



Early childhood *matters*

ARNEC supports nurturing care for young children in Asia

what is the *nurturing care framework*



Nurturing care is the very foundation of child development.

The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) is a roadmap for action to support parents, families, and other caregivers in providing nurturing care for young children. It has five indivisible components: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving; security and safety; and opportunities for early learning. It also highlights the importance of an enabling environment, with policies, services, and communities that are able to support families and other caregivers to provide nurturing care.

NCF calls for attention to be paid to communities where children are most at risk of being left behind and specific focus on families and children with developmental difficulties and disabilities.

The World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the World Bank, in collaboration with the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, the Early Childhood Development Action Network and several other partners, developed the NCF, which was launched during the Seventy-first World Health Assembly in May 2018.

"The period from pregnancy to age 3 is key for a child's development. That's when the brain grows fastest. And that's why young children need a safe, secure and loving environment, with the right nutrition and stimulation from their parents or caregivers."

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General, WHO

why support nurturing care for *early childhood development*

Early childhood is a period during which the benefits of early interventions can be intensified.

It is also a period when human beings are especially sensitive to several risk factors which include, amongst others, poverty; malnutrition; insecurity; gender inequities; conflict; violence; poor health care; humanitarian disasters; environmental toxins; and, caregivers' poor mental health.

If the exposure to these can be minimized and caregivers can be supported to provide nurturing care to their children in the early years, we can ensure optimal child development.

Nurturing care also lowers the stress level for children (when confronted by the risk factors) and helps them develop emotional, social and cognitive coping mechanisms against adversities. It has life-long benefits. It improves health, but also broader wellbeing, and

ability to learn and earn of the individual.

It even has intergenerational benefits and macroeconomic impact for society. Twenty years after the ECD intervention, stunted children who received psychosocial stimulation earned, on average, 25 percent more income than stunted children who did not receive stimulation.

Estimates suggest that for every \$1 spent on ECD interventions, the return on investment can be as high as \$13 (Nurturing Care Framework, WHO 2018).

Countries that invest in ECD also save on health expenditures, which can be redirected to other child development objectives.

Failure to invest in early childhood may mean forfeiting twice as much their current GDP expenditures on health and education (Lancet, 2016).

what can we do to support *nurturing care*

Governments must lead and facilitate multi-sectoral coordination. A nurturing environment must be deliberately cultivated and actively encouraged. National governments, which are best placed to do this, must develop a vision of comprehensive and integrated services for children and families, and support this through a national integrated ECD policy and program.



Nurturers need to be protected, too. Parents, family members, and other primary caregivers are the main providers of nurturing care. We must empower them and their communities to meet all the needs of young children. All caregivers need to be physically and mentally healthy to be able to provide a nurturing environment to children.



It will take more than a village to raise a child. With so many risk factors and enablers that can shape the life of a child, the NCF makes it clear that it will take concerted efforts of all, including civil-society groups, development partners, professional associations, academic institutions and funding agencies (both global and national), parliamentarians, service providers, educational institutions, the private sector and the media to play their part in ensuring that all children develop to their full potential.



Use data and research to guide national efforts.

Countries must improve national and local data systems to target and track coverage and quality of all five components of nurturing care for children.



SDGs and *nurturing care* are interlinked, essential to holistic child development



SDG Target 2.2. By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons.



SDG Target 3.2. By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.



SDG 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.



SDG Target 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.



SDG Target 16.2. End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

Photos. ARNEC thanks partners and friends for the photos used in this advocacy brief. We give full credit and appreciation to them for these photos.

Asia-Pacific: A Status Check

We are a long way from achieving acceptable levels of performance on nurturing care. Even in areas such as health and nutrition, much needs to be done.

UNICEF reports that despite economic progress in recent decades in the East Asia and Pacific regions, nearly half of all deaths in children under 5 are still attributable to undernutrition. Data from the country

profiles developed by Countdown to 2030 suggests that countries in the Asia Pacific region need to do a lot more. For example, there are several countries in which less than half of the children receive postnatal newborn care. For more information, visit <https://www.ecdan.org/countries.html>.

Early learning presents even more challenges. UNICEF data also reveals that throughout the region too few children are attending preschool programmes. Those

who do so tend to be from the richest 20 percent of the population.

<https://www.unicef.org/eap/what-we-do/nutrition>

What's next for countries in the region?

The NCF includes five strategic actions, accompanied by national and global milestones to 2023. Countries must consider the different aspects of the NCF, analyse the data that can reflect the gaps, bring stakeholders together, implement by sector and by level of government, and monitor progress.

Effective coordination and accountability are essential, although the mechanism will vary from country to country. The Countdown to 2030 country profiles are useful resources for this purpose.

The NCF website provides more resources for training, communication, and advocacy, such as but not limited to the NCF toolkit; country profiles; publications; videos and webinars; and training materials. For more information, visit NCF at <https://nurturing-care.org>.





ARNEC supports good practices on nurturing care

We provide a platform for sharing good practices on nurturing care and ECD in the Asia-Pacific region.



Nurturing care for children

The world has made great strides in ensuring the survival of children. The next frontier, as enshrined in the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2016-30 and in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is to ensure that all children are enabled to thrive—**with no child left behind**. ARNEC commits to help achieve this by promoting nurturing care and sharing good ECD practices for replication in the Asia-Pacific region .

Fostering family participatory care (FPC) in India. About 700 district special newborn care units have been established under the National Health Mission. The new units are adopting an innovative NCF called the FPC, which involves parents in the care of their sick newborn from hospital admission until discharge and responds to their needs and rights as parents (India Case Study, Nurturing Care Framework). The government also has issued an updated mother child protection care with age-appropriate messages on responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning, and extended the ASHA home visiting program to cover an additional 5 visits in the first 3 years of a child's life. For more information, visit https://nurturing-care.org/?page_id=784.

Improving parenting education (PE) through modular approaches in Nepal. The PE package consists of modules covering five key components: (1) ECD and role of caregivers; (2) development stages of children and nurturing care; (3) child health, nutrition and hygiene; (4) child protection and care; and (5) early learning. The PE Initiative is intended for children from 0 to 5 years old and has been implemented since April 2016 in five districts based on the Child Deprivation Index to identify the most marginalised populations in Nepal. The programme is implemented by the District chapters of Seto Gurans through the National SetoGurans in technical partnership with UNICEF and the Government of Nepal. Visit <https://nationalsetogurans.org.np> for more information.

Creating better beginnings for China's 'left behind' children. China's changing economic landscape has led to an estimated 9 million young children being left behind in poor, rural villages, while one or both of their parents seek work in distant cities. Most of the children see their parents only once a year. OneSky is healing broken communities and families by training and supporting adults remaining in villages to care for and nurture young children. Through the Family Skills Program, home visits and classroom-based training are undertaken. The OneSky Community Center provides a place for children to participate in innovative early learning experiences that support healthy physical, language, social-emotional, and cognitive development. For more information, visit <https://onesky.org>.

Building multisectoral support for ECD in the Philippines. The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council of the Philippines led an inter-agency and multisectoral process to develop the so-called 'Early Years First Strategic Plan' 2019-2030, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Philippine Development Plan. This Strategic Plan highlights the need for integrated policies and programming of investments for the early years, thus the need for inter-agency collaboration for ECCD services. Among the priorities of the Plan is to address malnutrition among 6-24 month-old children and pregnant women; neonatal mortality; cognitive and socio-emotional development of children with disadvantaged backgrounds; and children with disabilities and developmental delays, in emergencies, and/or exposed to violence.



ARNEC

Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

ARNEC Secretariat
1 Commonwealth Lane
#03-27 Singapore 149544
Telephone (65) 6659 0227
secretariat@arnecc.net

Our strategic goals

Goal 1. Improve advocacy for holistic and inclusive ECD. ARNEC will continue to engage policy makers and key stakeholders, including members, advocating the holistic nature of ECD in policies and programmes, and the strong inter-linkages of SDG Target 4.2 with the rest of the SDGs.

Goal 2. Increase the knowledge base on ECD. ARNEC will work with partners to generate and consolidate new knowledge through research, documentation of good practices, and the development of ECD tools and other resources.

Goal 3. Increase strategic partnerships and memberships. ARNEC will encourage more institutional and individual members ensuring full participation from highly diverse partners and members, including research institutions, universities, corporations, and foundations.



Goal 4. Strengthen ARNEC's reach and impact at the country level. ARNEC will form and/or strengthen linkages and broaden partnerships with national level ECD networks and associations.

ARNEC serves as a leading *knowledge platform for ECD* in the Asia-Pacific region

There are millions of young children in the Asia-Pacific region. They need no less than their rights upheld in homes, communities, and societies where their well-being and development are prioritised, guaranteed, and protected.

Building on ECD challenges and opportunities in the region, ARNEC has put forward an expansive strategy that defines our contributions for achieving the ECD targets in the SDGs. We are committed to support holistic and inclusive ECD.

Partner with ARNEC to support the SDGs and *nurturing care in Asia*