**[Calamity & schools](https://www.dawn.com/news/1713898/calamity-schools)**

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THE magnitude of the flood calamity notwithstanding, there is hope on the horizon. The flood has exposed the farce of education in rural Sindh. Now we also know it is a myth created by the authorities that parents do not want to send their children to school.

But the data on the havoc unleashed by the deluge on the school system can only be described as overwhelming. Collected with the involvement of Unicef and other partners of the Sindh Education and Literacy Department (SELD), the data meticulously records the facts now known about the state of education in the province.

**Editorial:** [*Lost to education*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1708159)

First, something about the damage inflicted on the infrastructure and the number of students affected. Unicef and SELD provided me the consolidated data. Of the nearly 44,000 schools in the affected areas, almost 20,000 have been destroyed or partially damaged. Due to this immense loss, the education of 2.9 million school-going children has suffered.

But there is still hope. There are teachers like Farzana who show us the light at the end of the tunnel. She is a teacher working at a Temporary Learning Centre (TLC) set up in Jamshoro by Unicef. There are 246 such teachers providing comfort and education to the traumatised children who have been witness to death and destruction.

The Temporary Learning Centre is an excellent idea.

Farzana works for an Indus Resource Centre school in rural Sindh. She is a gentle soul with a cheerful demeanour, who knows how to keep the children engaged. She can also handle children who are in a state of trauma by talking and reading stories to them. She makes them draw and colour pictures and sing songs. In this way, she helps the children understand their emotions and share them with others.

Farzana also teaches, but her pedagogy is not the conventional one popular in Pakistan. Her students learn more through fun and games. Except for three, none of the 38 children in her centre have been to school before. The TLC is their first school experience and they are happy and learning well.

**Read:** [*1,100 schools damaged in KP floods*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1710782/1100-schools-damaged-in-kp-floods)

A Unicef staffer tells me that the school kits which his organisation has provided contain all the basic material for teaching, such as stationery, notebooks, books and sports equipment.

Both Farzana and the Unicef representative maintain that the parents are pleased with the TLCs and are demanding education for their offspring. The government says Sindh has 4.5m children enrolled in primary schools. Where were they when the floods came?

The TLC is an excellent idea that Unicef has actualised as a standard procedure in times of natural calamities and war when children are affected in large numbers. The TLCs in Sindh, staffed by 367 teachers, are caring for 19,792 children. There should have been more.

Unicef tells me it is maintaining profiles of children in their villages so as to be able to track them when they have to be mainstreamed and moved to regular institutions. True, the monitoring system will ensure enrolment. But the attendance of the teachers can only be ensured by the community itself. I am not clear if Unicef is empowered to do that.

**Read:** [*Students suffer as flood-hit schools await rehab*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1710304)

But one can talk about the future only when the rehabilitation work starts. The disaster struck at a time when the government’s administrative and financial capacity as well as its political will to help is at its lowest ebb. No one would deny that rebuilding homes will take top priority while the programme of rehabilitating schools will go on the backburner. An attempt to restore the old order would not be feasible. It would be expensive and will benefit only those who caused it to fail in the first place.

So why not opt for an informal system on the pattern of the TLCs catering for children aged 4-12, but of a permanent nature? If the system I had suggested in my article a month ago (‘Why de-school?’) is adapted to the flood circumstances, it is likely to work. It would not require an elaborate construction programme. The teachers will be easy to train as the emphasis will be on the pedagogy of the child rather than focusing on the teachers’ knowledge of various subjects.

To recap the planned learning outcome of a child in the centre I have envisaged, it would suffice to say that the aim should be to encourage her own potential and allow her to cultivate her natural capacities. By age seven, she would have mastered the literacy and numeracy skills in her own language. By 12, she would be conversant in Urdu. The forte of the centre should be a library stocked with a variety of books that will be the knowledge resource for the curious mind driven by the child’s self-learning urge. The teacher’s role will be more that of a loving guide who triggers this innate process.

After that, the choice of mainstreaming should be available to the 12-year-old. She will be better than her compatriots from the regular school system who are rote learners.

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