

# 3F CRISIS : IMPACT ON EDUCATION

QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT, APRIL-JUNE 2009

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UNICEF, in coordination with the Department of Education and in partnership with Research Inputs and Development Action (RIDA), developed a monitoring mechanism to assess the consequences of the food, fuel and financial (3F) crisis on children's education. This first quarterly monitoring report presents the findings from the first monitoring cycle (April to June 2009).

**BACKGROUND:** Much of the world has experienced three interrelated crises (food, fuel and finance—the 3Fs) over the last two years, with both developed and developing countries suffering the impact of global economic forces. The onset of the 3F crisis has considerably slowed progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in many countries, threatening the development of key social sectors. The crisis is anticipated to have an impact on children's education in many parts of the world, since less financial means will call for coping mechanisms at the family level. These mechanisms may include reduced spending on educational expenses, resulting in lower school attendance of children or the removal of children from school so that they can contribute to the household budget through work in the home, fields or labour market.

**METHODOLOGY:** The monitoring mechanism involves three major components: household, school and community-level monitoring. Household-level monitoring is undertaken through analyzing the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) survey data collected by the World Food Programme, and school-level monitoring involves collection of information from 22 schools located in 11 districts (Humla, Tanahun, Achham, Mugu, Bajura, Jumla, Dadeldhura, Kapilvastu, Parsa, Saptari, Panchthar) through District Education Offices. Community-level monitoring involves field visits to two districts every three months and the holding of focus group discussions with mothers, children, and teachers. In addition, rapid impact assessments in districts displaying abnormal trends in the monitored indicators are also planned.

**Initial findings show that children are vulnerable to the impact of the 3F crisis: rising prices, especially of food, and loss of migration opportunities are recognized concerns within communities, and are affecting children's education. Detrimental coping mechanisms that impact children's education in several ways have been adopted by many households.**

## REDUCED EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURE

**30 per cent of households have reduced expenditure on education materials** (stationery, pens, bags, school uniform, etc.) to cope with shocks experienced at the household level, such as rising food prices or unavailability of food. In all FGDs conducted with mothers, participants said that prices of educational materials have increased since last year. It was also found that households who experienced rising food prices are likely to decrease their expenditure on educational materials.

20 households (out of 516) transferred their child from private to public schools to cope with shocks experienced at the household level. Community-level monitoring in Tanahun found that some children were moved from private to public schools because their fathers lost their jobs in the Middle East.

## HIGHER PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

Around 3 per cent of respondents revealed that they removed their child from school to cope with shocks experienced at the household level in the period April–June 2009. Price rises and the subsequent need for increased earnings are contributing to an increased incidence of child labour: when the household experiences a substantial increment in food prices, there is a higher chance that a child from the household will drop out of school and be sent to work.

Household monitoring found that in order to avoid their child's dropout, parents need to increase the amount of loans they take: there is a significant negative relationship between the amount of loan taken by households and the probability that they will take their children out of school to send them to work.

Many households reduce their children's attendance at school to send them for part-time work as a coping strategy. This coping strategy has gained momentum in the last two years: **23.8 per cent of respondents reduced their children's attendance** (for children aged 5–16 years) in the spring of

2009 compared to five per cent in the summer of 2008 (WFP, 2008). During their absences, 53 per cent of the children are working at home without a wage, 33 per cent are involved in paid labour, and 15 per cent are away from home.

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**These two coping mechanisms (reduced educational expenditures and child labour) along with others have adversely affected children's attendance as well as learning achievement through several pathways.**

### IMPACT ON ATTENDANCE

The reduced availability of educational materials affects children's attendance because students who go to school without educational materials are sometimes sent home by their teachers.

An increased percentage of households are using child labour as a coping mechanism which is affecting children's attendance and in some cases led to dropout.

Illness is already a major reason for low attendance, according to students and teachers in five of six FGDs. Moreover, data from school-level monitoring shows that the reason for students' absences is illness in 22 per cent of cases. The 3F crisis, which has led to decreased food consumption, a reliance on lower quality food and reduced use of soap, has effects on children's health and, therefore, school attendance.

To cope with rising food prices and hunger, mothers take their children to work with them and share the daily meal given by their employer with their accompanying children; this will affect children's school attendance.

In particularly food-insecure regions of Nepal, food distribution might affect both teacher and student attendance: in order to obtain their ration of rice from the distribution point of the Nepal Food Corporation, which in some cases is far away from their homes, both students and teachers miss a day or more of school.

Nevertheless, data collected at the school level indicate a slight increase in average school attendance compared to the same months last year: in May, students' monthly attendance was 8.7 days (out of 24) compared to 7 days during the same month last year, and in June, their attendance was 15 days compared to 12 days last year.

### IMPACT ON LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS

Higher levels of hunger, higher involvement of children in work, and lower expenditure on educational materials may result in lower learning achievements for students.

Hunger affects learning, according to teachers in Humla, where the food crisis has existed for many years. Similarly, all children involved in FGDs in Humla identified hunger as one of the causes for poor learning achievements.

Involvement in child labour results in irregular attendance. Participants in four out of six FGDs conducted with teachers and students said that students were irregular at school because of child labour. It is widely recognized that irregular attendance results in lower learning achievements.

Reduction in expenditure on educational materials and their consequent reduced availability can affect children's learning achievements. Lack of study materials (notebooks and pencils) was mentioned as one of the main learning barriers at six of eight FGDs conducted with teachers and children.

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**The severity of the impact of the 3F crisis on education differs by the households' socio-economic background, income source, geographical location and size.**

Household wealth is found to closely determine the use of education related coping mechanism: poverty stricken households having a higher likelihood of using child labour as a coping mechanism. Similarly, remittance-dependent households have a higher probability to reduce their children's attendance at school to send them for work and households from the Karnali region are more likely to decrease expenditure on educational materials.

Family size has an impact on determining the use of coping strategies: households having more school-aged children are

more likely to decrease expenditure on educational materials. Similarly, the probability that a household will send school-aged children to work as a coping mechanism increases with every additional family member.

The education level of the mother matters when deciding upon education related coping strategies: households with a relatively well-educated mother are less likely to reduce their children's attendance to send them for work, whereas male-headed households are more likely than female-headed households to adopt that coping mechanism.