

UNICEF Education Case Study

South Sudan: Including families and communities in the pre-primary subsector
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A toy workshop is held at a UNICEF supported nutrition centre in Yambio South Sudan. Mothers are taught how to make toys from clay. © UNICEF/UN0372521/Ryeng

Family and community engagement is one critical aspect of early childhood education (ECE). It is important to ensure that families and communities are active participants and partners in supporting children's learning and development across early learning settings. A strong relationship between families and pre-primary programmes creates a better transition between a child's learning at home and experience in pre-primary and even primary school. Communities play several roles when it comes to ECE in addition to being children's immediate contact with the outside world, including mobilizing local resources, identifying land for establishing low-cost ECE centers as well as managing these centers, enrolling new students, identifying and supporting teachers, and ensuring continuity of learning at home.

Strengthening the family and community component was a priority to be addressed through the Global Partnership for Education knowledge and information exchange (GPE-KIX) project, "Integrating early child education in sectoral planning" which aims to strengthen the capacity of education systems with resource and knowledge to implement quality ECE programmes at scale. In South Sudan, however, family and community engagement in pre-primary was limited because of the low levels of awareness of the importance of pre-primary education as well as the role of family and community in supporting pre-primary service delivery. While the previous ECD strategic policy plan (2017-2022) included guidance for including families and communities in nurturing care and early learning, there was no funding or resources for deploying this plan. There was no national plan or strategy in place to address the issue of parental involvement around pre-primary education or to involve the community in pre-primary provision or to maximize the community resources available towards pre-primary. For families, there were often cultural barriers to enrolment, particularly for younger girls and pre-primary education was not seen as a priority by families and communities in some areas. At the community level, there

was no separate governing body in charge of pre-primary schools and a general lack of capacity at all levels to coordinate community engagement systems. In particular, this affected rural populations where there were few or no ECE centers.

To address this, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) therefore prioritized the development of a family and community engagement framework for ECE. At a pre-primary analysis subsector workshop held in February 2022, which was part of UNICEF South Sudan's country workplan as part of the GPE-KIX project and attended by participants from the MoGEI and national and international education partners in South Sudan, the [Pre-Primary subsector analysis tool \(Tool 2.2\)](#) from the [ECE Accelerator Toolkit](#) was used to analyse the current state of family and community engagement in the country, which included identifying strengths and challenges as well as strategies/recommendations for how to address these challenges. The workshop also provided a hands-on learning opportunity for participants to become familiar with the processes and strategies relevant to developing policies, strategies, advocacy plans, and costing activities.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

As a result of this the pre-primary subsector review, family and community engagement was clearly embedded in the new ECE policy, strategy, and action plan. Some key strategies/recommendations achieved because of the workshop were to: 1) develop a community engagement framework to increase participation; 2) identify champions in communities to support engagement; and 3) fund and develop resource centres in community spaces, such as churches or primary schools, to demonstrate competencies and model play-based learning and child development. A draft budget specifically for family and community engagement was included in the pre-primary implementation plan. A national advocacy toolkit was also developed and ECE messages were clearly outlined in this toolkit, including advocating for the establishment of community ECE centres, particularly in harder-to-reach rural areas. Additionally, a community engagement framework will be developed.

To better engage families and communities, MoGEI, with support from education partners, will also continue enrolment drives, such as the national Back to Learning mobilization campaign, to encourage parents and communities to enroll their children in school, including ECE. Additionally, parent-teacher associations (PTAs) will be trained as champions to support communities to engage in early learning activities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Using the ECE Accelerator Toolkit, and more specifically Tool 2.2 (Pre-primary subsector analysis tool), allowed key stakeholders to clearly identify current challenges in the area of family and community engagement as well as develop strategies and recommendations to address these challenges.
- Engaging with local authorities at all levels is paramount for improved community engagement, particularly as they play instrumental roles in the management of community-based centers, and to create awareness in the communities on the importance of ECE. This includes consulting with state education authorities, chiefs, religious leaders and other existing groups within the communities.

NEXT STEPS

Taking the momentum established through the GPE-KIX project forward, next steps in South Sudan include empowering families and communities to take the lead in positively influencing and participating in school activities. Some key activities include establishing community ECE schools using temporary learning spaces, training more pre-primary teachers so that they can teach in these spaces, and training parent-teacher associations on their role when it comes to school management.

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