Let Us Learn Madagascar: An Integrated Program for Adolescent Girls

Zonta International has committed US$1 million to UNICEF USA from 2016 to 2018 to support the Let Us Learn initiative to address barriers to girls' education in Madagascar.

GOALS
• Create opportunities for vulnerable and excluded girls to realize their rights to an education in a secure and protective environment.
• The program is focused on three pillars:
  o Reaching out-of-school children
  o Expanding girls' education
  o Improving quality outcomes for learners

OVERVIEW
UNICEF is helping to advance education progress in Madagascar. Some of the most notable achievements have been made through Let Us Learn Madagascar. UNICEF is using innovative techniques to reduce school drop-out rates and absenteeism among the most marginalized and underprivileged children, particularly girls, in Madagascar. Zonta International's support has allowed UNICEF to expand this program to Anosy and Androy, the two regions most severely impacted by natural disasters. The following report covers the period of 1 February through 1 October 2017.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS
Institutional Strengthening - The bottlenecks that prevent girls from enrolling into post-primary education are removed and concrete measures are identified to ensure girls receive a quality education.

• A new Education Sector Plan was adopted and endorsed in June 2017. The Plan:
  ○ Extends basic education from a five-year cycle to a nine-year cycle to strengthen the focus on lower secondary education
Abolishes national examinations at the end of the primary school cycle to reduce school drop-out rates and improve transition rates from primary to lower secondary school

Promotes one year of pre-primary education to enhance early childhood development and improve school readiness

Aligns the school calendar with the agricultural cycle to improve retention rates; and

Increases the national budget allocation for education from 20 percent to 26 percent.

Access - By the end of the program, more girls will have access to post-primary education, through the development of additional learning spaces and the dispositions necessary to facilitate access for the most vulnerable children, particularly disadvantaged girls from rural communities.

Construction
• Construction began on two classrooms in the Manantenina lower secondary school in Anosy. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

Communication for Development
• 30 local authorities were trained to develop Communication for Development (C4D) projects at the community level. Trainings reinforced the importance of school enrollment and retention for girls and increased awareness about the protection issues affecting girls, including early marriage and sexual exploitation.

• C4D materials were developed to be used in community dialogues to promote gender equality and support behavioral change among parents and adolescents.

• More than 3,000 children were reached through interpersonal communication activities led by 80 trained youth peer educators. The youth peer educators were trained to engage adolescents and parents in discussions about the importance of school and specific challenges facing adolescent girls.

• 10 media professionals from local radio stations were trained on producing radio features to promote Essential Family Practices, particularly regarding girls’ school enrollment and retention.

Social Protection
• 1,000 households, caring for a total of 1,500 girls, received monthly cash transfers and one-time livelihood recovery grants. Transfers help families meet their basic needs and prevent them from turning to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labor.

Catch-up Classes
• 100 school teachers and principals from 36 lower secondary schools were trained to provide catch-up classes to students before the start of the new academic year in October.

• An estimated 700 girls who had dropped out of school participated in catch-up classes, exceeding the original target by 42 percent. These classes are held during the school holidays and equip students with the necessary competencies to enable them to return to school with their peers.

Child Protection
• School environments were made safer through the development and adoption of new codes of conduct, which address violence and other threats to girls in primary and secondary public schools.

• Child protection clubs were established in 14 secondary schools as a way for students to engage with their peers while raising awareness about child rights and protection issues.

• 573 students benefited from literacy classes, designed to support child victims and children at risk of experiencing violence and exploitation. Children enrolled in the program attend half-day classes over a period of three months.

Recreation Support
• Students from all lower secondary schools are benefitting from 97 recreational kits, which promote play, teamwork and socialization. They are intended to improve the physical and mental well-being of students and encourage them to stay in school. Following a gender analysis of the kit, additional items aimed at encouraging physical activity and sport among girls were added.
Quality – By the end of the program, the capacity of the system to offer a better quality of teaching and learning will be improved through the revision of the school program, teacher training, pedagogical support and the creation of teaching and learning materials.

- 420 pedagogical kits and materials were delivered to all public lower secondary schools in Androy and Anosy, benefiting 13,185 girls.

- 615 teachers from lower secondary schools in the two regions participated in an accelerated teacher training, which is now benefiting 6,494 girls in Anosy and 6,691 girls in Androy.

Challenges

Extreme poverty and food insecurity as a result of the drought last year left many families unable to afford school fees and pressured children to work to support their families. UNICEF is addressing these challenges by supporting holistic recovery and resilience interventions, including cash transfers, catch-up classes for out-of-school children and non-formal educational and social support through literacy classes.

Repetition rates also are challenges in these two regions due to unreliable assessments of learning outcomes, low infrastructure capacity, and children re-enrolling at the same level when they return to school. UNICEF is working to increase capacity through the construction of new classrooms, advocating for double occupation of classrooms (one class in the morning and one in the afternoon), strengthening the national learning outcomes assessment and finding another way of identification for children returning to school after catch-up classes.

Next Steps

- Complete construction of two classrooms by end of 2017 and begin construction of two additional classrooms.

- Continue to build capacity of regional and local leaders and C4D focal points in both regions, as well as engagement with young leaders.

- Conduct community dialogue sessions in 40 communities about girls’ access to an education and barriers that prevent girls from accessing an education, including child marriage.

- Produce and broadcast 10 radio programs promoting girls’ school enrollment and retention and increasing awareness around issues facing girls, including child marriage.

- Launch the second phase of cash transfers, moving from unconditional transfers to transfers on the condition that children attend primary school.

- Train school directors in targeted districts on child rights and protection.

- Provide continued support to the victims of violence and those girls at risk of violence and exploitation, including the integration of children from literacy classes into the formal education system.

- Improve the intake and referral mechanisms, including the possible set up of a One Stop Service Center, which would provide medical, legal and social services in one place for girls who are the victims of sexual violence.

- Increase awareness-raising sessions through the extension of children’s clubs to children in additional secondary schools.

- Train a second cohort of teachers during the last quarter of 2017.

- Conduct pedagogical support visits to all schools in order to consolidate the gains from the training program and optimize the use of pedagogical support materials.

- Monitor and support teacher networks during the academic year.

Photos: UNICEF Madagascar/2017/Abela Ralaivita

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