unrwa research in progress:
2016 monitoring of learning achievement findings

Overview
Efforts continue across the UNRWA education programme to advance the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Education Reform Strategy (ERS, 2011-2015) and the implementation of the Agency’s Medium-Term Strategy (MTS, 2016-2021). The education focus of the MTS is to ‘embed, enrich and sustain’ the Reform policies, principles and practices, with the ultimate aim being that school aged children complete ‘quality, equitable and inclusive’ basic education.

Research plays a key role in helping to strengthen understanding of the programme towards evidence based decision making. To this effect, the Agency has developed a number of tools to enable it to monitor the breadth and depth of the achievements and challenges. Three key studies are undertaken every two to three years: the Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA), the Perceptual Survey and the Classroom Practices Study. The baseline for each of these studies was determined early on in the Reform, between 2012 and 2013.

2016 Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA)
The MLA survey measures students’ academic achievement, not just with regards to their mean scores, but also with regards to their level of performance. In other words, the 2016 MLA enables the Agency to see how many UNRWA students are achieving at, below, or above grade performance level. In this way, the MLA provides important insights into the status of learning in UNRWA schools, the equity of student learning outcomes, and any progress made since the 2013 baseline.

The MLA also measures achievement with regard to students’ performance with regards to ‘Cognitive Levels’, ‘Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)’ and ‘Content Domains’. In 2016, all five Fields of UNRWA operations participated in the MLA, with Syria participating for the first time due to its security situation in 2013. Approximately 60,000 students in both Grades 4 and 8 in all five Fields participated in the 2016 Survey.

Key findings (in comparison to the 2013 MLA)
• A higher percentage of students reached the ‘Achieved’ and ‘Advanced’ Performance Levels in both grades and subjects with particularly strong improvements in Grade 4 Arabic and Grade 8 Mathematics.
• There were positive results with regards to a decrease in the proportion of students at the Not Achieved Performance level in Grade 4 (both subjects) and in Grade 8 Mathematics.
• The overall progress (both with regards to more students reaching the Achieved and Advanced levels as well as the decreases at the Not Achieved level) was at the Field-level and with regard to both genders. Lebanon Field particularly made substantial progress since the 2013 MLA.
• In the ‘Content Domains’ and ‘Cognitive Levels’, progress was noted also at
Agency-level. However Reading results suggested a need for specific attention (in both grades), and Writing in Grade 8, as well as Numbers and Algebra in Grade 4 Maths.

- The mean scores of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) have particularly improved in Grade 4 and 8 Arabic, and Grade 8 Mathematics.
- Agency-wide, the gender gap generally narrowed [i.e. improved] since the 2013 MLA, with the exception of Grade 8 Arabic.

**In the 2016 MLA:**

- More than half of the students reached the Achieved and Advanced Performance Levels in both grades for Arabic, and for Grade 8 Maths, at Agency-level; overall, Arabic mean scores were higher than Maths.
- There was very strong performance in Syria Field, with the Field having the largest proportion of students who reached either the Achieved or Advanced Performance Levels in Grade 4 [both subjects], and the smallest proportion of students at the Not Achieved level in all Grade/subject combinations. There was also strong performance in Gaza Field [e.g. largest proportions of students who reached either the Achieved and Advanced levels in Grade 8 [both subjects].
- Overall, at the Agency-level, a wide gender gap still persists in favour of girls, with the gender gap wider in Arabic than in Maths for both grades at Agency level. The smallest gender gap was recorded in Syria. Some exceptions were noted where the boys outperformed the girls in Grade 4 Maths in Syria, and in Lebanon for Grade 8 Maths.
- One anomaly, however, was in Grade 4 Mathematics where the Agency-wide performance was stagnant since 2013, with results not being as strong as in the other grade and subjects. In 2016, less than a third of students reached either the Achieved or Advanced levels in Grade 4 Maths.

**Way forward**

- The Full Report, Agency-wide and Field-specific Briefs, and School Reports have been disseminated to Fields; these will assist the Field, and the schools in understanding their progress and identifying where additional student support is required.
- Fields are now interpreting and reflecting on the findings in order to establish plans of actions to address areas of strength and weakness.
- Six videos [i.e. of a total of five Fields and one Agency-wide videos] were finalized by HQ and disseminated to the Fields for the 2016 MLA. The videos are in spoken Arabic and directly support the dissemination of the results.
- HQ is also now beginning an analysis of the Grade 4 Maths test questions to better understand the relatively stagnant results in the 2016 MLA.
- The next MLA will be implemented in 2020 to allow more time for UNRWA to fully analyse and address the findings of the 2016 Survey.

**For more information**

Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme, or UNRWA HQ Education Department on: info.education@unrwa.org.