

**DRAFT BACK TO OFFICE REPORT
JANUARY 3 - 9 2009
ABIDJAN, CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

Contents

A. Background: Donor coordination; Education for all

B. Purpose of the mission

C. Conclusions: Talent Academies; Government ownership; Visit to the border

D. Next Steps

A. BACKGROUND

Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone share common tragedies, with past catastrophes and potentially threatening surges of conflict and violence within their boundaries and across their borders. Findings show that the vast majority of combatants across factions were poor and uneducated. Many had left school before the conflicts started either due to lack of fees or because schools had closed down. To compound the problem, the post-conflict areas and regions, mostly rural, remain with a badly affected education system.

In the main cities and urban areas, adolescents and young people have few outlets to channel their legitimate hopes and aspirations, and they are exposed to wrong choices and influences. What should be the future economic and social forces of the country are in fact a ticking time bomb of violence, social disruption and fragility. The bottom line is that these states still face security threats and have not developed long-term economic strategies, particularly in the rural regions.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a military mutiny allowed rebel groups to seize the northern half of the country and caused some 700,000 people to be displaced. Socio-political crisis has resulted in the degradation of education infrastructure, including many primary schools. Efforts to reopen schools in the north have failed because too few teachers are willing to go back. The 2002–2003 civil war divided the once stable and prosperous country in two, with the northern half still under rebel groups' control, and populations trying to cope with life hindered by a severe deterioration of services and human rights.

The December 2008 signing of the Ouagadougou IV Agreement by parties in conflict and future contenders in the upcoming presidential elections was a key step in the peace process. The agreement provided for the integration of some 5,000 ex-combatants into the regular army. However, key stages of the electoral process have encountered major logistical challenges, resulting in the postponement of the elections. Equally, the redeployment of state authority in the north is not yet complete. And, most importantly, the aftermath of the crisis and all its consequences continue to negatively affect the lives of children and women.

The slowing down of the peace process poses challenges and creates the fear that Côte d'Ivoire could relapse into a conflict as a result of the current political stalemate and that conditions for the organization of free, fair and transparent elections may not be met. Renewed conflict would undermine efforts made so far in restoring peace and could increase the need for humanitarian assistance. This would also compromise the efforts of the donor community and the Government itself to take the country through a transition from an emergency to a post-conflict phase, during which purely humanitarian assistance could be replaced with an early recovery and development scenario. It also requires adaptation at programmatic, operational, fund-raising and functional levels as well as measures to prevent new episodes of social implosion.

The crisis has resulted in increasing poverty – from 38.2 per cent in 2002 before the conflict to an estimated 43.2 per cent in 2006 – massive population displacement, rising unemployment and a worsening composition of public expenditures. Access to and delivery of basic social services deteriorated, especially in the war-affected areas. Achievement of most MDGs is seriously off track. According to the 2006 UNICEF multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS), 33 per cent of children under 5 years old are suffering from moderate malnutrition and 15 per cent from severe malnutrition. During the height of the crisis, at least 500,000 children were out of school. There has also been a significant deterioration in Côte d'Ivoire's UNDP

Human Development Index (HDI), and the country now ranks 164 out of 177 countries. The HIV and AIDS prevalence rate, currently estimated at 4.7 per cent, is lower than previously thought but remains much higher in the war-affected areas.

According to recent statistics, 55 per cent of school-age children attend school; the disparity between rural and urban areas is 48/67 and 35/81 between poor and non-poor groups. If this trend continues, Côte d'Ivoire will not be able to achieve its objective of universal primary education (MDG 2). With regard to gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG 3), the girl-boy ratio at the primary level is 83, an improvement of nearly 9 points before the crisis. This trend, however, should mainly be attributed to a drop in boys' school enrolment.

Because of its relatively strong economic base in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire is one of the main destinations for child trafficking in the sub-region, with children coming from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, the Niger and Togo. In addition, as a consequence of the recent socio-political situation, a large number of children are also trafficked from the CNW (Central, North and West) regions to the southern regions and from rural to urban areas to work. The implementation of the National Plan of Action against Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Labour is not effective because it lacks resources and coordination.

An estimated 4 million children are not registered at birth. The modernization of the civil registry programme supported by UNICEF contains specific measures for the civil registration of children under 13 years old and an extension of registration for persons above this age. In spite of actions undertaken, violence towards children and women continues throughout the entire territory. In general, the population does not know their rights, and because of the lack of law enforcement authorities in the CNW regions, impunity is pervasive.

Donor coordination

Given the fragility of the peace agreement implementation, the partnership between Côte d'Ivoire's development partners is particularly strong. The World Bank has been working very closely with the United Nations system and the European Commission on stabilization and peace-building objectives, and with the African Development Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) on arrears clearance, normalization of relations, and advice and support for economic and governance reforms. In sum, donor coordination has been focused around financing of the Government's implementation plan of the Ouagadougou Accord. The projected costs of this programme are some \$247 billion CFA, and the donor contribution including the World Bank's pre-arrears clearance grant amounts to some \$195 billion CFA.

The World Bank and the United Nations have started a phase-one desk review for a post-conflict needs assessment, which, if the political process advances, will result in a resource mobilization exercise with the Government and donors. This review has served as a documentary basis for launching the poverty reduction strategy process, commenced in December 2007. By March 2008, the Ministry of Planning had started the household survey and consultation process. A full poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) was expected to be issued in mid-2008.

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the 34 African countries eligible for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. The prevailing crisis, however, has delayed its debt cancellation, including the finalization of the PRSP and

the subsequent decision dates by the IMF and the World Bank. Nationally, the Government faces a sizeable domestic debt to the private sector.

Developing countries fear a slowdown of aid flowing from Western countries, including the end to import privileges as a consequence of the recent global economic downturn. A worsening economic crisis would result in the further reduction of social investments, increased unemployment and sinking household revenues. Children and women would be the most affected, limiting their access to basic social health services, basic education and adequate nutrition.

Education for All

Côte d'Ivoire has a population of 17.9 million and a growth rate of 1.7 per cent. The adult literacy rate is 50.9 per cent. Primary education is not compulsory. Although tuition is free, some students have to pay for supplies and rent books from street vendors.

Nearly one third of the population is younger than 15. An unknown number of children in the north joined the rebel movement at the outbreak of civil war in 2002. Most have been reintegrated in society or returned to school, but sexual abuse and violence against children has become increasingly common. Human Rights Watch has reported that child soldiers were recruited from Liberia. Several pro-government groups have recently signed various action plans to end the recruitment and use of children by armed groups and forces. The armed opposition, Forces Nouvelles, has also shown a commitment towards this.

The country's education system has suffered since the civil war. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that more than 1 million children have been denied an education. Schools in the government-controlled south are flooded with students who fled the north, while those in the rebel-controlled north lack supplies and teachers. Year-end exams were cancelled, preventing students from moving forward in their schooling.

Research in 2002 showed that 67 per cent of children aged 6–17 attended school, including 73 per cent of boys and 61 per cent of girls. Many children between the ages of 12 and 14 left school due to poverty. With help from UNICEF and other aid agencies, nearly 1,200 schools have been reopened and the number of girls enrolled in school has doubled.

The 2006 school year saw the first nationwide school registration since the civil war broke out, and it was agreed that curricula would be coordinated at the national level. Data gathered from schools demonstrated that students who failed the secondary school entrance exams did not qualify for free secondary education and that many families could not afford to pay for schooling. Parental preference for educating boys rather than girls also persisted, particularly in rural areas.

Beyond a preference for educating boys rather than girls, girls face a number of gender-specific challenges to accessing education, including pregnancy and gender-based violence. In 2005, the Minister of National Education stated that almost one third of the 66 per cent primary and secondary school drop-out rate was attributable to pregnancies. According to a US State Department report on human rights, teachers sometimes

give good grades and money to students in exchange for sexual favours.¹ According to UNICEF, the child marriage rate is 33 per cent and the child labour rate is 35 per cent. Child labourers, mostly trafficked from neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali, are frequently used on cacao plantations.

Côte d'Ivoire has been suffering for the past four years under the socio-political crisis that has disrupted the education system, especially in the CNW regions – resulting in the degradation of educational infrastructure, including many primary schools. School buildings and furniture have suffered from acts of vandalism to the extent that the structures in many localities, particularly those in the west of the country, no longer meet the minimum conditions of security and viability to receive children.

As a result, a great number of children are deprived of their right to basic education. In addition to deteriorated facilities, because many facilities have been looted there are no longer adequate pedagogic resources to ensure quality education. Along with the construction of latrines and water points, and overall rehabilitation of classrooms to provide safe shelters for the children, schools require procurement of chairs, tables and kits for pupils and teachers.

Moreover, with the return of displaced persons who fled these areas, offering education is crucial to resettling formerly displaced populations back to the region. Apart from giving children the opportunity to continue their education, these activities necessarily involve local capacities, thereby generating opportunities for employment and social reinsertion for local entrepreneurs and workers as well as involvement of non-governmental organizations at the community level.

B. PURPOSE OF THE MISSION

The Learning Along Borders for Living Across Boundaries (LAB4LAB) initiative and the Talent Academies initiative are designed to support education, security and development in Côte d'Ivoire and three other post-conflict countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). The purpose of the Mission was to:

- (i) Discuss follow-up and fast-track implementation of post-conflict initiatives with the UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office as well as with government counterparts.
- (ii) Identify field of Talent Academy (ies).
- (iii) Advise and agree on concrete steps for taking these initiatives forward
 - in addition to the current country programme
 - in terms of advocacy, planning, time scale and logistics
 - in terms of costing/financial resources, technical inputs and partnership support.
- (iv) Present high-quality child-friendly schools (CFS) concept of LAB4LAB.

Following internal discussions by the visiting team with the UNICEF representative and his staff, extensive discussions were held during meetings with senior staff of the Ministry of Education, as well as United Nations Country Team (UNCT) partners, researchers and several other non-UN partners active in education.

¹ Reference: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

C. CONCLUSIONS

The two initiatives continue to garner enthusiasm and high expectations. Conceptual clarity and practical implementation steps were required and provided. The UNICEF HQ team presented the high-quality, second-generation CFS concept and LAB4LAB models.

There is need for advocacy and action on behalf of the country office to:

- (a) Maintain momentum and act urgently
- (b) Secure strong government leadership
- (c) Identify and secure support of key external partners
- (d) Promote and ensure community ownership
- (e) Consolidate general consensus and plan of action from stakeholders on next activities for immediate implementation of LAB4LAB.

More specifically:

1. Talent Academies: The Talent Academy initiative was suffering from some political indecisiveness due to anticipated control of the Ministry of Education. To drive forward the initiative and minimize the risk of compromising the core concept of the Talent Academies, the UNICEF headquarters team met with officials from the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Training (TVET). Presentation of the Talent Academy concept, including clarification of the intended target group and objectives, led to conclusive agreement to establish a Talent Academy dedicated to food processing in the town of Odienné in the northern region of Côte d'Ivoire. It was made clear that the Talent Academy should not be another TVET centre, and that the target group should be very specific.

A location was identified in Odienné, where a food-processing training institution was located until the war destroyed the building. The programme was transferred to Abidjan, but the regional position of Odienné (at the junction of Guinea and Mali) as a training platform in food processing remains. The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) will assist the Ministry of TVET financially, contributing to the rehabilitation of the centre. There may be a need to expand and adapt the building to the requirements of a Talent Academy, and architectural support will be needed once the programme is better defined. It is anticipated that the International Refugee Committee (IRC) will work with the Ministry and with UNICEF to establish criteria for selection of the students according to the Talent Academies' concept. The Food Processing Talent Academy in Odienné would have potential to be linked to the Catering training institution in Abidjan.

Another potential discipline for the Talent Academies identified was fashion, which remains to be explored. It was felt that the immediate effort should be concentrated on the food-processing Talent Academy before engaging on a second facility.

2. Government ownership: The meeting with key government officials confirmed their desire to be fully on board and in the driver's seat. The Deputy Director of the Ministry of Education urged faster movement and set standards and norms for the high-quality child-friendly schools to be adopted in the school construction programme under a World Bank loan of US\$50 million. It would also allow a better positioning of UNICEF in the sector plan for education and the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) negotiation. Guei Tieoulé Blaise, the Director

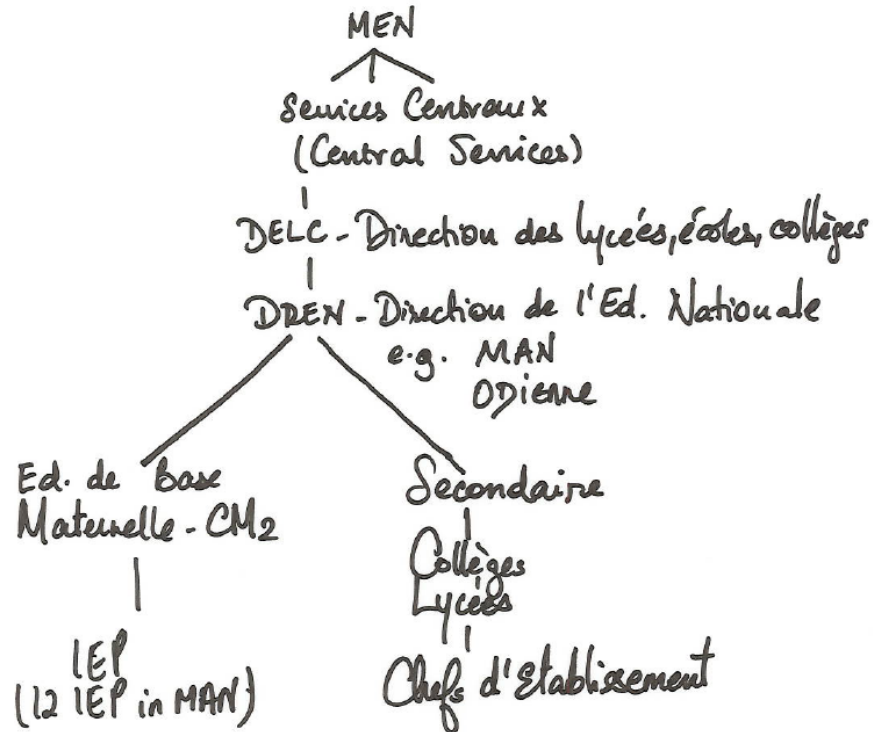
of the Direction Régionale de l'Éducation Nationale (DREN)) of Danané, whom the mission had met in 2008, reiterated DREN's commitment. The following key points were agreed upon:

- Sites would be fenced right away, and letters of attribution of the sites sent out to formalize ownership.
- There is an acute lack of teachers in Danané (about 540 are needed); teachers are unwilling to teach in an environment they can hardly perceive as schools. The problem of finding the right incentives to motivate teachers came up several times.
- Discussion also evolved around the sustainability of school canteens with the involvement of women's self-help groups and the community.
- Another key point was the official upgrade of the LAB4LAB schools to the level of 'Schools of Excellence'. The special status would enable the recruitment of experienced teachers for the LAB4LAB schools through the state programme.
- It was agreed that the terms of reference and teachers' profile will be designated according to the specific needs of the LAB4LAB (e.g., specialized in information and communications technology, mathematics, etc.). It was also agreed that the complexity of the initiative could necessitate an interim/transition period of school management by a school administrator. This would entail creating a special status while building capacities of the school directorate, personnel, teachers and the community to understand the requirements and ensure long-term stability and, later, to undertake school management.
- Teachers' housing comes under the responsibility of the Conseil Général and will be addressed accordingly.
- Concerning the school garden programme and its relationship with the 'Growing Connection' initiative linked to World Food Programme, the country office will connect to l'Agence Nationale d'Appui au Développement Rural (ANADER).
- Psychosocial support is an often neglected area even though it is important in the context of war-traumatized children and adolescents.
- The presentation of the model/plan was seen as the first signal that something is happening.
- Motivation and support of government partners is essential for success.

The site visits and overall exchanges indicated that teacher incentive is key to the success of the LAB4LAB initiative and also signalled a need for integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD). Many young children were observed running around the site who could benefit from preschool education. Literacy linked with preschooling is an option to look into, possibly combined with income-generating activities to help finance the preschools.

A workshop with the technical officers and Director of Cabinet of the Ministry of Education allowed them to consolidate their thinking around a new approach of what a school environment should be. It raised awareness of the multidimensional possibilities of a learning environment, and of the linkages between the school and the community as well as norms and standards to be adopted. There was also a request for support to integrate CFS norms and standards to community schools.

The presentation of the CFS concept to ministry officials raised several questions pertaining to costing, school management, teachers' accommodation as an incentive, classroom dimensions and number of children per class (50–60 square metres for 30–35 pupils).



The schools of the Learning Along Borders for Living Across Boundaries initiative are intended to be high-quality child-friendly schools – not just another school but an initiative that would signal to the community that something good is happening in their area. These schools are seen as purposeful and safe learning environments (latrines, solar energy, connectivity, child-centred teaching and learning, etc.) that can also create local employment. The purpose is to build schools that are healthy, energy smart, environmentally sensitive and use connectivity –complementing and enhancing learning, and making use of all available resources. They are schools designed with the learners and communities in mind, and which will be centres of focus for the community.

3. Visit to the border – Disrupted schooling: The field visit's objective was to finalize the selection of some sites for the location of border schools in Messempleu (9 kilometres from the Liberia border, with four communities in the surroundings) and Fieupleu (2 kilometres from the Liberia border, with eight communities in the surroundings).

Existing schools

The state of public schools in rural areas is very poor, especially in the border villages. The infrastructure seems very old and poorly maintained. By some unofficial accounts, many of the schools are 30–40 years old. Maintenance seems to be minimal at best, and the conditions reflect the low level of local funds available and of monetary commitment from the Government.

Water and sanitation is far less than adequate. All of the latrine facilities surveyed in public schools are dry latrine systems with decrepit structures. There are no facilities for hand washing and no provisions for water collection. Access to clean drinking water is not available in the schools, and latrines are neither gender nor age sensitive.

Schools regularly sit on an arid plot of land that has been cleared of all native vegetation; school buildings are set along the side of the road with no signs of the main entrance, vegetation, a playground or fencing. Most of the time there is a football field that is used as the sports area. Arid and dry soil tends to generate more dust than areas covered with some type of vegetation, and dust can have a direct impact on children's health in the form of asthma or skin disease.

Logistics

The two sites that were visited are still under rebel control. Like a few other humanitarian organizations, UNICEF can still operate within this political framework in relative security. The most efficient way to get there from Abidjan is by a three-hour helicopter ride to Danané. Locally, ground transport is the most common way of mobilizing labour and materials. Many of the secondary roads are dirt roads that may not be accessible during the rainy season.

Resources

Deforestation in this area is of utmost concern to local and outside architects alike. On the other hand, Côte D'Ivoire enjoys a very well-supplied construction materials market, with all of the basic construction materials from concrete blocks and cement to steel, aluminium and wood. The school models presented on this trip minimize the use of materials that are not locally available or that may present a maintenance challenge. Based on a basic study of available materials in the provincial region of Man and Abidjan, the UNICEF HQ team feels comfortable that the designs can be implemented without major roadblocks. The construction industry is active and well represented by many projects of different natures in the capital.

Technical staff

The UNICEF country office has one civil engineer on board who has already been involved in school rehabilitation and latrine construction efforts. His technical knowledge and understanding of construction, market demands and access to private entities will be a great resource for the project.

The UNICEF HQ team also met the architects from the construction unit of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and presented the plans for two models available for the different sites that will be selected. Their reaction was positive, and they stated that "the plans were clear and technically correct" according to local standards, allowing for an effective construction process.

Site 1 – Zampleu

The most significant component of this site is the electric power line that runs to the east of the site. This feature would allow the school to run on electricity and provide power to the community as well. The site sits along the main dirt road that connects three villages to Danané. The land has been cleared of all vegetation and trees. There is a slight slope that can be easily levelled off. The existing school building is very old and not well maintained. Classrooms have only one door, and the orientation does not provide the best protection from the sun. The main wood elements are not milled

properly to guarantee structural stability. Latrines are very old, unsanitary and unsafe. Hand-washing provisions are not provided, and there are no signs of water-collection mechanisms.

Site 2 – Fieupleu

The classroom building barely meets the most minimal standards. Many parts of it are dangerous to children: rough wall openings serving as windows, thatch roof that can easily catch fire, unlevelled structural elements, etc. The land in front of the building is clear and level, serving as the soccer pitch. The back of the building is still surrounded by trees and low vegetation. There is a slope that falls away from the building in a ratio of 1:6 approximately. The school has the only available borehole to access underground water for basic needs for the school and the village. Latrines are very old, unsanitary and unsafe. Hand-washing provisions are not provided. The new school would serve nine villages, making it a crucial and positive intervention in this region of the country.

General

- Soil conditions are stable, and data provided by MoE demonstrate that seismic movement is not common in the region. The last earthquake was registered more than 15 years ago.
- The main winds come from the south-west due to temperature change in the ocean water. The speed and strength of the winds is low, without an impact on structural calculations.
- Data collection on rainfall will be required to schedule and coordinate important construction activities.
- Clear recommendations have been given to the community to preserve “all trees and vegetation” until the final site plan for the school is provided.

D. Next steps

Conceptual clarity and implementation steps – Provide conceptual clarity as well as define implementation steps for both initiatives with government counterparts.

Advocacy – Ensure an advocacy strategy to (i) maintain momentum; (ii) secure strong government Leadership; (iii) secure support of key external partners; and (iv) promote **community ownership**.

Decisions in consultation with the Government – Discussions between the UNICEF country office and the Government to:

- (i) Identify and decide on additional border sites to be covered by LAB4LAB for first phase (2009)
- (ii) Adapt LAB4LAB models for four or five sites to start immediately (bill of quantities, costing, land surveys, bidding, construction)
- (iii) Finalize type of at least one Talent Academy (food processing) for priority action and establish action plan with the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- (iv) Develop Talent Academy programme to define the architectural design and equipment requirements.

CFS programming and technical tasks – Address immediate CFS programming and technical tasks:

- (i) Design of facilities, equipment, furniture, teacher training and school management for LAB4LAB
- (ii) Costing of full implementation per school in the border areas

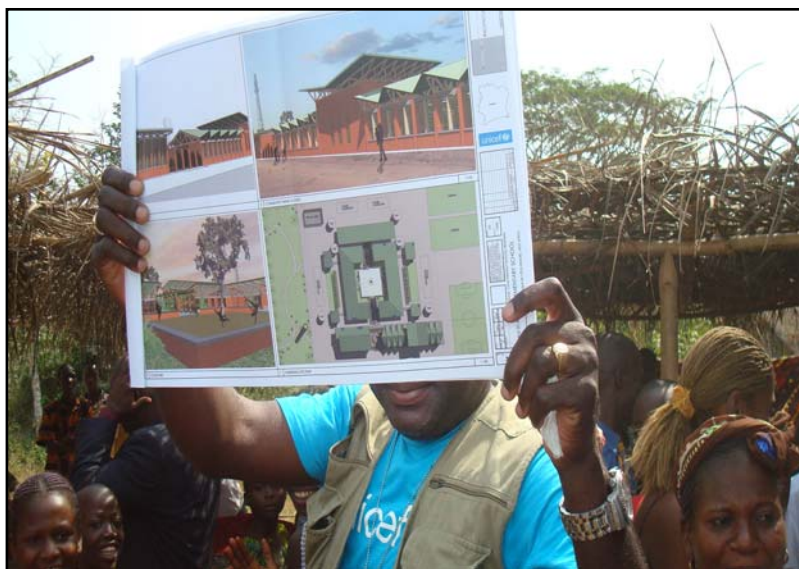
- (iii) Support for CFS standards in Côte d'Ivoire Sector Plan
- (iv) Financial implications for national budget and donor support budgets
- (v) Links to ECD and family literacy for holistic approach and to identify partnerships
- (vi) Consolidate partnerships along the borders
- (vii) Intersectoral (WASH, Child Protection, etc.).

Talent Academies programming and technical tasks – Address immediate Talent Academies programming and technical tasks:

- (i) Develop Talent Academy programme to define the architectural design and equipment requirements.
- (ii) Design specifications for equipment use, instructor training, etc.
- (iii) Develop criteria for selection by talent (youth focus-group discussion)
- (iv) Link to IDB and IRC for support to TVET
- (v) Costing of full implementation of Talent Academy in Odienné
- (vi) Set mind frame to rethink TVET and skills training
- (vii) Financial implications for national budget and donor support budgets.

Sub-regional focus through:

- (i) Sub-regional workshop for joint progress reviews for each initiative between UNICEF country offices focusing on programming aspect (proposed: Abidjan, February 2009)
- (ii) Possible coordination by UNICEF regional office
- (iii) Monitoring and evaluation of initiatives
- (iv) Setting national and regional standards
- (v) Facilitating exchange of technical expertise and other resources between countries
- (vi) Sharing of experiences and learning together.



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School design being presented to the community