A unique approach to school readiness
“Getting Ready for School: A Child-to-Child Approach” is an innovative and cost-effective approach to early education. This method aims to foster a rhythm of schooling by preparing preschool children and their families for on-time school enrolment and success.

Recognizing the lack of formal preschools and other early learning opportunities for most children in developing countries, this strategy builds on the natural phenomenon of younger children learning from and interacting with older children. Rather than replace comprehensive early childhood development (ECD) programmes, the programme provides a low-cost alternative for supporting young children’s school readiness in communities where formal ECD programmes are unavailable to most families.

The initiative – a collaboration between the Child-to-Child Trust and UNICEF – builds on a successful health promotion model that has been widely used in many developing countries.

UNICEF completed two independent evaluations of this pilot project. The Getting Ready for School (GRS) programme enjoyed a highly successful pilot implementation in several countries, and plans are being developed to expand the programme into more countries and regions and integrate it into other UNICEF quality education programmes.
1. A Child-to-Child Approach

The Getting Ready for School programme provides older children with guidance and information that they then share with younger children in the community through formal and informal means. Through such interactions, the younger children develop early learning competencies and are better prepared to start school at the right age, while the older children gain confidence and self-esteem.

The Getting Ready for School pilot programme was first implemented in Bangladesh, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tajikistan and Yemen. Factors considered in selecting these countries included:

- Low levels of primary school enrolment
- High levels of over-age children enrolled in primary school
- Low preschool coverage and absence of other early learning opportunities and programmes
- Poor retention rates, weak learning achievement and high levels of drop-out in early years of primary school

The initial programme involved training teachers to provide guidance and supervision to the Young Facilitators (students, typically in Grades 4–8), the Young Facilitators themselves, and Young Learners (children in the community who were one year away from expected on-time school entry at the start of the programme). Young Facilitators and Young Learners met in sessions that were held twice weekly at a school or in the community. The Young Facilitators worked with the young children through a series of planned activities designed to support child development through play.
2. A successful pilot

Two independent evaluations of Getting Ready for School found that the initiative enjoyed a successful pilot implementation in several countries. The programme was well received by stakeholders and achieved key goals.

Overall, the programme resulted in a higher number of on-time primary school enrolment for both girls and boys and impacted children’s school readiness in all six countries. Across all pilot countries, programme attendance was high and the communities where it was introduced expressed enthusiasm and interest in the approach. There was also evidence that Young Facilitators benefited from participating in the programme and reported increased self-confidence and enthusiasm for school. In Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the programme also positively impacted children’s academic progress and adjustment to the classroom, as well as increased family involvement in primary school.

Continued development and expansion of the programme, combined with efforts at securing sustainability, could make Getting Ready for School a valuable resource for communities that seek to increase early education opportunities for young children.
3. GRS in action

YEMEN: breaking the cycle of exclusion for girls and boys
GRS is delivering early learning opportunities to children who otherwise face exclusion, especially girls. The programme has also engaged girls as Young Facilitators, empowering them to help their younger peers.

Programme highlights:
• 32 per cent increase in on-time enrolment
• Children enrolled in the programme had better academic skills and better adjustment to their first grade classroom when compared to their peers
• Caregivers were more intensively engaged in their children’s classroom
• Cost per Young Learner: USD164.30

ETHIOPIA: drawing on the strength of close-knit communities for ECD
GRS has enjoyed particular success in Ethiopia, as it draws on the strength and solidarity of close-knit communities there. The country is planning a follow-up evaluation and plans to expand the programme.

Programme highlights:
• Demonstrated impact on school readiness in math & literacy
• Young learners had 100 per cent on-time enrolment, compared to 78 per cent net primary enrolment nationally
• Parents became more involved in their children’s education
• GRS raised the value of ECE in the eyes of the community
• Cost per Young Learner: USD53.77
BANGLADESH: supporting ECD during the transition to universal preschools

As Bangladesh transitions to universal, state-run pre-schools, GRS provides early childhood programmes to the country’s hardest-to-reach children.

Programme Highlights:
- High level of buy-in from communities, the Ministry of Education, local school staff, families and children
- Significant positive programme impact on on-time primary school enrolment
- Demonstrated impact on families’ engagement with their young children’s education
- Cost per Young Learner: USD67.54

DRC: providing a rare chance for early childhood education

In a country where the vast majority of children lack access to preschool, this initiative is helping the most vulnerable boys and girls get ready for school.

Programme Highlights:
- Enthusiastic Young Facilitators, teachers and school principals made significant efforts to implement the programme systematically
- Despite fewer programme sessions, GRS had a positive effect on children’s early literacy
- Parents took initiative in advocating for GRS, including requesting additional programme sessions during school breaks

“"My daughter has learned a lot during this project. She has become more confident and makes contact with other children... She counts, and writes her own name...I will enrol my daughter in primary school next year, and I hope she will complete her Masters one day. I studied only up to class six."

— Mother of a Young Learner in Bangladesh

“"It’s important to help the younger kids so they can avoid having problems in first grade...If they’re not well-prepared, when they go to first grade, they’ll never ask questions and won’t participate in class."

— Nefa Kabeya, 12, Young Facilitator in the DRC
4. Key recommendations

- **Children should meet at least twice per week.** The programme was most successful in countries where Young Learners had repeated and ongoing experiences and support to acquire school-readiness skills. Every effort should be made to ensure that children have access to the programme as often as possible – preferably twice a week or more – supplemented with extra practice at home or in the community.

- **Engage family and community from the start!** As the programme was only successful in countries where family and community were involved from the beginning, all future Getting Ready for School programming should include such early participation.
• **Early advocacy with ministries of education.** Further expansion of Getting Ready for School into new regions within countries or into new countries should, wherever possible, include early advocacy to ministries of education. This will work to harmonize programming with the country’s early childhood education goals and/or goals to increase on-time enrolment in primary school. Such up-front action will increase the chances of long-term programme sustainability and may increase more immediate practical support for the programme.

• **Make materials pre-literate, child-friendly.** Countries should follow through on plans to make programme materials more child-friendly and more culturally relevant.
Progress with getting all children to access and complete primary education – as well as ensuring the quality of that education – will continue to suffer setbacks as long as too many children start school later than the prescribed age and are poorly prepared for learning that is relevant to the 21st century.

Early learning gets children ready to start school at the right age and with the right skills.
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