



POLICY

SOS

LEARNING FOR LIFE

Formal Education Policy

October 27, 2008

This policy expresses the organisation's stand on formal education and sets an action framework for the SOS Children's Villages organisation. It is implemented by co-workers and other relevant stakeholders within the organisation, and has an impact on all aspects of the organisation's work. It has been elaborated in accordance with SOS Children's Villages' roots, vision, mission and values ('Who we are') and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It has followed a consultative development process with participation and feedback from national associations, and in consideration of the views of children and young people.



SOS-KINDERDORF
International

WHAT WE STRIVE FOR: POLICY STATEMENT

Access to
quality education
for all children

SOS Children's Villages strongly believes in quality education as the means to break the cycle of marginalisation, poverty, violence and family breakdown, as it helps children to develop the necessary capabilities they need to live a life in dignity, with respect, and empowered to participate actively in their society.

We therefore assure the access to quality education for all children in our Family Based Care and Family Strengthening Programmes, regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, abilities, health or any other attribute. We advocate for free compulsory primary education for all children in our target group as well as for the principle of inclusive, relevant quality education. Together with partners and other stakeholders, we enhance the capacity of public kindergartens and schools attended by children within our programmes and continually improve the quality of Hermann-Gmeiner-Schools and kindergartens.

INTRODUCTION

A. Background and scope

Education is a
human right

Education is a right. It is stated explicitly in the UN-CRC Articles 28 and 29, and referred to in several other articles. It is also stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In recent years, governments, civil society organisations and donors have attached immense importance to education. This is reflected in their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the UNESCO action for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the goals of Education for All (EFA).

But an estimated 77-to-93 million children still have no access to education systems; an estimated third of them are disabled; and many without parental care.

The first two goals of the Dakar Framework for Action for EFA refer directly to the educational needs of these disadvantaged children:

- 'Expanding and improving comprehensive early-childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children,
- Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.' (UNESCO, 2000)

If attending kindergarten or school, disadvantaged children often face stigmatisation or discrimination, especially if challenged with delays in their development due to abuse, malnutrition or neglect. Kindergartens and schools are often not able to provide a supportive and stimulating environment to overcome these challenges. This leads to low school enrolment, high drop-out rates, repeating of grades, and poor school performance by disadvantaged children. Thus a large number of young people in many regions of the world are ill-equipped to compete effectively in the labour market and to lead an independent life in dignity, with respect, and able to support themselves.



B. Target group

For all our actions our target group is children at risk of losing parental care or who have already lost it. In the area of formal education, children from the communities we work in and whose rights to education are violated are also part of our target group.

C. Definitions / terminology

FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education is the structured, systematic, monitored and evaluated teaching and learning process provided by public and private kindergartens and schools. It is based on national curricula and encompasses early childhood development (kindergarten and pre-school, pre-primary), primary, secondary and higher secondary, to post-secondary levels, including vocational and university education. In many contexts the level of formal education that is achieved and certificated has a significant influence on an individual's professional, personal and economic situation, as well as on society's economic and social development in general.

LEARNING FOR LIFE

Learning for life aims at the development of the full human potential for a meaningful and dignified life in a given context and through all stages of a child's development. It encompasses living and learning as interdependent and enables children to develop their ability to learn. It engenders their capacity for life-long learning; it enhances their capabilities and employment possibilities, and is the basis for living a self-supporting life in dignity and with respect within their families and communities.

PRINCIPLES

GUIDING SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES' ACTION

1. We promote child-centred education

Child-centred education as promoted and resourced by the SOS Children's Village organisation respects the individual child as a resourceful, unique human being who actively participates in her/his own development process. Education policies, curricula, kindergartens, schools, teachers and education support staff resourced or managed by SOS Children's Villages are child-centred and respond appropriately and in the best interest of the individual child to her/his emotional, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development.

2. We support parents in their role as primary responsible care-givers and educators of their children

Parents are the primary care-givers and are responsible for the education of their children. Child-centred education requires the understanding, active support and co-operation of parents, especially in the early development phases of a child. We ensure that parents and pa-

rental care givers are actively involved in and can take responsibility for the formal education of their children, and are able to claim their own and their children's educational rights.

3. We invest in the quality of teachers

Teachers and principals are the key to child-centred quality education. Teachers practising child-centred education are able to apply and create adequate learning and teaching methodologies. They respect their students and the students' parents, and establish positive and supportive relationships with them. SOS Children's Villages actively encourages teachers to further their professional competences in child-centred education.

4. We support the effectiveness and improvement of kindergartens and schools

Kindergartens and schools attended by children from the Family Based Care and Family Strengthening Programmes are spaces of positive learning and child protection. They are resourced, built or adapted accordingly, are barrier-free, inclusive, available to all, and safe. Their leaders create a supportive, enabling and motivating environment for the development of all children, teachers and staff. We support school and kindergarten leaders in their efforts to improve the child-centeredness and effectiveness of their kindergartens and schools.

5. We work in partnership to achieve sustainability

Governments are primary duty bearers for education. SOS Children's Villages works in partnership with them, local communities, donors, civil society, UN and other international organisations in the field of education and schools and kindergartens to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and quality of educational programmes. Together, we strive to overcome the challenges children and their families face when claiming their right to quality education.

6. Our efforts enhance social justice

SOS Children's Villages invests its resources in formal education with a focus on sustainability and enhancing the rights and capabilities of disadvantaged children. We empower children and their families to claim their educational rights; we build the capacity of communities and duty bearers and advocate for the right to free, relevant, inclusive, quality education. Kindergartens and schools resourced or managed by SOS Children's Villages follow human-rights principles, build civic abilities and active citizenship, and raise ecological awareness for sustainable development.

Education
without
discrimination

IMPLICATIONS

FOR THE WORK OF SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

Quality education
is child-centred

1. We promote child-centred education

Quality education is child-centred. The individual child is respected as a resourceful and active agent in her/his learning and development process. Teachers applying child-centred education are able to create supportive relationships which enable children to develop resilience, self-esteem, curiosity and motivation for learning.

Schools and kindergartens practising child-centred education

- actively involve children in defining their learning goals, choices and portfolios,
- encourage them to identify what is inspiring, motivating and stimulating for their learning and how they can learn best,
- listen to and take into account their views and understanding of what is relevant to them and their individual development process,
- empower children to actively co-create their learning environment together with their families, teachers and their community,
- consult with them about issues relevant to making kindergartens and schools safe, child-friendly and sensitive to the diverse needs of individual children, also in regard to gender, ethnicity, faith, abilities, health or special needs,
- protect children from any form of violence and abuse,
- respect minorities so that children can learn to read and write in their native/local language,
- support the necessary processes and structures to guarantee sustainable and active participation by children in areas such as having child representatives in the school management and/or parent-teacher committees,
- ensure that children can develop the necessary knowledge, capabilities, skills, attitudes and values required for realising their full potential,
- enable children to claim their rights.

SOS Children's Villages

- assures access to kindergartens and schools with child-centred education for all children within Family Based Care and Family Strengthening Programmes, regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, abilities, health or any other attribute,
- takes a stand against any form of discriminatory or abusive educational practice in kindergartens and schools,
- raises awareness for child-centred education, and actively promotes its effectiveness,
- advocates for child-centred education.

2. We support parents in their role as primary responsible care-givers and educators of their children

Parents are responsible for their children's education. They are important partners for teachers in the development process and schooling of their children, particularly in early childhood.



Schools and kindergartens with child-centred education

- take an early excellence approach which respects parents as 'first educators' of their children,
- give parents and other primary care-givers the opportunity to enhance their parenting skills and to develop the necessary parental capacities to successfully support the evolving abilities of young children and to guide their educational development,
- encourage parents to keep close contact with teachers to ensure that their children's individual learning needs are considered and met,
- encourage parents to actively work on parent-teacher committees, be part of school boards/bodies or to contribute through sharing their skills or competencies for the benefit of the school or kindergarten.

SOS Children's Villages

- supports parents to understand the value of child-centred education,
- empowers them to claim their children's right to quality education,
- encourages and supports parents to ensure that their children are able to attend school for as long as possible and in line with the child's capabilities and interests,
- supports parents through information about formal education, access to relevant programmes, specific learning support and/or scholarships,
- supports children and/or parents to voice their concerns and organise action to address any form of discrimination or violence within the public schools the children attend.

3. We invest in the quality of teachers

Qualified teachers and principals are the key to successful child-centred and relevant education. They respect their students as resourceful and capable human beings. They apply innovative and empowering methodologies and explore means of making teaching and learning meaningful to children and relevant to their lives. They apply forms of instruction that enable students to achieve success according to their capacities and potential.

Teachers applying child-centred education

- develop personalised and individualised learning situations and portfolios for each child,
- evaluate the individual progress a child makes within her/his learning process,
- adapt curricula to the individual needs of each child,
- respect and support diverse learning styles.

SOS-Children's Villages

- invests time and resources in appropriate recruitment, in-service training and professional development as well as the rights and welfare of teachers,
- invests in capacity building for teachers, principals and other educational staff,
- advocates for teacher education and curriculum development which supports and enhances child-centred education.

4. We support the effectiveness and improvement of kindergartens and schools

Effective schools and kindergartens are spaces for the holistic development of children and teachers. They develop and apply quality management systems, success-indicators and constantly monitor and evaluate their work. They work in professional partnership with others and take the local context into consideration.

Effective schools and kindergartens with child-centred education

- build academic, vocational and life competencies,
- encourage responsibility and integrity,
- focus on reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving,
- enhance peer-to-peer learning to build respect for diversity,
- enable children to develop social skills for building supportive relationships,
- enhance employability and inspire entrepreneurship,
- foster civic abilities and help children to become *competent, confident and caring*,
- focus on *leadership for learning*, school culture and climate, learning and teaching, teacher and student performance,
- create supportive relations within the school and with the wider community,
- encourage participation of children and families.

SOS Children's Villages

- assures that all children within the Family Based Care and Family Strengthening Programmes have access to kindergartens and schools offering relevant, child-centred education of high quality,
- works closely with the schools and kindergartens accessed by the children from these programmes, and builds the capacity of schools and kindergartens for child-centred education,
- builds networks between Hermann-Gmeiner and public schools and kindergartens,
- supports kindergarten and school leaders in their ongoing endeavour regarding the improvement and effectiveness of their kindergartens and schools.

5. We work in partnership to achieve sustainability

Education is the responsibility of both families and states as key duty bearers. We forge alliances and partnerships on local, national, and international levels with other credible actors to strengthen the role of duty bearers through

- *advocating* for adequate policies, plans and budget allocations, in order to provide accessible, relevant, inclusive and free quality education to all children in our target group,
- *building capacities* of duty bearers, teachers and principals, schools, kindergartens, education authorities and parents
 - by encouraging co-operation between stakeholders, schools and kindergartens,
 - through training, peer-learning, knowledge-sharing, professional development,
 - through investment in infrastructure and material,
 - through facilitation of school-effectiveness and improvement processes,
- *promoting and modelling child-centred education* through Hermann-Gmeiner schools and kindergartens.

With regard to schools and kindergartens, SOS-Children's Villages

- plans new schools and kindergartens only if the preceding feasibility study gives evidence of the absolute necessity of building new programmes, and if capacity building actions alone prove inadequate or impossible,
- maintains or builds a school or kindergarten only if a contract between duty bearers, stakeholders and the organisation clearly state the short- and long-term commitments, financial and in-kind contributions, and the responsibilities of the local government, communities and education authorities,
- builds schools or kindergartens by itself only, if duty bearers continuously fail to commit themselves to their responsibilities,
- approves new Hermann-Gmeiner schools and kindergartens only if they clearly serve the target group,
- develops an alignment strategy for already-established Hermann-Gmeiner schools and kindergartens, based on the results of a feasibility study and a self-evaluation of each school and/or kindergarten.

6. Social Justice

SOS Children's Villages targets its resources invested in formal education to promote inclusive and free quality education, which enables children of our target group to claim their rights and to develop to their full potential.

SOS Children's Villages, together with partners at all levels, therefore

- assures free access to education for all children in its Family Based Care and Family Strengthening Programmes,
- advocates for free compulsory primary education for all children in the target group,
- advocates for early childhood education, secondary education and vocational training available to all children in our target group,
- promotes child-centred education,
- promotes gender equality, equal access for all, social inclusion and non-discrimination,
- promotes ecological awareness for sustainable development,
- takes a stand against any form of discriminatory or abusive educational practices, e.g. the use of corporal punishment or discriminatory textbooks,
- encourages and supports the development and implementation of teaching methodologies and curricula based on human-rights principles, which build civic abilities and enable children to participate actively and to understand and exercise their rights,
- builds the capacities of families, communities and other duty bearers for assessing educational needs and the violation of educational rights,
- builds the capacity of duty bearers and stakeholders for designing child-centred responsive education programmes.

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