Background
According to the 2014 census, the population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is 51,186,253. The only official language, known as Myanmar, is spoken as a mother tongue by the Bamar ethnic group. The country includes more than 135 national ethnic groups whose members speak over 100 languages. Myanmar has been implementing major political and economic reforms since 2011. The Myanmar Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy was endorsed in 2014 signalling the priority placed on the early years. In 2009-2010, 22.9% of children aged 36-59 months were attending early childhood education (ECE) – an increase from 9% in 2000. Inequities in participation in ECCD programmes are prominent. Attendance rates vary across location (urban 39.1%, rural 15.9%); family wealth (richest wealth quintile 46.0%, poorest wealth quintile 7.6%); and across States/Regions (Rakhine 5.4%, Kayah 60.7%). The country has an under-five mortality rate of 50 per 1,000 live births and 35% of children under five years were estimated to be stunted in 2010-2015.

Objectives
No measures of child development existed hitherto in Myanmar. The main objective of this project was to equip the key ECCD stakeholders in Myanmar with a reliable measurement tool to assess the holistic developmental progress of children from three to five years of age. UNICEF Myanmar commissioned The University of Hong Kong to provide technical support to the Yangon University of Education in implementing the East Asia and Pacific Early Childhood Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) in Myanmar.

Recommendations
- Address gender, regional, ethnic and socioeconomic differences in early childhood development through the provision of ECCD programmes.
- Continue and accelerate the efforts to expand access to ECCD programmes as all children have been shown to benefit from attendance in ECCD programmes.
- Enhance the quality of the programmes for marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities and the urban poor. Currently urban and ethnic majority children seem to benefit more from attending preschool programmes than other children.
- Encourage the sharing of best teaching practices from Church or Monastery-based preschools.
- Provide ECCD programmes in children’s mother tongue and integrate appropriate strategies for official language (Myanmar) acquisition and transition to primary school.
- Support children’s development and learning across different domains of development as they are interconnected.
- Use these findings as a baseline and monitor the country’s progress in increasing access to ECCD programmes and enhancing child outcomes.
- Continue to adopt an integrated and coordinated approach in ECCD policy and programmes.
- Prioritize both preschool expansion and preschool quality.

Methodology
The EAP-ECDS short form (EAP-ECDS SF) consists of 33 items to assess children’s development in seven domains: Cognitive Development; Socio-Emotional Development; Motor Development; Language and Emergent Literacy; Health, Hygiene, and Safety; Cultural Knowledge and Participation; and Approaches to Learning. The EAP-ECDS SF was administered to 1,502 children (769 girls). The sample was stratified by state/region, urban or rural location, age and gender. The assessments were conducted in the Myanmar language and several ethnic minority languages between November 2016 and February 2017. In addition to child assessments, the participating children’s parents or guardians were interviewed in individual sessions.

Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/region</th>
<th>Urban Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Rural Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
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<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3y</td>
<td>4y</td>
<td>5y</td>
<td>3y</td>
<td>4y</td>
<td>5y</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early Childhood Development

- Older children had significantly higher scores than younger children in all domains of development.
- Girls performed better than boys in all domains except Motor Development.
- Urban children did better than rural children in most domains, but children residing in the Yangon satellite areas tended to have the lowest scores.
- Children from the ethnic majority group had higher scores than ethnic minority children in all domains.
- Children from wealthier families had higher scores than those from poorer households.
- Urban and wealth differences were less apparent for Motor Development than in other domains.
Preschool Attendance Matters

Impact of preschool attendance on different domains of development

- The benefits of preschool attendance were evident on all 7 domains of development.

Preschool attendance across family wealth, ethnic group, gender and urbanicity

- Preschool attendance was significantly associated with higher overall development scores for all wealth quintiles, majority and minority ethnic groups, boys and girls, and those residing in both urban and rural areas.

- Preschool attendance benefitted the most economically disadvantaged children (lowest wealth quintile) followed by the most advantaged children (highest wealth quintile).

- The impact of preschool attendance was higher for children from ethnic majority than those from ethnic minority groups.

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Type of Preschool Makes a Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations between types of preschool attended and children's development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference in development score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Children attending faith-based programmes (church or monastery) had higher developmental scores than children attending other programmes.
- Children attending stand-alone kindergartens or preschools attached to primary schools also had higher development than those who attended community-based centres or preschools attached to basic education middle schools or high schools.
- In addition to having a larger impact on children's development scores, church or monastery based preschool have a lower-wealth intake than many other preschool types as 47% of the children are from the two lowest wealth quintiles. By contrast, standalone preschool centres and community-based centres take a large proportion of their intake from the richest wealth quintile (40% and 37%, respectively).

Language of Instruction Matters

- Developmental scores of minority-language children attending preschools with a minority language as the main language of provision, compared to those attending preschools with Myanmar as the main language of provision.

The language of instruction in preschool was associated with overall developmental scores.

Minority-language children who attended preschools wherein the main language of instruction was a minority language did better than minority-language children in preschools with Myanmar as the main language of instruction. Significant differences were noted between the two groups in Language and Emergent Literacy, Approaches to Learning, Cultural Knowledge and Participation and Motor Development.

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iv. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar. op. cit.