Global childcare and the broader care economy: Case study summaries

Early childhood education and care in Viet Nam

While the VinaCapital Foundation (2014) notes: 'pre-school is an emerging challenge for Vietnam' (p. 2), it appears to be a challenge that the government is tackling head-on. Indeed, doubtless driven in part by women's high employment rate, Viet Nam's commitment to early childhood education was given its fiscal space early on.

Parental investment in early childhood learning

Parents in Viet Nam do not have much time to invest in their young children's learning.

Of children between the ages of three and six, MICS found that less than half (45%) had engaged in learning activities with their mothers over the three days prior to the survey.

Less than 15% had done so with their fathers.

Source: GSO, 2015b

The 2005 Education Law laid out a basic framework for care provision and covered the care of children from three months to six years (MoJ, 2005). Emphasising the importance of helping children 'develop physically, emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically', the law called for crèches for infants and toddlers, kindergartens for children aged three to six, and Young Sprout schools that combined both age groups (ibid.).

The country's National Strategy for Educational Development (2011-2020) called for rapid implementation of this framework - with access to kindergarten to be universal by the end of 2015, largely to ensure that children are ready for first grade (MoET, 2014).

With 98% enrolment for five-year-olds for the 2012/2013 school year, that goal was effectively met early (ibid). Enrolment rates for children aged three to five are also increasing rapidly - from 49% in 2000/2001 to 80.31% in 2012/2013 (ibid.). As enrolment in public early childhood programmes has grown, enrolment in private programmes has dropped. In 2012/2013, less than 17% of children were enrolled in private pre-schools - down from a high of nearly 60% in 2012/2003 (ibid.).

The nexus of early childhood education and child protection

While standard quality metrics for early childhood education are uniformly positive, news reports suggest that there is another side to the coin. One, for example, reports that the Deputy Minister of Education and Training admitted that only 34% of the 16,000 private preschools that provide care to under-3s are licenced (TUOITRENEWS, 2014). It added that a Women's Union survey had found that less than 19% of families sent their children to public pre-schools and that migrants were especially likely to use unlicensed private providers.

The last few years have seen many preschool teachers tried and convicted for physically abusing their young charges - binding their hands and feet to keep them still, force feeding them and kicking them to death. While we are unable to locate any abuse statistics, we note that the incidence is high enough that in Ho Chi Minh City the government is piloting web-cams in kindergartens (Vietnam News, 2013).

The government's recent Education for All National Review (MOET, 2014) highlights that the provision of education is not solely about schooling's advantages for children. It also mentions that growing efforts to move to full-day schooling, available to nearly 55% of children in 2012-2013, have 'benefits for parents, allowing them to focus on working' (p. 35).

Due to cultural beliefs, for the youngest children enrolment in early childhood education programming remains comparatively uncommon. In 2012/2013, fewer than 15% of children under the age of two were in non-familial care (MoET, 2014). Those who were not cared for by their parents were nearly universally in the care of their grandparents.

Finally, while factories in Viet Nam which employ a 'high number' of women are required to either set up on-site crèche facilities - or provide a childcare subsidy - evidence suggests that few women use on-site facilities. Fontana and Silberman (2013), in their survey of over 2,500 factory workers, found that 'only 3 percent of women with lower education and a negligible share of women with higher education' were using such care for their under-fives - presumably because they were either not available or were of low quality (p.20). Most used other childcare centres or relatives.

Early childhood education and care in Ethiopia

With the rapid scale-up of primary education, policy and fiscal space for early childhood education and care has only recently been carved out (Tigistu, 2013; Young Lives, 2013; Orkin et al., 2012; Woldehanna, 2011). The ECE Policy Framework was established in 2010 with the support of UNICEF, since which interest and enrolment, if not funding, has grown rapidly.

There are three general types of ECE programmes in Ethiopia: 'kindergartens, non-formal pre-school services, and O classes' (ACEI, 2015). Kindergartens, which serve children between the ages of four and six, have their own curriculum and operate from their own school compounds. They are almost entirely operated (90%) by non-governmental actors such as NGOs, faith-based organisations, community groups and private institutions (ibid.).

Non-formal classes are primarily delivered through the government's child-to-child initiative, which pairs older children and younger children so that the former can playfully help the younger learn colours, numbers, etc. (ACEI, 2015). O classes are a recent government initiative for six year old children who have not had access to kindergarten. They are run by local primary teachers and are aimed at getting children ready for first grade (ACEI, 2015).

While access to kindergarten remains almost entirely restricted to children from better-off, urban[1] families, (Tigistu, 2013; Woodhead, 2009) the rapid expansion of O classes is providing more and more children with some sort of pre-primary schooling.

Between 2010 and 2014, pre-primary enrolment rose from less than 350,000 to nearly 2.5 million children (MoE, 2015). The government reports that one-third of all four to six year olds are now in some sort of programme - 1.6 million in O classes, 490,000 in kindergarten and the remainder in informal classes (ibid.).

Ethiopia's ECCE Policy Framework priorities

- Creating a coherent government structure which will assist in institutionalising ECCE and in coordinating and streamlining ECCE services;
- increasing access to and equity in ECCE service provision;
- improving quality of ECCE services;
- enhancing nationwide advocacy on the importance of ECCE;
- establishing enhanced child protection mechanisms.

Source: Young Lives, 2013

Given that fiscal space remains extremely limited, the rapid expansion of programming has triggered significant concerns in regard to quality. For example, Orkin et al. (2012) observe that in rural areas, where primary teachers are already 'struggling to carry out the roles and responsibilities that have come with the rapid expansion of the primary education system', expecting teachers - or older children - to implement the ECCE framework is likely to further stretch an already overburdened system (p.27).

Tigistu (2013) further notes that because pre-school teachers, unlike primary and secondary school teachers, 'have to pay their own study fees', early childhood education in Ethiopia is considered 'to be a last resort profession', (p.19). This, along with social norms which allocate the care of young children to women - is clearly reflected in the teaching population. Whereas only 37% of primary teachers (and 16% of secondary teachers) are female, two-thirds of Ethiopia's 15,000 kindergarten teachers are female (MoE, 2015). Finally, Wondemetegegn (nd) found that even private kindergartens in Addis Ababa tended to lack instructional materials and adequate indoor and outdoor space for play.

Early childhood education and care in Palestine

The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education has focused on improving access to primary school and has largely ignored the care and educational needs of young children. Indeed, 'early childhood development is not supported by a national framework or public financing so there are gaps in service delivery that severely affect the quality and availability of preschool educational services', (ANERA, 2014:2).

Ethiopia's ECCE Policy Framework priorities

- Nearly 20% of the population is under the age of 5
- Only 4 preschools in both the West Bank and Gaza are public
- 1,132 preschools are run by the non-profit sector
- Only 38% of eligible children are enrolled in preschool

Source: ANERA, 2014

While the ministry is working towards establishing standards and developing curricula, as of 2014 there were only

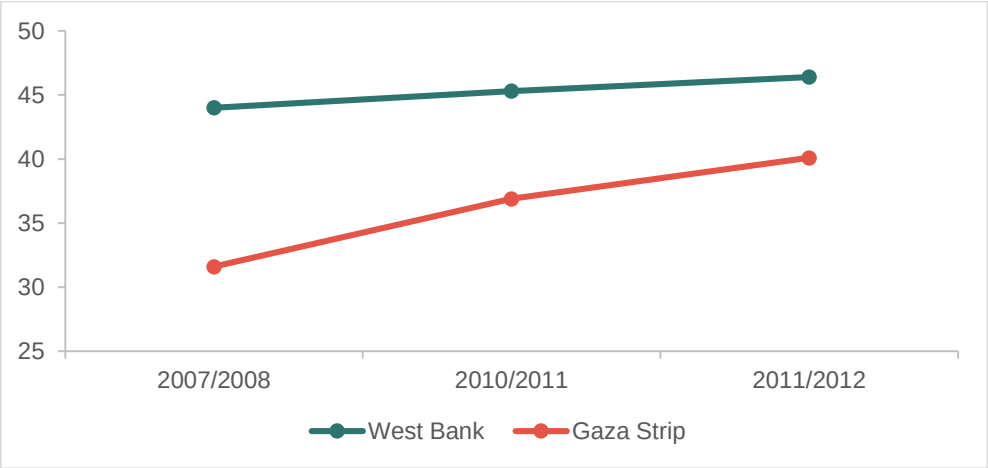
[1] Woodhead (2009), using the Young Lives samples, reports a rural enrolment rate of only 4%.

four public preschools in all of Palestine and less than 40% of young children were enrolled in any sort of preschool programme - including kindergarten (ibid.).

The poorest were particularly likely to be excluded; their rates of enrolment were nearly one-third of that of the richest quintile (PCBS, 2013). For children not yet old enough for kindergarten, schooling rates are even lower. MICS (2015) reports that only 26.4% of children between the ages of three and five were enrolled in any sort of early childhood programme in 2014.

Access to early childhood education is, however, increasing - especially for older children who are eligible for kindergarten (see Figure 1). That said, however, due the limited availability of adapted classrooms and trained teachers, there is little evidence that CWDs have been included in recent increases. A survey of 60 preschools in Gaza, for example, found that only 0.81% of students had any form of disability, 'much less than the nationally reported figure', (ANERA, 2014b: 8).

Figure 1: Enrolment rate for kindergarten, by year and region (PCBS, 2013)



There are also concerns about the quality of ECD in Palestine. For example, a 2014 assessment of preschools in Gaza found that the student-to-teacher ratio was 31:1 - nearly three times higher than international standards suggest (ANERA, 2014b). It also found that ECD providers were overwhelmingly likely to be young and inexperienced, in part because they are so poorly paid (ibid.; see also ANERA, 2014). Only 25% were over the age of thirty and "very few of them had bachelor's degrees in disciplines relevant to preschool education" (ANERA, 2014b: 1; see also PCBS, 2013).

The combination of large classes and young teachers often means that teaching methods are poorly suited to young children. The survey found that overall less than one-quarter of preschool teachers used at least three ECD teaching methods (e.g., play, music, telling stories, etc.) and only 7% used four or more. Physical spaces and supplies were also found to be largely inadequate. A team of engineers found the structural integrity of pre-school classroom buildings averaged only 2.8/10 and '(o)nly 11% of teachers reported that their preschools had the resources needed to implement quality ECD strategies', (ANERA, 2014b: 3). Most preschools were missing books, toys, musical instruments, etc. (ibid.).

Another critical gap identified by the assessment of Gazan preschools is their limited outreach to parents. More than two-thirds of those surveyed indicated that they had never participated in any sort of training about child development, learning or rights. This lack is reflected in the quality of parents' interaction with their young children. Only half read to their children at least once a week and less than a third took their children out for a weekly recreational activity (ANERA, 2014b). The 2010 Palestinian Household Survey, which included questions about whether parents of young children regularly sang, read and played with them,

found that children from poorer, less educated households were especially unlikely to benefit from playful parental engagement (PCBS, 2013)[2]. Most notably, that survey found that Palestinian fathers rarely interacted with their young children--less than 3% of children had engaged in enrichment activities with their preschool children in the three days prior to the survey (ibid.).

[2] The most recent MICS found fathers considerably more involved. That study reports that 55% of mothers and 12% of fathers had engaged in supportive learning activities in the three days prior to the survey (PCBS, 2015).