positive relationships free from violence, and provide the space and encouragement for children to play, learn, do their homework and read, especially in resource-poor households. We ensure that parents, caregivers and professional child care workers in our programmes access on-going training and continuous support to improve their practices.

We support parents and caregivers to acquire the skills and knowledge to secure employment or run small businesses to generate and manage a stable, secure and meaningful income for their household needs. This includes providing vocational, secondary or tertiary education, and training for literacy and numeracy skills, "soft" job and entrepreneurial skills or household budget and business management skills. The formation of savings and loan groups has proven beneficial to improve and retain trained

skills, and increase solidarity and peer-to-peer support through exchange of group members.⁹⁹ Parents and caregivers are also supported to access relevant social grants and engage in food production for the family.

We rely on a broad network of partners and encourage parents and caregivers, who in resource-poor areas often lack adequate access and knowledge, to make use of existing systems of community support, such as relevant health, social, education, child protection and development services from governmental authorities, and kids clubs, self-help groups or peer support groups.¹⁰⁰

We actively support the formation of parent-teacher associations or committees for parents to better accompany their children's education and voice their concerns. Such associations are vital for parents to lobby for improvements on access, school-drop-out, the use of funds allocated to the school, class size, teacher qualifications, quality of learning materials, levels of exam difficulty or access to adequate sanitary facilities for girls and boys.

RECOMMENDATION

Parents need to be supported in their children's education through adult education and training including social and economic support services, literacy classes, employment opportunities and legal frameworks for appropriate social and labour market conditions. The competencies of care professionals should be strengthened through on-going rights-based training and counselling for supporting families' economic, cultural and psychosocial capacities.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *SOS Children's Villages International (2014b)*



OUR EXPERIENCE

Change the way we are: A programme to reduce violence against children in Argentina

Since early 2015, SOS Children's Villages Argentina, in co-operation with the City of Buenos Aires, has been running a programme called "For a protected childhood" in Family Action Centres run by the Ministry of Social Development in seven of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in the city. These neighbourhoods have poor infrastructure; income is below the average per capita income and more than 30% of the population have not finished high school.

The programme focuses on providing caregivers with knowledge and training on child protection and strengthening emotional ties. It is a rights-based approach with a focus on a non-violent culture and promotes the development of children from birth to 12 years old. Within the first year, 372 adults and 197 children and adolescents participated in the programme.

Workshops for the Family Action Centres' care co-workers and the children's caregivers are based on SOS Children's Villages' Child Protection Policy and comprise the following areas:

- Raising awareness on child abuse and its reflection in parental models.
- Supporting adults to recognise child rights violations, including violations of privacy and every-day practices that increase risk, such as sharing a bed with an adult, or having no access to private spaces to change clothes or use bathrooms. The workshops suggest changes to better care for and protect children at home and how to raise difficult topics, such as sexuality.

Through these workshops, questions, debates and proposals emerged, and the content was well received. Participants were provided with new models for bringing up children and reflected on their own systems and family situations. They were particularly interested in learning more about how to set effective, positive and protective limits for children and how to communicate better with their children.

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*“A basic education helps us
in creating our identity.”*

Maya Dhal, India

Hermann Gmeiner Award Winner

A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD



SOS CHILDREN'S
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