



Source: UNICEF

# Early Development and Learning in **Vanuatu**

## Background

The Republic of Vanuatu is an archipelago of more than 80 islands in the South Pacific Ocean with a population of 266,000. About 97.6% of Vanuatu's population belongs to the largest ethnic group, Ni-Vanuatu. More than half the population is below the age of 25 and the under-5 mortality rate is 29 deaths per 1,000 births (UNESCO, 2014).

Of the 543 ECE (Early Childhood Education) centres in Vanuatu, 406 are private, 115 are community pre-schools and 22 are church-run pre-schools (Ministry of Education, 2012). Only a small number of church-run pre-schools have government assistance. There is no significant disparity between girls and boys in enrolment in early childhood education. However, the gross enrolment ratio varies greatly among provinces (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The Vanuatu Education Road Map was introduced in 2009 to set out the agenda for the development of education. The Road Map recognizes early childhood education as an integral part of the Vanuatu education system. Improving the quality of teachers and facilities and the implementation of a national kindergarten curriculum standards framework are recommended (Ministry of Education, 2009).

## Objectives

Vanuatu was one of six countries that participated in the East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) project, supported by UNICEF- East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), the Open Society Foundations, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC).

The main objective of this project was to equip stakeholders across East Asia and the Pacific with a common measurement tool to assess the holistic developmental progress of children ranging in age from three to five years. It was felt that stakeholders in Vanuatu including governments, universities, research institutions and donor partners, would be able to utilise the data garnered from this project to promote early development and learning, and prevent the loss of human potential by investing in the early years.

## Methodology

As part of this project, direct assessments of the holistic development and learning of 3- to 5-year-old children residing in urban and rural settings were carried out in the second half of 2013. Children were administered the EAP-ECDS. The items on these Scales were developed based on the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) from countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region (including Vanuatu) through an iterative process. The EAP-ECDS includes seven domains and 85 items. Caregivers were also interviewed in individual sessions to obtain: (i) standard demographic data; (ii) reports on the child's early learning and development; and (iii) information about the child's health and habits.



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Vanuatuan girls learning at school

## Conclusions

- The EAP-ECDS are valid and reliable measures of developmental functioning in Vanuatu. Older children performed better than younger children in all domains of the Scales.
- Participation in early childhood programmes had a significant positive effect on the EAP-ECDS. Children who attended such programmes scored about 6 percentage points higher than other children.
- Early childhood education in urban areas should be enhanced to improve the performance of children in urban areas.
- Steps should be taken to address gender differences in early learning and development.
- Caregivers should be provided education and support to encourage them to be more involved in the early development of their wards.

## Sample

Age	Rural		Urban		Total
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	
3Y	69	93	6	8	<b>176</b>
4Y	95	102	21	12	<b>230</b>
5Y	127	127	17	17	<b>288</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>694</b>

A total of 900 children and their parents/caregivers participated in this study. The sample was drawn from six provinces (Malampa, Penama, Sanma, Shefa, Tafea, and Torba). The sampling strategy was determined in conjunction with the Statistical Department, and the sample was stratified by region, urbanicity, and child's age and gender. In addition to the child assessment, one parent or caregiver of the child was interviewed in an individual session. Data from 3- to 5-year-olds with information about urbanicity ( $n = 694$ ) were included in the Scale Validations. The analyses of parental interview data included children of all age groups.

## Early Child Development

Comparisons of average scores on each domain were made across age, sex, and urban/rural settings. Further, the relationship between findings from direct assessments of children's performance and parent reports were also compared. Predictors of child development and learning, participation in early childhood programmes, home learning environments, children's health condition and health-related practices were also examined. There were significant developmental differences in the EAP-ECDS. Older children performed better than younger children in all domains of the Scales. This finding is not unexpected as the EAP-ECDS is a developmental scale with adequate validity and reliability.

### Cognitive Development

- Rural children showed significantly better performance than urban children.

### Socio-emotional Development

- Girls performed significantly better than boys.

### Motor Development

- Rural children showed significantly better performance than urban children.

### Language and Emergent Literacy

- Rural girls did significantly better than rural boys but there were no significant gender differences among urban children.

### Health, Hygiene, and Safety

- Rural boys were more likely to show a higher performance than urban boys.

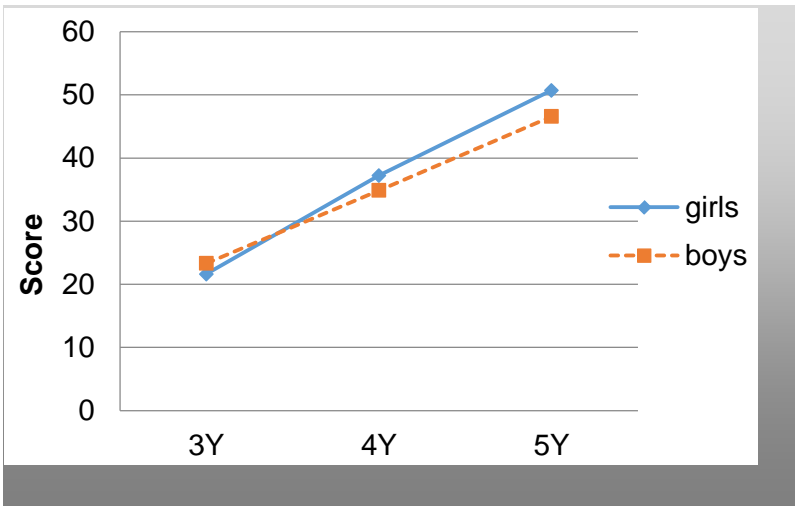
### Cultural Knowledge and Participation

- There were no significant urban-rural or gender differences in this domain.

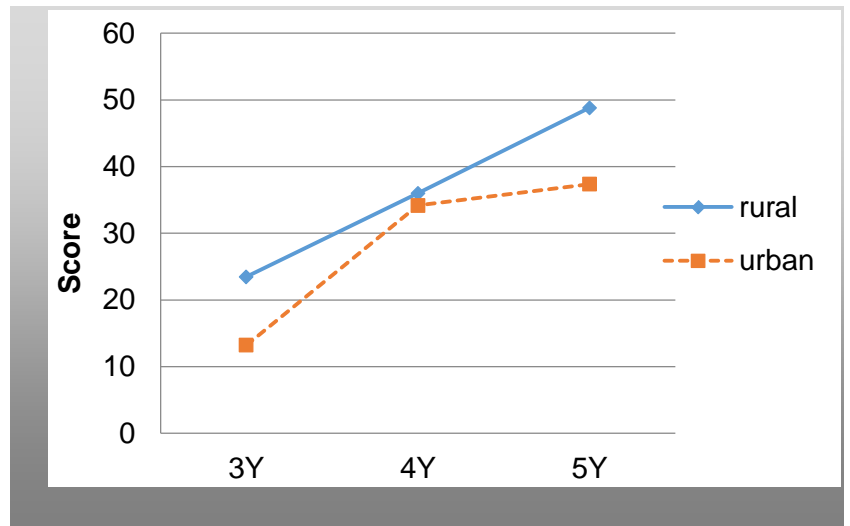
### Approaches to Learning

- There were no significant urban-rural or gender differences in this domain.

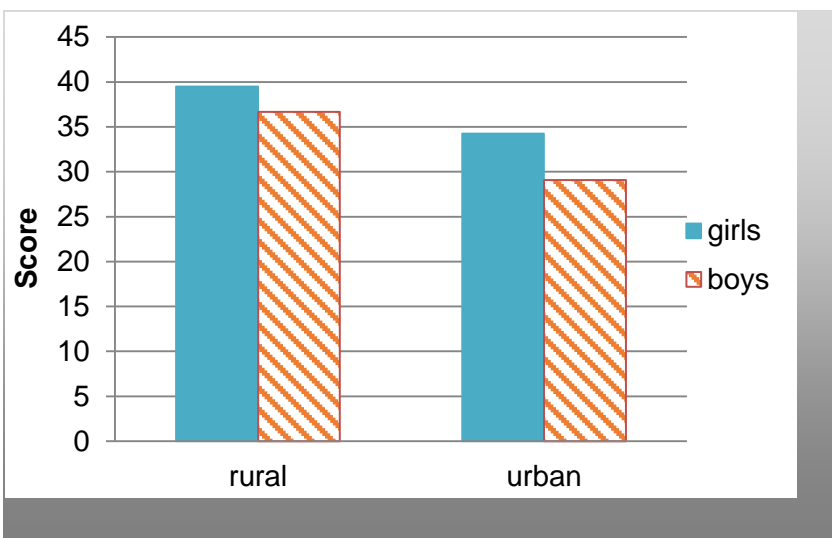
Age and Gender differences in Cognitive Development (Vanuatu)



Age differences in Cognitive Development in children living in rural and urban areas (Vanuatu)



Gender differences in Cognitive Development in children living in rural and urban areas (Vanuatu)



## Early Learning and Development

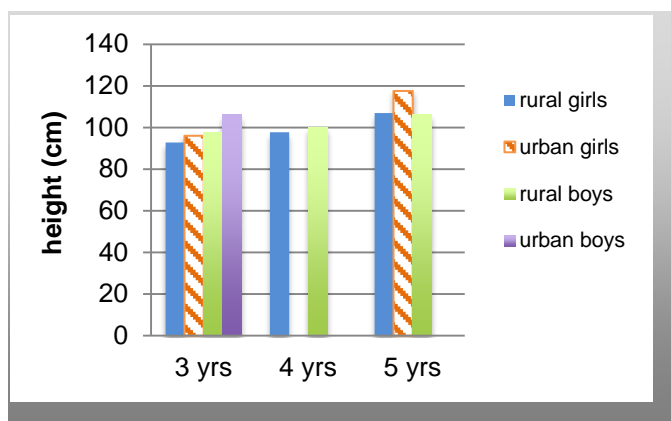
- Less than half (45.4%) of the participating children attended some form of an early education programme. This reflects the gross enrolment ratio for pre-primary education in Vanuatu which was 59 in 2011 (UNESCO, 2014).
- Children who were older were more likely enrolled in an early learning programme than other children.
- Children who attended an early education programme scored 6 percentage points higher on average than those who did not.
- More than half of caregivers reported having involvement in early learning-related activities at home. Urban children were more likely to have such activities with their parents at home. Mothers were more likely to be engaged in these activities with younger children. Other family members were more likely to be engaged in these activities with older children, and better-educated fathers were inclined to have more engagement than other fathers. Other family members in rural areas were more likely to be engaged in these activities at home with children than those in urban areas.

## Health and Hygiene

- Almost all children (95.2%) had had their vaccinations.
- Analyses showed that there were no significant predictors for families' health facilitation practices.
- Results indicated that older children and girls tended to have better health and hygiene habits (e.g., such as always washing hands after using the toilet and before meals without adults' directions, and eating vegetables without adults' directions) than other children.
- Younger children, those living in urban areas, and those with younger mothers were more likely to have reported health problems. It is not clear whether urban children suffer poorer health or whether urban parents are more aware of children health issues and therefore more likely to report health concerns.

## Height and Weight

Age and Gender differences in Height in rural and urban areas (Vanuatu)



Age and Gender differences in Weight in rural and urban areas (Vanuatu)

