

**Implementing minimum standards for education in emergencies: lessons from Aceh**

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In December 2004, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) launched a handbook entitled *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*. Modelled on the Sphere Project, the Minimum Standards are both a handbook and an expression of commitment that everyone, young or old, has a right to education during emergencies. This article describes the use of the standards to develop education and child protection responses in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh.

**About the Minimum Standards**

The Minimum Standards were developed with the participation of over 2,250 individuals from more than 50 countries under the aegis of the INEE, a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, donors, practitioners, researchers and individuals from affected populations working together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. They cover five categories:

- *Minimum Standards common to all categories.* These focus on community participation and on ensuring that responses are based on an initial assessment followed by an appropriate response, with continued monitoring and evaluation.
- *Access and learning environment.* The focus here is on intersectoral linkages and partnerships to promote access to safe learning opportunities.
- *Teaching and learning.* This category focuses on the elements that promote effective teaching and learning (curriculum, training, instruction and assessment).
- *Teachers and other education personnel.* This category focuses on the administration and management of personnel, including recruitment, conditions of service, support and supervision.
- *Education policy and coordination.* The focus in the fifth category is on policy formulation and implementation and coordination.

The INEE's Working Group on Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, comprising NGOs, UN agencies and government representatives, is facilitating the dissemination, promotion, training, piloting, monitoring and evaluation of the Minimum Standards. Demand for the handbook has been high, and over 17,000 copies have been distributed globally. Evaluation feedback from an initial assessment reveals that the standards are being used extensively – in over 60 countries – and have relevance for project planning, assessment, design, implementation and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies. Users report that the framework provides a common language among staff, agencies, members of affected communities and governments, and thus constitutes a common starting point for action. The Standards are

being used for capacity-building and training, and to promote education as a priority humanitarian response. The widespread distribution, promotion and use of the Minimum Standards highlights the growing interest among humanitarian agencies in education in emergencies.

### **Case study: Aceh, Indonesia**

The tsunami's effects on the education system in Aceh were devastating. Over 40,000 students and 2,500 teachers and education personnel were killed. Some 2,135 schools were damaged, including kindergartens, primary, junior and senior high schools, technical and vocational schools and universities, and 150,000 students lost access to proper education facilities. Schools opened again on 26 February, two months after the tsunami. In many locations, makeshift tents were used, or students and teachers from destroyed schools were absorbed into surviving ones.

Three agencies involved in the INEE Working Group – the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) – distributed the Minimum Standards handbook to their staff in Aceh, who used it to develop and coordinate their education and child protection response. UNICEF translated the handbook into Indonesian, and shared it with all the agencies attending Education Coordination Meetings in Banda Aceh. UNICEF also sponsored Minimum Standards (MSEE) Working Group meetings in Banda Aceh throughout February, March and April. At these meetings, Save the Children provided orientation on the Minimum Standards, and facilitated discussion on them. The need to fully understand and build upon the education system that existed prior to the tsunami quickly became apparent. IRC took up this issue and, using the Minimum Standards handbook, developed a 'Focused Conversation' template. This was used to better understand the education situation and design interventions, with an emphasis on learning from communities themselves.

Due to the dire lack of teachers in Aceh, an emergency teacher certification programme was initiated in March with the support of UNICEF and Save the Children, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Although the Ministry of Education had created 4,500 new teaching posts, around a third of new recruits had no formal training. In early May, following community assessments using the 'Focused Conversation' tool and discussions in the MSEE Working Group, the idea began to germinate to revitalise the system of clustering schools, known as *Gugus* in Indonesian. The *Gugus* system had been shut down prior to the tsunami because of the conflict in Aceh. Within a cluster, one main school served as a meeting/training place for teachers and administrators from surrounding schools. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, and in partnership with Syiah Kuala University and the University of Pennsylvania, IRC began training teachers from the *Gugus* schools who could later act as mentor teachers to new, untrained teachers. As a result of this initiative, 100 teachers have been trained as mentors. The Teacher Training Coordination Group meets regularly, and is now looking at approaching various agencies to support a longer-term initiative to sustain the *Gugus* system.

In addition to these coordinated inter-agency responses, IRC drew on the Minimum Standards to guide the design and implementation of its Emergency Education Program. In its emergency support to schools, IRC staff used the handbook's Information Gathering and Needs Assessment Questionnaire in its needs assessments. The assessment tool also helped in developing a safety assessment form, which IRC used to conduct structural assessments of damaged schools.

INEE's Minimum Standards provided a valuable and relevant design, implementation and coordination tool during the emergency phase, both for IRC and for other agencies. Copies of the handbook were also requested by the Aceh Provincial Ministry of Education. The standards were widely accepted, and provided a common framework, shared between all agencies, enabling a greater level of coordination and improved practice. The framework guided early discussions and actions, leading to more effective emergency education responses that laid the groundwork for long-term quality education systems.

There were nonetheless challenges in implementing a coordinated, quality emergency education response. The continual state of flux inherent in the emergency phase made it difficult to schedule meetings, and scheduling conflicts were common. High staff turnover in international agencies meant that several MSEE Working Group meetings had to focus on orientation. In addition, several key advocates for the INEE Minimum Standards have left Aceh, thus decreasing momentum and increasing the burden on staff that remain. This highlights the need for a training module to be developed to train practitioners and policymakers to effectively implement the Minimum Standards.

### **Lessons learned**

- Discussions on implementing the INEE Minimum Standards should be introduced in coordination meetings right at the outset of the response, including dissemination of the handbook and discussions on how to best utilise this tool within the local context.
- Staff need to be familiar with the INEE Minimum Standards, and also advocate within their organisations and to partners on implementing the standards.
- Translating the handbook into local language(s) is a priority.
- Staff continuity is important for maintaining the pace of coordination and implementation.
- Training materials and workshops are needed.
- Through in-depth discussions on implementing the INEE Minimum Standards, actors can gain a better understanding of how to strengthen or build upon previous systems of education.

## Next steps

IRC is continuing to raise awareness with other NGOs and community-based organisations about the INEE Minimum Standards in Aceh. For example, in September 2005 the Jesuit Refugee Service invited IRC to facilitate a session introducing the standards. In addition, sub-districts in Aceh have requested more information from IRC on the standards. As a result, IRC staff in Meulaboh have begun to meet partner agencies to constitute MSEE Working Groups at field sites. These groups discuss the content of the Minimum Standards, and their possible use in those communities, helping community members as well as education staff to better understand how to most effectively implement them to reach a higher level of quality education.

Because key staff involved in the MSEE Working Group in Banda Aceh are no longer working in the country, an important next step for IRC is to regenerate the MSEE Working Group in collaboration with UNICEF, Save the Children and the Ministry of Education. Once that is completed, the MSEE Working Group in Banda Aceh will resume awareness-raising with local partners, NGOs, Ministry of Education staff and teacher training institutions. The MSEE Working Group will also follow up on the mentor training that was completed in July.

Globally, a next step for INEE's Working Group on Minimum Standards, which follows from the lessons learned in Aceh, is developing training materials and implementing a process for training on the Minimum Standards. A series of regional Training of Trainers workshops will be held between January–May 2006 in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, North America and the Middle East and North Africa. Approximately 30 trainers will be trained in each region to train others to apply the Minimum Standards in their work; consequently, each region will have a cadre of trainers who will use training and other organisational and individual learning strategies to institutionalise the Minimum Standards within their agencies and partner organisations.

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