

INEE Minimum Standards Case Study: Building Capacity for Gaza Educationalists

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Background and Context

Existing movement and access restrictions on Gaza were greatly amplified in 2006. The subsequent 2008 - 2009 war on the Gaza Strip caused severe damage and disruption to education in Gaza. In addition to the significant loss of life and injury caused, schools and universities were deliberately targeted, with six university buildings destroyed and 16 damaged. During the military attacks, approximately 441,452 students from government, UNRWA, and private schools were unable to attend school. The ongoing blockage further exacerbates this situation and the subsequent recovery of the system. Currently, the socio-economic climate is one of widespread poverty, dependency, high levels of psychosocial stress, and continued insecurity.

Despite the prevailing movement and access restrictions, exchange of ideas and improvement of learning outcomes remains possible. Equipping education staff with knowledge and understanding of the INEE Minimum Standards can therefore help spur recovery where traditional interventions focused on physical and material reconstruction are not possible. Moreover, by promoting the INEE Minimum Standards in Gaza, UNESCO hopes to improve levels of preparedness and resiliency, thereby also supporting the idea of 'building back better.'

This Case Study focuses on the practical and tangible impact of INEE Minimum Standards trainings with regards to both emergency and longer term recovery planning in Gaza. It presents a model of application of the Minimum Standards that has since developed its own momentum and generated significant internal support. Indeed, the process followed by INEE members in Gaza is a highly participatory one involving a wide range of education actors (including the Ministry, the UN, local and international NGOs). This not only ensures a positive exchange of ideas and approaches but also helps to build ownership over the plans, which ultimately better facilitates their implementation.

Application

In the immediate aftermath of the 2008-2009 war in Gaza, UNESCO oPt office conducted a training of trainers (ToT) on the INEE Minimum Standards. Twenty-five education staff working with NGOs, UN agencies and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) were trained during this period.

Following 2009 Flash Appeal support for Gaza from the First Lady of Qatar, Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, UNESCO oPt sought to build upon this initial training. An integral component of the organisation's emergency education programme, therefore, included support for the Master Trainers (those who were trained in the original ToT) to expand INEE Minimum Standard trainings to target all education sub-sectors and a wide range of institutions working in the sector. A total of 750 teachers, education staff, and community activists participated in 37 workshops between March and August 2010 throughout Gaza.

In order to transpose this learning into tangible results for the education sector, a consultative steering committee was established to conduct necessary follow-up from the trainings. One of their first activities has been to create an education contingency planning tool. This comprises a user-friendly planning template, which allows trainees to develop contingency plans for their education institutions in line with the recommendations and the guidelines set forth in the Minimum Standards. The template itself is composed of two separate forms.

1. The first form is for the Advisory committee and sets out the activities that need to take place in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. The form is purposefully simplistic in layout with clear categories developed for different actions that need to be undertaken by a whole range of actors. The simple design is intended to facilitate its use and to allow the plans to remain flexible enough to be adapted to changing and unforeseen circumstances.
2. The second form is a more in-depth document designed for use by education authorities. The form uses categories and benchmark indicators taken from the INEE Minimum Standards thereby ensuring that the proposed activities are in line with global best practice for response. This will help education staff monitor the implementation of the recommendations and will allow for gaps and weaknesses to be more easily identified. It is hoped that strategic planners and decision-makers in Gaza's educational institutions will be able to integrate the plans set out in these forms to support emergency response more broadly.

Challenges

To date, ten separate working groups of trainees have used the templates to produce contingency plans for at-risk communities. These have been technically reviewed by UNESCO Education staff in the oPt. For example, the technical knowledge of the trainers is now being utilized in a UNESCO Crisis - Disaster Risk Reduction project for schools in the highly vulnerable border areas. INEE Minimum Standards trainers will be supporting the development of emergency response plans for selected schools focused on completion of the curriculum in these areas. The focus on curriculum is born out of the impact of the last war when students and teachers faced significant challenges completing the curriculum due to the time lost during the war. By combining the lessons learned from this previous experience with global best practices, the INEE trainers hope to help schools mitigate any future lost hours of class time.

Another example of the practical application of the INEE MS training in Gaza is the Minimum Standards Advisory Committee that was formed by a group of INEE Master Trainers to support the development of the INEE Arabic Language Community. To date this Committee has reviewed translations of the revised Minimum Standards and contributed to online discussion and information sharing through blogging. It is hoped that the creation of this Committee in Gaza will continue to support the sharing of experiences between Gaza and the wider education in emergency community. Looking ahead, the Committee also hopes to conduct an impact assessment of the trainings that have already happened. Findings of this assessment would feed into the development of a model that could be piloted in other fragile contexts.

Finally, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has also decided to harness the value of the INEE Minimum Standards, using them to develop internal contingency plans. Ministry staff was trained during the second phase of the INEE trainings undertaken by UNESCO and have approached the Master Trainers for support in this regard. The Master Trainers were invited to conduct another three-day training with MoEHE staff as well as staff from other Ministries who work on cross cutting issues, including staff from the Ministries of Planning, Health, Labour, Local Government and Media and Information. Thus not only is there a greater chance that the sustainability of the INEE MS trainings will be institutionalized into Ministry policies and approaches, but any actions consequently adopted will be able to consider issues of cross-sectoral concern.

The field office will continue to work with these various training groups to improve and support the implementation of INEE Minimum Standards in schools and communities across Gaza. A key component of this project is providing ongoing support to the Master Trainers to ensure the quality of the trainings is maintained over time. In this regard, UNESCO oPt office has supported the translation of INEE materials into Arabic and is also seeking to involve this core group of practitioners in an upcoming training on the Right to Education as it relates to the oPt context.

Outcomes

The creation of the contingency plans points to the importance of finding tangible outlets for the INEE Minimum Standards trainings. This is beneficial on two levels; it enhances the relevance and quality of the training and represents a tangible tool to support the provision of quality learning opportunities during emergencies.

1. The process of plan development is a valuable learning experience

The development of the plans encompasses the definitions, indicators and best practice lessons presented in the Minimum Standards training. By then applying these to the specific Gaza context, trainees gain directly relevant experience in the application of the standards thereby enhancing the relevance of the standards. The stronger network that is created through the process of training and plan development also represents an additional resource for education actors in Gaza. As such the planning process helps to anchor the professional development that has already been offered through the trainings. This has been a valuable source of continued professional support for education sector staff in Gaza.

2. The creation of tangible tools such as contingency plans helps with the application and understanding of the Minimum Standards in the field

The preparation of the plans allows for the identification of current gaps in equipment and supplies needed to help protect schools. Once developed, the plans constitute an excellent resource for an education system operating in crisis and fragility. Moreover, their implementation in schools may support additional emergency education programming. For example, the information collected and the analysis undertaken as part of the creation of the plans could form an integral part of any emergency response planning. As living documents, the plans can also be adapted to changes in the context.

3. Source of psychosocial support

In the context of the ongoing isolation of Gaza, feedback suggests that the trainings have proved an important source of psychosocial support to educators who are working under particularly stressful conditions. The chance to engage in professional dialogue and work together in a supportive community has become a way for teachers and education personnel to problem solve together and find solutions to the difficulties they face in these challenging times.

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