

CONCEPT NOTE FOR EVALUATIONS

Evaluation is a systematic and objective effort to determine the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts, based on agreed criteria and benchmarks among key partners and stakeholders. It involves a rigorous, systematic and objective process in the design, analysis and interpretation of information to answer specific questions. It provides assessments of what works and why, highlights intended and unintended results, and provides strategic lessons to guide decision-makers and inform stakeholders.

(1) Overview of the Evaluation:

1.1. Country: Uzbekistan	1.2. Title of the evaluation: Evaluation of the modeling of Alternative early Childhood Education	
1.3. Object of evaluation Alternative ECEs in two regions of Uzbekistan – Namangan and Khorezm established	1.4. Is there a theory of change available for this evaluation? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	1.5. Evaluation manager: Alberto Biancoli, Chief Education, UNICEF Uzbekistan CO
1.6. Geographic scope Select one <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sub-national <input type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-country <input type="checkbox"/> Regional <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-region /global <input type="checkbox"/> Other	1.7. Evaluation criteria: Select all that apply <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relevance / pertinence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Efficiency <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Effectiveness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustainability <input type="checkbox"/> Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Other	1.8. Evaluation use: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reporting results / accountability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decision making at UNICEF level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Evidence-based policy advocacy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knowledge management / learning <input type="checkbox"/> Other
1.9. Strategic Plan Focus Area: Select one <input type="checkbox"/> Every child survives and thrives <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Every child learns <input type="checkbox"/> Every child is protected from violence and exploitation <input type="checkbox"/> Every child lives in a safe and clean environment <input type="checkbox"/> Every child has an equitable chance in life <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-cutting <input type="checkbox"/> Other		1.10. Evaluation level: Select one <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Output (validation of pilot, demonstrative projects) <input type="checkbox"/> Outcome (national policies, scaled-up strategic interventions) <input type="checkbox"/> Impact (long term changes in the situation of children) <input type="checkbox"/> Other

Early Childhood Development and Education is one of the priority areas of the UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Programme. UNICEF has been complementing the Government of Uzbekistan's efforts to improve the Early Childhood Education (ECE) services through providing technical support to enhance systemic improvements and policy reforms. During design of the Country Programme for 2015-2020 the coverage in Early Childhood Education (ECE) was around 27% and several barriers with availability and access to affordable quality ECE was an issue in the country. Most critical bottleneck of ECE was fragmented and incoherent policies and the rigidity of the education system which inhibited the establishment of flexible and affordable quality alternative ECE arrangements. Almost all existing programmes were costly and not accessible to disadvantaged children. With the change in the Government of Uzbekistan in 2016 the reforms in preschool education became a priority area in the country and in September 2017 the new Ministry of Preschool Education (MOPSE) was established to enhance implementation of the reforms in provision of equitable access to quality preschool education for the 3–6-year-old children in Uzbekistan. The priority tasks for the newly established Ministry were to address gaps in access, service delivery and quality. The National 5-year programme supported by the road map, Education Sector Plan for 2019-2023, several policies and Law on Preschool Education identified key priority directions and the vision of the country towards achieving country specific goals and SDG 4. Provision of alternative pathways of services was one of the solutions in transformative changes in provision of the quality services for all children, including most vulnerable ones living in remote and rural areas. As highlighted in a recent Public Expenditure Review, conducted by WB in 2022, the public expenditure for pre-school education has doubled since 2017, reaching close to 20% of the total expenditure in education. The analysis of spending in preschool education further shows that per-capita expenditures in preschool are higher than per capita expenditures in general or specialized secondary education, estimated at 1,300 US\$ in 2022. The recent expansion of services and the need of additional targeting in order to reach the most marginalized regions and community calls for the identification of cost-efficient solutions, that meet the expected quality standards of preschool education.

Within this backdrop, UNICEF and the Government of Uzbekistan have agreed to develop alternative and innovative models of ECE provision in the country within the Joint Work Plan between UNICEF and MOPSE and identified as priority in the partnership with the Government. In a consultative and participatory mode, a Conceptual Framework for alternative forms of preschool education and initial workplan for modeling of the alternative forms of preschool education has been drafted in the end of 2018. Alternative forms of provision were planned to be modelled in a few selected, most deprived regions in the country with low preschool enrolment rates and recommended three types of Alternative models of preschool education based on international best practices. Those are:

- “School readiness” groups for 6 years-old children, last year of pre-school education.
- Mixed age groups for 3-5 years-old children.
- Play groups for 3-5 years-old children

All of the forms of alternative ECEs proposed considered holistic development of a child, including social and emotional and cognitive, in low cost, parents engagement, use of spare premises which was not expensive to equip, ECE opportunities for children from various cultural environment, opportunities for different age children to learn and develop through interaction in broad social context and preparation for school and kindergarten (in the long-term); School readiness model has been taken over by the Government and introduced as part of the commitment of implementation of the new Law on Preschool Education guaranteeing free compulsory pre-primary education for all 6 years old children. As the Ministry of Preschool Education (MOPSE) was relatively new and would immensely benefit from learning the good practices from across the world, UNICEF has also decided to support the government with exposure visits to some of the most relevant and effective practices in other countries. Taking into account successful experience of Poland in reforming preschool education system and good practices in implementation of alternative models of ECE and its policy implication and system level change, UNICEF and Poland Government jointly organized a study visit for Uzbekistan Government officials at National and regional levels.

Based on obtained knowledge and understanding from the study tour the Conceptual Framework of the Alternative models of ECEs was finalized and detailed work plan developed for implementation with key responsible people nominated for the project. It was decided by the MOPSE that two regions – Namangan and Khorezm, Heads of Regional Departments of Preschool Education of which has attended the study tour, were identified for modeling.

(2) Background and Rationale

- ♦ Describe the object of evaluation, the context, and explain why is important to do the evaluation at this specific point in time? What is theory of change behind the context and at what level the evaluation object is positioned?

- ◆ How does this activity link to UNICEF programmatic priorities and/or advocacy plan (e.g., CPD)?
- ◆ Where does the demand for this activity come from?
- Mention any counterpart / partner for conducting this evaluation.

Several stages of project implementation were identified:

1. Assessment of the catchment area/groups (# of 3-5 years old children; demand; “waiting que”, how far those children live from the location of the group; Makhalla engagement for identifying children from the poorest and most vulnerable families);
2. Selection of safe premises/preparation the premises (renovation, heating, clean water and WASH facilities)
3. Preparation of the supply plan for teaching and learning materials (TLM) and furniture based on standards and list of required specifications provided by MOPSE
4. Creation of the programme and manuals based on National Preschool Curriculum and Early Learning and Development Standards approved by MOPSE.
5. Development of training package and teacher guidebook on teaching in multi-age groups with focus on “learning through playing” methodology.
6. Capacity development and training of the preschool teachers
7. Admission process of children to the groups based on the list prepared based on the Makhalla list of children from vulnerable families.
8. Baseline assessment for starting activities, diagnoses of initial level of development of children based on the Observation list of the curriculum.
9. Monitoring and coaching of teachers.

Based on the Work plan and identified key stages of the modeling areas of responsibilities has been identified and agreed. While UNICEF provided full equipment of the ECE facilities with Teaching and Learning Materials and furniture the local Government was responsible for identifying of appropriate facilities, renovation and establishing of WASH facilities. Teachers were identified and they received salaries from local government. Initially total 8 groups – 4 in Khorezm and 4 in Namangan regions were launched and two more groups were opened with Romanian Government financial support with enrollment of around 400 children.

The same mode of alternative ECEs will be established with the EU funded project with focus on multi-lingual education in Surkhandarya region with establishment of 10 groups for around 400 children from vulnerable and ethnic minority families in 2023.

The evaluation was planned by the Country Office to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the modeling, present lessons learned and see if the model meets human and child rights standards and equity gaps to inform Government for further scale up the model Nationwide, with engagement of other stakeholders as IsDB, WB and others. A key focus on costing and financing of the proposed model is also required in light of need for scale up and existing challenges to sustain population growth with quality services.

The evaluation process will be participative and will involve Government counterparts at all levels along with relevant stakeholders.

(3) Potential Impact: Describe the expected results

- ◆ What are the evaluation criteria used in this evaluation? (relevance/pertinence, efficiency. Effectiveness, sustainability, impact)
- ◆ Indicate what difference the activity will make (if well done, the results of the evaluation should influence X/Y/Z).
- ◆ Explain how the evaluation findings will be used.
- ◆ For modeling, elaborate on the potential of scale-up of the intervention and explain how the Evaluation will add value to the process.

This evaluation is aimed at measuring modeling of Alternative ECEs' success and achievements in relation to the aspects of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and where possible, potential impact and sustainability. The evaluation is intended to generating knowledge from the implementation with a focus on costing and efficiency; identifying lessons learnt and propose recommendations for future programming and scale up. The specific objectives include:

- Assess of the project relevance to the country's development needs specifically the needs of the most vulnerable child rights to education perspective, status, and the capacity to achieve the project objectives.
- Review the effectiveness and performance of the project against planned results.
- Assess the efficiency of the project, in particular in comparison with the traditional state based ECE services.
- Identify and document successes, challenges lessons learned.
- Look into the sustainability of the project with potential for scale up of the model at the national level.
- Provide recommendations for future programming and scale-up.

Potential evaluation questions to be framed around equity-focused approach:

Relevance: What is the value of intervention in relation to the needs of the most vulnerable compared to better-off groups of children? What does current pilot project suggest about the appropriateness of intervention? If successfully implemented would this project intervention likely to address the key issues affecting needs of vulnerable groups of children, e.g. readiness for school and equal start with other children?

Effectiveness: Is the project intervention achieved results stated in the objective of the project? Were cultural, economic, political social factors have been taken into account while designing and implementing project? What are the main constraints on demand and supply?

Efficiency: Did the project use the financial and human resources in the most economical manner to achieve expected results? Are there any economical alternatives feasible? How cost-effective are state-funded public services in reaching the most vulnerable groups? How do costs of alternative ECE forms from pilot project compare to state funded public services to reach the most vulnerable?

Sustainability: Will the project model will be replicated or adapted? Is it likely to be scaled up when the external support is withdrawn?

Impact (to the extent possible, taking into account socio-economic and cultural aspects): To what extent the result contributed to decrease inequities of vulnerable children compared to better-off groups of children? What are the results of intervention: positive and negative? Intended and unintended?

The findings of the evaluation will be used as a basis for discussions, planning and programming between UNICEF and key national and international stakeholders. Evaluation results will be disseminated amongst government, development partners, civil society, and other stakeholders. It will inform the Government for future scaling up Alternative models of ECE, envisaged by the IsDB 70 million project and other initiatives. A joint management response will be produced upon completion of the evaluation process and made publicly available on the evaluation platforms.

(4) Methodological Approach: Justify your suggested choice of approach or methodology

- ◆ Is there enough data/evidence available for the evaluation?
- ◆ What are the sources? What qualitative, quantitative and/or specific tools you anticipate will be used (note existing international standardized tools) – how is evidence triangulated?

- ◆ Is the evidence generation for the evaluation involving primary collection of information?
- ◆ Explain why you propose this approach, and what alternatives were considered.

The evaluation methodology will be guided by the Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) as well as the UNICEF Evaluation Policy.

Proposed Methodology:

A national research agency (perhaps we could include our rationale for potential use of CERR?) will develop a methodology for data collection and analysis based on guidance provided by an international research agency as well as capacity development activities from ExCEL training. In particular, referring to the logical framework and theory of change ToC (if not available, provide support to reconstruct ToC), conduct evaluability assessment, i.e. assess availability of disaggregated baselines data, indicators, targets, output and outcome data available through M&E activities. Further, provide guidance for developing qualitative research methodology, including guides for in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions, consent forms, protection protocol, etc. and analysing the data, developing evaluation report and policy recommendations. The evaluation will be implemented through an inclusive consultation process targeting the government, key service providers at national, regional and district levels. Its results will be combined with the ECD/ECE programming experience and utilized for the development of a policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the national early childhood education system of Uzbekistan.

(5) Capacity Strengthening

Describe the capacity strengthening aspects of this activity. If not relevant, write “N/A” in the box below. Consider whether a consultant, contracted for data collection, might also be asked to train UNICEF partners, NGOs, and/or the national government office.

- **Capacity strengthening:** The process of conducting the evaluation will contribute to capacity strengthening at two levels: (a) capacity of UNICEF team in understanding various methodologies of evaluation, particularly, carrying out programme evaluation; and (b) capacity of national stakeholders in understanding the use and processes of programme evaluation, given the participatory manner in which the evaluation will be conducted.
- **Intersectoral.** Evaluation findings and recommendations will be used to improve coordination among various ministries and stakeholders, as well as UNICEF teams on education sector activities.

(6) Dissemination and advocacy plan

- ◆ Elaborate on how findings will be communicated – publicly or privately – to policy makers, partners and/or caregivers, educators, justice officials, professionals, the general public, firms, etc.
- ◆ Please indicate which promotion activities will be undertaken to ensure further use of the evaluation findings?
- ◆ Is there any partner involved in the dissemination / promotion of the findings of this evaluation?

Evaluation results will be disseminated amongst government, development partners, civil society, and other stakeholders. A joint management response will be produced upon completion of the evaluation process and made publicly available on the evaluation platforms.

In collaboration with the UNICEF Communication team, best practices and success stories will be documented separately and disseminated to stakeholders as well as a larger audience through: (i) seminars and workshops; and (ii) social media platforms. Such events will also draw lessons from international best practices to enrich the evidence from Uzbekistan.

(7) Risks: Describe ethical considerations, political risks, and a mitigation plan

Describe ethical considerations, potential cultural, organizational or political risks (e.g., if findings may challenge cultural norms, or call existing policies into question). If relevant, describe the plan to mitigate risks and protect the reputation of UNICEF and its partners.

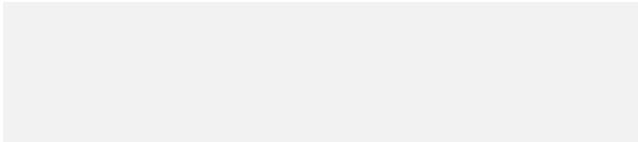
Adequate measures will be taken to ensure that the process responds to quality and ethical requirements. The team will be responsible for ensuring that the processes are in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines and adhere to the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. Evaluators need to identify specific potential ethical considerations, approaches and review processes in their proposal and inception report, including on harms and benefits, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, payment and compensation and conflicts of interest.

(8) Anticipated start date: 1-Apr-23 and end date: 30-Aug-23

Include the planning period. The end date should signify the date when the final report will become publicly available.

(9) Anticipated total budget (USD): \$60,000 Budget for UNICEF: \$60,000

Indicate any important details regarding the budget, such as funding source.



(10) Capacity of the candidate: Indicate particular expertise required for this evaluation (skills, technical knowledge, experience, etc.).

Required qualifications and areas of expertise:

For the research agency:

- Governmental or non-governmental research agency in social sector (national surveys, human development, early childhood development, education and early childhood education, etc.);
- At least five to eight years of experience in conducting research on similar, related topics, including research for use in policy development (verified by released reports or summary reports of studies)
- Previous work experience with UN Agencies and international research companies will be an asset (verified by records of previous work experience and projects involved)

For the team members:

- Advanced degree in social sciences (sociology, education, human development, etc.) relevant to the topic of the study;
- At least 5 years of relevant professional experience on education, early childhood development, early childhood education, (verified by records of work experience in carrying out at least two assignments on early childhood development/education);
- Advanced knowledge of qualitative research methods, and data analysis techniques (verified by examination of evidence from previous assignment deliverables);
- Excellent analytical skills (verified by examination of evidence from previous assignment deliverables);

- Excellent command of spoken and written English, Russian and Uzbek;
- Good computer skills, specifically knowledge of data entry, processing and analysis (verified by examination of evidence from previous assignment deliverables);
- Demonstrate strong interpersonal, communication skills and ability to address difficult topics (verified by records of work experience in carrying out at least three assignments related to interviewing and/or working with children and families at risk).