

# EDUCATION POLICY



## Introduction

Concern's work in primary education is grounded in the fact that all children have a right to education. We will maintain our focus on extremely poor children, with a special emphasis on girls as a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged group. Our education programme aims to improve the lives of extremely poor children in a sustainable way by increasing *access* to good *quality* primary education and support child *well-being*.

## Why Education?

Education is both the seed and flower of development. Education is a human right and a key factor to reducing extreme poverty and the attainment of human potential. Under the MDGs, huge gains were made in terms of getting children into school but significant challenges remain in terms of effective learning outcomes for children in school and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals/2030 Agenda

Education is an impetus to close the door on exclusion, poverty and suffering; it opens a new door to peace, prosperity and better health around the world. With education come literacy, numeracy and the general knowledge to advance in society. If people are to exercise their rights, they must receive an education. Yet, around the world many people are denied education. It may be because of their gender, race or religion, because of the language they speak, because of a disability, or simply because they are poor.

## Scope of the Policy

This policy covers Concern's work in basic education<sup>1</sup> in development and emergency contexts.

## Education Policy Aim

Concern Worldwide aims to sustainably improve the lives of extremely poor and vulnerable children by increasing access to good quality primary education and supporting child well-being.

The minimum standard of education must be that it enables people to lift themselves out of extreme poverty and maintain improved socio-economic status. In this policy, we consider "good quality education" to be of a standard that supports individuals to succeed in reaching learning goals in literacy, numeracy and life skills, while promoting children's healthy social and emotional development.

## Guiding Principles

### A. In assisting people in developing countries to achieve their right to education:

- Education is a human right for all people regardless of age, sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, disability, geographic location or any other factor, and Concern's work will support the attainment of this right.
- Equality is a prerequisite to achieving education for all.
- Children need safe and supportive spaces to learn, free from violence and oppression.
- The state is the primary duty-bearer to fulfil the right to formal education.
- Parents have both rights and responsibilities for their children's education - responsibilities to support children's education in the home from birth and throughout a child's life, and the right to choose formal education options that are most appropriate for their child within an education system.

### B. In support of the right to education in emergencies:

- Children in fragile and conflict-affected states have the right to education. In situations of emergency and fragility, where governments and civil societies do not have the capacity or will to respond to the right to education, international actors play a key role in securing the right to education.

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<sup>1</sup> Basic education is centred around the primary school curriculum, but may encompass pre-school, some grades of junior secondary school and flexible delivery mechanisms as alternatives to full-time formal school.

- Education during and following a crisis can provide safe spaces for children to cope with trauma and protect them from the increased risks they may face. To facilitate healing and learning processes, conflict-sensitive education and child protection are essential elements of education in emergencies responses.

## **Education Policy Focus**

To ensure that Concern works in the most effective ways to tackle extreme poverty, we are committed to building on existing strengths and developing new ones in our formal primary education programmes. We recognise that national education systems are complex and require specialist approaches. In order to deliver high quality education programmes, we will maintain a focus on three specific areas which we regard as essential outcomes – access, quality and well-being. Minimum standards are defined in the detailed Global Education Strategy document, to facilitate children realising their rights.



In emergency situations Concern's education response should be contextually defined by a needs assessment. We will maintain a focus on the three outcomes of this policy - access, quality and well-being - within a holistic programme. However, programmes will be flexible to humanitarian needs in duration (e.g. temporary learning spaces during displacement), and in scope (e.g. direct service provision where governments are unwilling or unable to respond). The internationally agreed Minimum Standards of Education in Emergencies will be followed in all humanitarian responses.

### ***Policy Focus 1: The Right of Access to Education***

Concern's education programmes target children living in extreme poverty, to support their right to full participation in formal primary education. Concern understands that to achieve access to education for all, we must look beyond the limits of school enrolment numbers and seek out a deeper understanding of the barriers to school participation. We understand that factors within the home, community and the wider society influence a child's attendance at school. The scope of our education programmes, therefore, extends beyond the school system, to engage parents and families, community members and wider society.

### ***Policy Focus 2: The Right to Good Quality Education***

For education gains to be realised by extremely poor children, high quality education is a prerequisite. Concern understands that high quality education will achieve a wide range of skills and knowledge in many subjects. Concern will focus on academic learning outcomes specific to literacy and numeracy, as a pre-requisite to accessing the full curriculum. Literacy interventions will be prioritised as the first point of intervention. When the school system is meeting the literacy instruction needs of learners, mathematics will then be prioritised.

### ***Policy Focus 3: The Right to Education that Supports Child Well-Being***

Concern understands that learning takes place through multiple overlapping experiences throughout a child's life. Explicit and implicit violence in the school, home, community and wider society violates children's rights to protection and impedes healthy development and learning. Age-appropriate life skills education, with a focus on HIV and AIDS prevention education, can encourage young people to adopt attitudes and behaviour that protect their health, such as empowering them to make informed decisions and negotiate safer sexual relations. Inter-personal skills such as assertive communication, self-esteem, decision-making and negotiation are empowering assets that extremely poor people, especially girls, need space and support to develop.

## **Targeting**

Concern is focused on the **poorest and most vulnerable contexts**. Education programmes target children living in extremely vulnerable contexts, with weak government capacities, affected by frequent natural hazards, conflict and instability, and often living in isolated, under-resourced locations. Within these contexts, education programmes seek out and specifically target children within **extremely poor households** and those at risk of exclusion from education – girls and boys from ethnic minorities, children affected by HIV and AIDS, orphans and children with special needs. Concern focuses on **formal**

**primary education** of children in full-time accredited schooling. We will target children not currently accessing their right to education – out-of-school children; and extremely poor children enrolled in schools but at risk of not completing their education with the literacy, numeracy and life skills needed to live free from poverty. Due to continued gender disparities in education and the increased risks and vulnerabilities faced by **girls**, they will be specifically targeted.

Balancing sustainable change with targeting the poorest, Concern aims for **educational systems strengthening**, seeking to build capacity of local education institutions at as high a level as practical in the context. The aim is to build capacity at district level and to influence national policy and strategy. This needs to be justified at programme design stage when Concern is focused at school and community level.

#### ***Application of Concern's Understanding of Extreme Poverty.***

Our education programmes will address inequality and discrimination in the education system, recognising that education can be used to either challenge or promote violence and inequality within wider society. We will integrate approaches to issues that impact communities we work in, including minimizing the negative impact of HIV and AIDS, providing family literacy interventions where appropriate, and working in concert with livelihoods and health programmes to contribute to country-level objectives related to assets, inequalities and risk and vulnerability.

As we work in contexts of extreme poverty, fragility and vulnerability, Concern will take action to reduce the impacts of disasters on the education sector. In our humanitarian action, we will respond to the right to protection and the right to education through contextually relevant interventions.

#### **How we will implement this policy**

Education programmes supported or managed directly by Concern will be designed and managed in conformity with the aim, policy focus and minimum standards outlined in this policy. For education in emergencies, where Concern's interventions may be for shorter time periods in line with our humanitarian mandate, we will maintain our policy focus but be pragmatic in how we respond.

#### **Links to Strategy**

Concern's Global Education Strategy reflects the intent of this policy. It is an outline of the number of countries, targeted numbers of children to benefit, core themes of specialisation or distinctive contribution where we will focus investments in action-research and advocacy work.

#### **Ownership and Accountability**

The Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Committee of Concern's Board will monitor adherence to this policy on a three yearly cycle. This will also be monitored by Senior Management on the same cycle. The Education Strategy will be monitored annually by the Strategy, Advocacy and Learning Directorate in conjunction with the International Programmes and Emergency Directorates.

#### **Monitoring the policy**

Progress against this policy is measured against Concern's contribution to improved access to education, quality of education and child well-being in countries of operation. Illustrative key performance indicators, which will be disaggregated by sex, include:

##### **Access:**

- % student attendance
- Gender Parity Ratio

##### **Quality:**

- % students scoring minimum standard of literacy skills (reading fluency and comprehension) in Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA)
- % student retention

##### **Well-being:**

- % children who say they have experienced school-based violence in the past two weeks
- % children aged 10-14 who correctly identify ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission