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PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN MOROCCO: CHALLENGES AND KEY POTENTIAL INPUTS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Novel coronavirus of 2019
G2G	Government-to-government
INDH	National Initiative for Human Development
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PPE	Preprimary education
SQ	Study question
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar

TERMINOLOGY

Human capital development—The World Bank Human Capital Project defines human capital as “the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. Investing in people through nutrition, health care, quality education, jobs and skills helps develop human capital, and this is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies.”¹ Human capital development means building people’s soft skills that translate into hard economic return for nations.

Nurturing care—The nurturing care framework maps the complementarity of multi-sectoral programming for children around “inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning,” which children need to reach their full potential.²

Preschool—Globally, many terms refer to early learning that happens before primary-school entry, with many overlapping definitions. These terms include early child education, preschool education, kindergarten, KG, early learning, and preprimary education. The United States Agency for International Development education-sector approach focuses on preprimary education. However, the term *preschool education* is used in the institutional system documentation that forms Morocco’s national frame of reference. Therefore, *preschool education* is used throughout this document unless another term is more relevant.

Early learning in Islamic faith-based settings—Early learning in Islamic faith-based settings teaches the principles and values of Islam as well as the basics of literacy and numeracy, and is offered at the preschool, primary and secondary education levels.

Upstream inputs—An upstream input in an educational system is an intervention or concept that starts at the ministry or central level before scaling out to high volumes of end users downstream, at school level.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STUDY PURPOSE

This study presents a brief landscape of Morocco's preschool education subsector and identifies the key strengths and challenges, as well as key recommendations to address current gaps. It seeks to answer the following study questions (SQs):

1. What is the current state of preschool education in Morocco, in terms of access, quality, financing, and provision?
2. What are key considerations and concerns in the current Moroccan context of preschool education? What opportunities and challenges are arising in the Moroccan context?
3. What are options for how these opportunities or challenges could be addressed? What issues warrant further investigation?

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

The Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports (MOE) first prioritized core themes and areas of need. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) then identified a select number of key informants serving as key stakeholders in the system, covering perspectives from the MOE, civil-society service providers of preschool education, multilateral entities supporting preschool education and broader early child education, multilateral entities financing preschool education, and other experts in the field. The study conducted in-depth interviews with key informants and codified and analyzed data.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

SQ1: WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MOROCCO, IN TERMS OF ACCESS, QUALITY, FINANCING, AND PROVISION?

Morocco's preschool education sector has reached a remarkable state of progress, comparative to other nations. Morocco's progress is particularly noteworthy within the context of the state of preprimary education in the Middle East and North Africa region. A clear vision, sound strategy, well-elaborated and documented preschool system, high-level political will, and coordination of multiple government entities have set the stage for a comparatively strong system. Government targets of reaching 100 percent enrollment by 2028 and including three years of preschool education starting at age three are the hallmarks of ambitious targets and rapid expansion. This expansion is accompanied by massive financing with \$600 million, with the World Bank as principal funder, allocated toward preschool education.³ Morocco's key challenge will be to ensure quality across large-scale, rapid expansion of access, financing, and provision.

SQ1 CONCLUSIONS

Morocco is undertaking a system of results-based financing that is globally innovative. The government contracts civil-society third-party providers to undertake actual implementation of preschool so nonstate entities essentially provide all preschool education services. Contractors are paid upon achievement of results. Morocco's massive countrywide scaling of results-based finance through nonstate contractors will provide lessons learned globally to other nations wishing to universalize preschool.

However, questions remain. Will domestic financial resources be able to cover the costs of expansion and maintenance preschool with 100 percent enrollment? As Morocco's preschool system expands at lightning speed, how will quality be maintained? While the model of civil-society provision of preschool education is globally innovative, some question whether government needs to develop its own in-house capacity in preschool education or whether vast cadres of preschool teachers will at some point need to become civil servants.

SQ2: WHAT ARE KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCERNS IN THE CURRENT MOROCCAN CONTEXT OF PREPRIMARY EDUCATION? WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ARE ARISING IN THE MOROCCAN CONTEXT?

The following were the main challenges and concerns in the Moroccan context:

- Reaching the MOE target of enrolling approximately 700,000 preschool students. As of 2019 global reporting, 762,000 out of 1,402,000 preschool-age children (age 4–5) in Morocco were enrolled.⁴
- Financing universal provision of preschool, eventually including for three-year-olds by 2028⁵
- Unstable employment and attrition of preschool teachers due to lack of civil-servant status and low salary (paid minimum wage)
- Training sufficient teachers and supporting continuous teacher development
- Improving quality in terms of infrastructure, equipment, teacher-student interaction, pedagogy, standards and norms, and supervision and monitoring of teachers
- Disconnect between childcare centers and preschools in terms of content, standards, and institutional governance, and a related need for linkages and smooth transitions between day care centers and preschools
- Lack of systematic transition of children from preschool into primary school
- Need for increased focus on family and parental engagement
- Unclear whether the model of civil society delivery is effective; the system needs evaluation
- Understanding the role of flexible community-based models of preschool in rural, sparsely populated areas, improvement of quality across dimensions of infrastructure, equipment, teacher-student interaction, and pedagogy

Key informants made in-depth suggestions on how to improve professional development, with a focus on elements that improve the underlying system or structure, such as the following:

- Improvements to training structure
- Continuous progression of training skills
- Coaching, mentoring, and support
- Monitoring and evaluation system
- Linkage of systems of preschool and primary school
- Coherence across civil-society implementation approaches
- Teacher-competency frameworks

Helping teachers understand and apply preschool system documentation (such as curriculum and frameworks) through technical support (coaching and supervision) and engaging families could all improve learner outcomes in basic skills development. Early learning offered in Islamic faith-based settings was a sensitive area with widely varying views according to stakeholder. Respondents believed that measurement through existing national systems was progressing well and providing evidence for system expansion.

While Morocco’s private–public civil-society partnership for preprimary education is globally unique, opportunities exist to improve the effectiveness of partnerships and stakeholder collaboration. The unique form of civil-society provision not only offers opportunities in terms of expansion toward universal preschool enrollment, but also presents challenges in terms of unlinked and nonparallel systems in each nongovernmental organization, lack of data sharing, and the need for overarching teacher-competency frameworks. Lack of recognized status, esteem, and sufficient salary of the preschool teaching profession continues to challenge progress across areas.

SQ2 CONCLUSIONS

There are opportunities to achieve targets of universalization of preschool, including focusing on professional development systems and systems strengthening at the central ministerial level; the regional provincial level; and across civil-society implementation mechanisms. The systems and structures of focus could include the following:

- Preservice training
- In-service training
- Teacher coaching, mentoring, and supportive supervision
- Teacher competency frameworks
- Continuity across professional development inputs
- Building capacity to apply and adhere to quality standards and norms, which has far-reaching impact, across various types of support

SQ3: WHAT ARE OPTIONS FOR HOW THESE OPPORTUNITIES OR CHALLENGES COULD BE ADDRESSED? WHAT ISSUES WARRANT FURTHER INVESTIGATION?

The third study question examines options for addressing opportunities and challenges in terms of areas for USAID support, areas less prioritized for USAID support, and intervention guidance—contextual and systems considerations when designing interventions or support. While discussions with the MOE identified professional development and preschool system expansion as core focus areas, leading thinkers in the preschool sector identified a more diverse range of challenges including childcare-preschool linkages, parent engagement and alternative modalities in rural areas.

Areas for USAID support included professional development and stakeholder engagement. The report prioritizes which areas are most ripe for investment, listing recommended areas for those wishing to engage or invest in the preschool education sector. The core, most essential and effective means to improve quality preschool education in Morocco at this time are

- Systems strengthening and
- Support to professional development.

Less prioritized areas were early learning in Islamic faith-based settings (at the preschool level), basic skills acquisition, nonformal education, public–private–civil-society partnerships, measurement, and human resources.

Intervention guidance, that is, recommendations on how to intervene in areas that warrant further attention, included rationale for investing, timing of intervention, mechanisms of engagement, and unlocking additional funding. Donor coordination is needed to flexibly fill in gaps; technical support not covered by government and technical inputs should not be delivered without close alignment with core stakeholders’ existing efforts, to ensure added value and reduce duplication.

Technical inputs should also be closely tied with elements that build the fundamental components of the system rather than one-off inputs.

USAID's best opportunity would be to use a systems approach with a long-term time horizon when investing in preschool education. The most value added may come from pooling resources to collaborate with other actors that are also investing in strengthening Morocco's ability to reach universal preschool enrollment. This would lead to

- Long-lasting support,
- More system-oriented support, and
- Leveraging of each stakeholder's areas of strength.

Additionally, it is highly recommended that USAID tap into new mechanisms that address early childcare and education and pool USAID funds with multilateral, philanthropic, and private funding to increase funding size and scope. Mechanisms could include government-to-government agreements focused on systems strengthening and feature more creative designs or diverse structures to maximize areas of expertise of actors and benefits to the preschool sector.

SQ3 CONCLUSIONS

SQ3 findings describe options for how opportunities and challenges could be addressed and the areas that warrant further investigation. In general, report findings demonstrate that enhancements, rather than restructuring, are needed. Areas prioritized for support included professional development and stakeholder engagement. Less prioritized areas were early learning in Islamic faith-based settings, basic skills acquisition, nonformal education, public-private civil-society partnerships, measurement, and human resources. Intervention guidance included two key suggestions:

1. USAID/Morocco could consider buying into mechanisms that pool funds and leverage additional pots of funds, such as the USAID CATALYZE mechanism, which has the mandate to blend public, private, multilateral, and bilateral funds for investment in early child care and education.⁶
2. There could be great value in leveraging mechanisms built to pool money from USAID and other sources for research, assessment, and support to intervention.

The current period is an opportune moment to engage, when there is existing momentum and political will in scaling preschool education. The combined support of coordinated stakeholders will be key in reaching Morocco's ambitious targets by 2028.

PURPOSE AND STUDY QUESTIONS

CONTEXT

Through the Middle East Education Research, Training, and Support initiative, under contracts AID-OAA-I-14-00075 and AID-OAA-TO-17-00022, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Middle East Bureau has supported a study on preprimary education (PPE) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in preparation for further support to this education subsector. PPE is repeatedly called out as a foundational stage of schooling in the 2018 USAID Education Policy. On September 8, 2017, the United States Congress passed Public Law 115-56, the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development Act, which calls for USAID to develop a comprehensive international education strategy in consultation with other relevant United States Government departments and agencies by September 2019. As part of this process, USAID examined the role of early childhood education and PPE in supporting reading programs globally. Additionally, the United States Government's Global Thrive Act's passage in 2021 further sanctioned and mandated United States Government support for early child development for marginalized children in developing countries, specifically supporting physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development and approaches to learning for children younger than eight years old.

The USAID Mission in Morocco requested this study to better understand preschool education in Morocco. The objective of this study was to examine key aspects of provision of preschool education in Morocco, including access, quality, and financing, to provide a high-level summary of the current state of preschool education and identify areas for further investigation. The study entailed scanning of the key aspects of preschool education which included mapping of providers; statistics on access and reach for underrepresented groups or locations; markers of quality; key considerations and concerns in the Moroccan context; the financing system; and key stakeholders, both Moroccan and international, involved in preschool education.

STUDY QUESTIONS

The study questions (SQs) were as follows:

1. What is the current state of preschool education in Morocco, in terms of access, quality, financing, and provision?
2. What are key considerations and concerns in the current Moroccan context of preschool education? What opportunities and challenges are arising in the Moroccan context?
3. What are options for how these opportunities or challenges could be addressed? What issues warrant further investigation?

The Mission commissioned this situational analysis, on behalf of the Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports (MOE), to help map the challenges and opportunities in preschool education. Conducting this analysis does not commit USAID/Morocco to further investment in preschool education in the future.

METHODOLOGY

This preliminary landscaping of the greatest needs in the preschool education system utilized data from well-positioned actors in the preschool scene to paint a picture and delineate the greatest

needs for intervention. The study was not designed as a full investigation, including the full range of stakeholders involved in preschool education, such as administrators and teachers.

DATA COLLECTION

The study used a mixed-methods evaluation methodology consisting of document review and key-informant interviews. Key informants were identified through recommendation of the donor and snowball sampling of key informants. Translation into Arabic was facilitated when necessary. The study team conducted all interviews via Zoom.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The study team conducted an in-depth review of the literature on PPE with a focus on Morocco, early childhood, quality, access, and finance in January and February of 2022.

KEY-INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The study team conducted interviews with five key informants in Morocco during April and May of 2022. Key informants covered perspectives from the MOE; civil-society service providers of preschool education; multilateral entities supporting preschool education and broader early child education; multilateral entities financing preschool education; and other experts in the field. Data were documented thoroughly with identifiers stripped.

To respond to the SQ on identifying the key challenges and opportunities for intervention, the study team first asked the MOE to prioritize what it identified as its greatest challenges and areas of greatest need for input. The findings of this consultation were translated into an interview tool that covered areas identified by MOE. Key-informant interviews were held with five of the foremost actors in the preschool space. These actors were asked to reflect on the areas prioritized by the MOE and present their analysis of the key challenges and most-needed inputs in each of the following areas:

- Professional development (including training, supervision, mentoring and coaching, planning, and the professional development system overall)
- Early learning in Islamic faith-based settings
- Development of basic skills
- Measurement and assessment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Public/private/civil society partnerships

DATA ANALYSIS

The study team sorted the data collected into key areas of priority, as identified by the MOE. Next, they sorted the data by subtopic, organized into themes. Multiple instances of the same concept were denoted. Each input was summarized, and noteworthy quotes were drawn from the text to illustrate the concepts presented.

DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION

This report is intended to be used by USAID in consideration of a potential approach to supporting the Morocco preschool education system. It is advised that USAID/Morocco share this report with national preschool stakeholders as an entry point for starting a deeper conversation about where USAID inputs could be constructive and useful rather than duplicative or tangential. The aim is that

all partners work together, leveraging institutional strengths and funding complementarity to contribute to the goal of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Morocco's early child education system.

LIMITATIONS AND BIASES

This study was conducted during the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Therefore, it was not possible to conduct travel in-country or meet face-to-face with stakeholders. This limitation was compensated by conducting interviews via Zoom. One additional limitation was that key informants were identified by the donor. Additional interviewees were identified through snowball sampling of additional informants indicated by interviewees. USAID facilitated access with five of the most essential stakeholders in the preschool space. Finally, time did not allow for the interviewing of teachers; principals; local implementing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other preschool system actors at regional and local levels. Therefore, the full range of views and perspectives was not incorporated into the final documentation, but rather the perspectives of a small core group of stakeholders are the key players in the early child education space in Morocco. The data presented in the report reflect the available literature and the ideas and inclinations of key informants interviewed.

FINDINGS

SQ1: WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF PREPRIMARY EDUCATION IN MOROCCO, IN TERMS OF ACCESS, QUALITY, FINANCING, AND PROVISION?

Morocco's preschool sector has reached a remarkable state of progress, compared with other nations globally, and particularly noteworthy within the context of the state of PPE in the MENA region.

With a Human Capital Index of 0.5, Moroccans born today will only reach 50 percent of their productivity potential (52 percent for girls and 49 percent for boys).⁷ At the highest levels of leadership, King Mohammed VI of Morocco has embraced the human-capital argument. The World Bank defines human capital as “the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. Investing in people through nutrition, health care, quality education, jobs and skills helps develop human capital, and this is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies.”⁸ Human-capital development means building people's soft skills that translate into hard economic return for nations. King Mohammed has prioritized preschool education as a key pathway to economic improvement and national progress, calling it “a royal project that places the human element at the center of national policies.”⁹

In 2005 King Mohammed launched the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) with the objective of ensuring a better distribution of the fruits of growth and to improve the living conditions of citizens. INDH has a budget of 1.9 billion USD, of which 185 million USD is dedicated to preschools.¹⁰ INDH takes a whole-of-government approach to systematic investment in human capital, beginning by ensuring that adolescents are well-prepared for pregnancy and parenting and then following the life cycle from the early child to adolescent stages, operating multi-sectorally across health and nutrition, security, child and adolescent protection, early stimulation and learning.¹¹ The expansion of preschool education is one strategy set within the context of a larger multisectoral approach that includes a health reform program; a medical insurance plan for the most disadvantaged populations; expanding access to nurseries and day care for up to 20,000 children; a social registry to improve targeting of vulnerable populations; and expansion of the Family Allowance program to include an additional seven million children.¹² During the third phase (2019–2023), INDH is investing 1.9 billion United States dollars (USD), with 60 percent funded through the national government budget, 30 percent funded by budgets of territorial authorities, and 10 percent from international partners.¹³ The goals of the third phase of the initiative are to improve the professionalism, cohesion, and interconnectedness of these networks to improve implementation.¹⁴

ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT

Within this framework, in 2018, Morocco launched the national program for universalization of preschool, with the targets of reaching universal enrollment of four- and five-year-olds by 2027–2028 and three-year-olds by 2028.¹⁵ In 2020, PPE in Morocco became free and compulsory.¹⁶ Currently, two years of PPE is offered, and as of 2019 global reporting, 762,000 out of 1,402,000 preschool-age children in Morocco were enrolled.¹⁷ Despite this progress, in 2021, a 17-percentage-point gap between rural and urban enrollment in preschool was reported.¹⁸ Gender gaps in preschool enrollment in rural areas have persisted, with 54.5 percent of rural girls ages four and five enrolled, compared with 68.8 percent of rural boys.¹⁹ Preschool attendance in Morocco is historically associated with mother's education. Among mothers with secondary or higher education, enrollment was documented at 74 percent in 2015, while only 29 percent of children of illiterate mothers attended preschool.²⁰ Socioeconomic status has historically predicted preschool enrollment

in Morocco. A child from the poorest quintile of households has a 6 percent chance of enrollment in preschool, while children from the wealthiest quintile are enrolled at a rate of 78 percent.²¹ The current plan for universalization of preschool intends to equalize these disparities.

Morocco's 2004 census counted 2.3 percent of the population with a disability.²² In 2021, data showed that illiteracy was 66.1 percent among persons with a disability.²³ In 2019, Morocco launched a national inclusive education program. This was accompanied by a handbook for regional and provincial directors of education and training on the implementation of the national program on inclusive education for children with disabilities.²⁴ In terms of preschool, this handbook advocates for a strategic action plan aimed at adopting the new curricular reference framework for children with disabilities between preschool age and adolescence. It also designates a management structure for implementation of inclusive education at regional academy and provincial levels, including preschool.

By 2021, Moroccan Observatory of Inclusive Education officials announced that the schooling rate of children with disabilities had reached 55.1 percent.²⁵ The Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion, and Family officials announced that the number of people benefiting from inclusive education support programs increased from 4,174 in 2015 to 16,123 people in 2020.²⁶ More data are needed on the current coverage of children with disabilities in the rapid preschool expansion. However, World Bank documentation on preschool expansion highlights equity and social inclusion, including children with disabilities as a main objective and stipulates that planned infrastructure and inputs should be built, taking disability into consideration in upcoming preschool education cohorts.²⁷

QUALITY

The national plan for universalization of preschool contains a concerted focus on quality with targets of training 28,000 new educators and upskilling the approximately 27,000 in-service educators currently in preschools.²⁸ The INDH program has constructed new quality preschool units that focus on improving pedagogical quality and raising stakeholders' awareness of the importance of a quality preschool education. By 2021, 8,000 preschool units were built.²⁹ Specifically in rural areas, the baseline number of preschool units was 1,200 with an end target of 7,200 units equipped and operational according to the (WB) ECE Quality Standards.³⁰ New preschools built through INDH will be gradually transferred to the supervision of the MOE.

In terms of quality inputs across the education sector that impact preschool, the 2022 Education Finance Bill proposed a focus on improving the Moroccan education system by improving teacher training through reinforcement of initial and continuing training for educational actors; upgrading the infrastructure and equipment of the regional and ancillary centers for education and training professions, and accelerating the universalization of preschool through the creation; rehabilitation; and equipping of rooms.³¹

FINANCING

The expansion of preschools is being actualized through a unique scenario of results-based financing where third-party providers, Moroccan NGOs, are responsible for the implementation of preschools and are paid based on reaching targeted results. The national initiative's institutional architecture is based on clear roles, accountability lines, and high-level ownership.³² The disbursement-linked indicators "will incentivize the Government to assess, improve and maintain the quality of [early child education] with a focus on pedagogical practices of [early child] educators."³³

Significant financing has been committed to preschool education in Morocco with 450 million USD through a World Bank project and 185 million USD through INDH.³⁴ The total budget being

expended on preschool education thus exceeds 600 million USD across the life cycle of programming.³⁵ INDH has a budget of 1.9 billion USD, of which 185 million USD is dedicated to preschools. Only 10 percent of the total budget for preschool education is funded by international partners; the remaining 90 percent is funded through domestic government entities.³⁶

This significant domestic and multilateral financing is situated in a larger context: Within the MENA region, Morocco received the second-largest portion (5.8 percent) of overseas development assistance provided by Arab institutions in 2019.³⁷ Morocco was one of the top three recipients of government-to-government (G2G) aid from both France (173 million USD) and Spain (6.5 million USD).³⁸

PROVISION

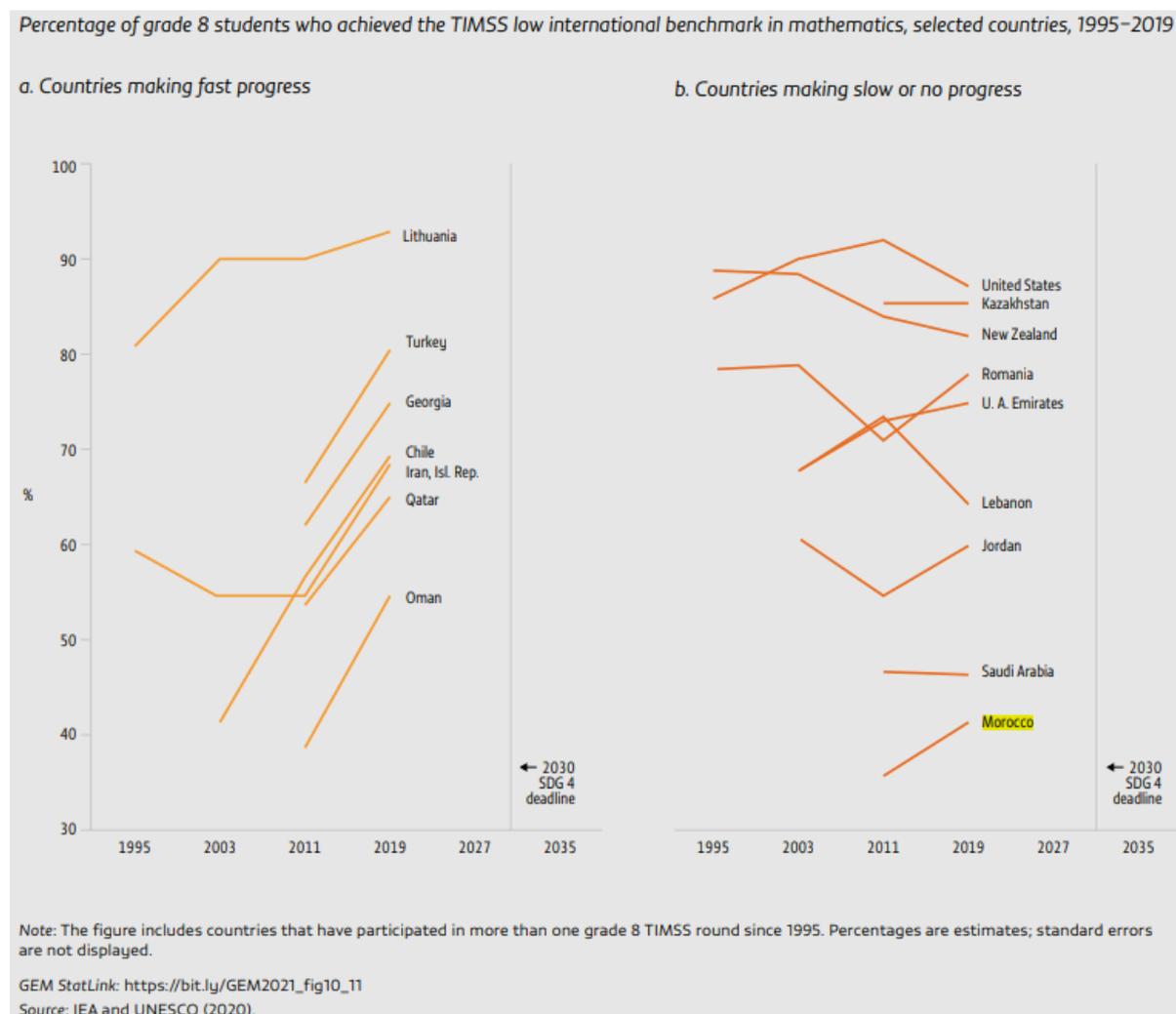
The large-scale public offer of preschool education (aiming to universalize public preschool education) is currently expanding to become widespread across the country. A key informant in the interview process described three modes of early child education, each using a different teaching force:

1. Public preschools: frequently enacted as one classroom in a public school that is supervised or implemented by an NGO and inspected by public system preschool education inspectors
2. Private schools: preschool education delivered in existing private primary and middle schools
3. Traditional preschools: religious or community spaces that teach principles and values of Islam and study of the Quran as well as basic numeracy and literacy

Day care centers are also offering early learning and stimulation activities for children.

In the area of learning outcomes, in 2011, Morocco ranked among the lowest countries, showing slow or no progress on learning, as assessed through the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). However, between 1995-2019, the nation made a rapid pivot in improvement in learning outcomes, with a jump in learning outcomes higher than almost any other country in its category (Figure 1).³⁹ Though potential COVID-19 learning losses may have dampened this trajectory.

Figure 1. Average Progress on Learning Is Slow and Often Stalls Before the Goal Is Reached



Morocco is currently measuring learning outcomes every three years, and the finding that preschool graduates are linked to better secondary outcomes has generated political will at the highest levels of leadership (conveyed by a key informant, who cited three yearly assessments conducted by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique; the specific assessment tools were not determined). King Mohammed VI has stated: "You are aware of the importance of pre-school education in the reform of the education system. It constitutes the base from which any reform must be initiated, since it offers children the possibility of acquiring a set of skills, psychological abilities and cognitive abilities. Thanks to these assets, they will be able to have smooth access to education and succeed in their subsequent school career. Ultimately, repetition and dropout rates will be considerably reduced . . . It also constitutes the best investment in human resources, considered as an imperative necessity to improve the performance of the Moroccan school."⁴⁰

SQI CONCLUSIONS

Morocco's preschool education sector has made remarkable progress, comparative to other nations globally, which is particularly noteworthy within the context of the state of PPE in the MENA region. A clear vision, sound strategy, well-elaborated preschool system, high-level political will, and coordination of multiple government entities has set the stage for a comparatively strong system. The government target of universal enrollment by 2028, including three years of preschool

education starting at age three, are aspects of ambitious and rapid expansion. Preschool expansion is accompanied by massive financing with 600 million USD allocated to preschool education. In addition, Morocco is undertaking system results-based financing that is globally innovative, the results of which be worth evaluating in future research. The government contracts civil-society third-party providers to undertake actual implementation of preschool so essentially all service provision of preschool education is conducted by nonstate entities. Associated contractors are paid upon achievement of results. Morocco's massive countrywide scaling of results-based finance through nonstate contractors will provide lessons globally.

Questions remain in terms of the access, financing, quality, and provision of preschool education. In terms of financing of universal preschool, will domestic resources be able to cover the costs of expansion and maintenance of universal preschool? As Morocco's preschool system expands at lightning speed, how will it maintain quality? How can Morocco avoid the pitfalls the world experienced when the rapid increase in access to education for all was accompanied by poor or declining quality? And while the model of civil-society provision of preschool education is globally innovative, some question whether complete government outsourcing of preschool education is wise. Does the government need to develop its own in-house capacity to provide preschool education? Will vast cadres of preschool teachers, at some point, need to become civil servants?

These questions are raised to recognize the remarkable progress that Morocco has made while considering key points to guide future progress in optimal directions and forestall pitfalls. Specific considerations within the Moroccan context are elaborated in the following section.

SQ2: WHAT ARE KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCERNS IN THE CURRENT MOROCCAN CONTEXT OF PREPRIMARY EDUCATION? WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ARE ARISING IN THE MOROCCAN CONTEXT?

A few highlights from results of the interviews with key informants are summarized below, with the greatest needs and recommended inputs covered for the following:

- Professional development
- Early learning in Islamic faith-based settings
- Development of basic skills
- Measurement and assessment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Public–private civil-society partnerships

KEY CHALLENGES

When asked to identify the most pressing issue in preschool education, the responses of the key informants were much more diverse and more nuanced than the initial areas identified by the MOE as the focus areas of the study. This follows a global trend in which the issues of support to parents or impact of childcare on learning outcomes are gaining visibility as issues that have a direct impact on education and learning outcomes. There may be value in linking support to more early learning in Islamic faith-based settings sector inputs, such as support for teacher training, supervision, and monitoring and for inputs and investments from diverse stakeholders who can apply innovative thinking, flexibility, and multisectoral approach to designing interventions to strengthen preschool education.

Respondents identified the following as some of the key challenges facing preschool education:

- Reaching the MOE target of enrolling approximately 700,000 preschool students. As of 2019 global reporting, 762,000 out of 1,402,000 preschool-age children (age 4–5) in Morocco were enrolled.⁴¹
- Financing universal provision of preschool, eventually including for three-year-olds by 2028⁴²
- Unstable employment and attrition of preschool teachers due to lack of civil-servant status and low salary (paid at minimum wage)
- Training sufficient teachers and supporting continuous teacher development
- Improving quality in terms of infrastructure, equipment, teacher-student interaction, pedagogy, standards and norms, and supervision and monitoring of teachers
- Disconnect between childcare centers and preschools in terms of content, standards, and institutional governance, and a related need for linkage and smooth transitions between day care centers and preschools
- Lack of systematic transition of children from preschool into primary school
- Need for increased focus on family and parental engagement
- Unclear whether the model of civil society delivery of is effective; the system needs evaluation
- Understanding the role of flexible community-based models of preschool in rural, sparsely populated areas

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The inputs generated by key stakeholders focused on building the system and structural elements of the professional development system, particularly at the levels of central MOE, regional centers, and regional supervision and support systems, as well civil-society third-party provider systems. Inputs also focused on enhancing existing features of the system such as accessibility of teacher tools and

types of training topics offered. Because professional development needs are diverse, there are great opportunities for support to upstream inputs at the level of the central system and core structure. Examples could include a clear competency framework for teachers, continuous progression of teacher skills through training and teacher mentoring, and supportive supervision systems. When these investments are applied and replicated, they will flow out through large cohorts of teachers to children at the school level. Prioritized challenges and opportunities for professional development are outlined below.

The greatest needs identified in professional development are more systemic issues, such as the following:

- Disconnect between preservice training and in-service training
- Multiplicity of training providers without a unified approach
- Need for a clear competency framework for teachers and continuous progression of training to reinforce teacher basic skills
- Insufficient time in training

Key inputs into professional development for reaching improved learning outcomes of children included the following:

- Strengthening professional development policy
 - Unification of public and private training systems
 - Financing the professional-development plan
 - Continuity of training from preservice to in-service
 - Strengthening preschool content capacity in the MOE
 - Supporting central and regional structural regulation of training-capacity-center quality
 - Institutionalization of bodies to support regular mentoring
- Classroom-based (teaching and training) support
 - User-friendly tools, for example, “a bank of resources is needed for teachers to make existing tools more accessible and easier to use (e.g., tools such as the curriculum, teacher guide, editors’ collections of textbooks, and activity sheets)”
 - Increased applied training, where teachers can experience actual time in the classroom
- In-service training support
 - Quality-assurance mechanisms for professional development inputs
 - Increased time in training with 400 hours’ duration deemed as insufficient
 - Incorporation into training of particular topics and issues, such as protection, disability, and security
 - Improved monitoring and supervision and teacher sharing circles
 - Extending teacher support plans and tools to reach a wider segment of the population

Key informants cited several human-resources issues in professional development as linked to learning outcomes, including the following:

- Job stability of teachers as NGO employees
- Recognized teacher status

- Professional progression sequencing
- Desire for conversion of preschool teachers to civil servants

In rural areas, some respondents reported no difference in needs, but others cited the following:

- Human resource capacity challenges
- Need for training in specific topic areas
- Exploration of alternative service delivery models to reach sparsely populated rural areas where there is not enough population density to support a preschool

In terms of coaching, mentoring, and support for teachers, the following challenges were identified:

- Insufficient numbers of supervisors
- Lack of preschool specialization
- Lack of institutional stakeholder coordination around roles
- Need for enhanced development of tools and coaching frameworks

Key suggested inputs included the following:

- Institutionalization of bodies to support regular mentoring
- Extending teacher support plans and tools to reach a wider segment of the population
- Financing the professional development plan

Gaps in operationalizing professional development strategies included the following:

- Lack of content development capacity in the MOE
- Varied capacity among decentralized regional training centers
- Absence of a legal frame of reference for preschool teachers
- Need to finance the professional development plan

Potential solutions posed included the following:

- Strengthening preschool content capacity in the MOE
- Central and regional structural regulation of the quality of training centers
- Unification of public and third-party-implementer training systems
- Quality assurance mechanisms for professional development inputs

EARLY LEARNING IN ISLAMIC FAITH-BASED SETTINGS

In terms of opportunities and challenges, the topic of early learning in Islamic faith-based settings was a sensitive area. This seems less of an area of opportunity for external stakeholder engagement and more of an opportunity for inter-ministerial dialogue and consensus between domestic stakeholders. Regardless, the study team captured some of the key challenges and opportunities of traditional preschool education.

Challenges identified in early learning in Islamic faith-based settings included the following:

- Differing governance structure under the Department of Early Learning in Islamic faith-based settings within the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs
- Traditional teaching style and lack of early child-centered pedagogy
- Need for supervision and teacher support
- Uneven quality in early learning offered in traditional and preschool education

- Teachers not open to working according to the vision of the MOE
- General sensitivity on topics related to religion

Key informants suggested that the most important opportunities to improve early learning in Islamic faith-based settings included the following:

- Infusion of pedagogy and education principles into mosque-based teaching
- Unification of the teaching approaches used in traditional and preschool education
- Unification of the institutional governance structure of PPE providers
- Sensitization of parents and families to the importance of PPE
- Engagement of civil society in financial, logistics, and infrastructure support

KEY STRENGTHS: BASIC SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Key informants were asked what was needed to improve basic skills acquisition, such as the development of foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, social and emotional learning, and executive function. Key informants felt that this had received thorough support and was an area in which Morocco had made significant progress in curriculum development and policy reform but needs concerted efforts in monitoring and implementation. Signs of key foundational elements that lead to basic skills acquisition included the following:

- National frame of reference developed over five years (which includes a curriculum, a vision, a toolbox for teacher training, a framework for teacher competency and professional development, best-practice studies, monarch-issued statements, and other core system institutional documentation)
- Deep engagement and infusion of international best practices and studies into the national frame of reference
- Solid competency-based curriculum⁴³ that develops children’s holistic skills progressively

However, remaining challenges to children’s acquisition of basic skills include the following:

- The MOE’s lack of a holistic structural approach to implementing the framework
- Need for deep understanding of the essence of preschool methodology and pedagogy by teachers

Key inputs raised by stakeholders to improve children’s acquisition of basic skills included the following:

- Teacher comprehension of documentation of the preschool national frame of reference system
- Family engagement interventions
- Provision of technical support
- Revision of monitoring and evaluation tools
- Application of research results around transition from preschool to primary school

MEASUREMENT AND ASSESSMENT

Various measurement efforts are under way. The Higher Council of Education, Training, and Scientific Research measures learning every three years, including the preschool subsector. Key informants cited plans to conduct an assessment covering the past three years, with a focus on training outcomes, using the assessment tool “Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes.” The results of which will feed into a dashboard that supports a longitudinal approach to collecting and using data.

Among civil society organizations, the Moroccan Foundation for the Promotion of Preprimary Education has instituted a three-pronged tracking of competencies and capacities of children, annual evaluation of children, and digital exchange of data at the primary-school level to track academic results through primary school and up to college. The Zakoura Foundation works in collaboration with the MOE to measure outcomes in child learning. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) monitors on-the-ground implementation and has data available. INDH is planning a study on early child development with a focus on education, but this has not yet begun.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

As detailed below, numerous stakeholders are engaged in the preschool space. Gaps in fully engaging public-system stakeholders include teachers who are affected by the instability in preschool teachers' jobs and their lack of status as public civil servants, or even in more permanent teacher roles. Regarding civil-society engagement in preschool, gaps were noted in the lack of managerial skills and regulations regarding teacher recruitment, as well as the burden of funding a plethora of NGOs for service delivery. Donor coordination and flexibility are needed to fill in gaps not covered by government, and there is a desire for technical support from donors. Opportunities exist for rich collaboration through domestic early child networks or working groups, including mapping the roles of stakeholders so as to avoid duplication.

The following stakeholders and their respective roles are detailed below:

- MOE Department for Preprimary Education, leading the generalization of the national preschool framework
- Regional academies' PPE departments, serving as regional leads
- Local level: school educators and principals, local implementation of PPE (preschool educators operate within public schools, but they are not official MOE teachers; educators are paid for their services by the civil-society organizations that are contracted to provide preschool education; many of these educators lack prerequisite education and qualifications to become licensed teachers)
- MOE Department on Inclusive Education, with correlates at regional and local levels
- MOE School Health Department, which supervises school health across Morocco and at the regional level: doctor of the school or paramedical staff at public-school facilities
- Civil-society implementers of PPE: Moroccan Foundation for the Promotion of Preprimary Education, Zakoura Foundation, three medium-size NGOs (e.g., Injaz), and multiple locally based NGOs, as well as local associations
- Ministry of Interior INDH plays a key role in preschool implementation, especially in rural areas, and collaborates on crosscutting early child development activities
- Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Local Collectivity/Federation of the District of Morocco, involved in preschool provision, infrastructure, equipment, and district-level financial budgets
- Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs Department of Early Learning in Islamic faith-based settings and mosques- implementing early learning focused on teaching of the Quran, with some mosques used as space for early child education focusing on literacy and numeracy
- Ministry of Youth and Sports, covering governance of day care centers (prior to the governance shift toward the MOE)
- UNICEF, holding a key role in the sector in moving PPE forward

- World Bank, working with the MOE directly and paying loan installments based on the results of disbursement-linked indicators achieved and owned by the MOE, focusing on results, and providing technical assistance to best practices
- Ministry of Social Development, touching on early childhood issues

PRIVATE–PUBLIC–CIVIL-SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PREPRIMARY EDUCATION

Morocco has embarked on private–public civil-society collaboration in PPE with direct partnership with government and a high percentage of civil-society responsibility for provision, which is unique globally. One challenge to successful collaboration identified is the need to unify the vision of all collaborating stakeholders around the national legal reference framework for preschool. Another main challenge identified revolves around a core issue of civil society filling the whole role of implementation of a government public service. Key informants noted the following issues:

- “When the government comes into a sector it comes in with standards. Civil society does what they can with what they have. How do you position civil society in transition with public service?”
- Civil-society organizations “are excellent in developing modules, strong in advocacy; they have the [reach] to vulnerable populations, but they are not able to develop widespread service. No NGO in Morocco covers more than two regions, because of their capacity and finance challenges.”

Key discussions around improving the effectiveness of partnerships and stakeholder collaboration for PPE include the following:

- Clarified roles of each actor at each level of the system
- Improved third-party-provider selection processes, measurement and monitoring of preschool implementers
- Desire for the MOE to set clear standards across partners
- Increased leadership of the MOE in the partnership

As in many other areas, the suggestion of conversion of preschool teachers to public servants was proposed as key to more effective partnerships.

NEWLY SURFACED AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

Nonformal PPE organically arose among key informants as an area in need of intervention, not mentioned by the MOE. It was recommended that this area receive attention to reach those not well-served by the public offer (universalization of preschool). Key informants spoke of plans for the MOE to identify, count, and quantify nonformal classrooms, provide training that focuses on the implementation of the new curriculum, and establish authorization processes to help preschool provided via nonformal education to meet the minimum standards of quality.

RESPONDENT SUGGESTIONS AROUND USAID ENTRY INTO PREPRIMARY SPACE

Key informants welcomed USAID engagement. Contributions to reading in early grades were deemed beneficial. Support for the overall launch of the national preschool system would be valuable with a focus on technical support in professional development training, pedagogy, financing, and system governance. Funding capacity-building of government staff, studies, and experts as well as exchange of experience were seen as valuable technical contributions. Key informants also suggested comparing the documentation of the national frame of reference system (which includes a curriculum, a vision, a toolbox for teacher training, teacher competency and professional

development framework, best practice studies, monarch-issued statements, and other core system institutional documentation) with best practices in other countries. A process of comparison and alignment could work to sharpen the level of excellence in the existing documentation. Key informants deemed it important to coordinate and synchronize with other stakeholders already engaged in PPE:

- “Our national preschool system is launched, and I think we need principally technical help if we have some experts on trainings, pedagogical, financing, and making good governance of the system.”
- “USAID can help through studies, experts, exchange of experiences [to] help us make good decisions at good moments [rather than] work 10 years and after that see that the work is not good. It is an opportunity for Morocco as we are just three years in at the beginning of the plan.”

SQ2 CONCLUSIONS

There are several key considerations and concerns as well as opportunities and challenges in the context of preschool education in Morocco:

- Support for teachers
 - Key informants made in-depth suggestions on how to improve professional development, with a focus on elements that improve the underlying system or structure, such as improvements to training structure and continuous progression of training skills, coaching, mentoring, support, and monitoring and evaluation systems.
 - Learner outcomes in basic skills development could be improved by helping teachers understand and apply system documentation and providing technical support to monitoring and coaching and engaging families.
 - Lack of civil-servant status for the preschool teaching profession continues to challenge progress.
- Service delivery coordination
 - Civil-society collaboration in service delivery could be enhanced by clarified roles; improved organizational procedures, measurement; and monitoring; and clarification of MOE selection processes and quality standards.
 - Measurement to support advocacy of preschool universalization seems to be underway.
 - There is a need for donor coordination and flexibility to fill in gaps in the technical support provided by government.
 - Key informants perceived value if USAID were to provide technical support across areas of the preschool national launch and rapid expansion, in close alignment and coordination with other stakeholders already active in the space.

SQ3: WHAT ARE OPTIONS FOR HOW THESE OPPORTUNITIES OR CHALLENGES COULD BE ADDRESSED? WHAT ISSUES WARRANT FURTHER INVESTIGATION?

The monarch’s leadership, joint vision, established institutional documentation, and solid preparatory steps to develop a curriculum over past years, drawing on international practice and followed by large-scale results-based financing, have led to a solid foundation for preschool education in Morocco. Morocco’s preschool frame of reference includes a vision, a curriculum, a toolbox for teacher training, a teacher competency and professional-development framework, best-practice studies, monarch-issued statements, and other core system institutional documentation. While the government is leading a rapid expansion phase, enhancements are needed to strengthen and sharpen the ability of the system to meet its targets and enhance quality. Priorities for USAID support and intervention guidance are discussed below.

AREAS FOR USAID SUPPORT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many key informants highlighted professional development as a priority area. The most effective inputs cited were those that work upstream in the system—at the beginning, when a standard, practice, or concept is generated, before it is massively scaled out to the high volumes of end users downstream at the school level. Inputs that work at structural levels will help the system more effectively implement the vision of the preschool framework. Considering the host of areas identified in this study, professional development seems to be an appropriate entry point where USAID’s contributions could add value.

The areas in which inputs are needed and suggestions of key inputs into professional development are elaborated in SQ2, under “Professional Development.” Recommended investments in professional development are listed below under three pillars, with sequential progress foundational activities through progressive succession into activities that may be layered upon initial investments:

1. System Strengthening

- Strengthen the upstream system elements that are the building blocks of sustained high-quality preprimary education
- Support to continuity of professional development between in-service to preservice
- Support to unification of public and third-party provider training systems
- Institutionalization of bodies to support regular mentoring
- Strengthening preprimary content capacity in the MOE
- Development of quality assurance mechanisms for professional development
- Support to central and regional structural regulation of training capacity quality at centers
- Support to improved monitoring, coaching, mentoring, and supervision systems

2. Support to Professional Development

- Contribute technical elements that enhance the quality and effectiveness of professional development
- Support to increased ratio of applied training over theoretical training
- Support to incorporation of designated topics and issues into training
- Support to streamlining and enhancing of tools and user-friendly applications
- Support to development and institutionalization of teacher sharing circles
- Extending teacher-support plans and tools to reach a wider segment of the population
- Financing the professional-development plan

3. Support to Inclusion

- Support the MOE in reaching 100%-enrollment targets
- Support to reach of preprimary education to students with disabilities
- Support to reach of preprimary education to underrepresented groups (rural poor, girls, etc.)
- Support to parental and family engagement

Lines of action under Pillar 1, System Strengthening, are core and foundational. Pillar 2, Support to Professional Development, is not independent; its lines of action supplement Pillar 1's foundational activities, enhancing and expanding Pillar 1's core lines of action. Pillar 3, Support to Inclusion, focuses on the MOE's target of 100 percent enrollment; Pillar 3's lines of action may be dedicated or pooled to support reaching this target; support to inclusion of underrepresented groups, such as girls and the rural poor, as well as children with disabilities may be included. Pillar 3 may draw on the rich experience of USAID's Inclusive Education Teacher Training Activity.⁴⁴ Family engagement in support of learning is also prioritized as a key element of Pillar 3.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Key informants identified a welcome and clear role for USAID in terms of technical inputs and capacity-building of system inputs. Investing at the level of system capacity would dovetail nicely with the inputs of other investors in the preschool sector, such as the World Bank, UNICEF, the European Union, INDH, the MOE, and other key stakeholders. Donor support has been largely financial, leaving USAID in a good position to provide Morocco technical support at the preschool level, building on prior USAID technical support at the primary level in Morocco. While other partners are bringing in comparatively heavier financing, USAID could play a valuable role by making technical support available to the MOE.

AREAS LESS PRIORITIZED FOR USAID SUPPORT

EARLY LEARNING IN ISLAMIC FAITH-BASED SETTINGS

In terms of content, approach, and governance between ministries, early learning in Islamic faith-based settings is a sensitive area, which does not seem ripe for engagement by USAID or external stakeholders.

BASIC SKILLS ACQUISITION

USAID focused on basic skills acquisition in many countries in its last strategy and brings expertise to this area. Key informants acknowledged the valuable role that USAID/Morocco has played in this area in recent years. It seems that in the Moroccan context, the preschool curriculum addresses the core holistic competencies of early childhood. Over an extended period, Morocco has elaborated its curriculum and core reference framework. It has intentionally incorporated international best practices and developed the curriculum through iterative engagement of rural preschool teachers to enhance quality. In the area of improving children's learning outcomes around basic skills acquisition, rather than a focus on the downstream level of the school, it seems that the translation of the curriculum and framework into good teaching practice is needed. Therefore, as noted in the areas prioritized for USAID support above, enhancing the teacher professional development system is recommended rather than direct support to basic skill acquisition.

NONFORMAL EDUCATION

Nonformal education arose organically among key informants as an area in need of intervention that was not mentioned by the MOE. However, considering the size, targets, ambitions, and momentum of the national scale-up of preschool education, it seems wise to invest in the government rollout of the national preschool frame of reference and action plan at this time. After several years, when the strategy has time to bear and harvest fruit, it might be timely to analyze the public offer (universalization of public preschool) and identify what targets it has and has not reached, as well as the role of nonformal education in terms of filling gaps not addressed through the national preschool framework and strategy. At that time, further research or collaboration and consultation with UNICEF could be undertaken to identify the following SQs:

- Which populations would be best served by nonformal PPE?
- Why does public provision not meet their needs?
- Who is currently providing this nonformal PPE?
- Who are potential providers of PPE?

PUBLIC–PRIVATE–CIVIL-SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS

The partnership system is complex and well developed. It builds on an international body of evidence around results-based financing and is managed by partners with considerable experience in this area. The study team recommends that USAID not intervene in this area in a minor way (such as an evaluation or study) unless the Agency is seriously considering embarking in a major way and becoming a stakeholder in public–private civil-society partnerships for PPE.

MEASUREMENT

Several activities have been undertaken to measure learning outcomes or longitudinal effects of PPE. The most noteworthy of these activities is that of the Higher Council of Education, which measures learning every three years. The study team does not recommend that USAID enter with a separate study through its own implementers. If USAID wishes to engage in a study, it would be preferable to supplement or build on the council’s current longitudinal work.

However, in the big picture, the nation seems well equipped with data every three years. UNICEF was working on using the data, infusing a framework on Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes and adapting it into a dashboard for longitudinal data. Key informants referenced King Mohammed’s embrace of PPE in light of presumed higher academic performance at the secondary level among students who had participated in PPE. Longitudinal data is often sought to support advocacy for policy change.

It seems that the best use of funds at this time would be to support quality and effectiveness of the rapid expansion of PPE across the nation, rather than additional measurement or studies. However, planning ahead at an inflection point—for instance, three or five years from the launch of the national preschool plan—there could be value in reflection on the data generated and how the data inform the nation in terms of progress on the implementation of the universal-preschool policy.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The instability of the preschool teaching profession, in terms of minimum-wage salary and temporary employment, recurred as a key concern hindering quality and the progress of the system. However,

this issue may be addressed better by the government itself, as well as by dialogues with multilaterals that specialize in direct government partnerships, than by a bilateral funder, such as USAID.

INTERVENTION GUIDANCE

Since many of the recommendations are aimed at enhancing the system or structure, investing directly in system building should help in reaching targets.

RATIONALE FOR INVESTING

Establishing quality in PPE can exert profound impact on quality across the entire education system.⁴⁵ Quality standards in preschool such as supportive coaching of teachers, robust quality assurance, focusing on holistic learning outcomes, and using data to inform decision-making, all set precedents that influence later educational patterns and learning uptake.⁴⁶ Because participation in quality PPE is correlated with children persisting in later schooling⁴⁷ and because participation in preschool reduces later costs of addressing poor learning outcomes, prioritizing quality PPE strengthens the entire education system.⁴⁸ Not only does PPE need to be recognized, supported, and funded on a similar basis to other education subsectors,⁴⁹ quality of preschool needs to be elevated and prioritized as a core strategy for enhancing learning outcomes across all levels of education. This rationale may be utilized to understand or articulate how an entry into PPE would support USAID's other education investments. Morocco has already adopted the approach of preschool investment as a building block to a better system as a whole.

TIMING OF INTERVENTION

Considering that Morocco is not in a state of crisis, nor is it fragile, and that its vision, strategy, targets, and financing are clear, the study team recommends taking a long-term view of investment in preschool. What does USAID/Morocco wish to achieve by supporting preschool investment? How long does it wish to engage in sustaining support? It would be useful to understand a long-term vision and walk back from there in terms of designing an intervention.

MECHANISM OF ENGAGEMENT

The Moroccan context of preschool presents a level of system development, clarity of strategy, and unity of vision not commonly seen in other contexts. In this instance, where the government has already shown itself to be capable of managing large amounts of funds (\$600 million USD) for preschool and coordinating a diverse array of actors, the study team suggests that Morocco may be ripe for more direct support to the national government. One mechanism for investing might be to consider a G2G partnership. The G2G Education Toolkit could be used to assess this decision-making process.⁵⁰

Such a mechanism might allow for the government to build its own systems and benefit from USAID technical inputs to its capacity-building. Such a partnership would provide the MOE with flexibility to invest in the institutional inputs that would strengthen its ability to manage provision and to professionalize its workforce. It would avert time-bound project-based support that is deemed to have less effectiveness and long-term impact. In addition, investing in other long-term, upstream system-building efforts (e.g., at the MOE or at teacher-training institutes) would have more impact than downstream contributions at the service-delivery level, (e.g., at schools).

Another option for supporting a unified vision of action could be to enter a pooled fund or shared partnership with other investors and stakeholders supporting PPE in Morocco. Whether USAID

selects a G2G partnership, a pooled fund, or a conventional project mechanism, it should recognize that Moroccan systems and institutions are already strong. Moroccan institutions are well placed to have the last word on securing high-quality international technical assistance that meets their needs.

The study team does not recommend investing directly in some Moroccan civil-society organizations that are directly implementing PPE, because currently the World Bank is directing large-scale funds through the Program Operation Manual, and it is the MOE that is in the driver seat of monitoring quality outcomes across Moroccan civil society institutions. The MOE leadership needs to be strengthened and reinforced, rather than sidestepped. Resources could be used to help the MOE procure the technical expertise it needs, drawing from the pool of highest-quality national and global expertise.

UNLOCKING ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The most value added may come from pooling resources to collaborate with other actors that are also investing in strengthening Morocco's ability to achieve universal preschool enrollment. This would lead to long-lasting support, more system-oriented support, and leveraging of each stakeholder's areas of strength. USAID/Morocco could dovetail and provide technical inputs to accompany the larger contributions of actors in preschool-education (e.g., the government, the World Bank, UNICEF, or the European Union).

If USAID/Morocco wishes to unlock additional resources for preschool education, it could consider buying into mechanisms that pool funds and leverage additional pots of funds. For instance, it could consider investing in the USAID CATALYZE mechanism, which has the mandate to blend public, private, multilateral, and bilateral funds for investment in early child care and education.⁵¹ This could enable leveraging of the banking and equity sector into education, in addition to philanthropic and multilateral finance. Working through this mechanism could also enable leveraging and comingling of funds with the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank. For instance, the International Finance Corporation's new Care2Equal program (funded by the World Bank Child Care Incentive Fund with a current total value of 200 million USD, to which USAID is contributing 50 million USD) will conduct additional research and innovative ways to mobilize more capital with respect to childcare and Early Child Care and Education.⁵²

In addition, the World Bank's Mashreq Gender Facility is leading a market assessment in countries neighboring Morocco to outline ways to expand early childcare and education.⁵³ There could be great value in leveraging mechanisms built to pool money from USAID and other sources for research, assessment, and support to intervention. This could enable support to areas prioritized by MOE, such as professional development and preschool system expansion, as well as areas prioritized by leading thinkers in the preschool sector, including childcare-preschool linkages and parent engagement. Linking into such pooled mechanisms also leverages money from different entities that have outcome goals for women's economic empowerment, family well-being, youth workforce development, and increased economic productivity.

The wider sector is seeing a convergence of these actors and a breaking down of silos around early childcare and education. Accessing funding mechanisms for convening cross-sectoral actors and pooling funds would enable the application of cross-sectoral funds to help children three to six years old to reach increased learning and development outcomes, with benefits to the education sector as well as beyond.

SQ3 CONCLUSIONS

SQ3 findings describe options for addressing opportunities and challenges and areas that warrant further investigation. In general, the study's findings demonstrate that enhancements, rather than restructuring, are needed. Areas for prioritized support include a focusing on enhancement of the professional development system and professionalization of the teaching role and strengthening of the core systems that can support rapid expansion of access.

Larger funds or pooled funding might be necessary to undertake steps to support the MOE in reaching universal preschool enrollment. USAID should work in concert with other actors to align and coordinate investment into the system in a manner that enriches rather than duplicates existing work. It is highly recommended that USAID buy into mechanisms that address early childcare and education in order to increase the funding size and scope of how it is able to engage in supporting preschool education in Morocco. The current period, when there is momentum and political will in scaling preschool education, is opportune for engagement. The combined support of coordinated stakeholders will be key in reaching Morocco's ambitious targets by 2028.

ENDNOTES

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