



# Access to ECD centres in rural communities

Country: Armenia Organisation: Save the Children International

**MANAGEMENT SUMMARY:** Save the Children, which has been active in Armenia since 1993, has established a number of Early Childhood Intervention centres, which offer Inclusive Pre-school Education for all children. The organization cooperates closely with local and federal governments and has focused on rural areas, where poverty and lack of infrastructure are the most severe. Between the years 2011 and 2015, Save the Children has provided access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) services for more than 3,600 children in 19 rural communities of Armenia.

- In Armenia Children with disabilities live predominantly with their families and have few opportunities for social inclusion and integration
- Save the Children focused on Early Childhood Development in rural areas
- The Armenian government has implemented Inclusive Education regulations



Supporting children and families by building centres in rural areas



Numbers of Early Childhood Development Centres of Save the Children

Save the Children is recognized by the Armenian authorities as a leading agency and is a pioneering agency on inclusive Early Childhood Development. Together with the Ministry of Education and Science, the organization has co-led the development of the Pre-school Education National Strategy for 2016–2025.



#### THE PROBLEM:

### Lack of development centres

In Armenia there is a serious lack of specialized ECD centres for disabled children, since the concept of inclusive ECD centres has not yet been introduced.

In order to ensure the sustainability of ECD intervention and to promote the establishment of inclusive ECD centres, it is crucial to get an initial commitment from national and local governments for the inclusion of ECD costs in the state budget. Currently, as school-based centres are established, the Armenian state allocates per capita funding to the schools – a process that was achieved through the advocacy of Save the Children.



#### THE DEVELOPED SOLUTION:

### Early childhood centres are built

ECD Centres, known as kindergartens, pre-schools, and nurseries, are the focal points through which children aged 3–6 years are given access to early development and learning. These centres serve to promote the overall age-appropriate development of children through a cheerful and child-friendly environment outside the home.

The objectives of Save the Children in Armenia is to increase access to ECD services and pre-school education for the most deprived and marginalized children, including children with disabilities, and to support policies to create a children-centred inclusive ECD system in the country.

Save the Children starts with a needs assessment in every target community in order to understand the specific needs of children and their communities.

#### ABOUT ARMENIA:

### A small, landlocked country fighting poverty

- The Republic of Armenia covers an area of 29,743 square kilometres that is mountainous and partly volcanic. Its population of approximately 3 million inhabitants is divided into 10 provinces, while the capital, Yerevan, hosts approximately a third of the entire population. Armenian mines produce copper, zinc, gold, and lead, and a large part of the working population is employed in the agricultural sector.
- The 2015 UNDP Human Development Index shows Armenia in 85th place together with Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina, with a gross domestic product) of \$8,124 per capita and 38.5 percent of the population below the poverty line.
- There are approximately 207,000 children aged 0–4 years and 180,000 children aged 5–9 years, representing 13 percent of the entire population. Currently, 27 percent of children of six years and younger are enrolled in kindergartens.



#### THE MODEL:

### All stakeholders come together

The first step is the identification of target communities, which is performed through a three-level approach:

- At the community mapping level, the team sends an official enquiry to province municipalities and requests data for all communities in the targeted provinces. Next, all data received are reviewed, including such factors as demographic information, number of pre-school children, availability of kindergartens or alternative ECD services, remoteness from the regional centre, and the socio-economic profile of communities. Lack of any pre-school services is a primary factor for the preliminary selection of communities.
- The field-level assessment seeks to verify the received data and to assess conditions in the local schools, particularly the feasibility of transforming one classroom into an ECD centre. During this assessment, the project team also meets with the mayors and members of village councils to introduce the project and discuss the possibility of a community contribution of 15 percent to the



Children enjoy Early Childhood Development classes in newly established inclusive centres

## Through a specially structured educational curriculum, children practice basic mathematics, literacy, amplify hand motility, arts and crafts

renovation cost. With the participation of Save the Children's construction engineer, project staff conduct this assessment in order to see the conditions on the ground and to judge the feasibility of renovation activities. Thereafter, the Save the Children's team identifies a number of target communities for their project intervention.

- Final results of the mapping and field assessments are presented to the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Territorial Administration, Ministry of Education and Science, and province-level authorities in the target provinces to secure their approval for interventions and to get their commitment for further support to the selected schools.

### Performing a thorough assessment

Immediately after the selection of target communities, the Save the Children project team – led by a Project Officer and Construction Coordinator – conducts a needs assessment. This assessment is aimed to introduce the project, assess the local needs, and understand the perceptions of community members about problems related to ECD. Community mayors, school principals, as well as schoolteachers and parents participate in the needs assessment.

The assessment explores various data collection methods, including in-depth interviews with community mayors and school principals, as well as focus group discussions with teachers and parents.



Each classroom is provided with books, developmental games, toys, and other necessary supplies (scissors, crayons, paints, paper, play dough, etc.)

In order to set priorities, the following selection criteria are used:

- Lack of ECD services in the community, i.e., no kindergarten or any alternative services.
- Number of children aged 4–6 with and without disabilities.
- Availability of premises within existing school buildings and feasibility to transform 1–2 classrooms into ECD centres.
- Willingness of the community municipality and the school management to participate in the project and support intervention (there is a need for a 15 percent local contribution for renovation activities per project).

There are no transport issues in rural communities because the distances are short and people usually walk their children to the ECD centre.

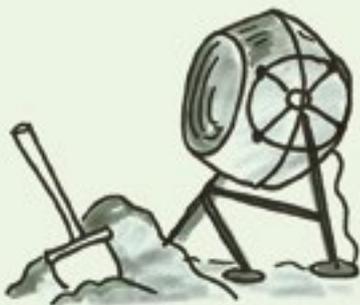
### Providing a standard layout and furniture

The premises allocated by a school administration are entirely renovated, with plastering of walls and the replacement of doors, windows, and floors. Each classroom is provided with a set of furniture specifically designed for interactive education, which includes sets of so-called “chamomile” desks and chairs, with each set consisting of six movable tables and seats, thus allowing various configurations for group and individual work. The furniture sets also include a bookshelf, a large and small cabinet for toys and shoes, a teacher's desk and chair, a blackboard, and a coat rack. A play corner is organized in each classroom with two mats. Additionally, each classroom is provided with books, developmental games, toys, and other necessary supplies (scissors, crayons, paints, paper, play dough, etc.).

Each ECD classroom is provided with a separate bathroom equipped with sanitary appliances specifically adjusted for children aged 4–6 years, and the bathrooms are provided with 24/7 running water and a sewerage system. All ECD centres are provided with electrical heaters to ensure uninterrupted education in winter.

Each day consists of a four-hour class for children aged 4–6 years, with some 20–25 children per group. If there are more children in the community, the classes are organized into two shifts.

The education is provided by a teacher and a teacher's assistant with a pre-school education degree. These two professionals are carefully monitored and guided by Save the Children's project staff during the first year.



#### FACTS AND FIGURES:

### 21 centres all over the country

The project achievements in the period of 2011–2015 were the followings:

- Save the Children provided access to ECD services for more than 3,600 children in 19 rural communities of Armenia and 2 centers in the capital Yerevan; the children completed a 10-month pre-school programme and were successfully enrolled in primary school.
- Capacity-building was provided to 48 ECD teachers on ECD and parental education methodology, resulting in enhanced knowledge and skills of 2,452 parents and caregivers on child health and development.
- 21 Parental Resource Centres were established and parental classes conducted for parents/caregivers of children aged 0–6 years.
- The Armenian Government subsidized the operational costs of newly established school-based ECD centres, providing per capita funding.
- A parents' manual was published addressing early childhood development, health, and violence against children.

The course runs for 10 months, during which time children practice basic mathematics, literacy, and arts and crafts. The classes are conducted in an interactive manner using play as the main learning tool.

To evaluate the effectiveness of ECD classes, Save the Children assesses the children's knowledge and skills both before and after the 10-month period. The assessment is conducted by ECD teachers through performance observation based on the indicators provided by the National Institute of Education, including: gross and fine motor skills; emotional, personal, and social development; cognitive and speaking skills; safe behaviour; and attitude towards learning/studying.

To date, the model has been piloted and scaled-up in 19 rural communities of Armavir, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, and Lori provinces and of the capital, Yerevan

city. As noted above, since the model is school-based, the state takes over the established ECD classes, providing per-capita funding for children aged 5–6 years (based on the Preschool Education National Strategy). However, there is still a need for advocacy with the government for inclusion/targeting of smaller children (aged 3–4) in this strategy, including appropriate budget allocation. At this point, Save the Children provides on-going guidance and monitoring of established services while moving on to other communities for the establishment of new ECD centres.



#### FUNDING:

### Involved for more than two decades

Save the Children Switzerland and Medicor Foundation fund the project in Armenia. Save the Children has been working in Armenia since 1993, earning a high reputation for delivering quality programmes for children and establishing strong and influential relationships with government and civil society networks. During this time the organization has managed over \$60 million in aid programmes to support the most vulnerable populations of Armenia.

The Armenian Government contributes 124,000 AMD (app. EUR 227) to schools per child/per year (high mountain regions receive 20 percent more). There is no state regulation to provide a separate budget allocation for children with disabilities in kindergartens and ECD centres, because as yet there is no institutionalized Inclusive Preschool Education in Armenia.



#### OUTLOOK:

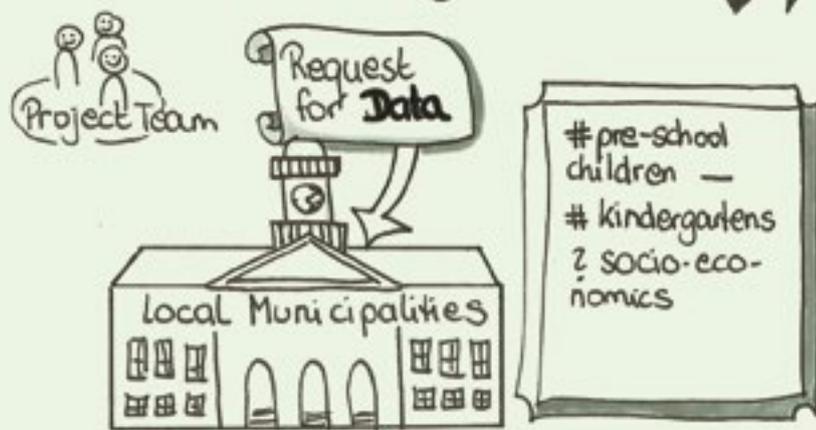
### High transferability

In recent years the Government of Armenia has taken important steps to legislate Inclusive Education, which became a national policy in 2005. The Law on Mainstream Education (which has merged previous laws on special education and mainstream education) stipulates that by 2022 all mainstream schools in Armenia will be inclusive.

In November–December 2015, Save the Children was involved and co-led the process to develop the Education Development National Programme for 2016–2025, and Inclusive Pre-school Education was one of the priority recommendations outlined by Save the Children.

The approach of low-cost, school-based inclusive ECD can be adapted to any country context both for rural and urban settings.

## Community Mapping



## Field-level Assessment



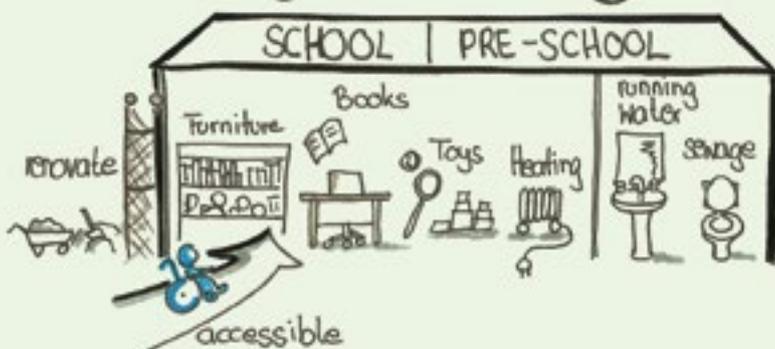
## Presentation to Authorities



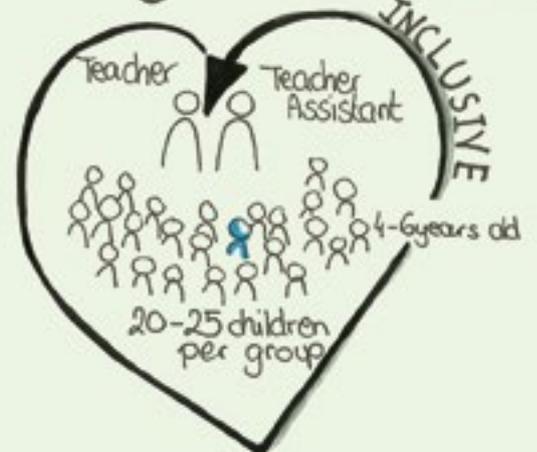
## Needs Assessment



## Renovating & furnishing



## Working with the children





#### ABOUT THE ORGANISATION:

### Save the Children

Save the Children International is an independent organization caring for children. Founded in 1919, today it operates in more than 120 countries throughout the world, reaching some 55 million children in 2014. Save the Children International aims for a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development, and participation. Their mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

Save the Children has been operating in Armenia since 1993, delivering relief and development programmes to the most vulnerable children and their families for more than two decades. Their vital health, education, and social initiatives have helped improve basic conditions of the poorest populations through community-based projects and the capacity-building of local partners and institutions.

There are approximately 65 non-governmental organizations working in Armenia, and Save the Children Armenia works in close collaboration with them. At the beginning of every intervention, Save the Children meets with other organizations working in education to discuss way of collaboration/joint activities and to avoid overlap.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

### Publications readily available

For further information, Save the Children has developed the following tools:

- Information flyers for parents and caregivers on child nutrition, hygiene, first aid, anaemia, intestinal worms, and posture disorders.
- A pre-school education and development handbook provide guidance for community leaders on how to establish cost-effective pre-school education services.
- The “Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Development in Armenia Concept,” describing a proposed inclusive ECD model for Armenia.
- A guide for ECD teachers and parental education facilitators
- “I know my child, what about you”: Guide for parents
- Hand washing Poster for children
- Healthy Teeth Poster for children



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This in-depth analysis can be downloaded for free at

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