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Ман аз мактаб омадам
(I am back from school)

Revisiting Good Practice:
Lessons Learned in Implementing
UNICEF's Alternative ECE Model in Tajikistan

2017

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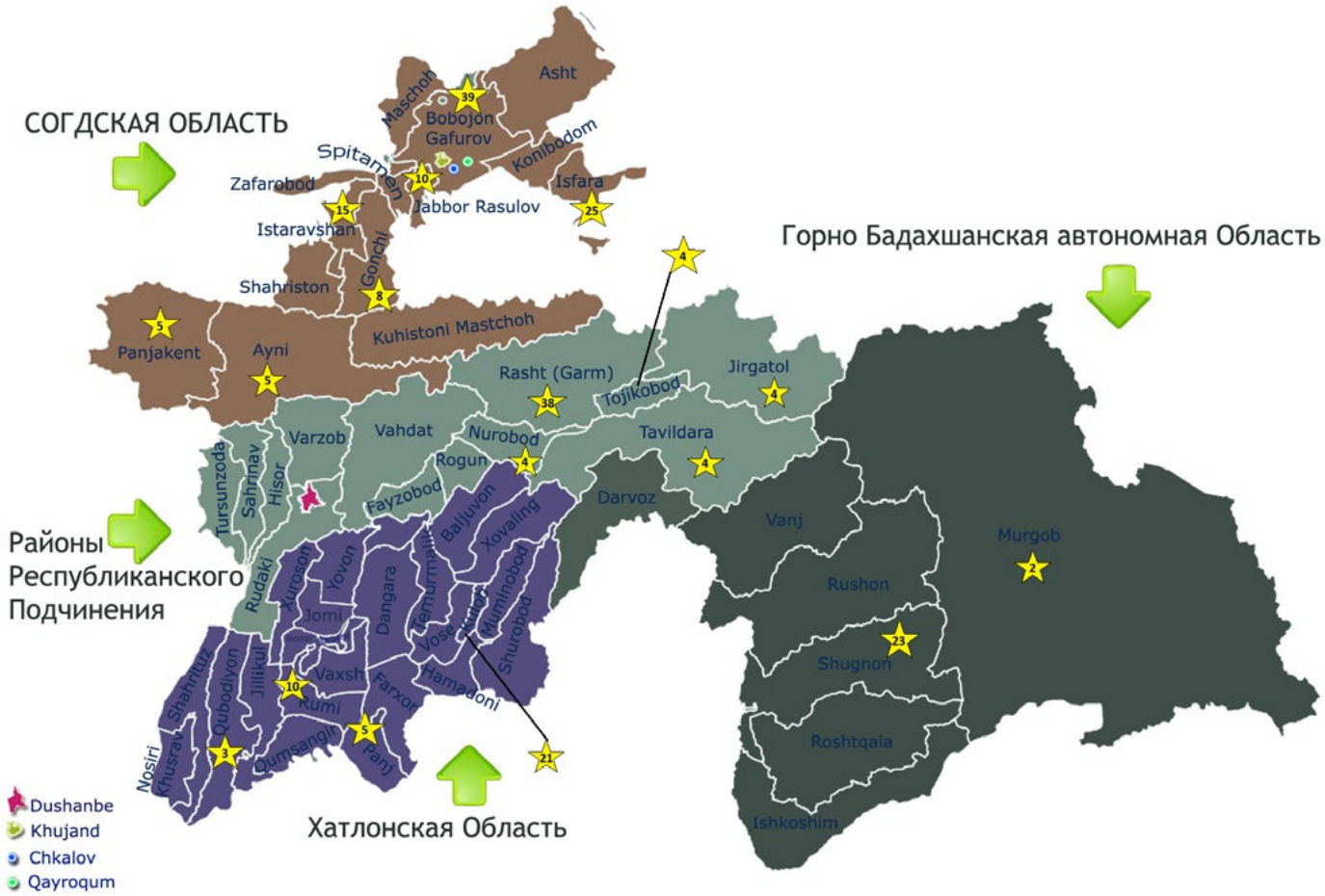

Districts and Cities	Province	State Pre-schools	#Children ('000s)	ECE Centres	... in ECE Pilot	#Children ECE ('000s)	Districts and Cities	Province	State Pre-schools	#Children ('000s)	ECE Centres	... in ECE Pilot	#Children ECE ('000s)
Dushanbe (Firdavsi)	RNS	27	7488				Vose' District	Khatlon	2	235	31		642
Dushanbe (Ismael Somoni)	RNS	24	3370				Yovon District	Khatlon	6	1084	46		1054
Dushanbe (Shohmansur)	RNS	19	3788				Faizobod District	RNS	2	384	5		111
Dushanbe (Sino)	RNS	52	12853				Hisor City	RNS	4	977			
Darvoz District	GBAO	1	74	26		453	Jirgatol District (Laksh)	RNS	4	180	10	4	234
Ishkoshim District	GBAO	5	260	31		630	Nurobod District	RNS	1	55	16	4	320
Khorugh	GBAO	5	844	12		458	Qurghonteppa	RNS	18	3090	1		17
Khujand	GBAO	37	9711	11		259	Rasht District	RNS	2	160	37	38	744
Murghob District	GBAO	6	185	10	2	171	Rudaki District	RNS	12	1538	6		176
Roshtqal'a District	GBAO	1	40	24		442	Rudaki (Guliston)	RNS	9	1431	1		21
Rushon District	GBAO	2	119	29		64	Shahrinaw District	RNS	4	322	29		968
Shughnon District	GBAO	1	30	37	23	900	Tavildara District (Sangvor)	RNS	1	50	15	4	251
Vanj District	GBAO	1	65	16		320	Tojikobod District	RNS	1	60	13	4	268
Baljuvon District	Khatlon	1	30	11		158	Tursunzoda District	RNS	11	1975	82		2390
Bokhtar District	Khatlon	8	1128	18		705	Tursunzoda (Istiqlol)	RNS	2	243	6		162
Danghara District	Khatlon	3	523	50		1396	Vahdat District	RNS	20	2212	87		1752
Farkhor District	Khatlon	10	792	56		1262	Varzob District	RNS	1	40	15		314
Hamadoni District	Khatlon	2	252	39		708	Aini District	Sughd	4	361	26	5	622
Jalalodinni Balkhi (Rumi)	Khatlon	14	1478	59	10	1114	Asht	Sughd	15	1604	32		1045
Khovaling District	Khatlon	1	75	44		712	Devastich District (Ghonchi)	Sughd	7	1114	30	8	3057
Khuroson District	Khatlon	4	465	38		542	Ghafurov District	Sughd	29	4758	48	39	1521
Kulob District	Khatlon	9	1420	35	21	950	Ghafurov (Chkalovsk)	Sughd	3	1635	6		153
Muminobod District	Khatlon	1	122	49		1134	Isfara District	Sughd	30	3074	47	25	1372
Norak District	Khatlon	4	647	10		355	Istarawshan District	Sughd	9	1253	26	15	673
Nosiri Khusrav District	Khatlon	5	256	12		263	Jabbor Rasulov District	Sughd	20	3212	27	10	895
Panj District	Khatlon	4	456	16	5	313	Konibodom	Sughd	20	2995	27		670
Qabodiyon District	Khatlon	5	413	20	3	605	Kuhistoni Mastchoh District	Sughd	2	80			
Qumsangir District (Dusti)	Khatlon	2	325	15		396	Mastchoh District	Sughd	10	989	15		347
Qumsangir (Jayhun)	Khatlon	2	240	31		676	Panjakent District and Ghonchi	Sughd	18	3487	4	5	117
Sarband District	Khatlon	3	523	9		224	Shahriston District	Sughd	1	267	18		462
Shahrtuz District	Khatlon	6	790	50		1356	Spitamen District	Sughd	10	1743	28		1837
Shuroobod District (S. Shohin)	Khatlon	1	40	20		276	Zafarobod	Sughd	5	743	23		987
Temurmalik District	Khatlon	3	224	33		689	Zafarobod (A. Jomi)	Sughd	6	965			
Vakhsh District	Khatlon	8	690	20		536			566	92032	1588	225	41249

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AKF-IPD	Aga Khan Foundation – Institute of Professional Development
APDC	Association of Parents with Disabled Children
Barnoma	The learning program for early childhood education
DRS	Districts of Republican Subordination (see RNS)
ECE	Early childhood education
ECD	Early childhood development
ELDS	Early Learning and Development Standards (for ages 0 to 7)
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GBAO	Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
Halifats	Communities
Hukumat	City and regional governance
INSET	In-service education and training
Internats	Orphanages
Jamoat	Self-governing local neighborhood (municipality level)
Kolkhoz	Collective Farms
Mahallah	Local community structure
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NIATRE	National Institute of Advanced Training and Retraining of Educators
Ranginkamon	The learning program for state kindergartens
RNS	Regions of National Subordination (see DRS)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Sadiki	Kindergarten
Shipang	A make-shift shelter typically set up in a field during harvest season
UNICEF Case Study	A case study of UNICEF Tajikistan's comprehensive approach to improving access to quality early childhood education (UNICEF, 2013)
ToR	Terms of reference
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
Yasli	Nursery / daycare for young children

Discussion Concept: Lessons from the Implementation of School-based ECE Centers in Tajikistan – March, 2017

This discussion concept note draws together the findings of a report for UNICEF Revisiting Good Practice: Lessons Learned in Implementing UNICEF's Alternative ECE Model in Tajikistan (McLean & Orozova, 2017) and the discussions at a consultation of UNICEF key partners in Dushanbe on the 22nd February 2017. Thus, although the note draws primarily from the research into the UNICEF model pilot, it presents the insights of all key partner organizations that offer alternative, school-based ECE centers and reflects on issues related to the design and implementation of the ECE centers and is intended as a contribution to the discussion on increasing the coverage and quality of ECE services in Tajikistan.

The need to develop an alternative model for early childhood education (ECE) in Tajikistan that is both cost-efficient and high-quality was recognized in national policy as early as 2005. The National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) recognized that preschool coverage through the state system reached only about 6 percent of eligible children in 2004 and that the resource constraints facing the country made it impossible to expand access based on the state kindergarten model (MoES, 2005). The updated National Strategy of Education Development – 2020 (GoT, 2012) also prioritizes early age children at risk, socially vulnerable families, and children with disability; it envisages a state program for children in rural areas that involves local authorities and communities.

The NSED-2020 acknowledges the Aga Khan Foundation, Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, UNCEF, and others for their contributions to developing alternative ECE models. These organizations responded energetically to address this national priority. To date, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), which opened its first ECE centers in 2002, now supports 196 centers. The Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation began establishing ECE centers in 2011 and currently supports 46. Over 400 ECE centers established with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science, with suppot from the Global Partnership for Education. The UNICEF-supported centers were set up in 2010; the UNICEF pilot now consists of 225 school-based ECE centers in rural areas in over 130 of the

406 jamoats in 18 districts. Local governments also responded enthusiastically, bringing the total number of ECE centers to 1,588. The growing commitment to the expansion of ECE amongst Government and development partners is also reflected in Tajikistan's Global Partnership for Education (GPE), round 4, that includes a strong emphasis on ECE. This resulted in strengthening the capacity of 432 existing ECE centers with provision of relevant and age-appropriate teaching-learning materials, furniture and toys, provision of ECE teacher training to 850 ECE facilitators, aiming to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes. These centers reach 41,249 children, almost one-third of all children receiving preschool services in Tajikistan and provide spaces for communities of diverse backgrounds to come together and have constructive dialogue and interaction around young children's development.

This research on the UNICEF-supported model draws on information from a review of relevant literature; empirical case study data from two field trips; subsequent interviews with experts, funders, and government officials. Although the research findings primarily address the UNICEF-supported model, the consultative meeting of UNCEF EC partners confirmed that not only do many other ECE centers face similar issues, but that the challenges facing the UNICEF pilot mirror many of the challenges facing the national policy commitment to expanding access to early childhood education for children who are marginalised and at risk.

The UNICEF-supported model

The UNICEF pilot is designed for groups of 25 children, each with a trained ECE teacher, to be housed in a converted classroom in a rural school. The co-location is intended to cut the costs of rent, heating, electricity, amenities, and maintenance. Teachers' salaries are provided from parent fees. Start-up costs—including refurbishment, materials and equipment, and teacher training—were covered by UNICEF. The ECE centers offer a bespoke ECE program known as *Barnomayi Tarbiyavi-Ta'limi Markazi Inkishofi Kudakon* / the ECE curriculum (MoES et al., 2013), which sets out activities and tasks across the five early learning domains (physical, cognitive, emotional and social, communication, and moral) for children aged 4 to 6. The program is designed to be delivered over nine months (September to May) for three to four hours a day, five days a week. The teacher training

(INSET) package includes the ECE curriculum (Barnoma), two training modules (NAITRE, 2014a & 2014b), and an ECE teacher-guidance manual. The INSET package is available in languages of ethnic minorities, including Russia, Kyrgyz, Uzbek to serve the linguistics needs of the communities with diverse ethnicities.

Research findings

The research findings on the ECE-supported model are structured around six ideas that are central themes both in national policy and international best practice in ECE.

1. Expand access by creating new forms of ECE that can be scaled up.

About 132,000 children are in some form of preschool education and care setting in Tajikistan. While this is almost double the number of children that were attending preschool about a decade ago, early childhood education remains inaccessible for over 80 percent of children in Tajikistan, the lowest rate in Central Asian region. Almost two-thirds of children attending preschool are in state kindergartens, almost one-third are in ECE centers, and roughly 6 percent attend privately owned preschools. The number of children in the state kindergartens has increased over the last decade, reflecting a growth of 50 to 60 percent. Roughly 42,000 children attend ECE centers, which were only started 2010. This is a good result; it shows conclusively that the ECE centers have expanded access relatively quickly. However, even though at total of 12,4 percent of children are enrolled in all forms of ECE, including state kindergartens and ECE centers (EMIS 2015), this only goes a small way toward meeting the challenge of expanding access for the majority of children and remains far from the target 30 percent coverage the government wants to achieve by 2020.

2. Develop a low-cost model that responds to the capacity and resource constraints.

A comparison of costs (UNICEF, 2013) revealed recurring costs of the ECE centers to be low, about $5 per month per child, compared with traditional kindergartens, which are in the region of $40 per month per child. This may or may not still be accurate for 2016, and, left unqualified, is slightly misleading. ECE centers, even those within the UNICEF pilot, which are by all accounts better off than centers that do not have assistance from an international agency, still have urgent resourcing needs. This reality, which is linked to reliance on fees that families cannot afford and the wholly

inadequate provision of learning materials, has led teachers to resort to buying what they need to implement the program from their own pockets. The SABER country report (WB, 2013) notes that the "affordability of the model for parents" should be analysed; it recommends there be an evaluation of the model specifically to inform scale-up and other similar interventions. The shortage of funds at the state level and the lack of clear legislative and regulatory provisions to support the operations of the ECE centers present major challenges not only for expanding the model but for sustaining the existing centers.

3. Offer a holistic learning program that attends to all aspects of child development.

Despite the best intentions of the ECE program design to deliver a holistic, multi-domain method for teaching and learning, teachers at the sites visited teach more like primary school teachers than ECE teachers and appear to focus more on the cognitive domain than other domains, placing heavy emphasis on reading, writing, counting, and arithmetic. These teachers were aware that most parents want this emphasis and, while each of the teachers had participated in some form of short-course training for teaching ECE, all were formally trained, or in training, as primary school teachers.

4. Provide the teaching, program and materials, and environment that support quality education.

These findings are structured around the three pillars of quality education put forward in Education International's "Unite for Quality Education"[1] campaign: quality teaching, quality tools for teaching and learning, and quality learning environments.

- Quality teaching

  International best practice shows that quality teaching is a consequence of a sequence of actions: recruitment of the best and most suitable candidates, provision of effective and ongoing ECE teacher education and support, a professional community of peers, and continuous professional development. The conditions of work and the location of the ECE centers are not conducive for attracting specialist ECE teachers. There is training available for ECE teachers but without the formal recognition of ECE centers, teachers' qualifications have little consequence and the majority of ECE teachers are trained as primary grade

1 https://www.unite4education.org/

teachers. Efforts to address the capacity constraints in relation to providing trained ECE teachers have been made since the establishment of the model, ensuring quality teaching will become a more pronounced challenge if the model is scaled up.

- Quality tools for teaching and learning

  The ECE Curriculum is a quality tool for teaching and learning. However, it is resource intensive, and parents seem to insist on an emphasis on the cognitive skills, which lead to it being underutilized. It seems that each of the centers offer an intensive program that drills certain skills but does optimize a relaxed, game-based learning approach. While the centers visited for the research are relatively well equipped, a majority of the 1,588 ECE centers reportedly lack toys and basic educational equipment.

- Quality learning environments

  Quality learning environments include physical surroundings that are comfortable and secure, as well as interactions with adults, teachers, and care givers that are positive, unthreatening, consistent, and caring. The idea, when the centers were first launched, was that parents would attend with their children and thereby see how they learn and develop. However, many parents drop off the children and come to fetch them a few hours later. Communities and local government are involved in the upkeep of the centers, but the current policy relies too heavily on the meagre resources available at this level.

5. Ensure inclusion for all marginalized children:

While the main rationale for the ECE model was to make the centers accessible to the most marginalized children – especially girls, children with disability, and ethnic minorities – fees make it impossible for the poorest of poor children to attend. The research indicates that there is persisting stigma attached with disability, expressed either as denial that it exists, “we have no children with disability in our village,” or conviction that children will be best cared for by specialists elsewhere or “taught at home.” No child with disability was seen at the sites visited. The ECE centers visited in Jalalodinni Balkhi district did demonstrate openness to ethnic minorities. The ECE centers in Rasht district had very low attendance by girls, and caregivers at one of the sites wanted children who had attended the center to be subsequently placed in

a separate kindergarten class. These perceptions and prejudices will not be changed with a decree or a policy document. There will need to be a sustained effort over time to change attitudes and demonstrate that full inclusion is good quality education that enables key lessons about life.

6. Integrate centers into an inter-sectoral strategy to support early childhood development:

The ECE pilot model does not seem to be regarded as one component of an array of interlinked and mutually reinforcing set of services and interventions for young children. Instances of inter-sectoral cooperation encountered during the field research appeared to be random rather than a consideration in the design of the model. A commitment to integrated early childhood services is a solid and very well-founded UNICEF position that needs to be strengthened in the future.

Recommendations

The report on the UNICEF-supported model puts forward seven recommendations for consideration by the partner organizations.

1. Build a collaborative inter-agency approach to secure the policy commitment for, and sustainable financing of, the ECE centers.

UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) have shown a sustained and collaborative commitment to developing a new form of preschool education institutions that operate at low cost. The way forward to build the ECE centers into a form of provision that can be universally realized needs combined and fully collaborative inter-agency efforts in close partnership with the MoES and Government of Tajikistan. A follow-up meeting with partners should be held to plan a shared way forward.

2. Revise the current preschool law that enables new forms of ECE provision and lays out a workable quality framework for early learning.

The current Preschool Law (GoT, 2013b) and the Law on Education (GoT, 2013a) are wholly inadequate in the provisions they make for the new forms of early education envisaged in the NSED-2020 (GoT, 2012). The new preschool law should reflect

and reinforce the key aspirations of an equitable and fully inclusive policy for early learning and care.

3. Develop a quality framework for ECE centers for review and approval by the Collegium of the Ministry of Education.

Ten key principles for a quality framework for early childhood education and care are suggested by the European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (European Commission, 2014, p. 9). Two additional principles on quality teaching learning and environments, developed by Education International (2016), the global confederation of teachers' unions, are added, bringing the framework for quality education proposed in this report to a list of 12 principles.

Recommender Quality Framework:

Access	1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children; 2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion, and embraces diversity;
Teachers	3. Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role; 4. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership that enables time for observation, reflection planning, teamwork, and cooperation with parents;
Curriculum	5. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values, and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way; 6..A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues, and parents, and to reflect on their own practice;
Monitoring and Evaluation	7. Monitoring and evaluation produces information at the relevant local, regional, and national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice; 8. Monitoring and evaluation that is in the best interests of the child;
Teaching and learning environments[2]	9. Teaching and learning environments are supportive, comfortable, and safe and secure, with the appropriate facilities to encourage student learning and to enable teachers to teach effectively; 10.Parents, students, teachers, school authorities, and support staff in a community working together to achieve the goal of providing quality education for all students;
Governance	11. Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organizations; 12. Legislation, regulation, and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publically subsidized or funded early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

2 Taken from EI's three pillars of quality education developed for their Unite for Quality Education campaign

4. Undertake a formative evaluation of the ECE curriculum and set up a process to revise and adjust it based on its first six years of implementation.

The ECE curriculum (MoES et al, 2013, 2013) emphasizes that teachers should encourage active learning; it mentions special needs children, but does deal with how teachers should manage inclusion. It would be very helpful for UNICEF to undertake a formative evaluation that would establish to what extent teachers find the program instructive helpful for improving and guiding their practice. Sub-questions might include: do they need additional manuals to demystify the domains; is it possible to use the ECE curriculum as self-instruction materials; and how might collaborative peer support networks and communities of practice be built around this material; what support do teachers need so that the feel comfortable with their ability to help special needs children?

5. Extend per capita-based financing to the ECE centers.

Per capita financing should be extended to the ECE centers; this would be consistent with the extension of this mechanism to state kindergartens in January 2017. The formula should be weighted to incentivize both inclusion and quality.

6. Build long-term partnerships and a long-range strategy to combat stigma against children with disability and strengthen support for their inclusion in the ECE centers.

A longer-term strategy is needed; it should be built from the bottom up with the local affiliates of the Association of Parents of Children with Disability, working in collaboration with their allies in local rights organizations, supporters within government and state agencies, and international donors.

7. Develop an approach to documentation that is driven from the ground up.

Revise the parameters to include professional development and collaboration for teachers, and establish a process that negotiates commitment to a locally prioritized and manageable list of key parameters for documentation. Secondly, establish a methodology that focuses on the development of individual portfolios for each child. Restructure classroom pedagogy to reflect the different domains, mentioned but hidden, and complement this with workshops for teachers to talk about what is

important to them in their professional development. The national Early Learning and Development Standards for ages 0 to 7 (ELDS) includes a set of standards with an associated indicator and learning activity in each of the five early learning domains and it provides a strong basis for documentation.

Conclusion

The distance between the inception of an idea, its design, and how it is implemented, is an important one that has many lessons to offer. UNICEF's approach to documentation, which is intended to support a more reflexive practice within the organization, is sure to provide insights for improving performance and impact. UNICEF's reflection about its own pilot ECE Centers, which represent the vision, shared by international agencies and the Tajikistan government, hopes to find ways to extend access and quality of early childhood education. Insights into the implementation of the UNICEF-supported model will have relevance for partner organizations as they think about their own initiatives.

The findings in the research on the UNICEF-supported model reveal gaps between the design model and the implemented model. This is not necessarily problematic; the design of every social project should be negotiated as it is implemented. However, the narrowing of the learning program to its cognitive dimensions, the lack of sustainable resourcing, the lack of support from central level to delegate responsibilities to local level in providing services for children, and the lack of integration of the ECE centers into a connected inter-sectoral strategy to support early childhood development in Tajikistan need attention. Furthermore, the 'designed curriculum', Barnoma, which is strong, had to be negotiated at certain sites to reflect what parents want; this was not anticipated.

If there is a growing international convergence around what matters for early childhood development, it is that approaching 'early learning' from the perspective of 'school readiness' is a useful entry point for programming; however, the real challenge is to get schools ready for children, and not children ready for schools. Also, the ECE Centers debate overlooks completely the need for a discussion about improving the quality of education in primary schools. These schools need to be made ready for the children they take in, but the emphasis in the discussion about the alternative ECE model, appears to focus entirely making the children ready for school.

INTRODUCTION

1.1) Scope and purpose of this report

This report was commissioned by UNICEF-Tajikistan to document and assess its pilot early childhood education (ECE) model. The pilot ECE model was established in 2010 to respond to the low coverage of preschool education in Tajikistan. It consists of 225 school-based ECE centers in over 130 of the 406 *jamoats*[4] in 18 districts in Tajikistan. As Table 1 shows (p. 11), there are over 1,500 operations described as ECE centers in Tajikistan. Most are attached to schools in rural areas, including villages and small towns; those listed under a city (e.g., the six in Kulob) are situated in relatively rural areas on the outskirts of the urban area.

The idea of the model was to set up ECE centers in dedicated school classrooms that would offer a specially designed curriculum for one or two groups of 25 children, each for four hours a day, during the school term. The intention was to increase access to early childhood provision using existing infrastructure, systems, and capacity, at an affordable cost, thereby providing a viable alternative to the state kindergartens, which are based on a model that is cost intensive and hard to expand.

ECE centers were replicated by local governments after UNICEF started setting up centers in 2010, following the Ministry of Education and Science's (MoES) efforts to partner at local hukumat (city and regional governance) level in expanding ECE provision and the additional impetus provided by the 2013–16 Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant, which provided $1,7 million for ECE, including strengthening 432 ECE centers out of a total of 1,588. A smaller number of ECE centers based on a similar idea have been operating since the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) opened its first ECE centers in 2002; AKF now has 196 centers. The Open Society Institute–Assistance Foundation also started setting up ECE centers in 2011 and currently supports 46. A majority of the new ECE centers (over two-thirds) are thus run by

3 This shift in emphasis echoed the new focus among international donors on learning outcomes; the emphasis on learning outcomes also affects the operations and goals of ECE centers (discussion with the Regional Advisor (Grover, 02Feb17)).

4 Jamoats in Tajikistan are third-level administrative divisions that can be compared to communes or municipalities.

local government, but typically without the benefit of the resources that international agencies and private foundations are able to provide for the comparatively fewer numbers of centers they run. This report is based on a review of secondary information and case studies in two ECE centers in two districts. The data therefore allow for indicative rather than representative findings, though general insights relevant for all ECE centers may be inferred.

The purpose of this research is to document and review the operation of the ECE Pilot and assess the model's potential scaling up in order to increase access to quality ECE in Tajikistan. This includes identifying good practices and challenges that have emerged in the creation and operation of the ECE centers. The research aims to provide practical recommendations for the improvement and expansion of the ECE pilot model. This is linked, of course, to a set of longstanding and persisting policy questions around the importance of effective interventions in early childhood that support primary caregivers, particularly mothers, and families in their efforts to optimise the development and potential of their children in the years before school. Although there is broad consensus among international and national Tajik experts[5] that interventions for young children are more effective when they are coordinated and multi-sectoral (i.e. including the health, social welfare, education, and local government sectors), focus on all five domains (physical, cognitive, emotional and social, communication, and moral),[5] and target the most marginalised children, financial and capacity constraints result in extremely hard policy and programmatic choices. This report is cognizant of these constraints but does not lose sight of the importance of the commitment to access to quality early childhood education for all children in Tajikistan.

1.2) Research design

The design for this research comprised a desk review of the relevant material provided by the UNICEF-Tajikistan office; a field trip to Jalalodinni Balkhi (Rumi) and Rasht districts in November 2016 to provide case study data, which included visits to four ECE centers and discussions with local officials, parents, and educators; subsequent interviews with experts, funders, and federal-level government officials; and a

5 As confirmed during interviews with the Regional Advisor (Grover, 02Feb17) and Irina Karimova (Karimova, 14Nov16).

6 MoES & Academy of Education (2012).

consultation meeting of partners and stakeholders on February 22, 2017.

No claim is made for the statistical representativeness of this data, however, feedback from the interviews and the consultation meeting of partners (UNICEF, 22 Feb 17) suggest that many of the features and attitudes reflected in the case studies are typical. It is expected that the findings will inform discussions dedicated to improving the ECE centers and the wider discussion about the challenges Tajikistan faces in developing a multi-model, multi-actor, multi-sectoral, integrated system of provision for early childhood care and education for all children.

The limitations of this research include the following:

- It was possible only to conduct four site visits in two districts. Even within the framework of a modest design, visits to two sites in Sughd and two sites in Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) would have strengthened the findings.
- The purpose of the research was to review the operation of the 225 ECE pilot centers funded by UNICEF. However, given that there are around 1,588 ECE centers in Tajikistan, many of which are supported by local hukumat-level district education departments—and that expansion is the reason for doing a pilot in the first place—a closer look at the ECE centers not in the UNICEF pilot would have been extremely beneficial to this discussion.
- Scaling up ECE provision in Tajikistan will need to involve a coalition of key stakeholders and a diverse, multi-model system of provision apart from the ECE Pilot. Potential models include the center-based state and private yasli (nursery/daycare) and sadiki (kindergarten); Grade Zero (which will be described shortly); short-term school readiness programs; and a range of home-based, center-based, and school-based community initiatives. This research only looks at the ECE pilot, but the discussion about scaling up should include multi-model approach options and a closer look at other models.
- Questions related to the payment of fees, the resourcing of the ECE centers, and the payment of ECE teachers' salaries came up repeatedly in the research. UNICEF conducted a cost effectiveness analysis back in 2010 to compare cost of state KG and alternative models. It showed the alternative models to be cost-effective and has helped UNICEF argue that alternative models can be integrated into ECE service provision.

- This research did not analyse the training program for teachers or the learning program for children, which would have required a different design. However, a closer look at teacher training capacity and a greater understanding of the type of training on offer would have helped us frame the recommendations in the report with greater understanding and clarity.
- The site visit was not long enough and there was not sufficient observation time to work through all the items in the documentation framework; approaches to documentation will be discussed further in this report.

The empirical data derived from the two field trips, which are presented as short case studies in chapter 2, are the foundation of this qualitative study. Appendix Two presents more detailed notes on the case studies; these notes attempt to record faithfully what was seen, said, and experienced without comment or analysis. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the case study data together with the documents reviewed and the interviews of various individuals who were not part of either case study. Chapter 4 provides a set of recommendations for improving the ECE centers and for extending access to ECE in Tajikistan.

This review of the operation of the ECE pilot and its potential for increasing access to quality ECE in Tajikistan is located within a wider historic landscape, which the next section of this chapter briefly sketches.

1.3) Background: reaching young children in Tajikistan

t their zenith in 1982, the number of state kindergartens reached 1,498 and catered for 228,773 children. Significant effort was made to provide training for the teachers, psychologists, nurses, and others staffing these institutions; early childhood development (ECD) departments were established in pedagogical colleges, universities, and in-service teacher training institutions (AKF, 2011). The extent of provision through large state-owned factories and firms that established their own kindergartens for the children of their employees is a largely un-researched part of this history. Many were transferred to the local hukumat level in the period of transition to a market economy, and few survived the collapse of the Soviet Union or the civil war.

Nor is much written about the "field kindergartens" of the 1950s and 1960s that were established in make-shift shelters in the fields, known as shipangs, during the cotton-picking season (Karimova, 1976). These yasli–sadiki innovations in industry and agriculture are examples of alternative models of care and education for young children in the country's own recent history that perhaps should be explored.

Preschool coverage through the state system dropped to about 6 percent of eligible children in 2004 (MoES, 2005). At its highest point, circa 1990, enrolment in the state system was in the region of 160,000 children, about 16 percent of eligible children. It can also be argued that these children were probably better off in urban environments. In remote areas such as GBAO and Rasht Valley, preschool coverage was always limited; 19 kindergartens in GBAO and 10 in Rasht provided services only to approximately 4 to 6 percent of eligible children, mostly in the larger villages and towns (AKF, 2011). Currently, in 2016, 578 state kindergartens nationwide are catering for 92,024 children. Though an increase from the low number of 420 state kindergartens in 2005, this is roughly the same number of kindergartens as there were 20 years before, just after the civil war, and these probably catered for 50 percent more children and served a population of roughly 6 million people—a population about 45 percent smaller than the current population.

The historically low rates of access to preschool services in the country have probably not been helped by the cumbersome state kindergarten model, which is expensive to run, hard to staff with the requisite professionals, and seemingly incapable of responding flexibly to local needs. Consequently, there has always been a need for alternative forms of provision. The most striking example perhaps being the seasonal shipang kindergartens mentioned earlier, some of which became established as regular kolkhoz kindergartens as the needs of communities changed (Karimova, 1976). The quality of the kolkhoz kindergartens was not considered to be high, but they were part of an alternative system that provided services for up to 70,000 children a year. Karimova (1976) reports that there were 80,000 children attending seasonal kindergartens in 1975; this is 9 percent higher than attendance in 1940. This suggests that seasonal kindergartens were, out of necessity, very active. In fact, their rise and decline mirrors Tajikistan's raw cotton production in the USSR, which grew to average 800,000 metric tons a year after World War II,

remained high in the 1960s and 1970s, and had declined to less than half the post-World War II average by 1999.

The National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) of 2005 acknowledged the resource constraints facing the country, suggesting that Tajikistan "needs to expand services rendered through creating new forms of preschool educational institutions at low costs" (MoES, 2005, p. 13). By 2010, UNICEF had identified at least 10 different models of alternative provision in Tajikistan (see Table 2 on page 17). The ECE pilot that is the subject of this research is a development of Model 8 in Table 2, Community-based ECE (School-based).

Each of these models has a different history and has had a different trajectory over the last decade. The Grade Zero program is of particular interest in a consideration of the ECE centers, partly because of their location at school and their emphasis on school readiness. The Grade Zero program was first promoted by AKF in the schools of GBAO, where most of the children are not mother-tongue Tajik speakers. A preparatory grade was introduced in the Soviet period to help children prepare for Tajik language schooling (AKF-IPD, 2008). AKF's Grade Zero program was seen as an opportunity to help teachers apply more interactive approaches to teaching. The Aga Khan Foundation Institute of Professional Development (AKF-IPD) promotes the use of free play corners to reinforce themes being taught in class and to encourage creativity and independent learning. An evaluation of the program in 2008 showed a statistically significant improvement in learning outcomes in comparison with the control group.

AKF-IPD piloted a community based-based early childhood development initiative in GBAO, later extended to three villages in the Shugnan district and four villages in the Rasht district, that set up community-owned early childhood development centers in rural communities (AKF-IPD, 2011). The centers were usually based in unused school rooms and offered half-day classes (for children aged 4 to 6 in Rasht, and 4 to 7 in Shugnan) that provided relevant, age-appropriate teaching and learning resources. ECD teachers were selected from the community; most were former kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers.

Table 2: Ten early models of ECE in Tajikistan*

	Model		Location	Support	Population
1	Traditional Kindergarten		Existing Government Kindergartens	MoES, DED	Mostly Urban
2	Traditional Kindergarten with NGO Support to Improve Quality			MoES, DED OSI/SbS or other	Mostly Urban
3	Traditional Kindergarten with 2-Shift Schedule to Expand Access	Alternative Models Designed to Expand Access		Planned for 2010	Mostly Urban
4	Getting Ready for School; Child to Child		Secondary Schools (Unutilized Space)	MoES, DED UNICEF	Mostly Rural
5	Getting Ready to School			MoES, DED OSI	Mostly Rural
6	School Readiness (1 month program)			MoES, DED	Mostly Urban
7	Grade Zero			MoES, AKF, DED	Urban & Rural
8	Community-based ECE (School-based)			MoES, DED AKF, UNICEF	Rural
9	Community-based ECE (Satellite)		Community or Home	MoES, DED AKF, UNICEF	Rural
10	Private Kindergartens		No Data	No Data	No Data

Source: McLean (2010)

An assessment of the sustainability of the model, Increasing children access to early learning opportunities: Impacts on children, parents and communities (AKF-IPD, 2011), indicates that start-up costs are relatively low and communities have been able to cover recurrent costs such as teachers' salaries and utilities. However, in Rasht only 30 percent of the ECD teachers seemed to receive their monthly salaries on time and only 22 percent reported being satisfied with the amount. In addition, the parental education program did not function well, as after six months only five parents were attending. Another significant finding was the children's relatively low literacy scores, particularly in Rasht, which indicates the inadequate attention paid to reading in the center and in their homes.

The NSED-2020 (GoT, 2012) aims to "level[ing] the access to education resources for early development children" by prioritizing children at risk and socially vulnerable families, payment exemption, home-based advice to families and support for

families of children with disability, improving infrastructure and resources, and a state program of local authorities and communities involved in the organization of educational resources for early age children in rural areas. Importantly, the NSED-2020 envisages the expansion of coverage through the "development of nongovernmental and private establishments, creating low cost forms of preschool education, such as child development centers, double-shift kindergartens and family kindergartens and etc." (GoT, 2012, p. 27). While ambitious, as the development partners' appraisal (AKF et al., 2012) notes, these aims recognize the inertia of the formal state kindergarten system and look to alternative models for expanding flexible access.

The NSED-2020 recognized the earlier collaboration in 2010 between the AKF, MoES, and UNICEF to model an "alternative, cost-efficient and quality early childhood education ECE groups" (Abduvahobov et al., 2013, p. 3). Abdhuvahobov et al.'s (2013) case study of the ECE pilot reports that there were then 164 ECE groups reaching approximately 4,000 children. These centers shared the characteristics of the contemporary model: centers are based in schools in mostly rural areas and operate three to four hours a day, five days a week though the academic year. UNICEF provided the furniture, equipment, materials; developed the Tajik, Russian, and English materials; and trained teachers through local government teacher-training institutes.

Based on this model for alternative ECE services, and no doubt encouraged by the aspirations of the NSED-2020 for the creation of low-cost models, the MoES and local hukumat-level education departments independently established a further 593 ECE groups. By May 2013, the MoES estimated that there were 831 ECE groups across Tajikistan reaching about 17,000 children between the ages of 4 and 6 (3 percent of eligible children). The fourth GPE (formerly Fast Track Initiative) grant (GPE, 2012) allocated an amount to support an additional 450 ECE groups. The curriculum used for the alternative ECE groups were based on the national Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) (MoES & Academy of Education, 2012) and approved by the MoES. The case study suggests that this curriculum was largely being followed in groups visited in 2013. The UNICEF case study (Abduvahobov et al., 2013) identifies the need to shift away from setting up

new groups, to focus on supporting and improving the regulatory environment and the components of the program. The case study also points to the importance of developing a monitoring and evaluation framework and incorporating indicators for learning outcomes in the Education Management Information System (EMIS), a need emphasized by the development partners' appraisal (AKF et al., 2012), as well as promoting inclusion for the most marginalized and children with disability (Abduvahobov et al., 2013).

The ELDS (MoES & Academy of Education, 2012) were created through a collaborative process among national and international early childhood experts. The ELDS are a set of aspirations for the country's children that reflect what young children should know and be able to do at a particular age. The ELDS includes a set of standards with an associated indicator and learning activity in each of the five early learning domains.

The World Bank's (WB) Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) country report (WB, 2013) notes that Article 16 of the Law on Education (GoT, 2004) states that preschool institutions are mandated to prepare children for school entry but does not mandate enrolment. The country report (WB, 2013) identifies the ECE pilot as an excellent example of a multi-sectoral intervention, noting specifically that it is a community-based ECD model, and "an innovative alternative to the current ECD model and provides access to 3,640 children aged 3 to 7." The report also notes that preschool enrolment increased from 5.6 percent to 8.9 percent between 2000/01 and 2010/11.

The Asian Development Bank (2016) notes that both the NSED and the 2013 preschool law (GoT 2013b) emphasize the importance of preschool education and reports that 508 state preschool institutions are reaching 74,448 children, compared with 944 institutions in 1991. The same strategy document also remarks that the government is working with international partners to improve curricula and teacher training facilities, and that the quality of education remains an ongoing concern.

Table 3: The five domains of child development described in the ELDS

Five domains of child development in the United States *(Kagan et al.,1995)*	Five domains of child development in Tajikistan *(MoES & Academy of Education, 2012)*
• Physical well-being and motor development • Cognition development and general knowledge • Social and emotional development • Language development • Approaches toward learning	• Motor development, physical health and well-being • Cognitive development and general knowledge • Emotional and social development • Speech development, communication, and preparation for writing and reading • Education and moral development of children

This overview of the history of efforts to reach young children in Tajikistan with early childhood services has briefly sketched the slow growth, rapid decline, and anemic recovery of the state kindergarten sector over the past century. It suggests that the formal model was always too inert and inflexible to respond or catalyze a response to the needs for early childhood services, particularly of the children and families that needed them the most. It illustrates an abiding, persistent search for additional and alternative models, and reflects the aspirational intent of policy to achieve universal services, targeting those that need them most. With its focus on early childhood programs and interventions that specifically aim to prepare children for school, this overview has shown how policy and programs aspire toward an integrated developmental approach and an integral understanding of quality that combines education with care and is thus multi-dimensional, multi-domain, and multi-sectoral (Grover, 02Feb16).

SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY FINDINGS

UNICEF-Tajikstan proposed two sites for field visits: the Jalalodinni Balkhi district in the south of Khatlon, where ECE coverage is low, and Rahst Valley, where there are believed to be access issues for girls.

According to the 2016 EMIS report, there are 14 state preschools in the district, catering for almost 1,500 children. There are 59 ECE centers, of which 10 are in the UNICEF pilot, catering for over 1,100 children. Two ECE centers were visited on November 9, 2016: the first was in Isaev jamoat located in a building close to the school kindergarten, as there was no space at the school (this center is referred to hereafter as "JD1"); the second was located in a room in the old school building, as the school had been moved to a newly constructed building (this center is referred to hereafter as "JD2").

There are only two state kindergartens in Rasht; they cater for 160 children. There are 38 ECE centers, all of which appear to be in the UNICEF pilot, catering for 744 children. Two ECE centers were visited on November 11, 2016: the first was located at a school in the town of Tojikobad in the Kalai Surkh jamoat (this center is referred to hereafter as "R1"); the second was located at a school in Bedak village in Navdi jamoat (this center is referred to hereafter as "R2").

This chapter presents a rudimentary analysis of the case study findings; a more descriptive write-up of the cases, including photographs from the site visit, is provided in Appendix Two. The analysis touches on five components that would be central to a documentation framework for the ECE centers: general facilities; teacher qualification, competence, and support required; involvement of the child's primary caregivers; profile of the children attending the center; and the learning program and activities. The analysis is rudimentary because less than

half a day was spent at each site, there was no baseline information, there is no documentation system in place, and there was no time to engage with the children individually. The idea of the site visits was twofold: to gain research insights from direct observation of the ECE centers in action and from direct interactions with teachers, children, and caregivers; and—with a view to informing the development of a comprehensive tool kit for documentation—to develop initial ideas about what a meaningful "documentation process" for the ECE centers would need to involve.

2.1) Condition of the classrooms and learning materials

At present, neither center in Jalalodinni Balkhi is suitably located, though renovations are being considered. JD1 is temporarily housed in an old, dilapidated room close to a kindergarten linked to the school. Parents were reportedly waiting to renovate the room but had not done anything because the accommodation was temporary. JD2 is located in a former school building that the jamoat is considering refurbishing; the school itself has moved to a newly refurbished building. In Rasht, the classrooms allocated to the ECE Centers were fully adequate. R1 is located in a room in a new building with the school. R2 is located in a well-maintained school building along with the other classrooms and children. Sanitation appears to be acceptable at three of the sites; the teacher at JD1 complained that the preschool children had to share toilets with the kindergarten.

The classrooms appear to be well equipped, although the teacher at JD1 complained of a shortage of learning materials, books, pencils, colored paper, and plasticine; she said there was little support from the school or parents and that she frequently resorted to buying things for the children herself. The teachers at JD2 said they had to buy all the stationery the children needed themselves. The teachers in Rasht also reported using their salaries to buy stationery for the children. The JD2 classroom is decorated with children's paintings, visual aids, and shelves with toys and books that are accessible to the children. R1 has a well-equipped classroom with posters on the walls, shelves with toys, books, and stationery. R2 has adequate stationery, toys, furniture, and books.

2.2) Teacher qualifications, competence, and support needed

The teachers at the four ECE centers also teach primary school. There are two functioning groups at JD2: one of the teachers trained as a primary teacher and has 12 years of experience, the other teacher has parents who are teachers, she considers this to be sufficient to support her work. The JD1 teacher is trying to complete her primary teaching qualification through correspondence. The teacher at R1 is a trained primary school teacher. The teacher at R2 is young and energetic but still completing her primary school teaching course part time through correspondence.

None of the teachers has been trained as ECE teachers. The teachers at JD1, R1, and R2 had each participated in a short course related to early childhood education: one had attended a UNICEF training seminar in 2013, which lasted for 8-9 days; another had attended a training conducted by the Education Department during a past summer; and the third had participated in a training group on the importance of ECD several years before, which had inspired her to ask the local administration, on her return, to help her establish the ECE center at her school.

It was possible to observe lessons at three of the sites (not JD2), where each of the teachers appeared to be competent and actively engaged the children. The teacher at R1 said she would value opportunities to exchange experience and support with other ECE teachers, and the R2 teacher was grateful for the support she received from the school. Every teacher, when asked about her salary, claimed it was too low.

2.3) Involvement of primary caregivers

A focus group for primary caregivers was held at each of the sites. The discussion at JD2 was attended mostly by grandparents, and the focus group discussions in Rasht were attended mostly by fathers and grandfathers. In general, parents and primary caregivers were satisfied with the progress their children were making but they did not appear to be particularly involved in the affairs of the ECE center. The

grandparents at JD2 were particularly supportive: one helps with cleaning; another looks after flowers in the school yard; and others sometimes bring bread and tea, or stand in when the teacher is sick. One of the fathers at R1 chops wood for the school.

There are problems with late or irregular payments at every center, as well as reports of many parents who would like to send their children but are unable to do so because they cannot afford the fees. There were originally two groups at JD1, but they had to be consolidated into one group because parents were not paying. At R2, the ECE center is closed for several months in the winter because parents were not paying when it was cold.

Parents, particularly those in Rasht, see the ECE center primarily as a school preparation year and expect that the children are being taught to read, write, and count, despite the fact that the ECE curriculum, Barnoma, is far broader than that. These parents pay the teacher directly and have made their expectations clear; the teachers at R1 and R2 mentioned that they try to emphasize in their teaching what the parents want them to teach. The parents at R2 clearly wanted their children to have an advantage at school and are advocating for their children to be placed in a separate class, so they will not be held back by students who had not attended the ECE class. Children attending the two ECE centers in Rasht wore school uniforms, and their parents clearly regard the ECE center as a zero grade class.

2.4) Attendance and inclusion profile

Most of the children at the four sites were 6 years of age, even though the curriculum is meant for different cohorts of children of 4-6 years of age. The ECE centers in Jalalodinni Balkhi showed openness to ethnic minorities: the teacher at JD1 made conscious adjustments for a child who spoke Uzbek at home, and there were a few children from Uzbek families at JD2 whose parents saw the center as an opportunity for their children to learn Tajik. The centers in Rasht considered the population more homogenously Tajik and expressed that there was no need for instruction in another mother tongue. R1, however, was proud to feature other languages with certain activities, such as counting to 10, which the children could do in Russian and English as well as Tajik.

There appears to be an issue with bringing girls to the center in Rasht, as the children at both centers were mostly boys; there were five or six girls at one center and only two at the other. The explanation given by (male) participants of the focus groups was that fewer girls are being born and their number is decreasing every year; this explanation is not supported by population data.

No one in any of the centers showed awareness of the need to include children with disability. The school director at JD1 insisted that they do "not have children with disability in [their] village." This was echoed by officials at the district who think this is a problem for the Psychological–Medal–Pedagogical Commission[7] and that children with special needs are "taught at home." A mother in the focus group at JD2 admitted "my child is disabled and I won't bring him here." When pressed by one of the other participants, she was adamant that he would not be accepted. Caregivers in the focus group at R2 admitted that the issue of disability and inclusion was very challenging for them and they were not aware of this issue before.

2.5) Learning program and activities

The centers follow the early childhood education curriculum, Barnoma, which emphasizes the five domains and recommends a stationery-intensive program of activities. This is good but it is also why the teachers are under continual pressure to buy stationery. Lessons were observed at JD1, R1, and R2. In the lesson that was observed at JD1, children were making appliqués of a snowman from colored paper. The lesson was interactive; the teacher gave tasks, pointed out mistakes, and praised the children. It was not possible to observe a lesson at JD2, but the teacher had a lot of primary school teaching experience and this was the center with the most children's work on display.

In the lesson that was observed at R1, the children recited a poem they had prepared; counted from 1-10 in Tajik, Russian, and English; and sang a song. While there was not much physical movement, the children said they liked "drawing and singing songs." In the lesson at R2, the children were taught intensively, much as they would be in school. The emphasis was on reading aloud, practicing writing,

7 OECD (2005) reported 67 PMPCs at district level under the responsibility of the local public health care department, of which 48 were working and 19 were no longer functional.

and mathematics. However, the children said they also like drawing, appliqué, and plasticine. Everyone was fully involved in the learning process. The teacher demonstrated a range of different strategies for teaching: singing songs, learning poems, telling stories, describing pictures, and doing mutual assessment. She provides descriptive feedback and teaches in both Tajik and Russian. All children had their own copybook and portfolio.

In general, even though they were interactive, largely child-centered, and involved a range of methods and activities, the lessons observed still seemed more like those of a first-grade class than a preschool center. All four centers had desks and chairs in rows facing the teacher, for example. This demonstrates that despite the aspirations of the ECE curriculum to emphasize all five development domains, what matters to parents, and what the teachers teach, is preparation for first grade.

2.6) Overall summary of case findings

The Jalalodinni Balki district and Rasht district cases provide a number of insights to inform not only an effective approach to the documentation of the ECE centers, but also to the challenges facing the development of effective alternative models to early education and care that are able to respond to local needs. The essential insight is that effective documentation needs to be substantially driven from the bottom up, and that the approach at the level of the EMIS needs to be streamlined enough to capture essential information for comparative and policy purposes and flexible enough to allow for local prioritization and ownership.

It is also clear from subsequent interviews and conversations that the situation at the ECE centers supported by UNICEF, AKF, and Open Society enjoy far more support than ECE centers run by local government in these areas. While the case studies of the UNICEF centers indicate that much could be done to improve the centers, the task of ensuring that a quality learning program is delivered consistently across all 1,500+ ECE centers is several orders of magnitude larger.

Table 4: Summary of findings at the four case study sites

Site:	JD1	JD2	R1	R2	Site:	JD1	JD2	R1	R2
Adequate classroom	N	N	Y	Y	Gender balance in class	Y	Y	N	N
Situated at the school	N	Y	Y	Y	Disabled kids included	N	N	N	N
Adequate sanitation	N	-	Y	Y	Minority kids included	Y	Y	Y	N
Adequate learning materials	Y?	Y?	Y	Y?	Kids from wealthier homes	-	-	Y	Y
Teacher buys materials	Y	N	-	Y	Kids in uniforms	N	N	N	Y
Teacher's salary is too low	Y	-	Y	Y	Kids mostly 6 years old	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teachers collect payment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Kids on waiting list	12	12	Y?	Y?
Teacher is trained for ECE	½	½	½	½	Learning activity: stories	Y	Y	-	-
Teacher teaches at school	Y	Y	Y	Y	Learning activity: drawing	Y	-	-	-
Methodological support	-	-	N	-	Learning activity: reading	Y	Y	Y	Y
Interactive teaching	Y	?	Y	Y	Learning activity: writing	Y	Y	Y	Y
Evident anti-bias approach	-	-	Y	-	Learning activity: playing	Y	-	-	-
Class seen as zero grade	Y	Y	Y	Y	Learning activity: poems	Y	Y	Y	-
Children's work on display	N	Y	N	N	Learning activity: numeracy	Y	Y	Y	Y
Caregivers actively involved	-	Y	N	N	Learning activity: singing	Y	Y	Y	-
Caregivers struggle to pay	Y	Y	N	Y	Learning activity: appliqué	Y	-	-	Y
Parent want separate class in school	-	-	-	Y	Barnoma program used	Y	Y	Y	Y

Legend	
Yes / No	Y/N
Partly	½
No data	-
Possibly	?
Actual number	12

Table 4 above outlines the main features of the four ECE centers to provide a rudimentary illustration of what documentation of the ECE centers could reveal. It does not address the far more important question, however, of what documentation looks like for individual children. The teacher at R2 keeps portfolios of the work of each child; this seems like an excellent place to start.

PILOTING THE ECE MODULE

3.1) Description of the ECE Module

What makes this a good case for documentation?

Documentation of the programs and initiatives of the ECE module is important for UNICEF-Tajikistan for three principle reasons:

1. To provide a record of the thinking that led to establishing an initiative and track its development through the implementation phase and, once the initiative begins to show results, to support reflective practice and inform program evaluation, as well as the design of future initiatives.
2. To provide knowledge management and preserve institutional memory during transitions and rotational staff changes in order to achieve greater consistencies in the organization's approach and contribute to systemic impacts.
3. To establish a greater openness and understanding of UNICEF's plans in order to facilitate trust and strengthen partnerships.

This approach to documentation would also support reflective practice in the ECE field more widely, particularly with regard to understanding scale-up and systems effects, and for strengthening collaboration around national ECE priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets. The ECE pilot is a good case for documentation because it reflects the sustained efforts of UNICEF-Tajikistan efforts to respond to a distinct national need: to increase access to early childhood services significantly in a country where participation is the lowest in the region. . Much can be learned from experiences that span from early advocacy to the establishment of an effective overall policy on child development in the form of national early learning developments standards created a decade ago (MoES & Academy of Education, 2012); through efforts to galvanize support for expanding access once this was recognized in national policy (UNICEF-Tajikistan, 2010a)

and the design and implementation of an alternative ECE model that demonstrates potential scalability.

There are at least two essential dimensions to documentation. If the first involves a checklist of program elements to guide implementation, enable monitoring and evaluation, and drive quality, the second is a focus on the learning progress made by each child, possibly through the maintenance of individual portfolios that facilitate a more child-centered pedagogy. The former is important at the systems level; the latter has implications for systems but must have significance and meaning at the level of the ECE centers, enabling, particularly, support of the professional needs of teachers. An approach to documentation that focuses only on program-level external validation and accountability will be less able to effectively guide the development of the ECE centers.

Seitz (2008) proposes an approach to documentation that focuses on the learning progress of each child rather than on overall standards at an ECE center. This includes maintaining individual portfolios that contain examples of a child's work, teacher's notes, and parent's comments and wishes. For example (adapted from Seitz, 2008):

- Teacher's description and overview of an event/ experience/ skill/ development
- Photographs of children at work – playing or writing
- Samples of children's work – drawings and paintings
- Children's comments – "I am back from school," recorded by the teacher
- Teacher or parent comments about a classroom event – "my child now recites poems"
- Teacher notes on children's conversations during small group time
- Observations that reflect progress such as "Nazar can now write his own name on his work"

There is currently no system in place for systematically documenting the overall implementation of the ECE pilot or the learning progress made by children at the centers. If a key purpose of documentation is to track parameters over time to monitor progress, a core set of parameters, determined centrally, need to

remain unchanged. However, without a significant degree of local ownership, documentation becomes a form-filling-out process devoid of meaning. A "combined approach" would need to identify key documentation parameters across all ECE centers, but also encourage the identification of additional parameters that reflect local priorities. The commitment to shared priorities is likely to be stronger if the documentation process assists the development of each ECE center by identifying where external support is needed.

UNICEF-Tajikistan is working to develop a standardized assessment instrument for measuring the learning level and school readiness of 6-year-old children at the start of their first primary school year.

This standardized assessment instrument offers both a comparative, summative evaluation of early learning outcomes and a baseline assessment for learning outcomes at ECE level, providing an evaluation counterpoint to the monitoring/ reflective practice emphasis currently envisaged in the documentation conversation. This assessment should be part of the documentation process, but as with other components of documentation, it needs to have relevance at the ECE center level.

Legislation and policies covering ECE services

This report briefly reviews policy related to early childhood education that has been promulgated since 2000. As discussed earlier, ECE was initially addressed within the overall education development strategies of 2005 and 2012 (MoES, 2005; GoT, 2012) and in 2004 and 2013 amendments to the Law on Education of 1993 (GoT, 2004; GoT, 2013a). However, in response to historical low numbers of children being reached through the state preschool system by 2005, and sustained advocacy from UNICEF and other organizations, ECE has recently received more policy attention.

The State Standard on Preschool Education №388 of 2009 (GoT, 2009) was followed by a presidential decree on early childhood education/school readiness programs in June 2010 (GoT, 2010). The National Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) were promulgated in 2012 (MoES & Academy of Education, 2012). The first stand-alone Law on Early Childhood Education and Care (GoT,

2013b) was passed in November 2013, and a law on preschool training and education passed one month later (GoT, № 1056, 2013c). Other laws followed in 2014, introducing a state program for the development of private preschool facilities (GoT, № 295, 2014a) and a new state standard on preschool education (GoT, 2014b), which revised the law of five years earlier. In 2015, new regulations for preschool education (GoT, 2015a) and a national concept for preschool education (GoT, 2015b) were passed.

The current Law on Early Childhood Education and Care (GoT, 2013b) attempts to provide blanket cover for all forms of preschool provision, including ECE centers, institutionalized care for children with special needs, and internats (orphanages). Careful attention is paid to the state kindergartens, but no regulations are provided for implementing and running ECE centers and nothing is said about their legal status or procedures for financial management. The Law on Education (GoT, 2013a), which replaces the earlier 2004 law on education (GoT, 2004), is silent on ECE centers and provides no helpful provisions.

At the UNICEF partners' consultation meeting on ECE documentation (UNICEF-Tajikistan, 22Feb17), Deputy Head of Commission for Science, Education, Culture and Youth Policy concurred that the "ECE regulatory framework, including Law on preschool education and care, needs to be revised and amended" so that ECE centers might be adequately provided for in law. In an earlier interview undertaken for this report, the deputy education minister at federal level pointed out the legal right of the establishment to open a dedicated bank account to receive all parent payments, formally deduct taxes, and so on (Latofat, 14Nov16). These remarks echo concerns of local hukumat-level officials. The head of the department of finance in Frunze jamoat and the chairman of the executive committee for the Jalalodinni Balkhi District (JB3FCI, 10Nov16) pointed out that it is not legal for teachers to take money directly from parents. He also has no knowledge of teachers having to use this money to buy equipment and learning materials. The head of the district finance department in Rasht (R3FI, 12Nov16) claimed to have no knowledge of teachers collecting fees directly from parents or buying learning materials from the money they collect. At the partners' consultation, the Deputy Head of Commission agreed that "It is important to develop normative legal documents regulating parental

financial contributions to ECE centers" (UNICEF-Tajikistan, 22Feb17). UNICEF developed a training module for ECE financial management and operation, with support from the civil society organization "Economics and Education", which is delivered systematically to UNICEF-supported centers. Training aims to create agreed understandings on the approach to funds management in ECE centers and a common understanding on the approach for fund management, development of cost estimations, payments of salaries, deduction of taxes etc. It also helps to improve operational functioning of ECE centers by properly arranging documentations (agreements with parents, contracts, budget development etc.).

The Chief Specialist of the Department of Preschool and Secondary Education and Science believes that a clear legal status for ECE Centers would enable them to be funded under the state per capita financing system, which was extended to the state kindergartens in January 2017 (Imatova, 2016). This is also the option preferred by heads of the finance departments in Jalalodinni Balkhi and Rasht (JB3FCI, 10Nov16; R3FI, 12Nov16). The head of the district finance department in Rasht recalled that per capita financing has been in place for schools since 2009 and there had been discussions about extending this provision to ECE centers two or three years earlier (R3FI, 12Nov16). Per capita financing could, at least theoretically, be based on a formula that concentrates resources where they are most needed. The key difficulty, as the Regional Advisor on ECD (Grover, 02Feb17) points out, is that even if the regulatory framework and per capita financing for ECE centers were passed into law, the government would still not have an adequate budget for expanding state provision. This is the reason the NSED-2020 envisages increased coverage coming from private kindergartens and low-cost alternatives (GoT, 2012:27).

The head of the economic department at the MoES (Fathiddin, 14Nov16) confirms that the government is already moving ahead with plans to develop legislation to further enable private preschools. Under the minister's initiative, an earlier plan was instituted for developing private preschools from 2014–2020 (GoT, 2014a). The idea is make special concessions for those who want to open private preschools, including land and an easier process to obtain the necessary documentation. The head of the economic department (Fathiddin, 14Nov16) reports that there are

currently 96 private kindergartens, a number he describes as being “16 percent of the total,” which it is of the 578 state kindergartens.

The ELDS were approved by the MoES on December 31, 2010 and are based on the 2004 Law on Education (GoT, 2004). The ELDS “covers all preschool educational institutions, preschool groups in orphanages, preschool groups (grades), child development centers, preschool groups beyond school organizations, as well as families and other spheres of early childhood development” (MoES & Academy of Education, 2012, p. 48). Rooted in the five learning domains (see Table 3 on page 17), the ELDS stipulates benchmarks for competencies that should be evident at various ages for children receiving adequate attention, stimulation, and care. It is intended to guide their application broadly to all forms of ECE provision.

The Barnoma program that was developed for the centers is based on the ELDS and therefore emphasizes all five learning domains. The site visit to Navdi jamoat in Rasht illustrates how primary caregiver expectations that lessons focus on reading, writing, and numeracy in preparation for school **skews the learning program toward emphasis on the cognitive domain over the other four domains**. Direct payment to the teacher also sets up a strong service provider–client relationship that makes it difficult for the teacher to insist on following the full learning program.

The Deputy Minister (Latofat, 14Nov16) points out that teachers and lesson programs are not adequately monitored because the ECE centers do not have a legal status; currently monitoring is only carried out at the request of the donors. She is also concerned that staff who work at the centers do not all have qualifications as educators or psychologists for preschool education. The Deputy Minister takes the view that staff who work in the ECE centers should either be primary school teachers or have specific qualifications for preschool professionals. These remarks serve to remind us that, as beneficial as securing legal status for the ECE centers will surely be, operating informally allows for great flexibility. The government has already decreed that a one-month preparation program for schools be implemented for all children. (Latofat, 14Nov16).

Considerable legislation in Tajikistan supports the legal rights and interests of children

with disability, including: Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan (GoT, 1994), Laws of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Education" (GoT 2013, amended version), "On Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Tajikistan" (GoT 2010, amended version), "On the responsibility of parents in schooling and education of children" (GoT 2011), and "National concept of inclusive education for the children with disabilities till 2015" (GoT 2011). International conventions on disability and inclusion ratified by Tajikistan and therefore include in domestic law include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); and the Standard Rules on the Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993).

The experience of the Preschool Law Kyrgyzstan in 2012 (GoK, 2012), which made the preschool year compulsory and free for all children aged 6, was that some schools introduced entrance exams that required children to read and count, and some schools asked parents for money. The preschool year in Kyrgyzstan was initially based on a 240-hour program that was develop in accordance with a national ELDS; this was expanded into a 480-hour year-long program, still based on the national ELDS and promulgated as an amendment to the Preschool Law. This has helped ensure that the preschool year is less academic and not a de facto grade zero. Further amendments were subsequently passed to accommodate private providers as part of the effort to expand coverage.

It's important to learn from the experience of the Preschool Law Kyrgyzstan in 2012 (GoK, 2012) and from detailed lessons from the current operation of the ECE pilot to ensure that any forthcoming legislation and regulations will strengthen learning and development across the five domains and make provisions that are enabling and flexible rather than rigid and stifling.

Purpose and rationale of the design of the model

This section identifies six central ideas that capture the spirit of the ECE pilot, and assesses the purpose, rationale, and design of the model in relation to each. As the

ECE pilot has no single founding document, the six ideas, or propositions, are drawn from the aspirations of the ECE model laid out in various national policies (GoT, 2005, ~2010, ~2012, ~2013; MoES & Academy of Education, 2012), the UNICEF-organized 2010 planning workshop and TORs for consultants' work (UNICEF, 2010a, ~2012, ~2016a, ~2016b), and international best practice (Kagan et al., 1995; Seitz, 2008; UNICEF-CIS, 2012; European Commission, 2014; Education International, 2016).

1. Expand access by creating new forms of preschool education institutions that can be scaled up.	The NSED of 2005 was the first policy document to squarely recognize that the formal state kindergarten system was incapable of expanding coverage to the extent or at the pace that was required. It puts down the purpose for the pilot, namely, expanding access through the creation of new forms of preschool education institutions at low cost. This insight is echoed in the NSED-2020, which goes on to explain that this expansion will be achieved by enhancing the "network of state institutions and development of network of non-state institutions, creating of low-cost types of preschool education, such as short-term stay groups" (GoK, 2012, p. 38). Access to ECE services was one of the lowest in the region in 2004/05, with only 6 percent of children of eligible age. At 12.4 percent in 2016, the coverage is still the lowest in the region but reflects progress. Any model that aspires to fill this gap needs to be scalable, in the sense of being both sustainable and replicable. Sustainability implies the model needs to be low cost, resources need to be renewable over the long term, and good management is required to support quality improvement. Replicability implies the model needs to attract support, be adequately supported with material and training capacity, and be able to respond adequately to local needs.
2. Develop a low-cost model that responds to the capacity and resource constraints facing the country.	The ECE pilot design attempts to respond to the NSED call for alternative, cost-effective models that respond to the capacity and resource constraints facing the country. The groups only stay at the center for three hours a day and the model was designed to be relatively low-cost (at least for central government) by making use of existing resources. It was intended that these features ensure long-term sustainability. The centers were to be housed in school buildings to have the benefit of free rent, free heating, and free electricity; teachers' salaries would be covered by parents' fees. Start-up costs including refurbishment, initial materials, and teacher training would be covered by UNICEF or GPE, or borne by jamoats.

3. Offer a holistic learning program that attends to all aspects of child development.	The 2010 presidential decree calls for an early learning program and a school readiness program (GoT, 2010). The ELDS (2012) lays out standards according to the five domains. The ECE curriculum for the centers is known as Barnoma; the INSET package includes the ECE curriculum (MoES et al., 2013), two modules (NAITRE, 2014a, 2014b), and an ECE teacher guidance manual that is used to deliver ECE teacher training. State kindergartens have their own ECE program called Ranginkamon. The ECE curriculum was developed by national and international experts and it lays out five goals: 1 – promote the psychological and physical health of the child and the development of vital competencies; 2 – advance the level of cognitive development of children; 3 – instill a love for the motherland, national customs and traditions, state language, national values of own people and other peoples; 4 – develop a sense of aesthetics, art, and musical abilities; 5 – ensure collaboration with family and society. The ECE curriculum puts forward an integrated approach to teaching that outlines various activities (speech development, art, basic understanding of math, familiarity with literature and handicrafts, etc.) for use in class. This method aims respond to the development needs of children from a multi- domain perspective; namely, their cognitive, sensory, social, physical, and moral development, linking the ECE curriculum coherently with the ELDS (MoES, 2012).
4. Provide the teaching, program and materials, and environment that support quality education.	Education International's Unite for Quality Education Campaign (Education International, 2016) argues compellingly that quality education depends on a combination of three essential elements: quality teaching, quality tools for teaching and learning, and quality learning environments. Attention to these elements—teacher training, a curriculum and resources for teaching and learning, the physical environment—is evident in the purpose and rationale of the model. However, they were not developed as a coherent quality framework or consistent with a serious commitment to quality education. Consequently, they were inadequately thought through in the design and are not fully carried through in the implementation of the model, as the next section will show. Nevertheless, the intention is that ECE teachers are trained ultimately through the regional Teacher Training Institutes or another suitable institution. UNICEF has organized its own trainings and GPE funding (GPE, 2012) was allocated to support training for ECE centers not in the pilot. Considerable effort was mobilized to develop a suitable and holistic ECE curriculum, the Barnoma program. Initial materials were

	provided by UNICEF, and the hope was that parents, and perhaps the schools, would contribute additional toys and stationery, as the Barnoma program requires a lot of material. Community involvement and local government support was important in the design of the model; the centers were to be located within schools so that they would benefit from being under the wing of a larger institution. The intention was to reach out to parents and secure local government support with enabling policy at the federal level.
5. Ensure inclusion for marginalized children: girls, children with disability, and ethnic minorities.	The purpose and of the model was to reach rural and remote communities, involve parents, and secure the commitment of local governments. This was well intended, but the rationale overlooks what is widely known about most of the country and particularly rural and remote communities: they have very meagre resources. Reaching and including children that most need the support of ECE services is fundamental to the purpose and rationale of the ECE pilot. It seems no careful thought was given to this in the design of the model. At a meeting of the Association of Parents with Disabled Children (APDC) of Dushanbe, Khujand, and Khorog (APDC, 2015) three principles that should guide inclusive education we identified: • Students with disability have the right to learn, develop skills, grow socially, and increase self-evaluation; • This should be in an inclusive educational setting with other children; • It is more economically effective for children with disability to stay with their families, and be placed in day schools, not in internats. If the ECE model was serious about inclusion, each of these principles would have been thought through carefully and be reflected in the design. Active collaboration with organizations such as the APDC would be very helpful.
6. Integrate ECE centers within a connected inter-sectoral strategy to support early childhood development in Tajikistan.	While it does not seem to have been an explicit part of the purpose for the creation of the ECE centers pilot, a commitment to integrated early childhood development is a legacy of UNICEF's longstanding commitment to work in this sector. The Regional Advisor on ECD (Grover, 02Feb17) confirmed that there is also a renewed emphasis on inter-sectoral work within the regional UNICEF-CIS office. An integrated approach to ECD intersects with several public sectors and includes a range of services such as health screening and preventive health, child protection, family support, and early childhood education. The SABER country report (WB, 2013, p. 3) provides a checklist list for promoting coordinated and integrated interventions for young children and their families, these include: healthcare, nutrition, early learning, social protection, and child protection. An integrated approach has been shown to be crucial for levelling the playing field for children at risk, especially those from different socio-economic backgrounds and poor neighborhoods.

Process and partners in the design of the model

This section explores the work and contribution of AKF and Open Society, and the similar thinking that led up to the creation of their ECE centers. The director of education programs at the Aga Khan Foundation (Mamadfosilov, 14Nov16), relates the history of the establishment of the ECE centers from the inception of early ideas. He reports that ECE centers were first started in the mid-2000s. In 2004-2005, AKF's Early Childhood Program had the goal to teach parents to care about the development of children of preschool age, from prenatal "up to when they go to school." The idea of the AKF program was to get parents to understand not only cognitive development, but holistic development: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. This was because parents tended to think only about safety and cognitive development, and that their children should be able to read, write, and count before going to school.

Parental programs were established where parents could attend together with their children every day for three to four hours. As over 90 percent of children have no access to ECD services in remote areas, a model needed to be found that is not costly but is flexible and can be implemented in remote mountain villages. A concept for an alternative model was developed in 2008 by the teacher training institute in Khorog and the GBAO government. Kyrgyzstan had implemented its own ideas for alternative models much earlier and AKF arranged study visits to both Kyrgyzstan and to Afghanistan, which had devised its own model. In Kyrgyzstan, it was feasible to establish kindergartens. In Tajikistan AKF decided to establish school-based centers. In Afghanistan, the initiatives are community-based but function in people's homes. The rationale in Tajikistan is that there are many schools and many that have additional classrooms that could serve as ECE classrooms. A model was designed that could be implemented with shared responsibilities by schools, government, training institutes, and communities. As the government only pays salaries for kindergarten teachers, the new model, like the UNICEF model, did not have money for teacher salaries and the idea was that parents would have to pay, although there was to be a contribution from the school for heating and possibly maintenance. Some districts are able to use local taxes, some rely on governmental support.

From the perspective of the Open Society Foundations (Dastambuev et al., 14Nov16), the idea of alternative preschool service for children was formed in 2004. The foundation worked with an international consultant, contracted by both UNICEF and Open Society. The main aim of these early efforts was to provide preschool education for remote regions, mostly mountainous, that did not have preschools. Open Society knew that low coverage and low quality were the two key problems. The focus at that time was the care and education of children, and Open Society developed a program that could be used in preschools that emphasized parent's involvement. The centers Open Society Foundations opened around 2009/10, however, used an approach to education that was in some respects like primary school, as it was considered important to get the many children aged 5 and 6 ready for school. The involvement of parents, particularly those that had lost out on their own education during the civil war, is thought to be particularly important.

The AKF approach (Zuloby, 14Nov16) is to bring together parents before the centers opened to explain the advantages of early education and parent support. The proposed arrangement was that parents cover the salary of the teacher and a snack for children. The school would maintain the center and ensure heating, electricity, and that the teacher was trained. This model was piloted in two districts of Badakhshan, where it worked well.

The model was presented to UNICEF while the organization was working on early learning standards; the government was also interested and the decision was taken to pilot the scheme in two other regions where UNICEF works. Additional money was provided to expand the pilot in Shugnan and Rasht. An evaluation (impact study) of this pilot (AKF-IPD, 2008) revealed significant improvements in the social skills, math, and literacy of the children in the program. This provided confidence that the model works well.

UNICEF and AKF organised a workshop in June 2010 to support the MoES (Collegium) to develop a mixed-model preschool system capable of expanding access to early learning programs across the country (UNICEF, 2010a). Two weeks after the workshop, a presidential decree was announced to start an early learning and school readiness program in Tajikistan, located in schools (GoT, 2010). The

ECE pilot was started later in 2010 with money from UNICEF for the initial centers. Subsequent developments included a cost effectiveness analysis (UNICEF, 2010) and a study of how increasing children's access to early learning opportunities impacts children, parents, and communities (AKF-IPD, 2011). The GPE-4 grant in 2012 strengthened the capacity of existing 432 ECE centers. Active collaboration between AKF, MoES, UNICEF, and the WB led to the development of the ECE curriculum (MoES et al., 2013). A group of 22 national trainers from different regions was convened, and training commenced with support from the GPE grant. The regional training institutes became involved to develop the two modules (UNICEF & AKF, 2014a, 2014b); these were supported by AKF-IPD in GBAO. Staff from these institutions were also involved in the development of the national curriculum, the teachers package, developing national trainers, and mentoring.

Open Society Foundations uses the Step by Step training program, which emphasizes the importance of involving parents. When the organization started opening centers in remote rural areas in 2011, many of the poor children did not know how to hold a pen, and a number of the teachers still have not been through the Step by Step training five years later (Dastambuev et al., 14Nov16). All the initial teachers were trained primary school teachers. Many children in these areas from very poor families did not even have a pen to write with. Most of the children are aged 5 and 6; younger children are too young for the school-based program, and a new program is being developed for them that focuses on learning through playing. The Open Society Foundation preschools Abduhamedova refers to do not use the Barnoma curriculum and are not part of the UNICEF-supported model. The issues they face, she maintains, are very similar.

Mamadfosilov (14Nov16) explains that the only zero classes are designed for children in GBAO who do not speak Tajik as their first language. AKF continues their work with parents and communities and are currently working with 166 halifats. Teachers report huge gaps between children whose parents spend time with them and those whose parents do not. Typically, AKF provides support for only the first one-and-a-half years, after which the community needs to take on responsibility.
AKF and provincial government are aiming for 100 percent coverage and have established ECD management committees in each village; these include the head

of the mahallah, a religious leader, the school director, and other influential members of the community. A six-day training for members of the management committees includes the legal base for establishing centers, budgeting, and management of ECE. The committee oversees expenses related to ECE centers, identifies gaps, and does fundraising to try to find money for children who don't attend the ECE centers. Farmers, local companies, and migrants all help to organize attendance. In winter, the ECD committees organize volunteers among the Grade 10 and 11 students in the village to take children to ECE centers and back home.

The OSI Education Program Director (Dastambuev et al., 14Nov17) reports that each district has a list of the children of school age and thus knows which children are of kindergarten age. OSI also plans to find an approach for "identifying children with disability" and emphasizes that the approach needs to focus on the child's needs rather than worry about the diagnosis. In rural communities everyone knows each other, and they know exactly which kids have special needs. The Education Program Director also explains that not all teachers are ready to teach an inclusive class. OSI offers training on inclusive education and is trying to involve community members; they find a lot of interest in the ECE centers from local government.

AKF implements a family reading program in villages that do not have ECE centers and establishes libraries in schools without ECE centers. Parents are encouraged to read to their children; once they see the value of this practice they tend to approach AKF on their own initiative to ask for help in establishing an ECE center.

Table 5: ECD centers supported by key partners, 2015

Food Group	UNICEF	AKF	OSIAF	MoES	Total
Total number of ECE groups	11	9	10	4	8
Total number of children	5	5	6	0	1
Target age group	2	1	3	1	1

Source: EMIS, Ministry of Education and Science

The UNICEF-supported model is thus part of a spectrum of efforts within Tajikistan to establish a sustainable, cost effective, high quality early learning experience for children that involve communities and local government. The role of organizations such as UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation is crucial for creating impetus around ideas, demonstrating quality in the centers they manage, and connecting efforts in Tajikistan with international experience. The breakdown of ECE centers supported by the key partners is provided in Table 5 above.

Location and beneficiaries

As pointed out in the limitations section, this research collected no empirical evidence to describe the locations or beneficiaries in any detail. In summary, however, the 225 pilot ECE centers are spread across 18 of 62 districts, and 132 of 408 jamoats; roughly 30 percent of the districts and 30 percent of the jamoats. They are mostly situated in rural areas, supposedly in school buildings, but the case studies indicate that this is not always the case and the location may be a local kindergarten; an old, vacated school building; or somewhere else. Figure 1 (see page 11) provides an at-a-glance view of the location of the centers by district. The ECE pilot was designed to reach marginalized and at-risk children. Site location selections have been consistent with this intention. The two case studies, however, indicate that the beneficiaries may not include the at-risk groups the pilot hoped to reach. While there appears to be ethnic diversity, girls, for whatever reason, are hugely underrepresented at the Rasht sites; almost all participating children appear to be 6 years old; and disabled children are absent everywhere.

3.2) Results and challenges

This section reviews the implementation of the ECE pilot, the results achieved, and the challenges faced, based on the data researched for this report. The six previously described propositions for the ECE pilot provide the structure for the discussion.

1. Expanding access

The first proposition is that the ECE centers should expand access by creating new

forms of pre-school education institutions that can be scaled up. A total 225 ECE centers were established with UNICEF support over the six years of the pilot; a further 1,363 have been set up independently all over Tajikistan by other agencies, communities, and government entities. This suggests the model is essentially replicable; however, these combined efforts only reach about 40,000 children, probably in the region of 9 percent of children aged 5 and 6. This is not insignificant growth after six years, but it is still too slow. The model is supposed to reach and include children from 4 to 7 years of age, but has primarily come to be regarded as a preparation year for school and most children, at least in the sites visited, appear to be 6 years of age.

There has been relatively significant growth in the number of children in the state kindergarten sector from the very low 58,000 in 2009 to 92,000 in 2016, a growth of about 60 percent. The number of state kindergartens has also grown from 487 to 578, about 20 percent over this period. As we have established, given the low overall enrolment rates, this is an insufficient rate of growth that is essentially just keeping pace with population growth. ECE pilot and other ECE centers nationally serve approximately 132,000 children—roughly 100,000 fewer than the number of children in state kindergartens in the 1980s. Even if the number of children in the ECE centers in GBAO was 10,000 in 2010, which is a lot, this 400 percent growth far outstripped growth in the state sector. This is a good result in terms of relative numbers; actual numbers are insufficient to meet the challenge of expanding access for a majority of children, and far from the 30 percent coverage the government wants to achieve by 2020 (Latofat, 14Nov16).

Also, as the discussion of the results under the remaining propositions shows, numbers are only part of the story and they cannot be assessed in isolation. The ability to scale up effectively does not only depend on the cost of the model, which is discussed under proposition two, it also depends significantly on whether enabling policies and the institutional processes and capacities for oversight and management are in place. Of course, the availability of financial resources is crucial; these include the financial status of local authorities, the ability of families to pay, and whether the state will accept that early childhood education is a public good it has a responsibility to maintain. The quality of young children's experiences in the

ECE centers and the effect it has on their lives and their learning also has yet to be fully understood.

Despite the encouraging growth in ECE coverage, Tajikistan has seen over the past decade persistent and severe resource and capacity restraints that include the availability of ECE teachers, training and support for teachers, and monitoring and management at systems-level. The most urgent challenge the UNICEF ECE model faces is how to scale up while preserving the essential elements of quality.

2. Developing a low-cost model

The second proposition is that the ECE centers should **develop a low-cost model that responds to the capacity and resource constraints facing the country**. The SABER country report (WB, 2013, p. 9) notes that: "[t]he level of public sector financial commitment to ECD is low in education and difficult to ascertain in other sectors." The Asian Development Bank (2016) points out that in 2012, spending on preschools was 6.9 percent of the education budget of local governments—a significant increase from 5.4 percent in 2007. Capital expenditures were also low ($1.4 million in 2012). There are reports of further increases in expenditure in recent years, which would require additional research to establish.

Thus far, there has been welcome support for the ECE pilot from international donors. Component one of the 2012 GPE grant allocated $1.7 million to support the growth of the ECE centers; this included plans to set up 250 centers and train 700 teachers (GPE, 2012). For continued scale-up of the model and sustained momentum for growth, further support from the GPE combined with an allocation form the central budget appear to be essential, particularly in the short term. Sustainability challenges in the mid- to longer-term will likely become more pronounced, especially if the expansion everyone wants to achieve materializes. Over the long term, however, a serious policy commitment to progressively achieving access to ECE for all children is needed at the level of the local government.

A comparison of costs in 2013 (UNICEF, 2013) revealed recurring ECE center costs to be low (±$5 per month, per child) compared with traditional kindergartens (±$40 per month, per child). While that calculation might have been correct based on

the figures available, this research reveals that it is not likely to be accurate and is probably not helpful. ECE centers have significant resourcing needs related to the inability of all parents to pay consistently and teachers having to buy many of the materials they need to implement the program and clean the classroom from their own pockets (JB1DTI, 09Nov16). Open Society reports a "general perception" in their remote rural locations (Dastambuev et al., 14Nov17) that everyone must pay because the teacher needs to buy equipment to keep the study room clean. These schools are not part of the UNICEF pilot, which suggests that this phenomenon is widespread. The SABER country report (WB, 2013) notes that the "affordability of the model for parents" should be analysed; they recommend an evaluation of the model to inform scale-up and other interventions. Initially, it was assumed that the centers would be located in schools to save them from having to pay for rent, electricity, and heat. The Deputy Minister (Latofat, 14Nov16) confirmed that while the majority of ECE centers are based within schools, a number of them are based in kindergartens. However, the schools and kindergartens may not have sufficient resources to bear the costs of the ECE centers in addition to their own costs. This is an assumption that needs to be tested.

The Barnoma program, which was developed for the ECE centers, requires a lot of stationery materials such as paints, chalk, colored paper, markers, stickers, etc. that provide a stimulating range of activities for the children. Inadequate thought and planning was devoted to who would pay, so this has not worked out well in implementation. As explained, parents contribute only occasionally for stationery and it is more-or-less expected that the teacher provides the learning materials (JB1DTI, 09Nov16; Dastambuev et al., 14Nov16). In addition, parents are often behind on payments and for some months of the year, at least at some centers, they do not pay at all (JB1DTI, 09Nov16). A second group at two of the sites (JB1 and R1) had to close because parents did not pay.

The shortage of funds at the state level and the lack of clear legislative and regulatory provisions for the function of the ECE centers present major challenges, not only for expanding the model but for adequately sustaining the centers that currently exist. The financial officers in the two districts who understand the financial challenges the model faces believe the answer lies in extending the per capita

financing system to the ECE centers (JB3FCI, 10Nov16; R3FI, 12Nov16). They also point out that proper legislative status is needed before a bank account can be opened and regular financing arrangements for accepting fees and paying salaries and other costs can be put in pace.

3. Offering a holistic learning program

The third proposition is that the ECE centers should **offer a holistic learning program that attends to all aspects of child development**. Barnoma builds from a philosophy of integrated and holistic learning that offers a wide range of stimulating activities and learning approaches (individual and group work) within the class to promote the child's development across all key domains (MoES et al., 2013). This is easier said, the saying goes, than done. Site visits did reveal that the teachers are using or know of the Barnoma program, particularly the teachers in one school in Jalaloddini and another Rasht (JB1 and R1) who demonstrated an impressive range of methods in their teaching. The teachers at the two other schools, however (JB2 and R2), were a lot more focused on teaching the children to read, write, and count, which they understood to be what parents want, echoing what Obidova (14Nov16) discovered elsewhere on her trip to Isfara, where parents "absolutely did not agree" that children should learn through games. Similar attitudes where noted by Open Society in the centers they have been setting up since 2011 in remote areas (Dastambuev et al., 14Nov16). The Regional Advisor on ECD (Grover, 02Feb17) also has the perception that most of the children in the ECE centers are 6 years old and that ECE centers are seen as a de facto grade zero year. Obidova (14Nov16) agrees that children in the ECE centers should not be learning the Grade 1 program; she feels they will then waste time in their first year of school. In fact, if they wait for other children to catch up, any advantages they may have had from starting early are likely to disappear within a few years.

The case studies demonstrate that despite the best intentions of the ECE curriculum to deliver a holistic, multi-domain method for teaching and learning, most teachers teach like primary school teachers, not ECE teachers, and they focus primarily on teaching reading, writing, counting, and arithmetic. Teachers know that this is what parents want. Each of the four teachers used some elements of Barnoma, two more than the other two, but they buy most of the materials themselves. In certain respects, this "new form of ECE" looks much like a zero grade class (nulyevoi klass). The challenge to get this

right will involve changing the attitudes of parents as much as ensuring that all teachers complete ECE training and are subsequently supported to implement the curriculum.

4. Providing an environment that supports quality education

The fourth proposition is that ECE centers should provide the teaching, program and materials, and environment that support quality education. This section is structured around the three pillars of quality education put forward in Education International's "Unite for Quality Education"[8] campaign.

• Quality teaching:

International best practice shows that quality teaching is a consequence of a sequence of actions: the recruitment of the best and most suitable candidates, the provision effective ECE teacher education and support throughout their career, a professional community of peers, and continuous professional development. Teachers are the most important educational resource and an essential prerequisite for quality education. There is a long way to go before this describes the context for ECE teachers in Tajikistan. Efforts to address capacity constraints in relation to providing trained ECE teachers have been made since the establishment of the model. The Head of Education at AKF (Mamadfosilov, 14Nov16) mentioned that an initial 22 trainer trainers were supported with money from the GPE grant, and that the regional training institutes have since developed and offer their own ECE courses.

The Dean of the Faculty of Preschool Psychology and Inclusive Education at Tajik National University (TNU) (Obidova, 14Nov16) takes a firm position: she does not think primary school teachers should be permitted to teach early childhood groups. Her view concurs with the deputy minister (Latofat, 14Nov16), who recognizes that staff who work at the centers do not all have qualifications as educators or psychologists for pre-school education. The deputy minister maintains that staff who work in ECE centers should either be primary school teachers or have specific qualifications as pre-school professionals. According to the dean (14Nov16), TNU does not train ECE teachers, they just prepare specialists in early childhood education. They currently have 10 to 15 daytime students. Their part-time evening classes are more popular;

8 https://www.unite4education.org/

there were 68 students in 2015, 90 in 2016, and they expect 176 in 2017. The dean maintains that a number of these students do go on to work in ECE centers.

The specialist in pre-school teacher in-service training at the Teacher Training Institute in Dushanbe, explains that most of the ECE students go through coursework for the state kindergartens, not the ECE centers (Devonshoeva, 10Jan17). ECE teachers get their training from organizations such as UNICEF, Open Society, or AKF. The conditions of work at the ECE centers are clearly not adequate to attract specialist ECE teachers. The dean's perception is that the problem is not so much the lack of available training, but rather the deployment of trained teachers in the remotely placed ECE centers (Obidova, 14Nov16). There is little incentive to go to and teach in remote locations, given that the conditions of employment are so meagre. The dean (Obidova, 14Nov16) agrees it is a good idea to set up ECE centers in "far regions," though, because this is where they are needed.

he specialist (Karimova, 14Nov16), who led the team who developed the ELDS (MoES et al., 2013) and directs the National Academy of Education, was alarmed to find that the teachers she observed on a trip to ECE centers supported by UNICEF and OSI were using the same approach as Grade 1 teachers: "…what I saw was shocking. They created the centers, but they did not prepare the place where the centers would be located, and the teachers are not ready. The teachers were teachers of primary classes and I know that the program for preschoolers and the program for primary classes are totally different." Indeed, as mentioned, none of the teachers at the four sites were trained ECE teachers.

• Quality tools for teaching and learning

The ECE curriculum, apart from the problems associated with adequate implementation, provides a strong basis for developing quality tools for teaching and learning; it includes the ECE curricula (MoES, et al., 2013) and inclusive teaching and learning materials and resources. Two modules for teacher training have been developed (UNICEF & AKF, 2014a, 2014b) based on a good set of standards—ELDS (GoT, 2012). The ECE curriculum is resource-intensive (at least in terms of stationery), which leads to it being underutilized. The deputy minister (Latofat, 14Nov16) reports that while the ECE enters supported by UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, and

Open Society generally meet the necessary requirements, the centers created by local hukumat-level jamoats generally do not meet the standard requirements. Many of these centers also run a dense program that does not have a relaxed, game-based learning approach, and they lack toys and basic educational equipment.

• Quality learning environments

Quality learning environments include supportive, comfortable, safe, and secure facilities to encourage students to learn and teachers to teach. Education International regards a quality environment as not just physical surroundings: "A quality environment also engages parents, students, teachers, school authorities and support staff in a community working together to achieve the goal of providing quality education for all of its students."

The two centers visited in Khatlon were not located in the schools; one was in a poor state of repair (JB1) and the other was in an empty, vacated school building (JB2). The centers visited in Rasht, on the other hand (R1 and R2), appeared to be suitable locations for the ECE groups. The deputy minister's view is that the classrooms allotted by the kindergarten and school administrations are not always appropriate: "In many cases the tables and chairs provided are too big, there is no drinking water, no hot water, and no toilet facilities" (Latofat, 14Nov16).

Community involvement and local government support do not appear to have been adequately facilitated by the design of the program; communities were to be engaged when centers were established and it seems the intention was that communities would continue to be involved. The case studies show primary caregivers at the four centers to be interested; it was apparently relatively easy to get a group of five or six to come to a focus group discussion. However, while their involvements range from chopping wood to looking after the class when the teacher is sick, they do not appear to be involved with children's learning to the extent envisaged in the design. Inevitably, the jamoats ended up taking the burden of supporting the centers largely on their own with no support from central government and, only when lucky, support from international agencies. Rather than facilitating a partnership based even on a modest cost share, the current preschool law shifts responsibility away from central government squarely to local hukumat-level jamoats that have meagre resources (GoK, 2013b).

The compelling idea, when the centers were first launched, was that parents would attend with their children and see how they learn and develop; however, many parents just drop off their children and fetch them a few hours later.

5. Ensuring inclusion for marginalized children

The fifth proposition is that the ECE centers should **ensure inclusion for marginalized children: girls, children with disability, and ethnic minorities**. While this was the intention, the ECE groups seem to attract parents that have a bit of money, not the poorest of the poor and not the disabled. This "capture" by the relatively-well-off in poor areas was inevitable. This is not to say, of course, that the children who attend the centers are from "well-off" families; far from it, many of these families still struggle to pay and are likely to be only modestly better-off than the extremely poor families. We may perceive in these small differences, however, the small and widening crack from which larger social disparities emerge. The grandparent at school R2 in Rasht who did not want her grandchild to be "disturbed" in Grade 1 by "those who were not attending this group" and thinks those who were educated in ECE centers should be in a separate class was not voicing an unpopular view.

We should note here the focus group discussion at the school in Frunze jamoat during which the mother with a disabled child insisted that disabled children would not be accepted, even after another mother encouraged her to bring her child (see pages 56-57). The stigma against disabled children, and often against their mothers, too, runs deep, and is not something that will be turned around by a policy document.

The deputy minister acknowledges that teachers are not trained to deal with disabled children (Latofat, 14Nov16); a mere four training hours are devoted to children with disability in the entire training program for ECE specialists at the TTI in Dushanbe (Devonshoeva, 10Jan17). The prevailing view that "there are special centers that work with these children," is consistent throughout the entire region: children with disability need specialized care in separate specialized institutions. The Dean of the Faculty of Preschool Psychology and Inclusive Education at TNU is aware of places in Rudaki district and Vahdat jamoat where there are places with Down syndrome (Obidova, 14Nov16). She is also aware that there are children with speech problems.

Two of the centers observed did have Uzbek children, and in one center the teacher used a mix of Uzbek language in her teaching. One of the centers used a bit of Russian, and the Barnoma program has several pages devoted to Russian language teaching, which it emphasizes specifically. Centers in GBAO, as mentioned, emphasize the national language, Tajik, as most of the children are second-language Tajik speakers. These findings auger well for the inclusion of children of ethnic minorities, but a larger sample will have to be analyzed before any conclusions can be made.

The joint Program of Cooperation for 2010–2015 between UNICEF and the Government of Tajikistan set a joint and explicit goal: "By end of 2015, the education system ensures increased completion of quality basic education by girls and expands access to quality early learning programs" (UNICEF-Tajikistan, 2010b). The gender balance in education institutions has been closely monitored for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All framework, and has consistently shown an under-representation of girls in rural areas. Nevertheless, a surprising find that merits attention is the under-representation of girls in the ECE centers visited. This is particularly evident in more religiously conservative Rasht; in the last school observed there were 2 girls and 17 boys. The unsubstantiated reason given for this imbalance by local care givers is that more boys than girls are born (R2FG, 11Nov16).

6. Integrating ECE centers into a connected inter-sectoral strategy

The sixth proposition is that the ECE centers should be integrated into a connected inter-sectoral strategy to support early childhood development in Tajikistan. The ECE pilot model does not seem to be regarded as a component of an array of interlinked and complementary set of services and interventions for young children. It should be. This is a solid and very well-founded UNICEF commitment. Instances of inter-sectoral cooperation encountered during the field research appeared to be random and do not seem to have been considered in the original design of the model. This realization should present a significant challenge for the pilot model in its next phase of development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build a collaborative inter-agency approach to secure the policy commitment for, and sustainable financing of, the ECE centers.

UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, and the MoES have shown a sustained and collaborative commitment to develop a new form of pre-school education institutions that operates at low cost. It is neither be possible nor desirable to extend provision to all children through the state kindergarten system and the ECE centers offer a potential way forward. There is still a lot to be done to ensure that the ECE Center model functions as it should to provide a holistic, quality program for all children, as these recommendations make clear. However, the way to build the ECE centers into a form of provision that can be universally realized needs to be built on collaborative inter-agency efforts and advocacy, and accomplished in close partnership with the MoES and GoT, as well as the World Bank. One of the sources of financing to get the ECE centers to the next level would be through a loan by the World Bank.

The executive summary for this report is written to provide a starting point for the preparation of a joint submission to, and full discussion with, the Collegium of the Ministry of Education and Science. There will need to be full agreement on the essential elements and steps that need to be taken to ensure quality ECE delivery. The other recommendations in this report could be considered by all partners and either agreed on or changed.

2. Revise the current pre-school law that enables new forms of ECE provision and lays out a workable quality framework for early learning.

The current Pre-school Law (GoT, 2013b) and the Law on Education (GoT, 2013a) are wholly inadequate in the provisions they make for the new forms of early

education envisaged in the NSED-2020 (GoT, 2012). The new pre-school law should reflect and reinforce the key aspirations of an equitable and fully inclusive policy for early learning and care.

Three steps would be necessary to ensure that the final law is adequate:

- First, international and regional experience should be concisely summarized . The focus of this work should be to establish the legal intent, describe and provide a contextual analysis of the legal regulations, and report on any information that can be found on the consequences of the legislation in the short to mid-term.
- Second, a re/drafting team should be set up that includes legal experts appointed by the GoT, ECE experts, and stakeholder groups from civil society and donor agencies.
- Third, a national seminar should be held to discuss the findings and pass on formal recommendations to legislators.

3. Develop a quality framework for ECE centers for review and approval by the Collegium of the Ministry of Education.

It should be expected that any new ECE model will strive for an acceptable form of quality in relation to the learning experience of the child, and that the assessment of learning outcomes reflects a holistic rather than a narrow cognitive focus. Ten key principles for a quality framework for early childhood education and care prioritized by the European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care are suggested below (EC, 2014, p. 9). Two additional principles on quality teaching learning and environments, developed by Education International (2016), the global confederation of teachers' unions, are added, bringing the framework for quality education suggested here to a list of 12 principles. These are as follows:

Access	1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children; 2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion, and embraces diversity;
Teachers	3. Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role; 4. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership that enables time for observation, reflection planning, teamwork, and cooperation with parents;
Curriculum	5. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values, and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way; 6..A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues, and parents, and to reflect on their own practice;
Monitoring and Evaluation	7. Monitoring and evaluation produces information at the relevant local, regional, and national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice; 8. Monitoring and evaluation that is in the best interests of the child;
Teaching and learning environments[9]	9. Teaching and learning environments are supportive, comfortable, and safe and secure, with the appropriate facilities to encourage student learning and to enable teachers to teach effectively; 10.Parents, students, teachers, school authorities, and support staff in a community working together to achieve the goal of providing quality education for all students;
Governance	11. Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organizations; 12. Legislation, regulation, and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publically subsidized or funded early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

9 Taken from Education International's three pillars of quality education developed for their Unite for Quality Education campaign.

4. Undertake a formative evaluation of the ECE curriculum and set up a process to revise and adjust it based on its first six years of implementation.

The ECE curriculum (MoES et al., 2013, 2013) stipulates specific technical provisioning and emphasizes that teachers should encourage active learning. It includes examples of daily time tables and work for groups. It does not describe how many hours should be used for the different aspects of the program, which could lead to significant and cumulating imbalances in daily instruction. The curriculum mentions special needs children, but does not go on to develop this important area of work or deal with how teachers manage inclusion.

The ECE curriculum appears to be quite prescriptive for teachers. It is helpfully detailed in its discussion of outcomes and activities related to the five domains. It possibly takes basic math a bit too far into the school program, unnecessarily deals with superlatives, and could have more emphasis on socialization. It would be very helpful for UNICEF to undertake a formative evaluation that would establish to what extent teachers find the program instructive and helpful for improving and guiding their practice. Sub-questions might include: do they need additional manuals to demystify the domains; is it possible to use the ECE curriculum as self-instruction materials; and how might collaborative peer support networks and communities of practice be built around this material? It is greatly encouraging to note that the ECE curriculum document positions itself as a working document "in a state of development" (MoES et al., 2013, p. 2), and welcomes amendments and additions.

5. Extend per capita-based financing to the ECE centers using a formula that promotes inclusion and quality.

Per capita financing is an approach to resourcing education where the amount of funding is decided on the number of children—not, for example, the costs of an education institution irrespective of how many children it serves. The formula should be weighted to incentivize both inclusion and quality. Key determinants

in the formula include what the base funding amount will be, what categories of children will be weighted more (provided more money), and the value of the various weights. An example of an approach to incentivize a response to the challenges highlighted in this report for a class of 20 might be:

6 children with no special needs: (12 x 1 = 12) 7 children from social disadvantage (7 x 1.2 = 8.4) 4 students of language minority (4 x 1.5 = 6) 3 students with disability (3 x 2.5 = 7.5) For this group, the total weighted student count equals: 33.9 (12 + 8.4 + 6 + 7.5)	***Other premiums could be added:*** For a qualified teacher (4 points) For a gender balance: i.e. no greater than 8:12 (3 points) For a school in a remote area (3 points) Total additional premiums: 10 (4 + 3 + 3)

The total count for the ECE group = 40.9; Per capita funding provided = 40.9 x base amount1

This amount could be split by various ratios between the central government and various districts or jamoats, depending on their means. For accountability and monitoring, the calculations and allocated amount should be made public.

6. Build long-term partnerships and a long-range strategy to combat stigma against children with disability and strengthen support for their inclusion in the ECE centers.

This research suggests that a further policy for the inclusion of children with disability is not likely to be effective. A longer-term strategy is needed; it should be built from the bottom up with the local affiliates of the Association of Parents of Children with Disability, working in collaboration with their allies in local rights organizations, supporters within government and state agencies, and international donors.

7. Develop an approach to documentation that is driven from the ground up.

Revise the parameters to include professional development and collaboration for teachers and establish a process that negotiates commitment to a locally prioritized and manageable list of key parameters for documentation. Then establish a methodology that focuses on the development of individual portfolios for each child.

With respect to the learning progress portfolio, children's work should be displayed prominently on the walls of the classroom during the year. Individual portfolios should be given to the primary caregiver at the end of the year as a record of the child's progress along with comments from the teacher to guide primary caregivers to assist their child's growth and development. A digitized record of each portfolio could be kept by the teacher, both to enable professional development through annual reflection, comparison, and methodological support, and to build a cumulative portfolio of learning outcomes for the ECE center.

Restructure classroom pedagogy to reflect the different domains, which are currently mentioned but hidden. The ELDS includes a set of standards with an associated indicator and learning activity in each of the five early learning domains.

Facilitate a workshop of teachers to talk about what is important to them in their professional development.

APPENDIX ONE: SOURCES AND REFERENCES

1) Interviews, site visits, and consultations

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Devonshoeva, Tutikhon (10Jan17) Interview, Specialist in preschool teacher in-service training, Teacher Training Institute, Dushanbe

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Imatova, Lutifa (14Nov16) Chief Specialist of the Department of Preschool and Secondary Education and Science, Interview, Dushanbe

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JB1FG (09Nov16) Focus group discussion with parents, Asaev jamoat, Jalalodinni Balkhi District.

JB2DTI (09Nov16) Interview with the director and teacher of an ECE center, Frunze jamoat, Jalalodinni Balkhi District.

JB2FG (09Nov16) Focus group discussion with parents, Frunze jamoat, Jalalodinni Balkhi District.
JB2TI (09Nov16) Interview with a teacher of an ECE center, Frunze jamoat, Jalalodinni Balkhi District.

JB3FCI (10Nov16) Deputy Head of the Department of Finance, Frunze jamoat; Chairman of the Executive committee of Jaloliddin Balkhi District.

JB3SI (10Nov16) Interview with the specialist responsible for ECE center, Department of Education, Isaev jamoat, Jalalodinni Balkhi District.

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Ahmedov, Ravshan	Ministry of Finance
Akobirov Sh.	RITTI (pro-rector)
Babaeva, Lola	OSI
Bazarova, Saodat	World Bank
Irgasheva, Madina	NGO “Economics and Education”
Jumaeva Z.	NGO “Sida”
Kabilova G.	OSI
Kamilova Z.	European Union
Karimova, Irina	Academy of Education
Khabibova Sobira	RITTI (In-Service TTI)
Khachtryan E.	WFP
Khakimzoda S.	Parents Association CwD
Khojaeva Kh.	MoHSPP
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Kholikzoda M.	Ministry of Justice
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Kotibova Sh.	Institute for Education Development
Kudratullo K.	MoHSPP
Kurbanov, Jamshed	UNICEF
Lashkarbekzoda Sh.	Anti Monopoli
Majidova B.	Tajik State Pedagogical University
Mamadfozilov, Zuloby	AKF

APPENDIX TWO: CASE STUDY NOTES

1) Site visit to Jalalodinni Balkhi District in Khatlon

I) The ECE center visited at the school within the Isaev jamoat was established with the support of UNICEF in 2012. As there is no space at the school, it is located in a building close to the school kindergarten. The school director noted, however, that "Such centers should be located outside of the school, not in the school," for the reason that very small children attend the center. The room where the ECE center is located is supposedly temporary: it is old and dilapidated and the ceiling seemed unsafe. The teacher informed the field researcher that parents were prepared to contribute resources for the repair of the room; but the refurbishment was on hold as it was not clear how long the center would be using that room. Children use the toilet and play in the yard belonging to the kindergarten. "We cannot equip our own yard because our location here is temporary," the teacher explained.

The field researcher was able to observe one lesson. Children were sitting in small groups making appliqués of a snowman from colored paper. The teacher was explaining how it should be done. The instruction was very interactive: the teacher gave the children tasks and actively helped them to achieve it. She used both Tajik and Uzbek to explain what to do as some of the children were Uzbek speakers. Once the task was completed by children, she provided evaluative rather than descriptive feedback. For example, she pointed out the mistakes one child had made but only after she had appreciated his efforts. The children appeared to be very proud to be in the group and regarded themselves as "at school". When asked why they like coming to the center, they answered that they like to learn letters and numbers, draw pictures and sing songs 'like real schoolchildren'.

Twenty-five six-year old children attend the group every day from 08:00 to 11:00. The center only offers one group in the morning because the teacher has a part-time teaching position at the primary school. Children are taught according to the

Barnoma ECE Curriculum. However, the teacher complained that she did not have the resources required for the lessons, such as colored paper, pens, pencils and plasticine. She was able to produce only very few toys that had been provided by UNICEF several years back: these included three toy cars and a few children's books. The teacher explained that the neither the school administration nor the parents assist with buying the necessary stationery and she needs to buy it herself.

Picture 1: Lesson in progress at the ECE center, JB1

In a discussion (JB1FG, 09Nov16) within a focus group consisting of parents and care-givers, the following reasons were given for why the children attended:

- The group is only for half a day and it is not necessary to pay for food;
- A parent with a second child in the kindergarten noted that her child in the ECE center was learning more;
- It was an opportunity to learn Tajik for a child whose family spoke only Uzbek at home;
- It was generally important to prepare children for school;
- One parent would have wished to have sent her child to the kindergarten but it was full.

In general, parents were satisfied by the progress they observed in their children.

Children had started in October but already knew many songs, could read six letters and could count up to 10.

The director of the school and the teacher in the ECE center were asked how the center was established at the school. The director (JB1I, 09Nov16) explained that first graders were coming to school without know what to do. She had heard in seminars that others had ECE groups and she approached the education department to see if one could be set up in the Asaev school. She had previously taught in the regional capital for five years and related how the center gives the children a head-start when they come to school: "They already know this is a school and they are able to hold a pen and a pencil." There were several meetings with the local community and parents at which she explained the expected benefits of the center. Interestingly, she noted that the better-off parents agreed immediately to send their children to the center.

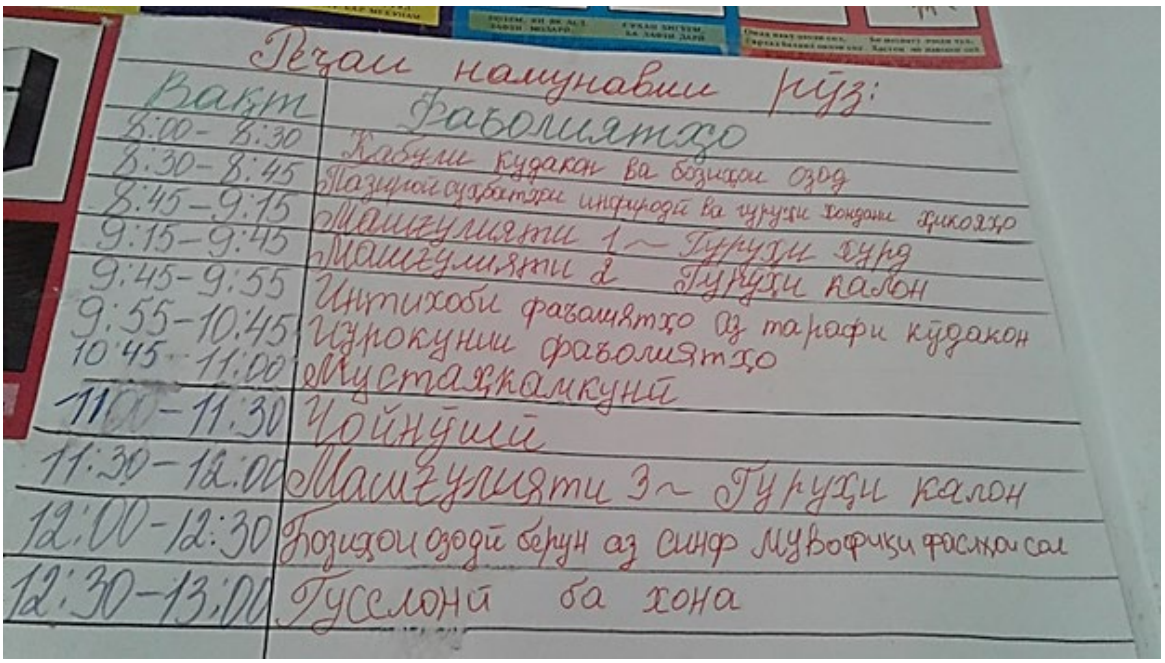
The decision to charge 25 somoni was taken at a meeting with parents, after she explained that parents paid for attendance at other schools. However, most parents only pay 20 *somoni*; some parents pay 15 *somoni*; and sometimes a collection is made for parents who cannot pay at all. It was confirmed that all parents pay fees; although a few might skip a month and pay the next. In the focus-group discussion, however, parents said they pay 30 *somoni* per month for one child and that sometimes the teacher collects additional funds - for instance, an additional 5 *somoni* was collected from parents for buying oilcloth for the windows (JB1FG: 09Nov16). The money is given to the teacher in lieu of a formal salary, seemingly on the understanding that she occasionally buys stationery for the children (JB1DTI, 09Nov16). When pressed as to whether this provided adequate resources for the ECE center, the director said she sometimes helped from the school budget.

Initially, there were two groups at the center and one had closed. The teacher explained that parents were unable to afford the fees (JB1DTI, 09Nov16). She went to visit them at their homes and they confirmed this was the case. There is a waiting list of about 12 parents, however, who would like their children to be taken into the current group. When the teacher was asked why they did not try to re-start a second group, the school director interjected to explain that, because the

salary from the center is low, the ECE teacher teaches a class at the school in the afternoon; and is busy 18 hours a week (i.e. one stavka). She has no time.

The teacher was asked how she managed on this amount, i.e. roughly 400 somoni (±$50) per month. She responded that she likes and enjoys her job and confirmed that she sometimes buys “snacks” for children and paint and paper. Later on in the interview, however, she admitted that she has problems buying all the things that are needed and that the children want: she promises them she will buy things “next month”. She also remarked that she would like more training.

The morning is divided into several classes that last 30-35 minutes. The children have tea and a snack half-way through, usually provided by the parents and supplemented occasionally by the teacher. Lessons include painting pictures and learning poems; play; and fairy tales and stories. There is a lesson program that is approved by the school director. The ECE center teacher visits the primary school to observe lessons taught by trained teachers: “I go and observe how they teach and how they praise the children and how they make the children behave themselves properly.”



Picture 2: Schedule of activities at ECE center, JB1

When asked about the inclusion of children with a disability, the director replied:

"We actually do not have children with disabilities in our village". The director acknowledged that she/he knew of children with disabilities who are of primary school age. When asked about children with disabilities in secondary or high school, the teacher replied: "We will ask."

In response to a question about providing an equal chance for all children to attend the ECE center, the director emphasized that the opportunity is there but parents cannot pay. The school does organize a preparation month in September before school opens. They provide a strong teacher to help children get ready for the school year. The primary school is very short of space however, and it has to have three shifts a day. This was the reason the ECE center had moved to the kindergarten.

Further, individual discussion with the teacher established that she has nine years of experience of working in school, although she has not completed her training. Three years previously she was invited to work in the ECE center; but at the same time secured a part-time position in the school. This enables her to benefit from social security and career-development opportunities. She is also a distance-learning student at a pedagogical institute. After graduation, she could be officially hired by school to teach at primary level. She teaches according to the program that was provided by the local educational department. She participated in a training event conducted by the Education Department during the past summer: it was provided only once. She collects fees from parents, of which 13% goes to taxes in the bank and the rest goes towards her salary and essential cleaning materials and teaching resources for the ECE center. "This money is not enough because some parents do not pay on time," she remarked.

II) The ECE center at the school that was visited in Frunze *jamoat*, also in Jalalodinni Balkhi district, was established with the support of UNICEF in 2013. It is currently located in a room in the old school building. The school itself has moved to a new, recently constructed building. The *jamoat* is in the process of considering if the old building will be refitted as a kindergarten.

The field researcher arrived in the afternoon when children had already finished their classes. A second group was expected within two hours. The teacher (JB2TI,

09Nov16) explained there are two groups at the school of 20 children each. The school administration has a waiting list including 12 children whose parents would like to send their children to this center. However according to the principles of creating ECE centers, there should be no more than 20-25 children in one group. The teacher uses the Barnoma program; but complained that the levels of development of the children vary and not all are ready to learn grammar and counting. The ECE center room is decorated with the children's paintings; visual aids concerning letters; and contains shelves with toys and books on a level accessible to the children.

Picture 3: Ready access shelves the ECE center, JB2

Most of participants who came to the focus-group discussion were grandparents. One of them was an honored teacher who explained that the children demonstrate very high progress in their academic achievements that surpassed "Soviet children" (JB2FG, 09Nov16). "Every day when we have a family dinner together my grandson tells us what he learns from the group, shares interesting stories and sings songs and poems." Participants in the group seemed to agree that the ECE center provides better preparation for school than the local kindergarten. One

participant remarked that her son did not want to learn at first; but that he now brings homework home and he has a timetable for his classes. Another remarked that her son used to cry in kindergarten but he learns poems in the ECE center and is better prepared for school. Yet another confirmed that her daughter had no longer wanted to go to kindergarten but is happy and learning in the ECE center.

Picture 4: Charts on the wall at the ECE center, JB2

ost caregivers in the focus group said they were able to pay the 30 *somoni* fees. A few said they would pay up to 40 as it was worth it. They also collect money to buy toys and wood for the fire heater in winter; and contribute to cleaning and refurbishing the center.

When asked about the attendance of disabled children, one participant said that they would be able to attend if their parent brought them. Another disagreed: “Disabled children won’t be accepted”. The first participant repeated that a disabled child would be accepted if a parent brought her or him to the center. The second replied: “I know that my child is disabled and I won’t bring him here.” The first participant persists: “Why? Your child might receive education too?” The second participant replies again: “I don’t know - he will not be accepted.”

The Uzbek families view the ECE center as an opportunity for their children to learn

Tajik. Most of the parents of these children are labor migrants in Russia. They are interested in the experiences and achievements of their children in these groups and they send money from Russia.

The teacher graduated from the pedagogical institute and has long experience of working in a primary school (JB2TI, 09Nov16). She was invited to work at this ECE center in 2013 by the director of the school. She teaches two groups of children. She reported that the parents send their children to this group because they want their children to be educated: that is why she pays attention to teaching reading, writing and counting. Her explanation for why so few five-year-olds were at the ECE Center was that five-year-olds are not ready to learn what she teaches: "They will need to know numbers and letters and be able to learn poems in order to keep up." This suggests there needs to be a preparation class to prepare children for the preparation class.

The teacher collects a fee of 20 *somoni* from parents. 13% goes on taxes and the remainder is salary. Sometimes the school administration helps by providing books or paper; but everything else including stationery used by the children is bought by teacher. However it was found that the parents and grandparents are very supportive: one grandmother helps the teacher by cleaning the room every day. Other parents look after the flowers growing in the school yard. They bring some bread and sometime provide tea for the children. If the teacher is sick, parents will look after the children at the center. However these contributions are not considered to be in-kind payments.

The director (JB2DTI, 09Nov16) explained that they were able to start one group after an initial meeting with parents in 2011. The center was ready and parents were invited to view it. Not all parents were able to afford the fees, which were 25 *somoni* in 2015 and went up to 30 *somoni* in 2016. The director regards the fees as being the main obstacle to making the center available to all children. Of the 40 children in the two groups, 34 are 6-year-olds and 6 are 5-year-olds. The teacher of the second group said she does not like to give the children homework and prefers to do all the tasks during class. She is not qualified as a teacher; but states that both her parents were teachers and that she learned how to teach from them.

III) Two interviews with officials at the Jaloliddin Balkhi District level confirmed much of what was seen and said in the two site visits. The specialist responsible for the ECE centers (JB3SI, 10Nov16) reported there were 38 ECE groups in Khatlon that cater for 687 children (EMIS 2016 figures are 39 groups for Khatlon). This indicates there is spare capacity in the existing infrastructure in the province even if each group had exactly 20 children: 38 groups x 20 children = 760 children. The specialist notes that this number is very low. There is also a clear distinction for her between the 39 pilot ECE groups and the official tally of 712 ECE centers in Khatlon.

The specialist confirms that parents pay on average 20-25 *somoni*; that this amount is agreed between the parents and the teacher; and that many ECE-center teachers also teach at the school in the afternoon shift.

It was put to her that current patterns of access could reinforce social disparities and tracking in schools, as the children who attended the centers are likely to be placed in the A Class (advanced class); and children in the groups observed were well dressed and had parents who, after all, could afford the modest fees. The specialist agreed all children should be able to attend; and she drew attention to the mandatory school-readiness month that offers a structured program every August for children going to school for the first time in September. She reports that there are lists of children who are of school starting age; and points out that part of the teachers' job is to locate them and get them to start school on time.

The field researcher asked who identifies children with disabilities. The specialist responded that this is the responsibility of the health authorities; but that there is no diagnostic center in the district. She had heard of a possible agreement with the Embassy of Japan for establishing a center. She agrees that parents often have no idea that their child may have a disability; and mentions that five salaried specialists are attached to a program in the district run by UNICEF whose job it is to go to homes to find children with disabilities. To her knowledge, no child of preschool age with a disability has yet been identified, although this information should be passed on to the *jamoats*. There is a PMPC[11] in the district with paid

11 The Psychological-Medical-Pedagogical Commission: OECD (2005) data reported 67 PMPC's at district level under the responsibility of the local public health care department, of which 48 were working and 19 no longer functional.

staff, who appear to have responsibility for identifying children with special needs. The specialist reports that most children with special needs are 'taught at home' although "those kids who are able to pass the exam can join others at school."

The field researcher remarked that she had seen children with disabilities in one of the primary schools but none had been observed in the ECE groups. The specialist responded that they are working on this at the level of the regional government and the plan is to open a separate facility for children with disabilities. They are looking for a foreign donor. The purpose of the center will be to help the children integrate into the mainstream. The specialist reported that she personally visits a family with three blind children. She had arranged for the oldest in 8th grade and who reads braille to enter school. She acknowledges a lot of work needs to be done with parents so that they are not afraid to bring their children forward.

There are 14 social workers in the district; and some of the villages have a youth center. She reports that Jalalodinni district has a tradition of parents taking the initiative and building schools and classes. The district center she has in mind will bring specialists and the community together to strengthen education provision for children in the region.

The head of the department of finance in Frunze *jamoat* and the chairman of the executive committee for the Jalalodinni Balkhi District (JB3FCI, 10Nov16) pointed out that it is not legal for teachers take money directly from parents and that they have no knowledge of teachers having to use this money for buying equipment and learning materials. They pointed out that schools are funded on the basis of per-capita funding: the solution they propose is that teachers in the ECE centers should be included on this basis as well.

They plan to increase the number of private kindergartens in the district as there is no additional financing for state preschools. They repeat that all money collected should, by law, be put into a special account set up by the school and not paid to the individual teacher. "If the money does not go through us they just put it in their pocket and that's it."

2) Site visit to Rasht

I) The first field trip was to an ECE center in the town of Tojikobad in the Kalai Surkh jamoat in Rasht. The ECE center was established in 2011 with the support of UNICEF and is located in a room in the new school building. Twenty-five noticeably well-dressed children attend the group and the field researcher was able to observe one lesson.

Picture 5: The ECE Center, R1

In the lesson, the teacher mixed three activities: children recited a poem they had prepared at home; they then counted from 1-10 in three languages – Tajik, Russian, and English; and then they sang a song. There was not much physical movement. The classroom infrastructure was good: it contained many printed posters, shelves with toys, books and stationery. When children were asked what they like, they replied: “Drawing and singing songs.” A gender unbalance was noticeable: 70% were boys.

In the focus-group discussion (R1FG, 11Nov16), most of the participants were fathers who demonstrated a high level of attention to their child’s development and said they provided active support to the teacher. Chopping wood for the fire is later given as an example. They gave the following reasons for why the children attended the center:

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- Education is very important for a child's life and future;
- One had also sent an older son and was satisfied with the program;
- There is no local kindergarten but the parent 'liked the idea' of the ECE center;
- One father was a labour migrant in Russia. His wife is very tired from looking after 3 children and if one goes to the center for half of the day it makes it easier for her;
- One was a former director of the school whose grandchildren go to the group;
- One child simply likes to attend the center.

Participants in the focus-group discussion tended to regard the group as Grade Zero and they had already bought school uniforms for their children. They think the group is supported totally by the school. They consider their child has made noticeable progress and they notice their new songs and poems at home. One participant mentioned (his) child practices at home and writes with a pen and notebook. When asked about the lack of girls in the group, the answer was that fewer girls are being born and the number is decreasing every year, although there is no research that supports this view.

Participants said they were willing to contribute the 20 somoni per month fee. They acknowledge this is difficult for some parents. They spoke of a meeting that was being organized to talk about how to help families that cannot afford to send their children. There were different opinions on whether 12 or 30 families needed help.

The view of the group seems to be that a one-year-program is more pragmatic and easier to make accessible to all than a 2-3 year program.

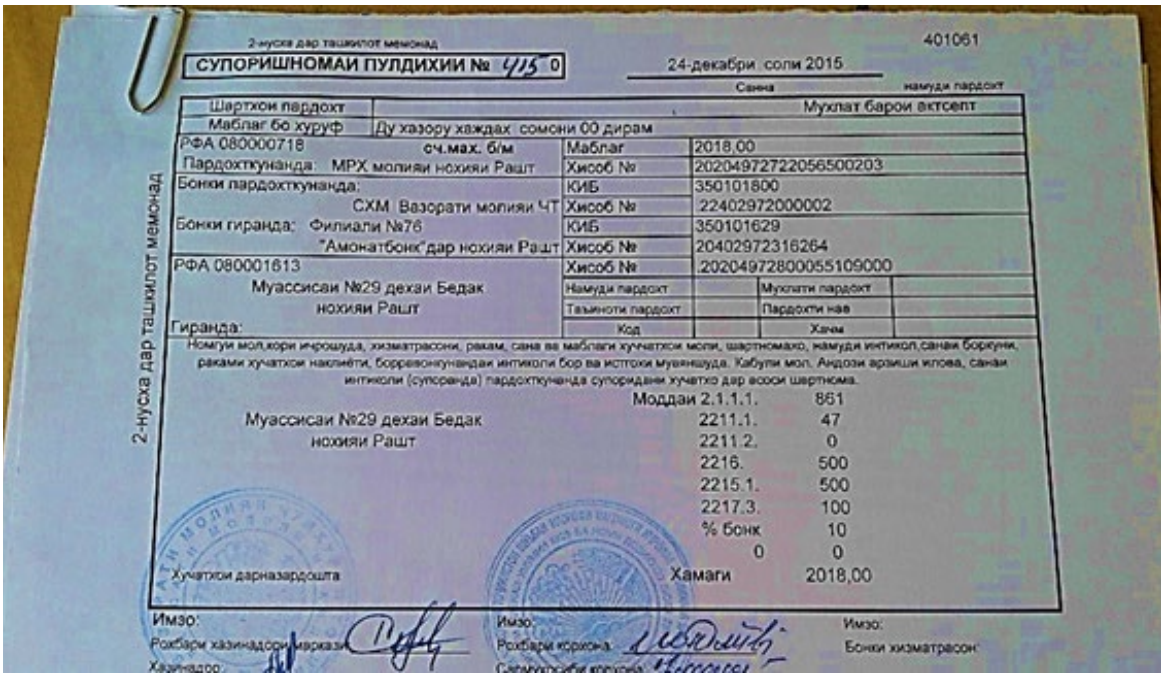
Picture 6: Fathers and a grandfather the in the focus group, R1

The director of the school is new. In his and the ECE teacher's interview with the field researcher (R1DTI, 11Nov16), he mentions that the most important issue related to the ECE center is the salary of the teacher. The school bookkeeper calculates her salary as one stavka[12] for an unqualified teacher, i.e. 283 per month for 16 working hours per week. This is the monthly salary she should be given from the parents' fees. However, as parents do not pay on time the center was closed in January, March and May 2016. This of course meant that the learning program was not complete properly. As a consequence of this experience, the group of parents signed a contract between school and parents. However, parents still do not seem to be able to pay consistently; and the group may continue in this irregular fashion.

In the interview (R1DTI, 11Nov16), the teacher said that there is a lack of methodological support. She does not like the *Barnoma* program because she finds it does not cater for children of different levels and ages in one classroom. Some of the children are ready to learn reading and mathematics; others are still getting familiar with the alphabet. The teacher said she does not know how a

12 "In the stavka system, a teacher's base salary is calculated on a weekly statutory teaching load. One Stavka is typically 18-20 hours a week of classroom teaching. However, one Stavka is only about 50-60% of the total salary, and is perceived as an unprofessional and unattractive job. (Silova, Globalisation on the margins)

student-oriented approach could be implemented in such a diversified class. She was quite animated on this issue and, turning, wrote on the blackboard in Tajik



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СУПОРИШНОМАИ ПУЛДИХИИ № 415 0

24-декабри соли 2015

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Номгуи мол,кори иҷрошуда, хизматрасони, рақам, сана ва маблағи ҳуҷҷатҳои асоси, шартномаҳо, намуди интиқол,санаи боркуни, рақами ҳуҷҷатҳои наклиёти, боргеронкунандаи интиқоли бор ва истгоҳи муайяншуда. Кабули мол. Андозаи арзиши иловa, санаи интиқоли (супоранда) пардохткунанда супоридани ҳуҷҷатҳо дар асоси шартнома.

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Рохбари хазинадори мраза
Хазинадор

Имзо:
Рохбари корхона

Имзо:
Бонки хизматрасон

Picture 7: The calculation of a teacher's salary, R1

"Ман аз мактаб омадам" or *"I am back from school"* to illustrate how seriously the children regard the center, as this is what they say when they return home each day. The teacher said she would like to have the possibility of meeting with teachers from other ECE centers in a systematic way so they might discuss issues around students' academic achievements, teachers' professional development, and how to use materials and innovative methods. The teacher attended a UNICEF training seminar in 2013, which was for 8-9 days.

II) This ECE center in Bedak village in Navdi *jamoat* is located in the school and has good infrastructure. There appears to be adequate stationery, toys, furniture and books. This center was established by UNICEF in 2011 and the refurbishment of the room that is used for the center was done by the school administration. It is very warm, clean and comfortable in the classroom. Children are not isolated from schoolchildren and could spend their breaks playing with other children in the schoolyard.

The field researcher had the chance to observe a lesson, during which it was

demonstrated that children are taught intensively: they read aloud and practice writing and math. The children mentioned that they like drawing, appliqué and plasticine. Everyone was fully involved in the learning process. Despite the teacher being very young and a distance-learning student at the pedagogical institute, she demonstrated a range of different strategies for teaching: singing songs, learning poems, telling stories, describing pictures, and doing peer assessment. She provided descriptive feedback and teaches in both Tajik and Russian. However there were 17 boys and only two girls in the class.

All children have their own copybook and portfolio. The teacher explained that this was the wish of the parents: parents want an academic program "like in school." That was also the explanation that was given for dressing children in school uniform when this is not a requirement of the center. One of the participants confirmed this in the focus-group discussion (R2FG, 11Nov16): "Nobody forces the children to wear a uniform: children ask for the uniforms since they are going to study and they connect the uniform with learning."

Picture 8: Boys (mostly) in the ECE center, R2

These children appeared to be more confident than the children in Khatlon. They openly answered questions. The children said that their neighbors and friends would also like to attend this group. One child said: "My friend could not come

here because he is lazy and not smart like me."

Most of the participants in the focus group (R2FG, 11Nov16) were grandparents. They were very satisfied with sending their children to this center because they felt confident the children would be prepared for school: they could read, write and count, sing songs, draw pictures and recite poems. They also felt that being in a group with other children was a good thing. "We don't have kindergarten here in our area, so this group is a better solution". One of the grandparents who was the head of the *mahallah*[13] said that their local community was very supportive of the ECE center and if there were more centers they would try their best to help them.

They were very comfortable with the idea of their children being ahead of the other children in their first year at school. One participant remarked: "Our children will know a lot that they will not know. Ours will know poems. We suggest that those who have not attended this group should have a separate class so that they won't disturb our children." When they were asked about inclusion of children with disabilities, participants said it was very challenging for them as they had not paid attention to this issue before. They asked for our suggestions and recommendation about what should be done with such marginalized children. Participants also insisted there was no need for teaching in Uzbek as 'almost' everyone in the area was Tajik. Their view on why there were only two girls in the group was that they felt there were fewer girls in general. A quick count of children in each of their families revealed they had 10 boys and 4 girls between them.

The participants pay 30 somoni per month and stated they were happy to do so as. They know the money is for the teacher as she is not paid for this work. They knew of other centers where teachers were not paid for up to three months and had left as a result. In their opinion, most ECE teachers were waiting to get jobs in the primary school. They know that their teacher spends her salary on paints and other equipment. They claimed that they also buy learning materials for their children. They mentioned that they try to support their children's attendance by providing snacks for school (bread and apples), buying a uniform, exercise books or a pencil case. A lot of things are sent by their parents in Russia.

13 In Tajikistan, the word Mahallah (traditional village council) was known before the Soviet period. (The word Shura was known as well in South Tajikistan, it is parallel to the village institution in Afghanistan.)

Picture 9: Grandparents in the focus-group discussion, R2

he director of the school is very supportive of the ECE center (R2DTI, 11Nov16). Several years before, she had participated in a training group on the importance of ECD; and on her return to the district she had asked the local administration to help her establish such a center at her school. She hopes to establish more centers like this one because she hopes that all first-grade children will be able to attend them. Currently, she places the children who have attended the ECE group in a separate class in the primary school because they are ahead of the other children.

The teacher informed the field researcher that she likes to work with the children and that she learns a lot from her communication with them. She did mention that the salary is too small; and while some parents promise to pay, they never do. She is very thankful that some parents help her with the furnace to keep the room warm for the children.

March 31, 2017