

Conference on Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) & Foundational Learning in Emergencies

Hosted by the School Education & Literacy Department - (SELD) Government of Sindh

Concept Note:

The province of Sindh has been the worst affected due to the monster floods of 2022. Over 60% of the schools have been partially and fully damaged, causing further disruption to learning incurred during COVID-19. The School Education & Literacy Department (SELD), Government of Sindh is boldly dealing with the Floods Emergency Response supported by multiple allies, viz. civil society, development partners and industry. The recent emergency has aggravated mounting challenges to achieve SDG 4 and the Sindh Right to Free & Compulsory Education Act 2013 for children aged 3-16 years. Sindh has progressively integrated ECCE in the RTE Act 2013 (Article 9) to build strong foundations for its children.

There is a growing consensus nationally and globally that 'Foundational Learning' is under threat undermining the targets of SDG 4. There are two definitions of Foundational learning that pivot a close linkage across ECCE and Lower Primary education up to grade 3 (3-8 years).

- a) [Foundational learning skills refer to the skills that make learning possible. Foundational skills are critical for students in kindergarten, first, and second grades. Foundational skills standards include print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition and fluency](#)
- b) [Foundational learning is defined as basic literacy, numeracy, and transferable skills such as socioemotional skills that provide the fundamental building blocks for all other learning, knowledge, and higher-order skills](#)

For Pakistan, both sub-sectors have received little attention in terms of access, learning outcomes and financial investment. The Government of Pakistan committed to the [Action agenda for Foundational Learning at the UN Transforming Education Summit \(TES\) in 2022](#). Both FL and ECCE are also acknowledged as Great and Best Buys respectively by the [Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel \(GEEAP\) Report 2023](#)¹

During emergencies, children in ECCE and Lower primary grades remain the most ignored, with more attention given to students in upper primary and secondary grades, both in schools and at homes. It is also a matter of grave concern that the building blocks of lifelong learning have not

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/05/09/education-smart-buys-cost-effectively-supporting-teachers-and-parents-can-lead-to-significant-learning-improvements>

been given due attention within the mainstream indicators associated with ‘education in emergencies’².

The recent emergency has aggravated mounting challenges to achieve SDG 4 and the Sindh Right to Free & Compulsory Education Act 2013 for children aged 3-16 years. Sindh has progressively integrated ECCE in the RTE Act 2013 (Article 9) to build strong foundations for its children. The two-day Conference on Foundational Learning and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Emergencies to be held on June 15-16, 2023 will address three objectives; these include to:

- 1) draw attention to the urgency of action for acknowledging and addressing foundational learning in floods/emergencies crises,**
- 2) mainstream ECCE in emergencies with clear indicators at output and outcome level and**
- 3) address ECCE & FL consistently and as priority areas across the relief, recovery and development phases during emergencies.**

The conference outcomes will thus focus on actionable steps for the government, civil society and development partners to collectively accelerate progress to meet the targets of the Sindh Education Sector Plan and Roadmap for Sindh (SESP&R) 2019-2024 embedded in SDG 4 and RTE 25 A.

The Two-Day Conference on ECCE & Foundational Learning Crisis in Emergencies will be a gathering of all key stakeholders to address the challenges faced by the education system in Sindh and Pakistan. Whilst COVID-19 is a lingering health crisis, the devastating floods have washed away whole villages across Sindh, Balochistan, KP and some districts of Punjab, leaving more than 2 million children in Pakistan inaccessible to education and damaging nearly 27,000 schools in the country.³ These emergencies emphasize the urgency to build more resilience and preparedness for such crises and to ensure growing investment and system strengthening to the continuum of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Foundation Learning in lower primary (up to grade 3). Growing investment in these two sub-sectors where a majority of the enrolled children are present will create sustainable lifelong learning possible.

The Foundational Learning crisis in Pakistan has solid evidence available (ASER 2010-2022/SAT/LEAPs) to build a strong case for building forward better; the combined nexus of poverty, low literacy, vulnerable caregivers, climate change impact, poor infrastructure further highlight why these groups and sub-sectors need urgent attention.

The conference with focus on Foundational Learning and ECCE in emergencies will promote collaborative efforts to address current gaps, preparedness and propose interventions with the consensus of all stakeholders including strategic policymakers.

² <https://www.educationcluster.net/country/pakistan>

³ UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/press-releases/schools-more-2-million-children-pakistan-remain-inaccessible-due-devastating-floods>