



Country-Led Evaluation of Preschool Education in Timor-Leste (2012–2020)

Final Report

April 2022

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The opinions expressed within this report are those of the authors and evaluation informants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the government or UNICEF.

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Contents

Acronyms	vi
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Executive Summary.....	1
Methodology.....	1
Key Findings	2
Conclusions	4
Recommendations.....	5
1. Background and Context.....	7
2. Object of the Evaluation	10
3. Purpose, Objectives and Scope.....	15
3.1. Purpose	15
3.2. Objectives of the Evaluation	16
3.3. Scope of the Evaluation	16
4. Methodology.....	17
4.1. Evaluation Criteria	17
4.2. Evaluation Framework	18
4.3 Evaluation Design and Methods	20
4.4. Data Sources and Sampling	22
4.5. Stakeholder Participation	25
4.6. Ethical Considerations	25
4.7. Constraints and Limitations	27
5. Findings	28
5.1 Relevance.....	28
5.2 Coherence	30
5.3 Effectiveness	34
5.4 Efficiency	51
5.5 Sustainability.....	63
6. Conclusions	66
7. Lessons Learned.....	70
8. Recommendations	71
Annex A: Terms of Reference	77

Annex B: Evaluation Matrix.....	90
Annex C: Documents Reviewed	103
Annex D: Interview and Focus Group Protocols	107
Annex E: Sample	138
Annex F: IRB Certificate	139

Figures

Figure 1. Theory of Change	12
Figure 2. Country-Led Evaluation of Preschool Education in Timor-Leste: Summary of Approach.....	20
Figure 3. Gross Enrolment Rate per Municipality, 2013 and 2020.....	23
Figure 4. Preschool GER 2013–2020	45

Acronyms

AIR	American Institutes for Research
CSEP	Civil Society Education Partnership
DG	Directorate General
ECD	Early childhood development
ECE	Early childhood education
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FGD	Focus group discussion
DGP	Gross domestic product
GER	Gross enrolment rate
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
HANDS	Halimar, Aprende no Descobre Susesu
INFORDEPE	Instituto Nacional de Formação de Docentes e Profissionais da Educação
IRB	Institutional review board
KII	Key informant interview
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
NCF	Nurturing Care Framework
NER	Net enrolment rate
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToR	Terms of reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNTL	Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa’e
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

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Executive Summary

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 states that by 2030, all children should have access to quality preschool education to ensure they are ready for primary education.¹ Preschool education improves long-term educational and life outcomes in developing countries especially; school readiness programmes have the potential to provide additional support to students who are otherwise socio-economically disadvantaged.^{2,3} Whilst access to education has substantially improved in recent years, Timor-Leste's preschool education sector is not prepared to achieve this SGD, or its own targets.

To help inform future planning for its preschool subsector, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) commissioned this independent evaluation of Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Timor-Leste engaged the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct the evaluation, with support from the *Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e* (UNTL) as an in-country partner for this work.

The evaluation focused on Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector and covered years 2012–2020 to align with the launch of the Policy Framework for Preschool Education. It fulfilled the three main objectives: (1) Develop a theory of change to capture the pathways towards increasing equitable access to quality preschool education in Timor-Leste; (2) Assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the preschool education policy and programmes in Timor-Leste; and (3) Identify lessons learned and make recommendations useable by the government and its key partners to inform decision-making on policy and programme design and implementation of the preschool subsector.

Methodology

This thematic evaluation consisted of a single round of data collection, with a desk review of relevant documentation and education management information system (EMIS) data, plus 36 key informant interviews with government stakeholders at the national and municipal levels, international organisations such as UNICEF and the World Bank, teacher training institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and preschool programme providers. Team members from UNTL also conducted a focus group discussion with Timor-Leste's Early Childhood Development (ECD) Working Group.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'The 17 Goals', <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>, accessed 1 February, 2022.

² Arnold, Carolyn, Kathy Bartlett, Saima Gowani, and Rehana Merali, *Is everybody ready? Readiness, transition, and continuity: Lessons, reflections and moving forward*, UNESCO, 2006.

³ Gertler, Paul, James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto, Arianna Zanolini, Christel Vermeersch, Susan Walker, Susan M. Chang, Sally Grantham-McGregor, 'Labor market returns to early childhood stimulation: A 20-year follow-up to an experimental intervention in Jamaica', NBER Working Paper No. 19185, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

Key Findings

In this section, we present key findings related to each of the evaluation questions.

Presence of comprehensive and evidence-based policies and plans for the delivery of high-quality preschool education.

Taken together, Timor-Leste's preschool



policies and plans address the key areas required for high-quality preschool education systems. However, plans are fragmented across documents and are mostly at a high level. There are substantial gaps in the availability of relevant data, making it very challenging for Timor-Leste stakeholders to engage in evidence-based planning.

Extent to which actors in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector collaborate and coordinate with one another and with actors in other sectors to meet children's holistic needs. There are a variety of actors in the preschool subsector, but there is no coherent national plan that integrates Timor-Leste's efforts into a larger framework. The main collaboration mechanism for preschool education at the national level was the ECD Working Group (which was established to review multisectoral ECD policy more broadly, including preschool education). However, the group's work stalled due to staff turnover and the pandemic. At the municipal level, there are no systematic mechanisms of coordination in place amongst municipal education authorities, partners and the MoEYS.

Presence of adequate governance and accountability structures and strategies. Timor-Leste has clear lines of authority and explicitly defined roles and responsibilities for the subsector. National-level stakeholders indicated a need for more effective collaboration on financing and implementation amongst government actors and between the government and other organisations. Municipalities have primary responsibility for preschool financing and implementation, and they would like improved guidance on preschool standards.

Budgeting and financing for the provision of cost-effective preschool education. As a portion of gross domestic product (GDP), the budget allocated to preschool is less than one tenth the recommended level (of 1 per cent of GDP). Within the education sector budget, the subsector receives one third or less of the recommended proportion. Timor-Leste appears to start with a budget allocation for preschool in the education sector plan, then determines how to use it best, rather than basing the budget on a comprehensive and long-

range subsector plan with corresponding identification of what resources are required. On the positive side, the MoEYS and partner organisations communicate well regarding how partners can help provide resources for the subsector.

Preparation to implement the preschool education strategy in a timely manner. A strength of Timor-Leste's approach to preschool subsector planning is its strong alignment with the broader education sector. There are short- and long-term targets for the expansion of preschool education, but stakeholders say they are unrealistic. Subsector plans are not fully articulated with a scope and sequence of costed activities to be carried out over time (including roles of different actors across the subsector to carry out the plan).

Monitoring and quality assurance systems for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement. Timor-Leste's school standards address elements that apply to preschool classes but that are not fully aligned with developmentally appropriate practice. There are insufficient school inspectors, and programmes lack guidance on how to work towards meeting standards. Furthermore, stakeholders use the EMIS but consistently noted issues of timeliness and comprehensiveness of the data – which negatively affected its utility.

Existence of a sufficient and well-trained preschool education workforce. Timor-Leste is following best practices by considering preschool teachers as part of the educator workforce. However, government hiring of preschool educators is not a priority, and there is a severe lack of qualified teachers and teacher trainers. Most preschool teachers lack formal training, although there are some professional development opportunities.

Families and community engagement. Timor-Leste has several policy directives regarding family and community engagement in schools, but some stakeholders lacked information about how to implement these policies. Family and community engagement was almost entirely focused on what families and communities could provide for schools (money, labour, etc). Stakeholders seemed unaware that preschool programmes should also engage in strengths-based planning and partnership with families and communities.

Participation in quality preschool education programming. Timor-Leste made progress in the development and expansion of preschool, but with a 27 per cent gross enrolment rate (GER) as of 2020,⁴ the country is not on track to attain SDG 4.2 by 2030, nor is it likely to reach its own targets of 50 per cent enrolment by 2024 or 80 per cent enrolment by 2030. On the positive side, boys and girls participate equally in preschool programming.

Support for children's successful transitions into Grade 1. Stakeholders agreed that in principle, preschool programming should align with the expectations for students entering Grade 1, but in reality, there is no deliberate alignment. There was inconsistent use of

⁴ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 'Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) (District wise by School Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020', <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/download/15-emis/99-3-gross-enrolment-rate-ger-district-wise-by-school-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

Grade 1 data to help stakeholders determine whether preschool education was preparing children well for basic school.

Promotion of equity. Timor-Leste has strategies for the professionalisation of the preschool workforce (which primarily serves children from lower-resource communities), but they are not used consistently. Lack of designated funding is a significant constraint. The country has a plan to incentivise qualified teachers to work outside the capital, which can help improve equity in access to professional teachers. And education system monitoring addresses gender and disability, plus non-discrimination, but not linguistic diversity. Finally, there are almost no training opportunities around education for children with disabilities, leaving them without access to educators who know how to meet their needs.

Preparation to provide long-term and scaled-up, quality preschool education

programming. The country's short- and long-term plans for the development and provision of preschool are viewed as unrealistic by stakeholders. Stakeholders reported that there were insufficient data on the subsector to make accurate cost projections, and they strongly believed that preschool education received inadequate financing to achieve its goals.

Conclusions

The findings from this evaluation lead to the following conclusions:

The enabling environment. Timor-Leste's preschool system exists as a subsector within the larger education sector – a best practice. Preschool stakeholders felt a sense of ownership towards the subsector and understood their respective roles. However, strong coordination was lacking between the different actors, making their efforts less efficient.

The preschool subsector is severely underfunded by global standards, in relation to both the country's GDP and in terms of how much of the overall education sector budget goes to the preschool subsector.

Planning and budgeting. There are multiple actors working on access and quality of preschool education in Timor-Leste, but no coherent plan specifies step by step how the country will achieve its goals for preschool. It is a strength of Timor-Leste's preschool subsector that it is already included in the national EMIS. However, EMIS data were often not timely or accurate, and stakeholders were not sure how to effectively use the EMIS data that were available. In addition, EMIS does not capture data from community preschools or other alternative or internationally funded programs. Stakeholders also lacked sufficient data to make accurate cost projections for preschool programming.

Workforce. Timor-Leste is following best practices by identifying preschool teachers as part of its basic education workforce. Yet, the country's teaching standards have not been adapted for the preschool level. In addition, there is a severe shortage of qualified preschool teachers. The country does have strategies to build the capacity of its untrained preschool

workforce, but implementation of these strategies is hampered by budgetary constraints and insufficient availability of teacher trainers.

Quality assurance. A strength of Timor-Leste's preschool system is its inclusion of quality assurance monitoring as part of MoEYS education sector monitoring. The monitoring framework formally addresses gender and disability, plus non-discrimination, but is not explicit about linguistic diversity. Monitoring tools capture key elements of a safe and supportive learning environment for any grade level. However, some indicators are not appropriate for the preschool level. Timor-Leste has too few school inspectors, and monitoring visits can be sporadic. Municipalities and programmes would like improved guidance on how to meet standards.

Curriculum. Timor-Leste has a developmentally appropriate preschool curriculum. However, preschool educators often did not have the teaching and learning materials they needed, and there was also confusion regarding the use of first-language instruction.

Family and community engagement. Timor-Leste has policy directives around family engagement, but educators were unclear how to put them into practice. Family and community engagement was heavily focused on getting families and communities to contribute funds or labour to the preschool class. However, there was a lack of awareness on the importance of engagement with communities as partners to co-develop plans that best meet the needs of the children, or strengths-based engagement with families to plan how to meet individual children's holistic needs. This type of family and community engagement may have been happening in some preschool programmes but was not part of business as usual.

Recommendations

This evaluation yielded 12 recommendations, with Recommendations 1 and 2 having the highest priority:

1. Develop a comprehensive national plan for preschool improvement and expansion toward progressive universalisation. This plan should cover all key aspects of the preschool system; indicate short-, medium- and long-term targets based on a realistic assessment of what can be accomplished; define step by step how the country will move towards these targets (with costed activities); and specify the roles and responsibilities of all actors in the subsector towards carrying out those steps.
2. Improve financing of the subsector. Carrying out Recommendation 1 can help the MoEYS and partners project what level of funding will be needed and when, identify activities to prioritise with limited resources, advocate for funding from donors and create efficiencies in the system.
3. Improve the timeliness and quality of EMIS data to facilitate planning and oversight. Expand the EMIS to comprehensively cover public and private preschool programming.

4. Determine how to simultaneously build the skills of the largely untrained preschool workforce it has now, whilst working towards increasing the size of its workforce overall, especially the availability of qualified professional teachers. The country needs a national teacher recruitment and training strategy. Also, identify and scale the most effective models for training unqualified/volunteer staff.
5. Determine how best to build upon the diversity of preschool delivery models in use in Timor-Leste, so as to maximise efficient coverage and meet the needs of different types of communities.
6. Timor-Leste's standards for basic schools should have a tailored module for the preschool class that reflects developmentally appropriate practice.
7. Preschool programmes need step-by-step guidance on how to work towards meeting standards. It is also important that this guidance provides low-cost and feasible options where achieving some standards may seem costly or out of reach.
8. ECD working groups should be established at the municipal level, to foster coordination within the subsector as well as promote cross-sector collaboration towards promoting child and family wellbeing.
9. There should be a legal requirement for all preschool programming and activities to be registered with and approved by the national and/or municipal government. The government needs to have the authority over preschool programming, including the activities of NGOs working in the subsector.
10. Provide preschool programmes with guidance regarding the use of first-language instruction, and work to ensure that all preschool programmes have the basic materials they need to carry out the preschool curriculum.
11. Broaden understanding of family and community engagement to include strengths-based partnership with shared responsibility for meeting children's needs.
12. Complete a situational analysis of education for children with disabilities. The study should consider both the needs of the children and how educators and programmes can best be prepared to serve these children.



1. Background and Context

Whilst access to education has substantially improved in recent years, Timor-Leste's education sector remains overwhelmed with issues such as poor learning outcomes, high repetition rates and high dropout rates. With a growing number of public and private schools, primary school enrolment rates have improved significantly, with a net enrolment rate (NER) of 82 per cent in 2020, compared to 64 per cent in 2005.⁵ Yet a 2017 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) covering 6,326 students in 128 schools found that 16 per cent of Grade 1 students could not identify any letters, and 76 per cent scored a zero in reading comprehension.⁶ Grade repetition is also a problem, particularly for children who do not begin school at the officially designated age of 6. For instance, whilst 25 per cent of children repeat the first grade, 29 per cent of children who start Grade 1 at age 5 repeat the grade, compared to 23 per cent of children who start at the age of 6.⁷ The higher repetition rates for younger children signal a lack of access to early learning opportunities. Preschool enrolment is low, with 25 per cent of children enrolled (NER) as of 2020.⁸ Additionally, the Timor-Leste Out-of-School Children Study⁹ found that 64 per cent of five-year-old children were attending basic (primary) education instead of preschool.

Seventy-one per cent of the population resides in rural areas, yet the preschool education supply is lowest in these regions.¹⁰ Additionally, half of school-aged children suffer from stunting, which, coupled with chronic malnutrition, has a negative impact on children's cognitive development.¹¹

Poor WASH infrastructure in homes and schools and related health problems may also have an impact on school attendance and progression. The government's 2016 guidelines for WASH in schools noted that nearly all Timorese basic schools face challenges in the provision of WASH and that most schools lacked reliable access to water and/or functioning toilets.¹² Awareness and uptake of appropriate hygiene practices is low. In rural areas, for instance, only 2 per cent of the population reported washing their hands with soap after

⁵ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, '4. Net Enrolment Rate (NER) (District wise by School Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020', <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/download/15-emis/100-4-net-enrolment-rate-ner-district-wise-by-school-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 28 February 2022.

⁶ World Bank Group, *Using EGRA for an Early Evaluation of Two Innovations in Basic Education in Timor-Leste: The New Curriculum and Professional Learning and Mentoring Programme*, The World Bank Office, Dili, Timor-Leste, 2019.

⁷ UNICEF, *Timor-Leste Out-of-School Children Study*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2017.

⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, '4. Net Enrolment Rate (NER) (District wise by School Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020', <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/download/15-emis/100-4-net-enrolment-rate-ner-district-wise-by-school-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 28 February 2022.

⁹ UNICEF, *Timor-Leste Out-of-School Children Study*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2017.

¹⁰ Directorate General of Statistics, '2015 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census – data sheet', <<https://www.statistics.gov.tl/category/publications/census-publications/2015-census-publications>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

¹¹ UNICEF, *Timor-Leste Out-of-School Children Study*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2017.

¹² Government of Timor-Leste, *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools: Guidelines for Timor-Leste, Vol. 1*, Government of Timor Leste, 2016.

using the bathroom or changing a baby's diaper. In addition, a 2016 research report suggests that 46 per cent of caregivers in Timor-Leste believe that physical punishment is appropriate for children; corporal punishment in school has been associated with a series of negative education outcomes, including poor academic performance, low class participation and school dropout.¹³ Finally, over 35 languages are spoken as first languages in Timor-Leste,¹⁴ and families who do not speak Tetum or Portuguese may have difficulties accessing services.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 states that by 2030, all children should have access to quality preschool education to ensure they are ready for primary education.¹⁵ Evidence shows that preschool education improves long-term learning outcomes and lowers dropout rates. Preschool education programmes aim to increase students' emotional, social and mental preparation to succeed in school.¹⁶ Children who enter primary school after a successful preschool education programme demonstrate higher test score performance, class participation and effort, and high school completion rates.^{17,18} In developing countries especially, school readiness programmes have the potential to provide additional support to students who are otherwise socio-economically disadvantaged.^{19,20} In a review of World Bank projects, only early stimulation programmes had positive, long-term effects in all six evaluated categories of physical development, cognitive development, language development, socio-emotional development, schooling outcomes and employment outcomes.²¹ In Indonesia, for example, the Early Childhood Education and Development Project reduced educational achievement gaps between children from high- and low-income families in comparison with results in non-project villages.²²

¹³ UNICEF, *Parenting and Preschool Factsheet*, UNICEF Timor-Leste Country Office Child Protection and Education Sections, 2016.

¹⁴ Directorate-General of Statistics, '2015 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census – data sheet', <<https://www.statistics.gov.tl/category/publications/census-publications/2015-census-publications>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

¹⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'The 17 Goals', <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

¹⁶ UNICEF, *School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework*, United Nations Children's Fund Education Section, New York, NY, 2012.

¹⁷ Berlinski, Samuel, Sebastian Galiani, and Paul Gertler, 'The effect of pre-primary education on primary school performance', *Journal of Public Economics*, vol. 93, 2009, pp. 219–234.

¹⁸ Grantham-McGregor, Sally, Yin Bun Cheung, Santiago Cueto, Paul Glewwe, Linda Richter, Barbara Strupp, & the International Child Development Steering Group, 'Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries', *The Lancet*, vol. 6, no. 369, 2007, pp. 60–70.

¹⁹ Arnold, Carolyn, Kathy Bartlett, Saima Gowani, and Rehana Merali, *Is everybody ready? Readiness, transition, and continuity: Lessons, reflections and moving forward*, UNESCO, 2006.

²⁰ Gertler, Paul, James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto, Arianna Zanolini, Christel Vermeersch, Susan Walker, Susan M. Chang, Sally Grantham-McGregor, 'Labor market returns to early childhood stimulation: A 20-year follow-up to an experimental intervention in Jamaica', NBER Working Paper No. 19185, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

²¹ Jeffery C. Tanner, Tara Candland, and Whitney S. Odden, 'Later impacts of early childhood interventions: A systematic review', The World Bank, 2015.

²² Jung, Haeil, and Amer Hasan, 'The impact of early childhood education on early achievement gaps: Evidence from the Indonesia Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) project', Policy Research Working Paper, no. WPS 6794, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2014.



In recent years, preschool education has benefited from renewed institutional support from the government of Timor-Leste and partners. For instance, the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030 identifies preschool as a priority for education and sets a target of achieving a preschool NER of 50 per cent for three- to five-year-old children by 2015 and 100 per cent by 2030.²³

Additionally, the government is currently developing a multisectoral National Policy for ECD that includes a priority for preschool education and investing in the construction, rehabilitation and accreditation of preschools. One key element of the current strategy is implementation of the Halimar, Aprende no Descubre Susesu (HANDS) programme by New Zealand Aid in close collaboration with the government. HANDS is intended to increase access to preschool programming, with a special focus on language and pre-reading skills. Furthermore, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has been supporting community preschools in the Ermera and Viqueque municipalities since 2017, which together represent about 3 per cent of preschool enrolment in the country. A 2019 midterm review of HANDS identified bottlenecks such as fragmented management of preschool education, insufficient funding, and lack of quality standards and oversight.²⁴ At this juncture, it is important to gain a holistic picture of the subsector at a national level – including the identification of opportunities to strengthen the system efficiently.

²³ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

²⁴ Clark, Keryn, Belynda McNaughton, and Maria Sufa, *Halimar, Aprende no Descubre Susesu (HANDS) Mid-term Report*, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade Aid Programme, 2019.

The government of Timor-Leste has prioritised the development of and commissioned an evaluation of its preschool education subsector, managed by UNICEF Timor-Leste. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has been contracted to conduct this national-level evaluation and will provide timely and comprehensive information to the government and other preschool education stakeholders to help guide this process. This report provides an overview of the evaluation, presents the findings for each of the evaluation questions and offers recommendations for stakeholders in Timor-Leste's preschool education system.

2. Object of the Evaluation

The object of this evaluation was Timor-Leste's preschool education system at the national level. The primary focus was on the government's development and implementation of a comprehensive preschool education system during the 2012–2020 timeframe. However, there are several other entities currently involved in the provision of technical assistance and/or direct services in the preschool education subsector, such as UNICEF, New Zealand Aid and NGOs. As Timor-Leste develops its own national preschool education subsector and capacity, these other entities would be expected to step back from the key roles they play in filling gaps in the subsector at this time. Therefore, this evaluation helped identify what the government will need to do to fully develop its preschool education subsector, but it does not focus solely on the government.

The AIR/UNTL evaluation team worked with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) to retrospectively develop a theory of change for Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector (see Figure 1). This draft theory of change was finalised during a workshop held with the ERG and the MoEYS on 11 August 2021. This theory of change was reviewed at the conclusion of data collection and refined as needed during the validation workshop for the evaluation findings and recommendations.

Focus

This evaluation focused on the inputs, activities and outputs shown in the theory of change (see Figure 1). Outcomes and impacts are important, but resource constraints did not permit their inclusion in this evaluation.

The theory of change includes inputs in the form of government leadership, policies and legislation, public demand, and financing. The subsector then requires planning and budgeting, workforce development, curriculum development, family and community engagement, and a system of quality assurance and/or accreditation. If these activities are carried out successfully, the outputs would be system capacity (that is, the ability to serve all children in Timor-Leste, or all children whose families wish to enrol them in a preschool), a workforce of qualified preschool staff, well-resourced preschool programmes, and families and communities that promote ECD, including preschool education. If these outputs occur, then children across Timor-Leste will have access to quality preschool education environments and will experience support for their learning and development at home and in

the community. If these outcomes are realised, Timor-Leste will achieve improved (and sufficient) early learning and school readiness for its children.

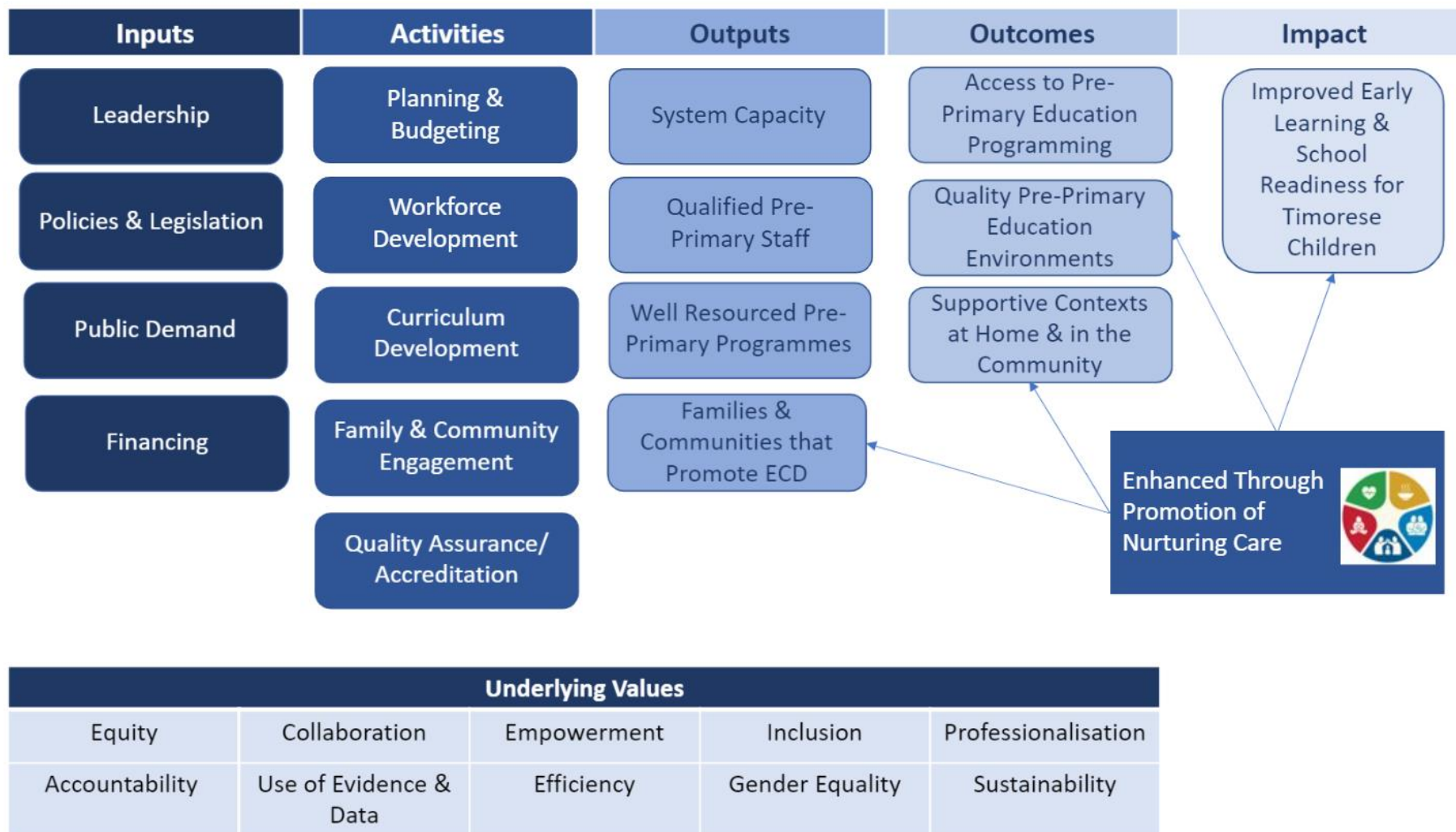
The evaluation explored inputs, activities, and outputs. Given the resources available for this evaluation, it did not include direct assessment of the outcomes or impacts. The underlying values were reflected in the framing of interview questions for participants.

The theory of change also displays the key role that nurturing care (as operationalised in the Nurturing Care Framework [NCF]²⁵) plays in the development of supportive environments for young children. The NCF addresses the foundational supports that all young children need to survive and thrive: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and opportunities for early learning.²⁶ Preschool education is an essential source of opportunities for early learning, but all these elements must come together (including early learning outside of preschool education as well) for optimal development.

²⁵ World Health Organization, World Bank Group, and UNICEF, Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development, <<https://nurturing-care.org/>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

²⁶ World Health Organization, UNICEF, and World Bank Group, 'Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential', World Health Organization, Geneva, 2018.

Figure 1. Theory of Change



The theory of change also rests upon 10 values that permeate the preschool subsector:

- *Equity*: ensuring that all children have access to quality preschool education, with a special focus on meeting the needs of the most marginalised
- *Collaboration and integration*: stakeholders working together within the preschool education subsector and across sectors to provide holistic support for children's healthy development
- *Empowerment*: making sure all relevant stakeholders have a voice, including those who are typically marginalised
- *Inclusion*: providing preschool education for all children, regardless of disability or family background
- *Professionalisation*: developing and supporting the preschool education workforce as professional educators, equal to educators serving older children
- *Accountability*: defining lines of responsibility across the elements of the preschool system and ensuring that those responsible feel ownership and are held to account
- *Use of data*: systematically using evidence for accountability and decision-making
- *Efficiency*: using available resources wisely to achieve desired outcomes whilst minimising waste
- *Gender equality*: ensuring that boys and girls have equal access to quality preschool education, men and women are both welcome in the preschool education workforce, and both mothers and fathers are viewed as key partners in preschool education
- *Sustainability*: planning how the preschool education system will grow and be sustained in the future

There are multiple underlying preconditions, assumptions and risks associated with this theory of change. Many of these apply to government partners who are filling gaps in preschool provision (and implementing the theory of change, at least in part).

The preconditions are:

1. Leadership has an interest in developing its preschool education sector.
2. Leadership is motivated to provide quality preschool education (not just access).
3. Policies are put into effect.
4. The government has accountability to stakeholders for the delivery of preschool education.

5. Personnel overseeing preschool education programming understand quality preschool education.
6. Any curriculum promoted or already in use is based on good practices in preschool education pedagogy.
7. There are positive and constructive relationships between preschool education leadership and other preschool education personnel.

The underlying assumptions are:

1. Stakeholders value the promotion of equity.
2. Stakeholders believe in the empowerment of families and communities.
3. Stakeholders are willing to coordinate within the preschool education sector.
4. Parents and communities are, or would be receptive to, messages about preschool education.
5. Parents will send children to quality preschool education programming if it is available.
6. Leadership is willing to engage in evidence-based and data-driven decision-making.
7. It is possible to implement quality standards for preschool education that will drive quality improvement yet not overwhelm programmes.

The risks are:

1. Government instability leads to frequent personnel changes.
2. Available funding for preschool education is significantly below what is required.
3. Competing national and/or municipal priorities divert resources from preschool education.
4. Emergencies (natural disasters, health emergencies, etc) disrupt operation of the preschool education system.
5. There is an insufficient preschool education workforce (due to factors such as lack of interest in the job, lack of educated workers, low wages, etc).
6. Data that are collected (on implementation, outcomes, impacts) are not used – thus wasting resources and the opportunity to use data for planning, budgeting and accountability.

3. Purpose, Objectives and Scope

This evaluation was commissioned by the MoEYS, with support from UNICEF Timor-Leste, to fulfil the following purpose, objectives and scope.

3.1. Purpose

As stated in the terms of reference (ToR), the purpose of this formative, participatory, utilisation-focused evaluation was to generate evidence and learning from the implementation and results of preschool education initiatives in Timor-Leste (*see Annex A*). The findings produced through the evaluation inform strategic decision-making on preschool education design and programming in the country. The government of Timor-Leste also benefits from the evidence produced through this evaluation to improve the capacity and quality of preschool education. The evaluation informs stakeholders in Timor-Leste how best to leverage the preschool education framework to drive improvements in the country's preschool education policies, funding, systems and delivery platforms.

Recognising the need for improvement in the quality and coverage of preschool education in the country, the government of Timor-Leste has taken different steps to strengthen the preschool subsector. These include the NESP 2011–2030,²⁷ which identifies preschool as a priority for education, and the development of a National Policy for ECD, amongst others. Therefore, the MoEYS desired to acquire ample evidence on the existing system. This evaluation therefore aimed to identify the supply-side and demand-side bottlenecks and challenges and to provide recommendations that will inform decision-making on policies, programme design and implementation. The information also guides system expansion by providing effective approaches for future scaling up of preschool education programmes.

Uses for the evaluation and intended audiences

As specified in the ToR, the main purpose of the evaluation was to generate evidence to inform the discussions and plans by Timor-Leste's MoEYS and institutional stakeholders to create an enabling environment for accessible, quality and sustainable opportunities for preschool education in Timor-Leste. The evaluation built on the findings and lessons from the UNICEF-supported longitudinal study carried out by AIR that studied the effects of preschool education with parenting education support. The MoEYS, municipal and local authorities, and other development partners involved in the provision of preschool education are the target audience and main users of the evaluation. Other users include other United Nations agencies,

²⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

development partners, NGOs, community service organisations, faith-based organisations and the private sector.

3.2. Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation fulfilled the three main objectives stated in the ToR:

- Develop a theory of change to capture the pathways towards increasing equitable access to quality preschool education in Timor-Leste. Develop the ToC based on the review of the literature on childhood education programming and based on contributions from key stakeholders (including the ERG). The theory of change will provide a theoretical framework of activities, outputs and outcomes that will form the basis for evaluating the overall programme of preschool education activities in Timor-Leste.
- Assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the preschool education policy and programmes in Timor-Leste.
- Identify lessons learned and make recommendations usable by the government of Timor-Leste and its key partners to inform decision-making on policy and programme design and implementation of the preschool subsector and on early childhood development, including cross-sectoral linkages in the country.

3.3. Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation focused on preschool education programming across Timor-Leste from 2012 to 2020.

3.3.1. Thematic scope

The thematic scope of the evaluation covered the assessment of approaches to implementing preschool education in Timor-Leste. This involves the extent to which the programmes increased equitable access to preschool opportunities. The evaluation covered preschool education programming offered by the diversity of providers in Timor-Leste, including the government, the Church, UNICEF-supported community preschools and others. The evaluation also built on findings and lessons from previous studies in Timor-Leste (including the UNICEF-supported study on school readiness and parental support), guided by the Global Partnership for Education's Better Early Learning and Development at Scale framework.²⁸ Doing so helped the evaluators examine the strategies and approaches for strengthening the preschool education system to ensure quality, equitable and sustainable services. Note that this evaluation did not involve an impact evaluation, nor a direct observation of preschool education quality or learning outcomes.

²⁸ Global Partnership for Education and UNICEF, 'Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS): An innovative partnership and knowledge initiative for planning early childhood education,' <<https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/better-early-learning-and-development-scale-belds-flyer>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

Based on the various sources of data proposed for use in the evaluation, the data analysts triangulated findings and assessed the extent to which preschool education programmes were supported by other relevant sectors such as health, nutrition and social protection.

3.3.2. Geographic Scope

This evaluation was at the national level, with two municipalities (Ainaro and Lautem) serving as sites for more in-depth data collection, plus (less in-depth) municipality-level data collection in Baucau, Bobonaro, Viqueque and Oecusse. These municipalities provided an overview of the preschool education landscape in Timor-Leste to help answer the evaluation questions, but the report of findings does not include municipality-specific case studies. *(See Section 4.4 for more information about the sampling decisions.)*

3.3.3. Chronological Scope

This evaluation covered the time frame from 2012 to 2020. The starting date of 2012 coincided with the release of Timor-Leste's 2012 Policy Framework for Preschool Education.

4. Methodology

The methodology for this evaluation was aligned with the requirements of the ToR (see Annex A). This section articulates the evaluation criteria, evaluation framework, evaluation design and methodology, data sources and sampling stakeholder participation, ethical considerations, and constraints and limitations.



4.1. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria are aligned with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee criteria, addressing relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. These criteria apply to this evaluation in the following ways:

- **Relevance.** The government of Timor-Leste must have comprehensive and evidence-based policies and plans for the delivery of high-quality preschool education.
- **Coherence.** Government and non-governmental actors in Timor-Leste's preschool subsector must collaborate and coordinate with one another to effectively meet young children's holistic needs at scale.
- **Effectiveness.** Timor-Leste's preschool system must have (1) adequate governance and accountability structures and strategies for the provision of quality preschool education; (2) a sufficient and well-trained preschool education workforce; (3) family and community engagement as active partners in the preschool education sector and in promoting young children's learning; (4) young children's access to and participation in preschool education programming; (5) supports for children's successful transitions into Grade 1; and (6) a focus on the promotion of equity, including reaching the most marginalised; empowerment of women and girls; respect for linguistic diversity; and inclusion of people with disabilities.
- **Efficiency.** Timor-Leste must have an adequate budget and financing mechanisms for the provision of cost-effective preschool education (even if part of the budget and financing comes from non-governmental sources). The country must also have effective monitoring and quality assurance systems in place for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement.
- **Sustainability.** Timor-Leste must be prepared to provide long-term and scaled-up, quality preschool education programming nationally. In addition, it is important for the country to be aware of and leverage opportunities to strengthen its preschool education system.

There are no defined national or international standards for what constitutes an effective preschool system. However, there is a broader understanding in the field regarding what is required for countries to have a well-functioning preschool subsector. These informal criteria are captured in the UNICEF Preschool Subsector Analysis Tool.²⁹ This tool provided guidance for the evaluation criteria, framework and indicators used here – although the tool was not used in its entirety.

4.2. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework for this project was based on the ToR and was developed in collaboration with the ERG. Fourteen evaluation questions were finalised based on a workshop that included the ERG as well as representatives from the MoEYS.³⁰ These questions are founded on a rights-based understanding of development, particularly the right to education

²⁹ UNICEF, 'Preschool sub-sector analysis tool', <<https://www.ece-accelerator.org/toolkit/section-2/tool-2-2/subsector-analysis-tool>> accessed 1 February 2022.

³⁰ Workshop held August 11, 2021.

and a commitment to equity for women and girls, linguistic minorities and children with disabilities. The questions furthermore align with the strategy to strengthen local capacity and systems found within the Convention on the Rights of the Child/Core Commitments for Children.

The evaluation questions were as follows³¹:

1. To what extent does the government of Timor-Leste have comprehensive and evidence-based policies and plans for the delivery of high-quality preschool education? (relevance)
2. To what extent do actors in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector collaborate and coordinate with one another and with actors in other sectors to meet children's holistic needs? (coherence)
3. To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate governance and accountability structures and strategies for the provision of quality preschool education? (effectiveness)
4. To what extent does Timor-Leste have a sufficient and well-trained preschool education workforce? (effectiveness)
5. To what extent are families and communities engaged as active partners in the preschool education sector and in promoting young children's learning? (effectiveness)
6. To what extent do children in Timor-Leste have access to and participate in quality preschool education programming? (effectiveness)
7. How and to what extent does Timor-Leste support children's successful transitions into Grade 1? (effectiveness)
8. To what extent does the preschool education system promote equity, including reaching the most marginalised; empowerment of women and girls; respect for linguistic diversity; and inclusion of people with disabilities? (effectiveness)
9. To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate budget and financing mechanisms for the provision of cost-effective preschool education? (efficiency)
10. To what extent is Timor-Leste prepared to implement its preschool education strategy in a timely manner? (efficiency)
11. To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring and quality assurance systems in place for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement? (efficiency)

³¹ There was initially a thirteenth evaluation question regarding opportunities to strengthen the preschool education system, and what would it take to leverage those opportunities. The evaluation team did not have data that directly answered that question, but rather used that question to guide the discussion in the conclusions and recommendations sections.

12. To what extent is Timor-Leste prepared to provide long-term and scaled-up, quality preschool education programming nationally? (sustainability)

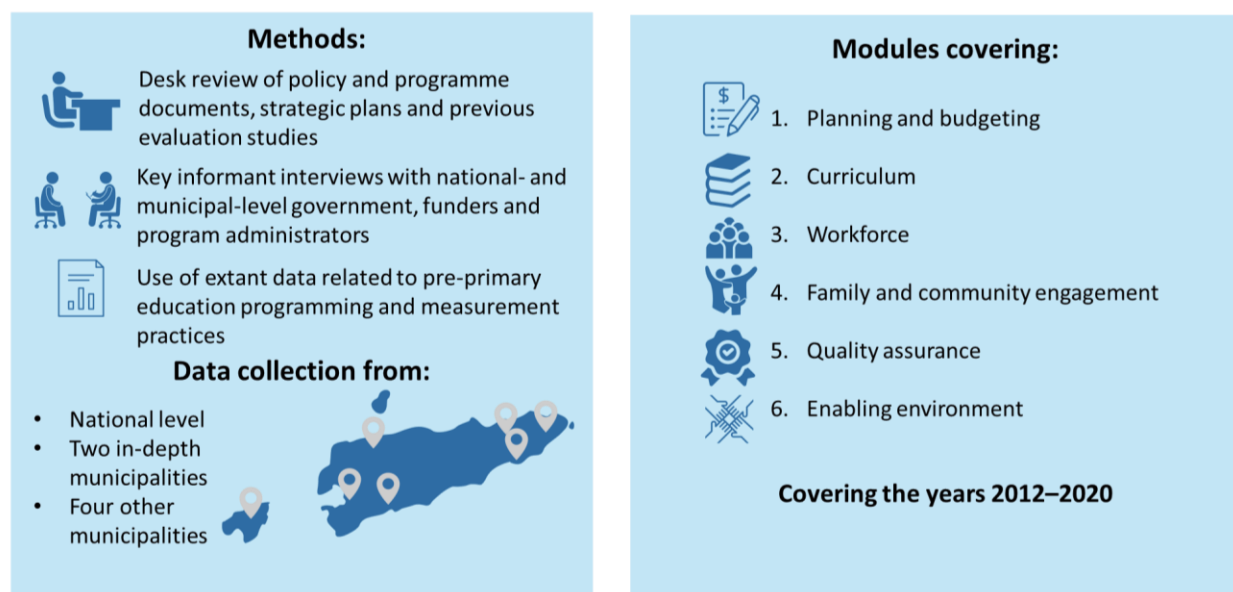
Based on these questions, the team developed an evaluation matrix that specifies the criteria, indicators, sources of information and data collection techniques used to answer these evaluation questions (*see Annex B*).

4.3 Evaluation Design and Methods

This thematic evaluation consisted of a single round of data collection across a variety of stakeholders and other information sources that allowed the team to answer the evaluation questions (*see Figure 2*). Researchers from AIR and UNTL gathered qualitative data and existing documents, as well as quantitative data from secondary sources such as data from the EMIS. Where possible, analysts triangulated findings across sources.

This section outlines the specific components of the approach, along with the rationale for selecting them in order to achieve the evaluation’s purpose, objectives and scope. This section also discusses the methods and data collection tools used.

Figure 2. Country-Led Evaluation of Preschool Education in Timor-Leste: Summary of Approach



4.3.1. Desk review

This evaluation included a desk review to collect existing documents and secondary data pertaining to the chronological scope of the evaluation. The existing documents enabled the data analysts to understand the policies, plans, budgets, monitoring mechanisms and other

systems in place, whilst the secondary data enabled team members to utilise more extensive data beyond the scope of this study in a cost-effective way.

The UNTL data collection team began the desk review process during the inception period with the support and guidance of AIR. Using a list of criteria and suggested documents for which to search, the UNTL team combed through resources to find available information regarding the preschool education sector for 2012 to 2020. These documents included national strategic plans for education, budgets, school inspection manuals, enrolment data, and project and activity reports in English, Tetum or Portuguese (*see Annex C*). After compiling these sources, the team matched available information to indicators in the evaluation matrix (*see Annex B*). During the subsequent project phases, the evaluation team continued this process and sought out additional sources from interview participants.

4.3.2. Primary data collection

The evaluation consisted of key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders at the national and municipal levels (*see Annex E*). This qualitative data collection method enabled the evaluators to reach a set of respondents who could provide rich information regarding topics such as current strategies, objectives and policies for preschool education; the extent to which communities, families and personnel are aware of the importance of preschool education; the investment of human and financial resources in preschool education; and considerations of equity, gender and inclusiveness. These KIIs included in-person and virtual (telephone or web-based) interviews at the national level; in-person interviews in Ainaro and Lautem; remote interviews with informants in Oecusse, Baucau, Bobonaro and Viqueque; and a focus group discussion (FGD) with the ECD Working Group, a collaboration group with stakeholders such as the MoEYS, UNICEF, Plan International, the World Bank and others.

Whilst the national-level KIIs enabled the evaluation team to answer the questions pertaining to the policies and systems in place, the municipal-level data collection provided an overview of the preschool education landscape. This distribution of municipal-level KIIs enabled the evaluation team to study two municipalities in depth, whilst also including a larger number of municipalities within the sample. In consultation with the ERG, the evaluation team intentionally chose the sites, respondents and interview format to most benefit the integrity and feasibility of the evaluation.

This data collection method is subject to the limitation of recall bias. Additionally, because of staff turnover, some of the key informants may not have been able to address the full time frame covered in this evaluation. Although the scope of the evaluation covers 2012 to 2020, interviews took place in late 2021 and thus may have included more recent information from

2021. However, given the retrospective nature of the evaluation, this data collection method is best suited for the circumstances.

4.3.3. Data collection tools

The KII protocols for this evaluation were based on the evaluation matrix and the KII questions integrated into the matrix (*see Annex D*). Note that for questions allocated to the MoEYS on a national level in the matrix, not all government officials interviewed were asked all questions for the national MoEYS. Rather, the evaluation team selected the subset of questions that each individual would be able to answer well.

4.4. Data Sources and Sampling

This section discusses the data sources, sampling and analysis methods for the desk review and qualitative data collection within the evaluation methodology. The use of all these sources enabled the evaluators to obtain multiple data points for each of the indicators within the evaluation matrix. Doing so enabled triangulation across methods and data points to obtain a diversity of perspectives, ensure data accuracy and mitigate the limitations of individual data sources.

4.4.1. Desk review

For the desk review, the evaluation team selected data sources through a process in which the UNTL team conducted an online search for available data relevant to the evaluation questions and scope. After compiling the data sources, the team reviewed each document to indicate which information, as outlined in the evaluation matrix, was pertinent to the study. During the KIIs, the data collection team also asked respondents whether they had any additional documents that they would be able to share for review.

One limitation of the desk review analysis is the assumption that the documentation is complete. When certain strategies and activities were not covered in the documents, the evaluation team assumed that those strategies and activities have not been conducted or addressed. The evaluation team mitigated this challenge by confirming the documentation gaps during KIIs.

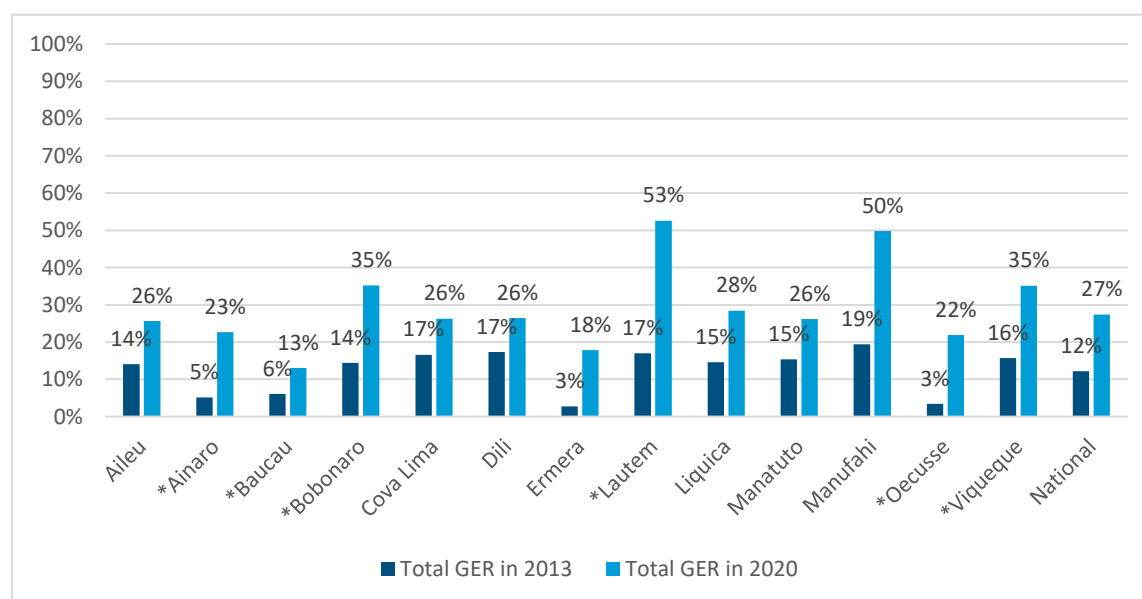
4.4.2. Primary data collection

Given the limited timeline and scope of this evaluation, the team did not conduct site visits in every municipality in Timor-Leste. Whilst the approach presents an understanding of preschool education nationally, the evaluation team needed to base some of the conclusions on data from a subset of the country.

Therefore, for primary data collection, the evaluation team purposively selected six municipalities for the sample based on the recommendations of the ERG. The evaluation team selected Ainaro and Lautem for in-depth analysis because they present varied preschool education conditions. Ainaro has one of the largest numbers of preschool education projects by development partners (specifically HANDS, and programmes from Plan International and CARE International), whereas Lautem has relatively few projects. Lautem has the highest gross enrolment rate (GER) for preschool education in Timor-Leste (almost double the national average), whilst Ainaro has one of the lowest GERs (*see Figure 3*).³²

The four additional municipalities selected for remote data collection also present varied preschool education conditions: Oecusse is separated from the rest of Timor-Leste and thus renders a unique sociocultural and logistical context, Baucau has the lowest national GER for preschool, Bobonaro has a high GER for preschool (35 per cent in 2020 compared to the national average of 27 per cent) and Viqueque is one of the two municipalities in which UNICEF is implementing its community-based preschool programme.³³ Each of the selected municipalities has varied numbers of preschool education projects from various partners.³⁴

Figure 3. Gross Enrolment Rate per Municipality, 2013³⁵ and 2020



Note: Municipalities with an asterisk (*) were included in this evaluation.

³² Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 'Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) (District wise by School Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020', <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/download/15-emis/99-3-gross-enrolment-rate-ger-district-wise-by-school-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ UNICEF, 'Who's doing what, where in the Timor-Leste Education Sector', [PowerPoint slides], 2019.

³⁵ 2013 was selected as a comparison year because data were not available in 2012.

The sampling plan for the specific individuals interviewed was also determined in consultation with the ERG. This sampling plan enabled the evaluation team to reach a set of respondents who could provide rich information relevant across the evaluation questions on both the national and municipal levels (see Annex E).

The evaluation team made the decision to conduct interviews virtually or in person considering respondents' access to technology, the feasibility of hosting virtual or in-person interviews, the risks of in-person data collection in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the available resources for this evaluation. UNTL reached informants in Oecusse, Baucau, Bobonaro and Viqueque remotely (via internet or telephone), considering the budgetary constraints, feasibility of travel, and probable accessibility of selected participants. However, because respondents in Ainaro and Lautem likely would be more readily available in person, UNTL conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews in the municipalities.

4.4.3. Data analysis

Data analysis occurred in alignment with the evaluation matrix. The matrix provided a framework for the analyses (such as thematic codes) to ensure that the evaluation team answered the evaluation questions thoroughly and as intended. The analytic approach included data sensitisation and coding of KII transcripts, then analysis and interpretation of the data from across the KII transcripts, documents and secondary data. After analysis of the KII transcripts and desk review of relevant documents and secondary data, the evaluation team critically reviewed the categorised data against the evaluation questions and created summaries of the key findings. Team analysts triangulated the findings from across respondents and data sources as much as possible.

Key informant interview data. The analytic plan for KII data included data sensitisation and coding, and then analysis and interpretation of the data against the evaluation questions and evaluation matrix.

Data sensitisation and coding. As a beginning stage of the data analysis process, the evaluation team created a preliminary coding outline and structure based on the theory of change, evaluation questions and interview protocols. This coding outline served as the tool for organising and subsequently analysing the information gathered through the interviews. Coders collaborated and discussed the outline to ensure that they were categorising data according to the same standards. The AIR team then uploaded into NVivo® software all transcripts that were prepared by the UNTL data enumerators. AIR coders then selected two sample transcripts to code simultaneously and compare in order to ensure inter-rater reliability. Next, coders read and organised the data from the transcripts based on the coding outline developed. The AIR data analysts then read and reread the coded information from the interview transcripts to

formulate emergent themes from the data and categorise the data based on those themes and the evaluation questions.

Analysis and interpretation of the data. During this iterative process of data analysis, reduction and synthesis, evaluators characterised the prevalence of responses, examined differences amongst groups, and identified key findings and themes related to the evaluation questions. Team members paid special attention to differences amongst respondents according to gender, location and role, as well as to any gender equality and human rights issues.

Document review. For the document review, the team used a spreadsheet template aligned with the evaluation matrix. The team extracted into this template the relevant information from the documents verbatim, then added a summary of the key point(s) for each indicator based on the information in the documents.

Analysis of secondary data. The team did not carry out any in-depth data analysis with secondary data. Instead, the evaluation reports descriptive statistics from secondary sources (such as enrolment rates).

4.5. Stakeholder Participation

This evaluation relied on direct input from a variety of actors in Timor-Leste's preschool subsector. Our key informants included government officials from multiple departments within the MoEYS, municipal education officials, global partners (such as UNICEF), NGOs and programme providers (including the Church).

Based on the available resources for this evaluation, it was not feasible for the team to engage with a representative sample of parents from across Timor-Leste. To gain at least some parental input, the Timorese NGO Alola met with some parents in communities in March 2022 to ask for their feedback and input on the recommendations from this evaluation, particularly in relation to family engagement.

The team was unable to directly engage with preschool children due to resource constraints.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

For this study, AIR and UNTL adhered to strict requirements for the protection of human subjects. This section provides assurances that team completed the work in line with United Nations evaluation norms, standards and guidelines. The section then describes the method by which AIR gained approval (exemption) for this evaluation from the AIR in-house institutional review board (IRB). Finally, this section discusses the ethical considerations involved in this evaluation.

This evaluation was exempt from ongoing IRB oversight because it was not human subjects research (see *Annex F*). The subject of the evaluation included policies, programming and so forth; it was not about individual human beings, nor did UNTL gather personally identifiable, private information. This section does not address special protections for children because this evaluation did not involve interaction with children.

4.6.1. Alignment with evaluation norms and standards

For this evaluation, AIR followed the Code of Conduct of the United Nations Evaluation Group, which requires both a conflict-sensitive and a gender-sensitive approach to research and adherence to the “do no harm” principle, as well as transparency, confidentiality, accuracy, accountability and reliability, amongst other key principles. Specifically, with regard to the protection of vulnerable individuals and communities, AIR respected and adhered to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Refugee Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Evaluators also adhered to other human rights conventions and national legal codes that respect local customs and cultural traditions, religious beliefs and practices, personal interactions, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity. Further, this evaluation was conducted in accordance with the evaluation principles of openness, transparency and participation. AIR ensured that the evaluation complied with UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. The evaluation was guided by the ethical principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, responsibility, honesty and integrity.

The AIR IRB followed the standards set forth by the American Evaluation Association’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators and the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. Three general principles define these standards: (1) evaluators conduct evaluations legally and ethically, considering the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as the general public; (2) evaluators conduct evaluations in a competent and efficient fashion that will lead to reliable and accurate results; and (3) evaluators design evaluations and report the results in a manner that is useful to and appropriate for the intended audience. Clear guidelines exist regarding the expectations with which local data collectors must comply (e.g., how to store and restrict access to physical files and electronic data files; how to treat identifiable information).

4.6.2. Ethical approval

All AIR staff, subcontractors and consultants involved in the collection of data from human research participants adhered strictly to the requirements of the AIR IRB. The AIR internal ethical review mechanism was used in lieu of associated ethical review committee of UNICEF, given that the AIR IRB mechanisms comply with the minimum quality standards established in the UNICEF policy. The AIR IRB (IRB00000436) is registered with the Office for Human Research

Protections as a research institution (IORG0000260) and conducts research under its own Federalwide Assurance (FWA00003952).

4.6.3. Protection of human subjects

This evaluation did not include human subjects, according to international standards. For example, according to United States statute 45 CFR 46, a human subject is “a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) is conducting research.” Human subjects research “obtains information or biospecimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyses the information or biospecimens; or obtains, uses, studies, analyses, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens.” This evaluation was not about any identifiable persons.

Nonetheless, the evaluators took care to ensure the safety and well-being of the evaluation participants. At the beginning of each KII and FGD, the study team explained to participants the nature of the study, how the team would and would not protect any information they choose to provide, and that their participation was voluntary. The enumerators asked participants to give their consent for participation prior to the start of the interview. The team also took precautions to mitigate the risk of transmitting COVID-19 by following best practices as outlined by the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in accordance with the national and relevant municipal requirements in Timor-Leste.

4.7. Constraints and Limitations

AIR identified four main constraints and limitations associated with this evaluation design:

1. Given the available resources for this evaluation, the evaluation team was unable to conduct independent, direct observations of preschool education programming quality or of children’s learning and development. This therefore limits the ability to draw conclusions about the quality or impacts of Timor-Leste’s preschool education system.
2. Also due to resource constraints, the evaluation team was unable to include data collection with end users of the preschool system (preschool teachers and families). This constraint limited the ability to incorporate the perspectives of these stakeholders when answering the evaluation questions.
3. Conducting interviews remotely can restrict the ability of interviewers to connect more personally and read respondents’ body language.
4. Some of the stakeholders selected to interview for this study declined to participate. The evaluation team was unable to collect any data from HANDS, which is a key programme in Timor-Leste’s preschool subsector, or from an education leader whom the team planned to interview in Oecusse.

5. Findings

This section presents the findings from the evaluation, organised by OECD DAC (Development Assistance Committee) criteria, to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste.

5.1 Relevance

We assessed the relevance of the preschool subsector with a focus on relevant policies and plans.

5.1.1. To what extent does the government of Timor-Leste have comprehensive and evidence-based policies and plans for the delivery of high-quality preschool education?

There were two areas of focus for this question: the extent to which (1) Timor-Leste has a comprehensive plan for the delivery of high-quality preschool education, and (2) those plans and policies are based on evidence.

KEY FINDINGS

Taken together, Timor-Leste's preschool policies and plans address the key areas required for high-quality preschool education systems. However, plans are fragmented across documents and are mostly at a high level.

Timor-Leste has substantial gaps in the availability of key data from its population and context, making it very challenging for stakeholders to engage in evidence-based planning.

Comprehensive planning. Timor-Leste has preschool education plans in place that partially address the design and operation of a national preschool education system – although these plans are somewhat fragmented. In 2011, the government published its National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030.³⁶ This national plan covers the entire education sector, including the preschool subsector. This integration of preschool in the national education sector planning is a strength of Timor-Leste's approach. At the time of its publication (prior to the start date for this retrospective evaluation), the plan addressed (1) the development of a national curriculum; (2) a preschool teacher competency framework; and (3) preschool teacher training.

³⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

Timor-Leste's subsequent Policy Framework for Preschool Education³⁷ further addresses five areas of strategic focus: (1) expanding the availability of quality preschool education; (2) increasing the training and ongoing professional development of preschool educators; (3) supporting development of the national curriculum; (4) development of family and community partnerships; and (5) development of a standards-based monitoring and evaluation system.

Most recently, the MoEYS approved an Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020–2024,³⁸ which continues the integration of preschool planning into the larger education system planning. This document articulates strategies to strengthen the preschool subsector in the areas of (1) infrastructure and physical capacity to serve children (including prioritising access for children who live in remote areas and/or who are at risk of exclusion); (2) human resources and subsystem management (including curriculum and licensing); and (3) the strengthening of pre- and in-service training, support and supervision for preschool teachers. This document also includes a list of specific activities that the country needs to undertake to implement these strategies.

Use of evidence for planning. Preschool subsector plans should be based on two kinds of evidence: (1) timely and relevant data from within the country, and (2) global evidence for best practices in the subsector. The ESP 2020–2024³⁹ is based partly on data for preschool enrolment and participation. However, in many areas, the country lacks the data needed to make targeted planning decisions. The ESP identifies the need for a study to document the costs and associated benefits of the various preschool models currently in use in Timor-Leste and in similar contexts and to identify the combination of investments required to scale up cost-effective models. The plan also indicates the need for better information regarding teacher/child ratios and teacher workloads. However, there is little discussion in the ESP of the need for effective systems to gather key pieces of information *in an ongoing manner*, rather than as a one-time, fact-finding exercise. National preschool stakeholders confirmed that they use the data for preschool planning but agreed that the data were not kept current and lack key indicators, such as learning outcomes and teaching quality.

Timor-Leste's Policy Framework for Preschool Education⁴⁰ reflects an understanding of the essential elements of quality preschool education at the classroom level, such as the need for a safe and supportive environment, an effective curriculum, family involvement, well-qualified

³⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, and UNICEF, *A Policy Framework for Preschool Education: Weaving a Tais for Children in Timor-Leste*, <https://issuu.com/kirstyswordgusmao/docs/a_policy_framework_for_pre-school_e/9>, 2012.

³⁸ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *Policy Framework for Pre-school Education*, Government of Timor-Leste, 2014.

teachers, and adequate teaching and learning materials. The framework also addresses the need for a standards-based monitoring system and for effective partnerships. In addition, the ESP 2020–2024⁴¹ highlighted the continuing need for Timor-Leste to (1) develop supervisory and human resources management systems for preschool educators, (2) create policies that will allow for strategic use of the diverse preschool education models that Timor-Leste has and (3) build up its preschool infrastructure.

However, the country’s subsector planning does not appear to address several elements that are required for a well-functioning preschool system, including (1) comprehensive monitoring that captures coverage, participation and child outcomes as well as the above-mentioned quality indicators; (2) bidirectional data sharing from the national to the local levels; and, relatedly, (3) data-driven decision-making in areas such as financing, budgeting, planning and promoting equitable access to quality preschool education.

Stakeholders also noted that the MoEYS currently lacks sufficient personnel with knowledge of effective preschool education standards to engage in planning on its own but receives much technical support from partners such as HANDS, UNICEF and the World Bank. One national MoEYS staff member summarised the issue well: “From the government side, especially the [MoEYS], we do not have experts, but we work with partners, because they have experts that work with us to run the programmes.” According to one informant, the MoEYS has employed three Timorese professionals who were educated abroad to support and revise the preschool education policy, and this informant would like to see the government draw upon a greater number of qualified Timorese people in this way.

5.2 Coherence

The evaluation’s focus on coherence included collaboration amongst actors in child-serving systems to meet children’s holistic needs.

5.2.1. To what extent do actors in Timor-Leste’s preschool education sector collaborate and coordinate with one another and with actors in other sectors to meet children’s holistic needs?

To answer this question, the evaluation team considered the extent to which actors in Timor-Leste’s preschool education subsector (1) collaborated in ways that maximised national availability of preschool programming, and (2) collaborated with actors in other child- and family-serving sectors to meet children’s holistic needs.

⁴¹ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

KEY FINDINGS

Many different actors effectively collaborate on preschool access and quality in Timor-Leste. However, no coherent national plan integrates their efforts into a larger framework.

The main national collaboration mechanism for preschool education was the ECD Working Group. However, the group's work stalled due to staff turnover and the pandemic.

At the municipal level, there are no systematic mechanisms of coordination in place amongst municipal education authorities, partners and the MoEYS.

Collaboration within the preschool subsector. The ESP 2020–2024⁴² highlights the ongoing need for public purpose partnerships to expand and reform preschool education. The National Directorate of Preschool Education is the main coordinating body for national and international collaboration in the subsector. Based on guidance from the NESP 2011–2030,⁴³ the National Directorate of Preschool Education signs memoranda of understanding with partners and stakeholders who support the development of preschool education in Timor-Leste. However, MoEYS stakeholders claimed that this support was not enough to ensure adequate progress towards the national goal of 80 per cent preschool enrolment by 2030. For instance, a MoEYS leader stated that to reach the goal for 2040, “If possible, we should build preschools in all places. With the support of development partners, ... there are indeed many preschools. But the reality shows that the percentage of children accessing [schools] is still small.”

A variety of stakeholders are collaborating with the government of Timor-Leste to ensure the quality of preschool education. For instance, the World Bank works with the MoEYS and INFORDEPE (Instituto Nacional de Formação de Docentes e Profissionais da Educação) to develop teachers' competency standards and training curricula. UNICEF helped support the MoEYS in the development and drafting of the ECD policy and, together with Alola, helps provide teacher training in community preschools. HANDS provides teaching materials, training support for inspectors and leadership training. Plan International provides mobile libraries and play materials to children. CARE International works with INFORDEPE, the Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development,⁴⁴ the Preschool Department and others to produce teaching materials (e.g., Lafaek Magazine, an educational publication for children) and ensure their alignment with the curriculum. ChildFund International works with the MoEYS and municipality

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

⁴⁴ Formerly known as the 'Curriculum Unit'.

leaders to monitor their work and also provides training. The Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) collaborates with the MoEYS to develop a child-centred curriculum.

The main mechanisms for collaboration amongst preschool education providers at the national level were the ECD Working Group (described above) and an additional Early Childhood Education (ECE) Working Group more specifically focused on preschool education. Stakeholders indicated that the ECD Working Group convened to identify financing sources and to help draft the ECE policy in Timor-Leste. Doing so helps to ensure that the policy delivery is consistent and that laws can regulate preschool education. But, as described above, the ECD Working Group stopped meeting. The ECE Working Group has also failed to remain active because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some development partners added that they did not know the status of the ECD policy, although they had contributed to discussions around the drafting of the policy. Re-establishing the ECD Working Group was one of the main stakeholder recommendations to help improve coordination amongst development partners and MoEYS around preschool education.



Despite the absences of the working groups, stakeholders described collaboration amongst the national, state and municipal education officials, as well as with partners, as “very effective” in identifying problems and planning to respond to needs. One MoEYS leader stated that the collaboration with

UNICEF was effective, adding that community preschools significantly improved preschool enrolment. A different stakeholder cited the collaboration with HANDS in particular, noting that HANDS was involved in writing the National Education Strategic Plan.

National-level partners also believed that collaboration around preschool access was effective. UNICEF respondents reported that UNICEF and the HANDS programme worked closely together to avoid duplication of efforts. Yet, a civil society stakeholder suggested that the MoEYS should initially evaluate the needs for contribution with partners, so that partners can cost-share preschool education in the most efficient way: “I hope that in the future, the Ministry should take the initiative..., because it is easy when the government asks in the first place, when they

come with the plans. Some challenges that the government may face, they have to speak so that the partners can have a look at their plan or budget to support.”

Nonetheless, whilst there are multiple players in the subsector, and generally worded goals around collaboration, the evaluation team could not identify a written plan that specifies how their efforts will fit together into a coherent national plan. Stakeholders from the ECD Working Group mentioned that UNICEF and Plan International had been working with the MoEYS to draft an ECD policy for Timor-Leste in consultation with other partners, but the effort stalled with the turnover of key staff in partner organisations and ministries. Several stakeholders noted that finalising this ECD policy would be a key step towards making more efficient use of resources for preschool education in Timor-Leste. For instance, an NGO stakeholder stated, “We have to improve our coordination tying with the policy. ... We are pushing this draft and policy. But until now, we ourselves don’t know this policy’s whereabouts. That’s why we have fragility [in] coordination, because [with] no policy to lead us, we just implement our own programmes at the government, organisation, and preschool level.”

National and subnational collaboration. There was collaboration between national and municipal levels within the government. For instance, one national-level MoEYS staff member noted, “The municipal level always works together with the national level. Even if the preschool in the municipality is now under the control of the municipal administration, we need to work together because at the municipal level they do not have capability.” However, stakeholders reported that they lacked an established system to ensure regular coordination took place.

At the municipal level, there were at least some instances of poor coordination between local preschool providers and government entities. For instance, a stakeholder in Ainaro recounted instances of partners opening preschools without coordinating with the preschool inspector. That said, the preschool focal point in Baucau observed better communication between partners and the municipal authorities, suggesting that there is variation in the quality of coordination across municipalities. Based on the data available, it is difficult to discern whether the issues experienced in Ainaro are typical, or specific to that municipality.

Cross-sectoral collaboration. At the national level, members of the ECD Working Group reported that the MoEYS, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion collaborated in the development of ECD policy. Stakeholders also stressed the importance of the three ministries working together on ECD policy development and advocacy.

At the subnational level, stakeholders often mentioned collaborating with the health sector around needs such as nutrition and health. This included stakeholders in the municipalities of Lautem, Ainaro and Viqueque. For example, one municipal Director of Education reported, “We collaborate with Health, Agriculture and Municipal Finance.... We collaborate with the health

part to vaccinate the children and provide the medicine to them to fight the intestinal worms each year. They always do it.” Similarly, a community preschool coordinator in Lautem said, “Yes, we have collaboration about nutrition, and we get ‘merenda escolar’ [school lunch] from the national level. ... We also cooperate with health staff to give vitamins and medicine.” One municipal focal point for preschool education reported a similar situation, stating that each student received 25 cents for school feeding, and municipal health visited schools to vaccinate children. ChildFund representatives stated that they did not receive support from the government around school feeding and health, but had their own nutrition programme. Further, stakeholders from Lautem reported collaborating with the government around the Integrated Service of Community Health programme, a primary health care programme in Timor-Leste,⁴⁵ by providing health staff with funds for fuel and food.

Collaboration between the preschool subsector and social protection and child protection was mentioned infrequently. For example, a few municipal-level stakeholders reported collaborating with social protection around safety during natural disasters. For instance, one municipal Director of Education stated, “We work with the social protection to provide a guideline for the preschool students so they can apply when the storm, landslide, heavy rains, flood take place.” CARE and ChildFund reported working directly on child protection, and a municipal government stakeholder also noted collaboration with these organisations around child protection, including building public awareness. However, this kind of subnational collaboration on child protection was not typical for the country.

5.3 Effectiveness

The evaluation examined effectiveness in terms of governance and accountability, workforce, family and community engagement, participation, transitions to Grade 1, and considerations of equity and inclusion.

5.3.1. To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate governance and accountability structures and strategies for the provision of quality preschool education?

For this question, the evaluation team addressed one criterion: the extent to which responsibilities and accountability for the preschool subsector are clearly defined and coordinated through mutually consistent communication.

⁴⁵ Martins, N. & L. Trevana, Implementing what works: A case study of integrated primary health care revitalization in Timor-Leste, *Asia Pacific Family Medicine*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2014.

KEY FINDINGS

In general, Timor-Leste has clear lines of authority and defined roles and responsibilities for the preschool subsector.

Municipalities have primary responsibility for preschool financing and implementation, and would like improved guidance on preschool standards from the national level.

National stakeholders want more effective collaboration on financing and implementation amongst government actors and between government and other organisations.

Preschool subsector stakeholders reported having a sense of ownership and an understanding of their respective roles in the system.

Coordination and communication on responsibilities and accountability. The government of Timor-Leste has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for implementing preschool education at the national level. The Organic Law of the MoEYS (Decree-Law No. 13/2009)⁴⁶ describes the responsibilities of the National Directorate of Preschool Education as well as supporting bodies, such as the Directorate General (DG) of Preschool Education, Basic Education and Recurrent Education⁴⁷; the Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development; and others. A results framework that is part of the ESP 2020–2024⁴⁸ includes medium-term goals (by 2024) that are mostly for the larger education system and would benefit the preschool level as a part of that system (for example, by improving infrastructure). As affirmed by one MoEYS leader, these documents have allowed each directorate and department to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities for implementing the national plan.

In the past decade, the government of Timor-Leste has also made efforts to promote decentralisation through various laws and decrees, therefore assigning more responsibilities and autonomy to its 13 municipalities in regard to education.⁴⁹ Timorese law promoting decentralisation states that responsibility for financing and administration for preschool is placed at the municipality level.⁵⁰ As one national-level stakeholder said, “Based on the system that is in place, the Ministry is responsible for the policy and curriculum, whilst the municipal education [administration] is responsible for the education mechanism at the municipal level.”

⁴⁶ Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law No. 13/2019, Organic Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2019.

⁴⁷ In 2021, the title changed to “DG for Education and Teaching.”

⁴⁸ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

⁴⁹ Fernandes, R. (2018). Enrollment and internal efficiency. In B. Thornton & M. Miguens (Eds.) *Analysis of the Education Sector in Timor-Leste* (pp. 35–62). Timor-Leste Ministry of Education, World Bank, & Global Partnership for Education.

⁵⁰ Government of Timor-Leste, Law No. 09/2016, Law of the Sucos, 2016.

Accordingly, the municipal-level representatives interviewed from the MoEYS clearly articulated their roles as those in which they implement the plans set forth by the national MoEYS. Across municipalities, there is less guidance at the local (*suco*) levels. School inspectors at the municipality level are also responsible for ensuring that MoEYS-provided school subsidies (to procure teaching materials and office stationery and to conduct small repairs to school infrastructure) are used as intended, and that the school receives the subsidy to which they are entitled.

Across the national, municipal and local levels, the government, local NGOs and foreign partners are responsible for financing and implementing preschool education. As described above, the MoEYS and the National Directorate of Preschool Education assume planning responsibilities, whilst the municipal governments follow their direction in implementing programmes. According to one informant, the Department of Finance and the MoEYS staff focused on preschool are responsible for planning the budget, activities and programme for preschool education. However, this person said the municipal education sectors design their own plans and allocate the preschool budgets within their municipalities. Local and global partners, such as the World Bank, UNICEF and CSEP, also support the implementation of and financing for preschool education. These partners supply a large percentage of preschool education support in Timor-Leste, through their independent initiatives (coordinated with the MoEYS) or through the government budget.

Some interview informants did identify issues with coordinating financing and implementation mechanisms. One national-level Ministry leader indicated a need for improved collaboration between the MoEYS and the Ministry of State Administration, particularly regarding budgeting. This leader claimed that the two ministries need to examine the preschool education responsibilities they have assigned to the municipalities in order to further improve coordination. A member of the ECD Working Group noted that the problem with coordination takes place between the ministries and municipalities, and within the MoEYS and amongst partners as well.

Stakeholders indicated that they understand their role in and had partial ownership of the preschool education plan. As described above, informants clearly articulated the work for which they were responsible, and their various roles as outlined in the laws governing the provision of preschool education. At the national level, the MoEYS is the key entity responsible for planning, budgeting and ensuring preschool implementation. Government partners, implementing NGOs and MoEYS staff at the municipal level all indicated that it is their responsibility to follow the plan set forth by the MoEYS. Although preschool education is considered 'decentralised', with municipalities and school administrators each having a role, municipal-level leaders indicated that they follow the direction from the national level. For instance, one municipal focal point

stated, “I do not plan anything that is only based on what I want and think. I have to follow instructions. ... We in the municipality will not do our own plan.”

Similarly, international partners and national NGOs all indicated that they follow the plan of the national MoEYS. Representatives from organisations like UNICEF, CARE International, Plan International and community preschools all claimed that their ultimate responsibility is to support the MoEYS and follow their plans. Multiple people referred to the MoEYS as an ‘umbrella’ for all preschool programming. Stakeholders’ focus on the MoEYS plans demonstrates successful coordination of preschool implementation. However, many municipal- and local-level implementers do not feel engaged in the planning process or that their feedback is considered (*see Section 5.4.2*).

5.3.2. To what extent does Timor-Leste have a sufficient and well-trained preschool education workforce?

This research question included five indicators that addressed the extent to which Timor-Leste (1) has a robust and coherent strategy for recruiting appropriate staff for the preschool education subsector; (2) has defined a core set of professional competencies and standards for preschool educators; (3) has initial requirements defining the level of education and training required to teach preschool education now, whilst also specifying how these requirements will become more stringent over time; (4) has effective and flexible pre-service preschool education teacher training programmes; and (5) promotes continuous workforce improvement and staff retention for its preschool education workforce.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste is following best practices by considering preschool teachers as part of the regular educator workforce.

Timor-Leste is not able to provide enough qualified teachers for its preschool classes.

Government hiring of preschool teachers is not a priority, and hiring is based on funding availability rather than needs.

There are insufficient numbers of teacher trainers available. Most preschool teachers lack formal training, although there are some professional development opportunities.

Standards exist for teachers in general, but there are no standards specifically associated with developmentally appropriate practice at the preschool level.

There are almost no training opportunities around education for children with disabilities.

Staff recruitment for the preschool subsector. According to EMIS data,⁵¹ Timor-Leste had 673 public and private preschool teachers in 2018 for 21,399 students, equating to a student/teacher ratio of nearly 32 to 1 – far above the 20-to-1 ratio that UNICEF recommends for the preschool level.⁵² If Timor-Leste were to reach its 2024 target of 50 per cent preschool enrolment (with a 20-to-1 ratio), the country would need approximately 1,600 teachers. There is substantial evidence that low student/teacher ratios are especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds⁵³ – which is the case for most children in Timor-Leste (and is also related to issues of equity within Timor-Leste).

Respondents agreed that there are not enough preschool education staff in the subsector to meet the demand for the preschool provision. As one person said, “Our schools are still crying for teachers.” This sentiment was echoed by UNICEF, MoEYS, the World Bank and respondents at the municipality levels. The UNICEF respondent further explained, “Even you look at the infrastructure – the number of preschools – they do not have enough to meet even half of the target set in the national plan.”

Timor-Leste has multiple strategies for recruiting preschool teachers, but according to respondents, it is unclear when they use each strategy and to what extent each strategy will meet the needs of the field. For example, one MoEYS leader said, “We opened the vacancy based on the financial capacity that the Ministry [had],” implying that the government recruits teachers based on financial capacity rather than the specific needs of the subsector.

The government of Timor-Leste has a salary standard set by the civil service commission. This standard ensures there is no difference in the salary of teachers in all education levels, including preschool (and is a best practice). However, a reward system is lacking for volunteer teachers who teach at community schools and NGO schools – despite text in Article 9 of Decree-Law No. 23/2010 stating that there should be a system of special incentives for educators.⁵⁴ According to a municipal focal point for preschool, “We have to acknowledge that the voluntary teachers are outnumbering the permanent and contracted teachers, because at each school, there might be two or three voluntary teachers.” Reportedly, volunteer teachers tend to leave after a few years. As one respondent explained, “They are teaching voluntarily because they believe that when the government take[s] over this preschool, they will automatically be the educator for that preschool centre. But in fact, the government ... does not

⁵¹ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

⁵² UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education – Advocacy brief*, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

⁵³ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, ‘Equity’, Education GPS, <<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41746&filter=all>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

⁵⁴ Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law 23/2010, Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers, 2010.

put money to support the continuity of those educators. ... That's why, after the establishment of the preschool for two or three years, these educators stop teaching." According to interview participants, in some instances volunteer teachers receive small monthly stipends that amount to roughly 25 to 30 U.S. dollars, but in other cases the NGOs only have the resources to cover their telephone bills.

There is currently a lack of training for teachers on how to identify and support children with disabilities. According to one staff member from INFORDEPE, "Teachers have sufficient knowledge [of] how to treat children, but for the children with disability, there is no specialised teacher yet." Furthermore, many respondents noted that data on this population are lacking; that is, they do not know the extent of the need for special education teachers at the preschool level. As a respondent from UNICEF explained, "There have not been any systematic system[s] of identification of children with disabilities in school. Most people think about physical disability rather than mental disability. There are other types of disability not so visible, but [they] have not been detected or identified."

Professional competencies and standards for preschool educators. The Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers (Decree-Law No. 23/2010)⁵⁵ includes a framework of mandatory competencies for educators. According to the NESP,⁵⁶ stakeholders developed a preschool teacher competence framework for teachers working with children under 6 years old and integrated it into the National Teacher Competence Framework. As it stands, the framework includes, but is not specific to, preschool teachers, since it also applies to primary and secondary school educators. The competencies cover knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators. According to the NESP,⁵⁷ stakeholders revised these competencies to provide practical evaluation indicators and to align with standards of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation.

Requirements to teach preschool education. Article 48 of the Basic Law of Education (No. 14/2008)⁵⁸ states that early childhood educators should possess a diploma for teaching conferred by a higher education establishment, such as a university offering bachelor's degrees or the equivalent. However, the Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers (Decree-Law No. 23/2010)⁵⁹ offers a "special transitional regime" exemption for those already working in preschool education institutions who do not

⁵⁵ Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law 23/2010, Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers, 2010.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Government of Timor-Leste, Law No. 14/2008, Basic Law of Education, 2008.

⁵⁹ Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law 23/2010, Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers, 2010.

have the necessary academic qualifications. The MoEYS plans to develop standardised pre-service and in-service training programmes for preschool teachers but has yet to do so⁶⁰.

According to the ESP 2020–2024,⁶¹ Timor-Leste plans to establish “a coordinated system of pre-service and in-service teaching training developed and implemented allowing new and existing teachers to gain a specialist preschool teacher qualification.” Many of the current preschool teachers in



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Timor-Leste reportedly do not have formal teacher training or an established background in education. For instance, one MoEYS member said, “Most of the teachers do not have the teaching background. However, we have to accept it and keep going with this reality.” Respondents from UNICEF, the MoEYS and local directors of education echoed this sentiment. One municipal Director of Education explained that teachers do not have degrees specifically in preschool education because until now, “[there have been] no rules saying that educators should have their degree [in the] areas of preschool education. Some of them just finished their secondary school [education, and] they are now teaching pre-primary school.” ChildFund also reported that most of the teachers working in the community preschools only have a secondary education, whilst a few graduated from the university in areas other than education. To fill this gap, schools hire untrained teachers or facilitators to lead classrooms and attempt to prepare teachers through in-service trainings.

Pre-service preschool education teacher training programmes. Timor-Leste does not have sufficient pre-service training available for preschool teachers. Whilst UNTL has graduated preschool teachers, institutions such as the Catholic Institute of Teacher Training in Baucau and INFORDEPE reported not having a specialised preschool education curriculum ready to be implemented. A staff member from INFORDEPE explained that a preschool curriculum has been started, but only 4 of the 12 content areas are complete. An informant from the Catholic Institute of Teacher Training said, “We do not have the specialisation area here in the

⁶⁰ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

institution regarding preschool education. We are only specialised in primary education, but we are open to work with the preschool teachers.”

Given the overall shortage of contracted and permanent teachers in Timor-Leste, there is likely a shortage of teacher trainers. Timor-Leste’s Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers (Decree-Law No. 23/2010)⁶² states that those who are currently serving as teachers, but who do not hold a bachelor’s degree as stipulated by the Basic Law of Education, are subject to “an intensive training programme determined by the [MoEYS]” in order for them to obtain a certification equivalent. This intensive teacher training programme is designed to provide teachers with the knowledge outlined in the National Teacher Competence Framework (described in Section 5.3.2).

Preschool staff who are not formally trained in preschool education have opportunities to develop their competencies through in-service training. According to respondents, most of these trainings are hosted by INFORDEPE and partners such as ChildFund, the HANDS programme and CARE International. For example, a staff member from ChildFund described how they support the MoEYS in capacity building: “Those educators who are not graduated in the preschool education area, they have to attend the training continuously so that they can increase their knowledge on preschool teaching. That’s why ChildFund has [an] important role to help [the MoEYS] in [the] preschool education area based on the capacity that this organisation has.” INFORDEPE utilises a three-module training, the creation of which was funded by ChildFund. The training covers curriculum guidance, classroom management and play-based learning. Whilst many respondents reported that INFORDEPE regularly offers training, some teachers reported that they went for long periods without training. Additionally, NGOs reported offering their own types of in-service training to their teachers. For example, a respondent from the Alola Foundation said they provide trainings on teaching methodology and the preschool education curriculum.

Article 23 of the Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers (Decree-Law No. 23/2010)⁶³ states that continuing training is “an integral part of working hours and the functional content of teaching staff” and is ensured by the MoEYS. Article 6 states that teaching staff are obliged to participate in “continuous and intensive training” through training programmes that are accredited and guaranteed by the MoEYS. Yet, as stated in Section 5.3.2 of this report, the MoEYS has not yet developed

⁶² Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law 23/2010, Career Statute of Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers, 2010.

⁶³ Ibid.

standardised in-service training programmes for preschool teachers but has articulated intentions of doing so in the ESP 2020–2024.⁶⁴

An MoEYS staff member commented on the reach of current in-service professional development: “We can now say that most of [the] teachers have received capacity-building training to be better teachers. Not that they understand everything, but at least they have the capabilities to teach children.” (But note that the evaluation team was unable to corroborate this statement.)

Regarding the timing of the trainings, a respondent from the MoEYS discussed how trainings can sometimes take teachers away from their classroom and, in turn, negatively affect the students’ educational experiences. INFORDEPE also reported addressing this issue by scheduling trainings during the school holidays. Overall, a number of training opportunities are available to in-service teachers who are not qualified to teach preschool, and key stakeholders hope to grow these in-service trainings to meet the needs of the teacher workforce.

5.3.3. To what extent are families and communities engaged as active partners in the preschool education sector and in promoting young children’s learning?

To answer this question, the evaluation team considered the extent to which (1) family and community engagement is a priority for Timor-Leste’s preschool education subsector, and (2) preschool education subsector stakeholders use effective strategies to engage families and communities in preschool education.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste has several policy directives regarding family and community engagement in schools, but some stakeholders lacked information about how to implement these policies.

Family and community engagement was almost entirely focused on what families and communities could provide for schools (money, labour, etc). Stakeholders seemed unaware that preschool programmes should also engage in strengths-based planning and partnership with families and communities on how best to meet the needs of the children and their families.

There was cross-sectoral collaboration regarding nutrition/school feeding. There was much less collaboration in other areas, such as health or child protection.

Prioritisation of family and community engagement. Timor-Leste has several directives in place to encourage family and community engagement in preschool education. According to

⁶⁴ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

Decree-Law No. 3/2015,⁶⁵ the national preschool education curriculum is based on close collaboration with the student's family and community and is intended to strengthen the child's understanding of their role in society. In addition, Law No. 9/2016 (Suco Law)⁶⁶ states that sucos have the responsibility to "sensitise the community members to the importance of schooling for children and mobilise the community to the fight against early school withdrawal." Regular school inspections monitor schools' compliance with policy directives concerning family and community engagement – namely, if schools have a parent-teacher association that is effective, meets regularly and operates according to best practices. Inspectors should also encourage school administrators to engage with community-based organisations to meet their schools' needs. However, not all municipal-level MoEYS staff were aware of these directives. Whilst a few individuals discussed teacher trainings on the topic of parental engagement, several other stakeholders said they had not received any guidance.



Overall, there was a common understanding amongst stakeholders that family and community engagement in preschool education is very important. Respondents from NGOs and schools, as well as directors of education, reported that family and community engagement provides the support necessary to build and staff new schools. For example, one municipal Director of Education said, "When I visit the community, they always ask us to open more preschools. That is a sign that they understand the importance of the preschool." Respondents also stated that family and community engagement are important because preschool students need adults in their lives to get them ready for school and to take them there. As a public preschool coordinator explained, "For me, the engagement of parents and community is very important because the students are just small children. They need their parents to be involved to organise them."

Strategies to engage families and communities in preschool education. National-level respondents from the MoEYS reported partnering with HANDS to meet with municipal leaders to sensitise them on preschool education and to encourage them to share information with their municipalities.

⁶⁵ Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law No. 3/2015 Approves the National Curriculum of Pre-school Education, 2015.

⁶⁶ Government of Timor-Leste, Law No. 09/2016, Law of the Sucos, 2016.

Families are involved in preschool education programmes in a variety of ways, although there were only a few instances in which respondents reported family involvement that went beyond asking families to pay for things or provide resources. Regarding the physical labour that parents provide, a community preschool coordinator explained, “When we decide to clean up our environment, mostly parents will take over this work. They organise together with the parent-teacher association. So, when we need help from parents, we just coordinate with [the parent-teacher association] for discussing anything about our school.” There were mixed reports about parents volunteering, however; whilst a staff member from CARE mentioned that parents help teach the students, a community preschool coordinator said, “[Parents] never [assist in the classroom]. [If we wanted], they would help us, but they said we teachers work for it because we get paid. They would not get anything for becoming [volunteer] assistants.”

Community resources such as community leaders, religious spaces, primary schools and existing social networks are leveraged to help preschool education programmes meet the needs of children and families. Additionally, there were reports of preschools partnering with the MoEYS to provide a school feeding programme called ‘merenda escolar’. As a respondent from the Alola Foundation said, “The community, parents and the local leaders provided spaces to us to teach the children, and they themselves wrote the proposal to establish some preschools in where they live. That is why I said the collaboration [with the families and community] is very effective.”

5.3.4. To what extent do children in Timor-Leste have access to and participate in quality preschool education programming?

AIR answered this question based on two criteria: the extent to which (1) children across Timor-Leste have access to quality preschool education programming, and (2) there is public demand for quality preschool education programming in Timor-Leste.

KEY FINDINGS

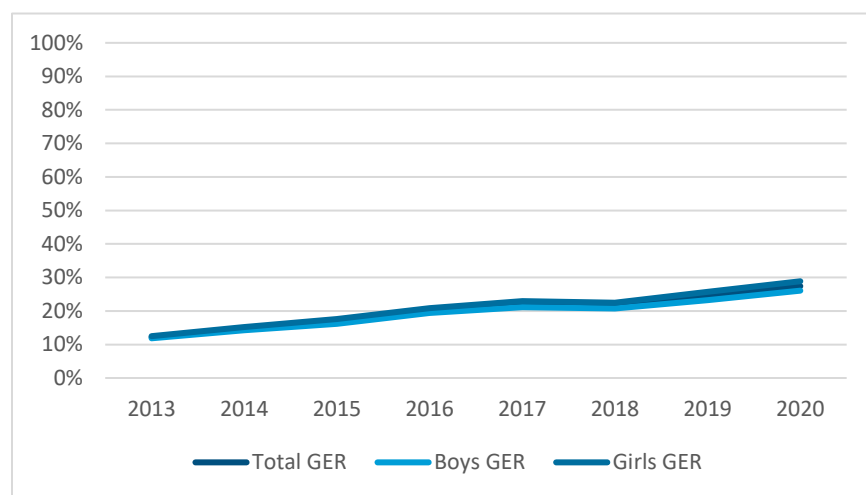
As of 2020, Timor-Leste’s GER for preschool (public and private programmes combined) stood at 27 per cent, with nearly identical rates for boys and girls. However, it is unclear what percentage of children are in programming that is of good quality.

Timor-Leste has a developmentally appropriate curriculum for the preschool level, but there is a lack of clarity about whether programmes should use first-language instruction.

Extent to which children across Timor-Leste have access to quality preschool education programming. Preschool GER has steadily climbed since 2013 and in 2020, stood at 27 per cent

(see Figure 4).⁶⁷ As of 2020, 16,869 Timorese children attended public preschool, and another 9,788 attended private programming (for a total enrolment of 26,657). Enrolment rates for boys and girls are almost identical.⁶⁸ These figures only reflect enrolment. The evaluation team could not identify any available database that combines enrolment with quality data, so it is unclear how many of these children are in programming of adequate quality.

Figure 4. Preschool GER 2013–2020



The government of Timor-Leste approved and implemented its current preschool curriculum in 2015.⁶⁹ This curriculum includes many best practices for preschool education, including elements to promote literacy, basic mathematics, motor skills and general development for children aged 3–6 years. Leaders in the MoEYS also emphasised the importance of play-based learning in the curriculum. As a member of the Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development explained, “The most important thing is that the kids learn from their playing. They have to play a lot. We do not impose the rule to enforce them to write. They have to play.” This emphasis on play-based learning is an essential best practice in ECE.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, ‘Gross Enrolment Rate (District-wise, by School Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020’, <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/summary/15-emis/99-3-gross-enrolment-rate-ger-district-wise-by-school-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020/jdownloads/summary/15-emis/96-0-number-of-students-district-wise-by-education-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, ‘Number of Schools (District wise by Education Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020’, <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/summary/15-emis/96-0-number-of-students-district-wise-by-education-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Basic Education Curriculum for Preschool in Timor-Leste*, 2014.

According to interview data, public and private preschool institutions both use the curriculum in the classroom (although a few implementers said that they still use the old version). In addition, many preschools have play materials to align with the curriculum, due in part to the active support of ECD partners who provide them. Nonetheless, preschools often lack sufficient curricular materials. In these cases, teachers demonstrate creativity by using local materials such as rocks, sticks and leaves to engage students in activities.

Best practice

Global evidence indisputably shows that children learn best when they receive first-language instruction in preschool and the first six years of primary education.⁷² During that time, they should also become familiar with the national language.

Interview informants explained that the curriculum lacks clarity regarding the language of instruction. According to the Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development, the law states that teachers can use the first language if necessary, but they are not required to use it as the language of instruction. A municipal-level education director explained the resulting problem: “Every time we have a different government, they always change their policy. Some want to promote Tetum at school, whilst others want to promote first languages. We are confused.”

Public demand for quality preschool education programming. Respondents referred to several system-level initiatives to encourage families to use available preschool education services at the community and national levels. At the national level, for example, a respondent from CARE International spoke about how they prioritise community dialogue and share information through Lafaek Magazine in all 13 municipalities. A UNICEF staff member explained that they have several campaigns to encourage preschool enrolment and that they host parent groups to teach fathers and mothers about how to interact with their young children and the importance of preschool education. Furthermore, the MoEYS is partnering with HANDS to facilitate access to preschool education.

According to a national education staff member, the MoEYS invites municipal education leaders to attend a workshop so they can then share information with parents in their respective municipalities. Stakeholders at the community level also employ strategies to encourage families to use the preschool education services. For example, the director of a public preschool said, “Our school is located next to the primary school, so we tell the students and teachers from that school to tell their parents to bring their younger siblings to enrol in our preschool. The response from the parents is positive.” A municipal focal point for preschool also explained

⁷⁰ Haddad, Caroline (ed.), *Improving the quality of mother tongue-based literacy and learning: Case studies from Asia, Africa, and South America*, UNESCO, 2008.

World Bank Group, ‘Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning,’ *World Bank*, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/loud-and-clear-effective-language-of-instruction-policies-for-learning>>, accessed 7 March 2022.

that they reach out to parents in letters, announce information in church or post information on a notice board.

Preschool education is not widely considered a public good in Timor-Leste (on par with basic school). Barriers to the Timorese population viewing preschool as a public good relate to the lack of a national mandate to provide preschools for all children, limited access to preschools, and a lack of understanding of the importance of schooling before 6 years of age. Stakeholders said that if preschool were to be mandated by law (rather than made optional), it would be seen more as a public good.

5.3.5. How and to what extent does Timor-Leste support children’s successful transitions into Grade 1?

This evaluation question had a single criterion: the extent to which Timor-Leste’s preschool education programming is aligned with Grade 1 expectations for incoming students.

KEY FINDINGS

Stakeholders agreed that in principle, preschool programming should align with the expectations for students entering Grade 1, but in reality, there is no deliberate alignment.

National MoEYS stakeholders did not believe there was sufficient Grade 1 data to help them determine whether children were adequately prepared for basic school, but other stakeholders did use Grade 1 data this way.

Alignment of preschool education programming with Grade 1 expectations. In planning for the preschool subsector, stakeholders in Timor-Leste’s education system have considered Grade 1 readiness but have not made it a priority. MoEYS and partners have acknowledged research showing the importance of preschool education for children entering primary school. Accordingly, when discussing the goals for preschool education, stakeholders concentrated on improving access to preschool education rather than on specific standards for readiness.

The NESP 2011–2030⁷¹ includes the vision that “[i]n preschool, [children] will develop the basic skills and knowledge to be prepared for basic education.” However, the goals set forth by the plan concentrate on access and do not include specific indicators for school readiness. Some ongoing efforts to support school readiness include revising the national preschool curriculum,

⁷¹ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

which includes objectives to promote school readiness through basic literacy and math skills as well as physical and socio-emotional development.

A 2019 evaluation of UNICEF's community preschools model in Ermera and Viqueque showed that children from aldeias with community preschools showed significantly better school readiness in emergent literacy; knowledge of health, hygiene and safety; and cultural knowledge, relative to children from aldeias with no preschools.⁷² UNICEF has also implemented a readiness programme to ensure that children can transition smoothly from preschool to Grade 1.⁷³ So far, however, according to informants from UNICEF and the MoEYS, this programme has reached only 11 schools,⁷⁴ and some MoEYS leaders reported that they do not believe it will be feasible to implement the programme nationwide. Although preschool education stakeholders have considered expectations for Grade 1 readiness, their subsector planning currently emphasises general access to preschool in the hope that any preschool education will benefit students as they transition to Grade 1.

There seemed to be confusion about the availability of Grade 1 data to help assess the adequacy of school readiness. A national-level MoEYS staff person claimed that the national-level MoEYS does not have data on Grade 1 enrolment, dropout and repetition. A municipal-level inspector also said, "We don't use this data yet. For Grade 1, we are not yet doing research on this issue looking [at] the quality of preschool." Correspondingly, the MoEYS preschool planning documents focused more on data related to preschool access, rather than on effectiveness of preschool education as evidenced by Grade 1 success. UNICEF, however, does use EMIS data from the national and municipal levels to inform its preschool programming. For instance, when the organisation developed its school readiness programme, it looked at repetition and dropout rates in Grade 1, including differences between rural and urban areas and differences based on socio-economic status. One UNICEF respondent said, "Whenever we develop new country programmes or annual work plans, we review enrolment data, we look at repetition rates, we compare the indicators, and [we] also look at how that particular municipality performs in terms of enrolment." The UNICEF planning documents also include data on Grade 1 dropout, literacy and numeracy rates to inform improvements in preschool education quality.⁷⁵

⁷² American Institutes for Research, *Timor-Leste Longitudinal Study on the Effects of Preschool Education with Parenting Education Support in Viqueque and Ermera*, Washington, DC, 2020.

⁷³ In addition, UNICEF's School Readiness programme helps Grade 1 children who did not attend preschool to catch up with their peers.

⁷⁴ An article from UNICEF (UNICEF Timor-Leste, Preparing children for their best chance at schooling success, <<https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/preparing-remote-children-their-best-chance-schooling-success>>, 22 July 2019.) At the time of the article's publication, States that the school readiness programme had been piloted in 11 basic education schools and 15 public and community preschools.

⁷⁵ UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, New York, April 2019.

5.3.6. To what extent does the preschool education system promote equity – including reaching the most marginalised – empowerment of women and girls, respect for linguistic diversity, and inclusion of people with disabilities?

To answer this question, the evaluation assessed the extent to which Timor-Leste’s preschool education subsector strategy focuses explicitly on building equity.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste has strategies for the professionalisation of the preschool workforce but does not use them consistently. Lack of designated funding is a significant constraint, leaving children in more remote or rural areas with less access to qualified teachers.

The country has a plan to incentivise qualified teachers to work outside the capital, which can help improve equity in access to professional teachers.

Education system monitoring formally addresses gender and disability, plus non-discrimination, but is not explicit about linguistic diversity.

Strategies focused on building equity. One way to promote equity is to ensure that all children have access to qualified teachers. Whilst respondents identified key strategies to address the professionalisation of the preschool workforce, none of them were confident that the strategies were implemented consistently or reliably. For example, a respondent from the World Bank said that they help INFORDEPE improve and review the teachers’ competence standards and the teachers’ training curriculum framework. However, the respondent was unsure to what extent the standards and frameworks were being implemented at the national level. A respondent from INFORDEPE claimed that the quality of these efforts is highly dependent on the budget available. Furthermore, it is clear that many preschools are staffed by volunteer teachers who have never had any formal education training. Therefore, whilst there is evidence of strategies to address the professionalisation of the preschool workforce, there is little evidence to support the fact that these efforts are widespread and implemented nationally. It is worth noting that the ESP 2020–2024⁷⁶ addresses the development and application of a human resources policy with incentives for teacher relocation outside Dili – an approach that may help address equity in access to qualified teachers.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

The evaluation team was unable to find documentation that explicitly addresses how the country should meet the needs of children and families from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Timor-Leste's education sector considers elements related to student diversity in its monitoring system, although these elements do not appear to be a predominant focus. The School Inspection Manual⁷⁷ includes several guidelines for inclusive education. Specifically, inspectors must assess whether the school regulations promote inclusiveness and non-discrimination; whether the infrastructure is “constructed in ways that enable all students – male, female, disabled, and terminally ill students – to access the school”; and whether teachers promote learning opportunities for all students “regardless of race, religion, skin colour, physical condition, sexual orientation, and social status.”

Although the MoEYS has these guidelines in place, the evaluation data show mixed views about the extent to which stakeholders have access to data related to inclusivity. Ra'és Hadomi Timor Oan, the national organisation for people with disabilities in Timor-Leste, reported in 2015 that the EMIS does not adequately disaggregate data by disability.⁷⁸ A national stakeholder and several municipal-level stakeholders claimed that they do not have data related to students with disabilities. Some interview respondents mentioned that the Department of Inclusive Education instead has access to these data. However, stakeholders were more familiar with data related to gender. For example, a municipal-level inspector described coaching teachers on promoting gender integration in the classroom.



⁷⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *School Inspection Manual*.

⁷⁸ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016-2020*, Ministry of State, Coordination of Social Affairs Commission for the Rights of the Child, Timor-Leste, 2017.

5.4 Efficiency

In the area of efficiency, the evaluation addressed budgeting and financing, timeliness, and quality assurance and data-driven decision-making.

5.4.1. To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate budget and financing mechanisms for the provision of cost-effective preschool education?

To answer this question, the evaluation examined the extent to which (1) Timor-Leste's preschool plan is well costed; and (2) resource needs, gaps and funding strategies have been identified and are monitored.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste's preschool subsector is severely underfunded. As a portion of GDP, its budget allocation to preschool is just under one tenth the recommended level. Within the education sector budget, the subsector receives one third or less of the recommended proportion.

Timor-Leste appears to start with a budget allocation for preschool in the education sector plan, then determines how to use it best, rather than basing the budget on a comprehensive subsector plan with corresponding identification of what resources are required.

The MoEYS and partner organisations have effective communication about how partners can help the MoEYS obtain necessary resources for the subsector.

Costing of the preschool education plan. The OECD recommends a global standard of 1 per cent of GDP allocated to preschool education. As of 2014, the allocation in Timor-Leste was less than one tenth of that figure (at 0.09 per cent).⁷⁹ In terms of the education sector budget specifically, a national-level MoEYS respondent explained, "The state budget allocation has not met the criteria of the minimum global standard (15 per cent to 20 per cent of the state budget to education), and also the preschool education has still 5 per cent from the general state budget of the MoEYS."

Timor-Leste's costing information appears to be spread across multiple documents/plans. These include Timor-Leste's National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016–2020⁸⁰; its

⁷⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Government expenditure on preschool education as share of GDP, 2014', <<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/government-expenditure-on-preschool-education-as-share-of-gdp>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

⁸⁰ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016-2020*, Ministry of State, Coordination of Social Affairs Commission for the Rights of the Child, Timor-Leste, 2017.

NESP of 2011 to 2030⁸¹; its ESP 2020–2024⁸²; and the MoEYS annual education sector budget. The evaluation team could not identify any one place in which all the key elements of the subsector are addressed in a comprehensive way (see Section 5.5.1 for more discussion on this topic). Rather, budgets identify a few priorities within the subsector. For example, the costed action plan in the ESP 2020–2024⁸³ addresses specifics such as the need for an updated teacher registry, provision of teaching and learning materials in alignment with the national curriculum, assessment of teacher workloads and ratios, and so forth. These activities may be critical, but they represent only a small portion of the resources that go into making the subsector function. Whilst individual activities and plans may have been well costed out, the evaluation team did not find documentation that linked the MoEYS subsector budget, planned targets and activities, and actual costs. It is possible that budgeting was based on actual costs from work previously done to carry out the same or similar activities, but the evaluators did not find documentation of this, nor did stakeholders mention it.

Timor-Leste has included preschool in its EMIS since 2013.⁸⁴ Timor-Leste’s ESP 2020–2024⁸⁵ includes projections related to the population of children aged 3–5 by municipality. According to data from the most recent census data from 2015, Timor-Leste is projected to have nearly 100,000 preschool-aged children in 2030.⁸⁶ The plan notes the number of children that the country (and each municipality) should be prepared to serve with ECE, plus the numbers of programme sites required for the country to reach the 50 per cent target for ECE coverage by 2024. These programmes will include a mix of formal preschools and community- and home-based options. The plan also refers to EMIS data on preschool teacher availability and on infrastructure and discusses the need to address critical shortfalls in these areas. There is a notable gap in addressing quality of programming (apart from infrastructure) based on programme quality data.

According to many informants, Timor-Leste’s preschool plans are more idealistic than they are realistic or based on data-driven projections. One staff member from ChildFund pointed out that it took 12 years, from 2002 to 2014, to provide just 2,900 children with access to preschool education. As several other informants also indicated, if current enrolment rates are projected

⁸¹ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

⁸² World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016–2020*, Ministry of State, Coordination of Social Affairs Commission for the Rights of the Child, Timor-Leste, 2017.

⁸⁵ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

⁸⁶ Directorate-General of Statistics, ‘2015 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census – data sheet’, <<https://www.statistics.gov.tl/category/publications/census-publications/2015-census-publications>>, accessed 1 February 2022.

over the next decade, the government's plans to achieve 50 per cent coverage by 2024 and 80 per cent enrolment by 2030 will not be feasible. The NESP⁸⁷ estimated (based on the situation in 2011) that the government would be able to provide only half of the ECE programming needed for the country to reach its enrolment targets. The plan specified the need for other organisations to cover the remaining half, although there were no specific details. More recently, Timor-Leste's ESP 2020–2024⁸⁸ continues to highlight the need for help from donors and partners to realise the plans for ECE. According to one member of the MoEYS, "We do not have sufficient resources to prepare the children. That is why I said [the plans are] too ambitious. Because when we define a target, we have to look at the progress of the participation rate of the preschool education. But the progress is slow." Most respondents indicated that Timor-Leste's preschool education plans could be realistic only if the government invests significantly more financial resources into the preschool system, which officials claimed is a challenge.

According to interview data, the MoEYS and partners have some successful synergies for funding preschool education in Timor-Leste. When the government budget is not sufficient, the MoEYS will ask for support from the partners. Groups such as ACETL (Joint Action for Education in Timor-Leste) and the ECE/ECD Working Groups have coordinated activities to complement the government's budget. The National Directorate of Preschool Education additionally coordinates with partners so that they do not duplicate funding with the MoEYS. One partner described a recent, successful initiative in which the government led a meeting with partners regarding how to apply for the Global Partnership for Education Fund. After discussion with various agencies, the government secured additional financial support. A respondent from CSEP stated, "Actually, there are some partners that want to support [preschool education]. They are waiting for the Ministry to ask for support, but this does not happen. The Ministry should think of how to share the plans or programmes that they need the contribution from partners."

Identification and monitoring of resource needs, gaps and funding strategies. Rather than starting with a comprehensive preschool sector plan and then creating a budget for it (including gaps that could be filled by re-budgeting or resource gaps filled by partners), Timor-Leste's approach appears to start with the funding that is available and then determine the best use for it. For example, municipalities are given preschool funds to distribute as needed, but their decisions are largely not incorporated into national plans.

⁸⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

⁸⁸ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.

The education sector budget does contain line items for preschool education, but the evaluators did not identify any particular prioritisation of preschool in the education sector budget. As stated at the beginning of this section, Timor-Leste's funding for the subsector is a fraction of what is recommended by global standards – a fact understood by the MoEYS.

In terms of monitoring, Timor-Leste does not appear to use data monitoring to track relationships between funding and resulting access, quality, effectiveness or equity in the country's preschool subsector. Municipality-level inspectors claimed that no such system exists. According to a national MoEYS leader, the Timorese government has tracked the implementation of the budget and programmes through the *Dalan ba Futuru*/Way to the Future system and Unit for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.⁸⁹ *Dalan ba Futuru* tracks outputs of government funding but does not track outcomes. For education specifically, the school inspection system and EMIS track school quality, although incompletely, as described in Section 5.4.3. Whilst the government does monitor the quality of the programmes they fund, the informants in the interviews did not mention using these data for any cost-effectiveness analyses that link outcomes to programme costs.

Finally, apart from general statements in policies and plans about the importance of diverse stakeholders in supporting the preschool subsector, there did not appear to be any specific costed plans for how their contributions of resources would fit into a larger funding landscape for preschool.

5.4.2. To what extent has Timor-Leste been able to implement its preschool education strategy in a timely manner? Where are the bottlenecks?

The answer to this question is based on two criteria: the extent to which (1) Timor-Leste has established a timeline with a phased approach for the rollout of preschool education programming, and (2) stakeholders in the preschool education subsector take a proactive approach to preventing and mitigating delays in the timely implementation of the preschool education strategy.

⁸⁹ Plans were made in 2021 to replace this system with the ANAPMA (National Agency for Planning, Motorization, and Evaluation) system.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste has short- and long-term targets for the expansion of preschool education, but stakeholders did not believe that these targets were realistic.

The country has plans to develop many aspects of its preschool subsector. However, plans are not fully articulated with a scope and sequence of costed activities to be carried out over time (including roles of different actors across the subsector to carry out the plan).

A strength of Timor-Leste's approach to preschool subsector planning is its strong alignment with the broader education sector.

Timeline with a phased approach for the rollout of preschool education programming.

As noted above, stakeholders did not think Timor-Leste's targets or timelines for preschool were realistic (*see Section 5.5.1*). The country does not appear to have any alternative targets or plans that are more realistic. Timor-Leste also lacks policy directives with specific, integrated timelines and roles/responsibilities for preschool service provision. The country does have plans around preschool expansion and strengthening the education system as a whole (such as through improved infrastructure), but these plans do not appear to have been implemented as formal policies.

On the positive side, a strength of Timor-Leste's preschool system is that it is part of the larger education system. This approach is aligned with global best practices for preschool education. Because of this integration, preschool subsector planning seems to be fully aligned with the broader education sector timeline.

Use of a proactive approach to preventing and mitigating delays in the timely implementation of the preschool education strategy. Timor-Leste's ESP 2020–2024 discusses critical issues affecting the country's ability to provide preschool education as planned, such as more programme slots for children (to be provided through a variety of programme models); more adequate classroom space; better quality programming (curriculum, standards, etc); increases in preschool educator training and skills; and better human resources management and system oversight. The plan also includes goals for system development and discusses concrete steps that should be taken towards achieving these goals.

The government stakeholders and preschool education partners who participated in this evaluation had mixed views about whether there were regular reviews of Timor-Leste's preschool subsector plan. Although the MoEYS and partners meet regularly to discuss individual programmes, it appears that these reviews may not include all stakeholders and may focus on

reviewing specific activities rather than the plans as a whole. For instance, one stakeholder stated that the MoEYS meets each year to review plans and discuss any needs for change. This person said that during the development of the ESP 2020–2024,⁹⁰ government partners and other members of the education community engaged in reviewing and validating the plan to identify areas in need of support.

However, other stakeholders did not agree that these reviews happened regularly. One stakeholder from ChildFund stated, “Regarding the review of the status of the preschool education plan, I think I don’t have information on that because I have been working here in ChildFund for eight years, but I [have] never [done a] review about this issue with the government.” Another staff member from UNICEF said that meetings with members of the ECD Working Group do not include reviews of the plans, only discussions of the forthcoming priorities and activities. This UNICEF staff person said, “Last year at the end of the year, we sat together and the Ministry presented some priorities for coming years to partners working in different levels of education – preschool, primary, secondary education and technical education – to see where and how partners can contribute to the achievement of the government priorities. But that is not really the review of the plan. I don’t think there is a substantive review of the plan.” Although several MoEYS stakeholders and partners claimed that they hold meetings every three to six months to review both the status of and plans for individual projects (namely, those of HANDS and CARE International’s Hatutan and Lafaek projects), these meetings focus on specific programmes, rather than holistically reviewing the preschool ESPs.

5.4.3. To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring and quality assurance systems in place for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement?

To answer this question, the evaluation considered the extent to which (1) Timor-Leste has quality standards for preschool education, (2) Timor-Leste has effective preschool education quality monitoring systems in place and (3) preschool education quality monitoring data are routinely used for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement.

KEY FINDINGS

Timor-Leste’s standards for primary and secondary schools address elements that are applicable to preschool classes, but the standards are also in many ways not well aligned with developmentally appropriate practice for the preschool age group.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Preschools that are under government oversight have routine monitoring visits, with feedback for educators, but there is no consistent oversight for other preschool education institutions.

Preschool programmes lack practical guidance to know how to work towards meeting standards (including incremental steps and low-resource options).

Stakeholders use the EMIS but consistently noted limitations regarding the timeliness and comprehensiveness of the data – which negatively affected its utility.

Stakeholders at municipal and local levels reported that they sent information up to the national level, but information did not routinely flow back down to them.

Quality standards for preschool education. Timor-Leste’s School Inspection Manual provides standards and assessment tools that cover preschool to secondary school levels.⁹¹ However, there is no distinction between standards for preschool classes versus other levels, and whilst some of the standards are relevant for the preschool level, others are not appropriate. Decree-Law No. 3/2015, which approved the National Curriculum of Preschool Education, gives principles and goals for preschool education.⁹² However, these principles and goals have not been sufficiently operationalised into standards with measurable indicators.

Preschool programmes may need guidance to help their leadership and staff know how they can work towards meeting standards. Whilst specific programmes (such as those run by NGOs) may receive technical assistance on how to carry out good practices, the evaluation team was unable to identify a set of these kinds of informational resources for use across Timor-Leste’s diversity of preschool programmes.

Preschool education quality monitoring systems. Timor-Leste took an important step with the integration of preschool data into its EMIS in 2013.⁹³ In addition, there is a set of goal-related indicators that addresses several aspects of the preschool subsector in the ESP 2020–2024.⁹⁴ However, as also discussed in Section 5.1.1, Timor-Leste does not have a unified and comprehensive preschool plan that covers all key aspects of the subsector in one place (which would include a monitoring plan for the system, rather than just individual components separately).

⁹¹ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *School Inspection Manual*.

⁹² Government of Timor-Leste, Decree-Law No. 3/2015 Approves the National Curriculum of Pre-school Education, 2015.

⁹³ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016-2020*, Ministry of State, Coordination of Social Affairs Commission for the Rights of the Child, Timor-Leste, 2017.

⁹⁴ World Bank Group and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *Education Sector Plan (ESP 2020 – 2024) Updating the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2020 – 2030)*.



Timor-Leste's School Inspection Manual⁹⁵ provides standards and assessment tools for public (government-funded) schools and private schools that have agreements with the government. This manual covers the preschool to secondary school levels and addresses the quality of pedagogy, management and access,

and inclusiveness. It is worth noting that the standards address the psychosocial aspects of the school environment as well as physical features and management. Whilst many of these standards are suitable for the preschool environment, other standards are not developmentally appropriate. For example, children at the preschool level should not be routinely asked to write answers to questions on a blackboard or to complete homework; preschool classes can function perfectly well with no desks; and teachers should use flexible approaches to giving lessons based on what is happening in the classroom, rather than following a rigid timetable. In addition, critical aspects of quality preschool are missing, such as the use of hands-on, play-based learning; the use of varied activities; and the implementation of lessons or activities that go beyond rote learning.⁹⁶ Without special standards for preschool classes, they can become a downward extension of Grade 1 and therefore would not be developmentally appropriate.⁹⁷

The MoEYS has a structure of general inspection, which includes preschool inspectors who are responsible for monitoring preschools in the municipalities. There is a total of 26 preschool inspectors – two per municipality. Preschool inspectors originally were supported by the New Zealand government (through the HANDS programme) and were trained on how to supervise and monitor the learning progress in preschool education. According to a national-level informant, preschool inspectors communicate with school inspectors and assess management, quality of teaching and teacher qualifications. In some cases, municipal directors of education also play a role in monitoring, such as in the municipality of Ainaro. Further, some NGOs (including ChildFund) reported conducting joint monitoring alongside municipal preschool

⁹⁵ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *School Inspection Manual*.

⁹⁶ See here for a review of the evidence for why play-based learning is essential: <https://learningthroughplay.com/explore-the-research/the-scientific-case-for-learning-through-play/>

⁹⁷ For a discussion of this issue, see: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504839.pdf>

inspectors. HANDS provides crucial support for the inspection process, including tablets to facilitate the transfer of data and information.

At the municipal level, preschool inspectors and other education officials described monitoring the conditions of schools, observing teaching methods and troubleshooting problems, such as lack of materials. They also described sharing data with municipal- and national-level stakeholders via WhatsApp. In addition, some of them said that they gave feedback on the spot to help teachers improve their pedagogies. Nonetheless, understaffing of preschool inspectors was one of the main challenges described by stakeholders. For example, one national MoEYS member stated that there were not enough inspectors to cover all schools in Timor-Leste. There were two dedicated preschool inspectors in each municipality, and according to EMIS data, the median number of preschools per municipality is 34, with numbers ranging from 14 to 60.⁹⁸ Many inspectors noted the challenges covering all preschools in the municipality. For instance, one municipal preschool inspector stated, “I think this is a little bit difficult to cover all of the preschool in this territory, because there is no time for the two inspectors to cover all of the six administrative posts in this municipality.” A UNICEF stakeholder echoed this view, noting that inspectors were understaffed, and the monitoring work depended on the funding available: “The inspection work depends very much on the funding. There is no money; there is no monitoring. The inspectors [are] also understaffed.”

Municipal inspectors cited challenges in conducting monitoring, including transportation difficulties and lack of support at the municipal level. For example, another municipal preschool inspector stated that there is no support for inspectors at the municipal level, since there is no decentralised inspection institution at the municipality. As a result, inspectors are unable to get the support they need for things such as transportation costs at the municipal level. As one inspector explained, “[There] is not a decentralised inspection institution in [this] municipality, so we are just deposited in this municipality. So, in the end, we don’t get any support because of the bureaucracy. This is a big challenge for us.” However, a different municipal inspector noted that despite these difficulties, inspectors still effectively managed their monitoring duties. The inspector explained, “But there are difficulties that they face every day. For example, geographically, we are mountainous [and distanced] between preschools, but they are doing [a] good job on inspection.”

Municipal preschool inspectors described receiving training from HANDS on curriculum, technical observation, how to use technology, leadership and techniques of continuous improvement. Most who reported receiving training were satisfied with the quality of

⁹⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, ‘Number of Schools (District wise by Education Level, by School Type and by Gender) 2020’, <<http://www.moe.gov.tl/pt/component/jdownloads/summary/15-emis/96-0-number-of-students-district-wise-by-education-level-by-school-type-and-by-gender-2020>>, accessed 4 April 2022.

the training they received, though some said that they needed more training. Some inspectors reported receiving training every three months, whilst others noted that the frequency of trainings had decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. A few municipal education officials cited issues related to the knowledge of preschool inspectors, including one director of education who stated that the inspectors did not have a preschool education background.

Not all preschools are included in the monitoring system. For example, a UNICEF stakeholder explained that community preschools are not registered with the MoEYS and therefore are not monitored by municipal inspectors. This respondent stated, “This is the big challenge: It looks like the inspectors are not responsible for community preschool education. That is the discussion that we need to talk [with] the MoEYS [about] to find the solution from the legal perspective: who will be responsible for these community preschools.” Further, one municipal Director of Education said that some community preschools are not registered in his municipality and, therefore, are not monitored by the preschool inspector at the municipal level. Nonetheless, preschools operated by some other partners (such as Plan International) did report receiving monitoring visits from municipal inspectors.

Regarding accreditation systems, stakeholders noted that there is a recently established system of preschool accreditation whereby organisations that want to open preschool institutions must undergo a licensing process and meet certain requirements. One MoEYS member explained that organisations are required to meet basic criteria to open preschools, including having adequate facilities and a playground or other suitable place for children to play and express their creativity. Another national-level stakeholder said that MoEYS staff collaborate with the local authorities to decide whether opening the school is logistically feasible. If so, the school can open promptly.

Use of quality monitoring data for data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement. Timor-Leste has systems in place to share and collate monitoring data from the local and municipal levels to the national level, although challenges remain with respect to the coverage and quality of data, as well as the efficiency and timeliness of data sharing. As previously mentioned, Timor-Leste took an important step with the integration of preschool data into its EMIS in 2013.⁹⁹ National-level MoEYS stakeholders explained that the MoEYS has specific preschool EMIS correspondents in the municipalities to control data collection at the municipal level. The MoEYS distributes the data collection format to the municipalities, which then collect the data from schools. Further, one national-level informant noted that only accredited preschool institutions participate in the EMIS data collection. As mentioned previously, community preschools are not yet accredited/registered with MoEYS, resulting in gaps in EMIS data coverage.

⁹⁹ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *National Action Plan for Children in Timor-Leste 2016-2020*, Ministry of State, Coordination of Social Affairs Commission for the Rights of the Child, Timor-Leste, 2017.

Because 46 per cent of all preschool-going children in Ermera and Viqueque attended UNICEF-supported community preschools in 2019, the gap in EMIS coverage was quite significant.¹⁰⁰

HANDS staff appear to have an important role in collating/relaying data to government stakeholders at the national level. For example, a respondent from the MoEYS noted that a HANDS staff member managed all the monitoring data from preschools and presented reports to officials from the National Inspection Unit. Other monitoring data, such as data collected by municipal inspectors, appear to flow from the municipal to the national level effectively, though gaps remain in the coverage of community preschools. Municipal inspectors described collating monitoring data, such as on student meals and teaching quality, and sending those data directly to national-level MoEYS stakeholders through WhatsApp and, in some cases, KoBo Toolbox, a resource for collecting field data using mobile devices. This was the case for municipal inspectors from Ainaro, Lautem and Oecusse. One preschool inspector explained, “The application is very useful for us to do our job well, and we can share the information with them [the national education administrators] so that they can access it regarding what is happening in the schools.” In addition, some municipality preschool inspectors reported sharing monitoring data with municipal stakeholders, such as the superintendent and others.

However, stakeholders described several challenges, particularly related to the EMIS, that affect the quality and timeliness of data sharing from the municipal to the national level. For example, one MoEYS informant described these kinds of difficulties: “The MoEYS is still facing various challenges regarding the data collection and production, especially the data regarding the learning effectiveness and teaching quality. We are also facing difficulties producing the updated data because we still use a manual data collection system, and data verification takes time because we have limited human resources. As a database, the EMIS has not had maximum capacities to capture the data regarding education quality, especially the learning outcomes, school management, teacher training, etc.” A World Bank staff member also mentioned gaps in EMIS data: “EMIS... is the source of data of the Ministry, but unfortunately, the EMIS does not provide much information that we often need.” The informant noted that the World Bank is helping support data entry training and budgeting to help EMIS improve its system, as well as improving data access at the school level.

¹⁰⁰ UNICEF, ‘Country Office Annual Report 2019, Timor-Leste’, 2021, <<https://www.unicef.org/media/90321/file/Timor-Leste-2019-COAR.pdf>>, accessed 4 April 2022.

Stakeholders shared that delays in EMIS data collection were caused by lack of resources and infrastructure issues, such as lack of internet connectivity. One MoEYS leader noted that these delays affected the ability of MoEYS to plan and budget based on the most recent EMIS data. This person said, “We only use EMIS data, but it is always late. For example, in [the] last year we needed some data urgently to do the plan, but the data was not available, and we had to use the data from the previous year. I personally think that to get the good data in rapidly, we need to invest on the EMIS subsection so that they can do their job rapidly, because we know that when the data is not available, our plan will not work smoothly.”

In contrast, some stakeholders at national and municipal levels still reviewed data to inform decision-making. National-level MoEYS stakeholders reported that monitoring and EMIS data were reviewed by different directorates at the MoEYS, including the Preschool Education National Direction, the Cabinet of General Inspection, and – in the cases of accreditation – the National Direction of Planning.¹⁰¹ National-level partners reported reviewing data such as enrolment, dropout and repetition rates to inform their plans. A UNICEF staff member stated, “We rely on EMIS a lot.” However, this staff member noted that EMIS data are available only at the municipality level, not at the school level. Some stakeholders explained that at the municipal level, monitoring data are used to inform plans at the national and municipal levels.

Despite reporting the review and use of data to inform plans, some municipal-level stakeholders believed the data they shared with the MoEYS did not result in changes to address the challenges they faced. For instance, a municipal preschool inspector stated, “Answering our concerns is so difficult. Why? Because we always send information to the national level... but they did not answer. ... I think we who are working at the municipal level have no value; we work hard but have no value.” Similarly, a municipal focal point from another municipality cited a lack of response from the municipal and national governments to their request for better school facilities: “Some suggestions they consider, and some they do not. For example, we have made several proposals and submitted them to the government to build the building for the preschool that is now using a community house, but we received no response and consideration on it. I don’t know why.”

¹⁰¹ According to the ERG, accreditation is now a responsibility of the Cabinet of Licensing, Accreditation, Evaluation and Education Statistics. However, during the 2012–2020 time frame of this evaluation, it was a responsibility of the National Direction of Planning.

5.5 Sustainability

In the area of sustainability, the evaluation considered the extent to which the country was prepared to provide programming for the longer term and at scale.

5.5.1. To what extent is Timor-Leste prepared to provide long-term and scaled-up, quality preschool education programming nationally?

This question incorporated the extent to which Timor-Leste has (1) the knowledge and leadership and (2) effective plans and mechanisms in place for the development of preschool education on a long-term and national scale.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the preschool subsector has effective communication between national and municipal levels.

At least in some places, there were communication issues between NGOs and municipal governments.

The government is able to fill its gaps in preschool subsector expertise through partners.

The country's short- and long-term plans for the development and provision of preschool are viewed as unrealistic by stakeholders.

Stakeholders reported that there were insufficient data on the subsector to make accurate cost projections. Stakeholders also strongly believed that preschool education received inadequate financing.

Knowledge and leadership required for the provision of preschool education on a long-term and national scale. Because preschool education is decentralised at the municipal level, communication between preschool education leaders involves the MoEYS at the national level, municipal education officials and municipal administrations. Most national-level stakeholders reported that communication between preschool stakeholders at the national and subnational levels was going well. For example, one stated, “[The] municipal level always works with the national level, even if the preschool is now under [the] control of the municipal administration. Collaboration of levels is going well.”

However, some national stakeholders noted challenges coordinating between the municipal and national levels. For example, one national-level informant said, “The responsibility of preschool education is the Ministry of State [Administration], so [the MoEYS] and [the Ministry

of] State [Administration] should work together,” suggesting that communication between the two ministries could be improved at the national level. Further, another national-level informant mentioned that communication between the different levels was good.

At the municipality level, stakeholders generally stated that communication with national-level stakeholders was frequent and adequate, though they typically had to travel to the national level when there was an urgent need. However, a municipal Director of Education noted that the communication between the municipal and national levels was sometimes hampered by the bureaucracy. The Director stated, “Our role and responsibility is not under the [MoEYS] but under the municipality administrator. If the administrator does not allow us to go to Dili, we cannot go because we are under the leadership of the administrator.”

Government stakeholders generally believed that there was not sufficient preschool education expertise within the ranks of the MoEYS. A national education leader said that there was a need for more ECD expertise to support the work of the MoEYS in preschool education: “Frankly speaking, we do not have the experts in the ECD area, especially in the national direction of preschool education. Currently, we work together to elaborate the policy draft to take it to consult with the judicial cabinet, but to make the implementation happen, we need [an] advisor; we need an expert to design the programme to be implemented. I think this is the job of the technical people.” Another national MoEYS leader agreed with this view, noting that HANDS was the main source of ECD expertise for the government: “At the preschool, most teachers do not have a preschool education background. We still have such difficulties facing the teachers, let alone when it comes to the experts. We talk about the experts from the government side, especially the [MoEYS]. We do not have experts, but we work with partners, because they have experts that work with us to run the programmes, for example – the experts from HANDS.”

Development partners also pointed to existing partnerships as sources of ECD expertise for the MoEYS – specifically, partnerships with the HANDS programme and the World Bank. For example, an international NGO informant said, “Partners provide funds to hire the [ECD] experts to develop some things to be used, and they do not work alone, but they work under the Ministry. ... The experts are involved with the Ministry to put their thoughts together to develop in the part of education, particularly the preschool education sector.” Further, an NGO respondent mentioned that a previous administration had organised an ECD conference in which international ECD experts shared their experiences with the MoEYS and partners in Timor-Leste.

Plans and mechanisms for the development of preschool education on a long-term and national scale. Informants at the national and subnational levels agreed that the funding for

preschool education in Timor-Leste is not stable. At the national level, the amount of funding varies each year, depending on the capacity of the state budget and the priorities of leadership. Informants stated that the budget allocated to education is too small and that the portion then allocated to preschool education is even smaller. At the municipal levels, leaders said they must then divide the funds they receive amongst the various sectors and across all schools. One municipal director stated, “If we get \$5,000 for preschool, we have to divide this money to all of [the] 43 preschools in this municipality, even though this money is not enough. ... In the municipality level, we do the planning and then we submit to the national level. Then this money is allocated for us only in one packet, and then we have to divide/share this money with other sectors in [the] municipality. So that’s why we only get a small amount of money, and it’s not stable financing.” Another municipal focal point explained that the state funding often arrives late and does not last the entire year. Sometimes municipalities don’t have enough money to pay teachers, and they have to make additional funding requests. Given the insufficiency of education funding, the government depends on support from partners. Several government stakeholders found the reliance on external support to be an imperfect but necessary solution.

Based on the documents reviewed, the government of Timor-Leste values financial transparency in its education system. The NESP 2011–2015¹⁰² discusses the Public Financial Information System and asserts that its proper use is required for development partners to provide direct financial support to the education sector. In addition, the School Inspection Manual¹⁰³ includes a protocol for inspectors to verify the registry of school assets and financial contributions of parents, as well as whether the records of school financial contributions and their uses are publicly displayed.

However, the interview data regarding Timor-Leste’s mechanisms to ensure financial discipline presented mixed findings. A government staff member said that when the MoEYS provides money to schools, they use a school grant log to ensure that administrators use the money to benefit the students and that inspectors check this log during their regular inspections. If school administrators use funds improperly, the MoEYS conducts a disciplinary process or, in more extreme cases, submits them to the criminal justice system. Multiple municipal-level inspectors, however, reported that no system exists to ensure the appropriate use of finances, particularly because inspections have not yet been decentralised to the municipal level. One respondent claimed that no auditing has been done in his municipality for preschools since 2016 or 2017 because inspectors need an authorisation letter from the national MoEYS. This person said,

¹⁰² Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030*, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

¹⁰³ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, *School Inspection Manual*.

“The controlling mechanism for budgeting specifically in preschool is not working during this time. It’s not working because we have to wait for the memorandum of understanding.”

6. Conclusions

The preconditions and assumptions underpinning the theory of change largely held up, and stakeholder beliefs were consistent with the underlying values shown in the theory of change figure (see Figure 1). The issues discussed in the findings point toward challenges in carrying out all the elements in

the theory of change at the desired scale and with the required quality, rather than any fundamental issues with the theory of change itself or the underlying values.

Timor-Leste has many key elements in place that will be required for the continued development of the subsector. The country has made definite progress in its expansion of preschool programming over the past two decades. However, as of 2020, the GER for preschool stood at 27 per cent, and stakeholders widely believed its 2024 and 2030 targets for preschool coverage were unrealistic. On the positive side, there is gender equality in preschool enrolment.

The remainder of this section presents overall conclusions across Timor-Leste’s preschool subsector and considers (1) the enabling environment for preschool, (2) planning and budgeting, (3) workforce, (4) quality assurance, (5) curriculum and (6) family and community engagement.

6.1. Timor-Leste’s Enabling Environment for Preschool

Perhaps the strongest feature of Timor-Leste’s preschool system is that it exists as a subsector within the larger education sector. This approach situates preschool as a critical element in education and is consistent with global recommendations. In addition, Timor-Leste’s legislation and goals for preschool education are appropriate and generally consistent with best practices in the subsector.

Preschool stakeholders from both inside and outside government systems felt a sense of ownership towards the subsector and understood their respective roles in making it work.



However, relationships between different stakeholder organisations were viewed as existing one on one rather than as a strong, collaborative network. This view applied to both relationships between the government and outside organisations, and between non-governmental entities. This approach is inefficient, and it also may put subsector planning at risk for becoming derailed if there is a change in government or organisational leadership. National-level stakeholders wanted to see more effective collaboration amongst government actors and between the government and other organisations – particularly regarding finance and programme implementation. See Section 6.2 for more conclusions specific to planning and budgeting.

With Timor-Leste’s decentralised preschool system, the municipalities play a strong role in managing the preschool system in their locations. Government stakeholders reported that there was good communication between the national and municipal levels. However, there is no systematic mechanism of coordination in place amongst municipal education authorities, partners and the MoEYS. And within at least some municipalities, there were issues with NGOs not collaborating with (or sometimes even informing) government authorities of their plans for preschool programming, such as opening preschool institutions.

Timor-Leste’s preschool subsector is severely underfunded by global standards, receiving just a small fraction of the recommended allocation. This underfunding occurs both in relation to Timor-Leste’s GDP and in relation to preschool’s share of the overall education sector budget. Stakeholders also strongly believed that preschool subsector funding was highly inadequate considering the country’s goals for quality preschool education.

6.2. Planning and Budgeting

Multiple actors are working on access and quality of preschool education in Timor-Leste, but no single national plan integrates their efforts into a larger framework. Subsector plans are fragmented across documents, are at a systems level or are specific to certain activities (such as plans to train a certain number of teachers). The evaluation team was unable to identify a coherent plan that specified step by step how the country was going to achieve its goals for preschool, and that covered all key aspects of the subsector. The MoEYS and partner organisations have effective communication about how partners can help the MoEYS get needed resources for the subsector. However, this kind of planning seemed to be based on specific needs at the time rather than the implementation of a larger strategic plan for the subsector. The country’s ECD Working Group served as the main collaborating mechanism for planning at the national level, but the group has become inactive due to staff turnover and the pandemic.

One strength of Timor-Leste's preschool subsector is that it is already included in the national EMIS. However, stakeholders need the EMIS data to be timelier and more accurate than it is now. In addition, some stakeholders were not sure how to effectively use the EMIS data available. As in most countries, the EMIS captures only a few elements of what is happening in the subsector, and it only accounts for programming under government oversight. There are also information gaps in key areas that are not usually included in an EMIS but are necessary for development and oversight of the subsector, such as how many children have disabilities (and what types of disabilities) and whether the programming being provided is achieving its goals of school readiness for children. Stakeholders also believed that they had insufficient data to make accurate cost projections for preschool programming.

6.3. Workforce

Timor-Leste is following best practices by identifying preschool teachers as part of its basic education workforce (rather than a separate kind of workforce). The country has teaching standards, but these have not been adapted specifically for preschool teachers to ensure that they use developmentally appropriate practices for young children.

Timor-Leste suffers from a severe shortage of qualified preschool teachers. The country is unable to meet its current needs, resulting in student/teacher ratios that are substantially higher than the recommended ratios for the preschool level. The hiring of preschool teachers is not a government priority, and hiring plans appear to be based on the (inadequate) availability of funding rather than strategic planning around how to address this workforce gap. The country's rate of development of its preschool workforce is insufficient to meet its short- and longer-term targets for preschool coverage.

As in many countries, Timor-Leste resorts to untrained teachers and volunteers to help provide preschool education. The country does have strategies to build the capacity of its untrained preschool workforce, but implementation of these strategies is hampered by budgetary constraints and insufficient availability of teacher trainers. On the positive side, preschool teachers do have some professional development opportunities, and partner organisations have been able to help provide capacity building for preschool teachers. It is worth noting that the country has almost no training opportunities to help preschool teachers meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Finally, government stakeholders do not think that the government on its own has adequate expertise in preschool education. The MoEYS has been able to engage its partners to fill gaps in expertise, and this collaboration has worked well.

6.4. Quality Assurance

A strength of Timor-Leste's preschool system is its inclusion of quality assurance monitoring as part of MoEYS education sector monitoring. The monitoring framework formally addresses gender and disability, plus non-discrimination, but is not explicit about linguistic diversity. Monitoring tools used on school visits have one set of indicators, regardless of the class level being observed. Most of these indicators capture key elements of a safe and supportive learning environment for any grade level. However, some are not appropriate for the preschool level. By applying standards for higher grades to preschool classes, there is a risk that the preschool learning environment will not be developmentally appropriate. On the positive side, there are reports that some school inspectors do provide practical support for preschool teachers (although this seems to be based on individual inspector initiative, rather than systemwide standard practice).

Timor-Leste has too few school inspectors, and those it does have are asked to oversee more schools than is practical. The result is that monitoring visits can be sporadic. Preschools that are under government oversight (either directly operated by the government or that are offered by NGOs in collaboration with the government) are part of the monitoring system. Other preschools do not have any routine oversight as part of education system monitoring. NGOs and other providers may have their own monitoring systems in place, but there is no accountability to the government in terms of their quality.

Data on school quality does flow up from the local to the municipal to the national level. However, information does not flow back down. In addition, municipalities would like improved guidance from the MoEYS on how to meet standards. Preschool programmes also need step-by-step, practical guidance on how they can work towards meeting standards.

6.5. Curriculum

A strength of Timor-Leste's preschool system is the fact that it has a developmentally appropriate preschool curriculum. However, some preschools still use the old curriculum, and socialization is needed to address this lag. Preschool educators often did not have all the teaching and learning materials they needed to implement the curriculum as planned but were able to use locally available materials to fill the gaps at least partially. There was confusion on the part of preschool educators regarding the use of first-language instruction (versus Tetum) when delivering the curriculum.

Timor-Leste does not currently engage in routine monitoring or evaluation of school readiness, so the country cannot be certain of the extent to which delivery of the curriculum as planned results in school readiness (in alignment with expectations for students entering Grade 1). Grade 1 repetition rates also provide important information about school readiness, but (as

noted above in Section 6.4), Timor-Leste does not currently have reliable EMIS data on this topic. There were mixed findings regarding the extent to which stakeholders used the information that was available to assess the effectiveness of preschool programming in this way.

6.6. Family and Community Engagement



Timor-Leste's education system recognises the importance of family and community engagement in preschool education (and of education more broadly). The country has several policy directives around family engagement, but preschool educators were unclear on how to put them into practice. The family and community engagement that did take place was heavily focused on encouraging families and communities to contribute funds or labour to the preschool class.

Whilst there is nothing wrong with encouraging parents to volunteer or asking the community to help provide resources (such as materials and labour to build a new classroom), stakeholders in the preschool subsector seemed unaware of other important types of family and community engagement.

In particular, there was a lack of engagement with communities as partners to co-develop plans that best meet the needs of the children, or strengths-based engagement with families to plan how to meet individual children's holistic needs. This type of family and community engagement may have been happening in some preschool programmes, but it was not part of business as usual overall.

7. Lessons Learned

In the course of this study, the AIR evaluation team learned four lessons with broader applications:

1. For preschool education to be sustainable, it's important that it is viewed as a common good by the general population (as they view basic education). Usually, countries first need to convince the population that it is a common good; then it can be integrated into the larger education system. The evaluation team learned that even if preschool education has already been brought under the umbrella of basic education (as in Timor-Leste), that step alone does not automatically ensure public understanding of it as a public good. More advocacy may still be needed.

2. Even if a country has multiple partners engaged in promoting preschool education, and those organisations share similar goals, it is still critical to have formal mechanisms for coordination and collaboration. These mechanisms can help ensure that their efforts are efficient, such as through identification of gaps and overlaps, and leveraging of one another's activities and investments.
3. Many countries rely on volunteers and/or untrained teachers to fill substantial human resource gaps in their preschool subsectors. It is important to address this issue through two simultaneous approaches: building up the skills of the workforce that is available now and in the short term, whilst working to increase the number of trained preschool teachers over the longer term.
4. Family and community engagement is critical for effective preschool education, but countries may just focus on what families and communities can provide (such as funds or labour) and the presence of a parent-teacher association. Preschool stakeholders at all levels need guidance to help them understand that families and community engagement is more effective when families and communities are also respected as capable partners who can collaborate in planning with educators towards meeting children's needs.

8. Recommendations

The evaluation team formulated 12 recommendations based on a combination of (1) direct input from stakeholders in the course of interviews, and (2) review of the evaluation data across sources to identify actionable areas of need or gaps.

Recommendation 1 (planning) is of the highest priority, as it sets the stage for all of the remaining recommendations. Recommendation 2 (financing) is the second highest priority, as financing is required to facilitate execution of the other recommendations. The planning and financing recommendations are inter-related, because effective financing decisions require a comprehensive costed plan, while at the same time step-by-step planning needs to be realistic based on the resources the government can allocate (in addition to what partners could provide). The remaining 10 recommendations do not need to be carried out in a specific order, and their prioritization and sequencing should be determined in the course of planning (as per Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 1: Develop a comprehensive national plan. The best thing that Timor-Leste can do for its preschool subsector is to create a coherent, unified plan for development in the coming years. This plan should cover all key aspects of the preschool system, indicate short-, medium- and long-term targets that are based on a realistic assessment of what can be

accomplished, define step by step how the country will move towards these targets (with costed activities), and specify the roles and responsibilities of all the actors in the subsector towards carrying out those steps. The plan should reflect progressive universalisation in the provision of quality preschool education for all children in Timor-Leste. This plan should address the entire preschool system with all actors, not just those aspects under the oversight of the government and a few key partners. This plan needs to include monitoring and evaluation so that stakeholders can verify that the correct approaches are being taken. If done well, the plan should endure regardless of changes in government or NGO staff. This activity should be carried out as promptly as is feasible and should involve the MoEYS plus all of the other actors in the subsector. This is the kind of activity that UNICEF or HANDS would be well positioned to facilitate (or the ECD Working Group, if it is relaunched), but the MoEYS should be viewed as a strong leader in this activity.

Recommendation 2: Improve financing. Timor-Leste needs to change its approach to financing preschool education. The country lacks stable and adequate financing for preschool. Development of the subsector plan (as specified in Recommendation 1) can help the MoEYS and partners (1) project what level of funding will be needed and when, (2) identify which activities should be prioritised based on limited resources, (3) advocate for funding from donors and (4) create efficiencies in the system. The MoEYS will need to take the lead in rethinking funding, with support from whatever partners it believes will be helpful. This activity should be a priority.

Recommendation 3: Improve the EMIS. The MoEYS should work to improve the timeliness and quality of preschool sector EMIS data to facilitate planning and oversight. In addition, the MoEYS should expand its EMIS to comprehensively cover both public and private preschool programming (perhaps by adding reporting requirements for NGOs operating programming, in relation to Recommendation 7 below). These efforts are critical for the MoEYS and partners to be able to engage in data-driven planning – both as the system operates now, and if Recommendations 1 and or 2 are implemented.

Recommendation 4: Develop the workforce. Timor-Leste will need to determine how to simultaneously build the skills of the largely untrained preschool workforce it has now, whilst working towards increasing the size of its workforce overall (including skilled teachers as well as teacher trainers). The country needs a national teacher recruitment and training strategy, and a standardized approach and curriculum to ensure uniform teacher preparation to use best practices. In addition, Timor-Leste would benefit from taking an inventory of its existing teacher training models for unqualified staff. The inventory should capture their relative effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, feasibility of scaling, and whether the entity that offers that model would be willing to make it freely available (and perhaps conduct a training-of-trainers workshop for

other organisations). Then the country can standardise and promote that specific model. This approach will help ensure that investments in teacher training are using the best practices for Timor-Leste, and will also help the subsector overall with a consistency of approach to professional development for unqualified or volunteer teachers. Finally, staff who oversee and support preschool education at the national level (such as at the MoEYS and INFORDEPE) and school level (such as school inspectors and school principals) need training in developmentally appropriate practice for preschool level. The INFORDEPE should take the lead on this activity.

Recommendation 5: Determine how best to build upon the diversity of preschool delivery models in use.

The country already has a broad selection of preschool models that are in use. It is important for the MoEYS and stakeholders to have a good understanding of what these models are, what resources they require, how effective they are, and where they are best suited to



work (given the diversity of contexts found across the country). A national study is required to capture this information and allow for the side-by-side comparison of different models. This activity could take place as part of the planning described in Recommendation 1, so that it informs good decision-making around programming. The activity could be carried out by the MoEYS or by one of the other subsector stakeholders in the country.

Recommendation 6: Customise standards for preschool. Timor-Leste's standards for basic schools should have a tailored module for the preschool class that reflects developmentally appropriate practice. For example, teachers should primarily use play-based and hands-on learning; they should not expect children to sit at desks for long periods. With more developmentally appropriate standards, school inspectors will be able to assess the extent to which observe quality education at the preschool level (and can encourage preschool educators to use these practices). NGOs and others that provide programming can also be encouraged or required to meet standards. The INFORDEPE should be able to take on this task in collaboration with the MoEYS.

Recommendation 7: Help programmes know how to improve. Preschool programmes need guidance on how to work towards meeting standards (and if Recommendation 4 is implemented first, these standards will be more aligned with developmentally appropriate

practice). It is important that this guidance takes into consideration that some programmes may start far below standards, and gives practical recommendations about how improvements can be made step by step. It is also important that this guidance provides low-cost and feasible options where some requirements may seem costly or out of reach to programme staff. This activity could be completed in conjunction with Recommendation 4.

Recommendation 8: Establish ECD working groups at the municipal levels. ECD working groups should be established at the municipal level, to foster coordination within the subsector as well as promote cross-sector collaboration towards promoting child and family wellbeing. The working groups should include municipal education authorities, partners, the MoEYS, and representatives from other child- and family-serving systems. The activity could be carried out by the MoEYS or by one of the other subsector stakeholders in the country.

Recommendation 9: Require registration of preschools at the national and/or municipal level. There should be a legal requirement for all preschool programming and activities to be registered with and approved by the MoEYS and/or municipal government. The government needs the authority over preschool programming, including the activities of NGOs working in the subsector. This legal requirement should be implemented by the MoEYS at the time of its choosing, and NGOs should be involved in helping ensure that registration and oversight processes are developed to be feasible and efficient to comply with.

Recommendation 10: Provide guidance on first-language instruction. Because first-language instruction best promotes student learning¹⁰⁴ and educators in this study were unclear about Timor-Leste's language-of-instruction policies for preschool, the MoEYS should provide preschool programmes with guidance regarding the use of first-language instruction, and should work to ensure that preschool programmes all have the basic materials they need to carry out the preschool curriculum. This activity can be carried out when feasible – either as part of the broader subsector plan defined in Recommendation 1 or as a specific activity in the absence of this larger plan. Many NGOs in Timor-Leste have expertise in best practices in first-language instruction and in the creation of low-cost teaching and learning materials. These NGOs could either carry out this activity directly or work with the MoEYS so the MoEYS can do so.

Recommendation 11: Broaden ideas about family and community engagement. Timor-Leste's preschool subsector needs to broaden its understanding of family and community engagement beyond simply asking families and communities to provide resources. Preschool programmes

¹⁰⁴ World Bank Group, 'Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning,' *World Bank*, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/loud-and-clear-effective-language-of-instruction-policies-for-learning>>, accessed 7 March 2022.



need to know how to engage communities as equal partners with shared responsibility for meeting the needs of children and families. For example, the school and community can discuss how to address mutual concerns (such as poor child nutrition or the need for clean drinking water at the school) through joint efforts. And preschool educators also need to know how to engage individual families in a way that recognises each family's strengths, builds mutual trust and good communication, and gets families and educators working together to help each child thrive. The MoEYS is well positioned to lead this work with support from other actors in the subsector who have experience in carrying out similar activities.

Recommendation 12: Provide preschool education to children with disabilities. The country lacks a strategy for meeting the educational needs of preschool children with disabilities, and there is limited information available regarding how many children have disabilities and what their needs are. Timor-Leste should carry out a situational analysis study of education for children with disabilities (which could include a larger age span than just preschool age). The study should consider the needs of the children, as well as how educators and programmes can best be prepared to serve these children. This situational analysis is a necessary first step towards planning for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education sector. The MoEYS should work with other actors in the sector to secure funding and determine the best organisation to carry out this study.

There is a wealth of recent guidance on best practices for carrying out these recommendations. In particular, the MoEYS and partners may find these resources useful:

- The Early Childhood Education Accelerator Analysis and Planning Toolkit¹⁰⁵
- UNICEF Global Resource Guide on Public Finance for Children in Early Childhood Development¹⁰⁶
- USAID (United States Agency for International Development) Guidance for How to Develop Quality Preschool Programmes¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ ECE Accelerator, 'Strengthening Early Childhood Education in Education Sector Planning Processes', <<https://www.ece-accelerator.org/>>, Accessed 7 March 2022.

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF, *UNICEF Global Resource Guide on Public Finance for Children in Early Childhood Development*, <<https://www.unicef.org/documents/global-resource-guide-public-finance-children-early-childhood-development>>, accessed 7 March 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, K., 'Guidance for How to Provide High-Quality Preschool Programs,' *USAID*, <<https://www.edulinks.org/resources/developing-high-quality-preschool-programs>>, accessed 7 March 2022.

- The newly launched Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Hub’s Resources for Early Childhood Education¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁸ FLN Hub, ‘Early Childhood Education,’ <<https://www.flnhub.org/focus-area/early-childhood-education>>, accessed 7 March 2022.

Annex A: Terms of Reference

EVALUATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN TIMOR-LESTE

Concept Note

Background and Rationale

Timor-Leste is a small island nation, and with the restoration of its independence in 2002, it is also one of the world's youngest countries. It has a population of 1.293 million¹⁰⁹, of whom 69 per cent live in rural areas and 44.5 per cent are aged under 18. The 10- to 24-year-old age group accounts for one third of the population,¹¹⁰ with a potential for demographic dividend if the fertility rates continue to decline. Whilst Timor-Leste benefited from high levels of economic growth until 2016, prolonged political uncertainty and high dependence on rapidly reducing oil revenue is hindering the country's economic development. Poverty levels have declined but remain high, particularly for children in rural areas but also for poor children in urban areas. Access to social services has significantly improved, but inequality in access remains a concern, especially for persons living with disabilities, rural communities and children, women and young people from socially marginalised and poor households.

Access to education has improved significantly, with a primary NER of 89 per cent in 2018 (girls 93/boys 86) compared to 64 per cent in 2005.¹¹¹ Challenges remain in the quality of education, lack of safe water and sanitation at schools, which disproportionately affects girls, and high repetition rates. The preschool GER was 21 per cent in 2018, far behind the national target of 50 per cent by 2024.¹¹²

Despite global evidence on the importance of early childhood education,¹¹³ the number of students attending preschool is still low, with only 22 per cent of children in Timor-Leste are enrolled in preschools as of 2017.¹¹⁴ Preschool is integral in ensuring that children arrive in primary school ready to learn and can expect to achieve genuine learning whilst at school. Getting more students into preschool at the appropriate age is essential to promote school readiness and avert high repetition rates and student dropouts. In 2017, 33 per cent of children were participating in some form of organised early childhood education or learning activity in

¹⁰⁹ United Nations population projection figures for 2019.

¹¹⁰ Population and Housing Census 2015.

¹¹¹ Education Management Information System.

¹¹² Education Management Information System.

¹¹³ https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_69851.html

¹¹⁴ MOE EMIS 2017. Data does include children enrolled in the UNICEF-supported community pre-schools.

the one year before the official primary age.¹¹⁵ However, according to the EMIS education data, which does not include community-run schools, access to preschool education is much lower, covering only 21.6 per cent of three- to five-year-old children in 2018. High repetition rate (23.9 per cent) and dropout rate (5.57 per cent) in Grade 1¹¹⁶ suggest poor school readiness. Nearly 40 per cent (39.1 per cent) of all children 5 and 6 years old are not in either preschool or primary schools.¹¹⁷ However, attendance of girls is slightly higher than boys. These figures include wide variations in GER between municipalities with Manufahi at 38 per cent and Baucau at 10 per cent and a total of five districts in the country have GER below 20 per cent.

The National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030¹¹⁸ identifies preschool as a priority for education, with a target of achieving a preschool NER of 50 per cent for 3 to 5-year-olds by 2015 and 100 per cent by 2030.¹¹⁹ The 2015 target was missed with preschool NER at 14.3 per cent.¹²⁰ The 2012 Policy Framework for Preschool Education states that “Timor-Leste’s vision for preschool education is to provide all children between 3-5 years of age access to a quality preschool programme close to their home.” The policy framework outlines five strategic focus areas to support the achievement of the government’s vision for preschool education in Timor-Leste. These are:

- Expand the availability of quality preschool education
- Increase the training and ongoing professional development of preschool educators
- Support curriculum development
- Development of family and community partnerships
- Development of a standards-based monitoring and evaluation system.

The five strategic areas emerged from a set of contextual issues and the recognition that early childhood education involves a multisectoral and multidimensional approaches to ensure children are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and services to guarantee their full potential. Relevance of preschool education as an important stage of development that builds foundation for later development is less understood by both the general public as well as key decision-makers in the country. The involvement and empowerment of local communities and families as active partners in the policy discourse is an important aspect of galvanising support for improving access to preschool education and quality of learning. A lack of ownership by

¹¹⁵ UNESCO UIS 2019

¹¹⁶ EMIS, 2017

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Education

¹¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, ‘National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030’, Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ MOE EMIS 2017.

communities, for example, can lead to poor maintenance and support of government and donor supported facilities. The importance of family and community partnerships in early childhood education is underscored by a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)-supported longitudinal study that assessed how access to preschool education with parenting education support contributes children’s nutritional status, school readiness, early grade learning and progress through basic school.¹²¹ The phase 1 findings found that the community preschools group had performed better on overall school readiness scores compared to the other-early childhood education (ECE) and no-ECE groups. Children in community preschool aldeias had better performance in emergent language and literacy; health, hygiene and safety; and cultural participation.

The development of a National Policy for Early Childhood Development (ECD) is another important step by the government in improving preschool education in Timor-Leste (the draft ECD policy is yet to be approved by the Council of Ministers). The MoEYS is prioritising early childhood education and is investing in the construction, rehabilitation, and accreditation of preschools as a key priority. Currently there is a ratio of 1 teacher for 32 children at preschool.¹²² One option being considered to expedite the planned growth of preschool education is to use alternative delivery modes, such as community-based preschools. In 2019, 3,581 children (1,830 boys and 1,751 girls) were enrolled in UNICEF-supported community-based preschools in Ermera and Viqueque Municipalities. Despite its short history of implementation since 2017, that is limited to only two municipalities for modelling purposes, the community preschool enrolment represents a little over 3 per cent of national enrolment. In the two municipalities, they represent a 14 per cent increase in enrolment for Ermera and 23 per cent increase in Viqueque raising their enrolment well above the national GER of 25 per cent in 2018. A recent cost analysis shows that community-based preschools on average have an operating cost of \$43 per child as compared to \$287 in a standard public preschool; and an average set-up cost of about \$48 per child compared to \$697 for a standard public preschool (insert reference). Based on data collected in 2018 at the start of primary school in schools where children who attended community preschools as part of a study to track their performance in early years of primary school suggest that children coming from community preschools performed relatively better than their counterparts as measured by the East Asia Pacific Early Childhood Development scale (EAP-ECDS). The average score for children from community preschools was 58.4 compared to 53 for those coming from other preschools (public or private) and 51.8 for those who had no preschool background. The model mobilises community resources such as spaces for learning and volunteers as facilitators, and uses

¹²¹ American Institutes for Research. Timor-Leste Longitudinal Study on the Effects of Preschool Education with Parenting Education Support in Viqueque and Ermera

¹²² Ministry of Education, 2018a

low/no-cost, locally available materials for play and learning. Community-based preschools are also an important entry point for accessing vulnerable families and promoting community cohesion.¹²³

Strengthening of the early childhood education system is an important goal of the MoEYS and key stakeholders in the preschool subsector. This will require accelerating access to quality preschool education and promoting school readiness to learn through addressing the supply-side and demand-side bottlenecks and challenges in the subsector.

Purpose, Objectives, Audience and Expected Use

This is a formative evaluation to generate evidence and learning from the implementation and results of the early childhood education initiatives in Timor-Leste. The evidence will be used to inform decision making on programme design and implementation of the preschool subsector and on early childhood development, including cross-sectoral linkages. The evaluation will also inform the government of Timor-Leste early childhood education national policies and budgets and UNICEF's strategic position in early childhood education in the country.

The evaluation objectives are:

1. Develop a theory of change (ToC) to capture the causal pathways towards increasing equitable access to quality early childhood education in Timor-Leste. The ToC will be developed based on the review of the literature on childhood education programming and contributions from key stakeholders, in close consultation with the ERG. The ToC will provide a theoretical framework of activities, outputs and outcomes that will form the basis for evaluating the overall programme of early childhood education activities in Timor-Leste.
2. Assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the early childhood education policy and programmes in Timor-Leste.
3. Identify lessons learned and make recommendations that can be used by the government of Timor-Leste, UNICEF and other key partners to inform decision making on policy and programme design and implementation of the preschool subsector and on early childhood development, including cross-sectoral linkages in the country.

The primary audience for this formative evaluation is the Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports (MoEYS), municipal and local authorities, UNICEF and other development partners involved in the provision of preschool education such as the government of New Zealand (who fund the public preschool programme). The secondary audience is other United Nations agencies and

¹²³ SEL preschool pilot, UNICEF, 2016

development partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community service organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations and private sector.

The proposed country-led evaluation seeks to generate evidence to inform the discussions and plans by the MoEYS and UNICEF to create an enabling environment for accessible, quality and sustainable opportunities for early childhood education in Timor-Leste. It is expected that the evaluation will build on the findings and lessons from the UNICEF-supported longitudinal study on the effects of preschool education with parenting education support.

Scope of Evaluation

The formative evaluation will cover the period from 2012 to 2020 and will assess the approaches to implementing ECE and the extent to which they increase equitable access to preschool opportunities and their contribution to readiness to learn in formal schooling. Building on findings and lessons from previous studies in Timor-Leste and guided by the Global Partnership for Education's Better Early Learning framework, the evaluation will examine the strategies and approaches for strengthening the ECE system to ensure quality, equitable, and sustainable services. The evaluation will examine to what extent the ECE programmes are linked to other multisectoral interventions across the domains of health, nutrition, education and social protection. The evaluation will look at ECE initiatives of the government and its development partners – it will not be restricted to UNICEF ECE interventions.

The geographic scope of the formative evaluation is the national and subnational levels. At the subnational level, a sample from the 13 municipalities in Timor-Leste will be selected for inclusion in the evaluation. The final list of municipalities will be discussed and agreed with Evaluation Reference Group that will comprise members from MoEYS, UNICEF and other key partners.

Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The evaluation will focus on (1) relevance, (2) coherence, (3i) effectiveness, (4) efficiency, and (5) sustainability of the ECE approaches and programmes with gender, equity, and human rights considerations.

Below are the preliminary evaluation questions which will be finalised during the inception phase. They can be commented on and adjusted by the bidders in their technical proposals.

Relevance – extent to which the ECE approaches and programmes are suited to the needs, priorities and policies of relevant national stakeholders, municipal authorities, beneficiaries, and donors.

- a. To what extent are the current strategies/approaches, implementation modalities of ECE programmes still valid and respond to the national priorities given the country context, the existing ECE challenges, and the national target of achieving a preschool NER of 100 per cent for 3- to 5-year-olds by 2030?
- b. To what extent are the programme strategies/approaches appropriate for achieving the desired results?

Coherence – compatibility of the ECE programmes with other cross-sectoral interventions in the country. How well do the programmes fit for purpose?

- a. To what extent are the ECE programmes or implementation modalities consistent with the national objectives for preschool as outlined in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030,¹²⁴ Policy Framework for Preschool Education (2012), and other national strategic plans? This includes complementarity, harmonisation and co-ordination with others, and the extent to which the ECE programmes are adding value whilst avoiding duplication of effort.

Effectiveness – extent to which the ECE programmes attained their objectives.

- a. To what extent were the desired results of the ECE programmes achieved / are likely to be achieved?
- b. To what extent have the ECE programmes or implementation modalities motivated families and communities and decision-makers to fully understand the importance of early childhood education and development?
- c. What were the major factors (enabling and/or bottlenecks in the demand and supply side) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of desired results (including strategies, partnerships, inter-agency collaboration)?

Efficiency – measures the ECE programmes outputs in relation to the inputs and whether they used the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results

- a. Is the level of achievement of outputs and outcomes related to access to preschool and readiness to learn when compared to the level of financial and human resources mobilised/used?
- b. Were the objectives achieved on time, or have there been any significant delays in programme implementation and achievement of results, and if so, why?

¹²⁴ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 'National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2030', Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, 2011.

Sustainability – whether the benefits of the ECE programmes are likely to continue after donors’ support ends

- a. To what extent are the activities and results of the programmes likely to be sustained over time? To what extent are the current ECE strategies, approaches and implementation modalities sustainable overtime?
- b. What were the major factors which influenced/could influence the sustainability of the ECE activities and results?
- c. To what extent can the approaches to ECE programme planning and implementation with government partners be better aligned to the priorities of government (national and local) to support the replication and scale up of tested programme models?
- d. To what extent are the ECE programme pilot initiatives (i.e. design, advocacy and evidence generating) likely to be scaled-up?

Additional criteria for consideration:

Gender, equity and human rights – extent to which girls and women as well as marginalised populations benefit from the ECE programmes and initiatives.

- a. To what extent have the programmes been implemented in communities which had the greatest need for it, with the intention of reducing inequities? Have equity considerations been integrated at each stage of the programme cycle?
- b. To what extent have the programme effectively mainstreamed gender equality and empowerment of women and girls? Have considerations been made towards empowering their families and communities towards engagement with ECE programming?
- c. To what extent have the programmes been inclusive of and responsive to the needs of people living with a disability?
- d. To what extent were duty-bearers and right-holders correctly identified and actively involved throughout the programme implementation?

An evaluation matrix that contains the tailored evaluation questions and sub-questions with key indicators, data collection methods, means of verification and source of information will be developed by the selected evaluation team as part of the inception phase. The preliminary evaluation questions can be prioritised and modified by the evaluation team during the inception phase based on the evaluability of the evaluation object and each evaluation question. The proposed priorities and modifications of evaluation questions needs to be agreed with MoEYS and UNICEF.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

The evaluation will be a non-experimental and utilisation-focused evaluation adopting theory-based and mixed-methods approaches. Evidence will be collected primarily through extensive desk review of documents and data already available, complemented by information gathered directly from key stakeholders at national and local levels through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and other appropriate means. Considering the health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that all primary data collection will be conducted remotely. To strengthen the data collection process, it is expected the evaluation team will use a local partner (for example, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e).

Findings, conclusions, and recommendations should be based on triangulated evidence. Three types of triangulation methods could be adopted: 1) cross-reference of different data sources (from interviews, FGDs, and review of documents); 2) investigator triangulation through the deployment of multiple evaluators; and 3) review by participants through the respondents' validation meetings and consultation with government and UNICEF key respondents during the report drafting process. The triangulation efforts will be tested for consistency of results, noting that inconsistencies do not necessarily weaken the credibility of results, but may reflect the sensitivity of different types of data collection methods. This is to ensure validity, establish common threads and trends, and identify divergent views.

The evaluation design and methodology including the necessary data collection, sampling strategy and selection criteria, and limitations and mitigation measures shall be further developed and improved by the bidders in their respective proposals. Alternative approaches can also be proposed. This will be further specified and finalised by the selected evaluation team in collaboration with UNICEF and the Evaluation Reference Group during the inception phase.

The evaluation will follow the [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations](#) as well as [UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis](#) and [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#). It also have to consider [UNEG Guidance on integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation](#) and [UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicators](#). The final evaluation report will need to be compliant with [UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Reports standards](#) and UNICEF- Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) review criteria.

Special measures will be put in place to ensure that the evaluation process is ethical and that the participants in the evaluation process can openly express their opinion. The sources of information will be protected and known only to the evaluator(s). The Evaluation Team will ensure that the evaluation process is in line with UNEG Ethical Guidelines, i.e. ensuring ethical

conduct in data generation will be imperative. Specific attention should be paid to issues specifically relating to:

- Harm and benefits;
- Informed consent;
- Privacy and confidentiality; and
- Conflict of interest of the evaluation informants.

Consequently, the Evaluation Team has to ensure that it is clear to all subjects that their participation in the evaluation is voluntary. All participants should be informed or advised of the context and purpose of the evaluation, as well as the privacy and confidentiality of the discussions.

Workplan and Deliverables

The formative evaluation will involve **three phases**: Inception; Data Collection, Analysis and Report Validation; and Presentation of Final Evaluation Report.

Phase 1 – Inception Phase: A draft and final inception report (up to 45 pages)

- Scope and methods
- Finalised list of evaluation questions
- Development of evaluation instruments/tools
- Work plan/timeline/schedule to conduct interviews/discussions
- Chapter plan/report template for the final evaluation report.

Phase 2 – Data collection and analysis and validation of draft evaluation report

- Desk review of relevant documents
- Ethical approval sought from an Institutional Ethical Review Board
- Training of enumerators
- Interviews with national and subnational key stakeholders and data analysis
- Develop zero draft evaluation report with preliminary findings (including initial recommendations) (up to 45 pages including the executive summary and excluding annexes) and evaluation brief
- Validation workshop for Evaluation Reference Group to discuss and validate the draft evaluation report and evaluation brief

Phase 3 – Presentation of final evaluation report and evaluation brief

- A PowerPoint presentation (up to 20 slides): A summary of key findings and conclusions prepared towards the end of the evaluation and submitted before the final meeting with the Evaluation Reference Group
- A final evaluation report (up to 45 pages including the executive summary and excluding annexes) and an evaluation brief based on comments and feedback received on the draft report during the validation meeting.

Phase	Activity	Timeframe	Schedule of payment
Inception phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inception meeting with Evaluation Reference Group• Initial desk review• Draft inception report• Final inception report	15 days	20%
Data collection and analysis and validation of draft evaluation report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desk review of relevant documents• Ethical approval sought from an Institutional Ethical Review Board• Training of enumerators• Interviews with respondents• Data collection phase debrief	53 days	50%
Presentation of final evaluation report and evaluation brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of key findings and recommendations to ERG• Submission of the final evaluation report and evaluation brief (up to 45 pages)	12 days	30%

* For review by the Evaluation Reference Group (allow 2 weeks for the ERG to review) and provide feedback

All the deliverables must be compliant with [UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards](#), [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations](#) and [GEROS Evaluation Quality Assurance Tool](#)

The assignment is envisaged for 7 months, starting 01 June 2021 and completed by 31 December 2021.

Dissemination Plan

The evaluation will be disseminated to the relevant stakeholders in the preschool subsector in Timor-Leste particularly the identified primary and secondary audience of the evaluation

including national and local government partners, CSO partners, other development agencies, INGOs, and the wider development community.

An evaluation brief summarising the key findings, conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendation will be developed and disseminated to the key partners through various means such as email roster of relevant partners, UNICEF website posting, distribution at UNICEF and partner key events.

Within UNICEF Timor-Leste, the evaluation will be presented to the whole of the staff, preferably through a special session, or through the regular office meetings such as PMT/CMT. The evaluation will be shared as well with EAPRO for dissemination to other countries in the region, and with HQ, for a larger scale dissemination.

Once approved, the evaluation report will be electronically submitted to the UNICEF Global Evidence Information System Integration (EISI) within 15 days from the date of completion. Where the recommendations are targeted towards UNICEF, the Country Office (CO) management is expected to develop and implement a two-year action plan in response to the evaluation recommendations. The CO will also upload the action plan unto EISI for quarterly progress monitoring and reporting.

Management and Quality Assurance

The Evaluation Manager will be the UNICEF Multi-Country Evaluation Specialist in close coordination with the UNICEF TLCO-Education Section Chief, UNICEF EAP Regional Office (EAPRO) Evaluation Advisor, and UNICEF EAPRO Education Advisor, under the overall guidance and responsibility of the UNICEF Timor-Leste Representative.

The evaluation manager will be responsible for the day-to-day oversight and management of the evaluation ensuring the quality and independence of the Evaluation and its alignment with UNEG Norms and Standards and Ethical Guidelines.

An evaluation reference group will be created to provide guidance/technical inputs to the evaluation and quality assure all evaluation deliverables (from a technical point of view) which includes the inception report, draft report, and final report. The reference group include selected government officials from the Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports (MoEYS), UNICEF TLCO Senior Management, Education Chief and/or Education Specialist, Multi-Country Evaluation Specialist, PME & Social Policy Chief, UNICEF EAPRO Evaluation Adviser, and UNICEF EAPRO Education Adviser/Specialist, with UNICEF-PME as the secretariat. terms of reference of the Evaluation Reference Group will be developed.

The Evaluation team should adhere to all the above-mentioned UNEG and UNICEF evaluation guidance documents throughout the evaluation process. The team is also responsible for ensuring that all the deliverables are compliant with UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards, UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations and GEROs Evaluation Quality Assurance Tool before the submission to UNICEF.

Qualifications and Experience

The core evaluation team may comprise 3-4 full-time experts, but UNICEF is flexible in the team's composition provided the evaluation work is of high quality. A gender balanced and culturally diverse team composition, including national team member, is strongly encouraged. Examples of profiles could be as follows:

- Team Leader, evaluator by profession – with minimum 10 years of expertise and experience in development programme evaluation (including country programme and/or outcome level evaluations) preferably with a multidisciplinary background, strong strategic and analytical skills, familiar with the socio-economic context of South East Asian countries, and with good knowledge of UNEG evaluation norms and standards and experience in leading a team for United Nations evaluations. As team leader, he/she is responsible for preparing the overall work plan and overseeing its implementation, ensuring coherence of the analytical approach, and ensuring that all evaluation outputs are produced in an acceptable and timely manner. He/she will also be responsible for ensuring cross-cutting issues e.g. gender equality, equity and human rights, including child rights are well considered; ensuring ethical conduct of evaluation; ensuring adequate trainings for national team members/enumerators; also ensuring integration of the inputs of the other team members into a coherent evaluation report.
- Education/Evaluation Specialist – with extensive expertise and minimum 7 years of experience in conducting education strategic and sector development programme evaluations with a focus on early childhood education, inclusive education and children with special educational needs, knowledgeable of institutional issues related to development programming (with excellent knowledge of UNICEF and UNICEF education programmes, including the role of the United Nations system, partnerships, results-based management, planning and monitoring, policy, advocacy, upstream programming and sustainable development issues). Familiarity with the education context in Timor-Leste, as well as specific equity, gender, climate and humanitarian child protection and human rights issues. He/she will be responsible in the development of evaluation methodology and instruments, overseeing data collection and analysis, analysing the findings and formation of recommendations, and drafting the evaluation report.

- Research associate/coordinator – will be tasked to support coordination, data collection, organising and documentation of evaluation meetings including the validation event, and all administrative and logistical support required to implement the evaluation. Should be a Timor-Leste national.

Conditions for work

The contractor should provide for their own computer and communication devices, internet connections, and workspace. They should also have to arrange for their own logistics, transport, communication, insurance and security.

Considerations regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

If a party determines on reasonable grounds that its performance in accordance with the contract will be affected by COVID-19, it will notify the other party as soon as reasonably practicable and the parties agree they will negotiate in good faith to vary the timeframes and cost variances as required for the parties to perform all obligations under and in accordance with the contract.

Criteria for selecting the institutions conducting the evaluation project

The evaluation will be conducted through an existing contract with the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Further details on the rationale for using this contracting mechanism are outlined in a Note for the Record document.

Annex B: Evaluation Matrix

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
Question 1: To what extent does the government of Timor-Leste have comprehensive and evidence-based policies and plans for the delivery of high-quality preschool education?		
Criterion 1.1. Timor-Leste has a comprehensive plan for the delivery of high-quality preschool education.		
1.1.1 Timor-Leste has a preschool education plan in place that addresses the design and operation of a national preschool education system	Document	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
1.1.2. Timor-Leste’s preschool education plan is integrated into its overarching education sector plan.	Document	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
Criterion 1.2. Timor-Leste’s preschool education plans and policies are based on evidence.		
1.2.1. Timor-Leste’s preschool education plans are based on comprehensive and up-to-date data regarding the current preschool education situation in the country (including coverage, quality, etc).	Document	ESP 2020–2024
	MoEYS Municipal	Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
1.2.2. Timor-Leste’s preschool education plans are based on the global evidence for what constitutes a high quality and effective preschool education system.	MoEYS Municipal	What is the basis for the preschool education subsector plan in your municipality?
	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
	Global Partners	Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
		Did your organisation use any global or regional experts or guidance in developing your plans for supporting/providing preschool education?
		• If yes, in what areas? (<i>Probe for elements in theory of change.</i>)
Question 2: To what extent do actors in Timor-Leste’s preschool education sector collaborate and coordinate with one another and with actors in other sectors to meet children’s holistic needs?		
Criterion 2.1. Actors in Timor-Leste’s preschool education subsector collaborate in ways that maximise preschool education coverage.		
2.1.1. Timor-Leste’s national preschool education strategy makes effective use of the different types of preschool education programming provided in the country to maximise resources and coverage.	Document	ESP 2020–2024
	MoEYS Municipal	Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
2.1.2. There is ongoing and effective collaboration amongst preschool education providers (such as the government, UNICEF and NGOs) to maximise coverage and quality.	MoEYS Municipal	In what ways does the municipal government collaborate with other preschool education providers (including NGOs, the church, and other providers) to strategize how to provide preschool education?
	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National, ECD Working Group	To what extent do stakeholder organisations collaborate on a national level to improve access to preschool education?
	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National, ECD Working Group	To what extent do stakeholder organisations collaborate on a national level to improve the quality of preschool education programming?
		• Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
		• Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
Criterion 2.2. Actors in Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector collaborate with actors in other sectors to meet children's holistic needs		
2.2.1. At the national and subnational levels, Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector collaborates with other child- and family-serving sectors to address children's needs in nutrition, health, social protection, and child protection.	MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	To what extent does your preschool education team collaborate with teams from other child- and family-serving sectors (inside or outside your organisation) to help meet children's holistic needs? (<i>Probe as needed for elements of nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, child protection.</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why? Are there any ways that cross-sector collaboration could be improved?
	ECD Working Group	To what extent is there sufficient cross-sector collaboration to meet Timorese children's holistic needs? (<i>Probe as needed for elements of nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, child protection.</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any ways that cross-sector collaboration could be improved?
Question 3: To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate governance and accountability structures and strategies for the provision of quality preschool education?		
Criterion 3.1. Responsibilities and accountability for implementation are clearly defined and coordinated through mutually consistent communication.		
3.1.1 Across all levels (national, municipal, local) the preschool education subsector plan includes clear lines of authority and identified roles and responsibilities towards implementation of the preschool education plan.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024 Timor-Leste's policy framework for preschool education (2014)
	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal	To what extent does the MoEYS have a clear plan or structure to align subsector activities at the municipal level (planning, budgeting, workforce, quality, etc)? And does the MoEYS at the national level provide guidance for this collaboration at the municipal level (or do municipalities do things their own way)? What about at the local (suco) level?
3.1.2. Across all levels (national, municipal, local) there are clear lines of accountability for preschool education financing and implementation.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024 Timor-Leste's policy framework for preschool education (2014)
	MoEYS Municipal, National	At the municipal/national level, who is responsible for ensuring that preschool education is provided as planned?
	MoEYS Municipal, National	At the municipal/national level, who is responsible for ensuring that the preschool education plans are funded?
3.1.3. Stakeholders at national and subnational levels have a sense of ownership of the preschool education plan and an understanding of their role in the plan.	MoEYS National	What is your department's role in the national preschool education plan? Do you think your department understands this role? Why?
	MoEYS National	Do you think your department has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?
		What is your organisation's role in the implementation of the national preschool education plan?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
	Global Partners, NGOs National, NGOs Municipal, University Partner	Do you think your organisation has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?
	MoEYS Municipal	Do you think the MoEYS at the municipal level has responsibility for helping to implement the nation’s preschool education plan? What makes you think that?
Question 4: To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate budget and financing mechanisms for the provision of cost-effective preschool education?		
Criterion 4.1. Timor-Leste’s preschool education plan is well costed.		
4.1.1. Preschool education plans are comprehensively costed (that is, account for all of the programmes and categories in the subsector, and all of the types of costs for core functions).	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Others as identified by key informants
4.1.2. Preschool education plans are based on data-driven projections that include enrolments, quality inputs, and human and physical resources.	Documents	ESP 2020–24
		2020 EMIS report
	MoEYS National	Others as identified by key informants
4.1.3. Preschool education cost planning considers resources that may be provided by other actors in the subsector (such as UNICEF, World Bank, and NGOs).	Documents	In what ways (if any) does the government use data-driven projections to inform its preschool subsector planning?
		ESP 2020–2024
4.1.4. The preschool education budget links planned targets and activities to actual costs at the national, municipal, and local levels.	Documents	Others as identified by key informants
		MoEYS National
	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Others as identified by key informants
	MoEYS National	When the government plans targets and activities in the preschool sub-sector, to what extent are these plans based on realistic cost estimates?
Criterion 4.2. Resource needs, gaps and funding strategies have been identified and are monitored		
4.2.1. The preschool education plan identifies budget gaps.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
		Others as identified by key informants
4.2.2. The preschool education plan includes strategies for resource mobilisation and prioritisation of preschool education within the education sector budget.	Documents	ESP 2020–24
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
		Others as identified by key informants
4.2.3. The preschool education plan addresses the role of diverse stakeholders (e.g. UNICEF, World Bank, NGOs) in the	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
provision of necessary resources for preschool education programming.		Others as identified by key informants
Question 5: To what extent has Timor-Leste been able to implement its preschool education strategy in a timely manner? Where are the bottlenecks?		
Criterion 5.1. Timor-Leste has established a timeline with a phased approach for the rollout of preschool education programming.		
5.1.1. Timor-Leste has realistic short- and long-term targets and timelines for service provision and/or expansion of services, taking into account the current state of service availability, access gaps, and the system’s capacity to deliver or manage provision.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Others as identified by key informants
5.1.2. Timor-Leste has clear policy directives specifying the timelines and roles/responsibilities for preschool services provision.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
		Others as identified by key informants
5.1.3. Timor-Leste’s preschool education subsector timeline is aligned with the broader education sector timeline.	Documents	ESP 2020–2024
		Timor-Leste’s policy framework for preschool education (2014)
		Others as identified by key informants
Criterion 5.2. Stakeholders in the preschool education sector take a proactive approach to preventing and mitigating delays in the timely implementation of the preschool education strategy.		
5.2.1. Timor-Leste’s preschool education sector planning identifies and addresses capacity gaps and obstacles that could affect implementation.	Documents	Situation analysis (2014)
		ESP 2020–2024
		Others as identified by key informants
5.2.2. Preschool education subsector government stakeholders and partners routinely review the status of preschool education plan implementation, and devise strategies to address delays or gaps as they arise.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If yes, do these reviews involve the creation of strategies to address delays or gaps?• How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
Question 6: To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring and quality assurance systems in place for data-driven decision making and continuous quality improvement?		
Criterion 6.1. Timor-Leste has quality standards for preschool education.		
6.1.1. Timor-Leste has established comprehensive and evidence-based aspirational standards that define what high-quality preschool education would look like in Timor-Leste.	Documents	HANDS Programme Results Documents
		Others as identified by key informants
6.1.2. Timor-Leste has defined a system of levels or steps that indicate how preschool education programmes can advance to achieve the desired level of quality.	Documents	Need to ask key informants if such documents exist.
Criterion 6.2. Timor-Leste has effective preschool education quality monitoring systems in place.		

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
6.2.1. Timor-Leste has an effective system in place to monitor the preschool education subsector as a whole (not just the quality of individual programmes).	Documents	Need to ask key informants if such documents exist.
	MoEYS National	Is a system in place for monitoring preschool service quality through regulations, accreditation, inspection, and other external review processes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the system monitor the preschool education subsector as a whole, not just the quality of individual programmes?
6.2.2. Timor-Leste has established comprehensive, evidence-based indicators to measure the quality of preschool education programming.	Documents	HANDS Programme Results Documents
6.2.3. Timor-Leste has a set of monitoring tools for assessing and improving programme preschool education quality and effectiveness (in the form of early learning).	Documents	HANDS Programme Results Documents
6.2.4. Timor-Leste has sufficient personnel who are knowledgeable about preschool education and are tasked with oversight, quality monitoring, and/or quality improvement at both the system and programme levels.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	Who is involved in the monitoring system for preschool education? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a single, recognised institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?
	MoEYS National	Is there sufficient knowledge about preschool education amongst personnel responsible for oversight and quality monitoring of preschool education?
	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	Who is responsible for regulating and monitoring preschool services and providers from national to subnational and local levels?
Criterion 6.3. Preschool education quality monitoring data are routinely used for data-driven decision making and continuous quality improvement.		
6.3.1. Timor-Leste has effective systems in place for monitoring data to be efficiently shared and collated from the local level to the municipal level to the national level.	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal	Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and data sharing from the national down to the local level, and back up? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well are these mechanisms working? Are there aspects that are not currently well coordinated?
6.3.2. Preschool education system stakeholders at national and municipal levels routinely engage in reviewing preschool education data to inform decision making (including decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system).	Documents	2020 EMIS Report
	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal, Global Partners, NGOs National, NGOs Municipal	To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders at the national level routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? <i>Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)</i> Who is involved in this process? How often does this process take place?
	NGOs Municipal, MoEYS Municipal	To what extent is your organisation involved in preschool monitoring and quality assurance?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you feel that your organisation's feedback and contributions are taken into account?
Question 7: To what extent does Timor-Leste have a sufficient and well-trained preschool education workforce?		
Criterion 7.1: Timor-Leste has a robust and coherent strategy for recruiting appropriate staff for the preschool education subsector.		
7.1.1. There are sufficient numbers of preschool education staff in the subsector to meet the demand for preschool education provision – including for children with disabilities.	Extant data	This question will be partially answered through EMIS data. Ask implementing partners if they have data available.
	MoEYS National, Global Partners	Does Timor-Leste have enough preschool education staff to meet the demand for preschool education now?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If not, where are the gaps are there and what are the reasons?
		Are all children whose parents hope to enrol them able to attend or is there a waitlist? Does the number of available staff cause any bottlenecks?
		Does retaining teachers pose any challenges?
		Are there any problems with staff availability in more rural or hard-to-reach areas?
		To what extent does Timor-Leste have adequate numbers of preschool education staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities?
7.1.2. Timor-Leste has a strategy to recruit new talent into the preschool education field.	Documents	Looking ahead, what are the major challenges the country faces in having a sufficient preschool education workforce, given the country's plans for expanding access?
	MoEYS National	Need to ask key informants if such documents exist.
		How are preschool education staff recruited to work in preschool education? What are the primary motivations for teachers?
7.1.3. Timor-Leste has a system for retaining, rewarding and incentivising good preschool education teachers.	MoEYS National	Does the government have any strategies to attract new teachers? (<i>Probe: is there any outreach to scholarships, students who are completing secondary/post-secondary education, new graduates of vocational programmes, career changers, etc</i>)
		Need to ask key informants if such documents exist.
		If anything in document review, ask if those systems are used, how effective they are, and if there are any other systems in practice.
		How does the pay rate for preschool education teachers compare to other professions? How happy are preschool education teachers with their level of pay?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any strategies to incentivise or recognise good preschool education teachers? If so, please describe.

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
Criterion 7.2. Timor-Leste has defined a core set of professional competencies and standards for preschool educators.		
7.2.1. Timor-Leste has a competency framework specifically for the preschool education workforce that covers knowledge, skills and attitudes.	Documents	Baseline Survey of Preschools in Timor-Leste 2016
		HANDS Programme Results document
	MoEYS National, University Partner	Need to ask key informants if other documents exist
	MoEYS National, University Partner	Is there a set list of core competencies for preschool education teachers? <i>(Note that we are not looking for qualifications such as a secondary school certificate, but are interested in qualities.)</i> If so, what competencies are included? Specific knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or dispositions? And how are these systems used?
7.2.2. Timor-Leste has a competency framework for preschool education teachers that is aligned with the framework for basic schoolteachers.	MoEYS National, University Partner	<i>(If yes to previous question)</i> Do the core competencies for preschool education teachers align with the core competencies for primary schoolteachers? How are they similar or different?
Criterion 7.3. Timor-Leste has initial requirements defining the level of education and training required to teach preschool education now, whilst also specifying how these requirements will become more stringent over time.		
7.3.1. There are defined minimum requirements to teach preschool education in Timor-Leste.	Documents	Base Law of Education 14/2008.
7.3.2. Requirements to teach preschool education in Timor-Leste are feasible, and current teachers meet those requirements.	Extant data	This question will be partially answered through extant data such as the numbers and percentages of teachers with necessary qualifications.
	MoEYS National, University Partner	How feasible is it to achieve those qualifications (list qualifications)? What percentage of teachers would you say possess those qualifications?
Criterion 7.4: Timor-Leste has effective and flexible pre-service preschool education teacher training programmes.		
7.4.1. Timor-Leste has sufficient pre-service training available for preschool education teacher training.	MoEYS National, University Partner	What types of pre-service training are available? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Are there different options and pathways (i.e. at universities, in communities, etc)?What topics are covered? Does it include an emphasis on play-based, child-centred learning? Does it help build practical skills or is it information-focused?Are there options for teachers in remote or hard-to-reach areas?
7.4.2. Timor-Leste has sufficient numbers of well qualified pre-service preschool education teacher trainers available.	Extant data	EMIS data
	MoEYS National, University Partner	Do you feel that there are sufficient numbers of qualified preschool education teacher trainers?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
7.4.3. There is a system in place to assess whether trainee teachers are prepared to work in preschool education classrooms.	MoEYS National, University Partner	Is there a system in place to assess whether those completing preschool teacher training are ready to teach in classrooms, e.g. observation and assessment during student teaching?
7.4.4. There is a system of oversight and/or accreditation for preschool education teacher training institutions.	MoEYS National, University Partner	Is a system in place for quality assurance of preschool education teacher training institutions (i.e. an accreditation system or oversight structure)?
7.4.5. Preschool education staff who do not currently meet requirements have opportunities to develop their competencies.	MoEYS National, University Partner	Are there different options and pathways (i.e. at universities, in communities, etc) for pre-service training?
Criterion 7.5: Timor-Leste promotes continuous workforce improvement and staff retention for its preschool education workforce.		
7.5.1. There are requirements for preschool educators to receive in-service professional development.	Documents	National Capacity Development Plan 2018
7.5.2. There are opportunities for preschool educators to participate in in-service professional development.	MoEYS National, University Partner	Are preschool educators required to participate in in-service professional development? If so, what are the requirements?
	MoEYS National, NGOs National, University Partner	What in-service professional development opportunities are available, if any? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For whom are those opportunities available? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any differences based on location or type of preschool education facility?
7.5.3. Timor-Leste engages in data-driven decision making about preschool education teacher training and support.	MoEYS National, NGOs National, NGOs Municipal, University Partner	How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support?
7.5.4. There are mechanisms in place to monitor working conditions for preschool educators.	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	Are there any systems in place to monitor the working conditions of preschool educators (i.e. teacher-student ratio, time or lesson planning or professional development, availability of materials, pay, etc)? If so, please describe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does leadership address the concerns of educators regarding working conditions? Are there systems in place?
Question 8: To what extent are families and communities engaged as active partners in the preschool education sector and in promoting young children's learning?		
Criterion 8.1 Family and community engagement is a priority for the preschool education subsector.		
8.1.1. Timor-Leste has policy directives about family and community engagement in preschool education.	Documents	New preschool education curriculum (2014)
		National Education Sector Plan 2011–2030
8.1.2. Preschool education stakeholders understand and believe in the importance of family and community engagement in preschool education.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	Is the importance of family and community engagement well understood and accepted by preschool subsector leadership and stakeholders, including preschool directorates, directors, managers and teachers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">In your opinion, what would be the best way to address those roadblocks?
	MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	In your view, how important is family and community engagement in preschool? Please explain.
		To what extent do preschool directors, managers, and teachers in this municipality understand the importance of family and community engagement? <ul style="list-style-type: none">What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?
Criterion 8.2. Preschool education subsector stakeholders use effective strategies to engage families and communities in preschool education.		
8.2.1. Preschool education programmes take deliberate actions to welcome family involvement (beyond simply asking families to pay for things or provide things).	MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	Do preschool staff in this municipality receive guidance/support on how to engage families and communities effectively in preschool education programming? <ul style="list-style-type: none">If so, please describe.
		Are partnerships created between families and preschool education programmes? Note that this does not include simply asking families to contribute or pay for things.
		Can families be involved in preschool education programmes in various ways, e.g. as volunteers in the classroom, or through digital/social media and in-person activities/events? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do these opportunities appear to fit with the reality of families’ lives, considering work hours, etc?
8.2.2. Community resources are leveraged to help preschool education programmes meet the needs of children and families (such as health services, leadership to encourage enrolment, etc).	MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	To what extent are communities engaged meaningfully in preschool education services? To what extent are other civil society organisations or municipal government departments involved in preschool education?
Question 9: To what extent do children in Timor-Leste have access to and participate in quality preschool education programming?		
Criterion 9.1. Children across Timor-Leste have access to quality preschool education programming.		
9.1.1. Quality preschool education programming is available to children across Timor-Leste	Extant Data	EMIS data for enrolment
		Ask key informants if quality data exists
9.1.2. Preschool education policy/legislation mandates free preschool education.	Documents	National Education Sector Plan 2011–2030
	Documents	Baseline Survey of Public Preschools in Timor-Leste (2016)
		Is an official national or subnational preschool curriculum framework(s) in

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
9.1.3. Preschool education providers in Timor-Leste use a preschool education curriculum (or curricula) based on best practices in preschool education.	NGOs Municipal, University Partner	place? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If yes, to what extent do educators use the curriculum? Do teachers have learning and play materials for the classroom, (probe: books, toys, games, art materials and manipulatives)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do these seem to be consistent with the curriculum/other guidance teachers use? (<i>Probe: developmentally appropriate, relevant to the local context, supportive of play-based learning</i>) Are the materials sufficient? Why or why not?
Criterion 9.2. There is public demand for quality preschool education programming.		
9.2.1. Timor-Leste has system-level initiatives to encourage families to use available preschool education services.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National, MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not? How do you think Timor-Leste could build up parental demand for quality preschool education?
9.2.2. The population of Timor-Leste values preschool education as a public good (in line with the way basic education is viewed).	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	In Timor-Leste, to what extent is preschool education seen as beneficial to society? <i>Probe for different viewpoints amongst different stakeholder groups.</i>
	MoEYS National	What do you think would be the best way for Timor-Leste to get its general population to view preschool education as necessary and important?
Question 10: How and to what extent does Timor-Leste support children's successful transitions into Grade 1?		
Criterion 10.1: Timor-Leste's preschool education programming is aligned with Grade 1 expectations for incoming students.		
10.1.1. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning is informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (Grade 1).	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	To what extent is Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (Grade 1)?
10.1.2. Preschool education subsector stakeholders use on-time Grade 1 enrolment and early grade dropout and repetition rates to inform needed improvements in the coverage and/or quality of preschool education programming.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National	To what extent do you use data on Grade 1 enrolment and early grade dropout, as well as repetition rates, to improve preschool coverage or programming?
Question 11: To what extent does the preschool education system promote equity – including reaching the most marginalised – empowerment of women and girls, respect for linguistic diversity, and inclusion of people with disabilities?		
Criterion 11.1. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector strategy explicitly focuses on building equity.		
11.1.1. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector strategy addresses the professionalisation of the preschool education workforce.	MoEYS National, University Partner	Are there any efforts to promote the professionalisation and respect of preschool educators?
	Documents	Inclusive education policy (2017)

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
11.1.2. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector strategy explicitly addresses how the country will engage with and support children and families from diverse linguistic backgrounds.		Policy Framework for Preschool Education (2014)
11.1.3. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector strategy addresses how the country will encourage the enrolment of children with disabilities into preschool education programming, and meet their needs once enrolled.	Documents	Inclusive education policy (2017)
		Policy Framework for Preschool Education (2014)
11.1.3. Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector strategy addresses how the country will encourage the enrolment of children with disabilities into preschool education programming, and meet their needs once enrolled.	Documents	Inclusive education policy (2017)
		Policy Framework for Preschool Education (2014)
11.1.4. Preschool education stakeholders focus on gender, linguistic diversity, and disability when engaging in monitoring and oversight of the subsector and its programming.	MoEYS National, NGOs National, MoEYS Municipal, NGOs Municipal	To what extent are elements such as gender, linguistic diversity, and disability taken into account in preschool monitoring and oversight?
Question 12: To what extent is Timor-Leste prepared to provide long-term and scaled up quality preschool education programming nationally?		
Criterion 12.1. Timor-Leste has the knowledge and leadership required for the provision of preschool education on a long-term and national scale		
12.1.1. Timor-Leste has effective channels of communication between preschool education leadership at national and subnational levels, with shared responsibility amongst this leadership for preschool education success.	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal	How would you describe the quality of communication between preschool subsector leadership at the national and municipal levels? (If any issues identified), how could it be improved?
12.1.2. Timor-Leste has sufficient staff with preschool education expertise within the lead ministry to support the overall vision for preschool education, plus its policy development and implementation.	MoEYS National, Global Partners	Does the MoEYS currently have sufficient staff with preschool education expertise available to develop and implement its preschool education plans and policies? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where are there gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?
12.1.3. Timor-Leste's government has established relationships with other stakeholders (such as with universities or NGOs) to provide additional preschool education expertise as needed.	MoEYS National	We will be interviewing people from [say organisations]. Are there any other organisations that help support the MoEYS with additional preschool education expertise? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If yes, which organisations, and what type of support do they provide? Overall, do you think the MoEYS has sufficient access to preschool education expertise from outside of the government? If yes, what types of support?

Indicator	Source(s)	Document or Question
Criterion 12.2. Timor-Leste has effective plans and mechanisms in place for the development of preschool education on a long-term and national scale		
12.2.1. Timor-Leste has realistic short- and long-term targets and timelines for the provision of preschool education.	MoEYS National, Global Partners, NGOs National, ECD Working Group	Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic? Probe for anything unrealistic: What target do you think would be more realistic?
12.2.2. Timor-Leste has stable financing for its current preschool education programming.	MoEYS National, MoEYS Municipal	Does Timor-Leste have stable financing for its current preschool education programming? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which aspects of financing are stable and which are unstable? Where financing is unstable, what do you think could help to make it more stable?
12.2.3. Timor-Leste has evidence-based projections for the costs associated with scaling up preschool education programming nationally and providing preschool education at scale in the long term.	Documents	Ask key informants if documents are available.
	MoEYS National	When planning for preschool education in Timor-Leste to be scaled up and provided long term, how did the government make its cost projections?
12.2.4. Timor-Leste has monitoring systems in place to track the levels of preschool education funding, and assess their effect on access, quality, effectiveness, and equity.	MoEYS National	To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring systems in place to track the levels of preschool education funding, and assess their effect on access, quality, effectiveness, and equity?
12.2.5. Timor-Leste has mechanisms in place to ensure financial discipline in the use of available resources, avoid unnecessary or excessive expenditures, and detect leaks and wastage.	Documents	Ask key informants if documents are available.
	MoEYS National	To what extent does Timor-Leste have mechanisms in place to ensure reasonable use of financial resources, avoid unnecessary or excessive expenditures, and detect leaks and wastage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If mechanisms exist, how effective are they?
12.2.6. Timor-Leste has a development plan that addresses the broad range of professionals working in the preschool education subsector.	Documents	Ask key informants if documents are available.
Also address this question through information provided in response to other evaluation questions/indicators related to national policies, public demand, financing, etc.		
Question 13: Where are these opportunities to strengthen the preschool education system, and what would it take to leverage those opportunities?		
No specific criteria or indicators. The answer to this question will be based on information gathered to answer the other 12 evaluation questions.		

Annex C: Documents Reviewed

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Annex D: Interview and Focus Group Protocols

Introduction and Informed Consent (used at the beginning of each tool)

Hello, my name is and I am a researcher working with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct an independent evaluation of the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste. The MOEYS has commissioned this study through UNICEF to learn about the systems in place to support preschool education in the country.

I would like to conduct an interview with you to learn more about your knowledge of the preschool education sector. It should take about one hour. These questions are not about you personally and are not intended to judge you or your organisation. Rather, they are intended to provide more information to support the future development of the preschool education sector. If you do not know or do not want to answer any question, that is fine. You are not required to answer any questions.

We will not use your name in any reports and will make efforts to ensure that your responses are confidential. However, it is possible that a reader could determine that you were the source of information based on your organisation and/or position. We therefore cannot promise that your responses will be completely confidential.

If you agree, I would like to record the interview to fill in my notes. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside of AIR.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do I have your permission to audio record? *[If agreed, begin recording.]*

Key Informant Interview – Director Nacional de Financas e Administracao MEJD (National-level)

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is your department's role in the national preschool education plan? Do you think your department understands this role? Why?
4. Do you think your department has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?
5. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?

- Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?

Probe for anything unrealistic: What target do you think would be more realistic?

6. At the national level, who is responsible for ensuring that the preschool education plans are funded?
7. At the municipal level, who is responsible for ensuring that the preschool education plans are funded? Do municipalities plan their own budget for preschool?
8. How does the government plan to share the costs with or get the assistance from different actors to support the preschool subsector? What does that planning process look like?
9. When the government plans targets and activities in the preschool sub-sector, to what extent are these plans based on realistic cost estimates?
10. Does Timor-Leste have stable financing for its current preschool education programming?
 - Which aspects of financing are stable and which are unstable?
 - Where financing is unstable, what do you think could help to make it more stable?
11. When planning for preschool education in Timor-Leste to be scaled up and provided long term, how did the government make its cost projections?

12. To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring systems in place to track the levels of preschool education funding, and assess their effect on access, quality, effectiveness, and equity?
13. To what extent does Timor-Leste have mechanisms in place to ensure reasonable use of financial resources in the use of available resources, avoid unnecessary or excessive expenditures, and detect leaks and wastage?
 - If mechanisms exist, how effective are they?

Wrap-Up

That is my last question for you today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – General Director of Policy, Planning, Inclusion, and Printing from Ministry of Education (National-level)

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

First, I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. At the national level, who is responsible for ensuring that preschool education is provided as planned?
4. Do you think your department understands its role in the national preschool education plan? Why?
5. In what ways (if any) does the government use data-driven projections to inform its preschool subsector planning?
6. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?
 - Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?
 - *Probe for anything unrealistic:* What target do you think would be more realistic?
7. When the government plans targets and activities in the preschool sub-sector, to what extent are these plans based on realistic cost estimates?
8. How does the government plan to share the costs with or get the assistance from different actors to support the preschool subsector? What does that planning process look like?
9. When planning for preschool education in Timor-Leste to be scaled up and provided long term, how did the government make its cost projections?
10. To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring systems in place to track the levels of preschool education funding, and assess their effect on access, quality, effectiveness, and equity?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

11. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve **access** to preschool education?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
12. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve the **quality** of preschool education programming?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?

13. To what extent does the MoEYS have a clear plan or structure to align subsector activities at the municipal level (planning, budgeting, workforce, quality, etc.)?
14. And does the MoEYS at the national level provide guidance for this collaboration at the municipal level (or do municipalities do things their own way)? What about at the local (suco) level?
15. Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans?
 - If yes, do these reviews involve the creation of strategies to address delays or gaps?
 - How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
16. How would you describe the quality of communication between preschool subsector leadership at the national and municipal levels? (If any issues identified), how could it be improved?
17. We will be interviewing people from UNICEF, CARE, ChildFund, Plan International, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, Luta Hamtuk, Alola, World Vision, CSEP, and the church. Are there any other organizations (other than HANDS) that help support the MoEYS with additional preschool education expertise?

If yes, which organizations, and what type of support do they provide?
18. Overall, do you think the MoEYS has sufficient access to preschool education expertise from outside of the government? If yes, what types of support? /

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

19. How are preschool education staff recruited to work in preschool education? What are the primary motivations for teachers?
20. Does the government have any strategies to attract new teachers? (*probe: is there any outreach to scholarships, students who are completing secondary/post-secondary education, new graduates of vocational programmes, career changers, etc.*)
 - If yes, how are those systems are used? How effective are they? Are any other systems in practice?
21. How does the pay rate for preschool education teachers compare to other professions? How happy are preschool education teachers with their level of pay?

Wrap-Up

That is my last question for you today.

22. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop

Key Informant Interview – Current Directorate-General of Education and Teaching (DGEE) and Former Directorate-General of Preschool, Basic and Recurrent Education (National-level)

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

3. Does the MoEYS currently have sufficient staff with preschool education expertise available to develop and implement its preschool education plans and policies?
 - *(probe: Are there any gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?*
Where are there gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?
Lakuna iha koñesimentu ka disponibilidade personel neebe mak suficiente nee iha nebee?
4. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve **access** to preschool education?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
5. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve the **quality** of preschool education programming?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
6. To what extent does the MoEYS have a clear plan or structure to align subsector activities at the municipal level (planning, budgeting, workforce, quality, etc.)?
7. And does the MoEYS at the national level provide guidance for this collaboration at the municipal level (or do municipalities do things their own way)? What about at the local (suco) level?
8. Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans?
 - If yes, do these reviews involve the creation of strategies to address delays or gaps?
 - How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
9. How would you describe the quality of communication between preschool subsector leadership at the national and municipal levels? (If any issues identified), how could it be improved?

10. We will be interviewing people from UNICEF, HANDS, CARE, ChildFund, Plan International, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, Luta Hamtuk, Alola, World Vision, CSEP, and the church. Are there any other organizations that help support the MoEYS with additional preschool education expertise?

If yes, which organizations, and what type of support do they provide?

11. Overall, do you think the MoEYS has sufficient access to preschool education expertise from outside of the government? If yes, what types of support?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

12. Is a system in place for monitoring preschool service quality through regulations, accreditation, inspection, and other external review processes?
- Does the system monitor the preschool education subsector as a whole, not just the quality of individual programmes?
13. Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and data sharing from the national down to the local level, and back up?
- How well are these mechanisms working?
 - Are there aspects that are not currently well coordinated?
14. To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders at the national level routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making?
- What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? *Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)*
 - Who is involved in this process?
 - How often does this process take place?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

15. Does Timor Leste have enough preschool education staff to meet the demand for preschool education now?
- If not, where are the gaps are there and what are the reasons?
 - Are all children whose parents hope to enrol them able to attend or is there a waitlist? Does the number of available staff cause any bottlenecks?
 - Does retaining teachers pose any challenges?

Family & Community Engagement

I now have some questions for you about the engagement of families and communities in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector.

16. Is the importance of family and community engagement well understood and accepted by preschool subsector leadership and stakeholders, including preschool directorates, directors, managers and teachers?
- What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?
 - In your opinion, what would be the best way to address those roadblocks?

17. Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education?

- If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not?

18. How do you think Timor Leste could build up parental demand for quality preschool education?

19. In Timor-Leste, to what extent is preschool education seen as beneficial to society? *Probe for different viewpoints amongst different stakeholder groups.*

20. What do you think would be the best way for Timor Leste to get its general population to view preschool education as necessary and important?

Wrap-Up

21. Reflecting on everything we have discussed, what are the best opportunities for investment in improving preschool programming in Timor Leste?

That is my last question for you today.

22. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – General Inspector

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?

- Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?

Probe for anything unrealistic: What target do you think would be more realistic?

4. Does the MoEYS currently have sufficient staff with preschool education expertise available to develop and implement its preschool education plans and policies?

- (*probe:* Are there any gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?)

5. To what extent does Timor-Leste have monitoring systems in place to track the levels of preschool education funding, and assess their effect on access, quality, effectiveness, and equity?

6. To what extent does Timor-Leste have mechanisms in place to ensure reasonable use of financial resources in the use of available resources, avoid unnecessary or excessive expenditures, and detect leaks and wastage?

- If mechanisms exist, how effective are they?

7. To what extent is Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (grade 1)?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

8. Is a system in place for monitoring preschool service quality through regulations, accreditation, inspection, and other external review processes?

- Does the system monitor the preschool education subsector as a whole, not just the quality of individual programmes?

9. Who is involved in the monitoring system for preschool education?

- Is there a single, recognized institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?

10. Is there sufficient knowledge about preschool education among personnel responsible for oversight and quality monitoring of preschool education?

11. Who is responsible for regulating and monitoring preschool services and providers from national to subnational and local levels?
12. Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and data sharing from the national down to the local level, and back up?
 - How well are these mechanisms working?
 - Are there aspects that are not currently well coordinated?
13. To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders at the national level routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making?
 - What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? *Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)*
 - Who is involved in this process?
 - How often does this process take place?
14. To what extent are elements such as gender, linguistic diversity, and disability taken into account in preschool monitoring and oversight?
15. To what extent do you use data on grade 1 enrolment and early grade dropout, as well as repetition rates, to improve preschool coverage or programming?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

16. Are there any systems in place to monitor the working conditions of preschool educators (i.e. teacher-student ratio, time or lesson planning or professional development, availability of materials, pay, etc.)? If so, please describe.
17. How does leadership address the concerns of educators regarding working conditions?
Are there systems in place?

Wrap-Up

That is my last question for you today.

18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
19. I would also like to know if you might have some documents available that you could share with me?
 - Do you have any documents available that indicate how preschool education programmes can advance to achieve the desired level of quality? If so, are you able to send us those?
 - I asked you about the system in place to monitor preschool service quality through regulations, accreditations, and other external review processes. Are you able to send me any documents about the system for monitoring preschool education?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – Director Nacional Formasaun Profisional e Kontinua (INFODEFP)

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

3. Does Timor Leste have enough preschool education staff to meet the demand for preschool education now?
 - If not, where are the gaps are there and what are the reasons?
 - Does retaining teachers pose any challenges?
4. Are there any problems with preschool staff availability in more rural or hard-to-reach areas?
5. To what extent does Timor Leste have adequate numbers of preschool education staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities?
6. Looking ahead, what are the major challenges the country faces in having a sufficient preschool education workforce, given the country's plans for expanding access?
7. Are there any strategies to incentivize or recognise good preschool education teachers? If so, please describe.
8. Is there a set list of core competencies for preschool education teachers? *(note that we are not looking for qualifications such as a secondary school certificate, but are interested in qualities.)* If so, what competencies are included? Specific knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or dispositions? And how are these systems used?
 - *(If yes)* Do the core competencies for preschool education teachers align with the core competencies for primary school teachers? How are they similar or different?
9. Is there a set list of qualifications for preschool teachers?
 - *(If yes)* How feasible is it to achieve those qualifications?
 - What percentage of teachers would you say possess those qualifications?
10. What types of pre-service training are available?
 - Are there different options and pathways (i.e. at universities, in communities, etc.)?
 - What topics are covered? Does it include an emphasis on play-based, child-centred learning? Does it help build practical skills or is it information-focused?
 - Are there options for teachers in remote or hard-to-reach areas?

11. Do you feel that there are sufficient numbers of qualified preschool education teacher trainers?
12. Is there a system in place to assess whether those completing preschool teacher training are ready to teach in classrooms, e.g., observation and assessment during student teaching?
13. Are preschool educators required to participate in in-service professional development? If so, what are the requirements?
14. What in-service professional development opportunities are available, if any?
 - For whom are those opportunities available?
 - Are there any differences based on location or type of preschool education facility?
15. How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support?
16. Does the MoEYS currently have sufficient staff with preschool education expertise available to develop and implement its preschool education plans and policies?
 - (probe: Are there any gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?)
17. Are there any efforts to promote the professionalization and respect of preschool educators?

Wrap-Up

That is my last question for you today.

18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
19. I would also like to know if you might have some documents available that you could share with me?
 - We spoke about strategies to recruit staff into the pre-education field. Do you have any documents outlining this strategy that you could share with us?
 - Do you have any documents about the system for retaining and incentivizing preschool teachers?
 - We also spoke about the core competencies for preschool teachers. Do you have any documents that describe these?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Curriculum

I now have some questions for you about the preschool education curriculum.

3. Is an official national or subnational preschool curriculum framework(s) in place?
 - If yes, please describe how it was developed.
 - If yes, to what extent was the curriculum based on best practices in preschool education? Please explain.
 - If yes, to what extent do teachers use the curriculum?
 - If not, why not? Are there plans to develop an official preschool curriculum framework? Please describe.

Wrap-Up

That is my last question for you today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

4. I would also like to know if you might have some documents available that you could share with me?
 - Can you please share any documents relating to the preschool curriculum?

Key Informant Interview – MoEYS (Municipal-level)

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

First, I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is the basis for the preschool education subsector plan in your municipality?
4. At the municipal level, who is responsible for ensuring that preschool education is provided as planned?
5. Do you think the MoEYS at the municipal level has some responsibility the nation's preschool education plan? Why?
6. In what ways does the municipal government collaborate with other preschool education providers (including NGOs, the church, and other providers) to strategize how to provide preschool education?
7. At the municipal level, who is responsible for ensuring that the preschool education plans are funded?
8. Does your municipality have stable financing for its current preschool education programming?
 - Which aspects of financing are stable and which are unstable?
 - Where financing is unstable, what do you think could help to make it more stable?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

9. To what extent does your preschool education team collaborate with teams from other child- and family-serving sectors (inside or outside your organisation) to help meet children's holistic needs? (*Probe as needed for elements of nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, child protection.*)
10. Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why?
11. Are there any ways that cross-sector collaboration could be improved?
12. And does the MoEYS at the national level provide guidance for this collaboration at the municipal level (or do municipalities do things their own way)? What about at the local (suco) level?

13. How would you describe the quality of communication between preschool subsector leadership at the national and municipal levels? (If any issues identified), how could it be improved?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

14. To what extent is your organisation involved in preschool monitoring and quality assurance?
- Do you feel that your organization's feedback and contributions are taken into account?
15. Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and data sharing the national down to the local level, and back up?
- How well are these mechanisms working?
16. To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders in your municipality routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making?
17. To what extent are elements such as gender, linguistic diversity, and disability taken into account in preschool monitoring and oversight?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

18. Are there any systems in place to monitor the working conditions of preschool educators (i.e. teacher-student ratio, time or lesson planning or professional development, availability of materials, pay, etc.)? If so, please describe.
19. How does leadership address the concerns of educators regarding working conditions? Are there systems in place?

Family & Community Engagement

I now have some questions for you about the engagement of families and communities in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector.

20. In your view, how important is family and community engagement in preschool? Please explain.
21. To what extent do preschool directors, managers, and teachers in this municipality understand the importance of family and community engagement?
- What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?

22. Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education?
- If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not?
23. Do preschool program staff in this municipality receive guidance/support on how to engage families and communities effectively in preschool education programming?
- If so, please describe.
24. To what extent are communities engaged meaningfully in preschool education services?
25. To what extent are other civil society organizations or municipal government departments involved in preschool education?

Wrap-up

That is my last question for you today.

26. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – Catholic Institute for Teacher Training - Baucau

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Baucau.

3. Is there a set list of core competencies for preschool education teachers ? *(Note that we are not looking for qualifications such as a secondary school certificate, but are interested in qualities.)*
 - If so, what competencies are included? Specific knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or dispositions? And how are these systems used?
4. *(If yes to previous question)* Do the core competencies for preschool education teachers align with the core competencies for primary school teachers? How are they similar or different?
5. In this municipality, how feasible is it to achieve the qualifications for becoming a preschool teacher? (list qualifications from doc review) What percentage of teachers would you say possess those qualifications?
6. What types of pre-service training are available in this municipality?
 - Are there different options and pathways (i.e. at universities, in communities, etc.)?
 - What topics are covered? Does it include an emphasis on play-based, child-centred learning? Does it help build practical skills or is it information-focused?
 - Are there options for teachers in remote or hard-to-reach areas so that they can receive pre-service training?
7. Is there a system in place in this municipality to assess whether those completing preschool teacher training are ready to teach in classrooms, e.g., observation and assessment during student teaching?
8. Is a system in place in this municipality for quality assurance of preschool education teacher training institutions (i.e. an accreditation system or oversight structure)?
9. Are preschool educators in this municipality required to participate in in-service professional development? If so, what are the requirements?
10. What in-service professional development opportunities are available in this municipality, if any?
 - For whom are those opportunities available?
 - Are there any differences based on location or type of preschool education facility?

11. How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support in this municipality?
12. Are there any efforts in this municipality to promote the professionalization of preschool educators?
13. Are there any efforts to boost the respect for preschool educators in this municipality?

Wrap-up

14. We spoke about the core competencies for preschool teachers. Do you have any documents that describe these that you would be able to share with us?
15. That is my last question for you today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – Global Partners

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is your organization's role in the implementation of the national preschool education plan?
4. Do you think your organisation has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?
5. Did your organisation use any global or regional experts or guidance in developing your plans for supporting/providing preschool education?
 - If yes, in what areas? (*Probe for curriculum development, quality assurance, family & community engagement, workforce development, planning and budgeting*)
6. Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans?
 - How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
7. To what extent is Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (grade 1)?
8. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?
 - Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?
 - *Probe for anything unrealistic:* What target do you think would be more realistic?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

9. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve **access** to preschool education?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
10. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve the **quality** of preschool education programming?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

11. Who is involved in the monitoring system for preschool education?
 - Is there a single, recognized institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?
12. Who is responsible for regulating and monitoring preschool services and providers from national to subnational and local levels?
13. To what extent do stakeholders at the national level routinely review preschool data to inform decision making?
 - What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? *Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)*
 - Who is involved in this process?
 - How often does this process take place?
14. To what extent do you use data on grade 1 enrolment and early grade dropout, as well as repetition rates, to improve preschool coverage or programming?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

15. Does Timor Leste have enough preschool education staff to meet the demand for preschool education now?
 - If not, where are the gaps are there and what are the reasons?
16. Does retaining teachers pose any challenges?
17. Are there any problems with preschool staff availability in more rural or hard-to-reach areas?
18. To what extent does Timor Leste have adequate numbers of preschool education staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities?
19. Looking ahead, what are the major challenges the country faces in having a sufficient preschool education workforce, given the country's plans for expanding access?
20. Does the MoEYS currently have sufficient staff with preschool education expertise available to develop and implement its preschool education plans and policies?
 - *(probe: Are there any gaps in knowledge or the availability of sufficient personnel?)*

Family & Community Engagement

I now have some questions for you about the engagement of families and communities in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector.

21. Is the importance of family and community engagement well understood and accepted by preschool subsector leadership and stakeholders, including preschool directorates, directors, managers and teachers?
22. Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education?
 - If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not?
23. How do you think Timor-Leste could build up parental demand for quality preschool education?
24. In Timor-Leste, to what extent is preschool education seen as beneficial to society? *Probe for different viewpoints amongst different stakeholder groups.*

Wrap-up

26. Reflecting on everything we have discussed, what are the best opportunities for investment in improving preschool programming in Timor Leste?

That is my last question for you today.

27. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – National NGOs

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is your organization's role in the implementation of the national preschool education plan?
4. Do you think your organisation has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?
5. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?
 - Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?
 - *Probe for anything unrealistic:* What target do you think would be more realistic?
6. Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans?
 - If yes, do these reviews involve the creation of strategies to address delays or gaps?
 - How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
7. To what extent is Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (grade 1)?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

8. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve **access** to preschool education?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
9. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve the **quality** of preschool education programming?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

10. Who is involved in the monitoring system for preschool education?

- Is there a single, recognized institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?
11. Who is responsible for regulating and monitoring preschool services and providers from national to subnational and local levels?
 12. To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders in your municipality routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making?
 13. What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? *Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)*
 - Who is involved in this process?
 - How often does this process take place?
 14. To what extent do you use data on grade 1 enrolment and early grade dropout, as well as repetition rates, to improve preschool coverage or programming?
 15. To what extent are elements such as gender, linguistic diversity, and disability taken into account in preschool monitoring and oversight?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

16. What in-service professional development opportunities are available, if any?
 - For whom are those opportunities available?
 - Are there any differences based on location or type of preschool education facility?
17. How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support?

Family & Community Engagement

I now have some questions for you about the engagement of families and communities in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector.

18. Is the importance of family and community engagement well understood and accepted by preschool subsector leadership and stakeholders, including preschool directorates, directors, managers and teachers?
 - What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?
19. How are families and communities involved in preschool education?

20. Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education?

- If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not?

21. In Timor-Leste, to what extent is preschool education seen as something that is beneficial for society? *Probe for different viewpoints amongst different stakeholder groups.*

Wrap-up

That is my last question for you today.

22. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – Municipal NGOs

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is your organization's role in the implementation of the national preschool education plan?
4. Do you think your organisation has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

5. To what extent does your preschool education team collaborate with teams from other child- and family-serving sectors (inside or outside your organisation) to help meet children's holistic needs? *(Probe as needed for nutrition, health, social protection, child protection.)*
6. Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why?
7. Are there any ways that cross-sector collaboration could be improved?

Quality Assurance

I have some questions for you about the processes for quality assurance of preschool education in Timor-Leste.

8. To what extent is your organisation involved in preschool monitoring and quality assurance?
 - Do you feel that your organization's feedback and contributions are taken into account?
9. To what extent do preschool subsector stakeholders in your municipality routinely review preschool subsector data to inform decision making?

10. What kinds of data are reviewed, and for what purpose? *Probe for decisions about how to support continuous quality improvement, and increase the efficiency and reach of the preschool education system)*
 - Who is involved in this process?
 - How often does this process take place?
11. To what extent are elements such as gender, linguistic diversity, and disability taken into account in preschool monitoring and oversight?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

12. How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support?
13. Are there any systems in place to monitor the working conditions of preschool educators (i.e. teacher-student ratio, time or lesson planning or professional development, availability of materials, pay, etc.)? If so, please describe.
14. How does leadership address the concerns of educators regarding working conditions? Are there systems in place?

Family & Community Engagement

I now have some questions for you about the engagement of families and communities in Timor-Leste's preschool education sector.

15. In your view, how important is family and community engagement in preschool? Please explain.
16. To what extent do preschool directors, managers, and teachers in this municipality understand the importance of family and community engagement?
 - What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?
17. Have there been any initiatives to encourage families to enrol their children in preschool education?
 - If yes, were these efforts successful? Why or why not?
18. Can families be involved in preschool education programmes in various ways, e.g., as volunteers or visitors in the classroom, or in-person activities/events? (Note that this does not include simply asking families to contribute or pay for things.)
 - Do these opportunities appear to fit with the reality of families' lives, considering work hours, etc.?

19. To what extent are communities engaged meaningfully in preschool education services?
20. To what extent are other civil society organizations or municipal government departments involved in preschool education?

Curriculum

I now have some questions for you about the preschool education curriculum.

21. Is an official national or subnational preschool curriculum framework(s) in place?
 - If yes, to what extent do teachers use the curriculum? Do teachers have learning and play materials for the classroom, (probe: books, toys, games, art materials and manipulatives)?
 - Do these seem to be consistent with the curriculum/other guidance teachers use? (*probe: developmentally appropriate, relevant to the local context, supportive of play-based learning*)
 - Are the materials sufficient? Why or why not?

Wrap-up

That is my last question for you today.

22. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Key Informant Interview – University Partner

1. To begin, can you tell me about your background and responsibilities in your current position?
2. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with regards to preschool education?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about the planning and budgeting for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

3. What is your organization's role in the implementation of the national preschool education plan?
4. Do you think your organisation has some responsibility for implementing the national preschool education plan? Why?

Workforce

I have some questions for you about the preschool education workforce in Timor-Leste.

5. Is there a set list of core competencies for preschool education teachers ? *(Note that we are not looking for qualifications such as a secondary school certificate, but are interested in qualities.)*
 - If so, what competencies are included? Specific knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or dispositions? And how are these systems used?
6. *(If yes to previous question)* Do the core competencies for preschool education teachers align with the core competencies for primary school teachers? How are they similar or different?
7. How feasible is it to achieve the qualifications for becoming a preschool teacher? (list qualifications from doc review) What percentage of teachers would you say possess those qualifications?
8. What types of pre-service training are available?
 - Are there different options and pathways (i.e. at universities, in communities, etc.)?
 - What topics are covered? Does it include an emphasis on play-based, child-centred learning? Does it help build practical skills or is it information-focused?
 - Are there options for teachers in remote or hard-to-reach areas so that they can receive pre-service training?
9. Is there a system in place to assess whether those completing preschool teacher training are ready to teach in classrooms, e.g., observation and assessment during student teaching?

10. Is a system in place for quality assurance of preschool education teacher training institutions (i.e. an accreditation system or oversight structure)?
11. Are preschool educators required to participate in in-service professional development? If so, what are the requirements?
12. What in-service professional development opportunities are available, if any?
 - For whom are those opportunities available?
 - Are there any differences based on location or type of preschool education facility?
13. How does leadership make decisions about the needs of preschool education teachers regarding training and support?
14. Are there any efforts to promote the professionalization of preschool educators?
15. Are there any efforts to boost the respect for preschool educators?

Curriculum

I now have some questions for you about the preschool education curriculum.

16. Is an official national or subnational preschool curriculum framework(s) in place?
 - If yes, to what extent do teachers use the curriculum? Do teachers have learning and play materials for the classroom, (probe: books, toys, games, art materials and manipulatives)?
 - Do these seem to be consistent with the curriculum/other guidance teachers use? (*probe: developmentally appropriate, relevant to the local context, supportive of play-based learning*)
 - Are the materials sufficient? Why or why not?

Wrap-up

17. We spoke about the core competencies for preschool teachers. Do you have any documents that describe these that you would be able to share with us?
18. That is my last question for you today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Focus Group Discussion – ECD Working Group

Introduction

1. Can each participant briefly introduce your organisation and the work it does in ECD in Timor-Leste?
2. Please tell us about how the ECD working group was constituted and organized.
 - What were its main objectives?
 - What are the main actions or achievements of the ECD working group while it was in operation?

Enabling Environment

Now I have some questions for you about the enabling environment (or supportive conditions) for preschool education.

3. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve **access** to preschool education?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
4. To what extent do stakeholder organizations collaborate with others on a national level to improve the **quality** of preschool education programming?
 - Do you think this collaboration is effective? Why or why not?
5. To what extent is there sufficient cross-sector collaboration to meet Timorese children's holistic needs? (*Probe as needed for elements of nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, child protection.*)
 - Are there any ways that cross-sector collaboration could be improved?

Planning & Budgeting

I have some questions for you about planning for preschool education in Timor-Leste.

6. Do stakeholders review the status of preschool education plans?
 - If yes, do these reviews involve the creation of strategies to address delays or gaps?
 - How often do these reviews happen? And who takes part?
7. Overall, do you think the MoEYS has sufficient access to preschool education expertise from outside of the government? If yes, what types of support?
8. Timor-Leste has a goal of 80% preschool coverage by 2030. Do you think that target is realistic? Why?
 - Which aspects are realistic and which are unrealistic?

Probe for anything unrealistic: What target do you think would be more realistic?
9. To what extent is Timor-Leste's preschool education subsector planning informed by expectations for school readiness amongst children entering basic school (grade 1)?

10. How does the government plan to share the costs with or get the assistance from different actors to support the preschool subsector? What does that planning process look like?

Wrap up

12. Reflecting on everything we have discussed, what are the best opportunities for improving preschool programming in Timor Leste?

13. That is my last question for you today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and for the insight you shared today! Your responses will be very beneficial to help us learn how the preschool education sector in Timor-Leste can develop.

Annex E: Sample

Organisation Type	# of KIIs	Respondents
National Level (1 KIIs, 1 FGD)		
Global Partners	4	UNICEF Preschool education/ECD expert UNICEF Chief of Education UNICEF Education Officer World Bank
MoEYS	7	Current Directorate General of Preschool Education Former Directorate General of Preschool Education General Inspector National Institute for Training of Teachers and Education Professionals (INFORDEPE) Cabinet of Evaluation and Curriculum Development Directorate General of Policy, Planning, Printing, & Inclusion Directorate General of Administration and Finance
Implementing NGOs	4	CARE International Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) ChildFund Plan International
University Partner	1	University of Timor-Leste representative
ECD Working Group	1 FGD	
In-Depth Focal Municipalities (Ainaro, Lautem) (14 KIIs)		
MoEYS	[6	Municipality Education Leader (1 each Ainaro and Lautem) Preschool education focal point in Education Directorate (1 each Ainaro and Lautem) Inspectors (Ainaro and Lautem)
Implementing NGOs	8	Care International (1 in Ainaro) ChildFund (1 in Lautem) Other providers (3 each Ainaro and Lautem)
Other Municipalities (Baucau, Bobonaro, Oecusse, Viqueque) (6 KIIs)		
MoEYS	4	Education Directorate preschool education focal point (1 each Baucau, Bobonaro, Viqueque) Inspector (Oecusse)
Implementing NGOs	2	Catholic Institute for Teacher Training (1 in Baucau) Alola (1 in Viqueque)

Annex F: IRB Certificate



AIR IRB

Exemption Notification

To: Elizabeth Spier
From: IRB Administrator
Subject: B&P# 8C430
Date: 09/09/2021

B&P# 8C430 -Data Collection Timor Leste National Pre-Primary Subsector Evaluation has been verified by Kim Kendziora as **Exempt** on 09/09/2021.

On the basis of this review, the IRB has determined that the interviews/focus groups, as described in the materials submitted, are exempt on the grounds that the research is with adults and involves only the use of tests, surveys, interviews, or public observation as defined in 45 CFR §46.104 (d) (2). The participants' responses, if inadvertently disclosed, would not place them at risk of criminal or civil liability, nor would their financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation be damaged. Therefore, this component of the data collection is not subject to IRB oversight.

Regarding the secondary data analysis, the IRB has determined that this activity is exempt on the grounds that data collection does not involve human research participants as defined in 45 CFR §46.102 (e). Because the administrative data analysis will not involve intervention or interaction with participants, nor will it collect identifiable private data, the federal definition of a human research participant is not met and this part of the study is also exempt from IRB oversight. Data collection may proceed.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please contact the IRB directly to discuss any changes you may contemplate.

Thank you,
Erin Morrison
IRB Administrator
emorrison@air.org

Please be reminded that all projects must undergo IRB review before initiating any recruitment or data collection/analyses. Material changes to project activities also must undergo review via the Amendments tab.

