

## Expanding equitable early childhood care and education is an urgent need

**T**he linguistic, cognitive and social skills that children develop in early childhood are the foundations for lifelong learning. If children fail to develop these foundations because they lack adequate nutrition or opportunities to learn, there are significant costs for both individuals and societies, and the effectiveness and equity of education systems are undermined. Breaking the link between poverty and early childhood disadvantage represents one of the most urgent priorities on the Education for All agenda.

Ill-health and hunger are robbing millions of children of the opportunity to develop healthy bodies and minds. There is no substitute for health and nutrition in the early years of life. But progress in tackling malnutrition has been disappointing. Poverty and restricted access to good health care are among the greatest barriers to accelerated progress.

Good quality early childhood programmes incorporate elements of learning, health and nutrition. In this policy paper,<sup>1</sup> we point to striking evidence that equitable access to high quality pre-primary education markedly improves young

children's readiness to succeed in primary school. This can have particular advantages for those who are marginalized due to poverty or other factors. Yet participation in pre-school remains low in many countries, especially among children who need it most, and quality remains a concern. We describe the action needed in six core areas to expand access to good quality pre-schooling, particularly for the disadvantaged, and to better coordinate pre-school education with early childhood care and with primary school.

### Ill-health and hunger rob millions of children of the opportunity to develop healthy bodies and minds

Malnutrition is a human tragedy on a global scale. Every year, it is directly implicated in the deaths of over 3 million children and more than 100,000 mothers. Poor nutrition devastates immune systems (making children more susceptible to disease), increases the risk of anaemia and prevents proper brain development. Vitamin A deficiency alone accounts for about 6% of child deaths, and one in five maternal deaths

#### Box 1: A stark story of disadvantage in early childhood

While the world has seen significant improvements in early childhood survival, health and education over the last decades, the poorest and most vulnerable children are still falling far behind.

- About 28% of all children under 5 in the developing world are stunted (short for their age). Of the 171 million children suffering from stunting, 40% live in South-Central Asia, and 45% of children in Eastern Africa are stunted.
- In 2009, 157 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education programmes, an increase of 40% since 1999. However, a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 46% suggests that most children worldwide were excluded.
- In South and West Asia, enrolment more than doubled since 1999, increasing by 26 million. Sub-Saharan Africa also registered gains, with enrolment increasing by 6.2 million. However, enrolment remains extremely low in these regions.
- Children from disadvantaged families are being left behind. In Côte d'Ivoire, attendance at pre-school programmes varies from close to zero for the poorest children to almost one-quarter for the wealthiest. In Ghana, children from the wealthiest households are almost four times as likely as poor children to attend.



are attributable to iron deficiency. Fatalities are the tip of the iceberg. Estimates indicate that:

- each year, about 19 million children in developing countries are born underweight because of poor growth in the womb;
- about 28% of all children under age 5 in the developing world are stunted (short for their age);
- of the 171 million children suffering from stunting, 40% live in South-Central Asia, and 45% of children in Eastern Africa are stunted.

Beyond the immediate human costs, these figures add up to a disaster for national education systems. Similarly, children deprived of adequate food in utero or in their early years reach primary-school age carrying a large disadvantage. Children with high rates of malnutrition, especially in the first few years of life, have poorer learning outcomes. For instance, iron-deficiency anaemia consistently reduces children's test scores. Malnourished children are also more likely to start school late and drop out early.

While malnutrition is associated with low income, the relationship is not straightforward. Several middle income countries – including Libya and Namibia – have high levels of childhood stunting. It follows that economic growth is not a guaranteed route to accelerated improvement in nutritional status. Since the mid-1990s India's average income has more than doubled, with a limited effect on malnutrition. From far higher levels, stunting in India is declining at less than half the annual rate achieved in Viet Nam (which is growing more slowly). After two decades of high economic growth, children in India still suffer from some of the world's worst levels of stunting, wasting and low weight-for-age. Almost half are chronically malnourished (as observed through stunting), and the proportion of those who are underweight is 2.5 times as high as the average for sub-Saharan Africa. Seven out of every ten children from 6 months up to age 5 are anaemic.

Progress in tackling malnutrition has been disappointing. Millennium Development Goal 1 aims to halve malnutrition levels among adults and children by 2015. The incidence of malnutrition remains only slightly lower than in 1990. Moreover, it is estimated that 114 million fewer people moved out of extreme poverty in 2009 and 2010 than had been predicted before the sharp rise in food prices in 2008 and the subsequent global recession. While prices have fallen from their peak levels, food price inflation in many developing countries has continued to undermine efforts to combat hunger. Data on the effects of the price hike are sparse,

but World Bank estimates for 2009 suggest that countries such as Burkina Faso, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania may have experienced increases in malnutrition ranging from 3% to 5%, while the rise in Mozambique may have been as high as 8%. Another international surge in prices during 2010 may have exacerbated the risk of increased hunger, underlining the urgency of a more effective international response.

What is holding back the pace of advance in combating child malnutrition? The constraints are social and political rather than financial or technical. Interventions targeted at the immediate causes of malnutrition – micronutrient deficiency, dietary intake, disease – offer effective, low-cost solutions. One extensive review found that established measures such as complementary feeding, micronutrients and breastfeeding could reduce stunting by around 36% and cut about one-quarter of child deaths. The additional cost of these interventions – around \$10 billion annually – pales into insignificance against the losses caused by hunger. The bottom line is that most governments and aid donors are not attaching sufficient weight to the development of effective strategies for combating malnutrition.

### Getting ready for school: Expanding pre-primary education is crucial

Ensuring children are healthy when they start school is crucial for their learning. High quality pre-primary education is also vital in preparing young children for primary school. As the goal of universal primary education moves closer, concern has been rising over whether schoolchildren are actually acquiring the basic knowledge and skills that primary schools are meant to impart. This has focused attention not only on the quality of primary education but also on whether young children are being adequately prepared to benefit from primary school.

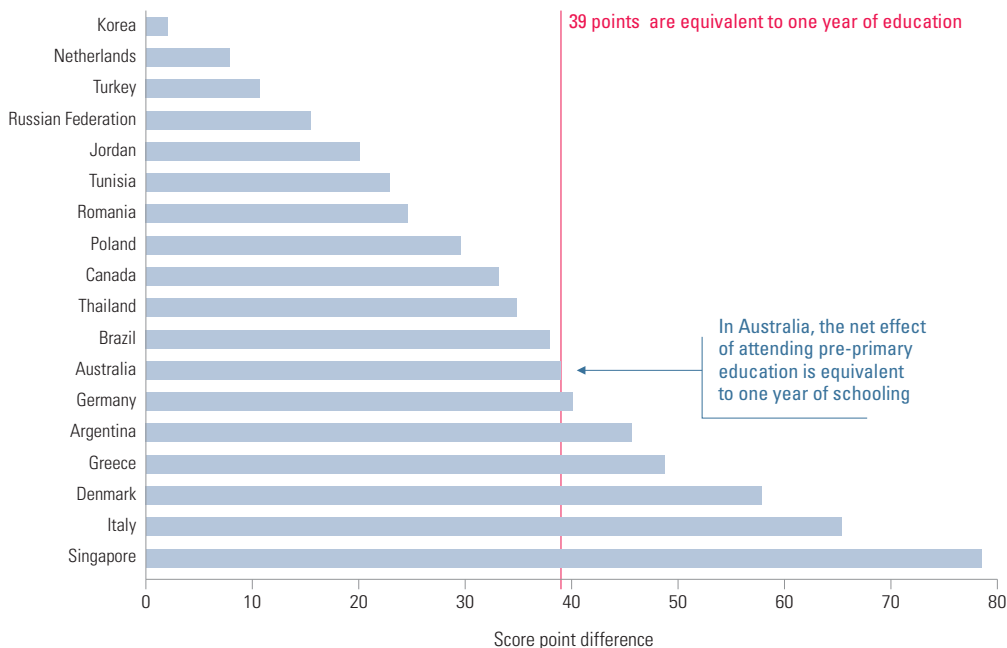
#### Pre-primary education plays a key role in preparing children for school and beyond

Young children are ready to learn, but their early experiences are crucial in facilitating their learning. Attending a high quality pre-school lays the foundations for learning and helps children make a smooth transition to primary school. Extending access to the poorest and most vulnerable children can boost their education and livelihood opportunities later in life.

The more time children spend in pre-school, the better their performance in primary school. Recent evidence based on the 2009 PISA survey shows

**Figure 1: Pre-primary education has a positive impact on learning outcomes in school**

Score point difference between 15 year old students who attended pre-primary school for more than one year and those who had not, after accounting for socio-economic background, selected countries, PISA 2009



Source: OECD, 2010.

that in 58 of 65 countries, 15-year-old students who had attended at least a year of pre-primary school outperformed students who had not, even after accounting for socio-economic background. In countries including Australia, Brazil and Germany, the average benefit after controlling for socio-economic background was equivalent to one year of formal schooling (Figure 1). Overall, PISA results suggest that the school systems that combine high performance and equitable learning opportunities for all students are also those that offer pre-primary education to a larger proportion of pupils, have smaller pupil/teacher ratios in pre-primary school, invest more per child at the pre-primary level and, especially, provide longer periods of pre-primary education.

Detailed evidence based on long-term studies from high income countries shows that pre-school contributes to school readiness and later academic achievement through the development of non-cognitive skills, such as attention, effort, initiative and behaviour, as well as cognitive skills in reading and mathematics. Evaluations of Head Start, the publicly funded national early childhood programme in the United States that focuses on poor children, suggest that significant positive effects for particularly disadvantaged subgroups persist well past the early grades of primary school and up to high school graduation. Among children whose mothers scored low in tests of reasoning ability – used as a proxy indicator of disadvantage among children – those who

attended pre-school as part of the programme were 17% more likely to complete high school.

There is now a growing body of evaluations from developing countries highlighting the benefits of pre-schooling (Box 2).

The short- to medium-term contribution of pre-school attendance to cognitive and non-cognitive skills and school performance provides the foundation for the basic skills that young people require to get good jobs. It also leads to higher earnings and employment outcomes in adulthood. The Early Enrichment Project in Turkey in the 1980s – which included a pre-schooling intervention – targeted children of low income migrant families whose mothers had little education. Two decades later, participants were found to have better educational attainment and occupational status than those who had not participated.

Higher pre-primary enrolment is expected to help poorer children stay longer in school. A recent simulation of potential long-term economic effects in seventy-three low and middle income countries showed potentially high benefits. For example, it was estimated that raising the pre-primary gross enrolment ratio to 25% in countries such as Ethiopia and Yemen would lead not only to increased school attendance but also to a future stream of wage income 6.4 times higher than the per capita cost of providing access to pre-school.

**Box 2: Pre-schooling has striking benefits for primary school performance**

Studies in developing countries on the benefits of pre-school vary in scope, but paint a similar picture overall, demonstrating positive effects on subsequent primary school performance. Participation is found to be particularly beneficial for those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds.

The benefits of pre-school for non-cognitive skills are demonstrated by a study in Argentina. As well as having higher test scores, third graders who had one year of public pre-primary school in an urban area showed improved attention, effort, class participation and discipline. In rural Gansu, Shaanxi and Henan, China, 4- and 5-year-olds who had attended pre-primary education scored 20% higher on a school readiness scale than those who had not.

Studies from many countries, including Chile, India and Madagascar, show the contribution of pre-school to overall cognitive abilities. In Chile, children entering primary school who had enrolled in public pre-schools or child care centres had higher cognitive skill scores. In rural Maharashtra, India, a project that improved the pre-school component of the Integrated Child Development Services had significant positive effects on the developmental and cognitive outcomes of 4- to 6-year-olds. In Madagascar, primary school children who had attended pre-school showed a 2.7 month benefit in terms of cognitive development and a 1.6 month benefit in terms of language and motor skills.

The effects can be particularly beneficial in addressing disadvantage. In a study in Argentina, the effect of

having attended pre-school on third grade test scores was twice as large for students from poor backgrounds than for students from non-poor backgrounds. A rare evaluation in a low income country found that children who had attended pre-school in rural Mozambique scored, on average, 12.1 percentage points above the other students on a cognitive development test in the first grade of primary school, including in memory, classifying objectives and counting to twenty.

Other research has demonstrated the benefits of pre-school in terms of developing specific cognitive skills. Fourth grade primary school children in Brazil who had attended day care and/or kindergarten scored higher in mathematics. In rural Bangladesh, an aid-funded project run by local NGOs set up 1,800 pre-schools, provided them with better materials and improved the quality of teaching. Participating children performed better in speaking, reading, writing and mathematics by the second grade of primary school than those who did not attend pre-school. In rural Guizhou, China, first-grade children who had attended kindergarten had literacy and mathematics scores significantly better than other children's.

Attending pre-school also tends to increase the years of education that children eventually attain. In Uruguay, 15-year-olds who had attended a public or private pre-school accumulated 0.8 years more education, were 27% more likely to still be in school and were less likely to repeat a grade than siblings who had not attended. In Mozambique, attending pre-school increased the probability of enrolling in primary school by 24%.

**Participation in pre-primary education is low and inequitable**

In 2009, 157 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education programmes, an increase of 40% since 1999. However, a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 46% suggests that most children worldwide were excluded from pre-primary education. The largest increases in total enrolment occurred in two of the regions that were furthest behind in 1999. In South and West Asia, enrolment more than doubled, increasing by 26 million. Sub-Saharan Africa also registered gains, with enrolment increasing by 6.2 million. Progress in the Arab States was slower: despite increases in enrolment, the GER in 2009 remained low at 21%.

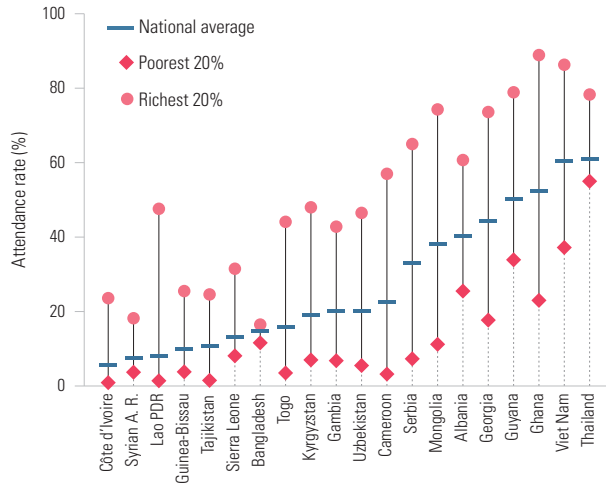
Overall gains in enrolment since 1999 have to be placed in context, not least because many countries started from a very low level. However, many countries have made significant gains. For example, Mongolia has more than doubled, and South Africa more than trebled, their pre-primary gross enrolment ratios since 1999. The rate of progress in increasing enrolment in pre-primary

education has been uneven. Some countries made initial progress in the first half of the 2000s while others began to progress more recently. For example, pre-primary enrolment rates grew faster in the first half of the decade in El Salvador and Georgia, and have since slowed. In Algeria, Indonesia and Nicaragua, progress before 2004 was much slower than rates registered since.

From a national perspective, current attendance patterns are counterproductive. Children living with high levels of poverty are in greatest need of support, yet they are least likely to attend early learning programmes (Figure 2). Large social disparities exist at all levels of average enrolment. In Côte d'Ivoire, attendance at pre-school programmes varies from close to zero for children in the poorest 20% to almost one-quarter of children from the wealthiest households. At the other end of the scale, Ghana registers a national attendance rate of 52%, but children from the wealthiest homes are almost four times as likely as poor children to attend an early learning programme. Such outcomes draw attention to the wide range of barriers facing poor parents, which

**Figure 2: Children in rich households are more likely to attend early learning programmes**

Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending early learning programmes, by wealth, selected countries, 2005–2007



Note: Data are for the most recent year available during the period specified. Source: 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011).

include the cost of enrolment and attendance and the limited availability of early childhood facilities near the home.

Patterns of disadvantage vary among countries. A child in Bangladesh has very little chance of attending pre-school: whether urban or rural, rich or poor, male or female, only around one in six attend (Figure 3). By contrast, 61% of 3- to 4-year-olds attend pre-school in Thailand, although there is a distinct wealth bias, with 74% of children from

rich households enrolled compared with 54% of poor children. In Nigeria, such disparities are particularly wide. Girls and boys from rich households, whether living in urban or rural areas of Nigeria, have a similar chance of going to school as a child in Thailand. By contrast, girls and boys from poor Nigerian households are on a par with children in Bangladesh. In all three countries, there is however very little gender difference amongst those in rich and poor households living in either rural or urban areas.

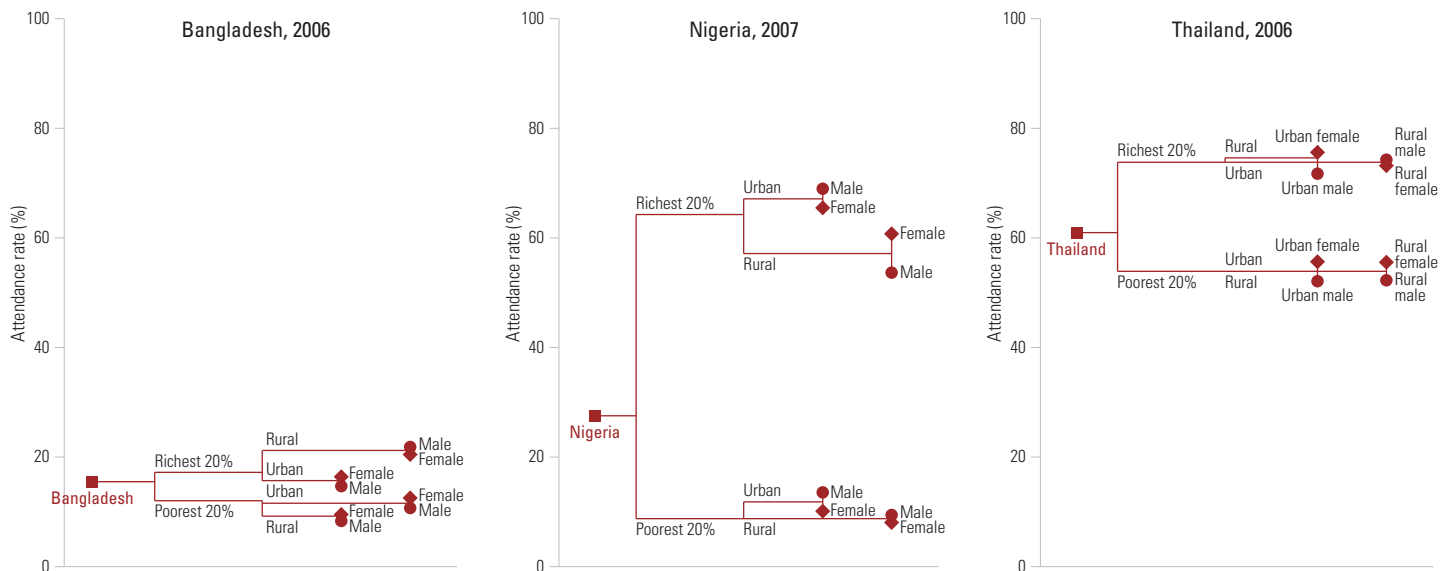
One reason children from urban areas and wealthier households are more likely to participate in pre-primary education is that they have greater access to private pre-schools that charge fees. In many countries and regions a large proportion of pre-schools are private. Globally, 31% of enrolment is in private pre-schools – and this may well be an underestimate, as data from private providers are not collected systematically in many countries. In the Arab States, 79% of enrolment is in private pre-schools.

A large share of pre-school enrolment in many low and lower middle income countries is also in private institutions. For example, in Ethiopia, where the gross enrolment ratio is only 4%, the share of private provision is 94%, and in the Syrian Arab Republic, with a gross enrolment ratio of 9%, the share of private provision is 71%. This indicates demand that is not met by the public sector.

Given that overall enrolment remains low, with gross enrolment ratios below 20% in thirty

**Figure 3: Participation in pre-primary education varies significantly within countries**

Pre-school attendance rate of children aged 36-59 months, by wealth, location and gender



Notes: The official age for pre-primary education is 3-5 years in the three countries. In Nigeria, the poorest 40% are shown in the urban areas.

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report team calculations based on MICS3 surveys.

countries with data on private enrolment (including twenty in sub-Saharan Africa), could expansion occur through the private sector? It seems unlikely. Private pre-schools are often priced out of reach of the poorest households, whose children are those least likely to be enrolled.

In India's Andhra Pradesh state, for example, pre-school enrolment in rural areas is highest among the richest 20% of households, where almost one-third of children attend private institutions. Almost all children in pre-school from the poorest households attend government providers. There are also marked differences in urban areas, with almost all children from rich households attending private pre-schools, compared with around one-third among the poorest households. Girls are more likely to be enrolled in government pre-schools. Where private provision is of better quality, this could further reinforce inequality between the rich and poor and between boys and girls.

One survey in rural China found that costs of private pre-school were prohibitive for poor households. Only 44% of sampled children aged 4 to 6 were attending pre-school or kindergarten. While primary schools are free, pre-schools and kindergartens are predominantly private and charge fees. The average yearly tuition is 380 yuan (US\$50), and yearly fees for in-school lunches are even higher, around 420 yuan (US\$55). Comparing the total of US\$105 with the average per capita income of US\$130 for Chinese families at the poverty line, it is clear that poor, rural families cannot afford these costs.

### **Action is needed to increase equitable access to good quality pre-school**

Increasing equitable access to pre-school programmes of good quality can play a significant role in supporting children's success in primary school and helping them overcome early disadvantage. Reforms are needed to ensure that all children reap the benefits of pre-school, including expanding facilities and making sure they are affordable, coordinating pre-school activities with wider early childhood interventions and identifying appropriate ways to link pre-schools with primary schools.

#### ***Make pre-primary education compulsory.***

Legislation that makes pre-school compulsory can increase enrolment if it is complemented with measures that expand supply. Pre-primary education is compulsory in very few countries. The 2007 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* counted thirty countries with some form of compulsory pre-primary education. Since then, only five more countries have taken this step.<sup>2</sup>

Complementing legislation with other reforms to support expansion has had positive results. Compulsory pre-school was introduced in Mexico in 2001 for children aged 3 to 5, and the gross enrolment ratio expanded from 74% in 1999 to 112% in 2009, with gender parity achieved. This growth was accomplished by increasing the numbers of classrooms and teachers. Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country with compulsory pre-primary education, in 2007 passed legislation to include two years of kindergarten in compulsory basic education starting from age 4. In addition, capitation grants were extended from primary school to kindergartens and teacher training programmes expanded. The gross enrolment ratio, which was 30% in 1999, had reached 71% by 2009, with near gender parity.

Other countries making moves towards compulsory pre-school include the Philippines, where implementation will begin in the 2012 school year, and South Africa, which intends to make grade R (reception) for 5-year-olds compulsory by 2014. The rollout in the latter case has so far been more rapid in provinces with higher capacity, with adverse implications for equity. In India, the government is considering whether to extend the Right to Education Act, which currently covers classes one through eight, to include pre-school for children aged 4 to 6. The logistical and financial implications are significant, involving hiring 1 million trained pre-school teachers to serve 40 million children.

Legislation making pre-school compulsory, however, is rarely enforced. In Sudan, where pre-primary education has been compulsory since 1992, the gross enrolment ratio was just 28% in 2009. Given the political and economic challenges facing Sudan, this is not surprising. But even in the thirteen Latin American countries with compulsory pre-primary education, the median gross enrolment ratio using data from 2008 and 2009 was 70%; only in Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay did it surpass 80%. And it was below 50% in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Honduras.

While making pre-school compulsory gives a strong political signal that it is valued, and can provide the impetus to expand infrastructure and invest in teachers, widely accessible pre-school can emerge without legislation. Few high-income countries have compulsory pre-primary education, yet more children from these countries are expected to enrol in pre-school and to stay longer. In the Netherlands, 98% of 4-year-olds attended pre-primary school in 2009, even though compulsory education starts a year later.



***Link pre-primary and primary education.***

A common way to expand pre-primary education is to attach pre-school classrooms to existing primary schools. The Gambia is attaching early childhood development centres to basic schools in deprived communities. In Liberia, pre-school is also provided through classrooms attached to primary schools, and teachers teach at both levels. According to Bangladesh's national education strategy, it will recruit one teacher in each government primary school to teach a new pre-primary class. This approach has clear advantages. There is potential for more efficient use of existing facilities, including classrooms, and administrative support comes built in. It can also foster continuity for schoolchildren and make it possible for older siblings to take young children to pre-school.

Where pre-schools and primary schools use the same facilities, however, there is a danger that pre-school children will be taught using primary school approaches for which they are not developmentally ready, in terms of pupil/teacher ratios, classroom organization, curriculum and teaching methods – a phenomenon described as 'schoolification'. Private pre-schools in India have been seen largely as a downward extension of primary education curriculum. This tendency also imposes academic pressure on children from an early age. In Kenya, while 70% of public primary schools have a pre-primary class, their teachers are trained in primary school methods. A more appropriate approach is being adopted in South Africa, where the plan is for most reception classes to be based in primary schools, but financed and staffed differently.

***Pre-school needs to be made affordable for the poor.*** Pre-schooling accounts for less than 10% of the education budget in most countries, and its share tends to be particularly low in poor countries. Nepal and Niger spend under 0.1% of GNP on pre-school, and Madagascar and Senegal less than 0.02%. One consequence is that the cost of pre-school is transferred to households, making it less likely that poor children will attend, even though they are the ones who stand to gain the most.

Governments need to ensure that pre-schooling is affordable for poor families, either by providing more public pre-school places or through conditional cash transfers, including vouchers. Where pre-schools are provided by non-state bodies, governments need to play a strong regulatory role to assure quality control. In Hong Kong, pre-schools are private but access is almost universal. In 2007, the government introduced a

voucher programme, which covers about half the tuition costs for half-day kindergarten programmes, with families continuing to pay the balance. The voucher can be spent at the school of the parent's choice as long as it is non-profit (about 80% of pre-schools in Hong Kong). The programme is designed to enhance access and affordability, while improving quality. Three-quarters of parents have reported that the vouchers have helped reduce their financial burden. A proportion of the funding is earmarked for upgrading school staff qualifications. Schools have to pass inspections and publish information to help parents choose. But principals and teachers have found it difficult to administer the programme. Such difficulties are likely to be even more pronounced in poorer countries, which would need to overcome considerable administrative constraints to ensure that access to pre-school is increased among poor households.

***Short pre-school programmes can help smooth the transition to primary school.***

As a substitute to a full public pre-school service, there have been experiments with shorter programmes. In Cambodia, not attending pre-school has been linked to high repetition rates in grade 1 of primary school. To overcome this problem, a special programme in the first two months of primary school uses a modified curriculum to focus on skills that children need to succeed in school, such as basic language skills; the concepts of number, time and space; and working in groups. An evaluation showed that the listening and speaking skills of children who took part in the programme were significantly higher by the end of the school year. A similar programme is being introduced in Malawi to help children make the transition from home and from community-based child care centres to primary school. In China and Mongolia, mobile 'ger kindergartens' (each housed in a ger, or yurt, a traditional felt structure) enrol children from pastoralist families for three or four weeks before moving on to the next site.

Another approach is for older schoolchildren to help young children make the transition to primary school. UNICEF has adopted a child-to-child approach within its Getting Ready for School programme, which has been piloted in six countries. With far fewer hours of direct support than most formal pre-school programmes, this lower cost intervention had a positive impact on children's school readiness in all countries and on literacy and mathematics in four of the six countries.

***Attention to improving quality is needed.***

Pre-school models that effectively prepare children for success in primary school develop literacy and mathematics skills through play, child-generated projects, collaborative activities and everyday experiences. Such characteristics require classes small enough for frequent interaction with teachers, as well as teacher training appropriate to young children's development.

For the sixty-nine countries reporting the percentage of trained pre-primary teachers, UIS data indicate that more than two in three teachers are trained. The quality of training, and of pre-schools more broadly, however, is often very low. In poor areas of rural China, one teacher is responsible for twenty-nine 4- to 6-year-olds, on average – far higher than the government requirement of seven children per teacher. And only 12% of these teachers had training in early childhood pedagogy. About one-third of pre-schools were in private houses that lacked the necessary facilities.

National programmes can help increase the quality of pre-schools. Maldives' inclusion of a comprehensive early childhood care and development programme in national development and education sector plans has helped strengthen both access and quality. Despite challenges associated with the country's island geography and post-tsunami reconstruction, the pre-primary gross enrolment ratio rose from 55% in 1999 to 105% in 2009. Teachers and parents have noted that teacher training, parent education and play-based, child-friendly teaching have increased pre-schoolers' confidence, sociability and engagement in learning.

Innovative programmes have been found to be particularly successful, even at relatively low cost. In Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar (United Republic of Tanzania), Madrasa Resource Centre pre-schools, developed by the Aga Khan Foundation, provide training and support that help staff use locally available, low cost materials for children to select, explore and experiment with. Staff are also trained to use appropriate language to stimulate children's curiosity in a sensitive and supportive way. After one year of pre-school, participating children were found to have better school readiness outcomes, with higher verbal, non-verbal and numeric cognitive skills, than those who attended public, community or other NGO-run pre-schools. In addition to the minimum eight years of schooling plus one year of teacher training required for pre-school teachers in each country, the Madrasa Resource Centre teachers received six months

of early childhood development training, plus professional development and support after graduation.

Pre-school sometimes varies greatly in quality within a country. In the United Republic of Tanzania, although national educational policy specifies the same standards for pre-primary education regardless of location, there are considerable differences between urban and rural schools. Rural classes have considerably less space, larger group sizes, fewer instructional resources and less qualified teachers. In Peru, the two main publicly funded pre-school programmes are highly differentiated, with disadvantaged children attending pre-schools of poorer quality.

While it makes good sense to prepare children for school, primary schools must also be ready for young children. Without trained and motivated teachers employing good quality, developmentally appropriate methods and materials in a safe, non-violent and inclusive environment, the chances of a smooth transition to and success in primary school are radically reduced, particularly for children with few learning opportunities outside school.

***Coordinate and integrate pre-school with early childhood care.*** Early childhood care and education programmes often suffer from fragmented planning, reducing their effectiveness. Analysis of thirty programmes in twenty-three developed and developing countries has shown that those that combined care with education boosted cognitive abilities the most. However, early childhood care (including maternal and child health and nutrition for pregnant women and young children) and pre-school education have traditionally developed as separate systems, with separate policies, programmes and administrative responsibility. Split systems tend to lead to differences in funding, access, regulation and workforce, and the misconception that care and education are separate processes. Countries have tackled these challenges either through interministerial mechanisms or by integrating early childhood programmes under a single ministry, such as education or social welfare.

Integrating care and education under one organization can be particularly beneficial in promoting a coherent overall policy, administrative and funding framework. In Chile, presidential commitment to education and child well-being led to the introduction of a programme called Chile Crece Contigo (Chile is Growing with You). The programme has been coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and implemented by lower tier governments. A network of professionals supports



low income families: health institutions monitor mothers and children to identify risk factors that call for referral to specific services, educational institutions assure access to crèches and nurseries, and municipalities support access to other social services and conditional cash transfers. A public awareness strategy increased the visibility of the system and recognition that everybody has a right to early childhood care and education. Effective integration has been aided by a unified information system that supports marginalized children across social sectors. The programme has been supported by the expansion of childcare provision. Between 2005 and 2007 the two main public providers of child care centres more than doubled their enrolment, from 15,000 to 33,000.

## Conclusion

As part of a comprehensive package of early childhood care and education, young children need equitable access to high quality health care, nutrition and pre-schooling. Even in poorer countries, political commitment and adequate funding can extend access to greater numbers of children. To reduce inequality, governments need to pay particular attention to children from poor households who already face disadvantages – and who stand to benefit most. ▣

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## Notes

1. The first part of this Policy Paper draws on sections of the 2011 *EFA Global Monitoring Report*. The second part will be published in the 2012 *EFA Global Monitoring Report*. All references to the evidence presented in these papers can be found in these Reports.
2. The five are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala and Nicaragua.