

## Story of impact

# Tackling the learning crisis in the DRC, amidst other crises

Whether it is conflict, natural disasters, COVID-19, or another tragic Ebola outbreak, there are many factors that make life hard for the children of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

So when, a few years ago, President Felix Tshisekedi announced the introduction of free basic education for all children, families across the vast country of 85 million people celebrated.

It was a rare highlight for a country beset by crises.

The mood at UNICEF's country office in the capital, Kinshasa, was equally jubilant at the prospect of removing some of the barriers preventing an estimated 3.2 million disadvantaged children from attending school. Sadly, we have seen first-hand what happens when children are not in school and are not learning, perpetuating a vicious cycle of generational poverty.

"This was the moment we had been waiting for," declared UNICEF DRC Chief of Education Helena Murseli. "This was a breakthrough in our ongoing efforts not just to get every child into a classroom but to improve the quality of the learning that he or she receives."

UNICEF – the coordinating UN agency for education – had been working hard to promote reform in the DRC's education sector. These efforts took several years and involved working closely with communities, the Ministry of Education, donors, and civil society to make the case for why reform was necessary and to plan exactly how to improve education overall, all supported by never-before collected data and brand new analysis from UNICEF experts.



### Democratic Republic of the Congo

Children have fun at a school enrolment campaign supported by UNICEF. This kind of advocacy work is vital to improving education outcomes and complements other kinds of education work, such as the construction of classrooms.

UNICEF helped make the case for reform by setting up special committees across the country, including in remote locations, so communities themselves could demand better education. We carried out extensive advocacy with local education authorities and teacher-parent organizations to promote access to school. And, importantly, parents were taught why it was so essential that they allow their children to attend school. In addition, specific activities promoted the enrolment of girls and supported National Teachers' Day and the International Day of Education – a helpful way to promote teacher motivation.

Identifying the funds needed for such a diverse range of activities was a challenge, since community level advocacy efforts are traditionally underfunded. But UNICEF had a uniquely powerful and versatile tool at its disposal: its annual allocation of funding from Core Resources for Results (RR), with their inherent flexibility and availability to be deployed on short notice.

At the policy level, RR had already funded a critical action necessary to make free education a reality: "We urgently needed to gather critical data – on how many children were in school, completion rates, and so on – that would strengthen the case for free education with the government," recalled Murseli. "No other donor was ready to cover the cost, but we found a solution in RR." The investment paid off when the new policy took effect.

The critical role of RR funding was again demonstrated when implementation of the new free education policy got under way. With parents no longer obliged to cover fees and other school costs, it was no surprise that when school later reopened previously unenrolled children flocked to schools in huge numbers, and many schools were unable to cope.

"Our classrooms were severely overcrowded," said Bingoma Samuel Sage, director of Birere Primary School in North Kivu province. "We had to have four children sharing a desk while others were sitting on the floor." In province after province, schools were simply overwhelmed.

"In some classrooms there were over 100 children because of the new policy," noted UNICEF Education Officer Pascaline Mupaya. "It created a crisis, and we knew we had a role to play in order to ensure that the new learners received a quality education."

Urgent discussions began among the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and other donors and partners on how to address the situation. As one part of a multi-faceted solution that addressed both the short-term crisis as well as the longer-term educational needs of children, UNICEF proposed creating space in simple but sturdy classroom blocks to be erected on hundreds of existing school premises. Depending on the complexity of the design chosen, a new block could be ready for use within as little as four to five weeks.



**Democratic Republic of the Congo**  
A teacher leads a lesson in a packed classroom. Overcrowding has become a significant problem in schools.





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**Students who were directly affected by the volcano eruption also received notebooks, pens, backpacks, and other school items – also paid in part by RR.**

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Most funding was to come from two multinational donors: the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait. But when the Nyiragongo volcano erupted in May 2021 in North Kivu, this region that was already plagued by rampant militia violence and consequent mass displacement of civilians now had to deal with seven schools burning to the ground.

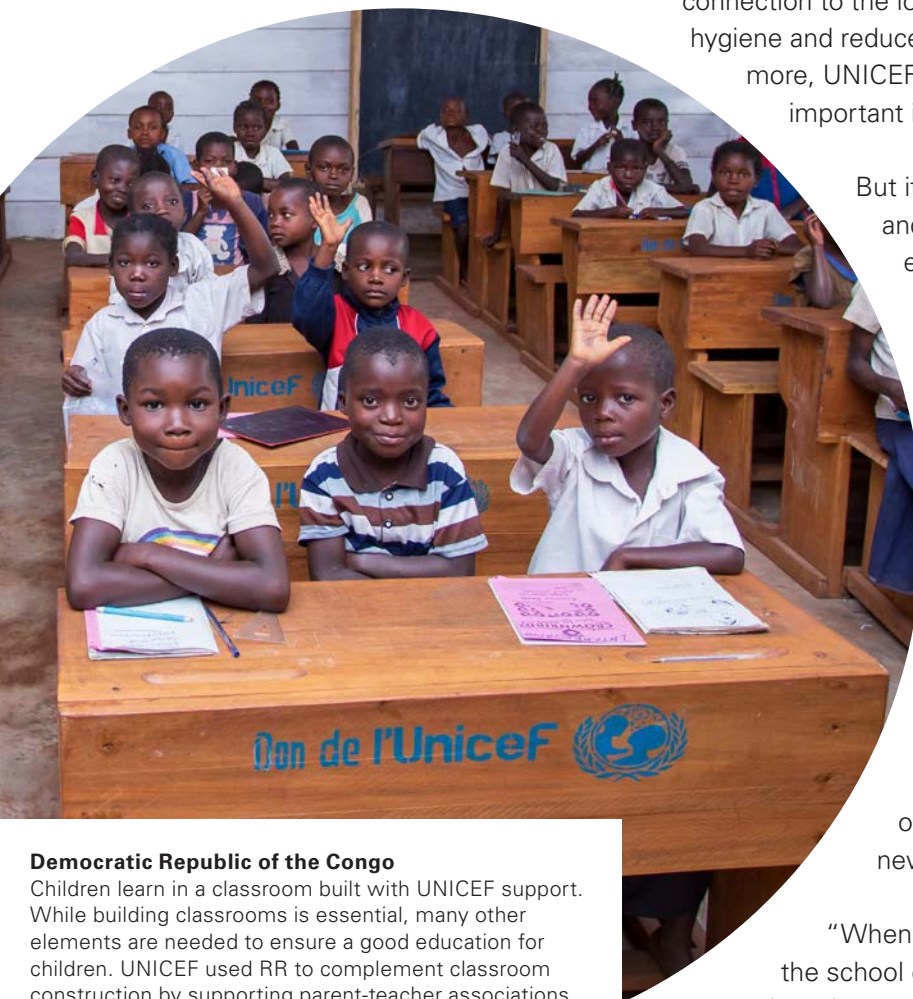
And that is where, again, RR proved invaluable. Given the exceptional situation in North Kivu, RR funds covered the construction of 12 out of 78 new classroom blocks, providing significantly improved learning conditions for the 1,400 students at Birere Primary and those attending many other schools. Students who were directly affected by the volcano eruption also received notebooks, pens, backpacks, and other school items – also paid in part by RR. “This really relieved the vulnerable parents who could not afford these supplies,” said director Sage.

Major issues remain, nonetheless. Sage says that at Birere Primary there is a need for teacher training in peace education and in child-centred pedagogy. The school also requires a permanent connection to the local water supply network in order to improve hygiene and reduce the risk of waterborne diseases. So once more, UNICEF is planning to turn to RR to address these important issues.

But it takes more than buildings to make a school and address the learning crisis. For a truly effective education system, it takes trained teachers, modern curriculums, and data and monitoring systems to track progress. For this reason, UNICEF used flexible RR funds across the country to strengthen school management, and in doing so we continue to achieve greater access and improved learning and teaching conditions for teachers and children alike. UNICEF and partners have also continued to involve local communities throughout the reform process so as to promote greater grassroots sustainability. RR funds covered everything from income-generation projects to pay for student uniforms, to the planting of school gardens and the enhancement of the new classrooms.

“Whenever something had to be done to improve the school environment or help get the local community on board, we turned to RR because of its flexibility and lack of conditions,” noted UNICEF’s Murseli. “Time and time again, donors who have supported RR saved the day.”

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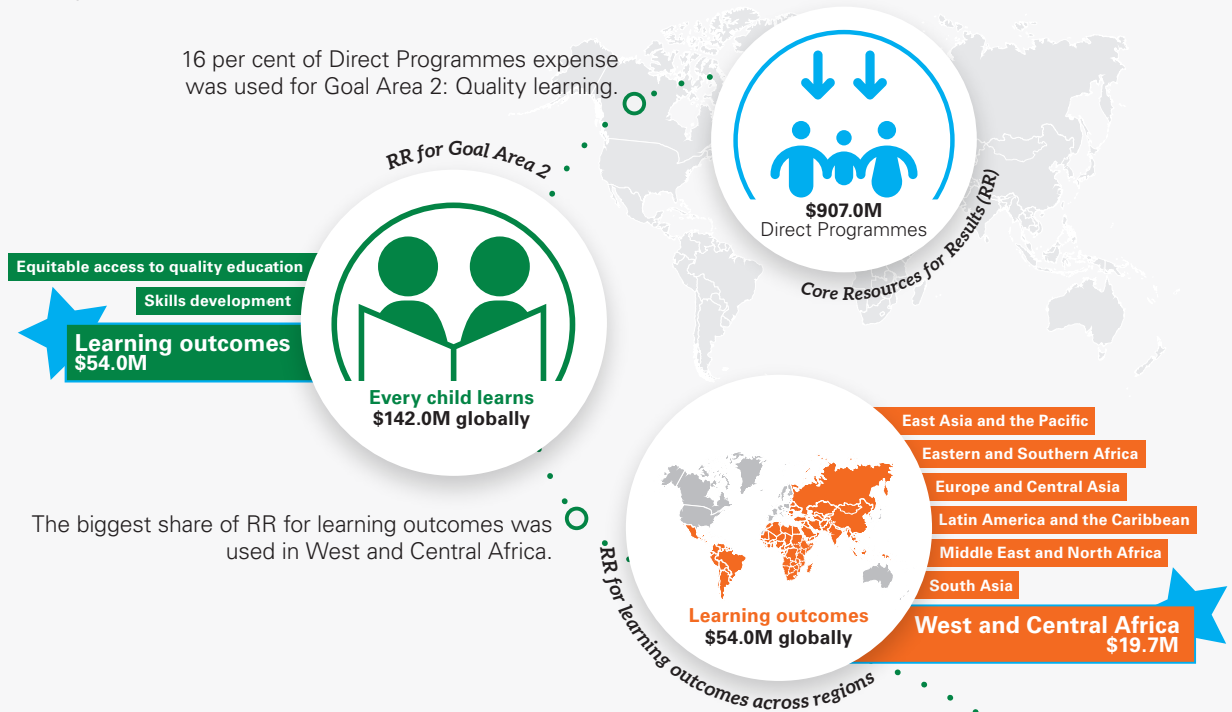


**Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Children learn in a classroom built with UNICEF support. While building classrooms is essential, many other elements are needed to ensure a good education for children. UNICEF used RR to complement classroom construction by supporting parent-teacher associations, teacher training, and more.

# From global to on-the-ground implementation: an illustration from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

This graphic illustrates how Core Resources for Results (RR) are used by one country to achieve results. It begins with following the global use of funds within one of UNICEF's five programmatic Goal Areas, then to a region, and finally to UNICEF's country office in the DRC.



In the DRC, RR was spent on improving education quality and learning outcomes to prepare children and young people for their futures.

**Expert staff and consultants** ensure that assessment of learning is strengthened and embedded in the national education curriculum, policies, regulatory frameworks, training materials, plans, and practices to improve learning outcomes for children, as well as skills and capacities for a fulfilled life.

**UNICEF's network of sub-offices** facilitates direct contact with emerging local authorities and communities in support of strong education programming.

**Partnerships with civil society and government partners** deliver education services, including school construction, early learning, and teacher development, with a focus on child-centered pedagogical methodologies and community engagement, as well as participation in education through parent-teacher associations and school management committees.

Procurement and distribution of **teaching and learning materials** are aimed particularly at marginalized children experiencing significantly lower learning outcomes.

**On-site field travel** supports partners to plan, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate UNICEF-funded programmes supporting improved learning outcomes for children.

**Learning outcomes \$5.5M in DRC**

RR for learning outcomes in the DRC

