

## Thematic Working Group on School Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing

### Sub-group of the Learning and Education2030+ Networking Group

#### Terms of Reference

##### Background

The extended closure of schools and other education institutions across Asia, implemented to help stem the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, has created unprecedented disruption to learners' education and their access to school-based and school-linked services<sup>1</sup>.

With an existing foundation of several platforms such as FRESH (Focusing Resources on Effective School Health), Health Promoting Schools, and Child-Friendly Schools – among others - promotion of health, wellbeing and nutrition in schools and places of learning is not the first initiative of this kind. It is understood that sustained implementation and data about the coverage and impact of previous initiatives may be patchy, and some seem to have lost momentum perhaps due to shifting donor priorities. Notwithstanding this, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical need to revitalize efforts around holistic school health and nutrition (SHN) programmes<sup>2</sup> that ensure the readiness of students for learning and of schools for teaching, and enable the health and wellbeing of learners, teachers and other school staff, with spill-over benefits for families and communities.

[Earlier research](#) around the benefits of effective school health services has demonstrated that health, nutrition, WASH and child protection support in school have a positive impact not just on access and completion rates in school, but also on learning. Recent evidence re-emphasizes that more investments<sup>3</sup> should be made in the learner and that healthy, well-nourished students learn better.<sup>4</sup>

Within the framework of the Learning and Education2030+ Networking Group, Asia-Pacific agencies working in the nexus of health, education, child protection, gender equality and others will converge around shared priorities in a sub-group focused on school health, nutrition and the wellbeing of learners, educators and the entire school community. The working group leverages the [renewed commitment](#) among UN agencies for better data, stronger partnerships, and ensuring adequate resources and more effective approaches to integrated, sustainable and impactful SHN programmes.

Under the aegis of the re-named and re-positioned Learning and Education2030+ Networking Group, Asia-Pacific, the working group on school health nutrition and wellbeing will bring to bear the comparative advantage and wealth of technical and programmatic expertise of its respective civil-society, UN and other

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<sup>1</sup> In these TORS, 'schools' refer to formal and non-formal learning spaces, including at pre-primary (early childhood), primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, including vocational education and training centres.

<sup>2</sup> School health and nutrition is a multi-sectoral approach to design and deliver coordinated and comprehensive strategies, activities and services that are integrated and sustained within the education system for protecting and promoting the physical, emotional and social development, health and well-being of students and the whole school community. (UNESCO, FAO, GPE, UNSCN, World Bank, WFP and WHO. 2020. [Stepping up effective school health and nutrition: a partnership for healthy learners and brighter futures](#))

<sup>3</sup> Investment in health during the first 1,000 days is widely recognized as a high priority, but there is historical neglect of investments in the next 7,000 days of middle childhood and adolescence (World Bank. 2018. [Optimizing education outcomes: high-return investments in school health for increased participation and learning](#)).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

partners working at all levels of education and across all modalities of learning to advance the goals and targets of SDG 4, among other SDG.

Moreover, the technical working group aims to further coordinate inter-agency efforts in Asia and the Pacific on situating school health, nutrition and wellbeing within the context of regional and national COVID-19 recovery and resilience plans. Agreed joint actions will build upon the momentum of a limited series of COVID-19 related [technical webinars](#) and consultations convened by UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA and WFP in 2020 that brought together officials in the health and education sectors, alongside other SHN stakeholders, to examine the health and wellbeing considerations of safe school reopening.

## **1. Purpose**

The Group will primarily function to:

- 1.1 exchange and share information, news, and events -- along with technical, normative and operational resources relevant to SHN, especially, but not exclusively, from the Asia-Pacific region -- that have been developed by the Group's member agencies and other trusted partners and stakeholders in SHN and wellbeing;
- 1.2 coordinate the planning and delivery of agreed, time-bound joint activities, prioritized in response to – in the first instance – the evolving situation of COVID-19 related school reopening and safe school operations (see Annex I) and thereafter, to the need for a sustained approach to advocate, support implementation of global frameworks like health promoting schools, and action on SHN and wellbeing, collective evidence-building, in the region;
- 1.3 sustain harmonized regional partnership to jointly mobilize and support stronger cross-sectoral approaches at the country level for SHN, particularly between the education, health, nutrition, WASH and protection sectors ;
- 1.4 explore innovative ideas around how school health and nutrition programmes can be enhanced, including the increased use of technology to enable schools to build back better school health systems;
- 1.5 provide advice and examples of good practice around the financing of school health and nutrition and its institutionalization in government structures and broader partnerships, including civil society and the private sector.

## **2. Membership**

2.1 The organizations in the Group will constitute its “Members”, together with other key agencies and institutions working in this field

2.2 The following organizations will comprise the initial Members of the Group (listed alphabetically):

- ASPBAE
- Education International
- Plan International
- UNESCO
- UNFPA
- UNICEF

- WFP
- WHO

2.3 Other organizations: adolescent and youth groups/networks, civil society, bilateral development agencies and UN, will be invited to join as appropriate, including agency partners not presently engaged in the structure and meetings of the Learning and Education2030+ Networking Group, Asia-Pacific

2.4. Member organizations will be required to reconfirm their membership and participation on an annual basis.

2.5 Each member will be routinely represented by one person (“the representative”) and an alternate. One or both should represent their organization at each meeting. All official documents related to the Group will be sent to both the representative and their alternate. This does not preclude meeting participation by additional colleagues of Member organizations.

### **3. Group operations and frequency of meetings**

The Group will meet virtually for at least one hour on a pre-arranged and confirmed date and time. The organization of group meetings will be agile: the frequency of meetings and the date of the meeting(s) will be fixed in advance via email exchange with agreement of the majority of the Group’s members, for example, if the scheduled date falls on a public holiday.

### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

4.1 The Group will be co-chaired by at least two member Organizations, each covering the education and health & wellbeing dimensions. This responsibility will rotate between the Member organizations every twelve months on a voluntary basis; in other words, no organization will be required to assume this responsibility indefinitely. In the first year the Group will be co-chaired by UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO.

4.2 The twelve- month period will run for a calendar year (1st January to 31<sup>st</sup> December).

4.3 One Member organization providing the co- Chair will also provide the Secretary for the Group. The Secretary will prepare the minutes of the meetings and circulate the agenda and supporting documents in a timely manner. The period as Secretary will run concurrent to the Chair. In the first year the Secretary of the Group will be UNICEF.

4.4 A call for nominations for the next Co-Chairs & Secretary of the Group will be circulated by the Secretary at least one month before the end of the twelve-month term of office.

4.5 The initial co-chairs will be UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO, with UNICEF acting as Secretary for first year.

These TORs will take effect subject to consensus of the founding Group members and remain in force until the Group decides to amend.

## **Annex I**

### **Short-term (6-8 months) Joint Tasks of the Working Group**

- i. Identify priority themes within SHN and wellbeing and organize online technical, webinar consultations on these agreed themes, engaging government counterparts, particularly from the education and health sectors.
- ii. Propose a joint mechanism to support monitoring of implementation of COVID-19 safe school reopening and operations protocols, and the impact of their implementation on the education and wellbeing of learners.
- iii. Map respective agency activities on SHN and wellbeing, including ongoing and planned work.
- iv. Establish an internal communication and document exchange platform for the Group.
- v. Collate a calendar of major events being organized by Member organizations on relevant themes of SHN and wellbeing (the calendar will be linked to the internal Group platform mentioned above).
- vi. Establish an online repository of resources, curated by Member organizations, of print/multi-media materials on school health and nutrition, especially but not exclusively in the context of COVID-19.