

A Child-Friendly School

The goals of Child-Friendly Schools are to create child-centered schools which take a comprehensive view of each child's well-being (health, nutrition, family and community life) and create an environment that promotes learning. This ambitious UNICEF initiative in Moldova receives support from the Veolia Environment Foundation.

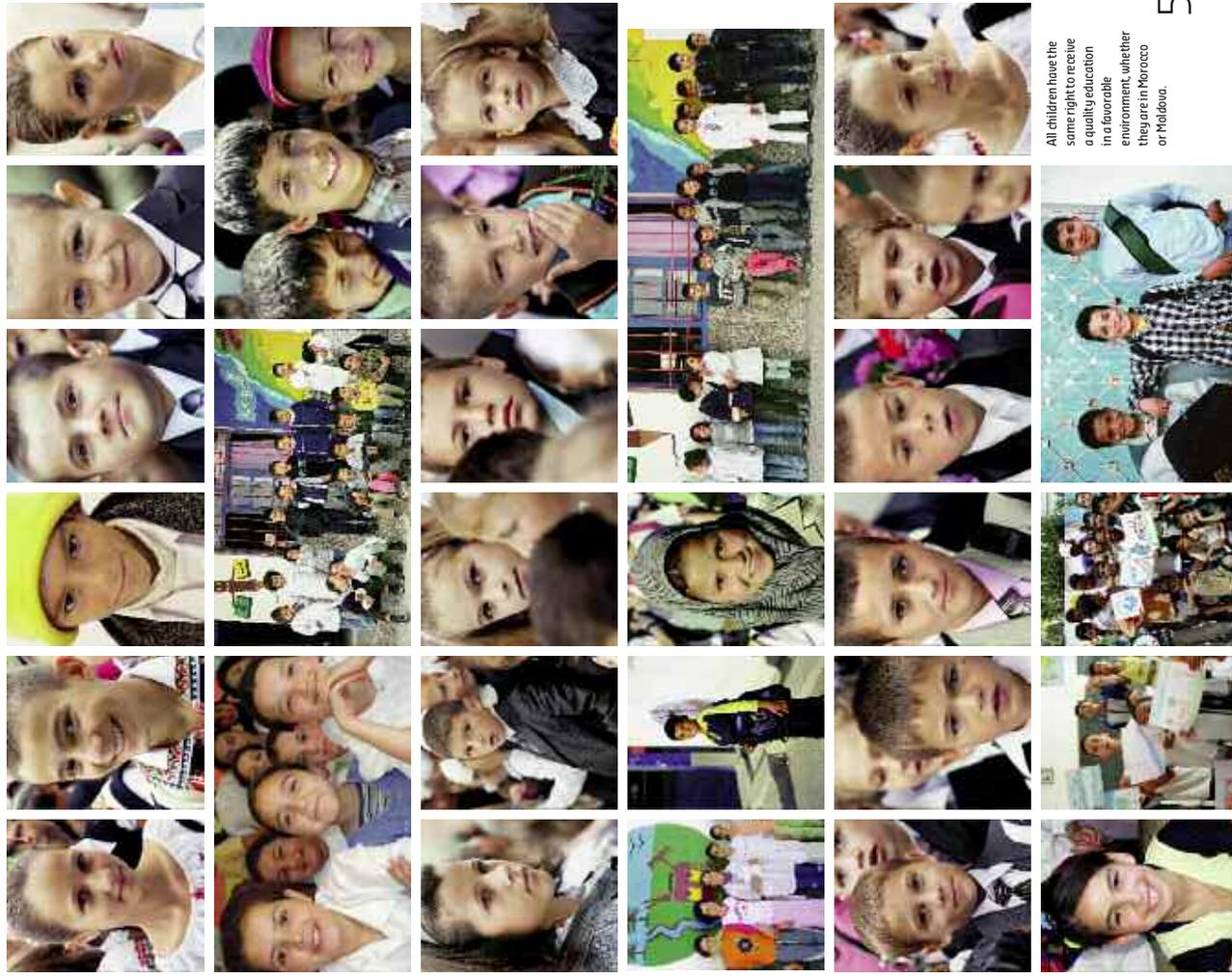
It all began in Morocco, in the early 2000s, when the government and UNICEF's Moroccan office began working to reduce school drop-out rates. Funds were short. Some 2,000 miles away, in Paris, UNICEF France approached Thierry Vandevielde, then the director of Waterforce. Their arguments won him over. He agreed to support the project and, more importantly, to find financial backers and partners. In 2003, a cooperative agreement was signed to rebuild approximately 30 schools in low-income neighborhoods on the outskirts of Tangiers. The next phase involved diagnosing the scope of the problem, an effort led by Veoliafor. Amendis, Veolia Water's Moroccan subsidiary, organized a host of projects (including building connections to public water networks, sanitation facilities and installing electricity).

The partnership was originally scheduled to run for three years (2003-2006), but was extended to the end of 2009. All the partners are pleased with the project's success and each is currently evaluating its involvement (see box, P. 55). UNICEF Morocco is particularly pleased. "We've created a model for promoting health and sani-

tation", says Olivier Gilbert, Veolia Environment's Deputy Director in Charge of Social Innovations, based in Tangiers. "The national education authorities have adopted this approach for the entire Tangiers and Tétouan region." Gilbert emphasizes the trust established among the project's key actors, particularly UNICEF. In addition, based on this experience, UNICEF has asked for the Veolia Environment Foundation's help with another school initiative, Child-Friendly Schools, this time in Moldova.

Access to essential services: water and heating

Moldova, a former Soviet republic, has grown by 8% annually, but 30% of its 4 million residents currently live below the poverty line. The quality of infrastructure is low and the conditions in schools are terrible. "In the winter, with outside temperatures of -25°C and no heating, it's barely 10°C in classrooms," says Sandie Blanchet, UNICEF's Deputy Representative in the country. UNICEF thus decided to address this problem through its Child-Friendly Schools concept, in cooperation with local governments (see box). First, the



All children have the same right to receive a quality education in a favorable environment, whether they are in Morocco or Moldova.

66 This is in line with Moldova's European aspirations and represents a modern approach to education, which focuses on inclusion, quality and equal access to education. **77**

LEONID BUJOR, MOLDOVAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION

A solemn moment. On September 1st 2010, two first graders and a high-school student of the Molesti School cut the opening ribbon. The ceremony was attended by the Moldovan Minister of Education, Leonid Bujor, the Mayor of Molesti, Mihail Cazan and Thierry Van develde, General Delegate of the Veolia Environment Foundation.



Ministry of Education invited Moldovan schools to participate in a national contest to select two or three target schools. Jean-Pascal Rigolleu, the project's sponsor at the Veolia Environment Foundation, visited some ten schools as part of the process and observed poor conditions throughout. "I saw coal-fired heaters, which were really just a heap of scrap iron," he says. "I saw broken windows and in some places there were no water points or toilets." The two schools chosen were in Molesti and Sofrmani. The task now is to ensure access to essential services, such as sanitation and heat. In 2008, Veoliaforce experts from Veoliaforce (Veolia Water and Dalkia) drew up an initial assessment of the work to be performed: insulate, renovate the heating system, build toilets and install appropriate lighting and small wastewater treatment facilities. Jean-Pascal Rigolleu describes the process. "Working with the Moldova Social Investment Fund, we drafted a set of specifications to help us choose the engineering and design consultancy firm and, then, the contractors," he says. "When the work got underway, we visited to make sure that everything was being done according to specifications." The renovation projects at the Molesti and Sofrmani schools are now complete. UNICEF and the Moldovan government have already moved to Phase 2 of the Child-Friendly Schools project, seeking to duplicate these models in the approximately 1,000 Moldovan schools — serving 850,000 school-children — still in need. Whether in Morocco or Moldova, children have the same right: to receive a high-quality education and to learn in an appropriate environment. ■



Morocco, the Success Continues

The project involving UNICEF, UNICEF Morocco and Veolia Environment initially included approximately 30 schools, but will ultimately involve more than 50. "The recourse of financial support and, in particular, the technical assistance provided by Veoliaforce and Amendis employees allowed us to work in other schools over the course of the program's three years," says Imane El Hatimi, Environment Manager at Veolia Environment, Morocco. Students now have 296 toilets and 152 wash-basins — some newly-built and others renovated. Teachers now have 58 toilets. Thanks to 30 new connections, the schools will have access to water systems, sanitation and electricity.

UNICEF and the project's sponsors estimate that approximately 50,000 children now have decent toilets and have learned about the importance of hygiene. The numbers speak for themselves. In Tangiers-Asilah province, the drop-out rate among girls fell from 5.1% in 2002-2003 to 0.9% in 2006.

Child Friendly Schools

In each country where UNICEF has implemented its Child-Friendly Schools program, it has helped to build a model school that children want to attend because they are comfortable there. That said, the international organization believes that there are multiple models of "child-friendly schools" that can be developed based on each country's specific economic and structural characteristics. Once UNICEF identifies this model, in collaboration with local authorities, it is duplicated elsewhere in the country.

Through the Child-Friendly Schools initiative, UNICEF addresses one of the key Millennium Development Goals (MDG). UNICEF estimates that in 2006, 110 million elementary school-age children were not attending school. In addition to the poor quality of education and the school environment, other factors, such as child labor, AIDS and civil conflicts threaten efforts to expand schooling.

1- The international community adopted eight MDGs in September 2000 at the United Nations. The U.N. pledged to achieve them by 2015.

Millennium Development Goals

- 1 Reduce extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 Ensure universal elementary education
- 3 Promote gender equity and women's empowerment
- 4 Reduce infant mortality
- 5 Improve maternal health
- 6 Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases
- 7 Preserve the environment
- 8 Establish a global development partnership