

## Accelerated School Readiness Programme





## Evaluation of Innovation in UNICEF Work

### Case Study: Accelerated School Readiness Programme

© United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2019  
United Nations Children's Fund  
Three United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017  
November 2019

The purpose of publishing evaluation reports produced by the UNICEF Evaluation Office is to fulfil a corporate commitment to transparency through the publication of all completed evaluations. The reports are designed to stimulate a free exchange of ideas among those interested in the topic and to assure those supporting the work of UNICEF that it rigorously examines its strategies, results, and overall effectiveness.

The contents of the report do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for error. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.

This case study report for the Accelerated School Readiness Programme is one of thirteen innovation case studies which were conducted as part of a global evaluation titled "Evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work". The case study component of the evaluation was conducted by Deloitte LLC. The case study report was prepared by Edward Thomas, Katherine Arblaster, Ariel Kangasniemi, Laura Maxwell and Adarsh Desai. Beth Plowman, Senior Evaluation Specialist, Evaluation Office led and managed the overall evaluation process in close collaboration with Ethiopia Country Office and Amhara Regional Office.

The copyright for this report is held by the United Nations Children's Fund. Permission is required to reprint/reproduce/photocopy or in any other way cite or quote from this report in written form. UNICEF has a formal permission policy that requires a written request to be submitted. For non-commercial uses, the permission will normally be granted free of charge. Please write to the evaluation office at the address below to initiate a permission request.

See innovation case studies at: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_103533.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103533.html).

For further information, please contact:

Evaluation Office  
United Nations Children's Fund  
Three United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017  
[evalhelp@unicef.org](mailto:evalhelp@unicef.org)

Copyright of photos:

Cover photo: © Ariel Kangasniemi  
Page 22: © Ariel Kangasniemi

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study report was commissioned by the UNICEF Evaluation Office. This case study report is the result of the commitment, efforts and contribution of a large number of individuals and institutions. The Evaluation Office wishes to thank the many colleagues who gave freely of their time for this evaluation. In particular, the team thanks the Ethiopia Country Office and Amhara Regional Office for their assistance in arranging field visit logistics, accompanying evaluators on regional visits and sharing advice and support throughout the process. Acknowledgement also is given to representatives of the Regional Education Bureau in Amhara, Ministry of Education, partner organizations and the UNICEF Education Programme Division. Thanks to Celeste Lebowitz, Geeta Dey and Dalma Rivero of the Evaluation Office for administrative support and Laura Gagliardone for support in finalizing the report.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of acronyms .....	5
1. INTRODUCTION .....	9
2. INNOVATION AT A GLANCE .....	10
3. CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ACCELERATED SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME .....	12
3.1 Development/humanitarian context .....	12
3.2 Innovation context .....	13
3.3 UNICEF programme context .....	13
4. THE INNOVATION JOURNEY FOR ACCELERATED SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME .....	15
5. ASR FIELD TESTING .....	19
5.1 Summary of ASR in Amhara .....	19
5.2 Lessons learned from Amhara .....	21
6. FINDINGS .....	23
6.1 Approach dimension .....	23
6.2 Organization dimension .....	28
6.3 Resources and capabilities dimension .....	33
6.4 Incentives and outcomes .....	34
7. CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS .....	39
Annex A: Methodology .....	43
Annex B: ASR stakeholders .....	46
Annex C: List of documents consulted .....	47

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ARO</b>	Amhara Regional Office
<b>ASR</b>	Accelerated School Readiness
<b>CEI</b>	Center for Education Innovations
<b>CO</b>	Country Office
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECO</b>	Ethiopia Country Office
<b>EO</b>	Evaluation Office
<b>GER</b>	Gross Enrolment Rate
<b>GQIP</b>	General Education Quality Improvement Programme
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>POC</b>	Point of Contact
<b>PoC</b>	Proof of Concept
<b>PTA</b>	Parent Teacher Associations
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>R4D</b>	Results for Development
<b>RCT</b>	Random Control Trial
<b>REB</b>	Regional Education Bureau
<b>RO</b>	Regional Office
<b>SD</b>	Supply Division
<b>ToT</b>	Training-of-trainers
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	The United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	The United States Agency for International Development



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, UNICEF has embraced innovation as one of its key strategies to achieve results for children. That commitment is reaffirmed in its current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and is evident in the organization's programming and institutional architecture. Indeed, since 2014, significant progress has occurred in a relatively short period of time, backed by clear strategic intent and targeted investment. With the increased foothold of innovation in UNICEF, it is important and timely to take stock of these efforts through high quality evidence to inform decision-making, learning and accountability. In keeping with the need for this evidence, UNICEF conducted an global evaluation of innovation in 2018.

The objective of the global evaluation was to assess UNICEF's 'fitness for purpose' to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve the outcomes and goals defined in its strategic plans covering the period 2014-2021. A set of innovation case studies was a key element of this global evaluation, along with an organizational assessment and a synthesis project. The case studies were guided by three objectives:

- To provide detailed descriptions of a set of innovations across stages of the development continuum inclusive of contextual influences
- To assess the application of innovation principles or other standards for a set of innovations with particular attention to issues of ownership and scale
- To produce clear conclusions and considerations for policy, strategy and management decisions to further enhance innovation as key change strategy.

Case studies were conducted by Deloitte LLP over the period February 2018-January 2019. Mixed methods were utilized for data collection including key informant interviews, document review and observations in the field.

The innovation case examined in this report concerns the Accelerated School Readiness Programme. In Ethiopia, high dropout rates from formal school in Grade One and limited

access to formal pre-primary education in rural regions are significant challenges for early childhood educators. Working closely with the national, regional, and local governments, UNICEF supported implementation of a 150-hour pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and social skills programme (Accelerated School Readiness Programme, or ASR Programme) intended to improve the equity of access to pre-primary education for children in disadvantaged areas.

The ASR programme was driven by a well-recognized problem in Ethiopia of limited pre-primary access and quality. It was tailored to meet the specific needs of the Government, which had a desire to improve pre-primary enrolment but lacked sufficient resources and technical expertise for implementation. Given the unfamiliarity of the Ethiopian government with ASR elements, including the delivery approach (eight weeks, offered to students not enrolled in existing pre-primary programmes) and pedagogical model (use of trained teacher facilitators following a highly specific curriculum/activity guidebook), UNICEF used a pilot approach to test the programme in 2016 and demonstrate viability to government stakeholders and communities. While this pilot approach was intended to use a gold standard randomized control trial approach, limitations associated with assigning control groups and working with the Government led to a non-experimental approach to collecting data on effectiveness.

Nonetheless, based on early evidence indicating that the programme could be effective to prepare children for school, the ASR programme continues to grow in scale, driven by highly supportive government partners. While initially envisioned by UNICEF as an interim strategy for improving pre-primary access, many stakeholders view the programme as a sustainable option for augmenting government pre-primary education, where pre-primary is not well-established or where enrolment rates are low.

A small contingent of Ethiopia Country Office and Regional Office staff in Benishangul-Gumuz were involved in development of

curriculum materials, training of facilitators, implementation of the pilot, socialization with government and community members and programme monitoring. Decision-making with respect to curriculum content and facilitation materials was carried out by the Government. Today, UNICEF primarily supports the programme through funding and technical guidance to federal and regional governments, with day-to-day implementation owned by regional and local education bureaux. This organizational approach is based on an emphasis by innovators on UNICEF's role as a 'demonstrator of innovation' as opposed to an implementing agency.

As ASR is reaching scale, it is beginning to experience several challenges related to ownership of the programme by regional government, including issues with timely distribution of materials and training of facilitators. In discussions with UNICEF case study informants, there is also a general concern from some individuals that the Government will be unable to scale ASR with the same fidelity and quality of training without UNICEF's support. Indeed, government officials interviewed often indicated that without UNICEF's ongoing support, this programme would not be possible.

The ASR pilot was funded by UNICEF, using funding from an innovation in education competition (not earmarked for specific purposes) and the World Bank Strategic Investment Fund (earmarked for the randomized control trial). With scaling of the programme to new regions, approximately US\$1.99 million was secured through the Roche Foundation and supports adaptation of ASR materials in specific regions (including translation), production of materials, training of facilitators, a teacher honorarium and monitoring. The Ethiopia Country Office also provides ongoing in-kind support to the Regional Office and regional government in the form of project management. Remaining funding is provided through the Government, as part of the overall Regional Ministries of Education budget.

In order to achieve sustainability, the availability of long-term, secure funding to carry out these activities has been identified as

a barrier. By 2020, UNICEF will have exhausted the Roche Foundation funds for ASR and other funding sources will need to be explored. Based on this, the Ethiopia Country Office has recognized a strong need for the federal government to equip regions with the ability to fully fund the programme and has advocated for increased funding in this area through existing educational funding programmes, such as the World Bank-funded General Education Quality Improvement Programme.

Incentives for adoption of ASR were not identified as a strong barrier or enabler of scale. Adoption of ASR has been driven by financial incentives (such as cost savings for schools and salaries for facilitators) in addition to strategic incentives, (specifically, progress toward Ethiopia's ambitious 80 per cent pre-primary enrolment target).

Linked to this second incentive, achievement of output level targets has increasingly been identified as insufficient in capturing the value of the ASR programme. Considering that the ASR programme was in part intended to overcome quality challenges associated with other pre-primary programmes, tracking leading indicators of quality, such as the number of returning facilitators, would be informative. This is particularly relevant given that the pilot assessment of a sample of students saw better pass rates of child-to-child participants on Grade One exams than ASR and O-class.

For UNICEF, bringing the programme to scale does not appear to have simply been about outcomes from the programme specifically; it is part of a broad Country Office strategy to enhance the quality of education in Ethiopia through close collaboration with the Government. Through co-innovation with the Government, UNICEF has also enhanced the ability of the Government to take a child-friendly, play-based approach to curriculum development activities going forward. This may soon be demonstrated in a revised pre-primary curriculum, developed with lessons learned from the ASR curriculum in mind.

The success of ASR in gaining traction with the Government is in part due to overwhelming attention to the problem of low enrolment in



pre-primary by the development community as a whole. The problem was also easy to understand and articulate, meaning that innovators were better equipped to come up with effective strategies.

Innovators at UNICEF working in education and beyond looking to develop scalable innovations should take a similar approach – focusing on problems that are shared by other regions or countries and are well-recognized by critical partners (e.g., government, community service organizations, communities, etc.) in the area of intervention. For individuals looking to incentivize greater innovation within their programmes or offices, giving attention to this problem identification and recognition stage can also aid individual staff members who may not see themselves reflected in the term ‘innovation’ to consider new approaches

to persistent (and perhaps not immediately evident) problems in their area of work.

Once a clear problem is identified, innovators should also work to temper the expectations of partner organizations related to innovation outcomes. The issue of low pre-primary enrolment and Grade One dropout in Ethiopia is complex. It is linked to conditions that go beyond the classroom. Considering this complexity, ASR was not framed by UNICEF as a single solution that could address all contributing factors to the problem. This helped to manage the expectation of government stakeholders and also encouraged the Government to discover and consider other necessary interventions in the enabling ecosystem for pre-primary (such as cross-ministry collaboration and pursuit of improvements in teacher education).

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is changing faster than ever before, and so too are the challenges facing its most vulnerable. Conflict and displacement, disasters and climate change, urbanization and disease outbreaks are growing increasingly complex and inter-related, demanding new strategies and approaches. Innovation for development – exploring new ways of delivering programmes, with new partners and new technologies – is increasingly recognized as crucial to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Since 2014, UNICEF embraced innovation as one of its key strategies to achieve results for children. That commitment is reaffirmed in its current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and is evident in the organization's programming and institutional architecture. Indeed, since 2014, significant progress has occurred in a relatively short period of time, backed by clear strategic intent and targeted investment. A number of formal structures have evolved, and new milestones achieved.

With the increased foothold of innovation in UNICEF, it is important and timely to take stock of these efforts through high quality evidence to inform decision-making, learning and accountability. In keeping with the need for this evidence, UNICEF conducted a global evaluation of innovation in 2018. The evaluation comes at a time when the organization is considering how best to maximize its resources for innovation and is intended to inform those decisions in an impartial manner, backed by credible evidence.

The objective of the evaluation was to assess UNICEF's 'fitness for purpose' to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve the outcomes and goals defined in its strategic plans covering the period 2014-2021. It also sought to provide insights on how innovation contributes to UNICEF's goals and objectives, as well as how innovation might contribute to increasingly effective organizational responses in the coming years. The global evaluation was

designed with three core components including: an organizational assessment, a set of innovation case studies and a synthesis project.

The case studies are intended to serve organizational learning by unpacking and examining the multiple pathways and dynamics which underpin innovation within the organization. In addition, the case studies contribute to accountability by assessing the manner in which innovation work in practice reflects the strategies and principles which UNICEF has developed to guide these efforts.

Three objectives guided the work:

- To provide detailed descriptions of a set of innovations across stages of the development continuum inclusive of contextual influences
- To assess the application of innovation principles or other standards for a set of innovations with particular attention to issues of ownership and scale
- To produce clear conclusions and considerations for policy, strategy and management decisions to further enhance innovation as key change strategy.

Cases are defined as *the processes an innovation was identified, developed, tested, implemented and taken to scale along with contextual factors such as underlying organizational and partnership arrangements*. The primary audience for the case studies is internal to UNICEF including senior management and programme managers at HQ, regional and country level. Its uses include informing the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 particularly the change strategy focused on innovation. UNICEF commissioned Deloitte LLP to conduct thirteen case studies to examine innovation across the spectrum of innovation types, country contexts and internal (UNICEF) and external (partner, supplier) actors.

All case studies were structured around a modified version of the Deloitte Dublin Framework for Innovation. Within this

framework, four thematic dimensions (i.e. approach, organization, resources and capabilities and metrics and incentives) are seen as necessary to enable successful innovation. Case studies employed a mixed methods approach to build a complete picture of the innovation process and identify findings related to these four thematic dimensions. The evaluation team collected qualitative and quantitative data through desktop review, case study informant interviews and field visits. More information on the methods used appears in Annex A. A listing of stakeholders engaged appears in Annex B and documents reviewed in Annex C.

The innovation case examined in this report concerns Accelerated School Readiness, a programme to teach pre-literacy, pre-

numeracy and social skills program in Ethiopia. The programme was developed in response to access and quality gaps for pre-primary education in parts of Ethiopia, particularly rural regions, where pre-primary education is often not cost effective for Regional Education Bureaus. Equity of education is an ongoing area of focus for UNICEF's Ethiopia Country Office who supported the piloting of the programme and subsequent adaptation.

This report includes information on the innovation (Section 2) as well the context for the development of the Accelerated School Readiness programme (Section 3), the innovation journey (Section 4), field testing of the model (Section 5), findings (Section 6) and considerations for UNICEF and conclusions (Section 7).

## 2. INNOVATION AT A GLANCE

### Description of ASR programme

The ASR Programme is a **150-hour pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and social skills program in Ethiopia**. The programme is intended for children who are six years old and have not yet completed any pre-primary education. It is delivered prior to starting formal schooling in Grade One. Children attend ASR classes on a daily basis over a set period of time to prepare themselves for the structure of a classroom, socialize with peers and learn early skills designed to thrive in Grade One. The programme was developed in response to access and quality gaps for pre-primary education in parts of Ethiopia, particularly rural regions, where pre-primary education is often not cost effective for Regional Education Bureaus.

### Intended innovation outcomes

Based on the results framework developed for the programme<sup>1</sup>, the overall goal of ASR is to contribute to the improved retention and

achievement of children in early grades of primary schooling.

- An initial pilot of the program was mainly intended as an **evidence generation and Proof of Concept exercise** for the Government. The pilot was intended to support the assumption that a short, high-quality programme could assist children with preparing for school when other options were not available to them or attendance was not feasible.
- Scaling up of the programme has continued to pursue the intended outcome of helping children **prepare for and stay in school**.

Importantly, the ASR programme is not intended to replace existing pre-primary programmes, such as the government-mandated O-Class, Child-to-Child, and other private, NGO, or religious pre-primary programmes. Rather, it is intended to augment existing choices for children, with a focus on

quality, cost-effective pre-primary programming.

## Innovation at work

The ASR Programme is delivered by trained teacher-facilitators in local (kebele) schools during the summer (rainy season) in advance of Grade One. Using a teacher's guidebook developed specifically for the ASR programme, teachers progress through eight weeks of learning activities designed to engage children in play, encourage socialization, establish classroom routine and, importantly, establish pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The guidebook provides a lesson plan for each day of the programme. Children are provided individual activity and art books that include worksheets corresponding to the weekly lessons outlined in the teacher guidebook.

In advance of ASR delivery at the kebele level, work is undertaken by numerous government and community stakeholders (with the official support of UNICEF) to enrol students, train facilitators and familiarize community members with the programme.

## Innovation users

The target users of the ASR Programme appear to be Regional Education Bureaux and woreda education offices, who are responsible for service delivery of pre-primary education. The target users of the materials developed for the programme include facilitators and children.

Figure 1. Extract from ASR student activity book

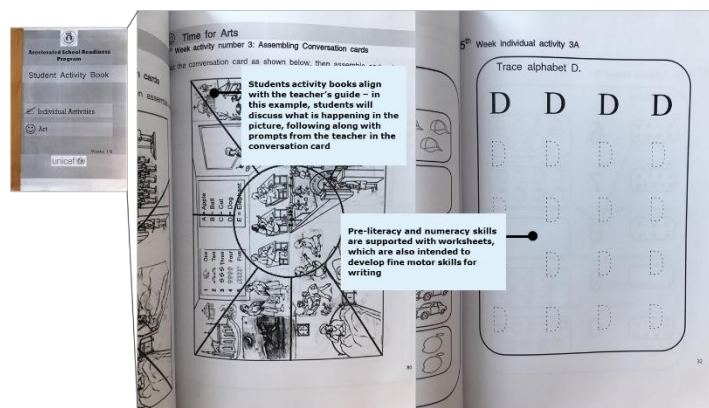
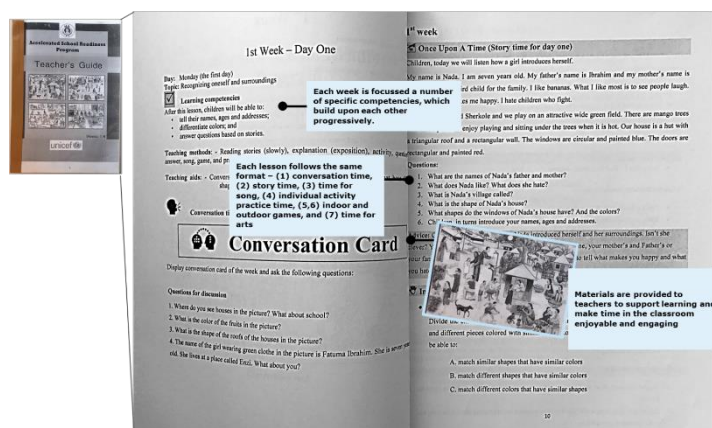


Figure 2. Extract from ASR teacher's guidebook



### 3. CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ACCELERATED SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME

#### Key takeaways

- UNICEF's Strategic Plan highlights innovation and partners as key enablers in driving equity of education globally.
- Within Ethiopia, where the ASR Programme has been developed and implemented, improving equity of education has been identified as a critical need.
- Pre-primary education is essential to realizing the full potential of a child; however, equity of access and quality of programming remains a challenge in many regions where UNICEF operates, including in Ethiopia, where children experience high dropout rates from formal school in Grade One and face limited access to formal pre-primary in rural regions.
- The ASR Programme is the first school readiness programme of its kind in Ethiopia that has been developed with the support of the Ministry of Education.
- Given the role of the community and policy environment in influencing a child's learning, innovation in the education sector is highly contextual and a school readiness programme in one country may not be considered particularly innovative in another country.

#### 3.1 Development/humanitarian context

Early childhood years are foundational for realizing a child's potential and establishing a positive path for adulthood. Investments in early childhood benefit both the individual and society, with numerous research studies establishing a positive economic correlation between investments in education, childcare and nutrition. Pre-primary education is an important component of promoting a child's holistic development and realizing these gains. Pre-primary contributes to 'school readiness'<sup>2</sup>, helping to prepare a child to succeed in a structured learning environment.<sup>3</sup> A significant body of evidence indicates that pre-primary learning can help a child successfully transition to and flourish in school.

A 2012 report by UNICEF highlights the importance of considering the need for school readiness for all children, especially the

vulnerable and disadvantaged, including girls, children with disabilities, minorities and those living in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that not all children have access to pre-primary learning. Lack of equitable access to quality pre-primary education could indicate that more than 200 million children under the age of five<sup>5</sup> in developing countries are at risk of failing to reach their full potential. The consequences of inequity in both access to and quality of early childhood education can be long-lasting. Children who do not receive some form of pre-primary education may struggle in a structured classroom environment. Also, they may develop a negative attitude toward school because they fall behind peers and are frustrated. Over time, this can contribute to a decreased feeling of belonging in the classroom environment and ultimately to dropout<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> While there are a variety of definitions of school readiness, it is generally understood at UNICEF to include the readiness of a child for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' readiness for school.

<sup>3</sup> Source: UNICEF (2017). UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development.

<sup>4</sup> Source: UNICEF (2012). School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/Child2Child\\_ConceptualFramework\\_FINAL\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/Child2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Source: Zubairi, A., and Rose, P. (2017). Bright and Early: How financing pre-primary education gives every child a fair start to life. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/theirworld-site-resources/Reports/Theirworld-Report-Bright-and-Early-June-2017.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Peters, S. (2010). Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School. Retrieved from [http://ece.manukau.ac.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/85841/956\\_ECELitReview.pdf](http://ece.manukau.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/85841/956_ECELitReview.pdf).

This challenge is recognized by UNICEF in a number of countries, including Ethiopia, where in 2011 the gross rate of children enrolled in pre-primary programmes was 5 per cent.<sup>7</sup> Access to pre-primary education highlights issues of inequity, particularly in rural areas. Even where pre-primary education may be available to rural students, learning outcomes may not be achieved due to a lack of child-friendly school infrastructure, a lack of qualified early childhood care and education teachers, and competing obligations of young children in their home lives (such as farming, livestock management, or care duties for even younger siblings). For families living in flood- and drought-prone areas, young children may attend pre-primary school hungry or may not attend school at all.

### 3.2 Innovation context

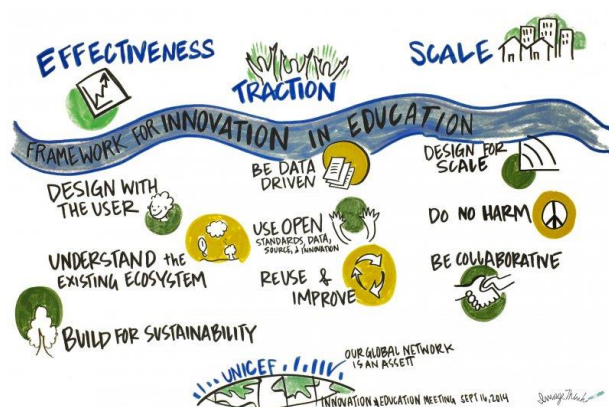
Innovation in education may take a variety of forms, including policy enhancements, the learning environment, curriculum and pedagogical philosophy. This is because children's learning is dependent on a variety of factors. In addition to teachers, peers, the direct learning space, and materials in schools, learning is influenced by the attitudes, philosophies and relationships between educational ecosystem participants. This includes policymakers, teacher education institutions, community members, parents and administrators. The interplay between these different factors provides a variety of entry points through which an innovative approach to education may create impact.

In 2017, more than half of UNICEF countries reported the use of innovative approaches for 'improving access to education and learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged and excluded children.'

At UNICEF, education sector innovations are generally process and methodological innovations. Often this means they differ from accepted ways of carrying out work to enable wider and enhanced programmatic impacts. Previous case studies of education innovations at UNICEF include programmes, products, services, processes or partnerships that are

characterized by 'novelty, improved equity, learning outcomes or strengthened education systems, traction with users and stakeholders, and potential to match the scale of a problem.'<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested by some informants that the education sector is more conducive to innovation than other sectors of work. This may be linked to the diversity of potential intervention points. It could also be linked to the tendency of innovators in this sector to adapt to the needs of their audience, drawn from their previous experiences as educators.

**Figure 3. Working framework for innovation in education in 2014**



### 3.3 UNICEF programme context

#### Global programming context

Achieving UNICEF's 2018 – 2021 Strategic Plan goal that 'every child learns' will require both innovation and partnerships to be successful. Innovation and partnerships have been identified by UNICEF as critical elements to enhancing the equity of education, both with respect to reaching all children, regardless of gender, socio-economic status or ability. Looking ahead to 2021, UNICEF has set a target of 30 per cent (+12 per cent over baseline) for the adjusted net attendance rate of children from the poorest 20 per cent in early childhood care and education. In addition, a 50 per cent (+6 per cent over baseline) gross enrolment rate in pre-primary education has been set. By 2021, UNICEF is hoping to support 80 per cent (+10 per cent over baseline) of children

<sup>8</sup> Source: UNICEF (2016). Journeys to Scale.



through UNICEF-support education programmes, including early learning education.<sup>9</sup>

### Country programming context

At the country office level, strategies for enhancing the equity of education are driven by the local operating context and history. Equity of education is an ongoing area of focus for UNICEF's Ethiopia Country Office<sup>10</sup>. In Ethiopia's strategic documentation and annual reports, innovation is not explicitly emphasized as a key change strategy. However, partnerships and collaboration with national and local policymakers is highlighted as a critical enabler of success for any programming. In particular, early childhood development is recognized as an important area of focus, with acceleration of integrated early childhood development emerging as a key cross-sectoral strategy for the country programme (2016 – 2020). Pre-primary education is perceived as a possible entry point for interventions that support the child's whole development beyond simply school readiness.

Investments to improve the quality of education have been prioritized by the broader international development

community in Ethiopia, with UNICEF playing a strong advisory role. The General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity (GEQIP-E) was developed in 2009 following concerns related to teacher quality and effectiveness of learning achievements. The World Bank, together with development partners (including UNICEF), has supported the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia to substantially increase the number of students enrolled in schools and improve the quality of education through GEQIP I and II.<sup>11</sup> In 2017, a new four-year GEQIP program was announced. While many objectives relate to educational quality, the most relevant to early childhood care and education is the goal to reduce student dropout rates at Grade One, taking into account students' socio-economic status, geography and gender. This will include quality improvements to government-mandated pre-primary programmes (O-class) and 'an early childhood care and education pilot trial to test innovative approaches for enhancing school readiness in disadvantaged areas' (i.e. broader implementation of the ASR programme).<sup>12</sup> A Programming for Results financing instrument will be employed.

---

<sup>9</sup> Source: UN Economic and Social Council (2017). Final results framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018 – 2021. Retrieved from [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1301145/files/E\\_ICEF\\_2017\\_18-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1301145/files/E_ICEF_2017_18-EN.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Source: Ethiopia Country Office Annual Report (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Source: World Bank Project and Operations Data (2017). Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Project.

<sup>12</sup> Source: World Bank conceptual plan (2017). Program for Results Information Document Concept Stage.

## 4. THE INNOVATION JOURNEY FOR ACCELERATED SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME

### Key takeaways

- The ASR programme was driven by a well-recognized problem in Ethiopia related to limited pre-primary access and quality and was thus tailored to meet the specific needs of a government that had a desire to improve pre-primary enrolment but lacked sufficient resources and technical expertise for implementation.
- Funding for this innovation aligns with UNICEF broad objectives for innovation in education. These include: identifying lessons learned for education innovators globally; utilizing an evidence-based decision-making process at the proof of concept stage; and demonstrating the importance of the government as co-creator in education.
- To determine the most effective delivery modality and demonstrate value to government and community members, innovators used a pilot approach in Beninshangul-Gumuz to generate early evidence of programme effectiveness.
- Today, ASR has scaled to additional regions and the programme is increasingly owned by the Government – therefore, UNICEF is working to advocate for policies that will enable the Government to self-fund the programme.
- Innovators in UNICEF and many government stakeholders frame the programme as just one part of a larger pre-primary toolkit available to the Government to improve equity of access, particularly for those children who would otherwise be unable to attend a full year of primary.

The innovation journey from needs identification to launch has been well-documented by UNICEF in the 2016 report 'Journeys to Scale'. Jointly commissioned by UNICEF and the Center for Education Innovations, the report described the innovation process and identified key considerations for innovation at UNICEF for winners of the Innovations in Education Initiative. The ASR Programme pilot was funded in part by this initiative.

To reduce replication, a summary of the 'Journeys to Scale' report is provided below, with additions based on discussions with key informants to this case study.

### Needs identification

Both the Ethiopian government and UNICEF were involved in needs identification for ASR. As discussed in the context section, high levels of pre-primary enrolment and Grade 1 dropout were prevalent across Ethiopia. When pre-primary was available to students, it was often low quality and progress toward universal pre-

primary education through a government-mandated class termed 'O-class' was slow. Between 2007 and 2010 the Ethiopia Country Office worked closely with the Ministry of Education to advocate for greater attention to early childhood care and education (ECCE) in policy frameworks and programming. This included participating in developing the ECCE framework and developing minimum learning competencies for O class and Grade 1.

### Recognition and exploration

Release of the ECCE policy in 2010 helped to provide an 'enabling environment in which to improve access to early learning opportunities and their quality.' In 2015, issues of educational quality came to the forefront and UNICEF perceived a significant opportunity for collaboration with the Ministry of Education to enhance quality. Despite an ambitious 80 per cent gross enrolment rate target set by the Government, the Ethiopia Country Office identified that fiscal constraints were likely to limit the ability of local governments to implement pre-primary programmes. Thus, a

lost-cost programme, high quality programme, 'needed to be designed to initiate progress toward the target.' Case study informants indicated that it was hoped that the programme could serve as a learning opportunity for the Ministry of Education, to improve the full-year O class programme and provide a much needed bridging programme for school readiness in areas where students may not be available for a full-year pre-primary programme.

## Development

Taking advantage of the momentum in early childhood care and education through 2015 – 2016, the Ethiopia Country Office functioned as a key partner in the conceptualization of the ASR programme. The Ethiopia Country Office aided in convening and serving as a member of the technical working group for the programme, designing trainings for teachers, generating and sharing evidence, providing input into development of curriculum materials, and providing technical and financial support. The curriculum and design firm Elixir, made up of several experienced educational consultants, was selected by the Government to design and produce the facilitators guide, student workbook and other supporting materials for the programme. While curriculum development was owned by the Government, the Chief of Education identified the need to break desired learning outcomes into a week-by-week approach and worked with Elixir to develop initial lesson plans for week one.

Overall, development of ASR programme was rapid – it was conducted over just three months. At this time, the Ethiopia Country Office also applied and secured US\$100,000 in funding through the CEI/UNICEF education innovations fund. The Ethiopia Country Office leveraged this initial funding to secure an additional US\$150,000 for a rigorous randomized control trial, which was contracted with the American Institute for Research.

*"We had all the ingredients needed to apply for [the funding]. Beyond just receiving the funding, the process of applying helped us to clarify much of our*

*thinking. We needed to think through everything."*  
Ethiopia case study informant

Prior to launch, UNICEF conducted a training of trainers (ToT), to equip master trainers (provided by the regional education bureau) with the skills needed to train teacher-facilitators to deliver the ASR programme. A total of 180 teachers were trained in July 2015, with additional training of Grade 1 teachers occurring in fall. Regional Education Bureaux also engaged with woreda education offices and local parent-teacher associations (PTA) to educate community members about the importance of pre-primary and encourage them to enrol their children in the ASR programme. In total, 995 participants received ASR orientation.

The expected results for the pilot programme included targets for school readiness as well as an intended demonstration effect for schools, woredas, administrators, teachers, and the Ethiopia Ministry of Education.<sup>13</sup> These included:

- 50 per cent increase in the number of children in the pilot region entering Grade 1 with minimum levels of school readiness (measured by a readiness skills assessment);
- Schools, woredas, and regional administrators will report data on attendance in O class and assessed level of school readiness;
- Existing O classes of low quality will adopt methods demonstrated in the two-month accelerated program; and
- The federal Ministry of Education will include accelerated school readiness programmes in the 2015 Education Sector Development Programme as an interim strategy for ensuring school readiness.

## Launch

The pilot programme for ASR was launched in June 2015 in 13 of 19 woredas in Benishangul-Gumuz. Two delivery modalities were piloted – one over the summer, facilitated by O class teachers (two months before children enter Grade 1) and one during the fall, facilitated by

<sup>13</sup> CEI Program Results Status: Accelerated School Readiness (2015). Retrieved from

<https://educationinnovations.org/program/accelerated-school-readiness>.

the Grade 1 teacher. The decision to use and compare two models was based on input from the Ministry of Education, who felt that the availability of newly graduated teachers in the summer would improve the ability of woredas

to find programme facilitators. The programme reached 9,267 of an intended 11,000 children across 208 schools, increasing pre-primary coverage from 38.1 per cent to 49.2 per cent in the region.

### Innovation in context: UNICEF and Results for Development (R4D) collaboration

In June 2014, UNICEF and R4D came together to facilitate the scaling up of innovations. Both organizations work in the area of innovation and quality of education. Thus, the partnership was viewed as a way to design and test a strategy for understanding the 'types of innovation programmes and interventions [with the] greatest potential for impact.'<sup>14</sup> Importantly, the initiative sought local innovations that took a strong pedagogical approach to solve similar problems to those present in education globally. A focus on pedagogy, as opposed to technology, was perceived by case study informants as a way to shift thinking about innovation to encapsulate a learner and teacher-centred approach. This was founded on the premise that innovations in education needed to achieve real outcomes for students (effectiveness), gain traction within the organization (traction), and acceptance within the government (scale and sustainability).

*"For most educationalists, innovation was seen as technology. These are not always well received, as they tend to be expensive and put technology first and the learner second."*

#### Programme division case study informant

A call for education innovations was sent to non-profits and UNICEF country offices. Of the 160 innovations nominated, UNICEF provided funding for 7 – 10 selected innovations, offering between US\$50,000 and US\$500,000, depending on the stage of the innovation. Selection of the innovations for funding was based on a desk review against selection criteria and external, expert assessment of potential for impact, scalability and innovativeness. The initiative was primarily led by the UNICEF Education Programme Division, with some participation by the UNICEF Innovation Unit in the selection of innovations.

## Scaling up

### Expanding the reach of ASR

Following the completion of the pilot in Benishangul-Gumuz and the perceived success of the pilot in increasing pre-primary coverage and school readiness for children entering Grade 1, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Country Office sought to expand the programme to other regions in Ethiopia. Funding for the expansion of the programme to those regions was secured from the Roche Foundation, through the Swiss National Committee for UNICEF. The regions where ASR is now present include: Amhara (in 2017), Oromia (in 2016) and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. In some regions, including Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia, the programme has also been delivered in selected refugee camps. The implementation model for the programme in

additional regions continued to use the same approach as to the pilot programme, involving UNICEF consultation with regional governments to gain support for implementation.

The delivery modality for the programme has changed since the initial pilot. A departure for a Grade 1 ASR programme occurred in 2016, based on a finding from the initial evaluation indicating that children tended to have better learning outcomes from the summer model. This choice was further driven by regional governments which, according to one UNICEF case study informant, were hesitant to support a Grade 1 model due to difficulties in aligning timetable and limited school infrastructure.

Since the beginning of the program, Ethiopia's pre-primary gross enrolment rate (GER) has increased, with rates in 2015 reported at 30 per cent.<sup>15</sup> In terms of ASR's contributions to the

<sup>14</sup> Source: CEI blog post (2014). UNICEF Partners with Results for Development Institute to Accelerate the Scale-up of Promising Innovations in Education. Retrieved from <https://educationinnovations.org/blog/unicef-partners->

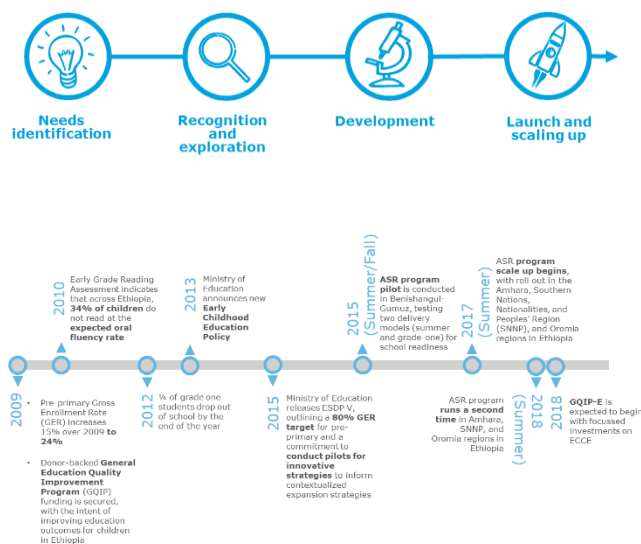
[results-development-institute-accelerate-scale-promising-innovations-education.](#)

<sup>15</sup> Source: World Bank database. School enrollment, pre-primary (% gross). Retrieved from

GER, some gains may be attributable to the ASR programme. However, gaps in access are still evident. The GER is still far from the 80 per cent by 2020 target set by the Government. With respect to gaps in access to ASR, when the programme was implemented in new regions, Regional Ministries of Education selected specific woredas for implementation of ASR. While the woredas selected were generally those where no O-class is offered or where enrolment in O-class is low, not all woredas meeting those criteria were included within the programme, in part due to resource limitations. As a result, some children still have limited options for pre-primary.

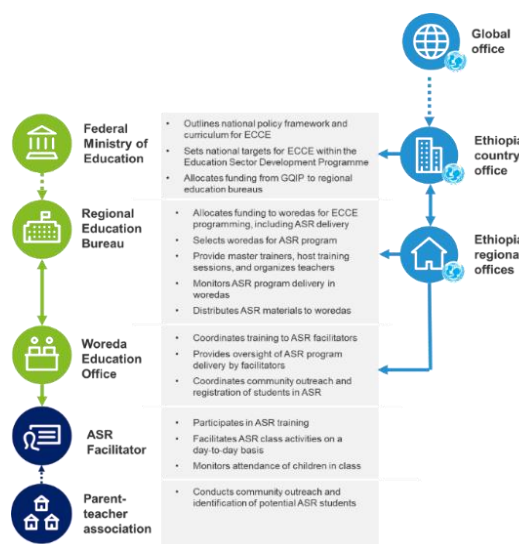
*"Our role [as UNICEF] is to introduce new programmes and then demonstrate that they can work through pilot. We expect the government to pick up these programmes once this has happened."* Country office case study informant.

**Figure 4. The innovation journey and timeline**



<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRE.ENRR?locations=ET&view=chart>.

**Figure 5. Typical implementation model for the ASR Programme**



### Looking ahead to 2020 and beyond

The CO continues to provide technical support to both ECOs and EROs as needed. Based on discussions with case study informants within the Ethiopia Country Office, there is now an enhanced focus on the office's work as a policy advocate for pre-primary more broadly. This includes support to the Government to enhance overall focus on education quality (with ongoing initiatives in this area) and support on the development of the new O-Class curriculum. The Ethiopia Country Office has also indicated that it is working to enhance cross-collaboration between groups within the Ministry of Education.

## Innovation in context: O-Class and Child-to-Child

ASR is not the only pre-primary programme in Ethiopia. O-Class (mandated by the Government) and Child-to-Child (a UNICEF/government initiative involving peer learning from older children) are other delivery models for pre-primary.

Given that there are existing models for pre-primary, why was the ASR programme necessary? For one, O-Class, despite being the most widely available and highest priority for government, requires new infrastructure. Preschool classrooms must be constructed and attached to existing primary schools.

Secondly, O-Class expansion has been uneven across regions and rural regions tend to have low enrolment rates, with some interviewees indicating that parents are hesitant to have a young child out of the house for an entire year.

Finally, quality of the O-Class curriculum and early-childhood teaching methods remains low. Teachers often do not receive training in early childhood education. This is further compounded by a tendency for children to stay in O-class for multiple years, with a wide range of ages in the same class challenging teachers to meet learners with appropriate activities for their developmental age.

It appears the Government is moving toward enhancing the quality of the O-Class curriculum. A new curriculum is currently under development. According to some government informants, the curriculum draws from the ASR approach, integrating child-friendly and play-based learning themes into the new curriculum. However, a recent Young Lives study of the scaling up of O-Class has indicated that there are essential improvements to be made in the broader educational ecosystem. Specifically, integrating of early childhood care and education in teacher training colleges and improved governance models for decision-making between the local, regional and national governments were identified as key enablers for successful scaling up of O-Class.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. ASR FIELD TESTING

### 5.1 Summary of ASR in Amhara

Two ASR programme cycles have been carried out in the region, over summer 2017 and 2018. The summer programme modality was selected by the regional government, which is supported by UNICEF regional office education specialists. The programme covers 20 of 105 woredas in the region, with 15 schools originally proposed to implement the programme in 2017. According to the regional office, after two summers, 20,000 children now have access to readiness programmes. These children would previously not have attended O-class or kindergarten due to a variety of factors and were considered at risk for dropout from Grade 1.

Going forward, there is strong appetite from the regional government to expand the programme to additional woredas. However, this will demand additional funding and planning given the challenges with respect to equity of access for ASR caused by

topographical and climate-related factors, as well as teacher availability.

#### *Who are the stakeholders involved?*

- **Programme funding and technical support to the region:** UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office provides funds to the Regional Office, taken from the pool of funds for the programme secured through the Roche Foundation. The Country Office also provides ongoing support to the Regional Office and regional government in the form of master training and materials.
- **Implementation planning and support:** UNICEF Regional Office works closely with the Regional Education Bureau counterparts in programme planning activities, identifies key activities for implementation and provides technical support as needed.
- **Regional preparation for implementation:** The Regional Education Bureau is

---

<sup>16</sup> Source: Young Lives. (2017). Scaling up Early Learning in Ethiopia: Exploring the Potential of O-Class. Retrieved from <https://younglives.org.uk/content/scaling-early-learning-ethiopia-exploring-potential-o-class>.



responsible for the majority of implementation activities, including:

- Selection of woredas;
  - Orientation activities, including with administrative zone and woreda administrators, education heads, and early childhood education facilitators; woreda education officers and kebele managers and school directors and supervisors from implementing schools;
  - Training of facilitator;
  - Curriculum material distribution; and
  - Compilation and analysis of implementation reports and ongoing programme oversight.
- Regional Education Bureau focal persons with experience in early childhood education are assigned to support woredas in implementation of the programme and oversee the overall quality of summer programming through ongoing engagement with woreda administrators, schools, and teachers.

- **Management of ASR programme:** Woredas play a critical role on-the-ground deployment of the programme, with responsibility for:
  - Selection of schools and registration of eligible children;
  - Identification of teachers willing to facilitate programme;
  - Training of ASR facilitators; and
  - Supervision of classroom preparation.
- **Delivery of ASR programme:** Trained ASR facilitators are responsible for delivering the ASR curriculum within select schools and monitoring the progress of children using a continuous assessment worksheet.

According to programme documentation and discussions with case study informants, facilitators are ideally O-class, Grade 1 or new teachers. However, those teachers are often attending other summer training activities during the programme and alternative facilitators without an early

childhood care and education background are often involved in the programme.

### *How is the innovation funded?*

It is challenging to clearly identify the costs associated with implementation, as there is no consolidated source of funding and spending information. Based on the UNICEF Amhara budget, the highest costs are associated with adaptation, development and printing of ASR materials, followed by payment of teacher incentives. Identifying sources and breakdown of funding for implementation is challenging. However, based on discussions with case study informants, the following sources were identified:

- **UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office:** Using funds from the Roche Foundation, the Country Office provides top up funding the Regional Education Bureaux to enable them to implement the programme accordingly to the plan and also provides in-kind support through organizing and delivering master training. UNICEF is also providing 300 Birr (US\$10) to teacher facilitators, to be paid upon completion of the summer programme.
- **Regional Education Bureau:** It funds purchasing, printing, and distribution of curriculum, play and learning materials, per diems and event costs for training, awareness and orientation activities, programme monitoring and progress reporting, and payment of facilitator incentives. The REB also provides funds to the woredas to pay incentives for teachers to become ASR facilitators – this is a salary of 1500 Birr (approximately US\$54) per month.

## 5.2 Lessons learned from Amhara

Based on discussions with case study informants and a review of documentation from Amhara implementation, there are several key lessons learned about scaling of an innovation following the piloting stage.

- **Findings from a pilot need to be put into the context of the local ecosystem.** According to case study informants, utilization of a summer delivery modality in Amhara was primarily based on the finding that students involved in the summer format for the pilot programme had improved learning outcomes compared to peers involved in the fall programme. No documentation was available to indicate if these findings were put into context of the local pilot ecosystem and it appears limited attempts were made to consider potential differences between the pilot region ecosystem and Amhara. Reflections of case study informants that the summer delivery model has been challenged by limited availability of teachers as well as local weather conditions associated with flooding indicates that deeper consideration of the appropriate delivery model may be needed prior to scaling within a particular region or zone.
- **Timing of materials and training is critical to influencing successful implementation activities.** Facilitators' materials for the first year of the ASR programme were delivered late to teachers, leading to challenges in delivery quality during the first few weeks of the programme. Timing of training was also identified as a challenge for the programme, given that facilitators received five days of training well in advance of the summer programme.

**There is no clear strategy for managing the different delivery modalities available for pre-primary and managing the transition to full O-class implementation.** While ASR is understood by all stakeholders to be a primarily interim strategy, it appears that the transition between the interim ASR programme and full implementation of O-class has not been

adequately planned. There were differences in woreda, Regional Ministry of Education (RMoE) and Federal Ministry of Education (FMoE) interpretations of what an interim strategy involves. For example, one woreda expressed a preference for the ASR programme over O-class. Additionally, during a joint discussion with UNICEF Regional Office, Ethiopia Country Office and the Regional Ministry of Education, it became clear that stakeholders were not fully aligned on how funds from the General Education Quality Improvement Programme could be used for further enhancements to pre-primary and ultimately the development of a long term strategy in this area. No documented strategy has been articulated for the transition from ASR to O-class, despite some stakeholders indicating that if "O-class is properly implemented", ASR will "no longer be required." Going forward, should the ASR programme modality become redundant with the planned revisions to the O-class curriculum, a transition away from ASR will need to be managed.







## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1 Approach dimension

#### 1. How does this innovation contribute to UNICEF country and global strategies?

As highlighted in the context section, the ASR programme is closely aligned to UNICEF's strategic plan, programme division strategic pillars<sup>17</sup>, and has clear linkage to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mainstreaming of early childhood care and education with the cooperation of government is gaining increased traction within the last two to three years, potentially due to the demonstrated success of innovations like ASR.<sup>18</sup> As evidenced by selection of ASR for funding in the CEI/UNICEF innovation challenge, the programme has also directly contributed to the current conceptualization of educational innovations, demonstrating that innovation can occur outside digitalization and technology development.

At a country level, the ASR programme is closely linked to UNICEF's five year Learning and Development programme<sup>19</sup>, which is focused on supporting the Federal Ministry of Education in improving access to and completion of primary education.

#### 2. Is this innovation about doing something new, scaling up (building on existing success), scaling out (replication and dissemination), or working at greater efficiency/economy?

The ASR programme involves doing something new, scaling up, scaling out, and working at greater/efficiency and economy.

- **Doing something new:** Based on discussion with government stakeholders, teachers, and UNICEF staff, several **elements of ASR were entirely new** in the Ethiopian context

when introduced. This includes the staged, eight-week curriculum-based approach to school readiness; the use of facilitator guides, complimented by student workbooks; the use of community-focused teaching aides, such as conversation cards with drawings of the local environment; the use of songs and rhymes to support specific learning competencies; and the used of play-based, practical training methodologies for teacher facilitators.

- **Scaling up:** The concept of school readiness was initially introduced through the Child to Child programme. Further, pre-primary education is not an entirely new offering in Ethiopia, with a universal O-class mandated prior to ASR. The ASR programme provided an innovative approach to scale up pre-primary that built upon existing concepts of school readiness, with an emphasis on a higher quality curriculum and facilitation and improved accessibility of the programme to the most vulnerable children.
- **Scaling out:** Considering that school readiness approaches had **been applied by UNICEF previously** in other countries (although with a slightly different curriculum and pedagogy), the ASR programme also included an aspect of scaling out.

**Working at greater efficiency:** ASR was launched with the explicit intent to provide a viable, cost-effective interim strategy for school readiness.<sup>20</sup> This was premised on the assumption that the ability to use existing school infrastructure and leverage trained facilitators at a lower pay rate than teachers would enable cost savings compared to a traditional O-Class. Early childhood care and education in general has also been positioned in policy analysis and research as a cost-effective strategy for eliminating disadvantages.

*Insights:* **Cost-effectiveness may not be the driving force for this innovation.** Cost-effectiveness was not highlighted by

<sup>17</sup> Source: UNICEF publicly available report. *Early Moments Matter for every child* (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Source: Case study informant interviews.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Country office document. *UNICEF Ethiopia Proposal to Roche Foundation and UNICEF Switzerland:*

*Promoting School Readiness for Disadvantaged Children in Ethiopia* (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Source: UNICEF/CEI publicly available report. *Journeys to Scale*. (2015). Corroborated by UNICEF ECO case study informants.

informants involved in implementation as the main advantage of ASR. The cost of ASR has increased since initial estimates in 2014 of US\$16–US\$20 per child. UNICEF has indicated that this is due to a variety of factors related to inflation in Ethiopia, such as shortage of hard currency, increased cost of materials, and ongoing emergencies in some regions. According to the programme manager, the ASR cost is currently estimated to be US\$25–\$US30 per child, with some variation among regions. No supporting documentation was available to indicate how this estimate was developed

### *3. How are/were end-user needs identified and considered and how did they shape the innovation?*

The Teachers/facilitators are ultimately the end users of ASR, delivering the curriculum using the materials and training provided to them.

#### **End user feedback on materials/curriculum:**

Based on discussion with the design firm engaged to develop the curriculum, consultation with teachers occurred over a series of several months. Limited documentation is available to reflect how feedback received from facilitators was incorporated into the curriculum. Given that discussions with current facilitators did not identify significant areas of improvement, it is likely that the materials and training adequately met their needs. Facilitators interviewed indicated that the pedagogy and materials available to them were well-designed. In particular, they appreciated how materials were built on the same format for each week and provided a relatively fool proof way for teachers to help students achieve minimum learning competencies. Further, they appreciated the consideration of Ethiopian fondness for cultural stories and songs, indicating that they appreciated the integration of local community elements into conversation cards and the use of songs as a supporting element to lessons.

**End user feedback on training:** Little documentation was available to demonstrate UNICEF's consideration of facilitators' needs in the development of training activities.

However, based on discussions with UNICEF innovators, it was understood that teachers often had limited understanding of developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods for young children and required practical, hands-on instructions. Training was thus designed to help teachers understand the rationale for specific pedagogical approaches (such as the use of games and songs); and provide facilitators a chance to experience and practice these approaches first hand. Both facilitators and government stakeholders indicated this approach was particularly effective in building the confidence of facilitators and enabling them to deliver the programme in a consistent manner.

#### **End user feedback on delivery modality:**

Trade-offs must often be made in the design of an innovation so that it appropriately meets the needs of end users, beneficiaries and funding organizations. Facilitators and government stakeholders in Amhara indicated that the use of a summer delivery modality was challenged by competing priorities for facilitators. The choice to pursue a summer programme was primarily driven by the initial findings of the pilot control trial, as well as the preference of regional governments, who identified that finding rooms in schools would be easier during summer. However, additional training is often offered to teachers over the summer period and teachers may prefer to enrol in those upgrading activities rather than continue to teach over the summer. This is assumed by many informants to make the programme less attractive to teachers.

**Insights: ASR materials could also consider the beneficiaries' needs.** The extent to which children were consulted during the design process for the programme is unclear. The design firm involved in development of the programme did consult with teachers; however, they did not identify consultation activities with children. Given the limited timeline for development of the materials, it is unlikely that substantial engagement with beneficiaries of the programme occurred. Further, the extent to which parents were consulted on materials is also unclear. While speculative, it is possible that some needs of pre-primary children were not

adequately addressed by the programme curriculum. For example, one regional UNICEF office stakeholder indicated that while there is a high emphasis on hygiene in materials, most children have limited access to clean water and may be challenged in applying those lessons in their homes. Further, the continuation of learning after children leave school is potentially limited. One of the two classrooms visited allowed children to bring their workbooks home after school. Should children wish to engage with their parents (and vice versa) on what they learned in school, the educational background of parents could be further taken into account in the design of materials, utilizing a human-centred design approach to identify their key needs.

#### 4. What challenges were faced during the innovation process and what strategies were used to overcome barriers?

Overall, the innovation process was described as highly productive and all case study informants expressed a positive attitude toward the process, despite any challenges encountered during development of the curriculum and rollout of the programme.

Those challenges included:

- Limited time for development of curriculum and piloting;
- Limited resources for implementation in all relevant woreda schools;
- Lack of available teachers for programme delivery;
- Limited support of some community members and school administrators; and
- Challenges associated with managing a 'gold-standard' approach to random control trial (RCT).

**Insights: Challenges encountered by ASR are similar to those experienced with the Child to Child (CtC) programme.** The CtC programme is another UNICEF initiative led

by UNICEF in Ethiopia. It involves a 'child-centred, peer tutoring approach that engages older children to conduct early learning activities with pre-school aged children in their villages.' As ASR is reaching scale, it is beginning to experience several similar challenges to the CtC. In particular, challenges related to timing for the distribution of materials and lack of ongoing training for facilitators identified in the final evaluation report for CtC are similar to ASR. In Amhara, distribution of materials in a timely manner was a challenge identified in the first year of the ASR programme. In discussions with UNICEF case study informants, there is also a general concern from some individuals that the Government will be unable to scale ASR with the same fidelity and quality of training without UNICEF's support. Beyond these challenges, it is evident that ASR has addressed, at least partially, several recommendations from the CtC evaluation report. While a formal comparison of these two programmes was not within the scope of this case study, the following characteristics of ASR reflect the recommendations of the CtC report:<sup>21</sup>

- **Addressing the need to focus on literacy as an aspect of early childhood development programming:** In the CtC final evaluation, it was found that literacy scores for children in CtC were very poor. Curriculum informants indicated that the ASR programme deliberately emphasized pre-literacy as a critical skill to be covered by facilitators and in materials.

Interestingly, the recent Benishangul-Gumuz region assessment found that approximately 7 to 10 per cent more children from CtC were able to read letters compared to ASR programme participants. This conflict in findings emphasizes the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes and potentially indicates

---

<sup>21</sup> Source: Evaluation report prepared for GoE and UNICEF (2014). An Evaluation of the Child-to-Child School Readiness Programme in Ethiopia.



a need for a formal comparative analysis of programmes.

- **Aligning to and integrating programming with the national plan for early childhood care and education, specifically the pillar for formal school readiness:** Conducted in 2014, the evaluation of CtC indicated a clear need to align with the then-upcoming O-class, complementing the programme by potentially targeting younger children. The children targeted by ASR are the same age as those targeted by CtC (6 years old) and it appears that gaps still exist for children between 4 to 5 years of age. According to one regional manager, in some cases, younger children will informally join siblings in the ASR programme.
- **Enhancing accessibility for vulnerable children:** Recruitment of the most vulnerable children into pre-primary programmes was identified as a key area of opportunity for UNICEF from the CtC evaluation. The ASR programme was designed to target those children who might not otherwise have opportunities to attend school due to their socioeconomic background. Working with the Government to recruit students to the programme through community engagement activities appears to have better enabled the programme to reach vulnerable children. In the future, disaggregated data for children participating in the programme related to their socioeconomic status and material education may be informative.

#### *5. How was scale considered through the process, starting with the initial design of this innovation?*

Addressed through other evaluation framework responses, specifically 'Outcomes'.

#### *6. Was a proof of concept and business case developed for this innovation?*

The use of a piloting approach aided in developing the 'business case' for ASR. Federal Ministry of Education stakeholders indicated that evidence that the programme could contribute to improved enrolment and academic performance in primary school encouraged the scaling up of the programme to other regions.

#### *7. How does this innovation complement or build on existing knowledge and work conducted in the country and across programmes?*

The ASR programme was intended to complement O-class, initially as an interim strategy and today, as a potential alternative delivery modality for pre-primary in select areas. The curriculum builds baseline pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills that are likely to be useful for Grade 1.

With respect to existing work conducted by the Ethiopia Country Office, case study informants and the Journeys to Scale report indicate that CtC was a jumping off point for ASR. However, it was challenging to identify the specific lessons learned from Child to Child that were applied to ASR. Given the growing emphasis on quality in education in Ethiopia, it is likely that issues associated with the quality and consistency of learning from CtC was an influencing factor in the choice to use trained teachers as facilitators of ASR.

#### *8. How have the local environment/market (including legal, regulatory and technological) considerations influenced the design of the innovation?*

The local educational system has strongly influenced the design of the implementation model for ASR. Education in Ethiopia is highly decentralized, with regional and local governments responsible for implementation of country policies. UNICEF encouraged a high level of collaboration between woreda administration and Regional Ministries of Education, and, to some extent, the Federal Ministry of Education, during implementation. Further, as discussed in the strategy section,

consideration of the existing pre-primary system is evident, with Regional Ministries of Education encouraged by UNICEF to select those woredas where O-class enrolment was low for initial implementation of the programme.

Beyond the policy environment for early childhood care and education, several other factors influenced the design of the innovation:

- **Culture:** UNICEF and the Government assumed that children who were not enrolled in O-class were likely needed at home for farming or child-minding duties during the year. Thus, a shorter eight-week programme would allow children to be out of school for longer while still providing a sufficient level of school readiness in advance of primary school, ultimately removing a perceived barrier to enrolment.
- **Socioeconomic status of children:** The focus of the programme on pastoral, rural regions was deliberate, given the availability of private, tuition-based pre-primary education in other areas. Early on, some stakeholders felt that the fall delivery model would be more appropriate in rural regions, sensing that families may wish to take time off during the summer. This perception was ultimately challenged by other stakeholders, who indicated that most families would not have the means or the desire to take time off during the summer. UNICEF thus made the decision to pilot both a fall and summer delivery modality based on this learning.
- **Weather conditions:** While not initially a factor in the design of the innovation, influence of the local physical environment is increasingly evident. Once again, trade-offs exist between the ideal innovation design and the likelihood of successful implementation. Flooding in some zones has likely led to inequity in rollout of the programme. Parents may hesitate to send their children to school during flooding or flooding may act as a physical barrier to school access in some communities. It appears, based on discussion with government stakeholders and upon review of the selection of schools for implementation, that there may

be a tendency to select schools where attendance is least likely to be hampered by these conditions.

### 9. What value does UNICEF bring to this innovation and what makes UNICEF suitable to scale it?

UNICEF is uniquely positioned in Ethiopia to work with all levels of the educational system. This is likely due to two factors identified by case study informants:

- **Historically strong working relationship with government:** Based on discussion with government and UNICEF stakeholders, the relationship between the Ethiopia Country Office and the Federal Ministry of Education is overwhelmingly positive, with UNICEF increasingly seen as a trusted technical advisor on both policy and curriculum decisions. While other organizations are present in the education space and may have similar objectives related to pre-primary education, those organizations are not perceived as willing to work within the existing system to overcome challenges together with the government. Instead, according to some government stakeholders, they chose to work around the government. In some cases, this contributes to mistrust, which ultimately harms the ability of an organization to take an intervention to scale in Ethiopia.
- **Technical expertise in early childhood development beyond the classroom:** Government stakeholders have recognized that, particularly in early childhood care and education, there is a strong need for collaboration across ministries. With a relatively complex governance system, schools in Ethiopia are influenced by the decisions of many ministries who may not communicate with one another. For example, the ministry making decisions about school infrastructure may not commonly collaborate with the ministry responsible for setting the curriculum. Particularly during early childhood, the whole enabling ecosystem for a child comes into play, necessitating communication between a broad variety of educational stakeholders, as well as other sectors, such as health and nutrition.

Thus, in the case of ASR, UNICEF is the most suitable partner to build the capacity of the Government to bring the programme to scale and encourage adoption of an evidence-based decision-making process on educational innovations. UNICEF is not the most suitable partner to bring the innovation to scale, given the extent of implementation and the cost (both in capital and human resources).

**Insights: Innovation may be an avenue for convening government stakeholders.**

Based on the work conducted through the ASR programme, UNICEF is increasingly perceived as a catalyst for collaboration between government ministries in the area of education. Due to this experience, government stakeholders have suggested that UNICEF is likely to contribute to increased intra-ministry collaboration in the area of early childhood care and education<sup>22</sup>. However, UNICEF has identified that even internally, there are significant challenges with cross-pollination between programme divisions, indicating that these observations by the Government may not be borne out by evidence.

**10. What principles or standards have been applied and how?**

No other principles/standards have been applied for this innovation. As per the context section, programme division formulated criteria for education sector innovations during the Innovations in Education Initiative: traction, effectiveness and scale. An Ethiopia Country Office stakeholder involved in applying for funding for the pilot identified with these aspects of innovation, but did not indicate that they had purposely aligned to them in development of ASR.

The Principles for Digital Development are referenced in the CEI/UNICEF selection criteria for innovation funding. These principles were not referenced by the UNICEF team involved in

the innovation and do not appear to have strongly influenced the design of the innovation.

**11. What are the steps taken or methods used to assess and mitigate risks to children, users, and markets?**

No specific steps were taken to assess and mitigate risks to children, users and markets for this innovation. There are potential physical risks to children implied by the presence of hazardous weather conditions in some regions during the summer rainy season.

**12. For innovations where openness is relevant, how have steps been taken to adopt and expand existing open standards?**

Openness is not considered relevant for this innovation, given that materials were specific to the Ethiopian context and curriculum.

**6.2 Organization dimension**

**13. What type of support was received from the leadership to enable the innovation process?**

**Country Office:** Within the Ethiopia Country Office, the Chief of Education was highly involved in the development of the ASR programme. Supported by a programme manager, the Chief of Education was involved in aiding the Government in design of the curriculum, specifically the translation of the curriculum into a useable, child-friendly format for teacher facilitators to deliver in the classroom. Although this Chief of Education departed from UNICEF prior to implementation of the summer pilot programme, scaling of ASR still occurred in the hands of a capable programme manager. Scaling of ASR within additional regions is carried out with the support of the new Chief of Education. Both leaders have cited the clear value proposition of enhancing access to pre-primary as reducing resistance of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Sources: Global Education Monitoring Report. *Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments.* (2017).

Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching and Learning. *Innovation in education: what works, what doesn't, and what to do about it.* (2017) Corroborated by programme division case study informants.

Government to this innovation. Given the tendency of both UNICEF and the Government to be risk adverse, it is possible that given strong government buy-in, leaders may have a stronger incentive to support the innovation process.

**Regional Office:** It is unclear to what extent leaders enabled the innovation process in all regions where ASR is present. Field office chiefs in some regions expressed interest in case study discussions, indicating that they were, at a minimum, attentive to the programme. One Regional Office leader indicated that while they were supportive of the programme, they were “expected to sell [it to the government]”. They expressed a desire to have more flexibility and input into the continuous improvement of ASR. This may be indicative of a gap in communication between Country Office and Regional Office leadership.

**Insights:** Leaders are required to make difficult funding decisions that can influence scalability of innovations. UNICEF leadership support was not identified as a critical factor for enabling the innovation process. However, considering the limited resources at the disposal of the Ethiopia Country Office going forward and the ongoing refugee and internally displaced persons crisis in the region, it is likely that buy-in and support of leadership will influence the scaling of the programme to additional regions. Based on discussion with the Country Office, leaders will face decisions related to funding priority areas.

It is currently unclear if ASR will remain a priority for the Ethiopia Country Office. Based on discussions with leadership, there is a recognition that more needs to be done to encourage the Government to fully own the scaling of ASR from a resource standpoint. During the case study visit, efforts were underway to put mechanisms in place for funding through the new General Education Quality Improvement Programme agreement, with leadership advocating for inclusion of early childhood care and education (and programmes like ASR) within the funding framework.

#### *14. What type of support and leadership facilitated the enabling environment for innovation?*

Supportive government leadership appears to be the most critical factor in enabling the innovation process for ASR in Ethiopia. Supportive government leadership was identified as an enabler of both piloting and scaling of the ASR programme by all UNICEF stakeholders involved in the innovation process. Specifically, government support at the regional and national level was evident, particularly considering their strong participation in the decision-making processes for both pilot and scaling.

#### *15. What role does leadership (internal and external) play in the innovation process globally? In-country?*

Leadership in country is discussed in questions 14 and 15. ASR was not a global programme and then involvement of global leadership was highly limited.

#### *16. To what extent do/did innovators feel empowered to take risks and to innovate?*

Risk-taking was not identified as a major factor in the innovation process. This is in part supported by evidence of minimal delays in the re-constructed timeline for piloting and scaling. Government stakeholders were highly supportive of the programme. Risks commonly associated with an attitude of hesitancy to ‘try something new’ that is commonly associated with government do not appear to have played into the development of ASR. This may be due to strong relationships with the Government established prior to ASR. One Ministry of Education stakeholder did identify that partnering with a trusted advisor such as UNICEF perhaps contributed to a lower perceived exposure to risk associated with the programme.

#### *17. Who makes decisions with respect to the design and implementation of the innovation?*

ASR design, including curriculum development, was owned by the Federal Ministry of Education. All decisions with regard to minimum learning competencies, curriculum

content and facilitation materials were made by the Government, with input from UNICEF.

**Insights: Decentralization of roles and responsibilities for implementation:**

Implementation of ASR at the regional level has been strongly encouraged by the Federal Ministry of Education. It is ultimately up to the Regional Ministry of Education to decide to implement the programme, determine the preferred delivery modality and select woredas for implementation. Woredas have inputted into the specific schools where ASR is implemented. UNICEF again acts in a technical advisory role to aid in decision-making at all levels.

**18. What factors were considered when making decisions about governance and ownership of the innovation?**

Government was identified from the outset as the decision maker and co-owner of the governance model for implementation of ASR. While no formal governance/ownership model exists for the programme as a whole, the Government is considered the de facto owner of ASR by UNICEF, particularly considering the need for long-term sustainability and scaling. Importantly, the Ethiopia Country Office continues to view its role as mainly a demonstrator of 'the possible' with respect to educational innovations.

At the regional level, similar factors have been taken into account, with formal workplans for the programme generally assigning most decision-making activities to the Regional Ministry of Education.

**Insights: More considerations of the programme at scale during the conceptualization of the governance model may have been advantageous.**

There are potentially contrasting perspectives on the specific role of UNICEF with respect to governance and ownership of ASR. Some Regional Country Offices have expressed concern with regard to the availability of Regional Ministry of Education resources for further scaling activities and feel that UNICEF will need to continue to play a partial ownership role that includes funding for the programme.

The same Regional Country Offices acknowledge that UNICEF is not necessarily in a position to own implementation country-wide, but indicated that long-term government ownership should be considered at the beginning of the innovation process, even in advance of piloting activities.

**19. How has the governance and ownership model influenced the innovation process?**

Government ownership of the ASR programme influenced the innovation process somewhat; however, collaboration between UNICEF and the Government has been a fairly equal relationship. Key aspects of the innovation process driven by the Government include:

- **Focus on pre-primary enrolment rates:** With the ambitious target of 80 per cent enrolment in pre-primary, the Federal Ministry of Education has strongly influenced the focus of regions on increasing enrolment rates (as opposed to improved learning outcomes and reducing Grade 1 dropout) through the ASR programme.
- **Relatively basic content and format of curriculum and materials:** UNICEF was involved in breaking down the curriculum into eight weeks of learning. Beyond this, all decisions with respect to the curriculum and materials were made by the Government (with some input from UNICEF). While the quality of materials has been identified as strong compared to other existing materials in the country, UNICEF has commented that there are clear opportunities for improvement when compared to pre-primary materials more broadly.
- **Integration of ASR lessons learned into other pre-primary programming:** Ownership of the curriculum for ASR by the Government has served as a capacity-building exercise. There is a perception that government oversight of the consulting firm responsible for development of the materials enhanced various ministries' understanding of child-friendly early childhood care and education approaches. According to government stakeholders, these learnings are being



translated into the revised O-class curriculum as well as the revised primary curriculum currently underway,

- **Use of facilitator terminology:** A number of case study informants indicated that, due to involvement of the Federal Ministry of Education in the ASR programme, teachers had higher expectations with regard to salary. As a result, a deliberate choice was made to use the term facilitator and thus provide a lower salary than a typical pre-primary teacher's. This has likely influenced the demographics of teachers, with UNICEF and government stakeholders indicating that they primarily attract newly graduated or young teachers who are looking to gain experience in the classroom.

Given the role of the Regional Ministry of Education, a decentralized approach to implementation has kept the amount of Ethiopia Country Office resources required to support implementation to a minimum. Further, with the Regional Ministry of Education and woredas assigning focal points and trainers to the programme, Regional Country Offices have primarily taken a project management role, maintaining workplans for the programme and serving as external, relatively neutral advisors to different levels of government.

**Insights: A top-heavy model for decision-making may limit the buy-in of local leadership.** The complexity of the governance model for ASR has been identified by Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF stakeholders as a limitation, particularly at the woreda and school levels. Importantly, a lack of ownership of ASR programme implementation by school administrators has been identified as a barrier for the programme. While administrators are consulted during orientation activities for a new implementation, the role of school administrators in implementation workplans is minimal. During the field visit, there was little evidence to show there was strong buy-in by administrators for the programme. School administrators were not present for case study meetings. Some case study informants, including facilitators, noted that administrators in some cases were not receptive to the programme and

did not provide support in the form of community engagement activities or classroom materials. No incentives are provided to school administrators to participate in the programme.

**UNICEF is challenged in balancing demonstration with implementation activities.** Many UNICEF case study informants indicated that UNICEF's main role is to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of new innovative approaches in education. This is particularly true in light of other priorities that staff members must balance with the programme.

While this role did not directly conflict with the Government's perception of UNICEF, in interviews government officials often indicated that without UNICEF, this programme would not be possible. When queried as to why, government interviewees indicated that while the funding UNICEF brings is critical, the technical and project management capacities of UNICEF team members are equally important in enabling the Government to implement and monitor initiatives such as ASR. The demonstration role of UNICEF was rarely mentioned, with just one government stakeholder indicating this to be UNICEF's main role on the project.

## *20. To what extent was sustainability considered in the plan for the innovation?*

As the ASR programme was intended to be an interim strategy for Ethiopia to enhance pre-primary enrolment, based on discussion with case study informants, long-term sustainability of the programme was not an intended objective during initial design, piloting and implementation. With continued challenges in expansion of O-class and the growing acknowledgement that some parents may prefer an eight week pre-primary alternative, sustainability is increasingly relevant to the ASR programme.

A policy advocacy strategy for the programme created in advance of the pilot stage does reference the need for ensuring transformation and sustainability of early



childhood education initiatives, including the ASR programme, through the following strategies:<sup>23</sup>

- **Ensuring early childhood education is an important part of ESDP V** (achieved);
- **Advocacy with influential members of the Ministry of Education and regional governments** (appears to be an ongoing priority of the Country Office);
- **Providing a variety of cost-effective options for regional governments** (associated with ASR programme and Child to Child differential strategies);
- **Promoting ASR as a strategy for ensuring quality** (highlighted by some case study informants, but not identified as a critical strategy during implementation); and **increasing planning capacity of woreda and Kebele officials** (assessment of this strategy was not within the scope of this case study; however, capacity building woredas and kebeles is provided by technical advisors involved in ASR).

*Insights:* **Without a clear ‘end date’ for an interim strategy, there is a need to consider sustainability from the beginning.** In order to achieve sustainability, the availability of long-term, secure funding to carry out these activities has been identified as a barrier. By 2020, UNICEF will have exhausted the Roche Foundation funds for ASR and other funding sources will need to be explored. The Ethiopia Country Office has recognized a strong need for the Federal Government to equip regions with the ability to fully fund the programme and has advocated for increased funding in this area. Based on comments from case study informants, it also appears that UNICEF has consulted with the World Bank in development of the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GQIP) and regional government budgets will be permitted to use GQIP funds toward early childhood care and education programmes, including the ASR programme, although there is limited

documentation available to understand UNICEF's role in supporting this transition of funding. UNICEF has indicated that its role in aiding the sustainability of ASR programmes, where it may be necessary, has in part been through the training of ASR trainers at the regional and woreda levels, who could now be equipped to carry out their own Training of Trainers activities as needed.

*21. Where does ownership of this innovation fit in UNICEF with respect to long-term sustainability?*

Not relevant. Given primary ownership by the Ethiopian Government, please refer to questions related to scale.

*22. When will this innovation become mainstream and no longer considered an innovation? What steps has UNICEF taken to move toward that point?*

According to case study informants, awareness of the ASR programme in Ethiopia is high. The programme continues to expand into new regions, reaching 4 of 11 regions in the country. In the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Office, 78 per cent of stakeholders interviewed by UNICEF in 2017 had a medium to high level of awareness of the ASR programme. Some UNICEF Ethiopia Regional Offices also stated that they are considering the integration of additional cross-cutting sectors, such as nutrition and child protection, into the programme. Together, these are markers indicating the programme has been mainstreamed in the country.

*23. How, if at all, has the innovation team worked across UNICEF offices and divisions to leverage internal and external knowledge/expertise and/or share learnings?*

In the Journeys to Scale report and the original ASR funding proposal, there are references to similar school readiness programmes implemented by UNICEF in Cambodia.

---

<sup>23</sup> Source: UNICEF internal working paper (2014). Accelerated School Readiness Program Use of ASR to transform program in Ethiopia.

However, there is limited documented evidence of the Ethiopia Country Office seeking Cambodia Country Office expertise/knowledge during the design of the ASR pilot and implementation model. Beyond this reference, there is limited evidence to indicate that collaboration with other UNICEF offices or internal/external subject matter experts occurred.

Looking ahead to implementation of school readiness programmes in other regions, collaboration is likely to become a stronger element. In 2017, programme division hosted a sub-Saharan workshop on financing of pre-primary education. With 20 countries in attendance, a large delegation from Ethiopia participated in the workshop and shared lessons learned from scale-up of ASR. In addition, there are indications from the Mozambique Country Office that lessons learned from ASR design and implementation were considered during development of their own school readiness program.

#### *24. How has collaboration across UNICEF influenced the innovation process?*

Given that this is a context specific innovation, minimal collaboration beyond the Regional Country Office and Ethiopia Country Office was evident. Please refer to question 23.

### **6.3 Resources and capabilities dimension**

#### *25. How is the innovation funded?*

**Pilot, including evidence gathering:** Funded by UNICEF, using funding from the innovation in education initiative (not earmarked for specific purposes) and World Bank Strategic Investment Fund (earmarked for evaluation).

**Scaling:** Funded in part by UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office, utilizing a portion of the US\$1.999 million funds secured through the Roche Foundation. These funds are provided for adaptation of ASR materials in specific regions (including translation), production of

materials, training of facilitators, a teacher honorarium and monitoring. The Country Office also provides ongoing in-kind support to the Ethiopia Regional Office and regional government in the form of project management. Based on the proposal to the Roche Foundation, the funding provided by UNICEF was expected to total US\$600,000.

Remaining funding is provided through the Government, as part of the overall Regional Ministry of Education budget. It has been challenging to identify the specific activities that are funded by the Government. Based on workplans, a review of UNICEF budget documents and discussions with case study informants, it appears that government funds are allocated to printing of curriculum materials, distribution of materials and purchasing of play and learning materials, per diems and event costs for training, awareness and orientation activities, programme monitoring and progress reporting, and payment of facilitator salaries.

#### *26. How much time and how many resources were invested at different points in the innovation process?*

Option question in evaluation framework – insufficient information available to case study team to provide sufficient response.

#### *27. What ongoing resources (human, physical, and financial) are required from UNICEF to manage this innovation?*

Optional question in evaluation framework – insufficient information available to case study team to provide sufficient response. Please refer to innovation outcomes for discussion of resources related to scaling.

#### *28. How, if at all, have partners external to UNICEF contributed to the innovation process?*

In a policy strategy for early childhood care and education dated 2014, UNICEF identified a desire to work with two external partners.<sup>24</sup> Partnership was not identified by case study informants as a critical

---

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF internal working paper (2014). Accelerated School Readiness Program Use of ASR to transform program in Ethiopia.

factor in the programme's design and implementation.

- **USAID** was identified as an institution requiring consultation to ensure the content of ASR could feed into an 'early grade reading' intervention in the early grades of primary school. This consultation does not appear to have occurred. Based on a recent review of early grade reading in Ethiopia, it appears that no such programme was implemented by USAID in the country.
- **Save the Children** was identified as a potential partner in the curriculum development committee, to enable them to align with the curriculum and present joint proposals to donors. Save the Children was not engaged by UNICEF through the piloting or implementation process and this organization was not referenced by any case study informants.

#### *29. How are partnerships designed to provide value to partners?*

Not applicable, no external partnerships.

#### *30. What methods, approaches or tools are used throughout the innovation process?*

Not applicable, no specific methods, approaches or tools were used during innovation process.

### **6.4 Incentives and outcomes**

#### *31. What incentives are encouraging/driving and discouraging/deterring adoption of the innovation by users?*

**Adoption by government:** Based on the Journeys to Scale report, adoption of ASR in regions was perceived as being incentivized by the Government's ambitious 80 per cent pre-primary enrolment target. Surprisingly, this target was not mentioned in interviews with any government informants at the federal, regional, or woreda levels. It is likely that this target has played a role in encouraging the adoption of the programme by regions. However, interviews with case study informants indicate that other incentives (for example, cost savings comparative to O-class implementation) are encouraging regions to adopt the programme.

**Adoption by school administrators:** Incentives for the adoption of ASR at a school level are minimal, with no specific funding provided to schools for oversight of ASR facilitators. According to one case study informant, the O-class director is intended to oversee the programme as part of the school but in many cases this has not occurred.

**Participation of teachers:** Financial incentives are provided to teachers to act as facilitators in the programme. This includes a 1500 Birr monthly stipend (approximately US\$54) and a 300 Birr payment (US\$10) at completion of the programme. Based on discussion with government stakeholders and UNICEF, these incentives may not be sufficient to encourage participation of existing O-class and Grade 1 teachers. Since the pilot of the programme, attracting qualified teachers has been a challenge.

Beyond the financial incentive provided to teachers, incentives in the form of training and experience are also evident, although not explicitly stated in programme documentation. Facilitators interviewed indicated that they were interested in participating in the programme to enhance their understanding of early childhood and child-friendly learning approaches, so that they could improve their lessons during the year. UNICEF stakeholders have proposed that these incentives may be equally as strong as financial incentives in attracting new graduates, students and inexperienced teachers.

**Insights:** The tendency of using existing incentives to attract new teachers may indirectly contribute to improved programme outcomes. Teachers who have worked in the same grades for some time may be less open to learning new approaches to education. One Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study found that teachers less than 30 years of age participated in twice as many days of development as teachers aged 50 and older. While this cannot be extrapolated to Ethiopia specifically, it supports the observation by two UNICEF case study informants who stated that young graduates and volunteers from teacher

colleges were often excited and eager to follow the instructions of trainers and learn from UNICEF. Theoretically, teachers who are more engaged in the training process and more supportive of the programme approach overall may be better engaged in the classroom with students, potentially contributing to improved programme outcomes. Further study is needed to understand the influence of facilitators characteristics and demographics on pre-primary outcomes.

### 32. What incentives are encouraging/discouraging UNICEF staff during the innovation process?

Optional question in evaluation framework – limited information available to case study team to provide sufficient response. Based on discussions with case study owners, no clear internal incentives were surfaced, beyond personal interest and passion in the area of early childhood development.

### 33. How were metrics designed and used to inform the development and scaling of the innovation?

**Design and piloting:** A formal results framework and basic Theory of Change was developed for the programme as part of the pilot phase of ASR. It is not clear how the metrics outlined in the results framework were designed and used to inform the development and scaling of the innovation. Based on discussions with case study informants, evidence gathering during the pilot phase was focused on the assessment of learning outcomes in Grade 1 in the area of literacy and numeracy of ASR students.

**Scaling:** Since piloting, this results framework and Theory of Change do not appear to have been updated. However, monitoring of the programme continues to focus on several key metrics outlined by this framework. While no single source of data on the ASR programme was provided for this case study, it appears that most regions track at least three of the following metrics:

- Number of woredas implementing ASR;
- Number of schools implementing ASR;
- Number of students reached;

- Enrolment, attendance, retention and achievement rates of students in Grade 1 following completion of ASR.

In addition, assessment forms of student learning outcomes are provided to facilitators for individual students. As the Regional Ministry of Education is the main decision maker for scaling, these forms are considered inputs into decision-making for continued scaling and improvement of the programme. Limited quantitative evidence was provided to the case study team, thus specific insight into how these metrics inform scaling is unavailable. However, Regional Ministry of Education interviewees in Amhara indicated that collection of this information by focal points is ongoing. Promisingly, some regions are pursuing professional assessments of these outcomes and some assessments have already been completed in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

#### **Insights: Leading indicators of implementation quality are limited:**

Overall, the design of metrics was identified as an area of improvement by UNICEF. The majority of metrics tracked are programme outputs. Considering that the ASR programme was in part intended to overcome quality challenges associated with CtC, tracking leading indicators of quality, such as the number of returning facilitators, would be informative. This is particularly relevant, given that the Benishangul-Gumuz assessment of a sample of students saw better pass rates of CtC participants on Grade 1 exams than ASR and O-class.

### 34. At what point in the innovation stage were metrics considered? How was impact measured before scaling (or how is it intended to be measured)?

Attempts were made to measure impact before scaling, with the random control trial planned for the pilot phase of work. However, due to several constraints in carrying out this work, scaling occurred before the full impact of the programme could be measured. Since the completion of the pilot programme, the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Office conducted a descriptive comparative study to identify implementation challenges and collect

quantitative and qualitative data related to children's enrolment, attendance and learning achievements in Grade 1, with results disaggregated by children who completed the Summer, Grade 1 ASR or O-class, or participated in CtC, or who had no school readiness activities in advance of grade.

**Insights: Randomized control trials are associated with trade-offs for project implementation.** As per the AIR Preliminary Report, the randomized control trials study ultimately used a non-experimental design, because of challenges in randomly assigning schools to the programme.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the preliminary study did not definitively identify programme impacts. Based on discussion with both UNICEF Headquarters and the Ethiopia Country Office, the level of rigor required for the study was overwhelming for the stakeholders involved. Framing the study required caution around communication with control groups (who would not be receiving the intervention). According to UNICEF, the value of the randomized control trial was perhaps not fully communicated to government partners. UNICEF felt that the Government may not have seen the piloting process as an informative step for the programme. However, based on discussions with government stakeholders currently involved, it appears that the pilot approach did in fact improve the reception of the programme by new regions. Going forward, the future of application of a randomized control trial approach to evaluation of future cohorts appears to be unknown. Some case study informants indicated that demonstrating strong evidence for impact of the ASR programme on children's learning and outcomes will continue to be a priority; however, more flexibility will be needed for the evaluation methodology employed. The programme appears to be reaching a critical stage for such an evaluation, given the end of Roche Foundation funding in 2020 and the desire

to transition the programme entirely to the Government.

### 35. How has data generated through the innovation process created value for UNICEF and partners?

Optional question in evaluation framework – given the limitations in the current RCT approach, data generated to date has been minimal. However, the Journeys to Scale report, which captured the initial findings of the preliminary assessment and piloting process, has been identified as an important tool for use by the global office to understand how to approach innovation from a strategic lens in the future.

### 36. What does the ideal future state of this innovation 'at scale' look like?

The ASR programme at scale is not explicitly defined by any programme documentation. Further, a formal strategy for scale has not been articulated. Different perspectives on scale based on case study informant interviews are presented below.

- **ASR is no longer required and has been replaced by O-class.** High demand for formal, high quality pre-primary at a grassroots level has been linked to the ASR programme at scale. Some informants indicated that the programme will have successfully achieved scale when it is no longer needed, because full O-class implementation and enrolment have been achieved.
- **ASR is part of a consistent portfolio of alternatives to O-class.** Particularly at a regional level, expanding ASR to more woredas and schools and reaching more students in existing woredas were expressed as priorities by some UNICEF stakeholders. For some stakeholders, this means that ASR is the only alternative delivery model to O-class. Other stakeholders expressed that they would prefer more options for pre-primary were

---

<sup>25</sup> Source: AIR Preliminary Internal Report for UNICEF (2016). Evaluation of the ASR Intervention in Ethiopia: Cohort 1 School Readiness Outcome.



available to children in addition to ASR, such as CtC.

Between the above descriptions of scale, a common element is the consideration that all children, including the most vulnerable, should have access to pre-primary education.

**Insights: Innovators are broadening their focus on enablers of pre-primary education.** Considering this approach, the long-term and widespread use of ASR across Ethiopia does not appear to be the only (or even the main) priority for the Ethiopia Country Office. Instead, the Country Office is focused on enhancing the broader ecosystem of enablers in place to encourage improved access to pre-primary in the country. According to several UNICEF case study informants, this shift has in part been driven by a reduction in Ethiopia Country Office funding for programme implementation activities, with the refugee crisis demanding increased resource investments by UNICEF and donors.

At a regional level, two Ethiopia Regional Offices interviewed expressed that enhancing the quality of the existing ASR programme and delivery modalities was critical – particularly by bringing parents into the curriculum and encouraging them to work with their children to reinforce the skills they learn in school.

*37. How has this innovation considered and demonstrated development outcome/impact objectives? To what extent does the innovation contribute (or have the potential to contribute) to equitable results for children?*

Outcomes in overall improvements in quality and access in pre-primary and primary education were conceptualized by ASR programme informants as follows:

- To contribute to **improved ability of teachers** to reach young children during lessons

through training and demonstration of a child-friendly curriculum and pedagogical approaches; and,

- To contribute to **increased support for early childhood care and education (ECCE)** in regions and woreda, driving improved quality of federal government-mandated ECCE programs.

This case study did not attempt to rigorously measure outcomes or impacts from innovation through a structured framework. Instead, the focus of this work was on identifying examples of potential outcomes and understanding how outcomes had been considered during the innovation process. This process included discussions with case study informants about potential and observed outcomes, observations of children in classrooms and consideration of the country context. With those limitations in mind, potential outcomes related to ASR could include the following:

- **Improved socialization, pre-literacy and numeracy skills, and hygiene of children:** The Amhara Regional Ministry of Education indicated that children who were involved in the ASR programme were performing better at school than those who didn't have these experiences. According to the AIR preliminary assessment of ASR outcomes, students in ASR performed better on mathematics, literacy, and environmental science in Grade 1 than other students. On non-academic measures, no significant difference between groups was found, which may indicate that socialization and hygiene outcomes are still limited. One case study informant mentioned that a lack of clean, accessible water in many ASR students' households likely limited their ability to put into practice some of the lessons learned in school.
- **Reduced Grade 1 dropout:** According to case study informants,<sup>26</sup> dropout rates are highest for Grade 1 in Ethiopia. Numerous case study informants indicated that

---

<sup>26</sup> No recent online data was available for Grade One dropout. However, one 2005 demographic survey found relatively similar dropout rates for all primary school grades

([https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Ethiopia\\_coreusaid.pdf](https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Ethiopia_coreusaid.pdf)).

reducing Grade 1 dropout was a major priority for the programme and the most common measure of success mentioned by informants. They indicated that students with limited school readiness are perhaps more likely to drop out of school due to a lack of experiences in the classroom and the resulting frustration experienced under a formal, (often non-child-friendly) learning curriculum. Despite the stated importance of this outcome, it appears there is inconsistent monitoring of this particular performance indicator of students involved in the programme, for reasons that were not made clear to the case study team. In discussion with Amhara and Oromia, it was indicated that this metric was not tracked. In Benishangul-Gumuz, retention rates for a sample of children in Grade One were 2 per cent higher for children who completed ASR compared to children with no school readiness (with an overall dropout rate of approximately 7 per cent). O-class and CtC participants had the highest Grade 1 retention rates, with rates of approximately 5 per cent.

- **Improved efficiency of pre-primary delivery and enhanced equity:** During pilot, UNICEF cited the reduced cost of delivering the ASR programme as key strength of the programme. Bringing a cost-effective programme like ASR into poor, often hard to reach areas can enhance the equity of pre-primary education. UNICEF has encouraged the Regional Education Bureau to consider further implementation in hard to reach kebeles and has highlighted the strength of the programme in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children. Enhanced equity was not highlighted by non-UNICEF actors as a critical outcome but was alluded to in discussions with both teachers and Regional Education Bureau focal points during field visits.
- **Catalyst of demand for child-friendly, play-based learning and training for young children:** Based on discussions with facilitators and trainers, as well as government stakeholders and UNICEF, it is clear that the child-friendly curriculum uses play-based methods. Teachers are gaining

a further understanding of how children learn at a young age and are more confident and stated they were more willing to apply these methods to in their own classrooms beyond ASR. They praised the materials provided for their appeal to children, particularly conversation cards that draw from the local environment, and the ease of using a curriculum that connected traditional Ethiopian songs and stories to specific learning outcomes.

Further, it is clearly evident that children are enjoying the curriculum activities. During observation in classrooms, students were visibly excited to recite their rhymes and use workbooks provided to them.

- **Improved awareness of and buy-in to formal schooling by communities:** In some areas, parents may hesitate to send their children to school, as they may not perceive the value of schooling at such a young age. This means they may send their students to Grade 1 when they are 8 or 9 years old, creating inefficiencies in the Grade 1 classroom and challenging teachers to meet the different developmental needs of students. One woreda focal point identified that the community awareness activities and the ASR programme seem to be influencing enrolment of young children in Grade 1. Members of both woredas visited stated that they found awareness of the importance of joining school at an appropriate age has grown in communities where ASR is present. This is in part attributed to the intensive awareness building activities undertaken by the woredas prior to implementation.

However, it is important to note that not all parents and community members are supportive of the programme. Both teachers interviewed in Amhara identified the important role of community leader support in the ongoing sustainability of the programme – for example, classroom infrastructure is limited and school administrators may not be willing to provide support to make school spaces more child-friendly for ASR program participants. Further, parents in some kebeles may like

the idea of the ASR programme but the delivery modality of the programme does not appropriately consider the other activities children might need to undertake during the summer. This appears to be highly contextual and based on hyper-local factors, such as the main sources of income for families in a particular region and weather conditions.

These outcomes are closely aligned to stated project outcomes from the 2013 Theory of Change articulated for the programme pilot, particularly retention rates for Grade 1 and exhibition of acceptable school readiness.

**Insights: Catalysing improvements in the learning ecosystem beyond the government:**

For UNICEF, bringing the programme to scale does not appear to have simply been about increasing access to pre-primary; it is part of a broad Country Office strategy to enhance the quality of education in Ethiopia through close collaboration with the Government. This is

reflected by the fact that UNICEF and the Government worked as co-creators of the ASR programme, with substantial capacity building activities undertaken by UNICEF to encourage government ownership of the programme. UNICEF appears to have also framed the innovation at scale as reflected by the enhanced ability of the Government to take a child-friendly, play-based approach to curriculum development activities going forward. This may soon be demonstrated in the revised O-class curriculum.

While these gains are important, there are clear limitations in the broader learning ecosystem that are likely to continue to present barriers to pre-primary quality. Although teacher education colleges were identified as a stakeholder by UNICEF, there is limited evidence of engagement with those learning institutions to build similar technical capacity in early childhood care and education training. Teachers may continue to enter the classroom without adequate training in this area.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The ASR programme has grown in scale since the original pilot conducted in 2016. While the implementation of the programme has evolved since the pilot, the ASR programme curriculum, implementation and training approach remain fairly unchanged. Today, the ASR programme has been scaled up to new regions and woredas as an interim strategy for improving pre-primary access, with UNICEF providing funding and technical guidance. Going forward, the programme is likely to be influenced by recent developments at the federal level related to improving access to early childhood care and education across Ethiopia. The Ethiopia Country Office is looking to the Government to aid in sustaining the programme as a continued option for access to pre-primary in regions where other options may not be well-established or where enrolment rates are low.

Importantly, the ASR programme was not originally intended to be a long-term strategy for delivery of pre-primary education. Many

UNICEF and government case study informants continue to view the programme as a bridging programme as regions continue to work toward full implementation of O-Class and achievement of the Government's goal of 80 per cent pre-primary coverage. However, several case study informants at UNICEF and in the Government have expressed that the programme needs to be sustained as long as O-class enrolment continues to be low for some children and, in particular, where quality issues are persistent. Continuing to apply the lessons learned from the ASR programme to innovation in delivery and improvements to O-class quality may be necessary to avoid poor long-term outcomes for children accessing programs beyond ASR.

ASR is positioned as an innovation within Ethiopia that is specifically designed within the context of the Ethiopian education system. Led by education specialists in the Ethiopia Country Office, who are supported by Regional Offices in implementation, the programme embraces

a strongly decentralized approach. Importantly, it is likely that different countries may already offer programmes very similar to ASR. In those countries, its format may not be considered particularly innovative. There are, however, still lessons to be drawn from the stepwise, collaborative approach taken through the development of the ASR programme with the Ethiopian government. Further, considering growing inequities in access to education caused by migration and displacement of people to refugee camps, UNICEF may look to ASR to leverage tools and methodologies to enhance access to pre-primary in transient populations.

**Table 1. Practical considerations for the ASR programme going forward**

<p><b>Articulate a clear strategy for transition from ASR to O-class or transition to multi-modal pre-primary system</b></p>	<p>The Ethiopia Country Office should consider a strategic review of the ASR programme prior to 2020 to identify potential transition strategies.</p> <p>It is possible that ASR may become part of a long-term portfolio of pre-primary strategies in Ethiopia. This is possible due to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the programme was originally envisioned as an interim strategy, the status of O-class implementation remains unclear, with some woreda and UNICEF stakeholders indicating that there was still significant progress to be made;</li> <li>• While according to the Government, a revised O-class curriculum will address some challenges associated with the quality of O-class (using a similar materials-based, child-friendly, repetition heavy approach), there are likely other areas of improvement to the quality of O-class that are needed (such as infrastructure, classroom environment, and teacher training);</li> <li>• Revisions to the primary curriculum underway, according to curriculum stakeholders, assume a basic level of pre-literacy and pre-math competencies, indicating the need for school readiness will be greater than ever going forward; and,</li> <li>• Recognizing the importance of equity and the opportunity costs associated with enrolling children in a one year pre-primary programme, alternative options may need to be available to the most vulnerable children.</li> </ul> <p>If longer term use of the programme is identified as likely, UNICEF should consider the level of funding required to maintain a long-term programme and identify any additional UNICEF support needed to build the long-term capacity of regional government and woredas to sustain this programme.</p> <p>In areas where O-class enrolment is high and the ASR programme may no longer be required, UNICEF should consider working with the Government to identify the steps needed to phase out the programme, including the community engagement activities that may need to support transition to a single O-class option.</p>
--	--

<b>Develop improved metrics for tracking quality and long-term outcomes of ASR and pre-primary generally</b>	Currently, few leading indicators of quality are associated with the ASR programme. UNICEF should consider working with the Government to identify additional metrics for tracking of both leading indicators of quality and long-term outcomes for children participating in ASR. This process may also build capacity within the Government to enable them to establish indicators of quality of pre-primary education more generally.
<b>Continue to seek evidence of impact and test programme assumptions</b>	<p>Acknowledging the challenges of the randomized control trial approach to evaluating ASR, there remains a critical need to demonstrate the impact of the programme, particularly given the speed at which scaling has occurred and the number of children who are now participating. The evaluation should also explore and test assumptions identified by informants related to reasons for Grade 1 dropout, low O-class enrolment rates, low interest of experienced teachers in facilitation and programme resistance from some community members through engagement with parents and school administrators.</p> <p>Finally, should the programme continue to remain within a broader pre-primary portfolio, more information is needed to test assumptions related to the cost effectiveness of the programme compared to O-class.</p>
<b>Employ innovation as a strategy to overcome other pre-primary challenges</b>	Other challenges in achieving the goal of 80 per cent enrolment in pre-primary were surfaced through the implementation of ASR. Considering the experiences of the Ethiopia Country Office with ASR and the strong relationships built through piloting and implementation of the programme at the level of the Regional Office, the Ethiopia Country Office could begin to consider addressing challenges related to the presence of younger siblings in the classroom, limited parental involvement in the programme, and limited child-friendly spaces for pre-primary age children.
<b>Document and share school readiness lessons learned globally</b>	Cross-pollination of learning from innovation is an important aspect of UNICEF's approach to innovation. To date, the majority of content written about ASR has been developed by an external provider. Using the authentic voice of individuals working on the ground can help to improve the credibility and usability of lessons learned reports. Given that other UNICEF offices, such as Mozambique, are exploring school readiness programming, it would be highly informative to incorporate the voices of field staff (from Regional Offices) to develop a brief project summary including lessons learned from the management of the project and relationships with local communities and government.



**Table 2. Innovation at UNICEF**

<b>Articulate the similarities and differences of an innovation to existing offerings</b>	Is the ASR programme an interim strategy or a complementary delivery model to O-class? It is apparent that particular conditions (such as limited O-class enrolment and favourable summer weather) may influence the response to this question. For innovations in education, where other options are available to meet the same need, UNICEF should consider clearly comparing these models. In the case of ASR, this includes identifying those conditions that are most favourable to the use of ASR as either an interim strategy or complementary delivery model.
<b>Find a problem recognized by government and shared by other regions or countries</b>	The success of ASR in gaining traction with the Government is in part due to overwhelming attention to the problem of low enrolment in pre-primary by the development community as a whole. The problem was also easy to understand and articulate, meaning that innovators were better equipped to develop effective strategies.
<b>Avoid framing an innovation as a single solution to a complex problem</b>	The issue of low pre-primary enrolment and Grade 1 dropout in Ethiopia is a complex one. It is linked to conditions that go beyond the classroom, including the readiness of schools for young children, the availability of trained teachers, the buy-in of communities and parents for primary education and the socioeconomic status of families (including access to critical resources, like water). ASR was not framed by UNICEF as a single solution that could address all contributing factors to the problem. This has helped to manage the expectations of government stakeholders and also encouraged the Government to discover and consider other necessary interventions in the enabling ecosystem for pre-primary (such as cross-ministry collaboration and pursuit of improvements in teacher education).
<b>Empower country offices to lead innovation</b>	Country offices are the most familiar with the problems faced by children and partners. They are valuable assets in identifying potential challenges for children and engaging with local users and partners. Where direct involvement in specific innovation processes is best owned by country offices, Headquarters programme division staff can encourage and empower them to consider the importance of innovation more broadly by providing appropriate training, information, examples and incentives.
<b>Continue to incentivize innovation in education</b>	<p>While a funding competition did not directly catalyse the emergence of the ASR programme, it did challenge innovators to clearly articulate their goals and consider key questions about the approach before investing significant time and effort into the programme. In particular, incentivizing attention to the problem identification and recognition stage could aid individual staff members who may not see themselves reflected in the term 'innovation' to consider new approaches to persistent (and perhaps not immediately evident) problems in their area of work.</p> <p>It is important to note that competitions may not be the most appealing format to incentivize innovation within UNICEF. Different organizational cultures and dynamics lend themselves better to 'competition' or challenge-based innovation initiatives that reward individual teams within the organization.<sup>27</sup> UNICEF's education programme could be well positioned by the nature of its mandate within the organization to consider other approaches to incentivizing innovation, in a manner that could encourage cross-sectoral collaboration.</p>

<sup>27</sup> Source: AgResults report (2017). A Framework for Evaluating Innovation Challenges. Retrieved from [https://www.abtassociates.com/sites/default/files/migrated\\_files/60bc2812-73c9-4cba-afd7-cc86425c2274.pdf](https://www.abtassociates.com/sites/default/files/migrated_files/60bc2812-73c9-4cba-afd7-cc86425c2274.pdf)

## ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

### Case study objectives

Innovation is perceived at United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) as a tool to tackle complex challenges faced by children around the world. For this reason, UNICEF identifies, tests and uses innovations to accelerate results that reduce inequities for children and to foster high-quality evidence for decision-making, learning and accountability.

Deloitte was engaged by UNICEF to conduct case studies to examine innovation across the spectrum of innovation types, country contexts and internal (UNICEF) and external (partner) actors. Cases are descriptive and explanatory, identifying how the innovation process has played out in single instances and surfacing key issues, challenges and successes. During scoping and development of the Terms of Reference for this evaluation, cases were selected by the UNICEF Evaluation Office through a multi-step approach. While diversity across cases was considered as a factor for selection, the sample selected was not intended to be fully representative of innovation at UNICEF. Therefore, the primary focus of this case is to understand the process of innovation for the Accelerated School Readiness Programme (ASR).

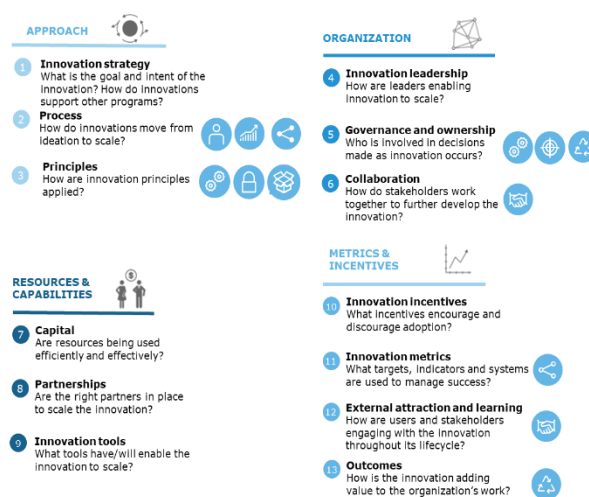
### Evaluation framework

Evaluation questions were structured around a modified version of the Deloitte Dublin Framework for Innovation. Within this framework, the approach to innovation must be enabled by the organization, its resources and capabilities, and aligned with incentives and metrics. These four thematic dimensions – approach, organization, resources and capabilities and metrics and incentives – highlight the four elements that need to be considered in order to enable successful innovation. They are complementary to UNICEF's Design Principles, which are intended to guide the innovation process for all innovation work at UNICEF.

#### Data collection and analytical approach

Deloitte employed a mixed methods approach to build a complete picture of the innovation process and identify findings related to the four thematic dimensions from the evaluation framework. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through desktop review, case study informant interviews and observations of the ASR curriculum in the field.

Figure 6. Evaluation framework



**Table 3. Summary of information sources**

<b>Desktop review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Primary and secondary sources:</b> Conducted reviews of presentations, evaluation/assessment reports, training materials, facilitators guide, student workbook, regional workplans, results framework, and funding proposal</li> <li>• <b>High-level ecosystem scan:</b> Reviewed specific reports for education programming in Ethiopia and Ethiopia Country Office reports and academic literature on school readiness programs to understand contextual factors</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement with stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interviews:</b> Conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, guided by interview protocols, with UNICEF staff, government stakeholders, and facilitators</li> <li>• <b>Observations:</b> Observed Accelerated School Readiness (ASR) activities in the Amhara region, observing classes in two schools located in two woredas (districts)</li> </ul>

The analytical techniques employed to triangulate data for this case study are outlined below:

- Content analysis and thematic coding of qualitative data against relevant evaluation research questions, with the intent of understanding initial themes and patterns in data;
- Reconstruction of the Innovation Pathway, based on implicit or explicit activities and assumptions, in order to describe innovation intent and contextual factors at a country level;
- Mapping of innovation stakeholders and identification of roles, actions, motives and incentives, to understand how the innovation was designed and for whom, and to inform the influence of human and organizational factors on success;
- Mapping of stakeholder perspectives to examine degree of consistency between stakeholder perspectives across standard questions; and
- Desktop comparisons of innovation with those of alternative or similar projects (where appropriate), to explore the value proposition of innovation.

### **Description of field visit activities**

A field visit to Ethiopia was conducted by an evaluation team member from 30 July 30 to 3 August, 2018. Scheduling of the visit was carried out by the UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office and Amhara Regional Office based on guidance documents from the evaluation team outlining the desired list of stakeholders for engagement.

Key activities conducted in Ethiopia are outlined below. Where interviews were conducted in Amharic, translation was provided by a UNICEF staff member.

- **Visits to woreda regional education offices and schools in Amhara:** Accompanied by UNICEF Country Office and Regional Office staff and a local regional education bureau representative, the case study team observed ASR activities underway in two districts (woredas) – Forgera and Ebinat. This included approximately one hour visits to observe lessons, interact with students and interview facilitators.
- **Visit to local UNICEF implementing partners:** Accompanied by a UNICEF Country Office representative, interviews were conducted by the case study team at the office of a local firm engaged in curriculum development (Elixir), the Federal Ministry of Education and Amhara Regional Education Bureau.
- **Visit to UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office.**

### **Limitations of this case study**

- **This case does not systematically assess the impacts or outcomes of innovation.** This case has captured perspectives on potential outcomes and impacts of innovations, when appropriate. However, given the early stage of scaling, limited scope of engagement and rapid approach to

conducting this case, the evaluation does not make objective conclusions on outcomes or impacts.

- **A single case is not representative of the total population of innovations at UNICEF.** The sampling methodology for selection of cases (the number, type and field visit locations) is not randomized and due to the highly qualitative and contextual nature of case studies, findings from this case are not generalizable to innovation at UNICEF as a whole. As such, cross-case analysis performed by UNICEF should be done with consideration of this limitation.
- **Field visits were intended to reflect a given innovation, as opposed to the UNICEF country programme. Selection of woredas for field travel was not based on a specific sampling methodology.** As such, these case studies do not make conclusions on specific Ethiopia Country Office innovation processes and do not make inferences around Country Office implementation of Design Principles. Further, selection of the Amhara region and specific woredas for field visits was not based on a systematic approach to sampling from regions in Ethiopia who have implemented the Kit. Thus, findings may not be generalizable to all regionals and are contextualized within the specific cultural and geographic environment of Amhara.
- **Due to the nature of innovation, it is expected that some innovations will continue to evolve during case study implementation.** This case presents a reconstruction of the innovation process up to August 2018. Future activities and priorities shared by stakeholders will be captured but cases do not strive to make forward-looking statements or conclusions.
- **Limited availability of formal documentation and budgetary information:** In part due to staff turnover following the launch of the ASR programme, the available documentation from the innovation process is limited. It is unclear to what extent the documentation provided is a complete representation of all documents developed during the innovation process. Further, the majority of documentation received was developed and used by innovators, is informally structured, and may be positively biased. As a result, this evaluation relied on the self-reporting of innovation process activities by UNICEF staff and consultants who may not have been involved in initial programme design. The evaluation team has relied upon previous information documented during the piloting process for ASR as the main source of information from the design stage of the ASR programme. Further, lack of a consolidated view of financial resources used during the innovation process has challenged the evaluation team in developing objective, evidence-based statements around resource use.
- **Potential for bias from case study informants:** Due to the limited scope of field activities, this evaluation collected feedback from teachers and partners who benefited directly or indirectly in the project. Stakeholders who were not directly involved in developing or implementing the ASR programme were not engaged (e.g., parents, teachers not delivering the program, etc.).

Participating teachers and partners may hold different perspectives from the non-participating groups. During field visit activities, UNICEF staff accompanied the case study team member during discussions with informants. It is possible that this influenced the opinions expressed by stakeholders. Further, due to the fact that translation of questions and responses into Amharic were performed by UNICEF staff, it is possible that further positive bias could be present in information gathered through interviews. Although a variety of perspectives (positive, negative and neutral) toward the program were shared, it is possible stakeholders may have been influenced by a desire to maintain or grow further funding for the programme.

## ANNEX B: ASR STAKEHOLDERS

<b>UNICEF Education Headquarters Programme Division</b> (two informants)
Innovation in Education Specialist Early Childhood Education Specialist
<b>UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office</b> (four informants)
Current and former Chief of Education Education Specialists (x2), including ASR programme manager
<b>UNICEF Ethiopia Regional Offices</b> (three informants)
Education Specialist and ASR implementation support team members (Amhara, Oromia) Field Office Lead (Oromia)
<b>Government</b> (eight informants)
Federal Ministry of Education, Curriculum Director Regional Education Bureau, Curriculum Directorate and Country Directorate Regional Education Bureau Amhara ASR focal points (x2) Woreda Education Office leader Woreda ASR programme manager (x2)
<b>Teacher facilitators</b> (2 informants)
<b>Curriculum design firm</b> (key ASR contributors, five informants)
<b>ASR students</b> (no interviews conducted, however, observations of two classrooms, with approximately 40 children per class)



## ANNEX C: LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

- Accelerated School Readiness Program Theory of Change and Results Framework (UNICEF ECO, results framework, MS Word)
- ASR Facilitators Guide and Student Workbook (Ministry of Education, facilitator and student materials used in classroom, hard copy)
- ASR Implementation Metrics, Benishangul-Gumuz (UNICEF Benishangul-Gumuz RCO, informal metrics tracking document, MS Excel)
- ASR Implementation Plan in Amhara (UNICEF Amhara RCO, detailed implementation plan outline (working paper), MS PowerPoint)
- ASR individual self-activity presentation – *Amharic* (UNICEF ECO, training document, PowerPoint)
- ASR initiative and its practices in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region – Summary of Study Report on ASR Implementation Achievements, Lessons Learnt, and Challenges (UNICEF BG RCO with data provided by BG REB, informal program monitoring report, MS PowerPoint)
- ASR Monitoring Assessment Checklist – *Amharic*
- ASR preliminary school readiness assessment report (third-party report, MS Word)
- ASR Programme Minimum Learning Competencies/Readiness Levels (unclear author, MS Word)
- ASR training materials (UNICEF ECO, training documents related to 5-day training delivered by master trainers, PowerPoint)
- Evaluation of the Child-to-Child School Readiness Programme in Ethiopia (third-party report, PDF)
- Journeys to Scale: Accompanying the Finalists of the Innovations in Education Initiative (UNICEF Education Section, PDF)
- School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework (UNICEF Education Section, PDF)
- Site Visit Brief: ASR Ethiopia (third party Results4Development report, impressions and recommendations from interviews, PDF)
- SNNP, Oromia, Amhara, and BG summer programme implementation status updates (UNICEF RCOs, workplan, MS Word)
- UNICEF Ethiopia Proposal to Roche Foundation (UNICEF ECO, funding proposal, MS Word).



© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
November 2019

3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017 USA  
[www.unicef.org/evaluation](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation)