



# The FRESH initiative: school health in the context of education for all

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**'Education for all' means ensuring that all children have a good-quality basic education. To ensure that as few children as possible drop out of education, schools should have a welcoming, healthy environment, in which children can learn about hygiene and nutrition. The FRESH initiative (Focusing Resources on Effective School Health), which is part of the Education For All movement, shows how this might be done.**

Ensuring that children are healthy and able to learn is an essential component of an effective education system. This is especially relevant to efforts to achieve education for all in the most deprived areas. Increased enrolment with reduced absenteeism and drop-out bring more of the poorest and most disadvantaged children to school, many of whom are girls. It is these children, often the least healthy and most malnourished, who have the most to gain educationally from improved health. School health programmes that are developed as part of community partnerships provide one of the most cost-effective ways to reach school-age youth and the broader community and are a sustainable means of promoting healthy practices.

Improving the health and learning of school children through school-based health and nutrition programmes is not a new concept. Many countries have school health programmes, and many agencies have decades of experience. These common experiences suggest an opportunity for concerted action by a partnership of agencies to broaden the scope of school health programmes and to make them more effective.

Positive experiences by WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank have suggested that there is a core group of cost-effective activities that can form the basis for intensified and joint action to make schools healthier places for children. These agencies developed a partnership for Focusing Resources on Effective School Health – the FRESH Partnership. This FRESH

Start approach was launched at the World Education Forum in Senegal, April 2000. Since the launch, this partnership now also includes the Partnership for Child Development (PCD), Education International (EI), the Education Development Centre (EDC) and an increasing number of agencies, organizations and governments that support this approach.

The core framework contains four components that capture the best practices from programme experiences. These are:

- health-related school policies
- provision of safe water and sanitation
- skills-based approach to health, hygiene and nutrition education

- school-based health and nutrition services

Supporting activities that provide the context in which the interventions can be implemented include:

- effective partnerships between teachers and health workers
- effective partnerships between the education and health sectors
- effective community partnerships
- pupil awareness and participation

The FRESH framework is now regarded by an ever-growing number of international donors, agencies and other stakeholders as an effective framework for school health. The FRESH approach to school health programming has now been adopted by more than 20 countries



School-based nutrition and health interventions can improve academic performance

# School Sanitation and Hygiene Education

## Box 1. Dakar Framework for Action

Six new goals were established to achieve education for all:

- 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 completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality
- ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes
- achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults
- eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality
- improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

in Africa and over a dozen in Asia and elsewhere in the world.

## FRESH as a strategy for achieving education for all

Education for All (EFA) is the commitment that countries around the world have made to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education of good quality. The EFA movement is based on the recognition that education is a human right, and that it is essential not only for sustainable development, but also for peace and stability among nations.

The EFA movement was born in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. There, participants pledged to provide primary education for all children and massively reduce adult illiteracy by the year 2000. At the World Education Forum, the follow-up conference that took place in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, it was reported that these goals were only partially attained during the nineties. The Dakar conference provided a forum for discussion of the obstacles to achieving the Education for All goals and resulted in a renewed commitment to this effort. Some 1100 participants from 164 countries adopted the Dakar Framework for Action (see Box 1), committing themselves to achieve quality basic education for all by the year 2015.

The link between student health and nutritional status on the one hand, and educational outcomes on the other, was already clear in Jomtien. Information

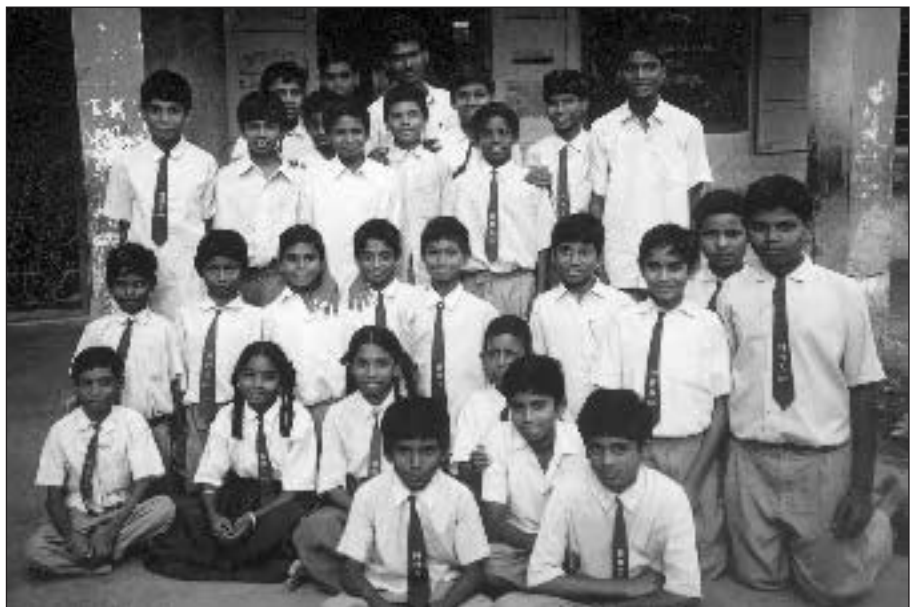
presented there demonstrated that poor health and malnutrition lead to low school enrolment, high absenteeism, poor classroom performance and educational wastage. In spite of this, the Framework for Action that resulted from Jomtien contained no specific goals for school health for the decade 1990–2000.

In the meantime, additional research and experience further clarified the relationships among health, cognition, school participation and academic achievement. It has been shown, for example, that nutritional deficiencies and parasite infections, which impair both physical and cognitive development, are causes of reduced school

enrolment, absenteeism and individual learning impairment. Social and mental health issues such as violence, injury and suicide, and lifestyle behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, are now universally recognized as reasons for which young people are not in school or not learning while there. Sexual behaviours, especially unprotected sex that results in infection with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy, affect both students' and teachers' participation in education. In some countries, malaria alone is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to ill health.

As part of the EFA 2000 Assessment, a special study on the relationship between health and education arrived at the following conclusions:

- school-based nutrition and health interventions can improve academic performance
- students' health and nutrition status affects their enrolment, retention, and absenteeism
- education benefits health
- education can reduce social and gender inequities
- health promotion for teachers benefits their health, morale, and quality of instruction
- health promotion and disease prevention programmes are cost-effective
- treating youngsters in school can reduce disease in the community



Nutritional deficiencies and parasite infections are causes of reduced school enrolment



Treating youngsters in school can reduce disease in the community

- multiple co-ordinated strategies produce a greater effect than individual strategies, but multiple strategies for any one audience must be targeted carefully
- health education is most effective when it uses interactive methods in a skills-based approach
- trained teachers delivering health education produce more significant results in student health knowledge and skills than untrained teachers.

## Dakar Framework for Action

Education for All implies creating an environment in schools and in basic education programmes in which children are both able and enabled to learn. By agreeing upon a common language for describing school health activities and endorsing a common set of recommendations for school health programming, the FRESH partner agencies aim to work more effectively together, and with education and health authorities at all levels, to improve the quantity and quality of school-based health programmes as one strategy for the achievement of Education for All.

## A FRESH toolkit

On behalf of all the FRESH partner agencies, UNESCO is now developing

a FRESH 'toolkit' in CD-ROM form. The purpose of this CD-ROM is two-fold: first, to encourage those who plan school-based health programmes to use the FRESH approach; and second, to provide those who implement such programmes with a set of practical, easy-to-use, and easy-to-adapt tools for achieving the best results. The tools incorporated into the Toolkit have been extracted from publications by WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, Education International, Partnership for Child Development, Education Development Center and other international organizations. Six health issues are addressed in the initial version of the Toolkit: Food and nutrition, Helminths and hygiene; HIV/AIDS/STI; Malaria; Drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention; and Violence.

The toolkit provides access to all of the documents from which tools are extracted. In addition it aggregates related information and recommendations from these materials into a user-friendly format that makes it easy to customize a mix of interventions for effective school health programmes which address specific health issues using the FRESH framework. This joint effort demonstrates the extra value that can be obtained when agencies work collaboratively in support of school health.

Still in development, the proposed format for the FRESH CD-ROM Toolkit has been mounted as a web site and can be viewed at the following address: <http://www.unesco.org/education/fresh>. Field testing of this draft version of the toolkit is now underway, with distribution of the finalized CD-ROM scheduled for autumn 2004.

## About the authors

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## Further sources of information

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## Web Sites

<http://www.unesco.org/education/fresh>  
[http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know\\_sharing/flagship\\_initiatives/fresh.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/flagship_initiatives/fresh.shtml)

<http://www.unescobkk.org/ips/ebooks/documents/fresh/>

<http://www2.edc.org/hhd/who/FRESH.htm>

<http://www.schoolsandhealth.org>

<http://www.freshschools.org>