Young Lives

Scaling-up Early Learning in Ethiopia:

Exploring the Potential of O-Class

Martin Woodhead, Jack Rossiter, Andrew Dawes and Alula Pankhurst

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Acknowledgements

Summary

SDG Target 4.2 identifies 'pre-primary education' as a strategy to strengthen school readiness and contribute to the quality and outcomes of education, which is supported by the powerful evidence from evaluation research. The challenge faced by many countries is to deliver the proven potential of well-planned, quality programmes to scale. This working paper summarises Ethiopia's growing commitment to pre-primary education and reports recent Young Lives engagement with the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia and other partners to support scale-up. Ethiopia's most recent ambitious targets for early learning have been set out in the Fifth Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP V 2015), with pre-primary classes (known as O-Class) within primary schools being seen as the most rapid route to scale-up.

The paper reports on the progress and the challenges in delivering ambitious targets. We report key findings from exploratory fieldwork on two key themes, namely the response of Regional Education Bureaus in planning, financing, management and ensuring human capacity for scale-up; and the potential of Ethiopia's Colleges of Teacher Education to supply sufficient trained teachers to work with young children, especially in the rapidly expanding O-Classes.

The final section draws on parallel experiences of other countries, notably Grade R in South Africa, and reports on six key challenges for scale-up; equity; age-appropriateness; cross-sectoral coordination; capacity building; and research and evidence. Other key challenges go beyond the scope of this working paper, notably the models for governance and financing that can deliver quality early education for all. While Ethiopia's initiative to scale-up O-Class is a welcome indicator of policy commitment to SDG Target 4.2, we conclude that there is a risk that low quality pre-primary programmes will not deliver on the potential of early childhood education and that children (especially poor children) will be the losers.

1. Delivering quality early learning for all

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have established early childhood as a global priority (Young Lives 2016). Strengthening this period of life is key to achieving at least seven of the SDGs, on poverty, hunger, health (including child mortality), education, gender, water and sanitation, and inequality. Specifically, one of the education targets states that by 2030 countries should: 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education' (SDG Target 4.2).

In the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

> '... early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years. This is a pivotal time... Too many countries have yet to make early childhood development a priority. We need to invest more, not just in education, but in health and protection. We need to target our investments and interventions to reach children at greatest risk of being left behind. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years' (UN Secretary-General 2015)

Taken in their entirety, the implication of the SDG goals for early childhood policy development are very ambitious – requiring multi-sectoral (and well integrated) initiatives supporting households, parents and children from around the infant's conception, through pregnancy and the earliest stages of life and right through to the first grades of school (Woodhead et al. 2014).

Positioning early childhood at the heart of global development reflects the convergence of persuasive lines of policy analysis and research evidence that 'investing in ECD (Early Childhood Development) leads to gender equality and empowerment, better health and education outcomes, improved skills, abilities and productivity, narrows the income, ethnic, and geographic inequality gaps, provides timely intervention for persons with disabilities, and is a cost effective strategy for eliminating disadvantage' (Consultative Group 2012: 19). Policies and strategies to scale-up early learning via pre-primary programmes is a key component of ECD and the main focus of this working paper. While 'pre-primary' programmes are our specific focus, early learning programmes are frequently referred to generically as ECCE (early childhood care and education), or included within the more holistic concept of ECD.

SDG Target 4.2 identifies pre-primary education as a strategy to strengthen school readiness and contribute to the quality and outcomes of education. Including pre-primary among SDG targets also builds logically on progress towards the MDG goal of universal primary education, with the primary school net enrolment ratio improved from 84 per cent in 1999 to 93 per cent in 2015. Improvements were especially strong in sub-Saharan Africa, with 11 countries rising at least 20 percentage points from 1999 to 2012 (UNESCO 2015 GMR). Unfortunately, headline indicators on primary school enrolment often disguise poor attendance rates, children overage for grade, with overcrowded classrooms, high dropout rates, and low achievement levels on core skills, especially among the most disadvantaged children who are most often attending the poorest quality schools. The quality crisis in

primary education is widely recognised, with UNESCO estimating that approximately 250 million children are attending school but not learning the basics (UNESCO 2014).

In this context, policymakers are increasingly looking towards ECCE programmes as one of the strategies that can improve efficiency and effectiveness of primary schools – by improving 'school readiness'. Even before the SDGs were agreed, 29 of the 49 sub-Saharan countries had adopted ECCE policy instruments, while nine were in development by 2014 (Vargas-Barón 2015). By 2014, 40 countries across the world had taken ECCE policy a stage further, introducing pre-primary as a compulsory stage of education, although Ghana is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa to have taken that step and 'progress in access has been uneven, with considerable difference between urban and rural areas, rich and poor families and communities, and thriving and deprived regions' (UNESCO 2015: 59).

In support of scale-up of pre-primary education, Crouch identifies a close statistical link between low levels of pre-primary participation, inefficiencies in the early primary grades and poor performance on cognitive skills. Admitting underage children in already over-crowded classes combines with low resources and teaching quality, low achievement levels and consequent grade repetition during these early grades are all indicators of systemic inefficiencies, which means children don't progress, something Crouch refers to as 'churning'. Specifically, he argues that in the absence of pre-primary, large numbers of underage children are being enrolled in Grade 1 where they 'churn' for several years without learning much before moving on to Grade 2, where they 'churn' again in smaller but still significant numbers. From this perspective, enrolling children in pre-primary classes would increase their readiness to learn in school, take the pressure off teachers in the early grades and improve children's chances of making progress through the school curriculum (Crouch, in press).

It is important to note alternative perspectives on policy priorities for school readiness. The flipside of improving 'children's readiness for school' is about ensuring 'schools' readiness for children'. Or, as Kagan puts it, readiness is 'the match between the child and the institutions that serve the child' (Woodhead and Moss 2007: 22). The risk to children if governments push ahead to implement early learning programmes in low-resource contexts is that millions may be enrolled in low quality pre-primary and then progress to low quality primary classrooms, and despite considerable investment, the long-term policy objective of improved human capital development is not realised. These risks are greatest during a transitional period when education quality systems are being consolidated, teacher training for pre-primary and primary classes is being strengthened, and effective governance and monitoring systems introduced.

Young Lives studies on early childhood

This working paper explores these issues through a case study of Ethiopia, one of the four countries that has been part of Young Lives longitudinal research and policy engagement (www.younglives.org.uk). Young Lives research in Ethiopia has been tracking 3,000 children growing up in 20 diverse sites across five regions in Ethiopia's federal government structure. The household circumstances, development and education of a Younger Cohort of 2,000 of these children has been recorded since they were babies in 2000/1, along with a smaller Older Cohort of 1,000 children born in 1994/5. With five rounds of data collected by the end of 2016, Young Lives has comprehensive information on these children's lives and development, including their access to early education and progress through school, which is

set in comparative context through parallel research being carried out by Young Lives teams in India, Peru and Vietnam.

Young Lives began a specific strand of research into early childhood policies and services in 2007, with parallel studies around access, equity and quality in Ethiopia (Orkin et al. 2012) as well as in India and Peru (Woodhead et al. 2009). Since 2015, we have been working closely with government, NGOs, and other agencies and stakeholders to inform operationalisation and scale-up of early education policies set out in the Fifth Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP V 2015), which is the specific focus of this paper. Besides providing a case study into the scale-up of early learning, the paper highlights an approach to research-policy engagement built on close dialogue between government priorities and research insights embedded in a specific country context.

2. Ethiopia's education revolution since 1990

The rapid growth in Ethiopia's primary school system in recent decades is the context for the Ethiopian government's current ambitious plan for expanding early education. Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 99 million (World Bank data, 2015), as well as being one of the world's poorest. The Ethiopian government has been demonstrably committed to addressing poverty and reducing inequalities – with an impressive record of pro-poor and pro-education spending. Over the past decade, the share of education budget in the total government budget has remained steady at 20 per cent (Khan et al. 2014).

Government reform programmes and donor support have encouraged rapid economic growth and improvements in infrastructure and services. Child mortality has fallen, access to healthcare has improved, and expansion of education has been rapid from a very low base. Following a regime change in the early 1990s, education was placed at the centre of Ethiopia's development policy, with a constitution that affords the right to equal access for every citizen. The major vehicle of policy development has been via successive national Education Sector Development Programmes (ESDPs) which set out goals and plans for progressive implementation of a comprehensive education system. Ethiopia was identified in 2007 as one of the countries making most rapid progress towards achieving universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary level (UNESCO 2007). Total enrolment in primary grades more than doubled from 7.4 million in 2000/07 to 18.7 million in 2014/15. Even so, the United Nations Human Development Index for 2015 still ranked Ethiopia 174 out of 188 countries (UNDP 2015).

Rapid construction of an education system from such a low starting point has not been achieved without compromises in the quality of learning, at least in the short term. Children from families with no prior experience of school entered classrooms that were often overcrowded and under resourced, and taught by teachers with only basic training, and in some cases relatively low competency levels in the skills they are expected to teach. A donor-backed General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) has supported quality improvements in general education since 2009.

As noted earlier, Young Lives has been tracking two groups of children born approximately seven years apart. This sequential longitudinal design makes it possible to monitor the way opportunities, challenges and outcomes have changed for the two cohorts, as well as tracking individual trajectories for individuals in each cohort. For example, when they were 7 years old in 2002, only 28 per cent of the Older Cohort enrolled in school; in contrast, in 2009, 50 per cent of the (by then) 7 year olds in the Younger Cohort enrolled. Young Lives divides household poverty into quintiles, and on this metric, enrolment was powerfully associated with poverty: 32 per cent of Younger Cohort children in the poorest versus 75 per cent of the least poor quintile were enrolled in 2009. Tracking these Younger Cohort children shows that many have been enrolled much later than 7 years old, such that 90 per cent of 12 year olds were in school in 2013, but 52 per cent were 'overage' for their grade. This was due to a combination of factors: late entry, poor attendance and frequent grade repetition because of slow progress (Young Lives 2014).

Young Lives surveys include brief cognitive and psychosocial measures, as well as numeracy and literacy tests. Comparisons between cohorts at 12 years old suggest a surprising trend, with no clear evidence of educational improvement; and decline in standards for some indicators. For example in 2013, only 71 per cent of 12 year olds in the Younger Cohort were able to answer a basic maths question ('2 x 4 = ?') compared with 83 per cent of an equivalent group of Older Cohort 12 year olds in 2006. For literacy, the evidence points towards weak progress through schooling, with 39 per cent unable to read a full sentence in their mother tongue by the age of 12 in 2006, improving slightly to 35 per cent in 2013. Even so, 10 per cent of the Older Cohort 12 year olds were unable to read even single words in their mother tongue in 2006; this increased to 14 per cent for the Younger Cohort at the same age in 2013 (Young Lives 2014).

Young Lives household surveys are complemented by school surveys which enrich evidence on children's progress and school effectiveness. In 2012/13, 12,000 children in Grades 4 and 5 were surveyed at the start and end of the school year to identify learning progress across 30 sites selected from seven regions. Competency levels were often low, and very variable between sites. For example, 86 per cent of children in Grade 4 and 79 per cent of children in Grade 5 were performing at foundational level or below for mathematics. Assessments of what shaped learning gains across the school year showed that whether children had attended some form of kindergarten or pre-primary class was one among many factors contributing to more positive school progress, especially at a time when pre-primary education was mainly available to the least-poor children in the sample, predominantly living in urban areas (Rolleston and James 2016).

3. Extending Ethiopia's education system into the early years

The Government of Ethiopia first designated a pre-primary stage in the Education and Training Policy in 1994. Pre-primary would focus on the 'all-round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling' at 7 years old (Ministry of Education 1994). But early childhood was not a major focus for government during the period when scaling-up primary schools was the priority. The Second Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP II 2002) acknowledged the importance of a pre-primary stage and the government's 'crucial

role in policy development and standard setting' but proposed that 'the private sector, NGOs and the community are encouraged to invest in the development of preschool programs and facilities' (Ministry of Education 2002). Consequently, preschool services only increased by 2 per cent between 1999 and 2006 (UNESCO 2009).

Young Lives household survey data for 2006 provide a snapshot of access to services among our 2,000 Younger Cohort children a decade ago. At that time nearly 58 per cent of the Young Lives sample in urban communities had attended preschool at some point since the age of 3. But only 5 per cent of all children went to a government-run programme. In contrast, less than 4 per cent of rural children had attended preschool of any kind (Woodhead et al. 2009; Orkin et al. 2012). This trend was confirmed by Ministry of Education statistics for 2007 which indicate a reported national gross enrolment ratio of 3.1 per cent, with 47.5 per cent in Addis Ababa (Ministry of Education 2008).

Figure 1 draws attention to the equity challenges in a largely unregulated, demand-led preschool system. Dominated by private fee-paying kindergartens, access to preschool strongly favoured the better off households among the Young Lives urban sample.

Figure 1.   *Early childhood services, attendance by poverty quintiles: urban sample, 2006*
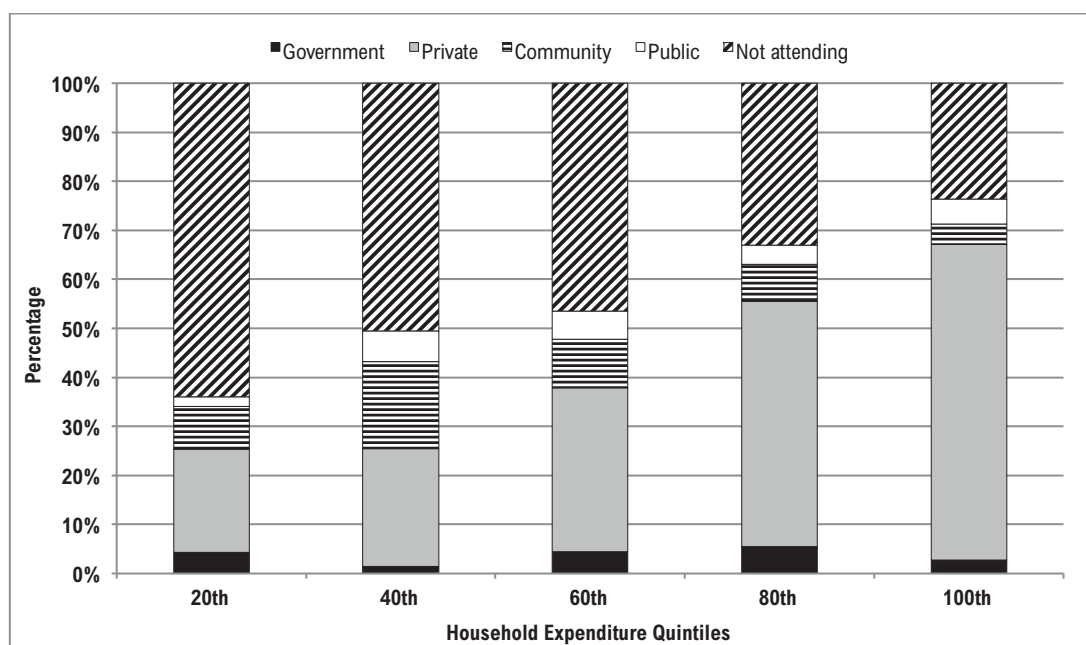
The early childhood landscape in Ethiopia has changed dramatically since Young Lives children were eligible for pre-primary education. The first policy boost came in 2010. Acknowledging that 'the services available for this age cohort are not only inadequate, but also fragmentary and lacking in coordination … [which] has resulted in poor utilization of the meagre resources targeted for ECCE', an inter-ministerial National Policy Framework for ECCE was launched (Ministry of Education 2010).

The new framework was built around four pillars. The first two – parental education and a comprehensive programme of early child health and stimulation – focused on children from the pre-natal period up to age 3 and fall under the Ministry of Health. They are being partially delivered via the major National Health Extension Programme, with 38,000 health extension workers delivering primary health care services, including to the most remote areas of the

country. The third and fourth pillars targeted children aged 4 to 6, promoting early learning through 'community based preschools, privately run preschools, preschools attached to primary schools and faith-based preschools'. One innovative non-formal ECCE programme is 'Child-to-Child' which was piloted by the Government of Ethiopia with support from UNICEF in 2008/09. Building on the Child-to-Child health education paradigm, the aim has been to improve children's school readiness through engaging older children as 'Young Facilitators' who conduct early learning activities with preschool-age children in their home villages. The programme has continued as a non-formal school readiness option in some of Ethiopia's regions and currently enrols 520,000 children. According to the ECCE Strategic Guidelines, the major objective of all these ECCE initiatives has been to 'ensure availability, equitable access to and affordability of quality ECCE services to all children, especially those who are marginalized and disadvantaged'. Accompanied by a Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE, the 2010 framework aimed to 'give all the country's children the best start and early stimulation in life'.

The National Policy Framework, Operational Guidelines and Implementation Strategy became the catalyst for rapid growth in government provision of ECCE. Enrolment levels across all forms of preschool rose from just over 340,000 in the 2009/10 academic year to over 3 million in 2014/15 (Rossiter 2015). These statistics included Child-to-Child schemes and multi-year kindergarten programmes. Especially significant were the rapidly increasing numbers of children attending primary school in the year before Grade 1 (which in Ethiopia is known as the 'O-Class' year). Various studies have evaluated these different approaches (see for example, the evaluation of Child-to-Child by Mundy et al. 2014; and the ongoing evaluation of the Accelerated School Readiness Intervention in Ethiopia, American Institutes for Research 2016).

Figure 2 highlights the fact that O-Classes attached to primary schools have emerged as the most widely available and highest priority for government, mostly due to the relatively low cost of provision within an established school site and the ease with which preschool classes attached to primary schools can be managed within existing federal and regional government structures.

Figure 2.   *Enrolment in kindergarten, O-Class and Child-to-Child, 1999/00 to 2014/15*
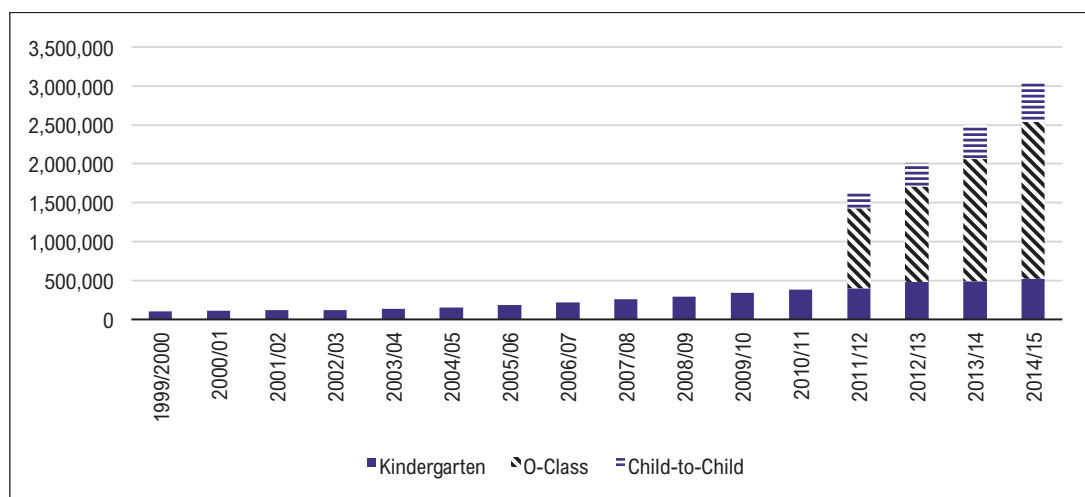
Source: Education Statistics Annual Abstracts 1999/00 to 2014/15, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia.

In the first academic year following the launch of the National Policy Framework for ECCE (2011/12), O-Classes enrolled almost three times as many children as had access to ECCE through kindergarten centres the year before. The growth in O-Class has also shifted access in ways that strengthen equity, given the rural location of the majority of O-Classes. Enrolment continued to grow through 2014/15 with O-Class serving 1.9 million young children – two in every three that attend the pre-primary stage according to official statistics.

The successes since 2010 – at least in terms of enrolment figures – have encouraged greater ambition for early education in Ethiopia. In 2015, the Ministry of Education embarked on its Fifth Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP V). ESDP V involves 'a concentrated focus on a few select important policy priorities … rather than on trying to spread limited resources across too many priorities.' Each sub-sector has access, equity, quality and learning targets. The boldest of these relates to ECCE access, with a proposed enrolment increase from 35 per cent of 4 to 6 year olds in 2015 to 80 per cent by 2020, which it is estimated will require training and recruitment of 100,000 teachers to work in the new O-Classes.

This ambitious vision for ECCE in Ethiopia combines with a much more proactive role for government than previously. Additional to the traditional role in coordinating private sector providers, under ESDP V 'government will engage in full provision of pre-primary education, from teachers to classrooms to learning materials', towards the 80 per cent enrolment target for 4 to 6 year olds. 'Quality, targeted, ECCE provision will be used as a tool to increase equity in the education system', will 'establish a culture of learning from an early age and will offer a cost effective method of improving children's readiness for learning foundation skills' (ESDP V, Ministry of Education 2015). It should be clarified that 'full provision' means that government will now have a hand in delivering services (paying salaries, providing learning materials etc.) in addition to its traditional roles of policy formulation and curriculum development. The private sector will still play a strong role, particularly for the kindergarten programme, but is now joined by government to deliver programmes to communities.

Table 1 summarises the achievements at the end of ESDP IV (2010/11-2014/15), as baseline for reviewing the targets set by ESDP V.

Table 1.   *Major objectives for ECCE in ESDP V*

	Baseline (ESDP IV)	Target (ESDP V)
Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (ages 4-6)	35%	80%
% of students that receive at least one year of pre-primary education	N.A.	100%
GPI in pre-primary	0.95	1.00
Pre-primary teachers holding the ECCE diploma	0%	15%
% of pre-primary schools with qualified leader (diploma)	N.A.	100%
% institutions that have been externally inspected once	0%	100%
% of pre-primary schools met and well above the standards	N.A.	60%

Figure 3 represents the scale of these ambitious targets. The details of how they will be delivered was not elaborated in ESDP V, other than the statement that a mix of modalities will be used and that 'in the first years of ESDP V different approaches will be piloted and lessons learned will be used to inform expansion choices' (ESDP V, Ministry of Education 2015).

As an example of this piloting in action, in 2015/16 the government of Ethiopia and UNICEF trialled two, eight-week (150 hour) Accelerated School Readiness (ASR) packages for 6- or 7-year-old children: a July-August (Jul/Aug) programme during the annual school break and a September-October (Sep/Oct) programme as a replacement for the first two months of Grade 1. Bridging programmes of this type are a response to the perceived high infrastructure and management costs of O-Class or kindergarten, which can slow down ECCE expansion in the poorest areas.

The ASR programme is led by a trained facilitator and is designed to support children's cognitive, motor, social and emotional development, through storytelling, play and conversation. Preliminary findings from the 162 school ASR pilots in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state were mixed, with 'Jul/Aug' ASR attendees outperforming their O-Class peers in pre-maths and pre-literacy assessments but 'Sep/Oct' ASR attendees underperforming compared to their Grade 1 peers (American Institute of Research 2016). A formal evaluation of ASR impacts is now underway, comprising a 120-school randomised control trial to test the effects of each of the accelerated school readiness interventions on children's academic and non-academic learning, attendance, and continued enrolment in school. This evaluation will also consider questions of programme feasibility and potential for scale-up, taking account of the difficulties of delivering a 'Jul/Aug' programme in what is Ethiopia's main rainy season and the disadvantages of running preschool programmes when older siblings are not attending school.

Figure 3.   *ECCE enrolment to 2014/15 and projection to 2019/20, based ESDP V plans*
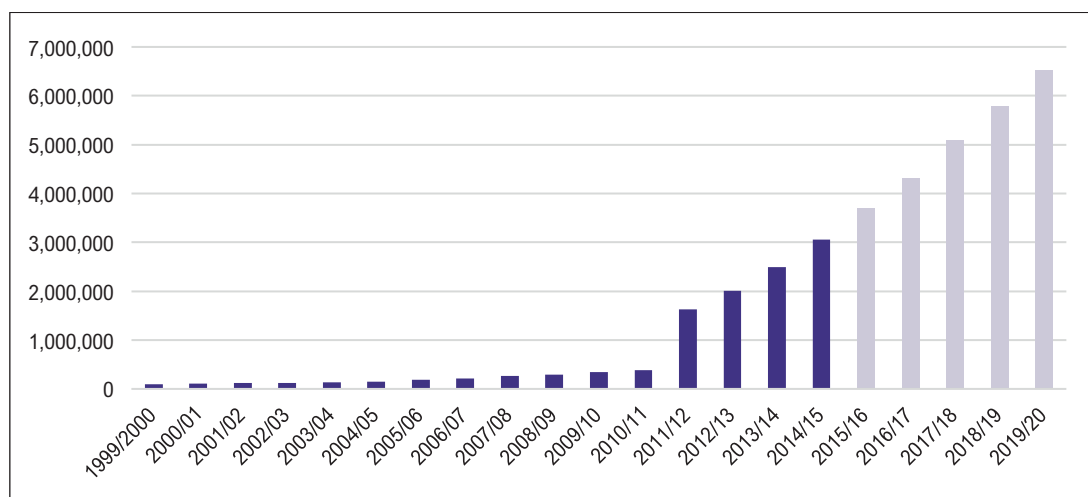
Source: Education Statistics Annual Abstracts 1999/00 to 2014/15 and ESDP V, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia.

4. Supporting scale-up plans for early education in Ethiopia

Young Lives' longstanding presence and credibility within Ethiopia has created rare opportunities to inform policy and service development, including in early childhood. Young Lives already studied the early stages of scale-up from 2006 through to 2010 (Orkin et al. 2012). In early 2015, the new Young Lives ECCE study (specifically on early learning in Ethiopia) coincided with the Ministry of Education's drafting of ESDP V. The overall goal of this new study has been to provide data and analysis on the operationalisation of O-Class policies in collaboration with the Ministry of Education's School Improvement Programme Directorate (SIP). SIP carries the responsibility to coordinate efforts to understand feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the various pre-primary approaches available.

Work began just as ESDP V was being finalised early in 2015, and Young Lives was able to offer input from international experience to the details of the ESDP V plan for ECCE. Strong links were established with the ESDP V drafting team and other Ministry of Education officials, as well as major ECD/ECCE-focused donors and NGOs based in Addis Ababa, (including World Bank, UNICEF, and Save the Children). A workshop presentation subsequently developed into a policy paper to link Ethiopia's ambitious ECCE plans with international guidance (Rossiter 2016). Through this policy paper, six features of effective ECCE systems were identified: (i) equitable and inclusive access; (ii) curriculum, teaching and learning materials; (iii) teachers and school leaders; (iv) parental and community support and engagement; (v) standards, monitoring and learning; and (vi) systems, financing, management and leadership.

Three of these features (ii, iii and vi), were identified for more detailed follow up by the Young Lives team, through consultation with an expert ECCE Taskforce – an inter-ministerial and donor group linked into the Ministries of Education, Health, Women and Children's Affairs in Ethiopia and convened at the federal level. To date (2016), two of these priorities (ii and vi) have translated into exploratory studies, namely into the way Regional Education Bureaus have responded to ESDPV in their system's planning, financing, management and leadership; and the capacity of Ethiopia's Colleges of Teacher Education to supply sufficient trained teachers to work with young children, especially in the rapidly expanding O classes.

Both studies have been based around fieldwork visits, semi-structured interviews and consultations with key stakeholders. They have also been informed by analysis of national Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, for example to visualise regional variation in the reach of O-Class supply, the rate of change in O-Class enrolment and the patterns of enrolment by gender, location and age.

5. Young Lives consultations with Regional Education Bureaus

Ethiopia has a federal system of government, with the delivery of central government policies decentralised to the regions. It is Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) within each state that carry the major responsibility for operationalising the policy targets in ESDP V. Decentralised governance is one of the reasons why ESDP V does not specify in any detail how policies for early education are to be operationalised, but it is respected as the guide for what is to be achieved in the plan period.

Consultation visits were arranged for seven regions of Ethiopia and the findings presented to the ECCE Taskforce in December 2015. A semi-structured protocol asked senior REB administrators about: (i) their preparedness to deliver ECCE (their skills, training, attitudes and support from above); (ii) their past, present and future plans for ECCE; (iii) their training, deployment, remuneration and supervision processes for ECCE teachers; and (iv) the available standards and current resourcing levels in ECCE classrooms.

Consultations revealed the challenges of delivering ambitious national policies when there is a shortage of specialist ECCE administrators and little orientation or training has been provided regarding national plans for ECCE expansion. REBs had, however, set enrolment goals for ECCE and use population data to estimate demand for services. Some REBs have targeted roll-out for pastoral communities, girls and language minorities, and all REBs used similar approaches to mobilise demand, including promotional campaigns to encourage school enrolment from the federal level down to kebeles (villages), especially during a nationally designated 'Education Week'.

REBs also face similar delivery constraints. No region involved in the consultation had a budget allocated for ECCE services. Each recognised the shortage of qualified personnel and had received little guidance on ECCE implementation standards, monitoring and supervision approaches. The human capacity shortage extends to classrooms with O-Class teachers, in particular, often untrained and locally contracted, or assigned from lower primary grades.

Regional variations in scale-up of early education

Despite sharing similar constraints, REBs vary in their response to policies on ECCE expansion. As illustrated in Figure 4, some have made substantial enrolment progress from a low base, others are only just emerging as ECCE providers.

Figure 4. *Net enrolment rate (NER) in O-Class, by region, 2011/12 to 2014/15*
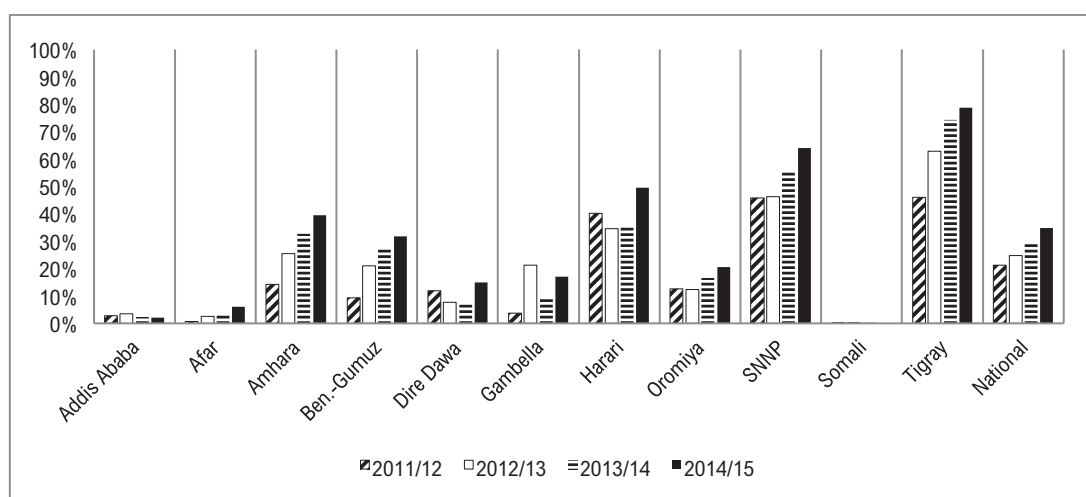
Source: Education Management Information System data, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia; as reported in World Bank-coordinated workshop on ECCE in Ethiopia, June 2016. Note that Somali NER data are unavailable and these enrolment rates in O-Class are additional to other forms of ECCE.

Variation in ECCE perspectives, organisation and planning preferences emerged between and within three regional groupings.

(a) **Addis Ababa**. The economic and political capital of the country is a special case. The reason for low enrolment rates in O-Class in Figure 4 is because of an established infrastructure of mainly private fee-charging kindergarten programmes and some church-linked preschools (Orkin et al. 2012). Through government-funded teacher training colleges in Addis Ababa, the City Administration supplies qualified teachers to private kindergartens. It does not provide any direct finance to private providers but does offer oversight and supervision to all pre-primary classes in the city.

(b) **Oromia, Amhara, SNNP and Tigray**. In these larger and more established regions ECCE services have until recently been very sparse. The O-Class initiative has found fertile ground, as a logical extension of now well-established primary school systems. Our consultation with REBs identified strong community participation, including the provision of food and establishment of water and sanitation facilities with community materials and labour (Amhara); of teacher training plans for rapid deployment (Oromia and Amhara); and of innovation through standalone O-Classes, located to minimise travel distance to primary schools for children in very remote areas (Amhara). No two regions were alike in priorities or planning objectives.

(c) **Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz.** These regions are relatively under-resourced and started their educational development from a much lower base than the larger and more established regions. Benishangul-Gumuz targets ECCE services, notably to increase access for indigenous groups and for girls. It has chosen to deploy experts from REB level to support districts in implementing ECCE plans. In contrast, Afar faces difficulties in gathering local political support for ECCE.

These differences in regional responses to national policy are reflected in progress in scale-up of early learning. The next section provides an overview of O-Class provision in 2014/15, at the time when ESDP V was issued. These analyses can serve as a baseline for monitoring national and regional governments' operationalisation of ESDP V during 2015-20.

Statistical snapshot of regional variations

Improving equity in access to early learning is a priority in ESDP V and was also referred to frequently in REB consultations. National statistics based on annual school returns provide indicative data that can be disaggregated to at least the regional level, as already presented in Figure 4. The regional variations of most interest relate to: (i) the rate of change in O-Class enrolment; (ii) the reach of O-Class, as indicated by the share of schools in each region that offer the service and where these schools are located; and (iii) who it is that is attending O-Class, in particular, children of which age and gender.

(i) The rate of change in O-Class enrolment

During the period to 2015, O-Class expansion had already been rapid (annual 25 per cent enrolment growth from 2011/12 to 2014/15) but very uneven across regions. Figure 5 highlights that the four remote, rural, pastoralist regions (Afar, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella; collectively referred to as 'emerging regions') show the fastest growth, but these growth rates are from very low bases. Among the large regions, Amhara demonstrates the fastest expansion of O-Class. In contrast, Addis Ababa shows no change in enrolment, due to the already high enrolment rates and dominance of private kindergartens in the city.

Figure 5. *Average annual O-Class enrolment growth rate by region: 2011/12 to 2014/15*
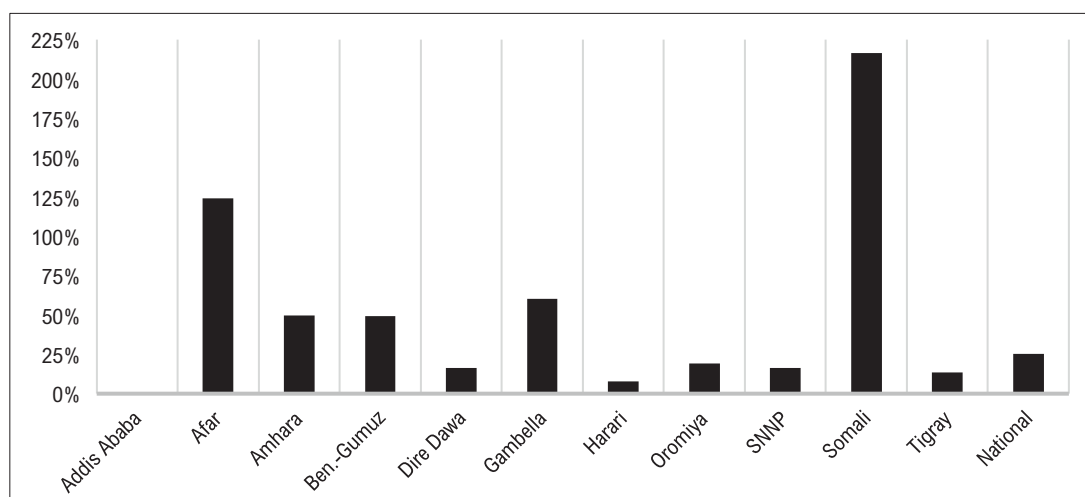
Source: Education Management Information System data, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia; as reported in World Bank-coordinated workshop on ECCE in Ethiopia, June 2016.

(ii) The reach of O-Class

Figure 6 shows the share of all primary schools that include an O-Class, by region. By 2014/15, 74 per cent of schools (and these are predominantly rural) included an O-Class – up from 60 per cent in 2011/12. In all regions except Addis Ababa and SNNP, the share of schools offering an O-Class has increased over the period. Benishangul-Gumuz has shown the fastest increase, but five regions remain which have 50 per cent or fewer schools offering O-Class.

Figure 6.   *Percentage of primary schools with an O-Class, by region over four years: 2011/12 to 2014/15*
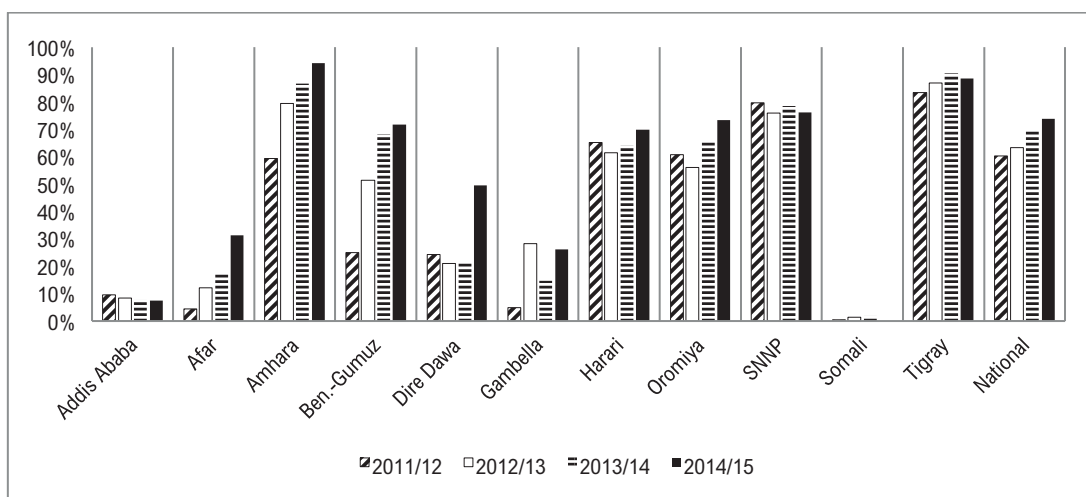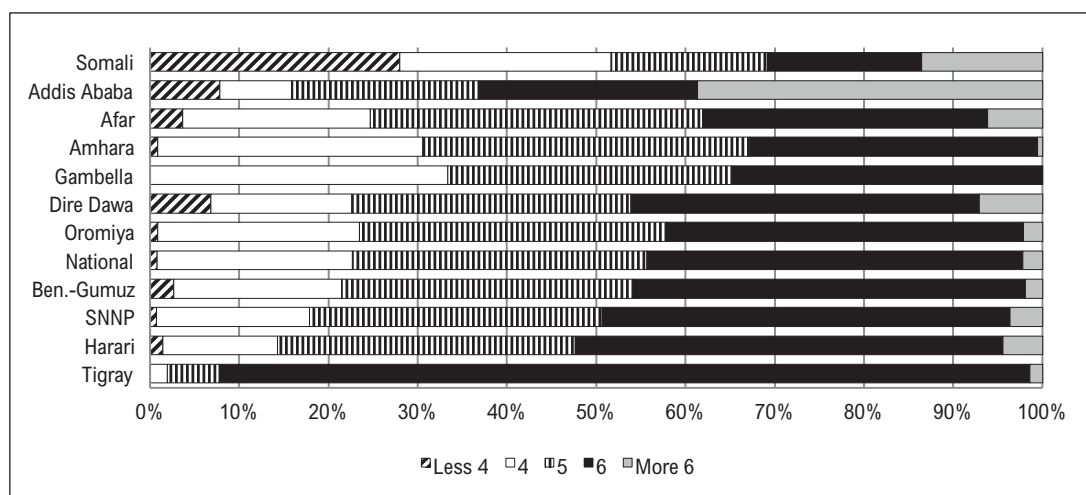

Source: Education Management Information System data, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia; as reported in World Bank-coordinated workshop on ECCE in Ethiopia, June 2016.

(iii) Who is attending O-Class?

The impressive growth in O-Class enrolment masks two important trends, related to gender and age. First, more boys than girls were attending O-Class in 2015. With a gender parity index of 0.95 across pre-primary, the opportunities to improve gender equality in the sector may be being missed.

Second, the initial policy vision for O-Class has been as a single year for 6 year olds before entering Grade 1, at age 7. At the moment, however, O-Class is accommodating students as young as 3 years old and as a result, only 42 per cent of students enrolled in O-Class are 6 years old (see Figure 7). The remaining 58 per cent of O-Class attendees are two or more years away from school entry age, with expectations to stay for multiple years at that level, before entering Grade 1. The trend varies between regions. In Somali and Addis Ababa, for example, fewer than one-quarter of enrolees were 6 years old. In contrast, Tigray has 91 per cent of enrolees at 6 years old.

This pattern of O-Classes attracting much younger children can be interpreted as a positive reflection on families' appetite for early learning opportunities, and incidentally, very similar trends created challenges for policymakers in England when British primary education was being consolidated in the late nineteenth century (see Woodhead 1989). With a wide range of ages in the same class, teaching and learning processes targeted at a child's developmental level are hard to define and deliver. Also any tendency for children to stay in O-Class for multiple years before progressing to Grade 1 is worryingly reminiscent of the early grade inefficiencies identified in emergent primary education systems (labelled 'churn' by Crouch 2015, see Section 1).

Figure 8. *Share of O-Class enrolment, by region and age, 2014/15*

Source: Education Management Information System data, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia; as reported in World Bank-coordinated workshop on ECCE in Ethiopia, June 2016.

Overall, these analyses provided valuable baseline information for monitoring implementation of ESDP V. EMIS data revealed that the share of primary schools with an O-Class had already been rising before formalisation of the government targets, but with huge regional variation. Positive national trends of increasing enrolment – mirrored in many regions – conceal concerns around supply, in particular rural supply, in Gambella, Afar and Somali.

The consultation with REBs and the analysis of EMIS data revealed much about plans and enrolment trends, which the Young Lives team were able to report back to Ministry officials, the Education Strategy Centre, SIP and the ECCE Taskforce. For example:

- What accounts for the regional variations, even among regions that share much in common? Benishangul-Gumuz is enabling access to O-Class for huge numbers in remote areas. Might the other emerging regions of Gambella, Somali and Afar learn from Benishangul-Gumuz about innovative planning to progress on ESDPV targets?

- Is Tigray's standout performance in enrolling 6-year-old children – the year before they join primary grades – part of a regional strategy for age-targeted ECCE and might such a strategy be applicable elsewhere?

- Who is O-Class for? If it remains a programme for 6 year olds, then more needs to be done to restrict access to only this group and consider providing additional, age-appropriate early learning opportunities for 4 and 5 year olds.

- How can gender equity be strengthened? Girls are currently underrepresented in O-Classes.

At the same time, many questions were left unanswered. Research, monitoring, evaluation and inspection systems are still at an emergent stage within Ethiopia's education system so there is urgent need for basic data, notably about the capacities and skills of teachers working in O-Classes, what curriculum and pedagogy they are actually practicing, what resources are available in the classroom, or anything about children's learning and preparedness for formal schooling. These issues are beginning to be addressed by Ethiopian and international university researchers, as well as by the World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children and other international and local NGOs.

6. Young Lives study of O-Class teacher supply

One urgent priority that Young Lives has begun to address is the question of human capacity: how are regions servicing such a rapid increase in enrolment in O-Class with trained teachers? And what plans are being constructed to achieve the projected requirement for 100,000 additional teachers? Consultations with REBs and the ECCE Taskforce had already revealed a number of channels into O-Class teaching. A few *woredas* (district administrations) provide teachers through regular salaried channels; some schools hire teachers on a contract basis from the local community; and other schools assign teachers from primary grades to supervise young children in O-Class classrooms. Teaching appointments can even vary within a school, with O-Class staff recruited via different channels.

The latter approaches can be considered innovative local responses where a shortage of trained ECCE staff is observed. Schools are allocating their own revenues, from community contributions and from primary-level budget, in order to finance an ECCE service. As the system continues to expand, however, inadequate approaches to pre-service teacher training, teacher deployment and teacher remuneration may limit the quality and age-appropriateness of O-Class teaching, or create highly uneven standards of service.

During early 2016, Young Lives carried out a focused study of these issues in Amhara region. Amhara is one of the three largest and most populous regions, and has seen the largest absolute O-Class enrolment increase in recent years (50 per cent average annual growth rate of enrolment for three years). Amhara has the highest number of Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs). There are 36 CTEs in Ethiopia, although at the time of this research, only 17 offered training for ECCE. 10 of these 36 CTEs are in Amhara so the scale of human capacity requirements – and potential to deliver – are equally large. Amhara also has stated that its ambition is to provide 100 per cent trained staff for ECCE during the ESDP V period. Our study was guided by the question 'what is Amhara doing to supply teachers and what does it plan moving forward? '

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in six woreda education offices (WEOs) and four of the ten CTEs in the region. Interviews were carried out with senior administrators, as trainers responsible for ECCE programmes, as well as with students training for ECCE, with the aim to understand how teachers are being prepared and deployed, as well as their knowledge and beliefs, especially about O-Class teaching. The next sections summarise the major lessons from this fieldwork.

Top-down planning and weak communication

With a regional plan to train and deploy approximately 20,000 ECCE teachers over the next five years, there is an acknowledged urgency to scale-up Amhara's teacher training system for ECCE. Fieldwork suggested, however, that this target will not be reached within CTE's current programmes, plans and resources.

ECCE training programmes were typically organised towards either a diploma or a certificate. They differed in duration (three years and one year, respectively) but appeared similar in terms of content, entrance and graduation requirements. Each programme prepared for

'universal ECCE' without targeting for any particular type of service delivery, age group, or later placement. Instructors reported that programme modules were relevant to ECCE teaching but concerns were expressed that content is too theoretical, and with too much overlap with primary-level training programmes. The importance of specialist modules for ECCE training was recognised.

Neither the instructors nor administrative staff responsible for ECCE training programmes expressed a clear understanding of what was expected of them by federal or regional government, including: which training approaches might be appropriate; which curricula were to be used for trainees or would be applied in O-classes or kindergarten centres; and how ECCE-trained teachers would fit within salary scales and career progression opportunities. As one CTE instructor put it, the expansion of ECCE was launched as a "kind of campaign where both resources and teachers are not ready". This uncertainty is made worse by the apparent weaknesses in communication to CTEs, with core policy documents scarce and many CTE instructors expressing limited understanding of regional or national expectations of ECCE programme and curricula.

In terms of formal governance, the REB in Amhara carries responsibility for planning, but there appeared to be limited engagement with either WEOs responsible for delivering ECCE via O-Classes, or with CTEs responsible for teacher supply. The senior management of CTEs saw themselves as passive implementers who train teachers as advised by the REB. One CTE Department Head who had read the core national policies for ECCE in ESDP V commented that: "The REB doesn't seem to encourage CTEs with a sense of ownership ... we are not part of the planning, often we get advised by the REB on the number of trainees we have to accept. I know ESDP V personally. As a CTE, we never participated in the process, and we were not introduced to the new policies after they were approved."

The capacity of the CTEs to support O-Class teacher training

Even though current planning approaches, support and guidance from federal and regional government has been weak, instructors showed initiative in strengthening ECCE capacity with limited resources. Ideas included arranging ad hoc events to share information on ECCE; gathering experience by visiting local ECCE facilities: "for instance, I visited a community school personally to understand what the environment and the ECCE provision look like. This is just my initiative"; and using internet resources to learn from other national ECCE systems and to obtain teaching materials. CTEs had established a variety of networks/links with schools, NGOs or universities. CTEs were also aware of shortcomings, and called for a technical link to federal and regional ECCE planners for training/awareness purposes – to improve understanding of programme objectives/constraints on all sides.

Even without a common orientation process, CTEs showed remarkable similarity in their perceptions of the purpose of ECCE. Ethiopia's interim O-Class syllabus emphasises six developmental objectives: pre-primary education for fuller growth of a healthy body and emotional development; the development and use of language; the development of basic computational/arithmetic skills; personal, social and emotional development; the development of environmental knowledge; and the development of skills of creativity and a sense of appreciation. CTE lecturers and students' priorities for early learning were revealed through a simple activity completed by CTE lecturers and students. They were given a list of 15 Early Learning Standards (ELDS) statements commonly recognised as important indicators of readiness to learn prior to the kindergarten or O-Class year. They were asked to select the five they regarded as most important. CTE instructors and trainees regarded the

foundations of effective ECCE as being a child's ability to cooperate and share, to use small muscles competently, to say the names of a few common objects and to begin pre-literacy exercises. They prioritised play in their image of effective ECCE, and judged learning by rote, at desks facing a teacher, as inappropriate methods. These perceptions are consistent with ECCE policy in Ethiopia and internationally and indicate their awareness of key inputs for O-Class teacher training programmes.

Models of pre-service training and in-service support

Even if the planning and coordination processes can be improved, it is unlikely that traditional, and relatively expensive, pre-service training approaches are going to be sufficient to service demand for capable teachers. Two major challenges need to be overcome.

First, O-Class is seen as an ECCE approach with promise to reach most children in Ethiopia, according to central government officials and policymakers. Among CTEs interviewed, however, there was scepticism about the feasibility of scale-up, combined with a belief that designating primary classrooms (and often primary teachers) for an O-Class would be a temporary fix. In support of this view, community mobilisation efforts have resulted in rapid infrastructure expansion for O-Class. Quick wins have been achieved by adapting primary school classrooms and using local resources to furnish and supply ECCE-specific facilities. Moving towards fully resourced ECCE environments will be slow, however. Many classrooms remain sparse or ill-adapted to ECCE, with inadequate nearby sanitation and water services and often lacking sufficient designated outdoor space and resources for play (Teferra et al. 2016).

Second, clarity will be needed from federal and regional governments about the continuation of certificate training programmes as a one-year ('fast-track') route to ECCE teacher status. Certificate training is generally considered by CTEs as inferior to the three-year diploma course. Yet questions surround the feasibility of delivering this extended route on the scale required to meet the shortfall in pre-primary teachers, nor the capacity development needs of the thousands of temporary and often locally contracted individuals, that are working in classrooms. Short-term training options – such as summer 'rainy season' courses during typically quiet periods for CTEs – for these individuals could help to rapidly capacitate a system that is trying to respond to ambitious demands. Work has begun to develop a professional development course for these individuals which may include complementary approaches via radio or 'teacher packages' of training for basic skills, as well as use of increasingly accessible new technologies.

7. Six challenges in scaling-up global ECCE

Previous sections have explored the way Ethiopia has been responding to the global policy challenge crystallised in SDG target 4.2 to 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'. In this final section we reflect on six of the key challenges for global ECCE: scale-up; equity; age-appropriateness; cross-sectoral coordination; capacity building; and research and evidence. Other key challenges go beyond the scope of this working paper, notably the models for governance and financing that can deliver quality ECCE for all.

1. Scale-up. A first challenge is around how ambitious goals for scale-up of ECCE will be operationalised. The goal for Ethiopia is to move from around 25 per cent enrolment in 2013 to 80 per cent by 2020. Lessons from scale-up by other countries in the region are useful. Some years ago, South Africa prioritised establishing Grade R (the equivalent of O-Class) in its primary school system. Between 2001 and 2012 Grade R enrolment increased by 11 per cent per year. To achieve this goal required providing 1,000 new classrooms each year (in order to accommodate 45,000 extra children each year). In 2011/12 the per child of provision calculated as R3,112 (US$ 243) per annum. Despite this investment, it took until 2012 to expand provision to the point that 94 per cent of Grade 1 learners had attended Grade R (Department of Basic Education 2014). Ethiopia is aspiring to achieve 80 per cent in half that time, from a lower starting point, with far smaller budgets, and with wider ambitions for ECCE than O-Class (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.   *Grade R uptake in South Africa over 10 years*
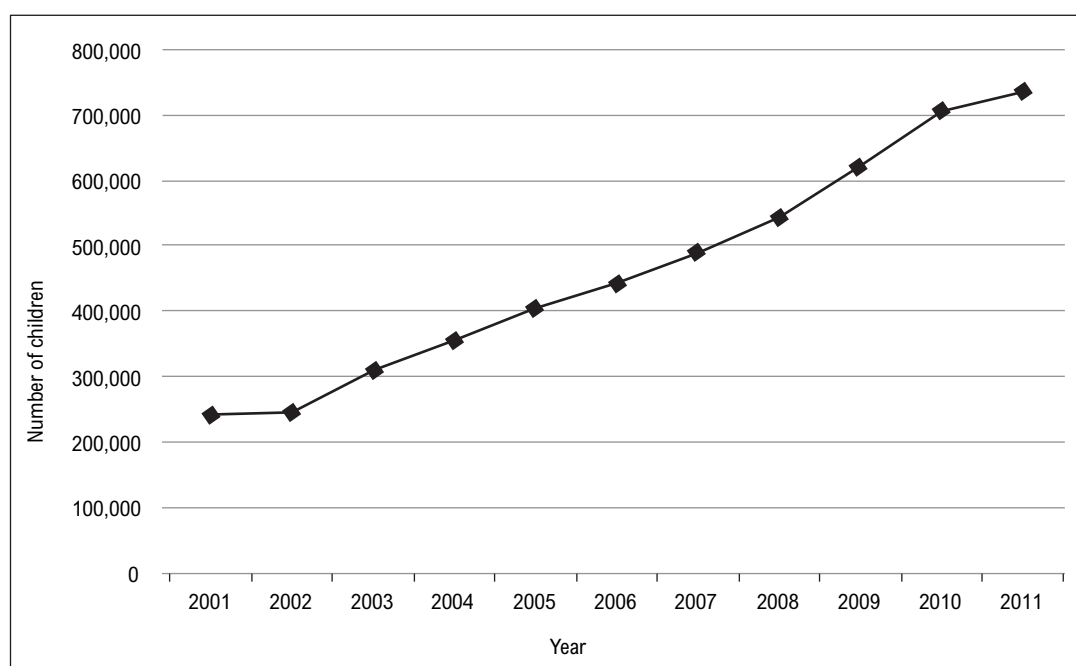

Source: Hoadley 2013.

Referring to South Africa's capacity for implementation as Grade R was scaled-up, Biersteker (2010: 37) notes: 'Significant investments were required for learner support material, teacher training, increased education department staff at national and provincial levels, and physical infrastructure.'

2. Equity. A second challenge is around how to ensure equity in scale-up of services, prioritising the most disadvantaged groups, which requires proactive targeting of resources and capacity. The global evidence on equity of access to quality services is not encouraging for any region of the world, despite the strong evidence and rhetoric around early intervention being a 'powerful equaliser' (see Figure 9).

Figure 9.   *Percentage of 3- to 4-year-old children who attend some form of early childhood education, by household wealth quintile*
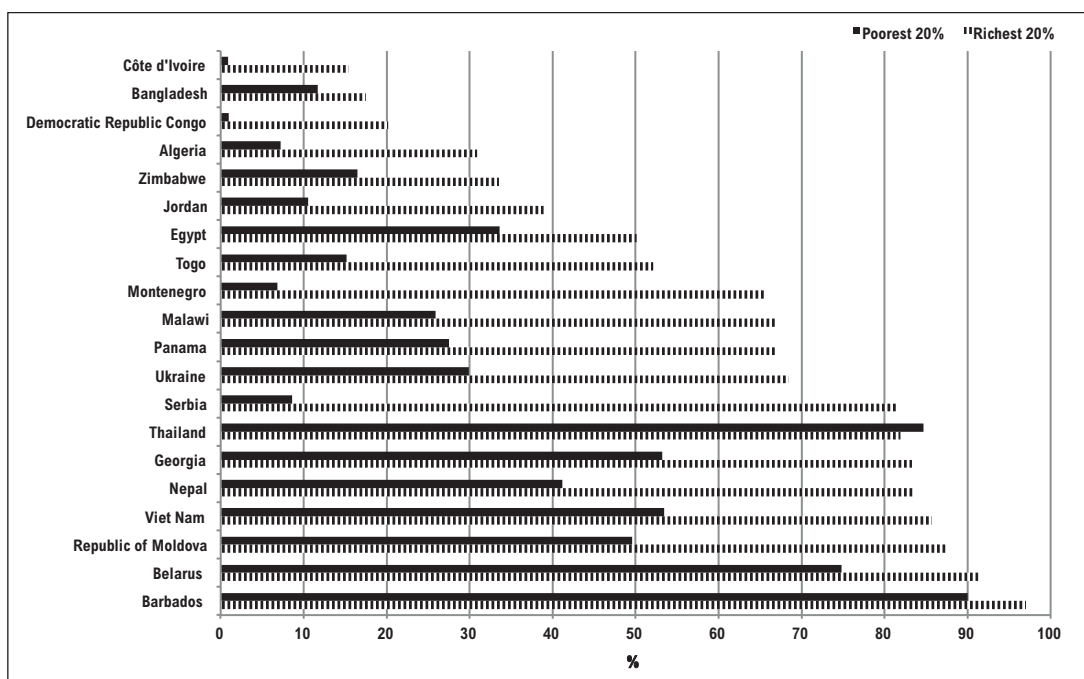
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2016, based on DHS, MICS, and other nationally representative surveys.
Data are from the latest available from the DHS (2012, 2013 or 2014), MICS (2012, 2013 or 2014) or the WMS (2013). With thanks to the Data and Analytics Section, UNICEF Division of Data, Research and Policy.

The risk is that better quality and more accessible ECCE services are available in urban and better-off communities, which merely serves to amplify initial advantages of more privileged children and widens the gap on entry to school. Within Ethiopia, as we have seen, providing equitable access and especially reaching remote regions is a strong policy priority. Governance and resourcing issues are critical, to ensure pro-poor delivery of services.

Again, South Africa's experience of introducing Grade R is relevant. An impact evaluation commissioned by the Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) found that on average, children who attended Grade R had better mathematics and home language scores in subsequent primary school years than those who had not. However, there was no effect for children from *poor* backgrounds (the vast majority) who also attended schools of *lower* quality. The authors conclude that: 'provision of Grade R to all will improve results in the wealthiest quintile by about half a year's learning, with almost no benefits for lower quintiles' (Department of Monitoring and Evaluation and Department of Basic Education 2014: 7). South Africa's massive roll-out has in fact widened the gap between rich and poor children. The research indicates that without significant attention to the quality of the teaching and learning environment, the promise of a Grade O or R year will not be realised.

3. Age-appropriateness. A third challenge is about avoiding 'early learning' being treated as an instrumental means to an end of improving children's readiness for grade teaching and the efficiency of primary school systems in delivering strong achievement outcomes. The risk is that ECCE is conceptualised (and delivered) very narrowly, as a downward extension of the primary cycle to ever younger children with little regard to the age-appropriateness of learning and teaching, or the synergies between health, well-being and learning. Locating

early childhood programmes within school classrooms, with many teachers being redeployed from teaching older grades, without specific ECCE training and with few age-appropriate resources, and insufficient guidance and support are all risks for many countries keen to scale-up ECCE. Within Ethiopia, the current Ministry of Education emphasis is on expanding O-Class, although the 2010 National Policy Framework identified four pillars spanning a much broader range of early childhood services, and including health sector initiatives, child-to-child etc. (see Section 3).

4. **Cross-sectoral coordination.** Recognising the importance of a broad concept of early childhood services, beyond pre-primary classes, bridges to a fourth challenge. ECD is about much more than 'preschool' in terms of age range, sectoral responsibilities and entry points for delivering services (Woodhead et al. 2014). As the UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and World Health Organization (WHO) Director–General Dr Margaret Chan put it:

> ;... to be most effective, interventions must be intersectoral, going beyond education to encompass health, nutrition, and protection. The healthy development of a child's brain depends on multiple positive experiences. Nutrition feeds the brain; stimulation sparks the mind; love and protection buffer the negative impact of stress and adversity. And distinct interventions are mutually supportive, achieving the strongest results when delivered together' (Lake and Chan 2014: 1).

For example, effective early learning programmes can begin in infancy and be closely tied to nutrition. A randomised controlled trial begun in Jamaica in 1986–87 has tracked the benefits of two years of psychosocial stimulation via home visiting combined with nutrition supplementation, with follow up after twenty years showing higher scores on a range of cognitive and educational tests, psychosocial functioning, eventually translated into higher earnings by the experimental group compared with a control group (Walker et al. 2006; Gertler et al. 2014: 1001)

Current plans for ECD in Ethiopia are largely on sectoral and age-specific lines, notably, with little tie-in between the current Ministry of Education plans in ESDPV and the Ministry of Health's equally ambitious large-scale Health Extension Workers (HEW) programme, launched in 2013, aiming to provide two HEWs in each community and targeting families with much younger children (Workie and Ramana 2013). Arguably, expecting more integrated policy and service delivery is unrealistic during early stages of system development. Just as scale-up of ECCE sets challenges for delivery of core early learning objectives, so the HEW programme already requires implementation of 16 packages, and any goals related to infant learning and development would add to the pressures on para-professionals tasked with delivering the programme.

5. Human capacity. These inevitable constraints on scale-up of holistic, integrated early childhood policies links to a fifth challenge, which is about human capacity, the availability of sufficient adequately trained and remunerated professionals, para-professionals, and community workers to deliver on ambitious policy goals. The Ethiopian government's scale-up plans in ESDPV anticipate needing an additional 120,000 teachers by 2020, trained in early learning and teaching. With only 17 Colleges of Teacher Education able to train for ECCE, and very few faculty with specialist ECCE training, it is hard to imagine how this can be achieved without compromising on quality. Pushing ahead on enrolment targets will need to be matched equally strong plans for curriculum and classroom quality, as well as teacher capacity, training and support. A short-, medium- and long-term policy may be needed on each aspect of strengthening capacity, fully operationalised with effective finance, governance, leadership, monitoring and community engagement.

6. Research and evidence. There is currently an imbalance in research investment between the well-articulated fundamental science of ECD and more patchy, contextualised studies of service delivery. This also reflects in the global policy discourse, especially the compelling economic analyses reporting high returns on investment in early childhood which are largely based on a small number of US-based experimental designs (Heckman 2008). It is encouraging that growing numbers of well-designed evaluations are being reported across diverse global locations (Engle et al. 2011; Nores and Barnett 2010), although still under represented in sub-Saharan Africa.[1]

For Ethiopia, Young Lives is able to offer some encouraging data on the positive impacts of ECCE, at least for a relatively privileged urban sample for whom data is available: '... children who had been to preschool had progressed further through primary school, by 0.218 of a grade on average, than those who had not' (Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2012). Some studies have been conducted on Child-to-Child (Mundy et al. 2014) and on the Accelerated School Readiness Programme (American Institutes for Research 2016). To date, very little evidence is available about scale-up, quality and effectiveness of O-Classes that goes beyond the modest studies reported in this working paper.

8. Conclusion

This working paper has explored the role for ECD programmes in strengthening education systems towards sustainable futures through a case study of Ethiopia. Of course, achieving better outcomes for education is not the only justification for investing in early childhood. There are many less instrumental and much more fundamental arguments for early childhood programmes, about young children's fundamental rights to a healthy environment, adequate nutrition, psychosocial support and early learning. Equally, we are cautious about building the case for ECCE around trying to resolve weaknesses in the next stage of the school system; again, children have a right to receive quality learning, and not just for reasons of education efficiency.

While all the evidence points to the potential of investment in early childhood, when it comes to delivering on that potential, many of the same challenges will face early childhood services as face primary education: namely ensuring good governance; sufficient resources, well-trained and remunerated teachers, and ensuring quality, age appropriate, child-centred curricula and pedagogy. At worst, mediocre ECD programmes will not compensate for mediocre school systems; and children (especially poor children) will be the losers, and the promise of investment in ECCE scale-up will not be realised. A South African education policy specialist reflected on that country's experience with the conclusion that:

'We shouldn't put a bad [Reception Year] onto a primary school system facing many challenges simply because we have the money to roll it out' (cited in Biersteker 2010: 49).

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1 But see Martinez et al. 2012 for an example from Mozambique, and a South African evaluation by Dawes, Biersteker and Hendricks 2012.

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Scaling-up Early Learning in Ethiopia: Exploring the Potential of O-Class

SDG Target 4.2 identifies 'pre-primary education' as a strategy to strengthen school readiness and contribute to the quality and outcomes of education, which is supported by the powerful evidence from evaluation research. The challenge faced by many countries is to deliver the proven potential of well-planned, quality programmes to scale. This working paper summarises Ethiopia's growing commitment to pre-primary education and reports recent Young Lives engagement with the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia and other partners to support scale-up. Ethiopia's most recent ambitious targets for early learning have been set out in the Fifth Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP V 2015), with pre-primary classes (known as O-Class) within primary schools being seen as the most rapid route to scale-up.

The paper reports on the progress and the challenges in delivering ambitious targets. We report key findings from exploratory fieldwork on two key themes, namely the response of Regional Education Bureaus in planning, financing, management and ensuring human capacity for scale-up; and the potential of Ethiopia's Colleges of Teacher Education to supply sufficient trained teachers to work with young children, especially in the rapidly expanding O-Classes.

The final section draws on parallel experiences of other countries, notably Grade R in South Africa, and reports on six key challenges for scale-up; equity; age-appropriateness; cross-sectoral coordination; capacity building; and research and evidence. Other key challenges go beyond the scope of this working paper, notably the models for governance and financing that can deliver quality early education for all. While Ethiopia's initiative to scale-up O-Class is a welcome indicator of policy commitment to SDG Target 4.2, we conclude that there is a risk that low quality pre-primary programmes will not deliver on the potential of early childhood education and that children (especially poor children) will be the losers.

Young Lives