

Closing Remarks

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Thank you for making the Closing Ceremony such a joyful moment!

Excellencies Ministers, Honourable Speakers, Honoured International Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ECE AND THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It has been an honour for Cambodia to host the ARNEC 2017 conference over the last three days. I would like to thank ARNEC Board Members for organizing the conference in Cambodia, all honorable speakers for interesting presentations and all of you for such lively and rich discussions and participation.

The world is at the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Shaped by globalization, the unfolding technological transformation has been triggered by the confluence of emerging technological breakthroughs, covering wide-ranging fields such as AI, IoT, 3D printing, robotics, nanotechnology, material science, quantum computing, autonomous vehicles and energy storage. This is no more science fiction, but already reality.

The new revolution will have an impact on how we train the new generation today for future job market. A child today can expect to change jobs at least seven times over the course of their lives – and five of those jobs don't exist yet. It is therefore impossible to predict which “hard skills” children in today's classrooms will need for jobs they will enter in 15 years' time.

The Education Commission (2016) considers that by 2030 more than half of the young people will be denied future, because they will not have skills for the changing job market.

A survey of 900 companies confirmed that soft skills – such as teamwork, knowledge of digital tools, an understanding of rules and regulations, responsibility and commitment – are the most relevant for the future. The jobs that even artificial intelligence can't replace will be those that require strong human character traits.

Research shows that skills formed during early infant and preschool years can translate into success or failure in school and in the post-school learning. Families and environment play the crucial role in skill formation in early state. Throughout the conference we heard the importance of the early moment for cognitive capital or a 'farm in the head.'

However, according to James Heckman, much of the early childhood interventions comes in boosting non-cognitive skills and fostering motivation. It means that early interventions are also good for non-cognitive capital. Non-cognitive capital is also as good as cognitive capital. Researchers found out that non-cognitive skills, such as self-discipline, persistence, reliability and personal traits such as leadership, perseverance are good for success in life. People with high IQ may not be successful in life, if they do not have some personality traits such as perseverance, persistence etc. Therefore, skill formation of the early infant and pre-school years are important, when human ability and motivation are shaped by families and non-institutional environments.

Post-school learning – **learning by doing and workplace education** – accounts for as much as one-third to one-half of all skill formation in modern economy.

Thus, ECD lays the foundation for both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, lifelong learning and 21st century skills: critical thinking, problem-solving skills that will be developed later on.

Therefore, the topic of our conference - "*The transformative power of Early Childhood Development (ECD): The importance of holistic interventions*" – is not only timely but also relevant and urgent. We need to change our mindsets. When parents invest in their children, they save money to invest in secondary and higher education, not necessarily ECE.

Cambodia has fully subscribed to the holistic approach to ECCD and applies a result-based framework to implement the ECCD Action Plan. Parents and policymakers are more conscious about the importance of early interventions. Enrolment of 5 year old children increased from 6% in 2000 to 31% in 2008,

then to 60% in 2014 and to 66% in 2017. Such rapid expansion was possible after the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) adopted a policy to create one preschool class in each primary school and to establish community pre-schools and home-based programs, with the support of UNICEF, GPE and NGOs, such as Save the Children, Plan International, Care, Global Alliance for Children and Child Fund and many others, to ensure equitable access. The private sector, such as Prudential also helps fund some activities. The establishment of bilingual preschools to provide a bridge from ethnic minority languages to Khmer language and special preschools for children with disabilities are crucial for inclusiveness. However, there are still many fundamental issues to address particularly in the area of quality and especially the care in the first 1000 days of life and before birth.

MESSAGES FROM ARNEC CONFERENCE

There are a number of strong messages came from this conference.

One: as discussed in this forum we cannot afford to ignore the body of evidence that identifies the problems faced by children in this region. There are clearly many young children suffering from problems associated with poor diets, disadvantaged conditions and lack of learning opportunities. Inaction is not an option as the consequences are too great and they last a lifetime.

Therefore, early interventions matter! Research shows that interventions during the first 1,000 days or from preconception to year 0 to 3 are critical.

It means that we must create not just preschools and care for children aged 3 to 8 years, but also establish nurseries (crèches) for children aged 1 to 3 years and child care centres to provide consultation to pregnant women and to provide care to children aged 0 to 1 year old. Therefore, parental education should be expanded to care for 0 to 3 years olds.

Obviously, creating good environment – nutrition, safety, protection from infections, good health and nurturing parenting – plays a very important role in the early years. Best practices should be documented and disseminated widely among the population. Investing in the early moment is crucial!

To address the above issue, **I would like to propose to establish ECD counsellors at school: pre-school and primary school. Schools can also coordinate with Health Centers to provide counselling. A philosophical**

question arises, should we educate the child first or the parent first within the context of parents with low education?

We must act now to realize the full potential of our young population to give them every chance of achieving high performance in schooling and their future contributions to the region and society.

Moreover, we should learn from the MDG by not just giving attention to access , but also to quality of ECD programs. In this regard, quality standard and monitoring of quality is essential to equity!

Two, this work cannot be the responsibility of a single governing body.

Policies should be integrated and implementation should be well coordinated: the health, nutrition, education, housing, child protection, immigrant children, indigenous children and communities and health and welfare of children in major cities, regional towns and remote and distant villages must be our priority.

Three, improvements will only be possible with good policies and

investment. Having a good Action Plan on ECD is only a good start, but coordinated implementation is a challenge when considering the geographic, social and population dimensions of the country. That is why we are here to bridge the gaps between research and policies. We are committed to taking steps to ensure that our policy is effective and producing real outcomes which can be measured.

Four, our greatest challenge as in other societies is the development of programs to educate our population on the importance of early childhood education to ensure that the potential within this policy framework involves all sectors of the community and all will benefit from its development. Moreover, we must reach the unreached to ensure inclusiveness and equity that will promote social peace.

LESSONS LEARNT

What are the lessons learnt from ECD in Cambodia?

Firstly, we should build the early childhood system that delivers results: the link between policies, teacher training and preschools. We have witnessed that any kind of early childhood interventions in the rural areas have transformed the rural community in addressing social issues and parents have become the

change agents to educate their children. With such rapid expansion, the challenge is preschool teacher training, as there are only 2,500 trained preschool teachers in Cambodia. Policy options should be costed based on the result framework by ensuring coherence across goals, policies and spending, a clear route from policy to implementation and effective governance and accountability.

Secondly, ECD is multi-dimensional. Stunting affects 22% of our children, due to limited hygiene, feeding practice, health access, water and sanitation. This requires a coordinated approach to ECD. Awareness about WASH, iodine and change of habits can help increase cognitive capital of our population. Therefore, these issues should be integrated into school textbooks and teacher training centers to promote the change in the habit of the population.

Thirdly, ECD should link to primary education. Studies show that improved developmental readiness of children facilitates on-time enrolment and better performance in primary education as well as reducing repetition and dropout. Early Learning Assessment can be used to readjust our interventions in the disadvantaged areas.

This findings at this conference formed a strong foundation for accelerating expansion of ECE services in Cambodia. The Commune Council and District Department of Education should monitor the service delivery. **To ensure inclusiveness and sustainability**, the home-based ECCD programs or community-based ECCD floating center for floating households should be connected to the government-run primary schools, with one teacher assigned to be a core teacher. The curriculum should address the local needs, such as **WASH, Health, Nutrition and Protection.**

Fourthly, qualified teachers play a crucial role in ECD. Therefore, Teacher Policy Action Plan (TPAP) constitutes the core of our reform programs. We will upgrade two regional teacher training centers in Phnom Penh and Battambang to establish Teacher Education Colleges (TEC) to train more qualified teachers including preschool teachers. Cambodia intends also to establish a center to train community preschool teachers and to standardize parenting training programs. We need in-service programs to support preschool teachers, mentoring programs and a community of learners.

Fifthly, a holistic approach is instrumental in fostering both cognitive and non-cognitive potential of our youngest citizens in order to sustain economic growth. Our parental training programs include practical demonstrations on how

to be healthy during pregnancy, how to cook nutritious food, basic hygiene, health and safety practices as well as acting as a forum for mothers to share ideas and support each other. For example, **food supplements (such as nutritious snacks, fortified rice) could incentivize ECE attendance and reduce child malnutrition.**

Sixtly, educated parents can have a transformative power. Parenting classes and parental awareness training have a high impact on child development.

Parents have the single biggest influence on the child's development potential before birth and during the first crucial 1000 days of life. Educating parents therefore is equally as important as educating children. The parental training program should cover the following:

- Conception and pregnancy care, Post natal care, Child development monitoring and nutrition
- Hygiene and Environment
- Health Services and Utilization

In addition to the modules included in the home based program the pre-school based program includes modules on:

- The right of child to comprehensive care
- Health status, general health and disease prevention
- Play and child development
- Child behaviour and control
- Child protection, identification of domestic violence and intervention
- Communication and child development
- Injuries and prevention
- Children with disabilities, care and intervention
- Preparation for schooling
- Non communicable disease, prevention and parental health care

The aim of the program is to provide skills and knowledge to parents on nutrition services, early childhood care and healthcare services at local level.

The first of these strands is to provide local education opportunities for pregnant mothers and parents with children aged 2 or below.

Seventhly, ECCD Planing, Monitoring and Evaluation System.

ECCD Result Framework focuses on 6 Goals and objectives of the policy, 9 strategies involving 11 Ministries and 25 programs, with output indicators and targets for each program. Moreover, Cambodia adopted 6 Public/Community Preschool Standards with 33 indicators and 4 Home-Based Care Program Standards with 22 indicators. However, I find that assessment tools of school readiness, such as IDELA and ARNEC tools presented at the conference very interesting. Thus, we need to develop the capacity of preschool inspectors who will be able to provide advice and guidance for quality assurance of different forms of preschools from Montessori to the normal ways of teaching, as well as different form of ECE services. Parents should demand more from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and different forms of ECD service providers. Their active participation is critical for quality assurance.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know that children are our future – but what type of future do we want for them?

Discussions at this conference have explored this question with the view to do the best for them and for our future. We can invest in our young children and reap the benefits of a population of healthy, enthusiastic, engaged, innovative people who contribute greatly to improving our future. The policies we choose will shape the future of these children and our societies.

This conference has given us the opportunity to explore different approaches to achieve equity and to overcome the limiting features caused by inequality, disadvantage, poor health and poor educational opportunities to produce healthy, smart, confident and capable children.

The overall aim of the conference was to serve as a platform for sharing new developments and initiatives as well as provide opportunities for policy makers and practitioners to strengthen partnerships, gain a broader perspective on addressing issues and contextualize our own countries situations within a more global agenda. We are now committed to SDG 4.2. But we need a good roadmap that guide us toward 2030.

We have shared a great deal of information together and learned much from each other even though three days is a very short time for such a huge topic.

There is no doubt that the conference has achieved its expected outcomes of informing policy makers and ECD practitioners on the latest research, development and innovations as well as enabling participants to establish a stronger ECD community in the Asia – Pacific Region.

Children are the future of our nations and we return to our own ECCD implementation with renewed energy and motivation!

We have now arrived at the time for recognizing the effort and personal commitments made to make this conference possible.

Excellencies, Honourable Speakers, Honoured International Guests and Colleagues: I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the conference organizers, speakers, rapporteurs, facilitators and participants for making this conference a great success.

I thank all Honorable Ministers for their remarks at the beginning of the sessions and participation in the conference.

In particular, I would like to thank the organizers of ARNEC for making this conference possible and UNICEF and UNESCO for their support. I thank Plan Cambodia for helping organize field visits.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sheldon, ARNEC Secretariat and my Co Chair Ms. Karin Hulshof from UNICEF for her strong support for the meetings.

I thank my Deputy Minister, H.E. Kim Sethany and her team at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the ECE Department and volunteers, interpreters and hotel staff members for making this conference a success. All credit for a successful conference goes to the team and ARNEC Secretariat.

I would like to thank all key stakeholders for supporting ECCD in Cambodia. Without your strong support we could not come thus far.

Finally, I thank you all for participating in this important conference and trust that you were as inspired as I was about the progress being made and the journey that we plan to make in the future.

My heartfelt thanks to you all once again. I wish you all a safe journey home and every success with this important work. I wish Nepal a great success in organizing the next ARNEC meeting.

Before closing allow me to quote Confucius: “If your plan is for 100 years, educate the children! And now we know the importance of the Early Moment!” Thank you!

STATUS OF ECCD IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia adopted in 2010 this approach by endorsing the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and establishing in 2014 the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development as a mechanism to coordinate all issues related to early childhood and all the interventions by key stakeholders.

Cambodia is committed to SDG Goal 4.2 “*Ensuring by 2030 that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.*” Policy options are costed based on the result framework by ensuring ***coherence across goals, policies and spending, a clear route from policy to implementation and effective governance and accountability.*** Confucius once said: “**If your plan is for 100 years, educate children!**”

The ESP set three policy objectives for the Early Childhood Education sub-sector:

- ***Increase enrolment of children from 0 to 6 years old, especially for poor, ethnic minorities and children with disabilities with priority to community preschool and home-based care services;***

In 2014-15 AY, only 20% of 3 year old children, 28% of 4 year old children and 64% (66% in 2016-17) of 5 year old children have access to ECE. Girls constitute 50% enrolment in all forms of ECE. Barriers linked to language, culture, geographic setting, and safety affect access to ECE. Multilanguage and inclusive education programs need to be given priority. Economic conditions are also a determinant of access to preschool education. The number of children aged 0 to 5 received ECE services were 426,000, the number of 5 year olds receiving ECE were 200,000 (66%).

- ***Improve the quality of ECE, care nutrition and increased health care services;*** and

The data show that only 11% of ECE services met quality standard in 2015, which is far from the target of 60%, and it is not possible to reach 90% in 2018. Learning assessment tests in ECE services for 5 year olds has only recently started. Test items were developed and training provided, but implementation was only 20%.

The percentage of children with an acceptable nutritional status was expected to reach 60%. Percentage of children in public preschools receiving deworming pills reached 95%.

- Ensure result-based management system fully functioning to support ECCD.

Preschools in Cambodia have expanded rapidly. Access by children aged 5 increased from very low level in the year 2000 to 40 percent in 2008 to 66% in 2016. However there are still many fundamental issues to address particularly in the area of care in the first 1000 days of life and before birth.

Such rapid expansion was possible after the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) adopted a policy to create one preschool class in each primary school and to establish community pre-schools and home-based programs to ensure equitable access.

Such policy also focuses on inclusiveness, with the establishment of bilingual preschools for 5 ethnic minority groups. This is important as Cambodia has 24 ethnic minority groups representing 10% of the population, living in 5 remote provinces. (In 2009, Care piloted multilingual community preschools in 7 villages of Ratanakiri. Since 2012, the MoEYS started the pilot of multilingual community preschools in 20 villages in 5 provinces). Program for 3 and 4 year old children is only in home language. Khmer is introduced to 5 year old children for 20 minutes each day. Currently there are 80 community schools and 3 state schools in 5 provinces (Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear and Kratie), with 84 trained teachers and 1,588 children from 9 different ethnic groups (Tumpoun, Kroeng, Ponorng, Kouy, Kroal, Kavet, Kachok, Laotian, and Prao), participating in the multilingual ECE programs. In 2015, the MoEYS adopted the Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP) 2015-2018, with the objectives of educating 10,000 ethnic minority students.

Inclusive Education Program for children with disabilities is currently being implemented in six provinces (Siem Reap, Battambang, Kompong Thom, Prey Veng, Ratanakiri and Phnom Penh) in 63 state preschools and 17 CPS, covering 145 students. A total 96 teachers were trained to provide inclusive education.

Another challenge is the floating households. *only around 23 to 30% of the children of floating households* have access to ECE, due to the lack of facilities, teachers and facilitators, salaried teachers and learning and teaching

materials. Trapped in the boat and floating houses, the children have limited stimulation for development of motor skills, language and cognition and socio-emotional skills, due to the lack of space for movement and interactions. Poor hygiene, sanitation and lack of nutritious food led to preventable disease infection and malnutrition.

All key stakeholders, public, private and civil society actors are engaged in early childhood interventions. At present Cambodia has 4,014 formal pre-schools and 6,403 formal pre-school classes attached to primary schools (164 separate preschools), serving 190,158 children (55%).

There are 2,834 community pre-schools (located in 1,021 communes out of 1,633 communes, serving 64,738 children (18%). UNICEF and GPE have supported the expansion of CPS.

There are also 392 private pre-schools with a total of 1,294 classes, serving 38,489 children (11%). Over 9% of children among the middle class and urban families are enrolled in private preschools. These schools offer full-day services with meals and teaching of foreign languages.

There are currently 3,114 home-based parental education centers, serving 52,837 children (15%), supported by development partners, throughout the country and there are plans to expand this number in the coming years. These programs focused on nutrition, child protection and health care. 95,000 parents participated in this program.

Overall, some 346,222 children received ECE services in 2016.

Public/Community Preschool Standards: 6 standards and 33 indicators.

- **Planning and monitoring:** School plan, SP classroom observations, technical support, technical meeting, regularity and contents of technical meeting;
- **Teaching and learning:** Lesson plans, teaching according to schedule and curriculum, use of teaching and learning materials, classroom preparation, regular tests, INSET, classroom-teacher ratio, classroom-student ratio, parent involvement;
- **General management:** teacher performance evaluation, SSC meeting, DOE monitoring.

- **Reporting and feedback:** Classroom semester reports, data, teachers are updated on student progress.
- **Playground and materials:** Playground size, hygiene, safety, playing materials, clean water for drinking and usage, toilette and usage.
- **Facilities and furniture:** Classroom building condition, furniture condition.

Home-Based Care Program Standards: 4 standards and 22 indicators:

- **General management:** Program network, plan, network functioning, evaluation of core mother performance, children statistics, plan of core mother, plan of lead mothers, monthly meeting of core mothers, weekly meeting of lead mothers, core mother monthly home visits.
- **Reporting and feedback:** Core mother progress report.
- **Technical tasks:** Core mother actual support to lead mothers and mothers at home, PRESET, INSET, lead mothers actual home visits, mothers interactions with children at home, regular tests of 5 year old children by core mothers;
- **Teaching environment, teaching and learning materials:** Home teaching place and playground hygiene and safety, teaching materials available at home, play ground playing materials.

We have made good progress over the last 5 years but there is still much to do.

Key next steps for Cambodia include:

- **Institutionalize Community Pre-schools.** This will enable community pre-school teachers to receive a salary from the Ministry of Education rather than the current situation where they receive a stipend from the Commune Council. This will help to improve the quality of community pre-school teachers and give them more time to spend with the parents of children in their class.
- **Create a mechanism to give greater recognition and status to the home-based programs and the mothers** who organize them by firstly arranging an operational base for the meetings such as eg: the local community pre-school.
- **Expand the number of home-based education centers,** community and formal pre-schools

- Strengthen the Monitoring and Evaluation system so that we can gather clear data as a basis for decision making
- Integrate ECE teacher training into broader teacher reform
- Steadily increase to 100% participation of children aged 5 and under, as well as their parents to engage in early childhood education related activities and benefit from the support.