



Asia-Pacific Regional ECD Conference
Theme: The Transformative Power of ECD: *The importance of holistic interventions*
Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia
March 1-3, 2017

Concept Note

Context and Background

Over 30 years ago Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified that children’s development was impacted by a multiplicity of factors all inter-connected. Bronfenbrenner talked about microsystems, the environments in which children directly participate as having significant impact on their development. Included in the microsystem are influence such as the resources available in the family home, parental education, knowledge and skills, parental physical and mental health, and the presence or absence of siblings. Children also participate directly in other environments. Some children have access to early childhood programmes where they may experience different environments with perhaps different resources, and adults who behave differently and have different expectations of the children. The relationships between these different microsystems are what Bronfenbrenner called the mesosystem.

Children’s homes, early childhood programmes and other microsystems are embedded in a local community context. We know that the communities in which children live have a big impact on their development. For example, we know that when children live in a community where parents think it is dangerous to play outside, children are more likely to become overweight. We know that if children live in communities where there are few resources (no libraries for easy access to books for example) children’s development is likely to be more limited. We also know that communities set the expectations for many things that impact indirectly on children. Where parents both need to work away from the home (and perhaps work in physically demanding or time demanding jobs) then the time they have available to their children is reduced, the energy they have to parent their children is reduced, and the standard of care available to their children whilst they are at work is dependent on factors usually outside of parental control. All these factors can impact on children’s development.

All of these factors interact and create a unique ecological niche for every individual child. Given this immense complexity, the assumption that there is one right way to enhance children’s learning and development does not make sense. Instead, our programmes have to be flexible so that every child in his/her unique ecological niche is able to succeed: to learn, to grow, to be healthy, and to be happy. Every programme needs to ensure that children’s rights for protection, safety, appropriate health and nutrition, loving relationships, esteem, value and opportunities to learn are addressed. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) makes it very clear that we cannot do that by addressing only one element of this very complex system.

Target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, **“By 2030, ensure 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”** reflects that early childhood care and education (ECCE) lays the foundation for children’s long-



term development, wellbeing and health. The Framework for Action for the Education 2030 (SDG 4) agenda recognizes the significant increase in pre-primary education enrollment but still, young children in many parts of the world do not receive the necessary care and education for them to develop their full potential.¹ The Framework for Action identifies indicative strategies for SDG target 4.2 which centers on the need to put in place integrated and inclusive ECCE policies and programmes and strategies supported by effective coordination among agencies responsible for health, nutrition, social and child protection, water/sanitation and education.

In the Asia-Pacific Region, there are key challenges related to early childhood development. One of these is improving equitable access to ECD. There is inadequate attention to equity, particularly access for young children from disadvantaged groups on account of location, language/ethnicity, gender, disability, income and/or economic status. An emerging concern is protecting young children in vulnerable groups, particularly refugees, children who are internally displaced, and children 'left behind'.

ECD quality is also a concern because of limited resources for standards, systems and capacity development for practitioners at the local, national and regional levels. ECD policy and programming is also affected by limited data for young children and the inability to integrate child-specific information from fragmented institutional arrangements. The quality issues are also linked with poor monitoring of objectives, results and risks facing young children at the country level. There is limited baseline information to inform policy and program targets and to compare progress of ECD interventions.

Conference Objectives and Theme

The Conference aims to bring together over 500 participants including Ministers and other high-level policy-makers, ECD professionals, academics, practitioners and all others interested in Early Childhood matters from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, to share and learn from examples of ECD policies, programmes and research. The Conference will serve as a platform for sharing new developments as well as introduce stakeholders in new initiatives related to early years' policy and programming.

Specifically, the conference aims to:

- Provide opportunities for policy makers and practitioners to contextualize ECD on the global agenda in their own countries;
- Strengthen the advocacy for holistic and inclusive ECD;
- Share knowledge, tools and noteworthy practices on ECD policies and programmes; and
- Strengthen partnerships for ECD among a large range of existing and potential stakeholders.

This Conference with the theme: ***“The Transformative Power of ECD: The importance of holistic interventions”*** will focus on the importance of equitable access to an integrated approach to early childhood development. The 2016 Lancet Early Childhood Development Series highlights that young children’s healthy development depends on nurturing care which ensures health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early learning. The Series emphasises the need to deliver multi-sectoral interventions, especially to the most disadvantaged children; essential among these are nutrition, to support growth and

¹ Education 2030, Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656e.pdf>

health; child protection, for violence prevention and family support; social protection, for family financial stability and capacity to access services; and education, for quality early learning opportunities.

The Conference will have the following sub-themes:

- a. Policies and programmes which address the holistic nature of ECD in a broader spectrum that integrates but is not limited to **health and nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning, and protection.**
- b. Approaches which focus on equitable access to, and participation in, these holistic programmes and which therefore address discrimination based on **gender, economic status, vulnerability, language/ethnicity, disability, and geography.**
- c. Quality monitoring of outcomes/measurements/indicators (how countries monitor the ECD-related targets in the SDGs) with special reference to inequity.

Expected Outcomes of the Conference

- Policy-makers and ECD practitioners are informed about the latest research evidence and innovative approaches in support of holistic and inclusive ECD.
- Stronger ECD community in the Asia-Pacific Region committed to a common regional ECD agenda linked to the global agenda.

Format of the Conference

As in usual Regional ECD Conferences organised by ARNEC, the sessions will be a combination of:

- Plenary sessions with keynote speakers/resource persons covering the conference theme and sub-themes;
- Panel Discussions with experts and country representatives covering each of the sub-themes;
- Concurrent paper presentations from ECD professionals and practitioners whose papers got accepted through ARNEC's Call for proposals; and
- Exhibit and poster presentation.

References:

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development. Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.). (2005). *Making human beings Human. Bioecological perspectives on human development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.