POLICY BRIEF
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GPE's Work for Early Childhood Care and Education

Highlights

- Delivering quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) is one of the most critical and cost-effective investments a country can make.
- For the first time, the Sustainable Development Goals include a target for ECCE (SDG 4.2) to ensure that children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.
- Despite progress in pre-primary enrollment in many countries, worldwide there are still more than 150 million children ages 3-5 who do not have access to pre-primary education.
- GPE has invested about US$180 million in more than 30 partner developing countries to support ECCE.
- Through GPE financing, countries improve ECCE by developing policy guidelines and service standards; training pre-primary teachers and facilitators; building and rehabilitating classrooms; establishing early learning assessment systems; distributing learning materials; supporting parent education and community-based early learning programs; and delivering communications campaigns to improve awareness of the benefits of ECCE.
- Conflict is a serious and growing barrier to ECCE services. GPE's work aims to ensure practical solutions in these settings. About half of GPE's partner developing countries with active grants containing ECCE components are affected by fragility or conflict.
- GPE's strategic plan for 2016-2020 commits to improving the quality and availability of ECCE, especially for those most often left behind. Within the GPE results framework, two specific indicators highlight the impact GPE seeks to achieve: (1) more children under age 5 developmentally on track, and (2) increased pre-primary enrollment.

1. Overview

The foundations of development and learning are laid in the first five years of life. The critical building blocks include adequate health and nutrition, nurturing and protective home environments, and cognitive stimulation through positive play and responsive caregiver-child interactions.[1] Evidence from developing

1 Pia R. Britto, Stephen J. Lye, Kerrie Proulx, Aisha K. Yousafzai, Stephen G. Matthews, Tyler Vaivada, Rafael Perez-Escamilla, et al., "Nurturing Care: Promoting Early Childhood Development," *The Lancet* (2016): published online October 4. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3.

countries shows that ECCE programs result in better and more equitable learning outcomes and can even improve health and income later in life.[2] In addition, ECCE programs can increase the efficiency of education systems by improving children's readiness for primary school, resulting in less repetition and dropout.

In the past decade, all regions of the world increased enrollment in pre-primary education.[3] Many governments made progress by strengthening public education systems to reach and meet the needs of younger children (e.g., ages 3-7). There is increasing evidence that delivering quality ECCE services is one of the most critical and cost-effective investments a country can make to reduce inequities and improve learning throughout life. Recognizing the benefits of ECCE, the Sustainable Development Goals include a target for ECCE (SDG 4.2) to ensure that generations of children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Although there has been great progress, there remain numerous obstacles to ensuring that all young children receive the support they need for their development and learning. Worldwide, there are still more than 150 million children ages 3-5 who do not have access to pre-primary education, including more than 80 percent of children in low-income countries.[4] Financing for ECCE continues to be a major challenge: Relative to other areas of education, funding for ECCE has not kept pace with enrollment growth. The poorest and most marginalized children—who have the most to gain from good-quality ECCE programs—are frequently left out. Conflict is a serious and growing barrier, with less than 5 percent of children having access to pre-primary schooling in some countries affected by conflict.[5]

GPE is dedicated to supporting developing countries in overcoming theses challenges. GPE's strategic plan, GPE 2020, commits to improving the quality and availability of ECCE, especially for those most often left behind. Within the GPE results framework, two specific indicators highlight the impact GPE seeks to achieve: (1) more children under age 5 developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial wellbeing, and (2) increased pre-primary enrollment. GPE supports ECCE by investing in stronger education sector plans (ESPs); mobilizing and delivering financing for these plans; and supporting effective and inclusive policy dialogue and monitoring. Over the past four years, GPE has steadily increased its focus on the importance of ECCE.

WHAT IS ECCE?

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a term adopted from the Dakar Framework for Action and refers to a broad range of programs and services intended to promote healthy child development, covering children from birth to the transition to primary school. ECCE includes support for learning, stimulation, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, and protection. It includes pre-primary schooling and other forms of formal and informal early learning programs.

Pre-primary education is formalized early learning immediately preceding primary school. Pre-primary schools can be attached to primary schools or can be entirely separate. Countries define the number of years that pre-primary education lasts and can vary from one to three years, usually covering children ages 3–7. GPE's investments in ECCE are primarily focused on service for this age group.

2 For example, see: Frances E. Aboud and Aisha K. Yousafzai, "Global Health and Development in Early Childhood," *Annual Review of Psychology* 66 (2015): 433–57; Paul Gertler, James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto, Arianna Zanolini, Christel Vermeersch, Susan Walker, Susan M. Chang, and Sally Grantham-McGregor, "Labor Market Returns to an Early Childhood Stimulation Intervention in Jamaica," *Science* 344, no. 6187 (2014): 998–1001; Nirmala Rao, Jin Sun, Jessie M.S. Wong, Brendan S. Weekes, Patrick Ip, Sheldon Shaeffer, Mary E. Young, et al., *Early Childhood Development and Cognitive Development in Developing Countries: A Rigorous Literature Review* (London: Department for International Development, 2014).

3 UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Education for People and Planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

2. GPE Support to ECCE

GPE supports governments and national stakeholders to improve access to quality early learning opportunities. It does so by supporting strong attention to ECCE in national ESPs in sector monitoring. GPE has invested about US$180 million in grants since 2002 to support more than 30 developing countries in implementing ECCE components of ESPs. GPE also supports strengthened domestic and international financing for ECCE.

2.1 SUPPORT FOR ECCE SECTOR PLANNING, ANALYSIS AND EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Technical and financial support to produce good quality and nationally owned ESPs is the foundation of GPE's operational model. Incorporating ECCE into country plans is an important consideration in getting development partners to endorse an ESP and for accessing additional GPE financing. An exercise conducted for GPE 2020 indicated that 14 out of 16 ESPs endorsed between 2014 and 2015 included an analysis section on ECCE.

Through jointly developed guidelines on education sector planning with UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, and the development of companion guidelines on education sector analysis in 2014 with UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, GPE has helped create a roadmap to support the mainstreaming of ECCE into education sector plans.

GPE is also actively involved in supporting partners to share new knowledge and evidence-based practices to resolve ECCE challenges through technical workshops, peer-learning events and conferences. The Global and Regional Activities (GRA) program supports research, capacity development and knowledge sharing at regional and global levels. The current GRA portfolio consists of 15 grants valued at US$31 million, the largest of which is the US$8.5 million Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning (PEARL) grant focused on ECCE and early grade reading research, knowledge sharing and evidence-based practice in the Pacific.

Interest in improving data and indicators related to ECCE has risen significantly, supported by efforts such as Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes (MELQO), a joint effort of the Brookings Institution, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. Currently, many developing countries lack robust and readily available ECCE data for evidence-based sector planning, including data on early learning outcomes, quality of ECCE services and financing for ECCE.

More than 10 partner developing countries are using GPE funds to enhance management and information systems that help measure quality and outcomes in ECCE according to nationally defined early learning and development standards. For example, the Ministry of Education in the Kyrgyz Republic, in partnership with the World Bank and UNICEF, used a GPE grant to introduce and adapt a new tool in the Central Asia region that measures children's readiness to learn at school across numerous developmental domains; the tool is based on the *Early Development Instrument* (https://edi.offordcentre.com).

The PEARL Program, financed by GPE and implemented by the World Bank, adapted a similar tool in Pacific countries and collected child development data from children ages 3-5: more than 6,600 children in Tonga and more than 1,500 children in Tuvalu. The results will be used to identify policy actions to achieve improvements in child development and early learning (see Box 1).

2.2 MORE AND BETTER FINANCING FOR ECCE

GPE supports improved financing to ECCE in GPE partner developing countries through its grants. It also promotes effective domestic and international investments in ECCE across the partnership.

Building on previous international and regional benchmarks set by the EFA High Level Steering Committee, the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration recommends that national governments allocate 4 to 6 percent of their gross national product (GDP) and/or at least 15 to 20 percent of their total public expenditure to education. Although a similar benchmark has not been set

BOX 1. SUPPORTING ECCE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN THE PACIFIC

The PEARL project, in partnership with the World Bank and governments in the Pacific regions, aims to broaden the knowledge base on the effectiveness, cost and scalability of school readiness and early literacy activities in low-literacy and low-resource communities. The project is piloting interventions in Tonga to improve the teaching and learning of basic reading skills and to strengthen children's school readiness through community-based play groups.

A key feature of PEARL is technical and financial support to countries (including Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu) to conduct a baseline census of school readiness indicators based on the *Early Human Capability Index*.[6] The results will support the development of country policy roadmaps and will help country teams better formulate and design effective interventions to improve school readiness. The country roadmaps—in combination with greater information exchange and joint problem solving among Pacific nations—aim to build stronger ECCE policies and programs that, in turn, will build stronger early learning outcomes for children in the region.

for ECCE, evidence suggests that a public investment of 1 percent of GDP at a minimum is required to ensure the provision of quality ECCE services.[7] The national average expenditure on pre-primary education is less than 0.1 percent of the GDP in developing countries.[8]

For the GPE partner developing countries with data, only Moldova and Mongolia spent 1 percent or more of GDP on pre-primary education. The burden of paying for pre-primary education often falls on families, and private providers account for more than 53 percent of all enrolled children in pre-primary education in low-income countries.[9]

At the international level, only 2 percent of foreign aid to basic education goes to the pre-primary sector.[10] Donors spend 26 times more on secondary education. Current estimates indicate that to reach the SDG 4.2 target and provide one year of pre-primary education for all children, the financial support will need to increase nearly sevenfold from US$4.8 billion to US$31.2 billion annually.

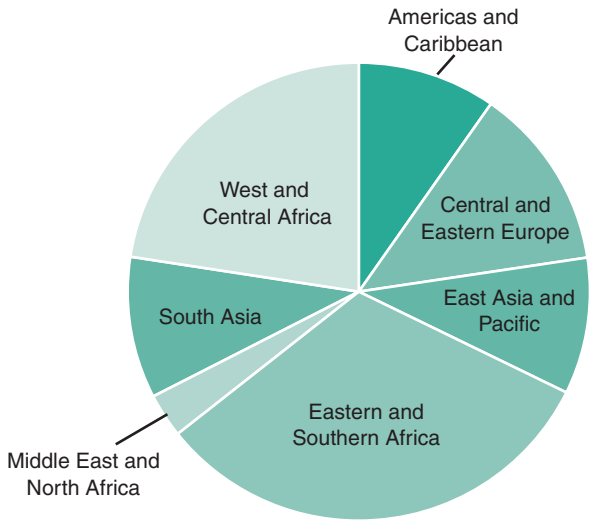
In response to these challenges, GPE has stepped up its funding for ECCE components in GPE grants. ECCE components now range from under US$1 million to more than US$20 million. A number of countries dedicated their entire GPE implementation grant to ECCE activities, including Guyana, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Mongolia and Nicaragua. Most of the GPE partner developing countries with active implementation grants that finance ECCE activities are in Africa; around half are countries affected by fragility or conflict.[11] Global recognition of the importance of ECCE and support from key partners such as UNICEF and the World Bank, which have facilitated national planning for ECCE and promoted increased investment, have spurred these investments forward.

2.3 EXPANDING ECCE ENROLLMENT

The overall gross enrollment ratio in pre-primary education in GPE's 65 partner developing countries grew progressively between 2002 and 2014, from 16.8 to 28.1 percent (see Figure 2). Enrollments rapidly

6 Sally Brinkman and Binh Thanh Vu, eds., *Early Child Development in Tonga: Baseline Results from the Tongan Early Human Capability Index* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).
7 Michelle J. Neuman and Amanda E. Devercelli, "What Matters Most for Early Childhood Development: A Framework Paper," Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) working paper series no. 5. (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2013).
8 Results for Development Institute, *Financing Early Childhood Development: An Analysis of International and Domestic Sources in Low- and Middle-Income Countries* (Washington: Results for Development Institute, 2016).
9 UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report*.
10 Results for Development Institute, *Financing Early Childhood Development*.
11 The GPE list of countries affected by fragility or conflict is based on the World Bank's Harmonized List of Fragile Situations FY16 and the UNESCO's 2015 List of Conflict Affected States.

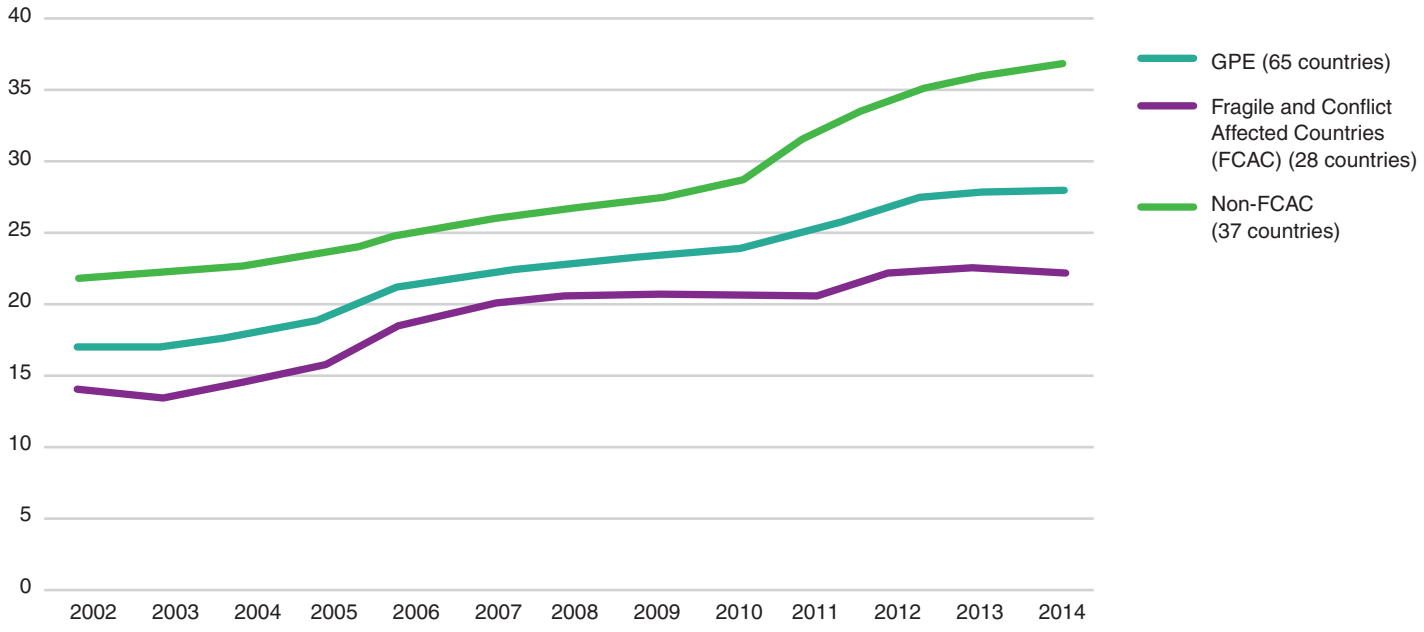
FIGURE 1. GPE'S SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT ECCE COMPONENTS OF EDUCATION SECTOR PLANS BY REGION



accelerated in several countries, especially after 2010. Partner developing countries took action in a variety of ways to increase the number of children in pre-primary education, including laws, policies, public awareness campaigns, financial incentives and fee abolition.

For example, Nepal, Albania and Vietnam have rapidly expanded ECCE provided by the government, increasing their gross enrollment ratio in pre-primary education to more than 80 percent. Countries such as Moldova and the Kyrgyz Republic, which have expanded ECCE through GPE grants, had a longer tradition of investing in pre-primary education and higher absorption capacity for ECCE investments due to existing delivery systems. Bhutan and Ethiopia started from extremely low baselines in 2010 to make progress in increasing pre-primary school enrollment ratios. Nepal and Ethiopia are notable as countries affected by fragility or conflict that rapidly increased pre-primary enrollment in recent years.

FIGURE 2. GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION, 65 GPE PARTNER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



Source: UIS estimates as of September 1, 2016.

Note: The 28 FCAC countries are based on the World Bank's FY16 classification of countries in fragile context and UNESCO's list of conflict-affected countries used in GEMR 2015: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

2.4 PROMOTING QUALITY LEARNING IN ECCE

GPE provides a range of support to quality ECCE programs, from system-level investments in management and planning to financing for teachers, learning materials and classrooms.

GPE recognizes that investment in teachers and effective teaching is central to improving quality learning. Many pre-primary programs rely on community workers and volunteers with limited formal pre-service or in-service training. As pre-primary programs expand, the supply of qualified teachers and facilitators will continue to be a major constraint to both access and quality. Around 90 percent of GPE grants with an ECCE component provide financial and technical support to countries to strengthen the role of pre-primary teachers through training and learning materials, construction of teacher training centers and by increasing salaries and incentives. Through GPE grants, several promising initiatives to strengthen pre-service and in-service training of pre-primary teachers have been launched.

PERCENTAGE OF GPE GRANTS WITH ECCE COMPONENT THAT FOCUS ON LISTED ACTIVITIES

Training of pre-primary teachers and other ECCE facilitators	90%
Building more and better pre-primary classrooms	90%
Distributing quality teaching materials, books and play materials	90%
Support for the development of ECCE policy guidelines and service standards	60%
Enhanced management and information systems that help measure ECCE results	45%
Support for parent education and ECCE communication campaigns	30%

Source: GPE data, September 2016.

GPE recognizes that the quality and availability of teacher training for ECCE affects children's transition to primary school and can lessen the challenges schools systems face when having to "catch up" underprepared primary school students. In Moldova, a GPE grant supported the implementation of an innovative and collaborative nationwide kindergarten-based mentoring program for pre-service and novice teachers, and is now part of the education system and new legislation (the Education Code) adopted in 2014. In Tanzania, funding supported a certification program (the Early Childhood Advancement Certificate Program, or ECACP) that provides in-service teachers with critical knowledge, skills and practice through a distance-learning platform administered through their district in-service Teacher Centers. The ECACP consists of audio, video and print materials that guide teachers through instructional theory and practice, and it supports them as they actively apply their knowledge in their classrooms. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the government increased hourly wages for pre-primary teachers by 40 percent in 2011 in part to attract younger professionals into the field.

2.5 SUPPORT FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN ECCE

Virtually all GPE grants with an ECCE component focus on strategies to expand access for disadvantaged and marginalized children. In Mongolia, for example, a GPE grant, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the World Bank and UNICEF, supported the development and implementation of mobile kindergartens housed in yurts that travel with nomadic families each summer and are equipped with furniture, teaching materials and toys. This alternative approach provided access to preschool for more than 3,700 nomadic children who might not otherwise have access to ECCE.

In the Kyrgyz Republic and Moldova, GPE-funded programs focused on improving access to ECCE services for children with special educational needs through the development of inclusive policies, renovations to ECCE centers, and the provision of special materials and rehabilitation equipment. In Lao PDR, a community-based school meals program, financed by GPE and implemented by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, encouraged improved attendance in pre-primary education in disadvantaged areas and provided better nutrition.

Expanding access is not simply a matter of costs: pre-primary schooling needs to be seen as relevant to parents and meaningful for children. A GPE grant in Uzbekistan—in partnership with the Ministry of Public Education, the World Bank and UNICEF—is financing the development and implementation of communications campaigns to focus on the critical role of parents, as children's first teachers, in providing stimulating early childhood environments and promoting learning in the home. Similarly, Moldova has shined a spotlight on ECCE through a public awareness campaign, "Help the Child to Become a Great Personality," including television programs, documentary films and posters targeting parents, guardians, pregnant women, teachers, and community and local leaders.[12]

2.6 SUPPORT FOR ECCE IN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY FRAGILITY OR CONFLICT

While almost half of GPE's partner developing countries made progress in increasing pre-primary enrollment, in 16 GPE countries, less than one child in 10 has access to pre-primary education. Of these 16 countries, 11 are affected by fragility or conflict, highlighting the unique challenges in expanding access to quality pre-primary schooling in such contexts.

Conflict and fragility adversely affect governments' and families' ability to provide ECCE opportunities for young children. Traditional funding mechanisms make it difficult for many development partners to operate in these countries, especially in unstable or dangerous environments. GPE gives high priority to helping children whose learning has been compromised because of conflict and fragility, and to building the long-term capacity of education systems. Currently, 28 of 65 partner developing countries are affected by fragility and conflict. In certain contexts of vulnerability, conflict or crisis, countries may also consider the development of a more short-term and action-oriented transitional education sector plan that takes into account the context and capacity for situation analysis and data requirements.

GPE currently provides technical and financial ECCE support to numerous countries affected by fragility or conflict. For example, as part of a larger program of teacher and school effectiveness in Uganda, GPE is collaborating with the World Bank to support the rollout of an ECCE teacher education certificate program, the revision of the ECCE policy and guidelines, and a costed plan of existing models of ECCE delivery. These activities are expected to establish an enabling environment for quality ECCE scale-up in the future. In Nigeria, children in the northern states have little or no access to pre-primary education, and insurgent activities and attacks on schools are a direct threat to schooling, especially for girls. In response, GPE is providing technical support and US$7.65 million—in partnership with ministries of education, USAID and the World Bank—to improve teaching and learning materials in pre-primary schools and promote parent and guardian engagement in early childhood development.

3. ECCE in GPE Partner Countries

MOLDOVA: COORDINATED AND MULTI-SECTOR APPROACHES TO ECCE

After independence in 1991, Moldova suffered a decade-long economic decline that led to the closure of many kindergartens, especially in rural communities.

Children build a tower with blocks in their preschool classroom, situated in a rehabilitation center for children with disabilities.

12 http://www.prescolar.md.

The gross pre-primary enrollment ratio decreased significantly from 72 percent in 1990 to 48 percent in 2001.

Moldova joined GPE in 2005, and a series of GPE grants totaling US$13 million were dedicated exclusively to revitalizing and expanding access to quality pre-primary education as part of its broader education sector plan. Implemented by the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF and the World Bank, the GPE-funded programs supported access to pre-primary education for more than 10,000 children through the renovation of kindergartens and endowment of pre-school facilities, including rehabilitation centers for children with disabilities, with furniture, books and teaching materials. Since joining GPE, enrollment in pre-primary education increased from 66 percent in 2005 to 84 percent in 2014.

Pre-primary teachers use interactive radio instruction to reinforce curriculum competencies and enrich learning environments for children in underserved areas.

A key feature of the projects was the development and nationwide use of policy documents and associated guides, including a new child-centered curriculum; early learning development standards for children and professional standards for educators; a systemwide professional development and mentoring program for preschool teachers; the provision of modern teaching and learning materials; and a new assessment tool to measure children's school readiness.

The GPE process in Moldova has improved coordination among donors, broadened policy dialogue among stakeholders, strengthened project implementation capacity, and mobilized the support of local communities—clearly benefiting the entire education system as a whole. Moldova is a regional leader in ECCE revitalization and has become an international case study in good practice. Most important, its youngest children are enjoying transformational early childhood education that will help them thrive.

ZANZIBAR: USING TECHNOLOGY TO BRING ECCE TO SCALE AT REASONABLE COSTS

Zanzibar's Education Development Program (ZEDP) for 2008-2016 is the first comprehensive plan to outline specific objectives and priorities for ECCE. ZEDP aims to ensure both equitable access to quality preschool education and primary school for all children, and that that teachers are trained to meet the demands of the new curriculum and professional qualifications at all levels. ZEDP also works to develop and implement policies and programs, strengthen institutional capacity to conduct needs assessments, and monitor conditions and results.

Zanzibar joined GPE in 2013. An active GPE grant for US$5.2 million focuses on expanding and strengthening pre-primary education in Zanzibar. The project is led by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, with the Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA) as grant agent and UNICEF as the coordinating agency. Activities include establishing *Tucheze Tujifunze* (TuTu) centers, based on interactive audio instruction (IAI), in areas with poor access to pre-primary education. The project has developed 84 lessons that are delivered through radio with the assistance of a classroom teacher or group facilitator, who is coached by the recorded "teacher facilitator" to implement active, child-centered instruction. IAI has demonstrated positive impact on learning outcomes and is considered an innovative example of good practice in ECCE.

CAMBODIA: ENGAGING PARENTS IN EARLY LEARNING THROUGH HOME-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

After joining GPE in 2006, Cambodia's initial GPE education sector planning and implementation grants were instrumental in bringing ECCE into the national policy agenda for the first time and introducing new forms of ECCE service delivery modalities for 3- to 5-year-olds. Enrollment in ECCE increased from 35 to 65 percent between 2008 and 2014, thanks in great part to the expansion of community preschools housed within primary schools and home-based care programs.

The innovative home-based education programs are built around a volunteer "core mother" who provides a network of mothers in local communities with information about the impact on young children of health care, adequate nutrition and early stimulation. Pregnant women and mothers of infants and toddlers often join the education sessions, and core mothers organize sessions that include fathers. The low-cost home-based program is designed to supplement but not replace pre-primary schooling.

The Cambodian *Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018* has a strong focus on ECCE. Policy objectives include increasing enrollment in community preschool and home-based education programs for poor, ethnic minorities, and for children with disabilities; improving the quality of ECCE services overall; and implementing a results-based management system to support ECCE. Cambodia has allocated 50 percent of its current US$38.5 million GPE grant, supervised by the World Bank, to expanding access to and quality of ECCE for 3- to 5-year-olds, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The project supports the construction of preschool buildings and community-based preschool classrooms, intensive training for national preschool trainers, and a communications campaign to increase parental awareness of the benefits of preschool education. Through this effort, the government has reached more than 53,500 children ages 3-5 with ECCE programs.

In a rural area about 4 kilometers away from the nearest preschool, a "core mother" uses tree leaves to teach children how to count while other mothers observe.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: BETTER QUALITY ECCE PROGRAMS FOR MORE CHILDREN

After its independence in 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic experienced almost a decade of continued decline and uncertainty, taking a toll on ECCE services. State kindergartens—a legacy of the Soviet era—operate 8 hours per day and provide both care and education, but coverage reaches only 17 percent of children ages 3-6. Given the high costs of the state kindergarten system, the government has committed to developing more flexible and cost-effective approaches to ECCE to reach underserved children. To expand ECCE coverage, the current education sector plan (2012-2020) aims to establish an accelerated school readiness program for 6-year-olds and community-based kindergartens.

The Kyrgyz Republic joined the Global Partnership for Education in 2006. A series of GPE grants totaling US$27.6 million have supported the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to improve access and equity; expand coverage; improve the quality, efficiency and relevance of ECCE programs; and strengthen sector management and monitoring. The MoES, in partnership with UNICEF, used part of the grant to design and implement an alternative school-readiness program, offered at primary schools during the summer and spring months for children who do not attend kindergarten. The 100-hour school-readiness program reached 40,000 children in 2006 and 76,000 children by 2010;

it was a pilot for a 240-hour program, introduced in 2011, which achieved coverage of over 40,000 children in its first year. Public response to and appreciation of the school-readiness program prompted the ministry to deliver a similar 480-hour program that will run over the course of a year, targeting the most "unreached" areas of the country.

Several important reforms and activities focused on improving the quality of ECCE took place in conjunction with GPE grant implementation, including the revision of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) to inform the ECCE curriculum; introducing child-centered teaching and learning practices; using internationally recognized early child development assessments to inform strategies for improved learning outcomes; and improving the ECCE environment through the provision of teaching and learning materials. These activities and reforms have increased the efficiency of the ECCE sector, laid the groundwork for greater access and quality, and contributed to an ECCE system that is fit for purpose.

4. Next Steps

Investing in ECCE is essential to GPE's overall goals to improve learning outcomes, promote equity and inclusion, and enhance the efficiency of education systems.

GPE has played a unique role in supporting developing countries in their work to improve ECCE, and demand for investments in ECCE is rising within these countries. GPE provides financial and technical support to facilitate policymaking and inclusive, evidence-based policy dialogue on ECCE among national governments, donors, civil society, teachers, philanthropy and the private sector.

Moving forward, GPE will do more to support education systems in developing countries so as to dramatically improve access, quality and learning outcomes in the early years. Working with developing countries and international partners through its new BELDS initiative—Better Early Learning and Development at Scale—GPE will build knowledge and good-practice exchange on how to strengthen ECCE within national education systems, and will provide technical and financial support for better evidence and strengthened sector planning and monitoring around ECCE.

GPE will support the global commitment to effective and efficient financing for ECCE and will continue to support governments that promote opportunities for all children, encouraging investments that lower the burden of ECCE on poor households while supporting better quality. There is a need to continue to explore what works to improve learning in ECCE, especially in countries affected by fragility or conflict, and an equally pressing need to bring to scale effective approaches that have been shown to make a difference.

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