

“The study, rare in Africa, has thrown light on the possibilities that we in developing countries can explore to give our children a much better future,” said H.E. Zeferino Martins, Minister of Education in Mozambique

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Ready for school. A preschool programme in rural Mozambique substantially improved children's skills and their likelihood to enrol into primary schools

Over 60 percent of children in sub-Saharan Africa fail to meet their development potential because of poverty. Inadequate health and nutrition, a home environment with few books and toys, limited parental stimulations and learning opportunities affect the children's development particularly in the early period of their lives.

In Mozambique, only 4 out of 100 children go to pre-school and very few programmes are available in rural areas where poverty is more acute. Existing evidence shows that investment in education early in life gives children a head start, and has effects on their immediate well-being and future prospects. But such evidence is not available from Africa. Are effective pre-school interventions viable in poor rural African communities?

For the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, a randomised evaluation examined the impact of community-based preschools. The programme, run by Save the Children in rural Mozambique, had positive impacts on children's enrolment and school readiness.

Key findings

Children who attended preschool:

- Are more likely to enrol in primary school at the right age. They spend more time on schooling and less time working on the family farm.
- Show large improvements in cognitive and problem solving abilities, fine motor skills and social behaviour.
- Are less prone to diarrhea and skin problems, though there is no evidence of positive impacts on nutrition.
- Their siblings are more likely to go to primary school.
- Their caregivers show improvements in parenting practices and an increase in parents' employment.

Policy impact

- As a result of these findings, the Ministry of Education in Mozambique is now planning to extend community-based preschools to 600 communities. Early childhood education was included in the country's 2012-2016 national education plan. The government has also created a national early childhood development commission.

The evaluation

Save the Children piloted a preschool programme in Mozambique where young children 'learn by doing' under the care of supportive adults. This is a community model of preschool where communities commit to providing a space, building classrooms, and form a committee responsible for managing and supervising preschools. Save the Children also provided five days of foundation training for teachers where they received coaching and mentoring on their teaching practices. In addition, programme staff had to undertake monthly visits. The cost of the programme is USD 2.47 per child per month.

The evaluation "[The promise of preschool in Africa: A randomized impact evaluation of early childhood development in rural Mozambique](#)" by Sebastian Martinez, Sophie Naudeau and Victor Pereira funded by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and the World Bank Spanish Impact Evaluation Fund, assesses the impact of the programme on children's development and readiness for school, looking in particular at the effects on primary school enrolment, child development outcomes, child growth and health, as well as impacts on older siblings and adult caregivers. Thirty communities from a sample of 76 were randomly assigned to receive access to the preschool programme. The impact analysis uses panel data collected in early 2008 and early 2010 from a random sample of 2,000 households with preschool-aged children in each of the 76 communities. It also uses surveys of 76 community leaders and 1,020 first-grade students.

What did we learn?

Preschoolers are more likely to enrol in primary school at the right time. Children enrolled in preschool are 25 percent more likely to enrol in primary school at the age of six. For boys the impact is even larger. Once in school, children spend more than seven hours extra on doing their homework and other school-related activities, and less time working on the farm.

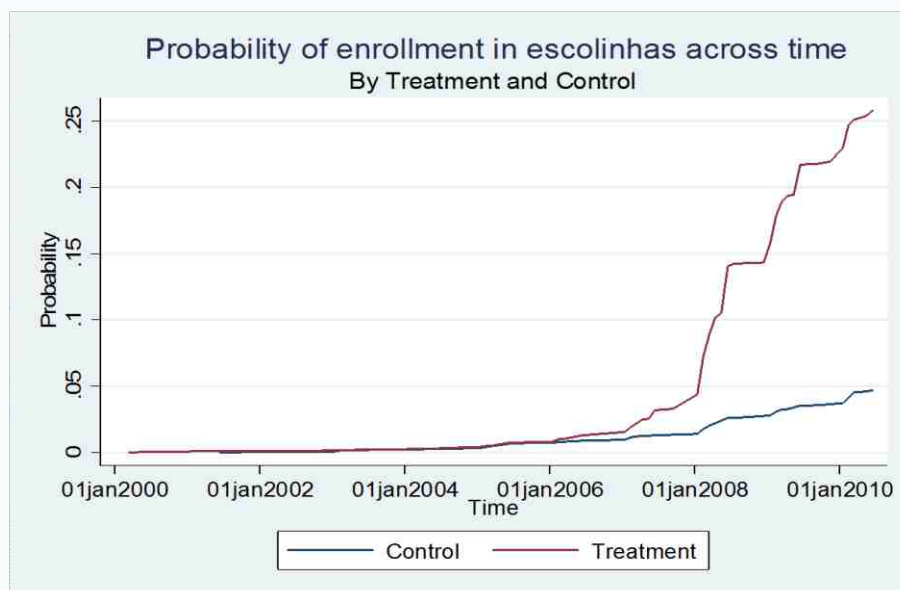
A head start for school. Children who attended preschool show a significant increase in problem solving, memory skills, and ability for counting, sorting and classifying objects. Over 6 percent showed

improvement in precise motor coordination. There are limited effects on language development as children may have joined preschool too late to reverse some of the language delays accumulated in early years.

No effect in reducing children's malnutrition. Over 40 percent of the children in the study sample were stunted. The preschool programme had no impact on the children's physical growth and nutrition, since the programme did not include a nutrition component. There was, however a reduction in skin diseases and diarrhea as a result of a strong focus on hand washing and good self-care practices.

Older siblings also benefit. The preschool programme appears to have influenced parents' perceptions on the importance of school and encouraged them to enrol their older children in primary school. The results show a five percent increase in school enrolment for older children.

More responsible parenting and caregivers are more likely to work. While the programme had limited effects on parents spending more time reading books, playing games or engaging in other activities with their children, it showed a significant drop in the number of parents who believe that physical punishment of a child is appropriate. These effects are probably due to monthly parenting meetings organized by the pre-school. Parents also reported higher satisfaction with their child's preparation for schooling and an increase in time spent at work over the past 30 days.



Evidence in brief draws out key findings from 3ie supported impact evaluations.

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