

Reaching every child - Could innovative models play a part in expanding early childhood care and education to hard-to-reach areas of Uganda?

Learning from the School Readiness Programme in Tanzania

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Expanding access to pre-primary education – ambitious targets >>>

Like in Uganda, expanding pre-primary education in Tanzania is now a priority. In 2017, the new education sector development plan set a target of 87.5% of children entering Primary 1 with at least one year of pre-primary education. However, in 2016, the reported net-intake rate in Tanzania was just 47%. Most of these attended Government pre-primary classes, though a small proportion attend private pre-primary schools, mostly in the more affluent urban centres.

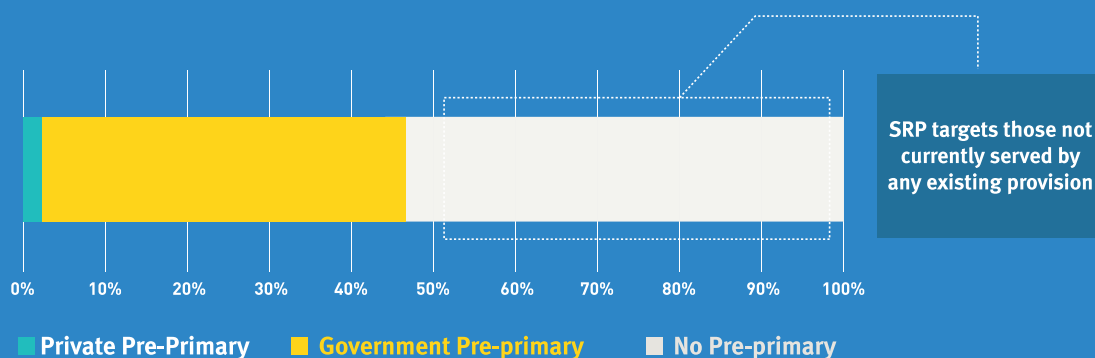
The recently updated pre-primary policy requires delivery of pre-primary education through pre-primary classes in every school, though this is still a work in progress for many. The policy also requires at least one year of pre-primary from the ages of 3-5 for all children, so there is a flexible enrolment age and some variation on the length of pre-primary. However, the current focus is mainly on increasing enrolment of 5-year olds. Pupils in these pre-primary classes are now counted under the capitation grant formula that determines the finance a school receives. In theory, this is a significant addition to the national education budget but schools don't always receive full amounts on time. The teachers of these classes are mostly primary trained teachers who have received very limited in-service training on pre-primary. There are some qualified pre-primary specialists but also a number of unqualified teachers in pre-primary classes and therefore the quality of provision can vary greatly.

The current access rates translate to mean that a majority of children of pre-primary school age in Tanzania do not attend any kind of early childhood education. A large proportion of these are children in rural communities who live too far from their nearest pre-primary class.

The rationale of the School Readiness Programme – a temporary solution to help children now! >>>

The value of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is now well evidenced (Yoshikawa et al, 2013). Children who don't receive any pre-primary education are more likely to start school late, if at all, and also more likely to drop out before completion. In Tanzania, there is also evidence that children from homes where Kiswahili, the primary school language of instruction, is not spoken were falling behind very quickly in primary school (OPM, 2015). This language barrier was particularly acute in rural communities where long distances to the nearest pre-primary class prevented attendance and the opportunity to develop language skills.

Types of Pre-Primary provision in Tanzania



Given limited resources, rapidly expanding existing formal Government pre-primary services was not a viable option in 2015. In light of this, the Government of Tanzania worked with a DFID-financed programme, EQUIP-Tanzania, to develop an innovative solution to expand pre-primary provision in rural areas that were not being provided with access to any form of ECCE provision.

The School Readiness Programme (SRP) was conceived as a temporary solution to rapidly expand ECCE provision for those unable to access existing pre-primary provision, until the formal government system is in a position to ensure full access. It was intended to reach communities located far from existing pre-primary classes, build the demand for ECCE, and lay the groundwork for formal provision in the future.

The school readiness approach was deliberately designed to be different from pre-primary classes. It was designed as a shorter, accelerated-learning approach, that began halfway through the school year and only targeted those not already enrolled in pre-primary classes. As a 12-week programme, expanded to 16 weeks in the second year, it covers various aspects of children's development, but particularly focuses on developing Kiswahili oral fluency to help children be more 'ready' to learn effectively in Primary 1. The model was designed to enable rapid and consistent implementation by linking to government systems, but be low cost through being run by volunteer Community Teaching Assistants (CTA).

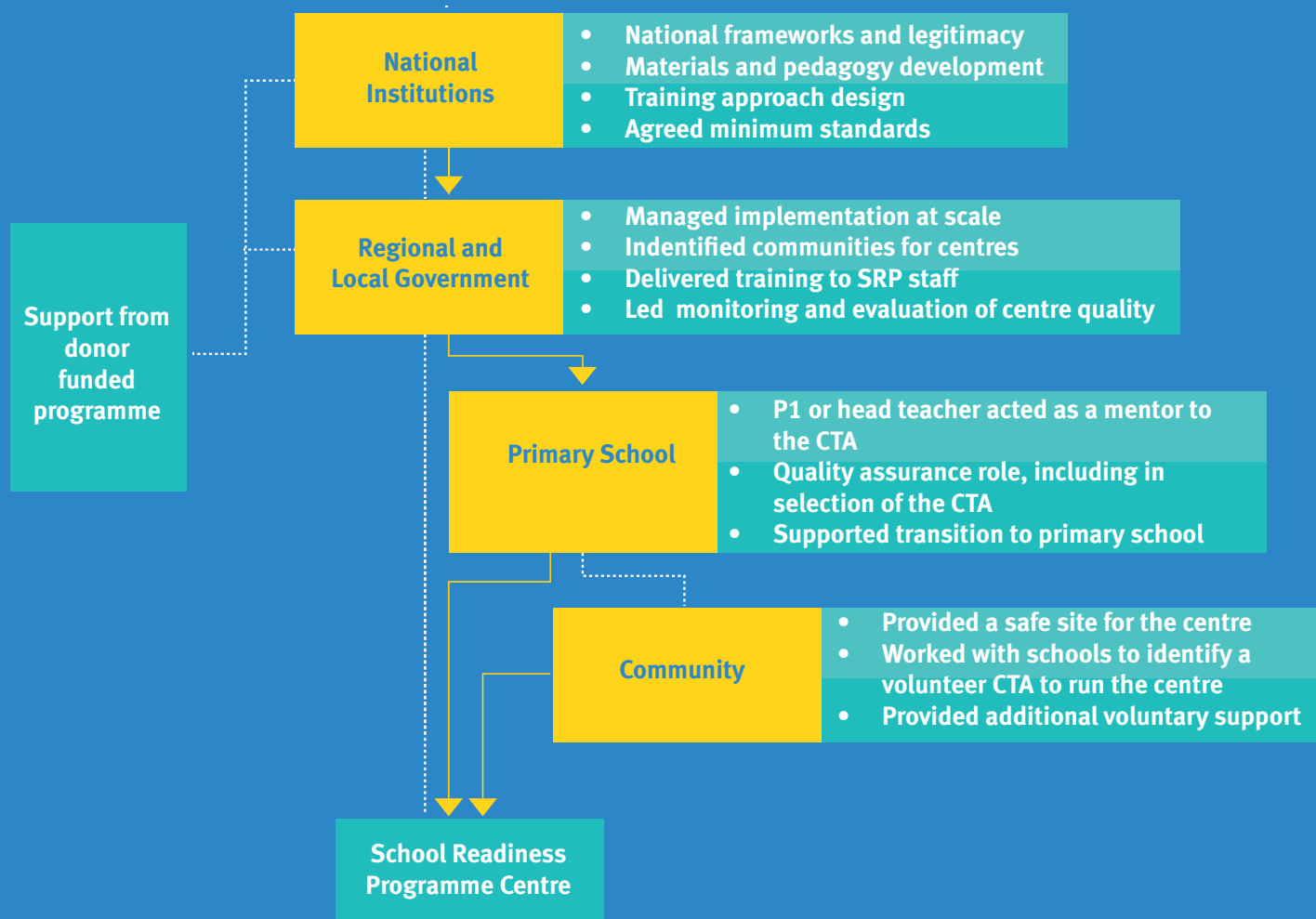
Key elements of the School Readiness Programme model >>>

The SRP model that was developed included a number of key elements:

- A 16-week programme to expand ECCE into under-served areas
- Implemented in communities located too far from their nearest pre-primary class for children to attend
- A focus on the development of school readiness skills, particularly oral language competence
- Centres led by volunteers from the host community – no salary costs
- Centres located in community buildings – no infrastructure costs
- Simple, age-appropriate pedagogy based on story books, songs, learning games and home-made teaching aids
- Set up, supported and monitored by local government and the nearby primary school
- Finance and technical assistance from DFID-funded EQUIP-Tanzania programme

Implementing rapidly at scale – who did what?

The development and implementation of the School Readiness Programme was a collaboration between multiple Tanzanian state and non-state actors, with financial and technical assistance from the DFID-funded EQUIP-Tanzania programme. This hybrid approach was critical to being able to set up and run almost 3,000 centres in just two years. The diagram below outlines some of the key roles that each actor played and illustrates how Government systems, schools and communities collaborated.

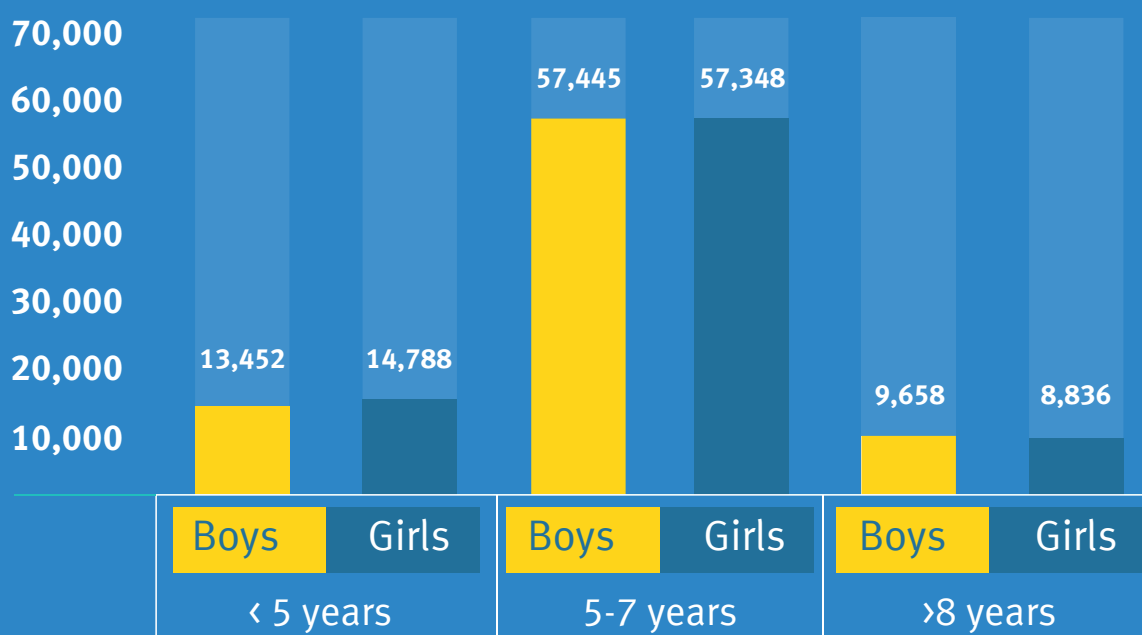


Achievements and costs of the School Readiness Programme >>>

Access

In 2015, 1,000 centres were established as a large pilot. Over 50,000 children enrolled and although many were in the target age group (5-7), there were children aged from 3-12 attending. In 2016, the number of centres was expanded to 2,792 and over 160,000 children attended, with the majority in the 5-7 age range and with a balance between genders with a balance between genders, as evidenced in the diagram below.

SRP Enrolment by Age and Sex in 2016



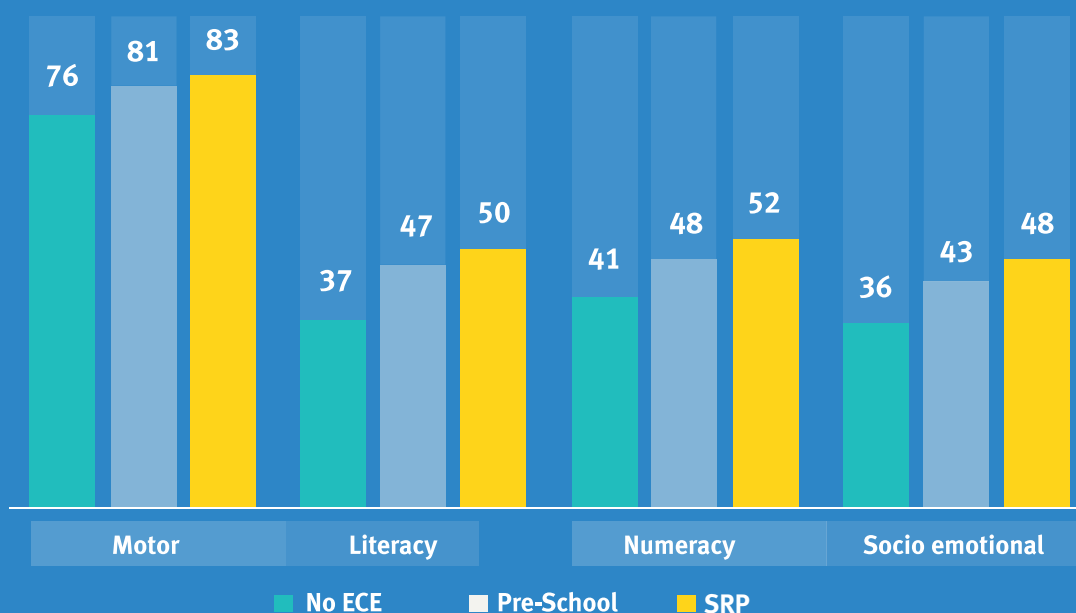
Transition to Primary School

In 2016, 102,308 of the 161,527 children enrolled in the Programme went on to enrol in P1 (63%). Given the low access to primary schools from these communities located many kilometres from the school, this was hugely encouraging. In 2017, SRP pupils accounted for 17% of all Primary 1 pupils enrolled in the 7 regions where it operated.

Learning Outcomes

In early 2016 a pilot learning assessment of 300 pupils in 2 regions (using the IDELA tool) gave encouraging results, showing that SRP pupils were achieving noticeably better learning outcomes than the pupils with no pre-school education (as highlighted in the diagram below). In 2017 a larger, more statistically representative sample of 1,191 pupils across all 7 regions was completed. This larger assessment indicated that not only were the Programme's pupils performing better than those without any pre-primary but they were also out-performing those who had been in formal Government pre-primary classes all year.

Average IDELA scores by pre-school attendance (%)



Costs

The additional costs into the education system for the development of the model, all materials, all procurement, training and the running of centres for 12 weeks was calculated in 2015 at around \$25 per pupil (OPM, 2017). In 2016, with many of the initial one-off development costs excluded and training and procurement costs lowered, the cost per pupil had reduced to an estimated \$12 per pupil for 16 weeks. The financing of both years was through the DFID-funded EQUIP-Tanzania programme. What this cost analysis doesn't take into account are the substantial contributions of the local communities who certainly provided significant inputs both in financial and in-kind terms (volunteer time, food, stipends, loan of buildings).

The essential ingredients for ensuring quality >>>

It can be seen from these results that there was some quality teaching and learning going on in many of these centres. The factors highlighted below are some of the elements that were crucial in achieving that outcome.

Hybrid model involving government, primary schools and communities

The School Readiness Programme benefitted from the structures and support of the formal government system and the flexibility and lower costs of community initiatives. This hybrid model was central to its success, in that notably the model:

- Used local government systems and structures to help ensure consistent implementation and quality across all communities;

- Linked SRP Centres to school to provide professional mentoring and support with transition;
- Placed the day-to-day running of centres in the hands of the community, leading to high levels of ownership, commitment and in many cases, significant in-kind contributions.

Selection of highly motivated volunteer community teaching assistants

At the heart of the success of the Programme is the quality of the volunteer CTAs and their commitment and motivation to serve their communities. Key to this was:

- Selection process: national minimum standards (e.g. primary completion, bilingual, commitment to children) were used in a selection process that was led by the local community and quality assured by the nearby primary school and local officials.
- Intrinsic motivation: volunteers had commitment to their community, valuing the importance and status of the role and being motivated by the progress they saw in the children.
- Extrinsic motivation: volunteers received no salary but attended district level training received a loan of a mobile phone for communication and M&E purposes, and communities made voluntary contributions

Simple, yet high quality and developmentally-appropriate pedagogy and materials

Since SRP centres were led by unqualified volunteers it was crucial to develop a simple, clear and easy-to-deliver pedagogical approach. The approach taken was to build lessons around a weekly illustrated storybook, written to clearly link to a national competency framework to ensure alignment at the central level. Each story would then have a set of learning songs, games, group activities and whole class activities that would provide a robust pedagogical approach that was easy to deliver with limited training or teaching experience. It provided a simple structure that could be built on as the unqualified teaching assistant gained confidence. The approach was developed in collaboration with Aga Khan Foundation, using their experience from the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme.

Participatory training model that helps unqualified volunteers to develop skills gradually

The training approach was critical given SRP centres were run by unqualified volunteers. Key aspects included:

- Trainers using a highly active and participatory approach at all levels of the cascade to ensure successful transfer of play-based learning approaches.
- Trainers selected based on their experience with early primary and pre-primary education rather than based on seniority, to help ensure commitment and understanding.
- Iterative training process for volunteers which saw a repeated cycle where a short burst of training was followed by a few weeks of implementation. This allowed for gradual development, practice and reflection, scaffolded support, and a culture of self-improvement.
- Focus on the creation and use of home-made teaching aids to improve lessons at no cost.

Institutionalising the approach – the successes and challenges >>>

As well as expanding local provision, the School Readiness Programme approach has also influenced national approaches to improving formal pre-primary classes too, including the:

- Adoption of SRP storybooks and their use in pre-primary classes to encourage age-appropriate teaching and learning activities;
- Creation of a new pre-primary curriculum that leans heavily on the Programme's national competency framework;
- Use of SRP national trainers as INSET trainers for primary teachers taking over roles in government pre-primary classes;
- Inclusion of the Programme approach in the latest 5-year Education Sector Development Plan.

However, there are still obstacles to overcome. The status of the SRP centres within the formal education system and therefore their future role is still unclear, although a small pilot building some of them into formal lower primary satellite schools is underway. The status of CTAs is also unclear. One way of recognising them would be through the development of alternative professional pathways to gradually develop and certify those who demonstrate sufficient quality. At that point they would need to be compensated financially and formally – raising a new challenge.

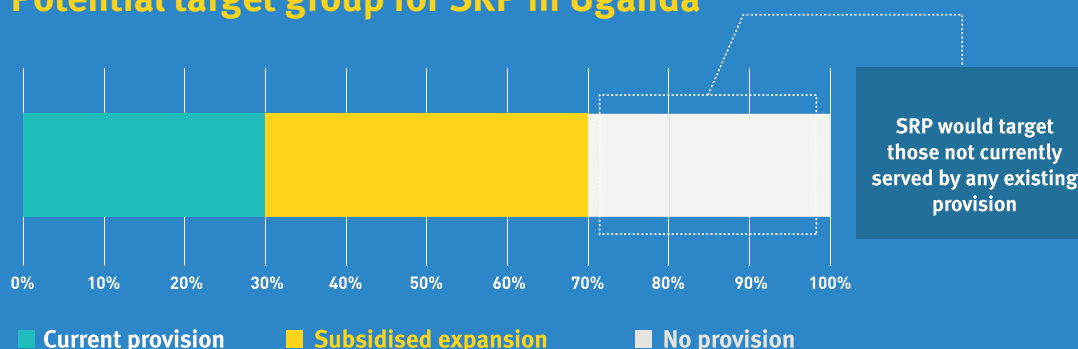
Could a Ugandan School Readiness Programme help expand pre-primary in hard to reach areas? >>>

Recommendation 1: Consider developing a hybrid Government-Community School Readiness Approach to expand provision in areas without access to pre-primary

In a context such as Uganda, where non-state actors are the drivers of pre-primary and ECCE, the Government cannot be expected to, nor expect to, provide universal coverage through 100% free public services in the near future. Under such constraints, the Government needs to take a more targeted and innovative approach. Programmes like the School Readiness Programme offers the Ugandan Government an option to include in their arsenal of approaches to improve access to quality pre-primary provision rapidly and cost-effectively. The programme approach as demonstrated by the School Readiness Programme enables easier take-up by large donors such as DFID whose objectives for early childhood education and reaching the most marginalised children in Uganda align well with such a proposal.

The diagram below shows that even if pre-primary provision were to be expanded from the current 20-30% up to say 40-70% through government subsidisation, there will still be the need, and likely demand, for pre-primary in a significant proportion of communities that will remain untouched. This should be the target population for Ugandan SRP – where the alternative is no realistic provision any time soon.

Potential target group for SRP in Uganda



Recommendation 2: Don't compromise on quality when trying to expand access

The experience of the School Readiness Programme shows that if done effectively access to quality early childhood education can be expanded rapidly. The focus on quality must not be lost in Uganda's quest to rapidly increase access as research shows that poor quality early childhood education can have negative impacts on children and that these negative impacts can be magnified for the most marginalised children (SCAA, 2012). Therefore, assessing learning and evaluating quality are critical.

Recommendation 3: Identify where external support could help develop and expand provision

To develop a quality model suited to Uganda, there is a need to learn from where quality exists already in the country, in the same way the School Readiness Programme looked at what was working elsewhere in Tanzania (the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme in Zanzibar) and adapted it for a new model. This could mean looking at what the Aga Khan Foundation is doing in Uganda, or looking at what can be learnt from the LBE low-cost parenting model to help develop a model suited to Uganda. It could also mean looking to support from a donor-funded programme as such support could enable Uganda to experiment with or pilot an idea before putting government funds behind it.

Recommendation 4: Consider the policy, certification and finance requirements from the beginning to ensure innovative approaches fit into systems operation

Uganda could learn from Tanzania's example and consider the policy, certification and finance requirements of a SRP-style programme from the very beginning. If policies explain how the Programme's Centres will fit into medium-term national approaches to expanding ECCE, layout alternative certification pathways for volunteers within reformed qualification frameworks, and start thinking about realistic budget provisions (and who will pay) to support such centres over time, then this would be laying the ground work for these Centres to be well integrated into an overall package of early childhood provisions within the country.

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Early Childhood Care and Education Think Piece Papers

A Set of ECCE Topics for Consideration in Uganda

