AIDE ET ACTION

SCHOOL READINESS TOOLKIT

Aide et Action

Changing the world through Education

Cover image: A primary school student in Kep province, Cambodia, enjoys play time between classes. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2020.

Left: A primary school student in Lai Chau Province, northern Vietnam, practices traditional dancing during extra-curricular activities designed for ethnic minority students. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

Why this toolkit? 6
Who is this toolkit for? 6
How to use this toolkit? 7

SECTION 1: KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS 8

1.1. Early childhood 8
1.2. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) 8
1.3. Rights-based, child-friendly schools 8
1.4. Equity, equal opportunity, and diversity 9
1.5. Child protection and safeguarding 10
1.6. School readiness 10
1.7. Transition and continuity 11
1.8. Do no harm principles 12
1.9. Holistic education 12
1.10. Regional vulnerabilities 13
1.11. Theory of change 14

SECTION 2: READY CHILDREN 17

2.1. Defining ready children, their growth, and development 17
2.2. Needs assessment checklist for SR project design 18
2.3. Capacity assessment checklist for SR project design 20
2.4. Child development skills checklists (3–4/5–6 years old) 21
2.5. Sample activities, outputs, indicators, and outcomes 25
2.6. Impact of SR actors 26

SECTION 3: READY TEACHERS AND ECCE/SCHOOLS 28

3.1. Defining ready teachers and ready schools 28
3.2. Needs assessment checklist 29
3.3. Sample activities, outputs, indicators, and outcomes 31
3.4. Teachers' capacity development attributes 32

SECTION 4: READY CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES 33

4.1. Defining ready families/caregivers and communities 33
4.2. Needs assessment checklist for ready families 35
4.3. Needs assessment checklist for ready communities 35
4.5. Sample activities, outputs, indicators, and outcomes 36

SECTION 5: CASE STUDIES/GOOD PRACTICES 38

FURTHER READING/REFERENCES 41

Footnotes 41
References 42

FOREWORD

Sheldon Shaeffer

The transition from the home or a pre-school programme to primary school is one of the greatest challenges that children face throughout their educational career.

Moving from the environment of the family or of an informal, child-centered pre-school to what is usually the more rigid, formal, and teacher-centered environment of the primary school can be a difficult experience. This is especially true for children of families disadvantaged by poverty and other marginalizing factors. These children may themselves be developmentally delayed (e.g., due to disability, malnutrition, ill-health, and a lack of cognitive and linguistic stimulation). They may have never attended a pre-school, and/or may have grown up in a home environment – with illiterate parents, using a language different from that of the school, or in contexts of conflict and natural disaster – which may not have prepared them adequately for school.

This is the classical definition of "school readiness": the extent to which a child – physically, cognitively, linguistically, and socio-emotionally – is ready for the environment, the routines, and the relationships characteristic of formal education. But another definition is equally important: the extent to which a school is ready to receive children who come from many backgrounds and each with very different needs. In other words, the extent to which a school is willing and able to include children of diverse abilities and needs – both physically in its classrooms, and academically in its teaching – learning process.

The problems of transition and readiness are complex and not always understood by schools, Ministries of Education, or by the development agencies which assist them. A prime example of this is the lack of understanding that early childhood, as a period in human development, covers from birth through eight years of age – and thus, this crucial process of transition. In many cases, this means that pre-school programmes are handled by one part of the Ministry of Education (or even by another ministry) and primary education, by another. As a consequence, the curriculum of pre-schools and the training programmes of their teachers are often implemented by very different units of a ministry than those of primary schools. The same separation of focus can be replicated in the development agencies concerned with education – one unit or individual "doing" pre-school (for children, say, from 0–6 years of age) and another handling primary school, with little collaboration between them. The result is often a focus on getting children ready for school and not on getting schools ready for children.

It is just this very challenge which makes this toolkit so important – for Aide et Action staff from its Southeast Asian offices and beyond and – ultimately, for a wider audience of development agency staff. The concepts clarified in the toolkit; the application of these concepts in the promotion of "ready" children, teachers and schools, and caregivers and communities; and the description of good practices in promoting school readiness are all valuable contributions to the increased quality, relevance, and effectiveness of Aide et Action's work toward the enhancement of young child development in the region.

Sheldon Shaeffer
ECCE Advisor, Aide et Action
Chair, Asia-Pacific Regional Network on Early Childhood (ARNEC)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Savy Lach

With our aim to improve the quality and accountability of our programmes, we believe it is necessary to equip our team members with tools, guidelines, and practical resources to support programme implementation at different levels. To this end, the present School Readiness Toolkit has been developed for Aide et Action Southeast Asia & China with significant contributions from our colleagues and friends that I would like to thank here.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the valuable work of Dr. Juliette Torabian, our senior international consultant, for having designed and introduced the Aide et Action (AEA) theory of change in school readiness; developed and delivered a training on ECCE/school readiness for our project managers from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, and Vietnam; and for having drafted this toolkit; which is both an unprecedented document in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)/ School Readiness (SR) and a comprehensive, supportive resource for AEA teams and beyond.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer, Chair of Board of Directors in Asia-Pacific Regional Network on Early Childhood (ARNEC) and a pioneer in world and regional ECCE, for his technical support throughout the development of this toolkit. My special thanks also go to Mr. It Vuthy, Deputy Director for Programme of SEAMEO CECCEP; Mr. In Samrithy, former Director of the NGO Education Partnership, Cambodia; and Ms. Giang Nguyen Thai Thi, Deputy Manager of the Pre-Primary Education Department in Lai Chau province, Vietnam for their kind support and collaboration.

Thanks to Ms. Ines Provoost, Regional Program Officer, who acted as the AEA focal point and successfully managed all phases of this project in close collaboration with our consultant and team members from AEA country offices.
I would like to thank all AEA team members for having ensured the success of this project by captivating different contextual angles of "Ready Children", "Ready Teachers" "Ready ECCE/Schools" and "Ready Caregivers and Communities". The team includes: Ms. Ruvini Wanigaratne, Regional Programme Manager; from AEA Laos: Ms. Anh-Thu Nguyen, Programme Manager for Development, Monitoring, and Reporting; Kongsa Yangluexa, Programme Manager; Leesou Bouapao, Field Coordinator; From AEA China: Ms. Sun Mai, Country Director; Ms. LIN Xiaoyuan, Senior Programme Officer; From AEA Vietnam: Ms. Huong Tong, ECCE Project Manager; Mr. Tue Tran Ngoc, Programme Development and Quality Manager; from AEA Cambodia: Mr. Marong Choeung, ECCE Programme Officer; Ms. Vera Ushurova, Project Development Officer; Mr. Mao Phen and Mr. Narom Mao, Programme Officers.

I would like to acknowledge the constructive contributions and guidance of my colleagues, Mr. Samphors Vorn, Country Director, Cambodia; Tu Nguyen, Country Director Vietnam; Vithanya Noonan, Country Director Laos; and Ms. Shirley Yau, Head of Development of AEA Hong Kong.
I am confident that this toolkit will prove itself as a valuable resource, which will facilitate the implementation of our ECCE/SR programs in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of Quality Education, particularly as ECCE is our global priority for the next five years (SDG 4.2). We aim to upscale this toolkit to a global ECCE/SR resource for all Aide et Action's teams across the world.

Savy Lach
Aide et Action Regional Director

WHY THIS TOOLKIT?

Within the framework of AEA SEAC's priority goal for 2019–2023, the project "Promoting Quality and Inclusive Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) and Parenting in Cambodia and Vietnam" aims to ensure access to quality early childhood care and education for children aged 3 to 8 years through enhanced teaching and quality of learning, responsive parenting, and local ownership.

To ensure school readiness (SR) processes are safe, inclusive, and of high quality, a capacity development plan is envisaged to progressively target and train:

1. AEA staff members (professional development)
2. Teachers in pre-primary and primary early grades (teachers in-service training)
3. Caregivers and families (parenting for SR)
4. Local communities and authorities (advocacy and awareness raising)

This regional toolkit on school readiness is the first in the series of toolkits mentioned above and aims to:

- Create a common language and approach across different AEA country teams
- Introduce and launch AEA theory of change for SR projects
- Provide tools and checklists for ECCE/SR project managers

The guiding principles of this toolkit include, among others:

- The UN Convention on Child Rights (CRC)
- Int'l Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- The 1999 General Comments of UNCESCR
- The UN 2004 General Comments on ECCE
- The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG no.4.2)

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

The toolkit is directly relevant to ECCE project officers, M&E managers, and country directors and is to be used by the AEA regional office to ensure quality, consistency, and relevance of school readiness project activities and outcomes across country offices. The toolkit encapsulates the main themes in ECCE/SR project development and therefore can potentially be scaled up to a global toolkit for all 19 country offices in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. It can also be of relevance and use to the wider community of ECCE programme managers – with different levels of experience and knowledge – who are promoting and implementing SR projects in different regions of the world.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This guide is an innovative resource for AEA project managers and their country directors to ensure quality, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of their ECCE/SR projects.

The toolkit is divided into five main sections that are color-coded for ease of reference:

Section 1: Provides the definition of key concepts in ECCE/SR (green section)

Section 2: Focuses on **ready children** and describes child development stages and school readiness skills. It also provides checklists, key indicators, and activities based on the AEA Theory of Change (ToC) (blue section)

Section 3: Delineates teachers and the characteristics of **ready teachers/schools** based on the child-friendly framework. It introduces relevant ToC-based activities and outcome indicators (orange section)

Section 4: Describes **ready caregivers and communities** and provides checklists and sample activities in line with the AEA ToC (violet section)

Section 5: Provides a snapshot of good practices in the region and elsewhere (light blue section)

NOTE: The key indicators and actions are suggested to help meet the AEA school readiness ToC. It is important to keep in mind that these lists may not be applicable to all contexts and neither are they to be used as a package. Certain indicators and activities shall be selected and adapted according to the scope, aims, and coverage of each SR project. The lists are to facilitate a better perception of the type of steps and strategies to consider when and if the context allows.

The following suggestions can help project managers in adapting the relevant indicators and activities:

1. Begin by analyzing the context and needs to prioritize at least one – preferably two – of the three elements of the AEA SR/ToC (knowledge, contact, equal opportunities)
2. Select a few indicators and activities that best relate to the priority areas of SR in your context
3. Discuss internally and decide on the main and specific objectives; review your capacities and resources for implementation; conduct a baseline; design your SR project, and adapt indicators and activities accordingly
4. Consider planning a brainstorming session or an awareness-raising event in which your target groups can participate; revise your project design according to the feedback of these groups, if needed
5. Produce and disseminate child-friendly materials (pamphlets/banners) highlighting the benefits of SR and your project activities among target groups
6. Use spot checks or systematic monitoring methods (field visits/informant interviews/focus groups) to track change
7. Evaluate the change in your target groups through participatory methods of data collection (focus groups/semi-structured interviews); report on good practices and lessons learnt; share knowledge within your immediate and extended professional networks
8. Draw on lessons learnt to revise the design and/or implementation of your projects

SECTION 1: KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

By defining key concepts, this section constitutes the theoretical basis of the AEA SR projects and aims to create a common ECCE/SR understanding and language across different country teams.

Early Childhood: defined as the period from birth to eight years old, when children go through remarkable growth (height/weight) and brain development. This is a critical period during which children are highly influenced by their surrounding environment and people.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): forms the foundation of a lifelong learning process during which children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills are developed – enabling them to become capable, caring, and responsible global citizens in future. At project level, ECCE is a particularly effective way in integrating disadvantaged and minority children; at national/ provincial levels, it is an effective investment towards improving early years' literacy and completion rates.

Rights-based Child-friendly Schools: UNICEF has developed a framework for rights-based, child-friendly educational systems and schools that are characterized as "inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities – and children" (Shaeffer, 1999[1]). A child-friendly school (CFS) is a holistic approach that recognizes children's rights and works to fulfill these rights. It addresses challenges of educational access, quality, and management through advocacy, capacity development, service delivery, and partnerships.

Specifically, CFS is:

Inclusive:

- Does not exclude, discriminate, or stereotype based on differences
- Provides free and compulsory education that is affordable and accessible – especially to families and children at risk of marginalization
- Respects diversity and ensures equality of learning among all children (e.g., girls, children from ethnic or other minorities, those affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, as well as internally displaced and refugee children
- Responds to diversity by meeting the differing circumstances and needs of children (e.g., based on gender, social class, ethnicity, and ability level)

Effective for learning:

- Promotes good-quality teaching and learning processes with individualized instruction appropriate to children's development level, abilities, and learning style through active and collaborative learning methods
- Provides structured content and good-quality materials and resources
- Enhances teacher capacities in CFS, and their commitment to child protection
- Promotes quality learning outcomes by defining and helping children learn what and how to learn

Healthy and protective of children:

- Ensures a healthy, hygienic, and safe learning environment with adequate water and sanitation facilities
- Provides health services such as nutritional supplementation and counselling
- Promotes life and green skills
- Enhances physical and socio-emotional health of teachers and learners alike
- Helps to defend and protect all children from abuse and harm
- Provides positive psychological experiences for children

Gender-sensitive:

- Promotes gender equality in enrolment and achievement
- Eliminates gender stereotypes
- Guarantees girl-friendly facilities, curricula, textbooks, and teaching/learning processes
- Socializes girls and boys in a non-violent environment
- Encourages respect for others' rights, dignity, and equality

Involved with children, families, and communities:

- Child-centered: promoting child participation in all aspects of school life
- Family-focused: working to empower families as the child's primary caregivers and educators and helping children, parents, and teachers in establishing harmonious, mutually respectful relationships
- Community-based: encouraging local partnerships in education, connecting communities and their members to learn, collaborate, and ensure the fulfilment of children's rights and wellbeing

In short, a rights-based child-friendly school is:

- **Child-seeking**: actively identifying excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning processes; treating children as subjects with rights and the states as duty bearers with obligations to fulfil these rights; promoting and helping to monitor the rights and wellbeing of all children in the community
- **Child-centered**: acting in the best interests of children; leading to the realization of the child's full potential; concerned both about the "whole" child (including their health, nutritional status, and wellbeing) and about what happens to these children – in their families and communities – before they enter school and after they leave (UNICEF, 2012[2])

Equity, Equal Opportunity (Equality), and Diversity:

Equity is about fairness and inclusion in education so that all students have the resources necessary for a high-quality education according to their needs. When concerned with equity, you may ask: "Should students coming from poor and marginalized communities receive more support to ensure that they are included and can catch up with the schooling system?"

Equality is about ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity and is not treated differently or discriminated against because of their characteristics. In other words, equality means that no one should have poorer chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe in, or whether they have a disability. The question "Should every student have/receive the relevant textbooks according to their level of study?" is a matter of equality.

Diversity is about taking account of the differences between people and groups of people and placing a positive value on those differences. Diversity means celebrating and valuing how different we all are. This is strongly linked with promoting human rights and freedoms based on principles of dignity and respect. It is important to recognize that none of us fit neatly into separate "packages" based on which we might be labelled or discriminated against[3] .

In school readiness projects, diversity is an important topic to be taken into consideration. Respecting diversity in SR projects means raising awareness and knowledge among parents and teachers around the fact that children learn and develop differently. These differences shall not lead into labeling children but shall serve as a basis for tailoring teaching and assessment methods to encourage further development and wellbeing of all children.

Child Protection and Safeguarding:

Everyone has a responsibility to keep children from harm and abuse including parents, teachers, and communities. There are different forms of abuse and violence against children, including:

Neglect: This is harmful to the wellbeing of children as they are poorly taken care of by their caregivers. Cases of neglect can include poor hygiene, diet, being left alone at home[4]; and not being taken to school or medical appointments. Parents may neglect their children for different reasons and therefore need to be trained on different forms of neglect and their impacts on children. Note that neglect is not just a phenomenon among poor parents who may need to leave their children behind to work in neighboring countries or in factories outside their town. Unfortunately, neglect is a rather common form of abuse and can be even more frequently observed in rich families within developed and developing countries.

Physical abuse: When someone deliberately hurts, hits, or injures a child.

Emotional abuse: When someone shouts at, uses threats, or makes fun of a child to make that child feel frightened, worthless, or unloved. Exposure to scenes of violence between parents or other people in their home/surrounding environment can also be harmful for children.

Sexual abuse: Where someone influences, involves, or forces a child to look at or take part in sexual activities. This could include encouraging unwanted touching, sexual harassment, involving a child in watching pornography or forcing a child or young person under the age of consent to have sex.

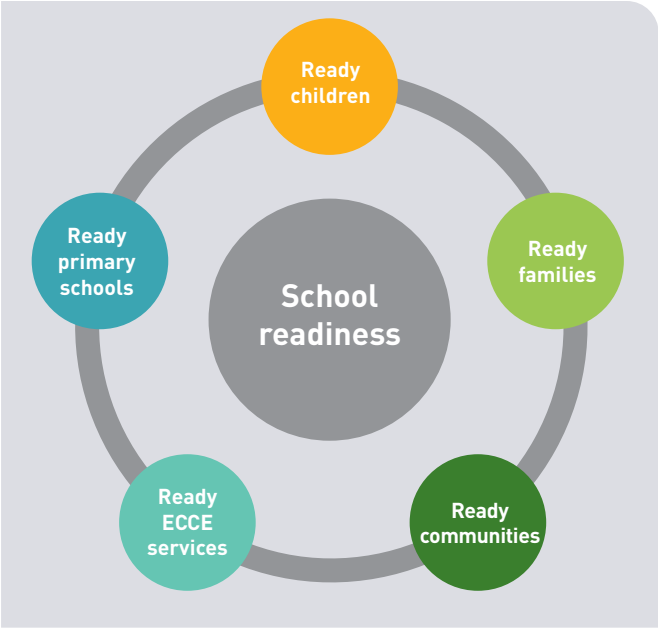


Figure 1: The main actors of school readiness

School Readiness:

School readiness is about children entering formal primary education with the social, emotional, cognitive and language competencies/skills necessary to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences. Thereafter, to successfully learn and progress to later stages of learning, and to become capable and responsible citizens.

For children to be school ready, it is necessary that caregivers, teachers, and communities collaborate to provide nurturing and enabling environments where all children can enjoy cognitive stimulation, emotional security, physical safety and health, and safely pass through the transition period between home and school. In short, school readiness is about "gaining skills and competences" plus "transition and continuity".

The process of school readiness for children starts in early years and continues into early grades of primary school – when children need to interact with their new surrounding environment, peers, and adults. However, school readiness is not merely about academic achievement, nor is it about children adapting to schools.

School readiness is as much – or even more – about schools and families having the capacity and knowledge to adapt to the academic, cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical needs of children to help them learn and prosper.

School readiness can facilitate successful enrolment, adjustment, progress, and achievement of children – particularly those from marginalized or minority backgrounds.

The main actors in school readiness include children; families/caregivers; schools/teachers; and communities. This is shown in Figure 1 (© Juliette Torabian, 2019).

Transition and continuity:

Transition happens when children/students leave one social context and enter another, for example from home to ECCE and from ECCE to primary education. In general, in the course of a transition period, three stages take place:

- The first phase is characterized by a detachment from an earlier social structure: in SR projects, this is when a child moves from home to ECCE or primary education and refers to the level of preparedness, attitudes, and reactions of children, family members, and teachers
- The second phase is the transition phase when the child is in the process of developing different identities that match both the new social environment (ECCE services/school) and the old one (home). This phase also includes other shifts, including: **a)** caregivers getting used to this new lifestyle change and learning to collaborate and interact with an external, different socio-cultural and educational system; **b)** teachers at pre-primary and primary education accepting that they are interlinked and that their combined approaches and activities can hinder/promote children's development and adjustment; and **c)** communities' socio-cultural resources and support systems that adapt to provide for better development and wellbeing among children, families, and teachers
- The third and final phase is the re-incorporation of children, families, teachers, and communities into a new social relationship that nurtures safety, security, respect, inclusiveness, and equity – hence accommodating socio-cultural and educational needs of all parties as they assume new identities and responsibilities

In developing SR projects, it is significant to think of transition as a period of change and continuity. Prevailing elements, such as relationships and resources, can be drawn upon to help shape a new range of roles and responsibilities and create a smooth, safe transition for all actors involved. The main questions on transition and continuity include:

- Are ECCE services and primary schools creating enabling, inclusive child-friendly environments in a continuous and harmonious manner through, e.g., their curriculum or teaching/assessment methods?
- Are communities providing in/formal resources and supporting families with young children?
- Are children enabled to adjust and progress in learning environments?
- Are families/caregivers capable of assuming a balance between their roles as caregivers and as social partners to schools or within communities?

Do no harm principles:

Project interventions – including SR projects – may have adverse impacts on target groups. It is, therefore, recommended to systematically address the following questions to avoid harming actors/beneficiaries:

- What are the potential risks involved in selecting areas and participants (ethnic and religious background/gender)?
- What are the drivers and sources of tension between communities and families?
- How could my project impact on such drivers of tension?
- Who would benefit from the implementation of my project? Are benefits equally distributed among community members, caregivers, teachers, and children as the main target groups?
- How will relationships (schools/caregivers/children/communities) be affected by the project?
- How best can I adjust my programme to include those marginalized and excluded without doing further harm?
- Are there any socio-cultural rules that I should be aware of in order to decrease harm to SR actors?
- How will my intervention affect gender and power relations?
- Will my project create further conflicts or better collaboration among SR actors?
- Is my approach inclusive, respectful of local norms and traditions? Is it rights-based and fair and is it providing equal opportunities among target groups?
- Is my project facilitating awareness and reinforcement of child protection, child-friendly schooling, inclusion, equity, and equality?

Holistic education:

A holistic education draws on principles of a whole child approach and subsequently gives equal importance to educational, emotional, social, cognitive, and moral needs of children rather than simply focusing on their academic achievement. Adapting a holistic approach in designing school readiness projects means:

- Emphasizing "learning by doing" through play and arts
- Shifting curriculum and pedagogy towards a whole child approach and child-friendly concepts
- Providing regular opportunities for caregivers, teachers, and communities to work together and exchange in non-violent manners
- Facilitating understanding of meaningful and active learning as opposed to rote learning
- Emphasizing collaboration and coordination instead of competition and conflict
- Raising awareness of social responsibility and democracy
- Integrating both ECCE services and primary schools in curriculum development processes to ensure continuity and transition
- Promoting teamwork, socialization, and sharing among children as well as other actors
- Replacing learning from textbooks with other varied learning resources
- Creating lifelong learners among all SR actors
- Helping shift assessment and teaching/learning processes to include all children
- Assisting children to become confident, self-directed learners, plus active and capable citizens

Regional vulnerabilities:

Certain vulnerabilities persist in the Asia-Pacific region that can have a negative impact on children and their school readiness skills or competences. Birth registration is a primary cause of persistent disadvantages for many children in the region, particularly among those already deprived and/or marginalized. Obviously, without proper documents, unregistered children do not gain access to basic health and education services. Disabilities and development delays are also among the factors that lead to exclusion of children, particularly among poor families – therefore a vital part of holistic quality ECCE programmes is to reach out to these children before primary level.

Another common obstacle to accessing and participating in ECCE services for many children of the region is the fact that the language of instruction is different from their mother tongue. This creates a divide between urban and rural, as well as ethnic/linguistic minorities and indigenous groups (the region is home to 1,000 different ethnic groups and more than 1,600 spoken languages).

Another source of discrimination is poverty. As a form of capability deprivation, this causes further marginalization due to a lack of economic and/or cultural capital. Poverty creates a vicious circle that undermines health, nutrition, hygiene, education and growth/development of children. Migration and internal displacement are among vulnerabilities in the region due to conflicts, violence, and/or climate change effects. The issues of gender inequality and different forms of violence are also prevalent – to different degrees – across the region.

In short, vulnerable children are usually those facing particularly challenging circumstances who are deprived from their basic rights to health, education, and wellbeing.

Examples of vulnerable children in the Asia-Pacific region – according to UNESCO – include:

- Children from ethnic/language groups
- Orphans and other vulnerable children including those affected by HIV/AIDS
- Children from poor households
- Girls, especially from vulnerable groups
- Children living with disabilities
- Children affected by violence (at home/at school/ within the community)
- Children affected by conflict (refugees and internally displaced persons)
- Children affected by natural or man-made disasters
- Children living in urban slums or street children
- Children living in hard-to-reach rural/remote areas
- Children living in pastoralist/nomadic communities

Theory of Change:

Theory of Change (ToC) is the entire process that defines the long-term objectives of a programme, then maps backwards to identify what will be done and how the programme's goals are expected to be achieved.

The AEA school readiness theory of change was developed, discussed and agreed upon by all participants from AEA offices in Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and China during their training between 11-13 September 2019. The AEA SR/ToC is based on three main drivers for change:

1. **Contact**: a combination of socio-economic circumstances – time, place, language, etc. – that influences rights-based and equal interactions among target group families, schools/ECCE services, and communities that can undermine and/or hinder SR among actors
2. **Knowledge**: a misperception of roles and responsibilities in SR and a total/partial lack of knowledge surrounding the importance of SR and ECCE – as well as child rights, safeguarding standards, and CFS – among different actors
3. **Opportunity**: a combination of socio-economic circumstances – language, time, place – that can exclude and marginalize some communities, families, and children compared to others – causing grievances and chronic deprivations of rights, dignity and capabilities

How Does Theory of Change Work?

ToC maps out the initiative through the following stages:

- Identifying long-term goals
- Backwards mapping and connecting the preconditions necessary to achieve SR goals
- Identifying and verifying basic assumptions about the context

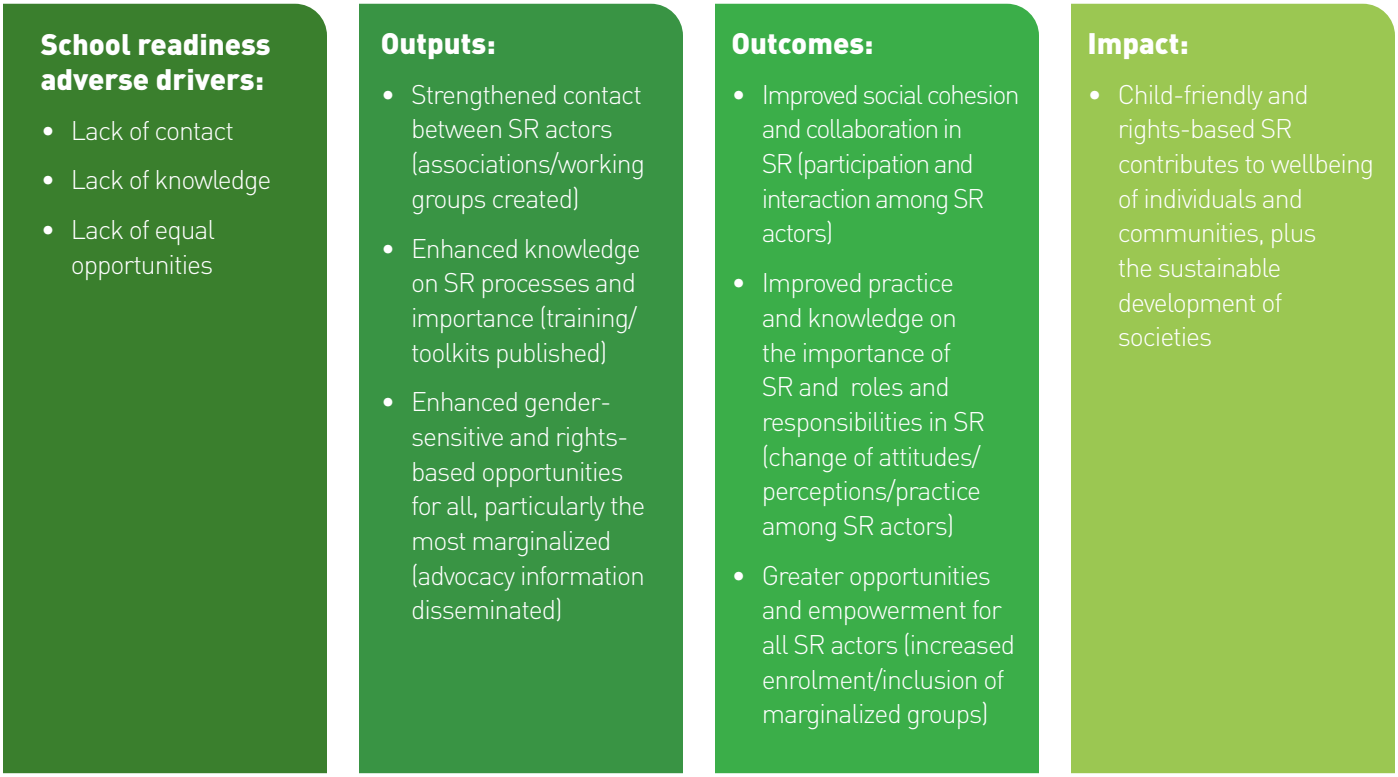


Figure 2: Theory of Change

- Identifying the project interventions that will be pursued to create the desired change
- Designing the SR project
- Developing indicators to measure project outcomes and assess performance
- Writing a narrative to explain the logic of the initiative

It is up to the ECCE project manager to conduct a first analysis of the context and needs, pinpoint what "needs to be changed" and work their way backwards to design the most relevant project – within the limit of their resources and capacities. Once this change pathway is clear, it's time to design the project and define outputs, outcomes, and their indicators to monitor progress towards the desired change. The factors in need of change might be: lack of contact, lack of knowledge, lack of equal opportunities, a combination of two or all three.

School readiness project components:

Needs assessment is an exercise to identify if and what needs exist (contact, knowledge, and opportunities) among SR actors to inform project design and to decide how best such needs can be addressed.

Baseline study is a collection and analysis exercise to measure conditions/knowledge/opportunities among SR target groups before a project starts for later comparison during the process of monitoring and evaluation.

Situation analysis is the combination of an informal learning from the context and a formal engagement in reviewing and analyzing the context prior to project implementation. Situation analysis gathers information on four main areas:

- The SR challenge in a given context, its severity, and its causes
- The actors affected by a particular SR shortcoming
- The broad context (regional/national/local) in which the SR issue exists

Figure 3: The process towards change

- Socio-cultural, political, and economic factors inhibiting or facilitating behavior change towards SR among different actors.

Stakeholder mapping is to identify any institution or individual with interest, power, and impact on the project. In designing school readiness projects, it is important to map all stakeholders and engage/inform them according to their levels of involvement and impact on the processes of project design and implementation as discussed during the training.

Logical framework is a way of presenting a project in a comprehensive and understandable form. The logical framework includes: overall objective and specific objectives of the project and its relevant outputs, outcomes, activities and indicators as well as risks and means of verification.

Outputs are direct productions or services of a school readiness project delivered to the stakeholders in order to achieve the desired outcomes. These include: training of teachers or caregivers; development of community-level or national practice plans/policy documents; dissemination of information; legislations on ECCE/SR; and awareness-raising interventions.

Outcomes are specific changes a school readiness project is expected to create in the practice and lives of the target groups. These include changes in teachers' practices based on CFS; improved health and hygiene among children; and increased awareness of SR among caregivers and communities.

NOTE: Outputs are easier to monitor and achieve compared to outcomes that are partially – or sometimes even less – under the control of the project manager. They depend on external factors, including the institutional and individual motivations for change against established methods and ways of doing/being.

Indicators are the instruments to measure progress towards defined outputs and outcomes. Output indicators show whether and to what extent outputs are achieved but do not provide information on the effect that is brought about by the project. These are usually quantitative indicators, for example: the number of teachers attending a training; the number of children participating in ECCE; the number of community-based organizations that work on ECCE/SR. Performance indicators are usually indicators of change or the desired outcomes of a SR project. These show whether and to what extent as the result of the project target groups' lives, power, rights, capabilities and wellbeing have changed. These include better understanding of SR; ease of access to ECCE services; higher participation of marginalized children and families; women's participation in community-based decision making; and improved contact among caregivers and communities. All indicators shall be SMART, i.e., Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Relevant; and Time-Bound.

Monitoring is "the ongoing, systematic collection of information to assess progress towards the achievement of objectives, outcomes and impacts," OECD-DAC (2002)[5].

Evaluation is "the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results, with the aim to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability." (ibid)

SECTION 2:
DEFINING READY CHILDREN

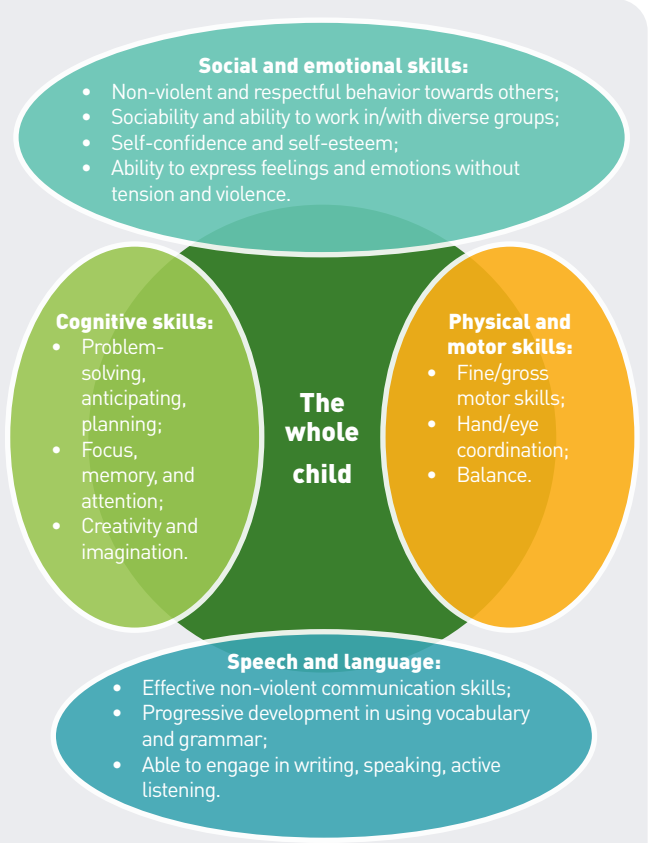


Figure 4: The whole child approach

This section focuses on school readiness among children and includes:

- Definition of **ready children**, their growth, and development
- Needs assessment checklist for SR project design;
- Child development skills checklist (3-4 years and 5-6 years old)
- Sample indicators, outputs, outcomes and activities for ready children based on the AEA SR/ToC

Defining ready children:

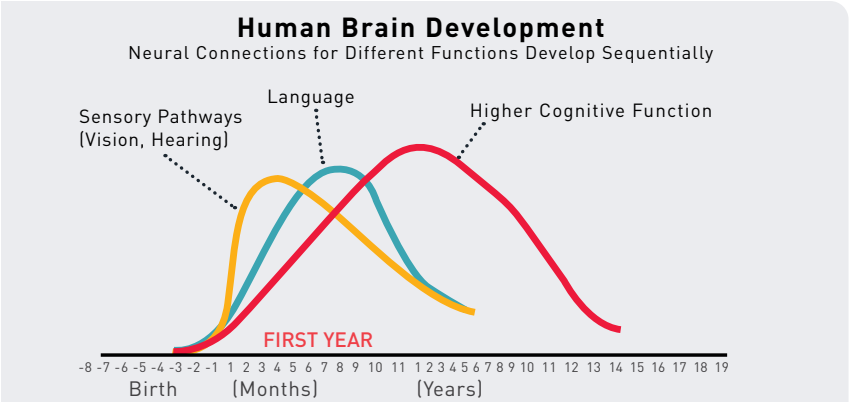
Children are considered ready for school[6] according to a range of behaviours, skills, and abilities they have when entering primary school. A general understanding exists around four main development skills among children – based on a whole child approach (Figure 4):

- **Social**: abilities/skills to form healthy relations with others, to show resilience, and to be able to interact with others (adults/peers) in a non-violent manner
- **Emotional**: abilities/skills to perceive, regulate, and integrate emotion in self-expression and thoughts
- **Physical**: gross motor (whole body/core muscles skills) and fine motor (finger and hand skills) as well as general physical health
- **Cognitive**: skills such as language (receptive/expressive), higher order function such as problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, planning, and anticipating

In many cases social and emotional skills are combined and presented as one category, while language skills are divided from other cognitive skills due to their importance in children's learning processes. This is shown in Figure 4.

NOTE: School readiness shall be understood in a holistic way – and as a continuous process – during which children accumulate knowledge and build on simple skills to perform in more complex ways across different domains of development. Developing skills in each of these domains is affected by the environment in which children grow and "normal" levels of development differ across cultures, ethnic, and religious groups, even among families. Therefore, the list of school readiness skills provided in this toolkit does not serve as a normative tool but as a general framework for the type of skills/abilities that can demonstrate children's school readiness.

School readiness is about a combination of healthy growth and development skills. Growth is normally characterized by a progressive curve indicating gain in size, height, and weight. Child development, on the other hand, is an interactive and complex process of change in cognitive, emotional, social capacities of a child as shown in the graph in Figure 5[7].



Source: In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

Figure 5: Human brain development

READY CHILDREN: NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FOR SR PROJECT DESIGN:

The following provides a non-exhaustive list that can be drawn upon during the needs analysis phase of school readiness projects based on AEA SR/ToC:

Questions	Yes	No
LACK OF CONTACT:		
Are children in contact with their peers (pre-primary/primary) to learn school readiness skills through supervised and regular meet-ups including, for example, in schools and during field visits?		
Are children in contact with adults (caregivers/teachers/community members) in a safe, harmless, nurturing, and enabling environment according to child rights, protection, and CFS?		
Are teachers, managers, and staff from pre-primary and early primary years participating in regular joint events, conferences, and meetings as part of a community of practice (CoP)[8] to discuss CFS, children's wellbeing, development needs, challenges, and health and safety?		
Are there associations that organize and monitor regular meetings between caregivers and teachers (pre-primary/primary) to raise awareness on responsibilities and roles of each actor in school readiness, create collaboration and dialogue between school and home, and address ethical or child protection concerns, if cases occur at home and/or in school?		
Are there social events and institutions where issues of children's school readiness can be discussed, monitored, and revised between caregivers and community leaders – so they can arrive at a common understanding and develop response plans?		
Are members of marginalized communities and ethnic minorities integrated/invited to participate in community/school events?		
What are the main obstacles towards availability and equal participation of all community members, caregivers, and teachers in the project's events/training? How can these be addressed in the project design (time/resources/frequency)?		
Is there an online platform, offline application, or a radio/TV programme available to help increase contact and exchange among SR actors?		

Questions	Yes	No
LACK OF KNOWLEDGE:		
Do statistics and information exist on ECCE/SR?		
Is the available data disaggregated based on gender, age, ethnicity, linguistic minorities and/or disabilities?		
Are there already established national, local or community-level plans/indicators on ECCE and CFS? Are these operational?		
Do reports exist on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child?[9]		
Are there general trends of challenges reported for the specific context of the project delivery?		
Are children familiar with and developing school readiness skills (use the checklist to determine the answer to this question)		
Are they learning about schooling from their peers through role plays, theatre, joint artistic projects, etc.?		
Are they aware of their rights? Are they trained on defending their rights and reporting cases of violence/aggression?		
Are adults aware and trained on CFS, child rights, minimum standards of child protection, child psychology, health and hygiene, nutrition, global citizenship, school bullying, gender equality and STEM for girls, or environmental and social safeguarding for the future of children?		
LACK OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:		
Do children from rural/urban suburbs, ethnic/religious/linguistic minorities, migrant/refugee communities, and other marginalized backgrounds have equal access to high quality, affordable, and sustainable ECCE services and primary education?		
Do boys and girls have equal access and completion rates at pre-primary and primary? Which group is affected by unequal opportunities and why?		
Are children with disabilities and special needs included in pre-primary/primary education?		
Are ECCE centres and primary schools following CFS principles?		
Do children benefit from free community services that can help them be ready for school?		
Are children victims of abuse, violence, displacement, labor, or any form of exploitation?		
Are their rights to health and education safeguarded in policies/local practices?		
Do children have access to storybooks and libraries to help with their early reading literacy – particularly if they come from ethnic/linguistic minorities?		
Do children benefit from/participate in storytelling activities that can enhance their understanding of "others"?		
Do they have equal access to educational toys and artistic tools – even if not sophisticated amphitheatres – but simple things like crayons, canvas, colour pencils and papers, etc.?		
Do they have equal access to safe places to play and learn by doing?		
Are children given a voice or do socio-cultural norms limit their freedom of expression and engagement?		
Do children suffer from malnutrition, stunting, chronic illnesses, or HIV/AIDS?		
Are they affected by a lack of economic capital (financial poverty), cultural or social capital or a combination of these?		
Are children affected by climate change, natural and man-made disasters?		

Once the needs of the target groups, i.e., children, are assessed, it is time to assess your own (individual, team, and organizational) assets and resources in order to design and successfully implement the overall and specific aims/ expected outcomes of your SR project. This can help to minimize risk and improve performance.

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FOR SR PROJECT DESIGN:

Questions	Yes	No
Does the project fit within the mandate of my institution/department?		
Does my organisation meet the legal requirements for operation in the country/rural and urban areas/schools/ECCE services?		
Are my colleagues and managers ready and willing to implement the project?		
Have I kept them regularly informed about the progress of the project?		
Are colleagues/managers directly involved in the project? Which ones?		
Do they have credentials, knowledge, and competences in ECCE/SR? Is their current workload manageable to take on further responsibility in this new project?		
Have I clearly communicated details of project, drawing on the collective intelligence of the team to revise scope, coverage, and aims?		
Do we need to hire consultants or a project manager at any stage of the programme to develop capacities on ECCE/SR internally?		
Do we have the resources and the space to accommodate a new colleague, if specialist knowledge is required at any stage?		
Do I have the necessary ECCE/SR and project knowledge/ competences and time to lead the implementation of this project?		
Do we have the necessary technical infrastructure (equipment, software, databases, etc.) for the successful implementation of the project?		
Do we have sufficient administrative staff and facilities to deal with the project?		
Can any of my organization's procedures/rules interfere with and/or slow down progress?		
Can I draw on the capacities of networks/platforms/coalitions to implement the project?		

CHILD DEVELOPMENT SKILLS CHECKLISTS (3–4/5–6 YEARS OLD)

The following is a guide – but not a norm-setting checklist – on the skills that children of 5–6 years may have to be considered school-ready.

NOTE: The list is not exhaustive. Children can have different levels of development in each domain and their overall skills/abilities are what can make them school ready. Children have multiple intelligences including musical/rhythmic; visual/spatial; verbal/linguistic; logical/mathematical; interpersonal; intrapersonal; bodily/kinesthetics; and naturalistic. This indicates that they may learn and develop differently within the contexts of their homes, schools, and communities.

A child is considered ready if they meet most or a good part of the skills in the checklist. The aim of the SR project can be defined as helping children move from emerging readiness to demonstrating readiness.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT **The child is able to:**	**Emerging**	**Approaching**	**Demonstrating**
Show independence and feel comfortable without the presence of an adult			
Separate easily from the caregiver at drop-off			
Have self-esteem and feel competent			
Accept authority and follow simple rules – at home and at school			
Be independent in dressing, eating, and going to the bathroom			
Express feeling in a non-violent and healthy manner			
Work on tasks independently			
Ask questions and seek help when necessary – not simply when attempting to seek attention			
Follow certain routines at home and at school			
Cope with disappointments without violence			
Show perseverance and determination when working on a task			

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT **The child is able to:**	**Emerging**	**Approaching**	**Demonstrating**
Take turns and share with others			
Form healthy and non-violent relationships with peers			
Socialize with all peers but also have a closer circle of peers/friends			
Take responsibility to lead and/or to follow a group depending on the task			
Handle conflict non-violently			
Show social manners (saying thank you; sorry; please; etc.)			
Respect and work with peers regardless of their backgrounds, appearances, disabilities			
Work, play and win/lose as part of a team			
PHYSICAL AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT **The child is able to:**	**Emerging**	**Approaching**	**Demonstrating**
Gross motor skills			
Run easily, climb and move with agility			
Balance when walking along a beam			
Distinguish between left and right			
Throw and catch a ball			
Hop on one leg and both legs			
Maintain balance while standing on one leg for a few seconds			
Dance and move rhythmically to music			
Sit on a chair or on the floor without flopping over			
Fine motor skills			
Hold and use a pencil or other writing tools			
Hold and use a pair of scissors			
Cut along straight and curved lines			
Use fingers to do pasting, cutting, tearing, placing pegs, etc.			
Hold and manipulate small things using all fingers			

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT **The child is able to:**	**Emerging**	**Approaching**	**Demonstrating**
Recognize shapes and colors			
Build a jigsaw puzzle			
Detect similarities and differences in a picture			
Distinguish foreground and background in a picture			
Estimate, anticipate, plan, and evaluate			
Group and classify objects and intangible information			
Copy patterns and shapes (easy to difficult)			
Know numbers and be able to do basic calculations			
Understand and be able to show concepts such as more/less; first/second; big/small; longer/shorter			
Solve problems individually and as part of a group			
Memorize and recite short songs/stories; movements; play roles			
Have a notion of time (weekdays, seasons, time of the day)			
Follow verbal/visual/aural instructions			
Listen to stories and recall events in sequence, answer questions about the characters, and use their imagination to finish the story or use the characters to make a new story			
Recognize letters of the alphabet and their sounds			
Read through picture books and tell the story			
Participate in discussions and activities			
Remember what they have learned before and connect it to new themes based on a well-designed sequential curriculum and syllabus			
Complete tasks individually or as part of a group			

Normally from the above list, the checklist for children of 3–4 years (in good health and without disabilities) can be extracted, too. It will simply be the same list with fewer and a simplified range of skills. The checklist below provides an understanding of the progress children can make in achieving the school-ready skills listed above.

NOTE: The list below is not exhaustive and only represents some of the skills children may have progressively developed between the age of 3 and 4. It is, therefore, more relevant to 'kindergarten readiness'.

3 years old	4 years old	Never	Sometimes	Often
Can draw a circle based on a model	Can draw a circle without a model			
Can cut a piece of paper into half	Can cut a piece of paper into four equal parts			
Can draw a line along printed dots to form vertical, horizontal and circular shapes	Can look at models and copy shapes and lines without pre-printed dots			
Can sort objects	Can sort objects based on color or shape or size			
Can un/fasten big buttons	Can get un/dressed without too much help			
Can cut a straight line or a big circle with help	Can cut a big circle without help			
Can use a tool for writing or eating with help	Can use a pen, a fork or a chopstick without help			
Knows their first name	Knows their first and family names			
Can say a few letters of alphabet	Can say a list of letters in the alphabet, or more			
Understands and follows simple instructions and routines	Has developed a habit in following instructions			
Can play and share with others	Can imagine, lead, and engage in teamwork			
Can recognize and repeat words, short sentences, story characters, music pieces, and dance positions	Can remember and recite words, shorts stories, etc			
Can distinguish notions of time; after/before; day/night	Can understand time in a more detailed way			

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS, INDICATORS, AND OUTCOMES

ToC	Activities	Outputs	Indicators	Outcomes
Lack of contact	1. Organize quarterly "learning by doing" sessions between preschool children and early graders (1st & 2nd) C2C 2. Advocate and establish CoP for preschool/primary school teachers in target regions/ communities 3. Establish and support inter-community/caregivers' association	Strengthened contact between SR actors (children, teachers, caregivers, communities) through: • Regular meetings • Established CoPs • Established parent/ teacher and/or caregiver/community associations	1. Change in frequency and interaction between peers (C2C) 2. Change in percentage of interactions between preschool/primary school teachers 3. Change in percentage of SR actors viewing their community as socially cohesive	Improved social cohesion and trust. Improved collaboration among SR actors. Improved inclusion of all SR actors.
Lack of knowledge	1. Design and deliver training on CFS for preschool and primary school teachers 2. Design awareness-raising campaigns for caregivers on child development/CFS/ nutrition/health/etc. 3. Design and deliver teachers and/or community guidelines ECCE/SR	Capacity development/ training delivered on CFS/ ECCE/WASH etc. among: • Preschool/primary school teachers • Caregivers • Community members	1. Change in percentage of teachers reporting enhanced knowledge and change in practice 2. Change in percentage of families reporting being competent and confident in CFS 3. Percentage of community members reporting enhanced knowledge in ECCE/SR	Improved practice and knowledge on the importance of SR and roles and responsibilities in SR.
Lack of equal opportunities	1. Identify and reach out to the most marginalized and minority groups 2. Raise awareness and deliver training workshops on challenges and inclusive methods among teachers 3. Develop strategic plans in collaboration with schools/ communities to include the identified marginalized children/caregivers in ECCE/ SR activities	• X number of families/ regions identified • Awareness-raising workshops delivered • Inclusive strategic plans jointly developed in collaboration with schools / communities	1. Change in percentage of marginalized children and communities integrated in ECCE/SR activities 2. Change in percentage in teachers' practice to include minorities and address their needs in teaching/learning 3. Percentage of SR actors' perception of equality (reduced grievances)	Greater opportunities and empowerment for all SR actors. Enhanced perception of inclusion and equality.

IMPACT OF SR ACTORS ON CHILDREN AND THEIR LEARNING/DEVELOPMENT (UNICEF, CFS MANUAL, 2009)

EC Years	Home setting	Community setting	School setting
0–3	Is caring (health, nutrition, hygiene, water, sanitation), stimulating, interactive, gender sensitive. Provides appropriate play and reading materials. Keeps a smoke-free indoor environment.	Provides health, hygiene, nutrition, water, sanitation, social welfare services. Provides access to energy for cooking, community gardens for food. Provides parenting programmes.	Provides child-to-child programmes, teaching schoolchildren how to care for and play with their young siblings.
3–5	Is caring (health, nutrition, hygiene, water, sanitation), stimulating, interactive, gender sensitive. Provides appropriate play and reading materials. Keeps a smoke-free indoor environment.	Provides community-based quality childcare centers. Ensures early learning in safe, protective, stimulating settings. Provides access to energy for cooking, community gardens for food.	Supports early learning programmes in the community by providing professional guidance, training and criteria. Provides safe, healthy environment with access to water, sanitation, food, and energy.
5–6	Is caring (health, nutrition, hygiene, water, sanitation), stimulating, interactive, gender sensitive; promoting child's development and preparedness for school. Provides appropriate play and reading materials. Keeps a smoke-free indoor environment.	Provides safe, protective center-based group learning opportunities. Prepares children for schooling. Ensures that children are free from disease, undernutrition, abuse and exploitation.	Supports or provides group learning spaces. Collaborates with community and parents to create quality early learning centers. Provides safe, healthy environment with access to water, sanitation, food, and energy.
6–8	Is caring (health, nutrition, hygiene, water, sanitation), stimulating, interactive, gender sensitive. Encourages learning. Collaborates with teachers. Participates in school events. Provides appropriate play and reading materials. Is free of labor that prevents child from attending school. Keeps a smoke-free indoor environment.	Proximity provides safe route to school. Is protective. Ensures that children are physically, emotionally, and cognitively ready for school. Provides after-school programmes for children at risk of dropping out, faltering, or repeating. Engages children in environmental activities.	Is ready to receive the child and attend to individual needs. Ensures the child is physically, emotionally, and cognitively ready for school. Partners with parents to prepare children for a smooth transition to school. Relevant curriculum, teaching and learning processes employed.

A list of sample school readiness indicators is listed below to further help the implementation of the AEA SR projects. Note that each indicator may apply to more than one ToC depending on the designed activities and expected outcomes.

School readiness indicators (% of)
Children demonstrating school readiness at kindergarten entry in the development domains of social, emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, and motor and physical
Children enrolled in an early care and education programme
Children with special needs/disabilities enrolled in inclusive ECCE services/primary schools
Families spending time to read books to their children or play with them to help with SR skills
Increase of educational toys and picture books in households
Children entering regular school from special education ECCE
Children with regular visits to medical centres
Children with normal growth rates (lack or decrease in stunting/malnutrition/hygiene/health
Children with access to libraries and public services relevant to school readiness skills and competency development

A pre-school teacher in Lai Chau Province, northern Vietnam, decorates her classroom using recycled materials to create a child-friendly learning environment and support active learning. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.

SECTION 3:
READY TEACHERS AND ECCE/PRIMARY SERVICES

This section focuses on readiness among pre-primary and primary school teachers and includes:

- Defining **ready teachers** and **ready schools**
- Needs assessment checklist for ready teachers and **ready ECCE services/schools**
- Sample indicators, activities, outputs, and outcomes for ready teachers and ready ECCE services/schools
- Teachers' capacity development attributes

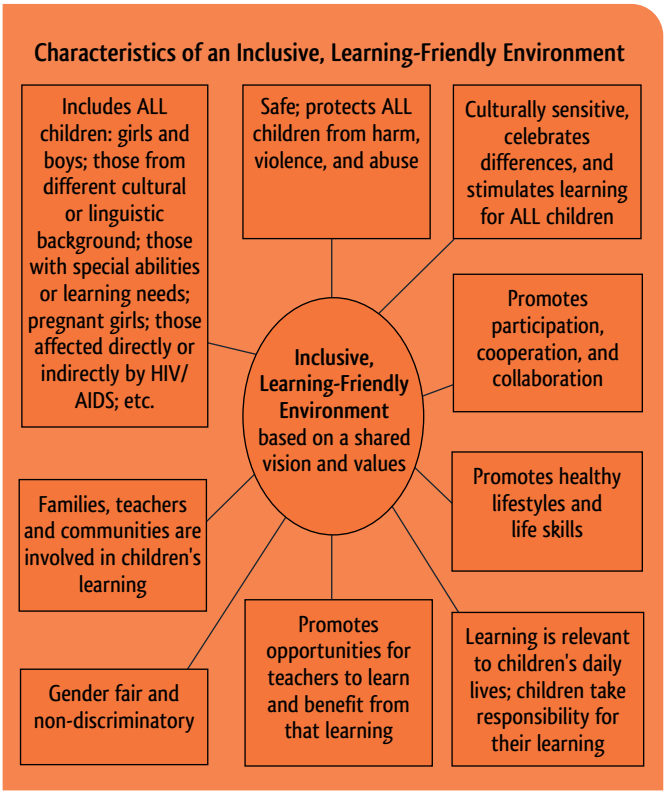


Figure 6: Characteristics of an inclusive, learning-friendly environment

Defining ready teachers and schools

Lack of readiness is no longer just a problem of children with insufficient skills to succeed in schools; rather, it is a mismatch between the attributes and capacities of children, families, ECCE services, and communities, and the ability/resources of schools and ECCE services, plus their teachers to suitably correspond and engage with each of these actors. It is important to change perceptions and understand that it is not for children to adapt to school but for schools/ECCE and their personnel to adapt to children – to their learning styles, their socio-emotional and cognitive needs.

Ready school/ECCE services refer to availability, accessibility, affordability, and adaptability[10] of programs, curricula, and services in both pre-primary and primary levels. Ready schools provide learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe and protective for all children; foster smooth transitions for children and their families; reach out to communities; are healthy and hygienic, inclusive and non-discriminatory; and follow child-centered methods of teaching/learning as shown in Figure 6.

Ready teachers are adult professionals with the necessary knowledge and competences to accommodate and respond to affective and cognitive needs of all children regardless of their backgrounds and can adapt their teaching and assessment practice to include all children and help them grow and develop in safe, nurturing, and enabling learning environments.

READY TEACHERS AND READY ECCE/SCHOOLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

The following provides a non-exhaustive list that can be drawn upon during the needs assessment phase in school readiness projects, focusing on ready pre-primary/primary school teachers and institutions based on AEA SR/ToC:

Questions	Yes	No
LACK OF CONTACT		
Do local teachers' unions exist? Are they operational and active?		
Are there any active CoPs?		
Are the unions/CoPs and other teacher-related institutions organizing regular meetings/events/professional development opportunities/knowledge sharing sessions, which encourage the participation of pre-primary and primary school teachers equally?		
Are there joint working groups created by teachers from different regions in the country?		
Are there online platforms and offline applications that provide discussion rooms for pre-primary and primary school teachers?		
Are there opportunities for other school staff to participate in awareness-raising or training opportunities?		
Are there networks of schools and ECCE services working together on thematic subjects such as: improving girls' education, early years' literacy, child rights, etc?		
LACK OF KNOWLEDGE		
Is there a national standard on the qualifications of pre-primary and primary school teachers?		
Is there a national/local code of practice/ethical guidelines for pre-primary/primary school teachers?		
Are all pre-primary and primary school teachers trained according to the national qualification framework before being hired?		
Does the teacher training curriculum contain any of the following subjects: CFS, child rights, child psychology and development; inclusive teaching/learning/assessment methods; equal opportunities and diversity; classroom management; syllabus design; addressing special needs in classrooms; child protection and violence against children (non-violent action and reporting); first aid, nutrition, health, social skills development through play; gender equality; green and life skills, etc.?		
Are teachers trained to adapt teaching and assessment methods to improve early years' literacy among all children?		
Are teachers trained on methods of advocacy and awareness-raising among colleagues, caregivers, and communities?		
Are teachers able to communicate properly in the language of instruction and/or the language of minorities?		
Are teachers aware of their ethical obligations and responsibilities towards children?		
Are there professional development opportunities for all teachers in preschool/primary schools as part of a national/local in-service training?		
Are these development opportunities free of charge for all teachers?		
Is there a major discrepancy in the knowledge and capacities of teachers in pre-primary and primary levels?		

Questions	Yes	No
LACK OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES		
Do preschool/primary schools provide access to clean water, lunchboxes, and toilets?		
Are school spaces child-friendly and accessible for all children?		
Are there enough and accessible storybooks/picture books for everyone?		
Are there libraries?		
Is there continuity in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE services and schools?		
Are ECCE services and schools safely separated – by fences, for example – to avoid safety and security risks for children?		
Can children play freely and learn inside – as well as outside – classrooms?		
Do teachers organize affordable and inclusive field visits/group trips or other recreation activities?		
Do teachers provide extra-curricular activities focusing on arts, music, group work, etc?		
Are there common standards or national regulations that oblige all preschool/primary schools to implement CFS and/or CRC?		
Are there cases of school-based violence and if so, how are these reported and dealt with?		
Are there legal/administrative support mechanisms in case of violence against children?		
Are there tailored programmes for ethnic and linguistic minorities to be integrated in the national education system at pre-primary and primary levels?		
Do teachers from different backgrounds have equal access to training and education to become teachers?		

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS, INDICATORS, AND OUTCOMES

ToC	Activities	Outputs	Indicators	Outcomes
Lack of contact	1. Establish joint working groups between preschool and primary school teachers and/or school manager/staff 2. Establish joint (teacher/caregiver) associations 3. Create/moderate online/offline discussion forums for teachers (pre-primary/primary)	• Thematic joint working groups established among preschool/primary school teachers • Parent/teachers associations established • Platforms created	1. Change in frequency and interaction between preschool/primary school teachers 2. Change in percentage of interactions between teachers/caregivers 3. Change in percentage of use/online presence of teachers	Improved and shared understanding of CFS etc. among teachers/caregivers. Improved collaboration and knowledge sharing among preschool/primary school teachers and caregivers.
Lack of knowledge	1. Design/deliver joint training for preschool/primary school teachers on topics such as CFS 2. Produce/deliver toolkits on CFS classroom strategies/assessment 3. Create inter-community learning CoPs (among all staff from pre-primary/primary)	• Joint training designed/delivered • Toolkits produced/delivered • CoPs created	1. Number of preschool/primary school teachers trained 2. Number of teachers equipped/with access to the toolkits 3. Number of teachers participating/covered by the activity in X period	Improved knowledge of CFS teaching and assessment methods as evidenced in change of practice. Improved knowledge on good practices/lessons learnt among members of the CoP.
Lack of equal opportunities	1. Identify teachers and teaching assistants from minority / marginalized backgrounds and share information on AEA activities in their region 2. Produce information brochures on AEA training (for preschool/primary school teachers) in minorities' languages 3. Translate training toolkits into minorities' mother tongue	• Minority teachers/assistants identified and informed • Brochures on capacity development activities of AEA produced in minorities' languages • Training toolkits translated into minorities' mother tongue	1. Percentage increase in minority teachers identified and informed 2. Number of teachers (pre-primary/primary school) from minority backgrounds with access to brochures 3. Percentage increase in the number of minority teachers included in training	Improved access and participation opportunities among pre-primary/primary school teachers from minority backgrounds. Decreased perceptions of grievances among minorities.

TEACHERS' CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (CPD) ATTRIBUTES:
(ALL CPD TRAINING SHOULD SATISFY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA)

Attributes	Yes	No
CPD requires ownership:		
Is the CPD valid/needed for all relevant stakeholders? Are they able to set common goals and formulate strategies? Is there a basic consensus on CPD strategy? Is the selected strategy the best entry point, given the situation analysis and needs assessment? Are all stages, sequences, and activities clear for participating stakeholders?		
CPD requires collaborative arrangements for effective decision making		
Is the CPD addressing organizational/behavioral/practice change? Are there particular political/socio-cultural concerns surrounding this change? Does the CPD have the required political and social support for implementation? Are all stakeholders clear on their roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the CPD? Do stakeholders have a common understanding of the issue of "lack of knowledge in SR"? Are decision-making processes informed by up-to-date, relevant, and accessible information?		
CPD is a continuous project that needs to build on existing structures/mechanisms		
Is the CPD in line with national ECCE policies, strategies, and government priorities? Is the CPD in line with the social and cultural norms and values of the target groups? Do CPD learning mechanisms allow information to accumulate and knowledge to be shared? Is the CPD reinforcing or operationalizing the existing ECCE policy frameworks – or is it showcasing the way forward? Can the CPD be scaled up as a reform process for other regions/contexts?		
CPD needs to be part of early project design activities for change, to be monitored and evaluated based on SMART indicators		
Is the CPD included/considered at the planning stage to ensure a holistic vision and strategic direction of other expected outcomes? Is the CPD providing equal opportunities for individuals/institutions from marginalized and minority backgrounds? Do individuals from selected target groups have equal access regardless of their sexual orientation, religion, ethnic/linguistic groups, age, and/or disabilities? Is a needs assessment carried out at the design phase? Is a baseline conducted to assess capacities at the start of the intervention? Are SMART indicators defined for the CPD to monitor progress? Is the CPD encouraging change in the practice/perceptions of SR actors? Is the CPD beneficial and relevant for all stakeholders? Has it changed anything in the wellbeing, safety, or health of children/families?		

SECTION 4:
DEFINING READY FAMILIES/ CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES

This section delineates the concept of readiness among caregivers and communities and includes:

- Defining **ready families/caregivers**
- Needs assessment checklist for ready families
- Needs assessment checklist for **ready communities**
- Sample indicator, output, and outcomes for ready families and communities
- Sample activities for ready families

Defining ready families/caregivers

The ready families dimension focuses on parental and caregivers' attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning, development and transition to school. Supportive parenting and stimulating home environments have been shown to be among the strongest predictors of school performance and child development during pre-primary and primary schooling.

Caregivers' educational goals, beliefs, attitudes and commitment are considered crucial for school success. Before entering schools, the most important development context for children is family. Families can have different compositions and can include any individual/s co-habiting with children, e.g., non/biological caregivers, siblings, extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. Each of these members, as well as their educational, socio-cultural, and economic resources and aspirations, can bear an impact – positive or negative – on a child's development.

It is important to realize that children's learning environments are not limited to schools and includes their family, community, and the wider society as shown in the graph below. Although teachers and ECCE practitioners influence children's learning, parents and caregivers also have a great – or perhaps a greater – impact on children's attitudes and propensity to learn in the early stages of their lives.

Readiness among families differs based on the elements mentioned above; however, generally a ready family is one that:

- Engages with the child through reading, singing songs, drawing, storytelling, and playing games
- Maintains a supportive and responsive relationships with the child to help them learn, gain confidence, and gradually grow independent
- Shows a commitment to ensure timely enrolment of young children in pre-primary/primary schooling
- Reaches out and maintains a positive relationship with the school and community to benefit the child's safety, security, inclusion, and wellbeing as part of this society

Ready communities:

Within a CFS approach to ECCE project design, particularly when targeting rural and remote areas, the role of communities is of the highest importance in re/building education, maintaining peace and safety, coordinating educational interventions, and even financing projects, e.g. teachers' development.

Ready communities provide the necessary in/formal resources to promote and facilitate wellbeing and development of children, in addition to supporting their families. For instance, one significant point is a child's right to education – which can be the basis of collaboration and coordination among communities, schools, and caregivers. Communities can support rights-based education by: advocacy; awareness raising; financing CFS training and schools; promoting

ethical codes of practice. In doing so, they can create a basis of trust and accountability among members of the community, teachers, and families. Some of the activities that ready communities pursue (with regards to ECCE/SR) include, but are not limited to:

1. Promoting children's rights and child-friendly teaching-learning practices at home and in schools
2. Organizing inclusive learning opportunities for all children
3. Giving a voice to children and reflecting their needs in decision making
4. Encouraging families' participation and facilitating progress and development of their children
5. Holding regular meetings with teachers and caregivers
6. Providing safe environments for children, teachers, and caregivers to work and mingle
7. Helping with formal registration of children (at birth/at school) – this is called community-based registration (CBR)
8. Creating synergies and incentives to involve caregivers in school decisions (parents/teachers associations – PTA)
9. Coordinating and conducting M&E on the progress of schools and families towards child-friendly learning environments
10. Reflecting local needs to national authorities

NOTE: When designing SR projects, remember the graph (Figure 7) below and think of ways in which AEA SR/ToC can be applied to each of these target groups.

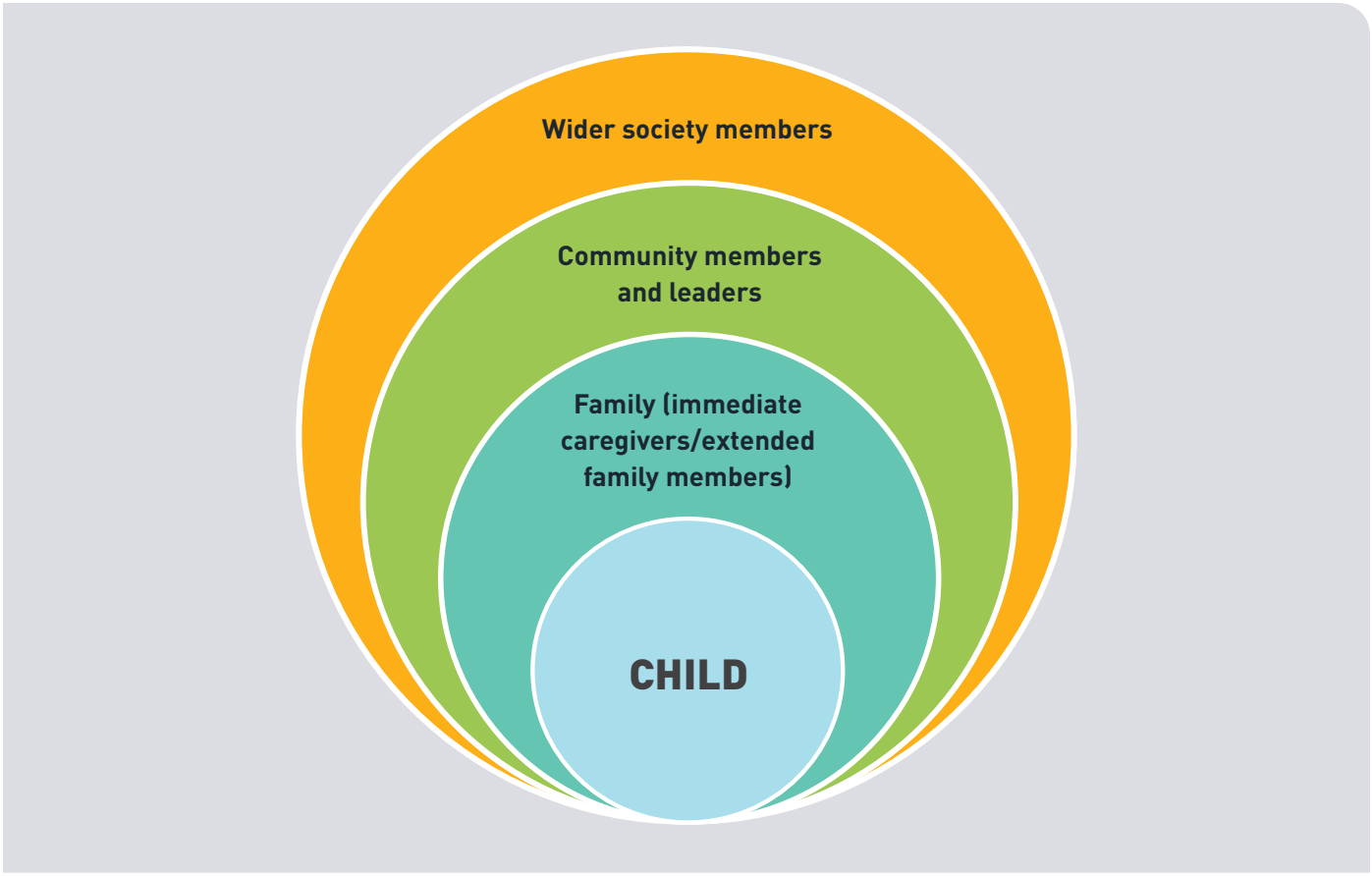


Figure 7

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLISTS

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST READY FAMILIES	Yes	No
Do they provide opportunities for family members to work with teachers and voice their concerns and needs?		
Do caregivers have the necessary knowledge and awareness about children's rights/school readiness/ development domains/the importance of supporting, reading, and playing with their children?		
Do they assume their share of responsibilities with regard to preparing children for school – or do they believe it's not their job, but the teachers' job, to educate children?		
What are their expectations of children's education, progress, and performance?		
Can they afford to/do they familiarize children with music, arts, and museums?		
Have they participated in training that can help them with their childcare skills?		
Do they have the necessary knowledge and skills with regards to general health, hygiene, nutrition, psychosocial and emotional needs of children?		
Do they participate in PTAs?		
Do they organize/participate in community-based activities?		
Do they have the necessary means (financial, educational, literacy) to help prepare children for school tasks as emotionally balanced, sociable and capable individuals?		
Are they aware of – and do they try to undo – gender norms that can undermine their children's capabilities? Do they treat and bring up their children in a gender-sensitive manner?		

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST READY COMMUNITIES	Yes	No
Do communities provide free services to support children and families?		
Do they have necessary knowledge on the importance of ECCE and SR?		
Do they help break gender norms or are they a source of gendered discrimination?		
Are they organizing/willing to organize events to raise awareness on children's rights, and gender issues?		
Do they have the financial capacity to fund community-based training for caregivers/teachers?		
Do they inform community members of the latest shifts in political, legal, administrative shifts that can have a positive/negative impact on their lives?		
Do they provide free services for child registration?		
Are their activities monitored and audited by a higher authority?		
Are they transparent and accountable towards community members?		
Are they prepared to manage and help community members in cases of natural and man-made disasters and to resume education of children?		

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS, INDICATORS, AND OUTCOMES

ToC	Activities	Outputs	Indicators	Outcomes
Lack of contact	1. Organize quarterly public events on ECCE-related topics for children/ caregivers/community leaders 2. Establish parent clubs with a focus of integrating the most vulnerable families 3. Establish inter-community working groups on ECCE/ SR	• Public events organized quarterly • Parent clubs created • Inter-community thematic working groups created	1. Change in percentage of the number/background of families participating in public events 2. Change in percentage of parents registered in clubs 3. Change in percentage of community members joining working groups	Improved and shared understanding of CFS etc. among families and community members. Improved collaboration between families and communities. Enhanced participation of parents in SR activities.
Lack of knowledge	1. Design/deliver intensive one-day workshops for caregivers 2. Produce/deliver toolkits on parenting for school readiness 3. Organize awareness-raising events/home visits	• Workshops designed/delivered • Toolkits produced/ delivered • Awareness/ advocacy events organized	1. Number of caregivers trained 2. Number of caregivers equipped/given access to toolkits 3. Number of homes visited/events organized	Improved knowledge of CFS among caregivers and community members/authorities. Improved understanding of SR/ ECCE.
Lack of equal opportunities	1. Organize public advocacy events on equal opportunities and inclusive education 2. Create mobile libraries/ movie displays to reach out to remote areas 3. Use technologies/radio programmes in ethnic minorities' language to deliver health/educational messages	• Advocacy events organized • Mobile libraries created • Radio programmes created	1. Change in percentage of perceptions of community members around ethnic minority issues 2. Number of remote rural areas reached 3. Number of radio programmes produced/ number of themes covered	Improved integration of ethnic minorities in education opportunities. Improved learning and health among the most vulnerable. Improved perception of equality among minorities.

Sample activities for ready families:

Evidence[11] has shown that the success of a SR programme relies on working with families by:

A. Designating and training a member of the community/ECCE/school with responsibility for supporting parents

B. Developing programmes based on a good knowledge of the local community and its strengths

C. Establishing trustworthy relationships with parents and schools

D. Reaching out to caregivers with flexible times and a range of engagement methods (for example home visits, weekend meetings, short play-time trainings)

E. Distributing toys, storybooks, and equipping libraries with resources for parents

F. Building trust and confidence with parents

G. Regularly sharing observations and information on children's development

H. Reflecting on parents' needs as adult learners and creating opportunities for their development alongside their children

Note that activities may appear to be similar between the ToC drivers, for example between increasing contact and improving knowledge, yet the outcome may not be the same.

For instance, delivering a training and gathering teachers from different districts may seem to fulfil the aims of "increasing knowledge" and "increasing contact". But it does not! It may lead to increased knowledge (if the change in knowledge is checked through pre- and post-training evaluation) but it does not automatically lead into more contact – simply because teachers may participate and then never be in contact afterwards. It is your responsibility – if lack of contact is a priority in your project – to envision and design activities that ensure contact is increased among teachers. For example, by creating post-training working groups among pre-primary and primary teachers to meet regularly (2-4 times annually or monthly online), in which they can work on the development of a common approach to reading literacy among preschool children and early graders.

Parents of pre- and primary school age children attend ECCE meetings implemented by Aide et Action in Lai Chau Province, northern Vietnam. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.

SECTION 5:
GOOD PRACTICES/ CASE STUDIES

The following examples of good practices may be helpful when designing and implementing ECCE/SR projects focusing on equitable access and equal opportunities[12].

Case 1: Expanding birth registration

In Bangladesh, the 2004 Birth and Death Registration Act establishes a legal basis for mandatory birth registration, which is implemented by service providers in the health and education sectors. This programme has been implemented comprehensively across the country with annual campaigns and registration drives organized jointly by the education and health sectors, civil society, NGOs, and local government (Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, 2014). The rate of birth registration for children under age five increased from 9.8% in 2006 to 31% in 2011, with 101 million births recorded in the new system (UNICEF, 2014[13]).

Case 2: Improving parental support

Cambodia's education strategy prioritized the expansion of ECCE for children from birth to age five (inclusive). The early childhood home-based education programme operates mostly in rural and remote areas and targets children from poor families, indigenous groups, and children with disabilities. It provides mothers with information on the nutrition, health, wellbeing, and education of their children (from birth to age five) in mother groups which usually meet weekly, although this can vary. Although the quality of provision is still low, regular training, monitoring, and evaluation aim to increase the capabilities of caregivers. The programme involves joint planning with the Ministry of Health to increase access to and uptake of health services for children under six years old (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2014). Children whose mothers participated in the early childhood programmes performed better in development skills assessments than those who did not participate in any programme (Rao et al., 2012[14]).

Case 3: Removing language barriers to improve inclusiveness

The language of instruction can act as a barrier to accessing and enrolling in ECCE services. Developing a curriculum and an education policy that corresponds to and incorporates local languages is a significant factor to consider in attracting excluded communities. For instance, evidence suggests that flexibility in hiring teachers locally for remote, underserved and otherwise difficult areas will help to improve learning (UNESCO, 2014[15]). The promotion of mother tongue languages in multilingual ECCE programmes has occurred in several countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand and Vietnam. In New Zealand, "language nests" in ECCE programmes have an explicit goal of maintaining and promoting the use of the Māori language parallel to that of English – New Zealand's other main language (Shaeffer, 2015). In Malaysia, where about 140 languages are spoken, ECCE can be offered in any language, but Malay and English must be taught alongside the other languages in pre-primary education (Kosonen and Young, 2009). In Lao PDR, a school preparation programme targets children from 5-6 years old the summer before they enter the first grade of primary education. The programme is an intensive course which prepares children for school. Most children have not previously attended an ECCE programme and are not speakers of the national language of instruction. The programme runs a set of activities to develop their social, language, preliteracy and pre-numeracy skills, for a total of 250 hours, distributed over an intensive schedule of five hours a day for ten weeks. The programme focuses on building local capacity by training teachers, furnishing classrooms with ECCE materials, and developing bilingual pedagogies (Hanoz, 2016[16]).

Case 4: Expanding access to difficult-to-reach populations

Mobile Crèches, a non-governmental organization which has been in operation in India since 1969, targets mothers working informally in the construction sector. Although government-sponsored childcare centers are available through the Anganwadi network, seasonal migrants do not usually benefit from those services. The Mobile Crèche integrated programme runs and organizes nutrition, education and health services; it monitors child development and encourages community engagement through networking, outreach, and partnership with construction companies. Children attending Mobile Crèche's programmes have demonstrated improved nutritional status, cognitive skills, and immunization records (Bajaj and Gupta, 2013). Mobile Crèche also operates programmes in urban slums where it runs community crèches and works with young families, pregnant women, and young children to improve child development practices.

Case 5: REACH project UK

A successful example of an ECCE/SR project among disadvantaged children in the UK is the REACH[17] programme, based on a framework called ORIM (see Figure 8) – which you can draw to tailor your own projects. In this project, a mixed team of teachers and ECCE practitioners in one area worked together to plan a two-day literacy programme with families in their homes, or at literacy events, which focused on books, early writing, and oral language. The following ORIM rubric is adapted from the NCB report (link below).

Families provide ↓	Early literacy →	Env. Print	Books	Writing	Oral language
Opportunities					
Recognition					
Interaction					
Model					

Figure 8: ORIM framework

Case 6: Innovative pedagogies

The "On-Country Learning" method from Australia is an interesting case in which education has drawn on the capacities and resources of communities and elders to educate indigenous young children (4-8 years old). The project was inspired by Norwegian "forest schools" where children learn outdoors. The on-country programme aimed to increase enrolment and success of Aboriginal children by respecting their traditional attachment to land. Therefore, for half a day each week, children (4-8 years old), their teachers, and the project managers traveled to the outdoor project site where they learned from local elder community members through storytelling, visual and performing arts, and different activities including fishing, making fire, shelter, etc[18].

Case 7: Incorporating pre-primary classes in primary schools

To ensure continuity and smooth transitions into primary school, one useful method is to physically bring ECCE and primary education closer together by allocating a section/room in the primary school to ECCE services. In Cambodia and Bangladesh, this method has been used and has helped pedagogical transition from ECCE to primary education. In these cases, teachers are trained to deliver teaching at both levels – which has both a positive financial benefit and can help children better adapt to primary school (as they are already familiar with both the teacher and the school environment).

Case 8: Improving capacities of the ECCE workforce

In the Asia-Pacific region, Singapore is the leader in the training workforce, including ECCE professionals, since 2001. In 2000, Singapore created a qualification standard for ECCE teachers' qualifications – which was updated in 2015 – covering those working in childcare centers in addition to those in pre-school. In parallel, an accreditation system to validate the curricula of teacher training institutes was drafted to ensure that

teachers would be prepared and trained to adopt an age-appropriate manner when working with children, to use child-centered and child-friendly teaching/learning methods, and to maintain empathetic child-adult interactions.

Case 9: Establishing ECCE quality standards

UNICEF has provided technical assistance to Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand to develop Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). In each country, national stakeholders have created their own development objectives for children (language, cognitive, social, emotional, physical) which take into consideration their relevant national and socio-cultural perspectives. The process of developing ELDS has had several benefits, including: building consensus among stakeholders; increasing their ownership; developing a sense of shared responsibility towards implementing ECCE; and maintaining the high quality, accessibility, and affordability of ECCE services as a priority.

Case 10: Providing conditional cash transfers for education

One of the most well-known conditional cash transfer cases is the Mexican government/World Bank project called Oportunidades. The programme was founded in 2002, based on a previous programme called Progressa (1997), and was designed to target poor families, providing them with conditional cash transfers in exchange for regular attendance of their children in schools – in which nutrition and medical check-ups/vaccinations would also be provided.

A student pictured at her pre-school graduation ceremony in Kandal Province, Cambodia. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Shaeffer, S. (1999). Towards a new framework for school management: Creating stronger partnerships for better education. Paris: UNESCO-UNICEF

[2] https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7260.html#A%20Framework%20for%20Rights-Based,%20Child-Friendly

[3] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/secondary-education-resources/useful-information/understanding-equality

[4] This is particularly relevant to children within the development stage, when they can take care of themselves, and obviously not older children. According to UNICEF, any person under 18 is a child

[5] http://web.undp.org/execbrd/word/Final%20RBM%20terminology%2030%20May.doc

[6] Note that being ready for school is not equivalent to "being able to learn"

[7] Taken from: Center on the Developing Child (2007). The Science of Early Childhood Development (InBrief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

[8] CoP or Community of Practice is an important component of a professional group, such as teachers, which enables the sharing of narratives (challenges/success stories/lessons learnt); deciding on ethical codes, quality standards; plus gaining and broadening knowledge in the field of teaching. Creating a CoP (at community, national, or regional level) can be an important output of an SR project under the "contact ToC"

[9] See the latest (Sept 2019) report on guidelines for the implementation of CRC: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/CRC.C.156_OPSC%20Guidelines.pdf

[10] The 4As of rights-based education

[11] Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Manni, L. (2007) Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS Study London: University of London, Institute of Education

[12] A useful source for further case studies is: The global report on equity and early childhood (2016) https://slidelegend.com/queue/equity-early-childhood-consultative-group-on-early-childhood-care-_59d09f0d1723dd140260d48c.html

[13] UNICEF (2014) Birth registration factsheet. Bangladesh Country Office, child protection section.

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[15] UNESCO (2014) Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2013/2014 Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All. UNESCO

[16] Hanoz, S., 2016. Intensive short-course ECE programme in Laos

[17] https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/HLE_doc.pdf

[18] For more information on this project and other innovative projects see: Innovative pedagogical approaches in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in the Asia-Pacific region: a resource pack, UNESCO Bangkok https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246050

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Top: Primary school student in Lai Chau province, Vietnam. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.
Middle: Primary school student in Kep province, Cambodia. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2020.
Bottom: Pre-school student in Vientiane province, Lao PDR. Photo: Christine Redmond, 2019.

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