



ARNEC
Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood



ECD in the SDGs

A briefing note

Contents

Abbreviations	iv
Preface by ARNEC	v
1. Introduction	1
2. What are the Global Goals?	2
3. Early Childhood Development in the SDGs	4
What does this mean for the Government and the whole ECD community?	6
Challenges and risks	7
4. Next steps at the UN	10
A 'fit for purpose' UN System	10
Indicators	11
Data	11
Accountability	11
5. What can you do?	12
6. References	13

About ARNEC

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network (ARNEC) is a network established to build strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the agenda on and investment in Early Childhood.

Help us advance ECD in the Asia-Pacific Region. Visit us at www.arnec.net and/or contact us at secretariat@arnec.net.

Our core partners

ARNEC thanks our core partners for contributing in the development of this Briefing Note on ECD in the SDGs, namely, UNICEF, UNESCO, Plan International, Save the Children, Open Society Foundations, and ChildFund International.

About the cover photo

The photo of a child in a learning environment on the cover of this Briefing Note was taken during ARNEC's documentation of Noteworthy Practices in Indonesia in 2015.

Abbreviations

APMED	Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education
ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network on Early Childhood
BEN	Bangladesh ECD Network
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAP-ECDS	East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
IAEG-SDGs	Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MELQO	Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Preface by ARNEC

Early childhood development (ECD) is the foundation for sustainable development. Giving every child, no matter where they live, the best start in life is the best way to ensure healthy and prosperous individuals, communities and countries.

ARNEC celebrates the inclusion of ECD in the global development agenda. ARNEC believes that ECD cannot be isolated from the rest of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is central to achieving the SDGs. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: “The Sustainable Development Goals recognise that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years.”

ARNEC has produced this brief to inform members of the possibilities offered by the new global agenda to improve the lives of young children and their families across the region.

It will be the first in a series of briefs that will provide further information and guidance for members about how to ensure that the new goals deliver for all children.

1. Introduction

On September 25th 2015 the United Nations took the historic step to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹—an action plan for people, planet and prosperity. The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals are part of this new universal Agenda and demonstrate its scale and ambition. They will usher in a new era of development cooperation, providing a common blueprint for the next 15 years.

For the first time in the history of global development early childhood development is part of the UN's global development goals. This recognises the crucial importance of early childhood as part of a transformative global agenda. Advances in the understanding of early brain development now tell us much more about the life-long health, learning and behaviour impacts of early experiences.

International attention from celebrities and politicians like Shakira, Ban Ki-moon² and Vice-Premier Lui Yandong have brought this science into the mainstream. The World Bank,³ the Inter-American Development Bank,⁴ and the Asian Development Bank are now highlighting ECD programmes in their lending portfolios. UNICEF,⁵ UNESCO,⁶ UNDP,⁷ and WHO⁸ are working to advocate for ECD, develop learning outcome measures, establish guidelines and monitor programs. In countries and regionally, governments and NGOs are partnering to scale up successful ECD interventions.

¹ United Nations (2015), *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

² UNICEF (2015), “Shakira and UNICEF call for leaders to join early childhood revolution”, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_85587.html

³ World Bank, *Early Childhood Development*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment>

⁴ Inter-American Development Bank, *Early Childhood Development*, <http://www.iadb.org/en/topics/education/early-childhood-development-ecd-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean,6458.html>

⁵ UNICEF, *Early Childhood Development*, <http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/>

⁶ UNESCO, *Early Childhood Care and Education*, <http://en.unesco.org/themes/early-childhood-care-and-education>

⁷ Young, Mary (2014), “The Case for Investing in early childhood, UNDP”, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/case-investing-early-childhood>

⁸ WHO, *Early Childhood Development*, http://www.who.int/social_determinants/themes/earlychilddevelopment/en/

The need is clear. In developing countries today, where 92% of the world's children live, one in 20 children does not survive beyond the first five years. 200 million children around the world do not reach their developmental potential due to poverty, malnutrition and deprivation in their earliest years.⁹

We cannot be complacent. Whilst we must celebrate this historic achievement, it is now time for Governments, civil society, businesses, communities and individuals to come together to ensure that early childhood development programmes are adequately funded, implemented and monitored to ensure that children are reaching their developmental potential.



Without making significant investment in early childhood development, millions of kids will be born into the same cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity.

Shakira

Child development is the most important human capital. Children are the most valuable resource for sustainable development.

Lui Yandong

The Sustainable Development Goals recognise that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years.

Ban Ki-moon

2. What are the Global Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),¹⁰ or Global Goals, are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators. There are 17 goals and 169 targets that aim to tackle poverty, inequality and climate change.

⁹ Grantham McGregor S et al., and the International Child Development Steering Group (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *Lancet*, 369:60-70

¹⁰ List of Sustainable Development Goals <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

The SDGs follow and expand on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),¹¹ which accelerated the world's focus on children. They were developed over the past two years through an historic UN consultation process which sought the views of governments, civil society, private sector and individuals from around the world. An extraordinary one person in every thousand around the world were consulted on what the Goals should look like.

The SDGs were officially adopted at a UN summit in New York in September and will become applicable from January 2016. The deadline for the SDGs is 2030.

The Goals will guide the political agendas and policies of UN member states over the next 15 years. Every country has a responsibility to develop a National Action Plan and review existing sectoral development plans to ensure SDG goals, targets, and indicators are included to indicate how they are going to deliver on the Goals and ensure that no one is left behind.

The Sustainable Development Goals paint an inspiring vision of what the world could look like in 2030.



¹¹ List of Millennium Development Goals <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

3. Early Childhood Development in the SDGs

Early childhood development is directly addressed in Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.” It is specifically mentioned in Target 4.2:



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.

However, ECD is not limited to one area of development. ECD and achieving the SDGs are highly interlinked. ECD has a strong multiplier effect which can transform individuals, communities and societies. It is reflected across the framework and contributes to achieving all of the goals. Equally, achieving the SDGs is essential to creating the environment in which all children can thrive:¹²



Goal 1: ECD is one of the most cost-effective strategies for poverty alleviation. Early brain development sets children up for the future and enables them to learn skills to flourish in a 21st-century economy.



Goal 2: Children who receive early stimulation with nutrition supplements have better outcomes than children who only receive nutrition supplements. ECD interventions buffer the negative effect of stress thereby improving absorption of nutritional intake.

¹² List based on Pia Britto's October 2015 UNICEF Connect blog “Why early childhood development is the foundation for sustainable development.” <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/why-early-childhood-development-is-the-foundation-for-sustainable-development/>



Goal 3: ECD interventions early in life set a trajectory for good lifelong health. It can lead to lower incidence of cardiovascular and non-communicable diseases and can increase well-being.



Goal 4: Learning begins at birth. ECD interventions have proved to be the foundation for later learning, academic success and productivity.



Goal 5: The link between early childhood development and women's economic empowerment is clear. Greater investment in high-quality and affordable childcare is linked to greater opportunities for women's economic advancement and empowerment.



Goal 8: Adequate childcare is a critical element of the decent work agenda. Investments in professionalisation of the early childhood workforce contribute to full and productive employment, especially for women.



Goal 10: Inequality often begins before birth. ECD is a powerful equaliser. The first few years of a child's life offers a window of opportunity to provide interventions that can close the inequality gap between children born into disadvantage and those born with many advantages.



Goal 11: ECD requires safe spaces that have sustainable, natural, and biophilic features.



Goal 12: ECD programmes set in place patterns of consumption, attitudes towards conservation and behavioural practices that will preserve the environment.



Goal 16: Early childhood interventions have the potential to instil values and behaviours that can reduce violence and promote peace. ECD interventions have been shown to lead to lower rates of violence in the home and greater social cohesion in communities.



Goal 17: Measurement of early childhood development at global, regional and national levels can serve as a powerful tool to revitalise global partnerships.

What does this mean for the Government and the whole ECD community?

ECD's inclusion in and reflection across the SDGs framework means that all countries now have the responsibility to ensure that their youngest citizens not only survive but also thrive. The focus now should be on how to deliver and measure success of the goals and targets that relate to ECD in partnership with civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders.

Critical will also be the support from the UN system on global and national strategies and systems of implementation, and decision on monitoring and accountability at global level that meaningfully support national implementation. The United Nations Development Group developed an Interim Reference Guide on how UN Country Teams can support Member States and national stakeholders in tailoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to national contexts ('mainstreaming') while protecting its integrity. You can find it here: <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mainstreaming-the-2030-Agenda-UNDG-Interim-Reference-Guide-to-UNCTs-7-October-2015.pdf>.

Challenges and risks

As the momentum from the SDGs shifts from the UN to national, regional and local level implementation, there are a number of risks:

- **Implementation** - A lack of clarity on how to effectively implement an integrated, universal and transformative agenda and the increased diversity of actors involved in this implementation phase could mean a reversion to old ways of work and siloed thinking. Decreasing political attention and focus around the SDG process could also mean governments fail to adequately follow through on commitments and select a fewer number of goals and targets on which to focus.
- **Monitoring** - Monitoring progress against the framework is an outstanding challenge. The Global indicator framework may become too complicated and fail to incentivise implementation, especially in areas governments tend to overlook. While the data revolution provides many opportunities, developing countries are concerned about the collection, availability and use of data from both official and unofficial sources. Reporting infrastructure may become too burdensome for countries with already stretched budget.
- **Accountability** – The process to review progress against the Goals has yet to be finalised. Some countries and actors are waiting for further UN guidance on indicators, accountability, and follow-up review before setting a strategy for implementation.

These are risks to the entire 2030 Agenda but also particularly to ECD. Implementing and monitoring progress against the ECD targets and indicators will require multiple inputs and new integrated ways of working across ministries and sectors.



Case Studies

Bangladesh ECD Network

The Government of Bangladesh approved the Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy in 2013. Subsequently, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has asked the Bangladesh ECD Network or BEN to develop a Strategic Operation and Implementation Plan for the Comprehensive ECCD Policy. BEN is an umbrella organisation that brings together civil society, government, academics, policy makers and practitioners. The invitation from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs builds on BEN's earlier work to help formulate an operational framework for pre-primary education and demonstrates the importance of national early childhood networks as a mechanisms to mobilise partners, advocate, inform and act. Such networks will be essential if the Global Goals are to be implemented effectively to improve the lives of young children.

Government of Bhutan

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is a relatively new programme in Bhutan. The national policy guideline was drafted in 2008, based on a pilot of a community based ECCD model in 2009. Since then, various approaches including work place based centres, early stimulation implemented through the health system and parenting education through various channels were adopted to ensure sector wide and integrated approach to ECCD. Subsequently, standards, curriculum guidelines and professional development programmes for ECCD Facilitators were developed and implemented, and quality assurance measures such as monitoring systems have been instituted. Today, 17% of children aged 3 to 5 have access to quality early childhood programmes and ECCD Facilitators are employed and paid by the government. This kind of Government commitment and investment are essential to ensure effective implementation of ECD in the context of the global development goals.



Measuring progress in ECD. There are a number of frameworks which can be used to measure progress against child development indicators and targets:

MICS

UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) can provide population-level data that is suitable to measure target 4.2 of the SDGs. MICS has an existing baseline of data from 100 low- and middle-income countries, which can be disaggregated by various geographic, social and demographic characteristics. The MICS global team, has developed a standard set of survey tools in consultation with government representatives and other experts – from tabulation plans and sample weights guidelines to manuals and questionnaires.

MELQO

Building on existing measures, the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes project (MELQO) – convened by UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and Brookings Institute – is working to synthesise and integrate existing global and regional measures. The aspiration is for the instruments and manuals to be freely available open-source for any country, agency, or organisation to use.

The goal of MELQO is to produce a sound approach to the measurement of child development and learning and of the quality of children's learning environments, that can be adapted for use in low- and middle-income countries and produce data that can be compared at a global level.

East Asia-Pacific-Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS)

The development of the EAP-ECDS was a collaborative effort of UNICEF, Hongkong University, ARNEC and the Open Society Foundations. The Scales are based on the most common indicators from the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) from seven countries in Asia-Pacific region (Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Vietnam). Given the wide range of countries whose standards were used, the scales can most likely be adapted to other countries in the East Asian Pacific region.

The 85-item EAP-ECDS can measure holistic development of young children aged 3-5 and included the following seven domains: Cognitive Development; Socio-emotional Development; Motor Development; Language and Emergent Literacy; Health, Hygiene, and Safety; Cultural Knowledge and Participation; and Approaches to Learning. They were administered to representative samples of children, ranging in age from three to five years, in six countries (Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu) in the respective local language or dialect from 2012-2014. The EAP-ECDS were found to be valid and reliable. A short form of the Scales is now being finalised for easier administration of interested countries.

4. Next steps at the UN

There are a number of ongoing processes at UN to help guide implementation and monitoring of the SDGs:

A ‘fit for purpose’ UN System

Member States are discussing through the ECOSOC Dialogue on the Future of the UN Development System¹³ how to position the UN system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda—shifting away from silos to more integrated ways of working to help achieve the SDGs. Phase 1 of this Dialogue, which took place between December 2014 and June 2015, focussed on building a better understanding of the current state of the UN development system and potential drivers of change. Phase II, between December 2015 and June 2016, has generated recommendations to ensure a UN development system that is fit to deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda.

¹³ ECOSOC Dialogue for the Long-Term Positioning of the UN Development System: http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/qcpr_ecosoc_dialogue.shtml

Indicators

The Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG)¹⁴ is responsible for drafting the SDG Indicators. The IAEG has also undertaken a separate disaggregation work stream to identify targets where particular population groups are mentioned and prepare proposals for disaggregation of current indicators. They concluded that SDG indicators should be disaggregated where relevant by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. On March 8-11, at the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the Interagency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) agreed on 230 individual indicators to monitor the 17 goals and 169 targets of the SDGs.

Data

The Global Partnership on Data for Sustainable Development¹⁵ is a coalition of organisations launched in September 2015 committed to strengthening data-driven decision making to help achieve the SDGs by 2030. The Global Partnership aims to help address the data challenge by mobilising and sustaining resources to improve data and strengthen statistical capacity; connect people, institutions and initiatives and break down barriers between them; build trust around data sharing; bring people together to solve problems related to data gaps, access and use. Their work is ongoing.

Accountability

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF)¹⁶ is tasked with reviewing progress on SDG implementation at global level. It will meet annually to provide guidance, leadership and recommendations. Its reviews will be informed by a regular progress report prepared by the SG based on the global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at a regional level.

¹⁴ Sustainable Development Goals Indicator website <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

¹⁵ Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data <http://www.data4sdgs.org/>

¹⁶ High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

5. What can you do?

ECD champions need to be actively engaged on SDG implementation at the national level. Find out the planning mechanisms, process, and timetables to achieve the Global Goals in your country. This includes when meetings will be held and what indicators are being considered. Coordinate with ECD partners and give your voice for ECD.

Your engagement is also important in support of the following actions:

Advocate using evidence. Generate and share evidence to inform policy. Support the assessment of existing ECD policies and programmes and their inter-linkages and advocate for clear alignment to achieve global targets and commitments.

Disseminate evidence. Disseminate evidence to all stake holders including communities, families, children, policy makers, and development partners. Ensure broader community participation in the SDG movement. Use simple graphics and advocacy materials to engage with communities and families.

Map available data and data sources for ECD indicators. Advocate for a strong system at national levels to monitor progress towards targets, including the appropriate disaggregation of ECD indicators by age, ethnicity, location, gender, disability status, migration status, and home environment.

Engage with other partners. Work with various sectors and ministries, civil society, and a wide range of actors and stakeholders at all levels. With specific reference to SDG 4, APMED 2030 recommends establishing or strengthening a national coordination mechanism with a high-level national body supported by technical committees with membership to include diverse sectors and civil society. This will also require new ways of working to embrace the diversity of actors involved in implementation and the commitment to deliver a transformational agenda.

Advocate for increased ECD financing. Take special focus on financing for ECD and seek for full disclosure of public investments for ECD, including better methods for calculating what it will take to achieve different targets and indicators.

6. References

The Sustainable Development Goals

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

High Level Political Forum

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

Sustainable Development Goals Indicator website

<http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

<http://www.data4sdgs.org/>

UNICEF (2015) *Progress for Children – Beyond Averages: Learning from the SDGs*

http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Progress_for_Children_No._11_22June15.pdf

Beyond 2015 (2014) *From Policy to Action Toolkit* (accessed October 2015)

http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/EN_Beyond_2015_Policy_to_Action_Toolkit.pdf

Measurement Tools

UNICEF MICS <http://mics.unicef.org/>

MELQO <http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/universal-education/learning-metrics-task-force-2/melqo>

