



**EARLY CHILDHOOD:  
the Foundation for All Development**



## What is Early Child Development (ECD)?

Early child development represents the ordered and interrelated emergence of physical, linguistic, social, emotional and cognitive capacities. This period encompasses the most rapid development of the lifespan; the first 7 years of life.

What happens - or doesn't happen - to children at this time affects not only their immediate well-being but also the foundations for their future, and those of their society. If children receive the best start early on, they grow to be healthy, build positive relationships, develop strong language and learning skills, go to school, and lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Investments in early childhood are the most powerful a country can make, with the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged and returns over the lifespan many times beyond the amount invested. Many problems later in life - developmental delays, health and mental health problems, poor literacy, criminality and unemployment - have origins in pathways that begin much earlier in life, often in early childhood. Early experiences set children on developmental trajectories that become progressively more difficult and expensive to modify as they get older.

Supporting early childhood development is a critical strategy for human capital development and poverty reduction. To reach young children and their families requires the efforts of every sector – each has a role to play in ensuring that all children receive the comprehensive and holistic support they need to fulfill their potential for development.

# THE CRITICAL NEED TO SUPPORT PARENTING AND IMPROVED FAMILY CARE

(Focus Ages 0-3)

*Family care - including nurturing and responsive relationships, feeding and nutrition - builds healthy brains and bodies with strong foundations for learning, behavior and health far into the future.*

## The Importance of Family Care – Nutrition & Stimulation – in the Early Years

- **Brain development** is at its most critical phase in the earliest years, especially prenatal to about age 3.
- Child nutrition is linked to **cognitive development** and to school performance later in life.
- Child nutrition improves when children also receive **stimulation** and learning opportunities.
- **Responsive feeding** also improves child nutrient intake
- Language exposure (before age 3) is linked to later **language development** and school performance.
- When adults and children engage in a task together, the **interaction** expands child learning and thinking.

## Family Support for Early Care, Nutrition and Stimulation in Tajikistan

- **Only 1 in 4** children under age 6 months are exclusively **breastfed**

- **Only 1 in 4** children with diarrhoeal disease receive simple **oral rehydration**
- **Almost 1 in 3** children face key risks to cognitive development: **stunting** (27%) and/or **iron deficiency anaemia** (30%)
- **More than 3 out of 5** children under age 2 receive little stimulation at home
- **More than 4 of 5** children do not have 3 or more **children's books** at home.
- Many parents lack the knowledge they need to provide the daily care children need to grow and thrive.

## Health System Support for Family Care in Tajikistan

- The health system has the best access to young children and their families.
- **Only 7%** of health budget goes to primary care; little goes to preventative, nutrition and parent care.
- Yet counselling and sharing information with parents is **not expensive**, and **saves money in the long run**.



## THE CRITICAL NEED TO INVEST IN EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMMES

(Focus Ages 3-6)

### The Importance of School Readiness

- **Early learning programs** improve school readiness and completion, especially for the most vulnerable.
- Children already behind on the first day of school tend to **stay behind**.
- **Girls** who attend early childhood programmes fare better in primary school than those who do not.
- One year of targeted and quality yet **cost-efficient programs** before school can make a difference.
- **Now is the time** to improve school readiness and children's futures in school and beyond.

### Formal Support for School Readiness in Tajikistan

- **Only 7%** of pre-primary age children attend preschool in Tajikistan.

- **Disparities** are significant; preschool access is concentrated among urban children able to pay.

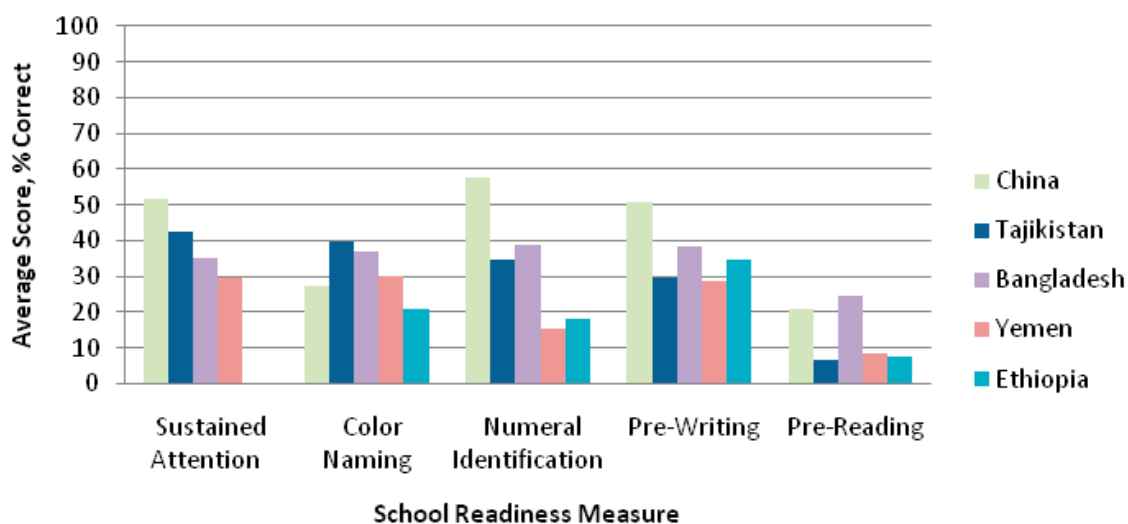
*Over half of all children in Tajikistan miss the chance of being in stimulating environments during the years with the most rapid growth of language, cognition, and social capacities: the first 7 years of life.*

### Evidence of School Readiness in Tajikistan

- Most children in Tajikistan enter school at age 7 without the skills they need to succeed.
- A school readiness assessment of 600 6 year old children in 2 districts showed average scores of:
  - o **Less than 10%** on pre-reading skills
  - o **Less than 30%** on pre-writing skills
  - o **Less than 50%** on naming numbers

### A Snapshot of School Readiness in Select Districts of 5 Countries

School Readiness in Tajikistan: Rural Children without Access to Kindergarten in Bokhtar and Jaloliddin Rumi Districts  
(Data from Child to Child 5-Country Pilot Evaluation, Baseline Data)



## EXPANDING ALTERNATIVE MODELS TO EXPAND PRESCHOOL ACCESS

*The National Strategy for Education Development calls for the development of cost-effective approaches to preschool, highlighting the need to explore, cost and evaluate diverse alternative models.*

### Expanding Preschool Access is a Key Priority but Requires New Approaches

- Preschool increases education system **efficiency** through improved readiness, achievement & retention.
- **Return on investment** in preschool is higher than returns on any other level of education.
- Yet preschool receives **only 4%** of the Education budget and **only 7%** of children attend preschool.
- Unfortunately, expansion of the traditional, high-cost Kindergarten model is not economically feasible.

### The Need to Invest in Preschool System Management and Reform

- Education **reforms exclude preschool**, precluding the same improvements to quality and efficiency.
- Existing licensing systems are unable to capture and track private and alternative preschools.
- Education Management Information System (EMIS) does not include Kindergarten or preschool.
- Legislation and regulation to support a Mixed-

Model Preschool System need to be developed.

- Education finance reform has not included preschool nor been used to free resources for preschool.

### Early Learning; A New Priority for FTI (Fast Track Initiative)

- **Tajikistan is ready!** Government and international partners are supporting system improvements.
- **Innovative, cost-efficient models exist**, are being evaluated, and are prepared for expansion.
- The Ministry of Education is drafting legislation and strategies to strengthen support to preschool.
- The Ministry of Finance is reviewing finance options for preschool.
- Yet Tajikistan cannot meet the severe need alone: **93% of children are still waiting for access!**
- A preschool component in **Fast Track Initiative** will boost programme expansion and system reform.
- The time is right to start preparing for the next the next 3-year round of Fast Track Initiative funds.

### Innovative Approaches Already Exist and can be Expanded to Increase Access to Quality Services

	Model/s		Location	Support	Population
1	Traditional Kindergarten		Existing Government Kindergartens	MoE, DED	Mostly Urban
2	Traditional Kindergarten with NGO Support to Improve Quality			MoE, DED, OSI/SbS or other	Mostly Urban
3	Traditional Kindergarten with 2-Shift Schedule to Expand Access			Planned for 2010	Mostly Urban
4	Getting Ready for School: Child to Child	Alternative Models De-signed to Expand Access	Secondary Schools (Unutilised Space)	MoE, DED, UNICEF	Mostly Rural
5	Getting Ready to School			MoE, DED, OSI	Mostly Rural
6	School Readiness			MoE, DED	Mostly Urban
7	Grade Zero			MoE, DED	Urban & Rural
8	Community Based ECD			Community, School or Home (Unutilised Space)	MoE, DED, AKF, UNICEF

# INVESTING IN PART-DAY ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR IMPROVED COST-EFFICIENCY

### A Part-Day Schedule for Diverse Preschool Models

- Existing Kindergartens reserve entire rooms just for beds, and **up to 4 hours per day** for sleeping.
- The effect of full day kindergarten is **virtually the same** as part-day kindergarten.
- Additional services beyond a half-day program show **economic returns close to \$0**.
- Part-day and shift schedules in other countries show dramatic impact at much lower cost.

*Relative to half-day kindergarten, the positive effects of full-day kindergarten have been found to be relatively small and generally do not last for more than a year.*

*The economic return per dollar invested would be expected to be close to zero.*

### Transforming Traditional Kindergartens to a 2-Shift Schedule

- A traditional Kindergarten might serve **40 children** between 2 classrooms, and 2 other rooms for beds.
- Children stay 8 hours each day, with perhaps only **2-3 hours** of “learning and development” time.
- Most time in Kindergarten is **sleeping** or basic care, when there is little added value to being in a centre.
- Working in **2 shifts**, a Kindergarten serves

**twice as many** children at virtually no extra cost.

- A part-day program has **reduced costs** to families because hot meals aren’t needed.
- When beds are removed, extra space can be converted into additional classrooms or play space.

### Using 2 Shifts to Expand Access & Quality in Traditional Kindergartens

- When Kindergartens transition to two-shift schedules, **access increases** and parent fees drop.
- More children access important support for early learning at **lower cost** to their families.
- Savings from reduced expenditure (e.g. on food) can be **redirected to quality**.

### Using 2 Shifts to Expand Access & Quality Where There ARE No Kindergartens

- Many areas of Tajikistan simply do not have Kindergartens.
- Efforts to expand access must also consider the many **rural areas where there are no Kindergartens**.
- Community-based & School-based models managed by District Education Departments, MoE and partners run **effective part-day programs** in rural areas.
- New regulations and guidance on 3-hour programmes can be relevant to all part-day models.



