

Summary

Workshop | Strengthening early childhood education through strategic planning: Exploring ECE accelerator tools KIX LAC | OECS | UNICEF

Date: April 25, 2025

Via Zoom

Organized by: KIX LAC

Duration: 2 hours

Below are the workshop presentations, presented in the order they were given.

1. Tips and Tools: ECE Accelerator Toolkit | Divya Lata, Global Theme Director for Early Childhood Education, UNICEF
2. Using the Build to Last Framework and the Pre-Primary Sub-Sector Analysis Tool in the Pacific | Sandipan Paul, Early Childhood Education Specialist, UNICEF Pacific Multi-Country Office
3. Exploring the ECE Accelerator Toolkit: Reflection on Countries in Eastern, Southern and West Africa | David Woods Baysah, Oficina Regional para África Oriental y Meridional de UNICEF
4. Activity: Discussion space on the usability of the tool in different contexts | English group facilitators: Raúl Chacón - KIX LAC, Divya Lata - UNICEF, Lisa Sargusingh-Terrance (OECS) | Spanish group facilitators: Rosa María Moncada - KIX LAC, Agustin de la Varga - UNICEF, Patricia Misiego - UNICEF

1. Consejos y herramientas: Caja de herramientas del ECE Accelerator, Divya Lata (UNICEF)

During the presentation, the critical importance of early childhood development and education (ECDE) was emphasized as a strategic priority in human and social development. The presentation focused on the "[ECE Accelerator Toolkit](#)", a tool designed to facilitate the systematic inclusion of ECDE in education sector planning processes. This toolkit was developed with the support of more than 40 organizations, within the framework of the "Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS)" project promoted by GPE, and its main objective is to support countries in strengthening their education systems from the earliest stages.

The toolkit is an online, interactive, and adaptable resource that supports education policymakers in analyzing the sector, defining a vision, and planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating ECE policies. It is structured around five key drivers: planning and budgeting; curriculum and learning framework; staff development; family and community engagement; and quality assurance. It also includes cross-cutting elements such as inclusion, gender equity, crisis and emergencies, as well as pedagogical approaches such as play-based learning.

It was also emphasized that one of the toolkit's greatest contributions is its ability to facilitate multisectoral dialogue and the active participation of key actors—ministries, donor agencies, civil society, communities, and families—enabling a participatory analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and priorities. Among the most notable tools are the [Conceptual Framework for the Early Childhood Subsector](#) and the [Subsector Analysis](#). This conceptual framework establishes the fundamental components for ensuring equitable and quality access to early childhood education services, emphasizing that the poorest and most vulnerable children should be the first to benefit. It stresses that, although the ultimate goal is universal provision, what really impacts the desired outcomes is ensuring that the service offered is of high quality.

At the heart of this effort is planning and budgeting, typically led by governments within their policy frameworks. This ranges from defining relevant and contextualized educational curricula to developing teaching staff who not only facilitate learning in the classroom but also interact with families and communities, ensuring a smooth transition from home to school. The role of those who support teachers, such as trainers, supervisors, and quality inspectors, is also considered essential. They must have the necessary knowledge to evaluate schools and close gaps in implementation.

For its part, the primary subsector analysis tool, built on this conceptual framework, allows national actors to collectively reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the system. Through specific modules, aspects such as current enrollment levels, types of service providers (public, private, community, religious), and goals in key areas such as curriculum, workforce development, community participation, and quality assurance are analyzed. This tool not only provides indicators and guiding questions, but also facilitates dialogue among relevant actors, promoting ownership of the problems identified and coordination to mobilize solutions.

In addition, the importance of having data and evidence to support decisions was highlighted; when these are not available, proxy indicators are suggested and strengthening information systems is promoted. Critical cross-cutting issues were also mentioned, such as inclusion (especially of children with disabilities), emergencies, and play-based pedagogical approaches. An improved version of the tool is currently being developed that incorporates more detailed elements on inclusion and intersectional analysis.

Finally, it was highlighted how the strategic use of these tools helps countries make informed decisions about who needs services, who will provide them, what services will be offered, and how their provision will be planned. National discussions cover topics such as universal coverage, the optimal duration of programs, and the identification of priorities that generate the greatest impact, especially for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups.

2. Use of the "Build to Last" framework and pre-sector analysis tool in the Pacific, Sandipan Paul (UNICEF)

The presentation provided a detailed overview of the implementation of the "Building for Durability" conceptual framework in the Pacific region. It highlighted that this region comprises 15 countries served by UNICEF, each with unique challenges and a strong political will to improve preschool education, aligned with the Pacific Regional Education Framework, which establishes joint priorities led by governments.

It was noted that, although the Pacific region had already had a regional quality framework for early childhood education since 2014, it had not been effectively operationalized. The arrival of UNICEF's conceptual framework was not perceived as something completely new, but rather as a strengthened, evidence-based update designed to provide continuity with previous work. In this regard, the conceptual framework and subsector diagnostic tool have been used in more than ten Pacific countries to support processes such as the development of ECE policies, national frameworks, and comprehensive sector plans. They have also been used for specific initiatives, such as evaluations of existing programs, the design of new national strategies, and the securing of international financing, as was the case in Micronesia, which managed to secure GPE funds thanks to the strategic use of the toolkit.

At the regional level, the conceptual framework has been the basis for two key initiatives: research on the state of ECE ecosystems in the 15 countries, structured according to the core components of the framework, and the development of the Pacific ECE Systems and Planning Toolkit, a tool adapted to the sociocultural context of the Pacific, designed to align global instruments with the cultural values, practices, and priorities of the region.

One of the most important lessons learned from this experience, according to Sandipan, has been the need to position the ECE framework within a broader multisectoral early childhood development approach. He also highlighted the importance of synchronizing the use of diagnostics with each country's educational planning cycle, ensuring their integration not only into sectoral plans, but also into their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases.

He also pointed out that the success of the diagnosis depends on careful preparation: robust situational analysis, interviews with multiple stakeholders (including teachers, religious leaders, communities, and NGOs), and the formation of national technical groups to lead the process. These consultations feed into discussions at diagnostic workshops, which typically last three to four days and address the five pillars of the framework in depth: planning, curriculum, staff development, community participation, and quality assurance.

A crucial lesson has been that the process must be tailored to each country's specific needs. Some prioritize curriculum and teacher training, while others focus on financing or quality. The approach has been flexible, adjusting the use of tools to national priorities.

Finally, emphasis was placed on the importance of a participatory approach: national leadership is essential, as is ensuring that local voices—especially those in direct contact with children, such as teachers, parents, and communities—are heard, respected, and reflected in policy decisions. Defining not only which tools are used, but how they are

used, has been crucial in fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring the cultural, political, and technical relevance of the process in the Pacific region.

3. Exploring the ECE Accelerator Toolkit: Reflections from Countries in Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa, David Woods Baysah (UNICEF)

During the presentation, an overview was provided of the use and application of the ECE Accelerator toolkit in 11 countries in East, South, and West Africa. It was explained that the implementation of the toolkit has followed a structured approach, beginning with a pre-diagnostic phase to contextualize the tool to each country's specific environment, and then moving on to a more in-depth diagnostic process. This process is characterized by three key elements: government leadership, inclusive participation of various actors (ministries, NGOs, parent and teacher associations, inclusion and disability agencies, among others), and a comprehensive analysis of national policies, legislation, and plans, with an emphasis on preschool education.

It was highlighted that, to accompany these processes, a detailed regional mapping exercise was carried out, covering more than 25 angles of analysis ranging from the enabling environment to financing and cost aspects. A skill-up plan based on previously tested effective models was also created, along with a resource mobilization and advocacy framework to support countries seeking to scale up their pre-primary education.

Specific case studies were then presented that demonstrated how the use of the toolkit has generated concrete impacts:

- **In South Sudan**, the diagnostic process, led by the Ministry of Education and supported by the World Bank, led to an increase in the pre-primary budget from 3% to 11%, the design of a family engagement framework, and the development of a national ECE policy.
- **In Mozambique**, the diagnosis was integrated with the education sector analysis at a key moment, enabling \$40 million from GPE to be allocated exclusively to preprimary education. In addition, a training manual was developed for senior officials, clearly differentiating preschool education within the broader framework of child development.
- **In Ethiopia**, the diagnosis served as the basis for revising federal early childhood education policy and developing a five-year strategic plan, all based on locally generated evidence.
- **In Zambia**, diagnostic evidence enabled the development of a specific subsector plan for preschool education, which received funding from the World Bank and technical support from the European Union, and led to the completion of a national school readiness assessment tool.

- **In Lesotho**, the results of the assessment revealed that the early childhood education curriculum was outdated. This led to its revision, the development of a new teacher training program, and its subsequent implementation in a virtual format.
- **In Gambia**, although only the module focused on staff development (teachers, caregivers, school leaders) was implemented, the process made it possible to draw up a roadmap for strengthening the training and qualification system for early childhood education staff, a key aspect in view of the expansion plans.

In conclusion, it was emphasized that the toolkit can be applied in whole or in part, depending on national priorities. The essential point is that the process generates evidence that can be used to strengthen systems, advocate for greater resources, mobilize partnerships, and guide strategic decisions. Experience in Africa shows that generating localized evidence, with government leadership and adequate technical support, can significantly transform early childhood education policies and systems in challenging contexts.

Space for discussion on the usability of the tool given the different contexts

During the webinar, participants were divided into two language groups—one in Spanish and one in English—to reflect on the potential and practical applications of the "ECE Accelerator" toolkit in their respective national contexts.

a. Spanish group

In the case of Honduras, it was mentioned that a Strategic Plan for the Education Sector is being developed with a projection to 2033, in which early childhood education has been defined as a priority. Significant progress has been made at the community level, particularly through the training of volunteers in issues related to early childhood development. This demonstrates a grassroots approach that seeks to strengthen local capacities in favor of early childhood, although there is still work to be done at the institutional and public policy levels to ensure effective and sustained implementation.

In Guatemala, the focus has been on updating the educational curriculum. The preschool curriculum was updated in 2023, and work is currently underway to revamp the early childhood education curriculum, which covers children aged 0 to 3. However, this process faces significant challenges due to the internal structure of the Ministry of Education, as different departments are responsible for different aspects of the system, which complicates the coordination and consistency of actions. In this context, support was identified as necessary to improve coordination between institutional actors, in order to facilitate the effective delivery of curriculum proposals to teachers and educational communities.

With regard to the possible implementation of the "ECE Accelerator" toolkit, both countries highlighted specific needs. Honduras pointed out the importance of beginning with socialization and awareness-raising processes aimed at high-level authorities—such as ministers or secretaries of state—in order to achieve political commitment. Subsequently, it was suggested that the technical teams responsible for implementing the tool should be trained, accompanying this process with a guide detailing the steps necessary for its implementation, from diagnosis to the prioritization of actions. Guatemala, for its part, considers that the tool could be useful as a mechanism for efficiently organizing, synthesizing, and applying the information collected from the ministry. In addition, they emphasized the need for technical support for the consultant in charge of leading the process of studying and formulating the curriculum for the 0-3 age group, at a key stage in identifying the needs and demands of the sector.

b. English group

The University of Guyana commented that although no formal analysis focusing exclusively on preschool education has yet been conducted in the country, a general analysis of the education sector plan that includes early childhood has been developed. It was also mentioned that a national policy aimed at caring for children aged 0 to 3 is currently being developed, which will be integrated into the general education policy. In this regard, it was highlighted that the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Accelerator tool has been identified as a valuable opportunity to bring together efforts that have so far been fragmented. This tool, which presents different modules, allows for the targeting of actions through a systematic framework and a clearer mechanism for the development of strategies for the preschool subsector.

The University of Guyana also recognized the great potential of this tool, as it would allow ongoing academic research to be linked to practical educational planning. In addition, collaboration with the Early Childhood Center of Excellence was mentioned, which contributes directly to the development of public policies and could be integrated as support in the implementation of the tool.

For its part, the Guyana Ministry of Education noted that the current education sector plan, designed in 2020 and valid for five years, is coming to an end, so a new plan that includes early childhood education is already being developed. Similarly, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is also including early childhood in its sector planning.

Regarding the use of tools similar to the ECE Accelerator, Guyana highlighted a game-based educational approach and raised the possibility of using the toolkit to strengthen the training of parents and caregivers, although the need to contextualize this tool to the local reality was emphasized. Finally, several challenges were identified for implementing the toolkit in Guyana, including the level of stakeholder involvement and resistance to change on the part of educators, given that the educational culture in the country is very academic and not very open to innovative approaches to early childhood education.

In the case of Granada, representatives mentioned that their 2023-2030 sectoral plan integrates preschool education to ensure quality education. This plan promotes improvements in learning, particularly in literacy and arithmetic, strengthens the research-based curriculum, promotes teacher professional development, improves early childhood facilities, and ensures the provision of resources, in addition to strengthening supervision and support for educators and educational centers.

In summary, both groups valued the tool as a strategic and flexible resource that can be adapted to different contexts, strengthening countries' capacity to improve the quality, equity, and sustainability of early childhood education. They agreed that its potential lies not only in the collection of information, but also in its ability to catalyze processes of continuous improvement, promote the exchange of experiences, and support the design of evidence-based policies.