

## **Promoting Holistic Learning and Development in Early Years: An Analysis of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from the Asia-Pacific Region**



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**October 2012**

Published by Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)  
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This publication is a product of collaboration between ARNEC and UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Bangkok 10110, Thailand.  
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## Acronyms

ARNEC Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood  
CFSs Child Friendly Spaces  
CGECCD Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development  
CRC Convention on the Rights of the Child  
EC European Commission  
ECCD Early Childhood Care and Development  
ECCE Early Childhood Care and Education  
ECD Early Childhood Development  
ECE Early Childhood Education  
ECECD Early Childhood Education, Care and Development  
ECED Early Childhood Education and Development  
EDNs End of Decade Notes (*Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All*)  
EFA Education for All  
ELDS Early Learning and Development Standards  
EU European Union  
EYDF Early Years Development Framework of Singapore  
GCE Global Campaign for Education  
GER Gross Enrolment Ratio  
GMR Global Monitoring Report  
MDA Mid-Decade Assessment (EFA)  
MDGs Millennium Development Goals  
MOE Ministry of Education  
NGO Non-Government Organisation  
NICHD National Institute of Child Health and Human Development  
SPARK Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework  
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund  
UNICEF EAPRO UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office  
UNICEF ROSA UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

# 1. PREFACE

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) has chosen the 2012 annual theme: “Early Experiences Matter: Building Foundations for Lifelong Learning” to bring rigorous attention to holistic and inclusive learning and development in early years.

Several research papers and studies are being prepared in order to provide relevant evidence-based information. More specifically, this study is part of a series of analytical works on the quality of learning and development in the early years, in the Asia-Pacific region, with the aim of increasing understanding of the topic and raising questions, to eventually supporting policy choices.

To this end, this research work analyses a section of the literature available on policies, practices and conceptual frameworks of quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region, embedded in the international scenario.

Particularly, the paper shall identify elements common to main international debates and frameworks, and highlights features of quality which seem unique to the region.

Finally, the findings of the analysis will provide insights for the formulation of conceptual frameworks of quality ECCE in the Asia-Pacific Region, and it will identify areas where evidence seems lacking and further research is therefore suggested.

## 2. Executive Summary

This paper focuses on the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Asia Pacific region. In a recent report on EFA goal n.1, UNESCO and UNICEF give this definition of ECCE:

‘The term ‘early childhood care and education’ (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support and aid the holistic development of children, from birth to age 8 years.’

(UNESCO et al., 2012)

In the introduction (chapter 3), arguments for an expansion of ECCE - particularly in developing countries – are presented in policies and programmes in the field of early learning and development, which advocates for the potential benefits on children’s later learning experiences and on their holistic development (UNESCO, 2006, Save the Children, 2009, ARNEC, 2011a, ARNEC, 2011b). Indeed research has demonstrated the gains that children can make by participating in programmes of ‘good’ quality, especially the underprivileged children, and it has been argued that ECCE can contribute to reaching the other EFA goals and MDGs. Therefore, ECD/ECCE can contribute to breaking the poverty cycle (Young, 2002, Consultative group on early childhood care and development, 2007, Naudeau et al., 2010), and a high return rate in investing in ECD which has been demonstrated (Young Lives, 2010, Engle et al., 2007a, Engle et al., 2007b, Young, 2002). This notwithstanding access is still very unequal (Arnold et al., 2007, UNESCO et al., 2012).

Chapter 4 explains the methodology used for this study. In order to contribute to an understanding of the quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region and to stimulate discussions, an analysis (mainly qualitative) of 54 documents selected in the literature available on the topic has been conducted. The regional discourses are embedded in an international scenario, where the main issues and debates are mentioned. The literature analysed for this paper includes policies, research studies, conceptual frameworks, practices and programmes.

The following two main chapters (5 and 6) are focused on the quality of ECCE in the international scenario (chapter 5), and on the quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region (chapter 6). In chapter 5, a brief analysis of the international literature on the quality of ECCE (and sometimes ECD, where the two areas were not clearly separated) has shown a variety of definitions of the quality of ECCE, from different theoretical positions and perspectives. To mention some of the main ideas, it emerged the importance of broad consultations, the effective involvement of the local community and to contextualise definitions and solutions. At the systems level, the need to take into account of the ecological systems (Britto P R et al., 2011) and the enabling environments (Tikly, 2010) has been claimed, and the policy levers formulated by OECD seem to be a useful guide. The sustainability of the level of the quality reached and environmental sustainability (Britto et al., 2011) are included here too. At the child and programme level, the concept of holistic child development (UNESCO, 2000) - encompassing all domains - has been reiterated, along with more attention to the quality of the service itself (Britto P R et al., 2011) and to define the elements of quality pedagogy (ISSA, n.a.). Moreover, importance has been given to how to measure quality (instruments, indicators, benchmarks, M&E systems and the process of assessing quality itself), stressing the need for equal attention to quantitative, qualitative and process indicators.

The analysis of the selected literature from the Asia-Pacific region (chapter 6) has shown some commonalities with the international scenario and some aspects which seem to particularly pertain to the region. The findings have been grouped into two categories: the quality of ECCE at the child and programme level; and the quality of ECCE at the systems level.

Regarding the quality of ECCE at the *child and programme level*, these dimensions have been identified:

- Holistic development goals
- Learning outcomes and assessment systems
- Curriculum
- Teacher/caregiver training and status
- Teaching and learning approaches
- Physical environment, teaching/learning material, and other resources
- Programme management and programme philosophy

In the category of ECCE quality at the *systems level* the following factors have been presented:

- Rigorous and systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activity
- Standards and quality assurance mechanisms
- Context-sensitiveness and the 'relevance criterion'
- Parental and community involvement, and support for parents
- Cost-effectiveness and sustainability
- Governance of ECCE: coordination, integration and continuity
- Equitable access to quality ECCE and inclusive practices
- Quality ECCE/ECD in emergency contexts
- Focus on 0-3 years old children: a regional priority

In the conclusions (chapter 7), the findings have been organised in a scheme (p.51) aiming to provide a useable knowledge base for the elaboration of the regional framework(s) on the quality of ECCE. Moreover, a series of discussion points and recommendations pertinent to each dimension and factor have been reported. Finally, some issues to be investigated further are suggested.



### 3. Introduction: A rationale for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early years, Early Childhood Development (ECD), Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are the terms usually adopted for a variety of interventions provided to children under eight years and their families, or before the age of regular schooling, and which ultimately aim to promote children's holistic development. UNESCO (UNESCO, 2006) provides this definition of ECCE in the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) dedicated to the topic:

Drawing on this holistic approach ... early childhood care and education supports children's survival growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

More recently, ECD/ECCE policies tend to cover the period **0-8 years**, so as to pursue a continuum between the pre-school experiences and the first years of primary school and holistic ECCE is defined as 'encompassing the health and well-being of young children' (UNESCO et al., 2012)

Early learning and development has gained importance and attention in international education, as many studies have shown its potential positive influence on children's later learning experiences and achievements (mostly in primary school), supported by research showing that 'Learning begins at birth' (UNESCO, 2006, Save the Children, 2009). More generally, it has been claimed that ECCE can have positive effects on the child's holistic development (thus including intellectual, socio-emotional and physical development) (ARNEC, 2011b).

In developing countries, ECCE has also been advocated for the impact it may have on the life of underprivileged children, particularly on poverty (Young, 2002, Consultative group on early childhood care and development, 2007, Naudeau et al., 2010). Research studies have demonstrated that early interventions can '... avoid loss of developmental potential' of disadvantaged children in developing countries (Engle et al., 2007a). Some literature argues that the greatest benefits are for the poorest and most vulnerable children - for instance HIV-AIDS victims, poor working mothers, orphans or children living in war or conflict (Penn, 2004) - and interventions in the field of ECD/ECCE can therefore promote equity (SIEF, 2012). Notwithstanding this potential for ECCE to benefit the most disadvantaged populations, access to these services for vulnerable children is still limited (Arnold et al., 2007). The disparity situation is explained here:

...It is also very unequal. ... Urban children are about twice as likely as rural children to participate, and children from the poorest one-fifth of households are half as likely to be in pre-school as children from the wealthiest one-fifth....

(UNESCO, 2011:38)

In view of the end of the EFA period in 2015, the Global Campaign for Education has recently issued policy papers to urge for an expansion of equitable ECCE within the Global Action Week held in April 2012 (Muñoz, 2012, UNESCO, 2012).

Research also demonstrates a **high return rate** for the investment in Early Childhood Development in general (Young Lives, 2010, Engle et al., 2007a, Engle et al., 2007b, Young, 2002), both for governments and the families (UNESCO Division of Basic Education, 2010, Penn, 2008). The economists Sen and Hickman (2008) also stated that investing in early childhood can have positive returns, due to the improved educational level of the population (Penn, 2008).

Since the establishment of the Six EFA Goals (see Appendix 2) in 1990 - and particularly Goal number 1 - and the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000, with the support of research and international networks (UNESCO, 2006), ECCE has been attracting the attention of Governments and donors and it is expanding progressively. Furthermore, it has been argued that ECCE can contribute to reaching the other EFA goals and MDGs (Annex 2), with a cascade effect (UNESCO, 2006). For instance, the programmes can have practical benefits for the female members of the family (UNESCO, 2006) as for example by supporting working mothers (Choi, 2002), which might consequently contribute to achieving gender equality in society. Indeed early childhood development interventions are often seen as segments of programmes for women (Penn, 2004, Save the Children, 2009).

At the regional and national level, the expansion of pre-primary is remarkable (UNESCO, 2011a, UNESCO, 2011b, UNESCO et al., 2012) but not yet universal. Also, the Governments' commitment on ECCE is generally increasing, as demonstrated by the number of ECD/ECCE policies issued in the recent years (ARNEC UNICEF, 2008, Evans, 2008, UNESCO et al., 2012, SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), but the provision does not cover the needs of the underprivileged children (UNESCO, 2011b, UNESCO et al., 2012, UNESCO, 2011a), who are often excluded in quality ECCE. Moreover, children aged 0-3 are largely ignored by the programmes (ARNEC, 2011a). Finally, important disparities exist within and between the countries, especially between rural and urban areas (UNESCO, 2011a).

Given the strong rationale for an expansion of ECCE, the question of the quality of the ECCE programmes becomes particularly important. Research has demonstrated that quality ECCE can positively influence child development, whereas low quality may have detrimental consequences (OECD, n.a.), especially with underprivileged children (Britto et al., 2011). Finally, quality is a core theme for ECCE in the Asia Pacific region (UNESCO et al., 2012).

Therefore, this study focuses on the quality of ECCE in the Asia-Pacific region, to contribute to increasing the understanding of the topic and stimulate discussions, and eventually to provide elements for the formulation of conceptual frameworks of quality ECCE in the region. The framework(s) should ultimately help policy makers improve ECCE services and undertake systematic, relevant and effective monitoring of quality aspects and processes (Zafeirakou, 2012). Their adaptation and application may in turn provide useful feedback to revise the frameworks themselves.

## 4. Methodology

The collection of literature has been guided by the following research question:

What evidence on the quality of ECCE from policies, policy guidelines, conceptual frameworks, and documented experiences from programmes and practice, from the Asia Pacific region - embedded in the international scenario and main debates - can be synthesised and provide a knowledge base to draft conceptual framework(s) on quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region?

### Main steps

- To collect the relevant literature, including academic and grey literature, where available – considering that literature on the topic is limited (Fenech, 2011)
- To analyse the collected literature on quality ECCE - particularly in developing countries.
- To synthesise the collected literature on quality ECCE in theories, conceptual frameworks, policies and relevant practices, programmes, in Asia Pacific region. As to the conceptual frameworks and policy guidelines, main international literature has been included.
- To identify similarities and differences of quality ECCE in the Asia Pacific region as elements of (regional) draft conceptual frameworks.
- Finally, to outline the needs for further research to fill the identified gaps

### Literature search

A range of sources were collected through the following search methods:

1. Universities' electronic library catalogues: using string and key words (e.g. ECCE, early childhood, quality, Asia, Pacific etc.) in educational and social care databases (SCOPUS; JSTOR; ERIC, ISI-Elsevier, ELDIS); from specialised websites such as: Child Care and Early Education Research Connections, Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association (PECERA), etc.; searching educational journals, mainly peer-reviewed (e.g. contemporary issues on early childhood, comparative education, early education and development, and others pertinent to the Asia Pacific region); through the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Centre at University of London and searching by core key wording strategy (e.g. quality early childhood; learners group age; systematic review, etc.)
2. ARNEC website, publications and links to relevant websites and people (practitioners, policy makers, researchers, etc.)
3. Selected websites: World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF (especially from regional offices), OECD, EC/EU, Young Lives, Consultative Group on ECCD, Consortium for Research and on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), Global Campaign for Education (GCE), NGOs specialised on children and active in the region, such as Save the Children, Plan International, BRAC
4. Main references cited in the collected literature
5. Some as yet unpublished policy documents that were obtained from personal contacts, fellow researchers and professional colleagues
6. Programme reports, data and other NGO documents and studies obtained through personal contacts

7. Conference papers, policy documents, presentation slides and by personal attendance to conferences
8. The Internet: Google, Google Scholar in general
9. Personal communication with research fellows, practitioners and other professionals

#### Selection criteria

The literature was collected using these main criteria:

- Academic and grey literature
- Relevance to the research topic
- Available information (policy documents, published literature, reports of experiences from the region, etc) from different sources to the extent possible
- Recent publications from year 2000 onwards including as yet unpublished literature and statistical data – unless it is a noteworthy document from previous years
- To include literature on different views and arguments on quality ECCE from different perspectives (e.g. socio-cultural, economic, political) and stakeholder groups (policy makers, researchers, practitioners, families, etc.)
- To include literature from the main development agencies involved in Education, notably UNESCO, UNICEF, WB, GCE, as well as from INGOs and the academia
- To include Government's policy documents from the concerned region, to the extent possible. As a result, some national policies on ECCD/ECCE have been analysed singularly - namely from Bangladesh, India, South Korea and Singapore - whereas other policies from South East Asian countries were already part of the SEAMEO-INNOTECH's (2011) report on quality assurance in ECCD. Moreover, many of the policies are also analysed in the report from UNESCO and UNICEF (2012).
- To include specialised networks such as ARNEC, CGECCD and others
- The geographical area (i.e. literature on Asia Pacific region, hence from South East and Pacific countries; recent summaries and meta-analyses, where present)
- To select noteworthy practices, case studies (based on the criteria above mentioned; methodology of the study; what seems to work and show short- and long-term outcomes; unique/innovative practice).
- Within the broad area of ECCE/ECD, to focus on early learning
- To limit the number of documents to analyse based on the research question, the type of study (mainly qualitative), and the terms of reference for this assignment

Finally, 54 documents on quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region have been selected and analysed. The list is provided in Annex 1.

## 5. Quality of ECCE: An overview of the international scenario

The quality of education is a topical subject in international education, as proven by the contribution of the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2005 to this topic, and the specific section on quality ECCE in the GMR 2007, including a number of noteworthy background papers. Several conceptual frameworks and debates on the definitions of the quality of ECCE have been developed over the years, deriving from diverse theoretical positions, formulated by different parties and entities (e.g. academics, international organisations, NGOs, etc.), and from various perspectives (e.g. socio-cultural, economic, political and so on).

This chapter provides a brief introduction to some of the recent concepts and arguments concerning the quality of ECCE, so as to provide a background for the section on the Asia Pacific region.

In the 90s, the European Commission Childcare Network (ECCN) proposed its framework for the quality of services for young children in the European Community, outlining criteria for quality and quality assurance mechanisms (Balageur et al., n.a.). The framework highlights that quality should be defined from the **perspectives of children, families and professionals**.

The importance of the perceptions which poor parents have of a “good” school is confirmed by studies conducted in different countries (Tikly, 2010, Tikly and Barrett, 2011), and in relation to the drop-out phenomenon (Sabates et al., 2010). In other words, defining quality requires a **wide range consultation and needs to be contextualised** (Myers, 2006). Moreover, as families’ perceptions and living conditions vary, a common aspect of quality seems to be the flexibility of programmes in order to meet the needs of the people (Woodhead, 2010).

Britto et al. (2011) have elaborated a framework on quality ECD which takes into account the **ecological systems** (Annex 3). The authors affirm that previous attempts to assess quality were much oriented to policy advocacy purposes, and that little attention was given to the **quality of the service itself**, to guide the **improvement of the programme and the system**. The authors also **classify the ECD programmes per sector** of intervention: health & nutrition, education, social protection and welfare, child protection, and other; and **by type of provider**: government, non-government, and private for profit. This conceptual framework may inspire local definitions of quality of ECCE in the region, at national and regional levels, like the Singaporean early years development framework which addresses the child and family level. (<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/PressRoom/EarlyYearsDevelopmentFrameworkEYDF.aspx>).

The importance of the quality of ECCE and **how to measure it** was defined by the Consultative Group of Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD), which identifies four cornerstones in an attempt to answer what programmes and policies should be in place to help assure the early development of children. Particularly, cornerstone 2 states: ‘focus on quality in early learning programmes including measuring quality’ ([http://www.ecdgroup.com/4\\_Cornerstones.asp](http://www.ecdgroup.com/4_Cornerstones.asp)).

**The transition to school and early grades of primary education** is also mentioned as one of the cornerstones by CGECCD. Indeed some literature has claimed the importance that preschool facilitate access to primary schools, especially in developing countries. However, UNESCO (2004) warns against the possibility of exerting excessive pressure on children to succeed, and to conceive pre-primary as a primary school (Myers, 2006), otherwise defined as

the '**risk of schoolification**' (Choi, 2008:unnumbered page). Fenech talks about the risk of narrowing the focus on getting children 'ready for school' (Fenech, 2011), and Arnold et al. (2007) points out that primary schools should also be prepared to welcome the children and thus guarantee the necessary "enabling environment" in which young children can learn.

**Child development domains** are usually referred to by ECCE policies and programmes as a framework to formulate definitions of quality, standards and indicators. The terminology may vary and the number of dimensions can be different too by country, as in the case of the Early Learning and Development Standards (Myers, 2006; Miyahara and Meyers, 2008). The ELDS are national standards to illustrate children's holistic learning and development during the early childhood years. However, it is possible to identify at least four common domains:

1. Cognitive
2. Socio-Emotional
3. Moral/spiritual
4. Physical

Regarding the actions to promote quality ECCE, an authoritative reference is the recent OECD guidebook 'Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2011), which identifies **five policy levers** that can promote quality in ECEC, having positive effects on early child development and learning:

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Some countries have reviewed their ECCE/ECCD policies as part of previous versions of the OECD's guidebook (version I and II from 2001 and 2006), like for instance South Korea (OECD, 2004).

The Dakar Framework for Action mention these features of **effective practice in ECCE** (UNESCO, 2000):

- (i) be comprehensive, focusing on all of the child's needs and encompass health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development;
- (ii) be provided in the child's mother tongue;
- (iii) be appropriate to the children's age and not the mere downward extensions of primary education;
- (iv) include the education of parents and other caregivers in better child care, building on traditional practice, (enabling environment)
- (v) include the systematic use of early childhood indicators

All the points listed here above seem to represent crucial issues in the definitions of quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region (see chapter 6 of this paper), albeit the concepts may assume different meanings and justifications in the various contexts.

The concept of comprehensiveness cited in the Dakar framework, is reiterated by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development's (DfID) consortium on Education Quality called EdQual (Tikly, 2010), which extends the concept of education to the field of **health and**

**includes life skills** as an essential component for vulnerable children. EdQual has developed a framework to implement **quality education** where **four enabling environments** – policy, school, home and community – need to be considered and provided with appropriate inputs in order to achieve good quality education (Annex 4).

Furthermore, especially in developing countries, a focus on **nutrition** seems crucial when delivering ECCE/ECD, also due to its influence on child development (UNESCO, 2011a, UNESCO, 2011b). As the last regional Global Monitoring Report (GMR) for South and West Asia affirms (UNESCO, 2011b): ‘Poor nutrition prevents children from developing healthy bodies and minds’. The Copenhagen consensus also confirms the intention of development cooperation to address nutritional issues for young children in the near future<sup>1</sup>, as stated:

The Copenhagen Consensus 2012 Expert Panel finds that fighting malnourishment should be the top priority for policy makers and philanthropists.

(Copenhagen Consensus, 2012)

Linked to nutrition, a field of ECD/ECCE that has been gaining increasing attention is **early stimulation** (Dang S. et al., 2011). However, this paper will not cover nutrition and early stimulation specifically since the focus is on ECCE and learning aspects in particular.

Moving attention to the pedagogical sphere, the International Step by Step association gives a definition of **quality pedagogy** (ISSA, n.a.), which includes seven dimensions and highlights the importance of the (pedagogical) process:

1. Interactions
2. Family and community
3. Inclusion, diversity and values of democracy
4. Assessment and planning
5. Teaching strategies
6. Learning environment
7. Professional development

Here interactions refer to the relationship between children and adults and among peers, and it is given a pivotal role in determining the ‘quality’ of the preschool experience and influences learning.

Regarding the **instruments to “measure” quality**, Britto et al. (2011:10) affirm that in low income countries, in ECD in general:

‘... measurement has focused on indicators of child development for national and international purposes, for example indicators of child health, growth and language development,’

Amongst the instruments most used in assessing the quality of ECCE there are the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale–Revised (ITERS–R) for small children, and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale–Revised (ECERS–R) for the quality of the classroom environment (Fenech, 2011). A more comprehensive list of instruments that describes the quality of ECCE is provided by Myers (2006), who classifies them by the country where they have been developed and/or applied, encompassing from international scales such as ECERS

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<sup>1</sup> See the Expert Panel Findings: <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=1637>

or scales on teacher-child interactions and focused on children's play, to locally developed tools such as the Madrasa Evaluation Instrument from Kenya.

According to Alexander (2008:34), in the OECD there has been a prevalence of **quantitative indicators**, with 'little insight into schooling itself, let alone teaching and learning'. Qualitative dimensions to be considered might be the types of class room activities (e.g. group vs individual activities), or learning through interaction with peers. In other words, elements of what is sometimes called the **educational process** (Myers, 2006). In synthesis, on how to **evaluate quality**, Myers (2006) suggests considering a large variety of instruments and indicators coming both from low and high income countries and which derive from a practical application in the contexts. During the last ECD regional conference organised by the network for early childhood in Asia and the Pacific region called ARNEC, he also suggests assessing progress by measuring national indicators over time, longitudinally, and to link quality evaluation with opportunities of professional follow-up for teachers/caregivers (ARNEC, 2011a).

Another important issue regards the **indicators** to be used to measure quality. At service level, and particularly for preschools, some of the indicators most utilised, especially for regulatory and comparability purposes, are (UNESCO, 2004):

- Class size
- Child-teacher ratio
- Material availability
- Teacher training

A recent research conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) focuses on these **benchmarks** for quality preschool::

- Student-teacher ratio in pre-school classrooms
- Average preschool teacher wages
- Curriculum guidelines
- Preschool teacher training
- Health and safety guidelines
- Data collection mechanism
- Linkages between preschool and primary school
- Parental involvement and education programmes

Moreover, three other categories: affordability, availability and social context are included in the analysis, and importance is given to the internal reporting system of the ECCE services (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

Another study by OECD on ECE services introduces benchmarks as the basic conditions that underlie good processes and outcomes for young children, whilst claiming the need to monitor these conditions for accountability purposes. Here Bennett (2008) identifies initially 15 benchmarks then grouped them into four areas:

- Child health and family support
- Governance of early childhood programmes
- Children's access to programmes and services
- Programme quality



It is specified that the benchmarks might be relevant for poor countries too, adapting the bar in an appropriate way. Here, it is worth mentioning the UNESCO (2006) report where a warning regarding the use of universal and probably unaffordable high quality standards in all contexts is mentioned. This can lead, for instance, to ill-informed policy decisions and funds allocation. Kagan et al. (2005) also claim **cultural variability and sensitivity** regarding the use of **learning standards**. The links between how we define quality and what we define as culturally-relevant learning outcomes should also be further analysed.

**Teachers as researchers** of their own practice, is a core concept of the approach born from the Italian experience in Reggio's toddler's and preschools (Rinaldi, 2006). In particular, teachers can reflect on their practice through the use of 'journals', which can contribute to the evaluation activity.

The Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF, 2012) affirms that in ECD services **measures of child development** for young children should encompass: (i) cognitive development; (ii) socio-emotional development; and (iii) linguistic development. Measures of nutrition impact that can be used are: (i) low birth weight, stunting, wasting, and underweight (ii) maternal and child micronutrient deficiencies, and (iii) BMI in women of reproductive age

At programme level, a considerable part of international literature claims high **effectiveness of the programmes** which can **integrate** education with health, nutrition, **parenting and** activities to involve the **local community** (Choi, 2008, Naudeau et al., 2010, UNESCO, 2006), as the Dakar Framework also envisages (UNESCO, 2000). For instance, parents' literacy courses can be promoted, due to the fact that: '... maternal education also weighs heavily in shaping prospects for pre-school participation' (UNESCO, 2011:38). Moreover, the sustainability of the services intended as the sustainability and improvement of the quality reached, and including environmental sustainability (Britto et al., 2011) is usually part of the conceptual frameworks of quality.

It is widely acknowledges, at least in principle, that definitions of quality should be **context-appropriate**:

'... a "one size fits all" approach to ECD services is not appropriate, in that quality measurement requires grounding in country and community context, values, and needs.'  
(Britto P R et al., 2011)

For Myers (2006; ARNEC, 2011a), definitions of quality ECCE should be sensitive to the context rather than relying on isolated indicators. More specifically, the author talks about "**quality profiles**", which are related to definitions of the world the people would like to live in, and ultimately are culturally appropriate and derive from the **experiences of people** in different countries. Hence he stresses the element of "diversity" in the definition(s) of quality, along with the importance of "**integration**" and "**inclusion**", particularly the integration of services and inclusion of the children in the '... wider developmental and learning environments' (ARNEC, 2011a).

The influence of culture on ECCE and the variability of definitions are claimed by several other authors (e.g. Tobin, Woodhead, Moss, Penn, Dahlberg, and so on). For instance, Woodhead affirms that 'Quality should be judged by the best of what is available locally' (Penn, 2004:21). For Tobin (2005) quality is a **process more than a product**, and definitions of quality should be locally constructed (including standards, if any), by **listening to many voices**. In this manner,

the service can be more responsive to its stakeholders, particularly families, children and practitioners, and ownership can be enhanced.

Similarly, it has been pointed out that **relevance to the children's lives and their families** is another key aspect of quality:

‘Quality also means relevance to local needs, adaptability to local and cultural and economic conditions, special consideration for marginalised and under-represented groups and the provision of education which helps children to adapt to their environments. If education is not perceived to be meeting this range of felt needs then parents may well withdraw their children from school.’

(Little, 1990)

However, the same author poses two questions: 'Whose culture? Defined and endorsed by whom?' (Leach and Little, 1999). Context appropriateness and relevance to the child and her family's needs are concerns common to the region too. The questions just raised seem therefore appropriate to the Asia Pacific region too.

Definitions of quality ECCE should be negotiated among **multiple stakeholders**, including policy makers, parents, children, practitioners and the like (UNESCO, 2004, Woodhead, 2006, Moss and Pence, 1994). Hence, a feature of 'quality' ECCE might be the capacity to listen to parental and community "voices", and the level of participation of the stakeholders to the negotiations on quality (Vennam et al., 2009, Vargas-Baron, 2005, Harrist et al., 2007). This issue is linked to **accountability** (Wong et al., 2010).

Finally, when talking about quality ECCE in developing countries, an issue that is often raised is the **limited access of underprivileged children**. Moreover, this situation can lead to a vicious circle where the poverty conditions of these children influences the quality of education they can afford, and the poor quality education they receive then influences – or reinforces – their underprivileged situation (Rose and Dyer, 2008). On the other hand, "low quality" programmes may have marginal benefits in underprivileged communities rather than no services or programmes at all. Therefore, **how and who defines quality** is a crucial point.

## 6. Quality of ECCE: Focus on the Asia Pacific Region

The analysis of the collected literature on the Asia Pacific region presents similarities with the international scenario and elements specific to the region, which can provide insights into the definition of conceptual frameworks on quality ECCE in the Asia Pacific region. As the OECD affirms about the quality goals of the ECEC programmes: 'They should be specific but have enough flexibility for application, (OECD, n.a., p.2). Hence, the diversity of this broad region needs to be taken into account.

Another point is the various terminology used. For instance, the age range covered by ECCE/ECCD interventions may vary from 0-5 years to 0-8 years depending on the country, as shown in the SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011) report on the South-East Asia region. Indeed, the importance of harmonising the relevant terminology at regional level seems a prerequisite necessary to find a common understanding of key concepts related to the quality of ECCE.

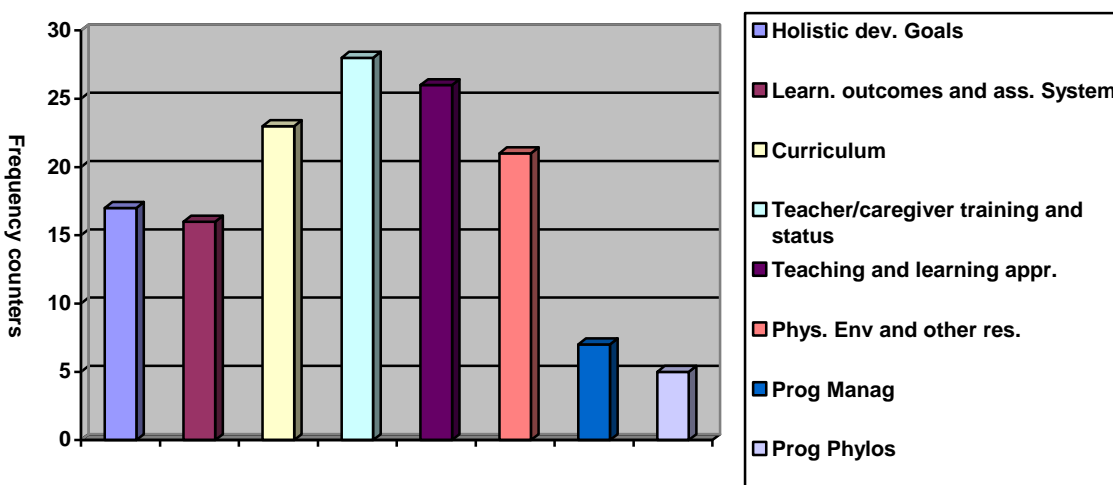
As the reader will see, the regional picture encompasses both structural and process quality dimensions, with some aspects more emphasised than others (e.g. standards), and elements which may deserve a specific study (e.g. teacher-child interaction).

The next section (6.1) is an excursus of the quality dimensions considered in the literature analysed, whereas the following part (6.2) deals with topical themes pertinent to quality ECCE in the region. In annex 5 there is a table showing the list of the documents analysed (horizontal) by quality dimensions identified (vertical), these latter grouped in three category: Dimensions of quality of ECCE at child and programme level; Indicators to measure quality; and Quality of ECCE at systems level.

### 6.1 Dimensions of quality of ECCE at child and programme level

Here below is a graph showing how frequently the literature analysed (see list in Annex 1) has mentioned the identified quality dimensions:

**Figure 1: Frequency of the quality dimensions**



### 6.1.1. Holistic development goals

Ensuring children's holistic development is a goal of ECCE/ECD interventions and is widely recognised in the region. Research has demonstrated that quality programmes can yield positive effects on the child's holistic development (ARNEC, 2011c).

Holistic development is explicitly mentioned in the policies (MOE Singapore, n.a, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009, Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012a, MCYS, n.a., MoPME Bangladesh, 2008, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010, OECD, 2004), and generally refers to the concept of the well-being of the child (UNESCO et al., 2012, MOE Singapore, n.a).

Usually the following four broadly defined domains of child development are:

1. Physical, health and motor development
2. Social and emotional development
3. Language and communication
4. Cognitive development

Yet differences may occur in the terminology used, the construct(s) attached to the concepts, and the ways to address it.

A table showing the development domains and their content by country in South East Asia is provided by SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011, p. 15)

**Table 1: Content/ Learning Areas per Developmental Domain**

Countries	Self, Social & Emotional	Cognitive	Language/ Communication	Physical /Health	Aesthetic /Creative	Moral/ Religious	Techno logical
Brunei Darussalam	Self & Social	Cognitive (literacy, numeracy, early science)		Physical	Aesthetic Creativity		Early ICT
Cambodia	Socio-emotional	Cognitive (awareness & thinking)	Language	Physical Health		Cultural Moral	
Indonesia	Socio-emotional	Cognitive	Language	Soft and gross motor		Religious / Moral values	
Lao PDR	Socio-emotional	-Sensory-perceptual -Numeracy	Communication	-Gross and fine motor			
Malaysia	Socio-emotional (self-esteem)	-Early Mathematics -Early Science -Sensorial	Language Communication	Physical	Aesthetic Creativity	Moral Spirituality	Basic ICT literacy
Myanmar		Mathematics	Language (Myanmar & English)	Health Physical	Aesthetic (music & art)	-Civics -Moral -Nation Building	
Philippines	Social emotional	Cognitive	Language	-Physical health & well-being -Motor skills	Creative Aesthetic	Character and values	
Singapore	Self and social awareness	Numeracy Environmental Awareness	Language and literacy (English)	-Healthy Habits -Motor skills	Aesthetics Creative Expression	Sound moral values	
Thailand	Socio-emotional	Cognitive		Physical			
Timor-Leste	Socio-emotional	-Pre-writing -Counting	Language	Physical			
Vietnam	Socio-emotional	Cognitive	Language	Physical	Aesthetic		

Sources: SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011) Regional Consultation Forum on Early Learning Frameworks, Policies, and Programmes, March 2011, Philippines, and SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011) Research Forum on Quality Assurance in ECCD in Southeast Asia, October 2011, Philippines.

Within the domain of physical and motor development, it is possible to include interventions in the field of health, hygiene and nutrition. Due to the low performance of key indicators on child health and wellbeing (e.g. stunting) in the region still, focus on nutrition and early stimulation seems pivotal, especially for very young children (Hamadani et al., 2006, UNESCO et al., 2012, Moore et al., 2006). Safety and health factors are clearly mentioned in some documents as components of the ECD/ECCE programmes (Rao et al., 2003), or part of the ELDS (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010). This means that ECCE encompasses more sectors (e.g. education and health), and involves several agencies. Therefore integration and coordination become key issues, and for this reason section number 6.2 is dedicated to this topic.

Social and emotional development is a category which is contemplated in the list of domains but apparently it has been given less importance than other categories, like cognitive development, for it appears fewer times in the literature considered.

Within the dimension of language development, multilingualism and the issue of the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction and care represents a topical issue in the region (Udommana, 2012), which is probably due to the variety of ethnic and cultural groups. However this topic is very much linked with the different situations of the indigenous communities in each country, and is related to the issue of the cultural appropriateness of the programmes (see section 6.4).

Cognitive development is perhaps the domain which is given more attention, at least in the preschool programmes and related research works, as demonstrated by the number of evaluative studies on the topic. Here the effects of preschool programmes on later school achievements are assessed and in some cases children's cognitive development is measured (Moore et al., 2008, Aboud and Hossain, 2010, Montie et al., 2006). Further information on these studies is in the next section on children's learning outcomes and in section 6.2.1 on indicators and instruments.

Moral-spiritual development can be associated with social and emotional development as in the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) of Bangladesh, where ethical values are mentioned (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010): or it can be considered a single category, as in the regional report from SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011). However, it seems to be an important category for many countries.

As seen above, cultural, aesthetic and creative development are added to the four classic domains (Miyahara and Meyers, 2008; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), and another category called technological is found in some countries (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011).

Finally, the analysis of other dimensions for quality such as curriculum content, learning and teaching practices and the learning environment will provide relevant information on how/if the holistic development goals are addressed. For instance, an ECD/ECCE policy might mention explicitly the holistic development goals encompassing the four core development domains, but the curriculum may not address them equally, or the teaching practices may seem to little stimulate motor skills development.

### 6.1.2. Learning outcomes and assessment systems

Learning outcomes refer mostly to the last segment of the ECCE pathway, at preschool level. Here below is an example of learning outcomes defined at national level, issued by the Governments of Bangladesh:

#### Box 1: Pre-primary learning outcomes - Bangladesh

Participant children in the pre-primary education, on completing the course, will be able to:

- Say own name, name of parents, address of family and own date of birth,
- Say names and function of different parts of the body,
- Follow social practices – say greetings, respect elders, giving thanks, ask permission and
- Engage in appropriate social interaction with relatives/friends,
- Recite children's rhymes, sing children's songs, national anthem and tell stories,
- Categorise similar objects/articles and differentiate dissimilar objects/articles,
- Draw and name circle, triangle, rectangle,
- Recognise and tell the names and functions of natural objects around them e.g., flower,
- Fruit, fish, bird, animal, sun, moon, tree, transport, weather, land and water,
- Show creativity by making objects, toys/ play materials by self choice using block, clay,
- Leaf, paper, sticks etc.,
- Count, recognise, read and write numbers from 0–20;
- Do simple addition and subtraction (with numbers below 10),
- Recognise, read and write Bangla letters,
- Read and write words composed of two Bangla letters,
- Describing events from picture,
- Have an expressive vocabulary of words presented in Class 1 reader,
- Recognise or say opposite word for known word.

(MoPMe, 2008)

Singapore has defined its desired outcomes for the kindergarten experience in consultation with early childhood education professionals and practitioners (Ting, 2007). The preschool desired outcomes are:

#### Box 2: Desired Outcomes of Pre-school Education – Singapore

- At the end of pre-school education, children will:
- Know what is right and what is wrong
- Be willing to share and take turns with others
- Be able to relate to others
- Be curious and be able to explore
- Be able to listen and speak with understanding
- Be comfortable and happy with themselves
- Have developed physical co-ordination and healthy habits
- Love their family, friends, teachers and kindergarten

(MOE Singapore, n.a. -b)

The importance of obtaining certain learning outcomes at preschool can be linked to the issue of transition to primary schools. Indeed preparing children for school is a key purpose of preschool education (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008; MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012a; Rao and Sun, 2010a), especially in countries where access - and completion - of primary education is not universal yet. In this regard, Rao and Sun (2010a) suggest that policies addressing children aged 0-8 can effectively ease access to primary

schools, also because the claimed positive effects of the pre-school experience tend to fade in the first (Nath and Shahjamal, 2008) or second year of primary school (Arnold et al., 2007).

In some evaluation studies conducted in Bangladesh (Moore et al., 2008; Aboud and Hossain, 2010; Nath and Shahjamal, 2008) the quality of the preschool programmes seems to be gauged mainly in terms of the effects on the children's learning outcomes, often measured by assessment tests on basic competences in literacy and maths. Again the link between preschool programme, (process and structural elements) and learning outcomes (in terms of language and cognitive performance) is investigated in the Montie et al. (2006)'s study in ten countries. Additionally, significant improvement in the cognitive, social, motor, and language development are found in Filipino children who attended ECD programmes in Armecin (2006), and the preschool quality was positively associated with child developmental outcomes in Rao and Sun's report (2010a). Therefore there seems to be a mismatch between the many ECCD policies aiming for holistic development and some assessment practices. Here further information might be useful in order to understand the reasons for focussing on basic competencies, which may be linked with traditional practices, parents and/or primary school expectations and the transition issue/access to primary school, or the availability of measurement tools. Moreover, the issue of consistency between holistic development and learning goals, and the assessment systems should be addressed, taking into consideration: the assessment methodology and administration; the capacity of the assessors (caregivers, teachers, parents, etc); and why to assess.

The Indian ECCE policy foresees a formative and continuous child assessment aiming at meeting children's development needs (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012a). In ARNEC-SEAMEO's (2012), the case of the assessment of young learners in Philippine public schools is reported, where monitoring the development and progress of the students is key, particularly to inform decision making levels and to promote accountability.

In the SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011) report on quality assurance in the region, the following types of assessment adopted in South-East Asia have been reported:

- checklist
- anecdote
- running report
- profile/record
- observation
- portfolio
- interview
- Others specific to some countries

Talking about learning outcomes and assessment systems, it is worth mentioning the risk of pressure to succeed on children (and on parents, teachers and principal providers alike) that excessive attention to the learning outcomes may entail, and which can make a preschool become a downwards extension of a primary school. This issue, common to the international literature, is likewise in the region too (UNESCO et al., 2012, McMullen et al., 2005). Moreover, some authors have pointed out the importance of taking into account primary schools' readiness to welcome the new children, instead of focussing only on the children's readiness (Arnold et al., 2007, Vennam et al., 2009). However, a main point is to link what the assessment is for with the quality ECCD.

Finally, several countries have issued their Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS), which are briefly reported in the section on Standards 6.2.2, and a specific report on the ELDS is provided by Miyahara et al. (2008).

### 6.1.3. Curriculum

Curriculum content is a dimension highlighted in a regional forum on quality ECCE (Udommana, 2012), which deserves attention for the formulation of standards on quality ECCE. A couple of years earlier, Rao and Sun (2010a) mentioned curriculum as a key element of quality, which influences the teacher-child interaction. The authors also highlight the importance of curricular continuity between pre-primary and primary education.

A study from the Institute of Education Sciences (2002) aimed to provide a rigorous analysis of the impact of preschool curricula on the learning outcomes at student level (particularly school readiness) and outcomes at classroom level.

In South East Asia, early learning curricula (covering different age groups) have been developed in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Timor Lest and Vietnam (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011).

In Korea, where a curriculum centred approach has been adopted, it has become the focus of the ECCE policy development (Taguma et al., 2012, OECD, 2004).

#### Box 3: Curriculum of ECEC programmes - Singapore

Three types of curriculum are in place in ECEC programmes: *National Kindergarten Curriculum* operating in all kindergarten facilities and structured with five major domains and around ten themes that are explicated in a set of teaching manuals; a *child care programme* that includes basic components on care, education, nutrition, health, safety, services for parents and exchanges with communities; and *hakwon programmes* designed by individual *hakwon* centres to teach specific aspects of Korean language, basic mathematics, piano, art and similar specific subjects.

The *National Kindergarten Curriculum* is the most authoritative and widely applied curriculum in ECEC in Korea. This curriculum, begun in 1969, has a five-year revision cycle. The sixth revision came into place in early 2000. The content covers five major domains of learning (physical health, social relationships), expression, language and inquiry), arranged in two levels. Teachers follow this curriculum by reference to twelve teaching manuals including an overview manual, one for each of ten themes and materials for full-day programmes. Implementation of the curriculum through the identified themes is clearly apparent during observation visits to any kindergarten.

In terms of its overall structure, documentation, regulations for operation and actual practice in the field, the child care curriculum appears more loosely structured in comparison with the kindergarten curriculum, although the five domains listed for 3-5 year olds in the kindergarten also form the basic elements for teachers planning the child care programme. "The child care plans need to include individual and group activities and active and quiet play in order to develop children's cognitive, social, physical and linguistic abilities, including activities necessary for biological needs such as nursing and toilet use." (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.65). A difference can be seen, however, in the delivery of the curricula, possibly because of the generally lower standards of recruitment and training in the childcare sector, and the less favourable working conditions of childcare staff.

(OECD, 2004, p. 19)

Singapore has developed a preschool curriculum framework to be used as a guide by kindergartens and child centres in order to respond to children's specific needs (Ting, 2007). In the kindergarten curriculum framework principles and practices are mentioned (MOE Singapore, n.a. -a). Malaysia's development and implementation of the ECCE curriculum (ARNEC and SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012) represents a quality assurance mechanism.



#### Box 4: Curriculum Standards, Malaysia

Malaysia has national curriculum standards for specific age range, specifying the content, teaching-learning process and assessment. The **National Preschool Curriculum Standards** for 4-6 years old children is mandated through the Education Act. It was revised in 2010 to make it standard-based and modular-oriented following curriculum transformation in the primary and secondary school curriculum for the continuation of education from preschools to primary education.

Malaysia's MOE has also developed the **Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum** for 0-4 years old children based on PERMATA curriculum and KAAK (from the MWFC) in 2011. Once the Acts have been amended the national early childhood curriculum will be fully implemented. To ensure compliance to the national curriculum standards, MOE will use the same mechanism as in preschools (4-6 years old) for the childcare (0-4 years old).

(SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2011, p. 39)

In Bangladesh, the NGOs play a significant role in providing ECCE and the curriculum is often considered a core part of their preschool programmes (Nath and Shahjamal, 2008). Main organisations such as Plan International, Save the Children, BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee), Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and others have developed their own curriculums, and now the Government is in the process of formulating a national curriculum which will benefit from the extensive experience accumulated by the civil society in the sector (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008).

ARNEC(2011b) identifies these features of ECCE curriculum in the region:

1. Activity-based
2. Child-centred
3. Age-appropriate
4. Flexible
5. Aiming at all-round development
6. Adapted to culture and context

The characteristics of cultural appropriateness and flexibility seem crucial in the vast Asia Pacific region, with its variety of cultures and the different socio-economic and political circumstances. For instance, in Pakistan the ECCE curriculum developed by the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) and adopted as national policy is based on the principles of the 'High Scope' ECCE curriculum, but culturally adapted (Muñoz, 2012). However, in some cases, the (preschool) curriculum may contrast with cultural norms, like in the case of Chinese immigrant parents in the USA described by Yamamoto (2012). Moreover, the relevance of the curriculum content to the child's life might be highlighted, and specifically refer to life skills as an essential component (Profeta, 2011, Tikly, 2010, UNESCO, 2006).

Finally, the relationship between written and enacted<sup>2</sup> curriculum could be further investigated in the region and provide useful feedback on both curriculum content and teaching practices, which are two intertwined dimensions.

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<sup>2</sup> Enacted curriculum can be defined as how the teachers apply the curriculum in the daily practice in the classroom

#### 6.1.4. Teacher/caregiver training and status

Teacher's and caregiver's training is another key dimension for quality ECCE, and implies that better quality services can be obtained through upgrading professionals (ARNEC, 2011a). For some countries it seems urgent to increase and improve the pre-service and in-service training opportunities, and to address the disparities in the coverage of qualified teachers at subnational level, especially between urban and rural areas (UNESCO et al., 2012). Others sustain that this dimension should be a core part of ECD programme evaluation (Yousafzai, 2010).

There is a need to identify standards in a region where duration of teacher training and the teachers'/caregivers' educational level required may vary significantly (UNESCO et al., 2012, SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011, Rao and Sun, 2010a), and data on teacher qualifications are not always available, especially in remote areas (UNESCO et al., 2012). Most countries have a general teaching licence or certificate and some require a specific ECCE licence too.

However the educational requirements differ by country, and some indicate the period of specific trainings whereas others require diplomas or college degrees (Udommana, 2012):

**Table 2: Educational requirements for obtaining an ECCD licence or certificate in the participating countries**

Country	Educational requirements for obtaining ECCD licence or certificate
Lao PDR	11+1 year, 11+2 years, 11+3 years
Malaysia	MOE preschool teacher: at least with a diploma
Myanmar	1 month teacher training
Vietnam	Diploma or college degree in early childhood education (2-3 years)
Brunei Darussalam	Private preschool teacher: O level credits
The Philippines	Government pre-school teacher: ranging from Basic Teacher Certification to post-graduate certificate
Thailand	High school graduate with ECCD training or college degree in early childhood education
Cambodia	High school graduate or college degree in early childhood education (a-5-year-programme)
Timor-Leste	2 years in teacher training programme (in process)
Indonesia	College graduate (in process)
	College degree in early childhood education or psychology

In addition, principals' and administrators' qualification are important in assuring quality (ARNEC, 2011b). To this end, the report on the South Asia region shows minimum requirements for childcare personnel, teachers and supervisors alike. Moreover, the report does not limit the standards pertinent to this dimension in the training, but it also includes the working conditions (i.e. working hours; salary; rewards and incentives), the professional development programme and performance assessment (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Hence the teacher's status is also an element of quality ECCE, and can be translated into an appropriate wage, regular schedule, and gender parity (in some places teachers and caregivers are female only). Furthermore, some parents claimed the (lack of) regular presence of the teachers in the classroom as an important issue affecting quality (Young Lives, 2010, SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), 2010).

The training can be offered by the government, NGOs, or private institutions supervised by governmental bodies. ARNEC (2011b, 2011c) also highlights these elements:

- Participatory trainings, where parents and other family/community caregivers are involved
- Experiential training
- Capacity building programmes for all the actors of the implementation system
- Pre-service and in-service training programmes
- Continuing support and guidance to ECCE professionals

And UNESCO et al. (2012) highlight the importance of skill training to improve child-teacher interaction.

Within the Global Campaign for Education, a case of best practice from Pakistan (Muñoz, 2012), shows these elements of training for teachers:

- Holistic development
- Importance of play
- Commitment to parents
- Evaluation of learning
- Creating an appropriate learning environment

Moreover, some trained teachers are supposed to replicate the training in the districts (the so-called cascade model).

Another example of good practice from Indonesia (ARNEC and SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2012) is the Capability Building programme for Early Childhood Educators, which was organised because many educators in Indonesia do not meet the qualifications required. The same training approaches are also used after the training as teaching methods (e.g. Montessori, High Scope, and Reggio Emilia).

Singapore emphasises well-qualified and trained principals and teachers behind high quality preschool education (Ting, 2007), sets minimum qualifications for teachers (raised in the recent years), and offers incentives (grants and scholarships) for teachers and caregivers (MCYS and CDN, n.a.). Moreover, it has developed a framework for teacher-training and accreditation, and it is formulating the Continuous Professional Development Framework for teachers and supervisors (MCYS and CDN, n.a., MCYS, n.a.).

In Korea, educators and teachers have a minimum educational level higher than many other OECD countries (Taguma et al., 2012), and in Taiwan, all teachers receive specialised training coherent with the Development Appropriate Practice (DAP) (McMullen et al., 2005).

A different picture is in China where teachers rarely have qualifications to teach children under 6 years and irregular attendance in the rural area are seen. Moreover some staff characteristics are considered important for quality ECCE, such as age, commitment, and engagement with children (Rao, 2010). However in recent years, teacher training has become more formalised and specialised, and a teaching certificate is considered an indicator of quality (Zhai and Gao, 2008).

In Bangladesh, the pre-primary framework mentions training of trainers (ToT) for pre-primary teacher/facilitator, and capacity building for the organisation and personnel (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008). Here it is worth to mention the activity of mentoring provided by networks of

teachers (e.g. in Bangladesh the platform CAMPE<sup>3</sup>), which can play a significant role to train teachers and therefore should be considered too.

In India, complementarity between pre-in-service and on-site training is foreseen (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012a, Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012b).

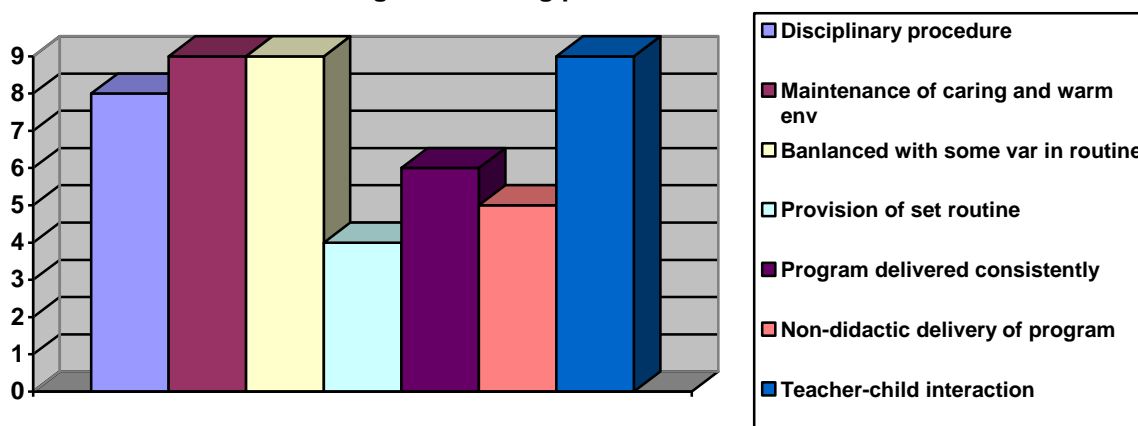
To conclude, this fundamental dimension of quality may include several variables (regarding the training and status of both teacher/caregiver and other ECCE service's personnel), and it shows a multifaceted scenario, with different levels of qualifications required and types of training. Therefore, whilst there is scope for standards to be set by selecting some of the elements/indicators considered in the regional literature (e.g. minimum educational level; type of teaching licence/certificate; duration of training flexibility seems of utmost importance in order to fit the different contexts of the region and avoid fixing standards which are hardly achievable in some deprived circumstances.

### 6.1.5 Teaching and learning approaches

The terminology used to refer to this dimension can vary; sometimes it is called teaching and learning practices, or pedagogical approaches, or in some cases it refers specifically to the teacher/caregiver-child interaction. Anyhow, it gives important information on what happens in the classroom, how teacher-child and child-child interaction should be, and how the children learn and develop. At the same time, it is a dimension highly influenced by socio-cultural factors, theoretical backgrounds and educators' beliefs.

From a survey conducted in the region, teaching and learning practices are considered pivotal (Udommana, 2012). Here below is a graph adapted by the author, showing the responses on teaching and learning practices:

**Figure 2: Recommended teaching and learning practice**



(adapted from Udommana, 2012, p. 5)

Teacher-child interaction has the highest score, along with the maintenance of caring and the warm environment and some variations in routine. Disciplinary procedure also seems highly considered (Udommana, 2012). The importance attached to discipline and sometimes the use of practices considered authoritarian from Western viewpoints, should be understood in the

<sup>3</sup> Campaign for Popular Education

socio-cultural context, recognising different ways to construct knowledge (UNESCO et al., 2012).

Finally, she stresses the importance for the countries to clearly define strategies, skills, behaviours for the teachers to enact the curriculum and involving parents. ARNEC (2011c) mentions experiential learning (versus rote learning), and reiterates the centrality of the teacher/caregiver-child interaction (Rao and Sun, 2010a).

In South East Asia, Los Angeles-Bautista (2004) talks about competent teachers being able to promote a positive sense of self for the child's wellbeing, and the image of the active learner and the need of opportunities to discover. Consistent with the concepts outlined above, she also emphasises the concepts of child-centred, play-based and adult-supported activities, and the child interaction with the staff and the environment.

A recent report from the regional offices of UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) highlights multilingual education for indigenous communities, and the use of empathy, culturally relevant group games and rotational leadership processes to promote collaborative work; this also fosters gender equality and addresses socio-emotional development. Creative solutions and strategies with groups are particularly needed in contexts where trained caregivers are few. Small groups are preferred as they allow for more intimate interaction, stimulation, development and protection.

The Indian quality standards comprise interaction (including staff-family and intra-staff interaction), and children's experiences and learning opportunities, particularly the opportunity to explore and make choices (MoWCD India, 2012b). The ECCE policy reiterates the features of play based, experiential, and child friendly teaching and learning, and adds the use of the mother tongue (MoWCD India, 2012a).

Rao (2010) describes a situation in China's preschools characterised by large classes and whole group instruction, and at the same time active learning is foreseen in the curriculum. This situation might be common in other parts of the region, especially in deprived zones and often rural areas, where teachers may also be less qualified, as seen earlier. In all the three countries considered in her paper (Ibid.), social environment seems a key quality dimension, and in an earlier report (Rao et al., 2003) the author notes attention to the child-teacher interaction and the use of appropriate practices in China and Hong Kong.

Again in China, Mc Mullen et al. (2005) argue that the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) principles seem to clash with traditional Confucian and socialist educational ideas, with parents' beliefs and with large-size classes. Hence, they affirm that China seems to apply DAP less compared to other countries, although policies and curricula contain these principles. The authors add that in China, Taiwan and Korea the DAP and teachers' beliefs and practices can diverge, and in South Korea a child-centred approach clashes with a more competitive and curriculum oriented approach. Another study conducted in 10 countries including China and Japan, has found that small group activities and child initiated activities - as foreseen in the DAP - have positively influenced children's cognitive and language performance (Montie et al., 2006). Finally Yamamoto and Li (2012) highlight that child-centred pedagogy has been present in China from the 70s, and teaching quality comprises both academic and moral features for Chinese parents.

In Bangladesh, child-centred pedagogy sometimes seems to clash with traditional rearing practices and the role of the child in the society. This issue needs to be understood in the context, and particularly discussed with the teachers/caregivers in participatory training, where

suitable meanings of child-centred pedagogy can be co-constructed (Profeta, 2010b). Indeed, as Uchida (2012:n.a.) points out the concept of child-centred education varies depending on the cultural context and how it is applied by the people; this because ‘... child care is a living profession...’..

In the ELDS of Bangladesh (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010), play is foreseen as promoting children's learning and development, as well as the idea of children as active learners. Another seminal document, the Operational Framework on Pre-primary Education (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008) gives examples of activities and weekly session plans which seem to be connected to the pedagogical approaches outlined in the ELDS and the comprehensive ECCD framework (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009). It seems to be a very practical tool for the teachers, if used in a flexible manner and is combined with teacher training.

However, the situation in the field may be different, as Aboud and Hossain (2010) report in their evaluative study:

‘The inclusion of literacy and mathematics in the pre-primary years is now generally accepted ... Parents and programmes in South Asia strongly view instruction in these domains to be essential ... However, when offered, it is often in the form of rote repetition of the teacher's words, an extension downwards of the first grade curriculum and instruction, rather than story reading, vocabulary development, emergent writing and problem solving...’

UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) also claim that in ECCE centres the teaching approach is still largely didactic and academic rather than play-based and exploratory.

Singapore's Early Years Development Framework (MCYS, n.a.) envisage a child as an active learner, enquirer and confident, it highlights the active involvement of the family and the image of the teachers as facilitators of the learning processes.

In conclusion, this crucial and contested dimension needs to be amply considered since the teaching and learning practices can be very influential on the quality of ECCE. Further investigations on teachers' beliefs and behaviours might help us understand eventual mismatches between policies, conceptual frameworks and practices, and contribute to find regional standards which will need to be eventually adapted to the different contexts, needs, constraints and resources.

#### **6.1.6 Physical environment, teaching/learning material, and other resources**

It is certainly important to include the physical environment in definitions of quality of ECCE in the region (Rao, 2010), but what characteristics are they supposed to have? ARNEC (2011b) describes its quality features in terms of being supportive of children's needs, low-cost, safe and hygienic, and culture-specific. In this latter point, in some contexts what may be considered basic or poor by Western standards, can still be regarded ‘good’ for parents and community members (Profeta, 2010b). In particular, the characteristics of safety, security and affordability can be relevant in assessing a centre (Profeta, 2010b, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012), and the community can contribute by providing local materials and furniture, like in the case of Laotian parents (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), or by paying the rent of the rooms (Profeta, 2010b).

The Indian quality standards for ECCE give an indication of square metre for classrooms and outdoor space, and include space for cooking meals and for naps. In Bangladesh, the Government mentions the child friendly environment and gives an indication of the location of the centre for pre-primary education (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008).

From a study on ECCE in Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, De Los Angeles Bantista (2004) affirms that early childhood settings are supposed to be physically child-centred and emotionally safe, and arranged in a way to facilitate learning through play.

In SEAMEO-INNOTECH's (2011) report on quality assurance in South-East Asia, it is noted that most countries have set requisites for physical facilities and the environment but not all of them are legally bound through registrations or the licensing systems. The quality ECCD centres standards are categorised by:

- Space and physical facilities
- Resources
- Safe and stimulating environment

Regarding teaching and learning material, the Indian standards for ECCE (MoWCD India, 2012b) talks about development appropriate toys and learning materials, development appropriate and child friendly play and learning materials.

Again cultural appropriateness is crucial, and locally available, low cost material might be suitable in some contexts (Profeta, 2010b). For instance, Udommana (2012) reports a case in Myanmar where parents volunteered to produce material for children.

For instance, the Malaysian MOE (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011) gives indications on preschool teaching-learning equipment and materials to use. In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) (2008) mentions core and supplementary materials, but does not give many details on how the material should be. Practitioners from China, Taiwan and Korea seem to prefer hands on material (McMullen et al., 2005). In Montie's study, there seems to be a positive correlation between material and cognitive and language performance.

In conclusion, national requirements on the physical environment and teaching and learning material exist in most countries in the region, but in many cases there are no effective assurance mechanisms. However, there is also flexibility here and context appropriateness seems very relevant, as the resource availability may vary widely in the region. Furthermore, a consultation with practitioners and other stakeholders at field level (e.g. parents, community members, children) might provide relevant information in the attempt to meet their needs and foster a sense of ownership too. In any case, 'quality' encompasses all the dimensions mentioned in this paper (e.g. teacher/caregiver-child interaction; community involvement; and so forth), hence much more than the physical environment and the materials solely.

#### **6.1.7 Programme management and programme philosophy**

The management of the ECCE service is a topic linked to the broader theme of governance, which deserves specific discussion in the section 6.2.7.

The importance of programme management for quality ECCE in Asia and the Pacific region is mentioned by Rao and Sun (2010), and SEAMEO-INNOTECH's (2011) report shows the

programme management standards for children 0-4 years old adopted by the countries as in the table here below.

**Table 3: Programme management standard for children 0-4 years old**

Countries	Staffing requirements	Pupil-teacher ratio	Time Period	Programme Evaluation
Brunei Darussalam		<u>3-5</u> 1:10		
Cambodia	none			
Indonesia 0-6			0-4 yrs old 120-180 min /wk <u>Kindergarten</u> : 150-180 min/ wk	There is programme supervision and evaluation once a semester.
Lao PDR	1	1: 20-25	School Year	
Malaysia	Number of child minders is in accordance to the child minder: children ratio 5-6: 1 teacher and 1 Student Management Assistant	<u>Existing</u> <u>0-3 yrs old</u> 1:5 <u>3-4 yrs old</u> 1:10 <u>5-6 yrs old</u> 1: 25 <u>For 2011</u> <u>0-1 yr old</u> 1:3 <u>1-3 yrs old</u> 1:5 <u>3-4 yrs old</u> 1:10	0-4 yrs old 3 - 10 hrs per day, depending on programme, and on the needs of parents <u>5-6 yrs old</u> 4 hours per week	Inspection is conducted once in every three months onto every childcare centres by state level officers. For MOE pre-schools, School inspectorate using Standard School Inspection Instrument.
Myanmar	Availability of active ECD Management Committee/ parents teacher committee	<u>3-5 yrs old</u> 1: 20	Once a Year beginning of the schooling	By using monitoring tool for region & state, township and School levels
Philippines	DSWS Admin Order 29 s 2004			
Thailand		1:16		BET OBEC ONESQA
Timor-Leste	none			
Vietnam		<u>3mo-3yrs</u> 1:8 <u>3-6 yrs old</u> 1:10		Self-inspection for Kindergarten Inspection by MOET

(SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2011:29)

Organisation and management is considered a quality standard in India (MoWCD India, 2012b), and the pre-primary operational framework of Bangladesh (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008) mentions an organisational and management framework to be defined, and gives guidelines for service delivery at field level. The ECCD policy framework (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009) also foresees implementation mechanisms and guidelines for day care centres to be probably finalised at a later stage (the framework is still a draft).

Seameo-Innotech & ARNEC's questionnaire (SEAMEO INNOTECH-ARNEC, October 2011) investigates programme philosophy in its survey; here the information collected from the countries will shed light on this topic. The Indian government mentions programme philosophy as part of ECCD quality standard 5 (MoWCD India, 2012b). In South Korea, obedience and respect are mentioned as important programme features (McMullen et al., 2005).

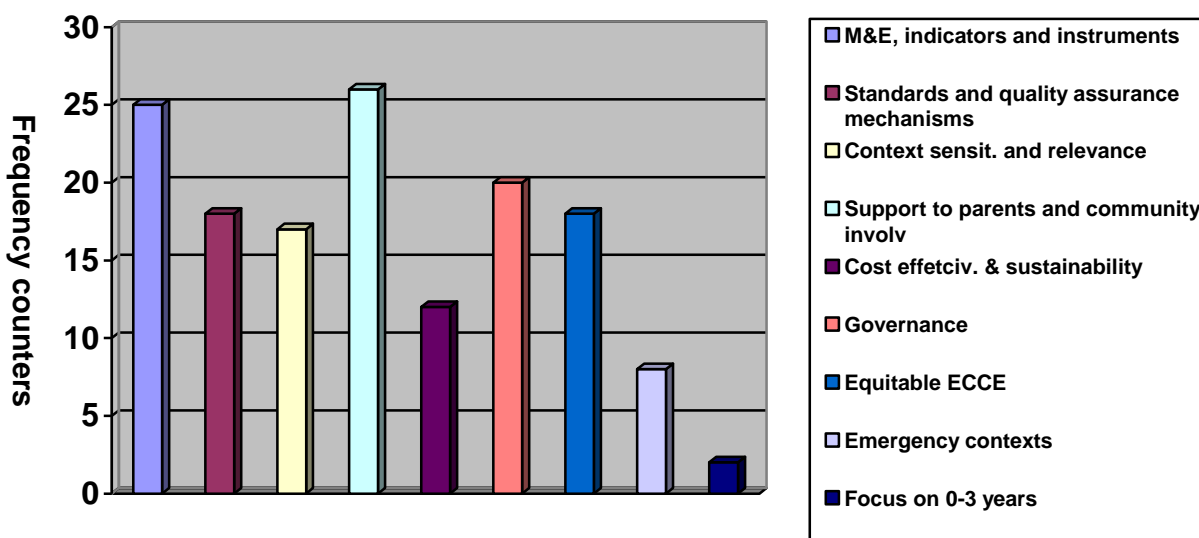
Finally, programme philosophy seems to be a (quality) variable that parents take into consideration when they choose a (pre)school, as in the case of Chinese and European American parents (Yamamoto and Li, 2012).



## 6.2 Elements of quality of ECCE at systems level

In this section, specific issues related to the quality of ECCE that emerged from the analysis of the regional literature have been discussed. Here below is a graph showing how frequently the literature analysed has dealt with each of the identified factors *in relation* to the quality of ECCE:

Figure 3: Frequency of the factors related to the quality of ECCE at systems level<sup>4</sup>



### 6.2.1 Rigorous and systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activity

There seems to be a need to perform regular, systematic and rigorous M&E of the programmes (ARNEC, 2011c; Vitiello and Kools, 2010; ARNEC, 2011b; ARNEC, 2011a), especially to assess their impact, and the short and longer effects on the child's development and learning (ARNEC, 2011c, Nores and Barnett, 2010). ARNEC (2011c) highlights the urgency of systematic and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation. The importance of supervision, monitoring and reporting of the activities is explicitly mentioned in the Bangladeshi operational framework for pre-primary education (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008), and in the Indian 's ECCE policy (MoWCD India, 2012a), where systematic M&E is foreseen to evaluate quality by using input, output and outcome indicators, and involving NGOs, professionals and institutions.

Rao and Sun (2010a) recommend monitoring and evaluating:

- ECD/ECCE policies
- Teacher and Programme Standards
- Child Development
- To refer to Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment
- To involve teachers/caregivers

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the literature was searched and selected based on the focus on 'quality of ECCE'. Therefore, ECCE/ECD in emergency and for very young children (0-3 years) have been investigated in relation to quality of ECCE only.

Regarding the purposes of the M&E activity, from the experience of Save the Children in Bangladesh, Hossain (2011) suggests assessing the effectiveness and outcomes of the programme with the aim of improving the intervention and ensuring quality, and in order to demonstrate the results to a wider audience for advocacy.

Therefore, this chapter deals with an important topic, acknowledged by ARNEC and SEAMEO (The SEAMEO-ARNEC ECCD Research team, 2011) within the category of 'data gathering'. In other words, what data are collected and how are key issues for the region. Moreover, UNESCO et al. (2012, p. 24) claims a '... lack of accurate, reliable, valid and disaggregated data.'

A definition from Rao seems to synthesise well the core characteristics of indicators and instruments (Rao, 2010):

'An easy to use measure which is aligned with a conceptual framework for defining and assessing quality can be used for programme improvement and decisions about which types of programmes should be scaled up, embedded in a monitoring and evaluation system.'

Indicators and instruments to evaluate the quality of ECCE are various. Some international tools are used in the region too, but locally adapted.

A main indicator widely utilised is the child-caregiver/teacher ratio (Zhai and Gao, 2008, Udommana, 2012; ARNEC, 2011b; Montie et al., 2006; Rao et al., 2003; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Quality of ECCE – and most of all the child-teacher/caregiver interaction - is certainly influenced by the number of children a teacher has to look after, but there are reservations on its comparative use, particularly between high-income and developing countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, the problem lies also in the insufficient number of trained teachers (UNESCO et al., 2012). However, some studies have proven that even in large class settings children can show development appropriate behaviours (Prochner, 2002; Tobin, 2005). According to ARNEC (2011b), the child/staff ratio should be defined depending on children's age and so as to allow for adult-child interaction. Moreover, the comparison over time of the child-teacher/caregiver ratio can be informative on the progress a country is making on quality ECCE. For example, in Korea the staff-child ratio is used for children aged three to six years, and group size is an indicator mentioned in the ECCE policy (OECD, 2004, Taguma et al., 2012).

UNESCO et al. (2012) refer to these indicators for ECCE in the region:

- Class size
- Child-to-teacher ratio
- Years of teaching experience

Rao (2010) refers to intensity and programme duration – used also in Bangladesh (MoPME, 2008) and Pakistan (Yousafzai, 2010) - as key quality indicators, and underlines the need to evaluate both structural and process quality. Fenech (2011:103) cites some processes:

- The quality of a child's experience
- Stimulating, developmentally appropriate programmes
- Warm and responsive interactions between staff and children
- Parental involvement

Amongst the instruments most used in the region, Rao (2010) recalls:

- The Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (Indian adaptation of ECERS) used in India and Bangladesh; adapted for Cambodia (CECERS)
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Version (ECERS-R)
- ECERS-E to evaluate the learning environment
- Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure (ECCOM) to evaluate dynamic teaching processes in different programmes

Here it is worth to mention the project of elaborating scales for the Asia Pacific region (ARNEC, 2011a).

To measure child outcomes, Rao and Sun (2010a) mention:

- Revised ability tests
- School readiness test
- Assessment tests
- Cross-National Tests of Achievement

Moreover, the retention rate in primary school, together with the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) are often used in relation to pre-primary education (Nath and Shahjamal, 2008). Here cognitive development can be also assessed. In evaluative studies conducted in Bangladesh, the researchers used (Moore et al., 2008):

- The WPPSI tests translated into the local language and with some items modified to assess cognitive development
- Performance tests in the main subjects
- Tracking the children in the following two years of primary school
- ECERS
- The Rubin play observational scale for socio-emotional development
- Action research to investigate the process of implementation and the teacher–child communication

The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale–Revised (ITERS–R; Harms et al, 2003) may be also used for centres that catered for children from birth to two-and-a-half years (Fenech, 2011).

In the last regional ECD Conference (ARNEC, 2011a), some countries reported on the scales and instruments used. For instance, in Pakistan the HOME tool is used to assess the quality of the home environment for young children, and the CDA (Care for Development Appraisal Tool for Assessing and Monitoring Child Development) is to be used by community-based workers to monitor and assess a child's appropriate development. Malaysia presented the development of WEBEASR (Web-based Ecological Assessment of School Readiness).

Reporting from the Save the Children's ECD programme in Bangladesh, Hossain cites the use of the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey to assess the parenting programme intervention. The KAP survey seems a very useful tool to understand the context and define quality taking into consideration caregivers', parents' and children's characteristics. ECERS was used to assess pre-primary school and particularly quality environment. Other variables assessed were: quality curriculum, quality instruction, quality assessment, engagement of family and community, performance tests, impact assessment (Hossain, 2011).

India reports its quality indicators and standards in the policy (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012b): child/adult ratio and number of children per class; and this list of tools to be adapted/adopted:

- Programme Evaluation Package by the World Bank
- The Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
- The Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University, Delhi
- The Accreditation Tools by branches of the Indian Association of Preschool Education Balwadi Environment Observation Rating Scale (BEORS), Mobile Crèches

Other measuring instruments from the region, for instance (Myers, 2006): Pakistan: CLEF (Teachers Resource Centre, 1998); Singapore: Pursuing Excellence at Kindergartens (PEAK) (Ministry of Education, Singapore, n.d.).

In Thailand and the Philippines, de Los Angeles Bantista (2004) underlines the development of tools consistent with the concept of child holistic development and integrated programmes, and refers particularly to a school readiness assessment tool that is being finalised.

In conclusion, amongst the indicators and instruments used to assess the quality of ECCE in the region, there are some which seem to be more frequently adopted (for example, as an indicator, the child-caregiver/teacher ratio, and as instruments, the various versions of the ECERS scale and performance/assessment tests). It is also worth considering the case of instruments locally developed, and to include process indicators; in fact a prevalence of quantitative indicators seems to be common (e.g teacher/caregiver-child ratio), albeit the need to consider process quality has been claimed.

Finally, as Wong et al. (2010) point out:

‘... many studies have examined the validity of quality rating instruments in Western countries, few studies of this kind have been conducted in Asia.’

Therefore, more research from the countries’ experiences can further assess the validity of the instruments used in the specific contexts.

### **6.2.3 Standards and quality assurance mechanisms**

There seems to be a need to clarify and find a common understanding in the terminology used among the countries, and particularly to define the concept of quality assurance framework and mechanisms (ARNEC, 2011b); regulation vs. accreditation; and data gathering, as evidenced by the questions raised by the participants to a regional forum (Udommana, 2012).

However, the need to develop ECCE quality standards and assurance mechanisms have been repeatedly advocated in the region (Kim and Umayahara, 2010; UNESCO, 2012; UNESCO et al., 2012). In more detail, ARNEC (2011b, 2011a) highlights the role of the states to ensure conformity of the ECCD programmes with the formal standards and accreditation principals - with the aim of promoting quality programmes - and the need to audit quality assurance.

As the report on South-East Asia explains (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), once the standards are set, they need a legal basis in order to enforce them and a regular activity of supervision; moreover, compliance with the standards should be rewarded, and in case of a centre reaching high quality levels, it should be formally recognised. On the contrary, revocation of a licence or closure can be inflicted as a penalty measure, and ECCD providers in difficult circumstances should receive special assistance to improve their quality level. The report finally adds that where the application of standards cannot be obtained – especially in some developing countries where access to ECCD services is far from universal - quality may be reached thanks to the collaboration with the civil society organisations, parents and community members, as happens in community-based pre-schools (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Effective collaboration with local organisations, parents and other community members may also foster ownership, sustainability and accountability.

Regarding the quality assurance indicators in ECCD, in addition to regulation and accreditation, the following have been included:

- Teacher qualifications and training (Udommana, 2012);
- Instruction
- (contextualised) Curriculum/early learning standards
- Assessment policies
- Supervisory and regulatory monitoring standards
- Learning environment
- Hygiene and health standards
- Physical structure
- Standards for programme (SEAMEO INNOTECH-ARNEC, October 2011)

As most countries have indicators and standards in their policies, differences exist in the levels of implementation and development, the qualifications of teachers and monitoring and evaluation procedures. Hence documenting good practices seems important in finding common points (ARNEC, 2011a).

In the SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2011) conference, ten countries from the region affirmed having some quality assurance mechanisms. In Indonesia, these levels of ECE standards have been developed:

- 1) Standard of Development Achievement
- 2) Standards for Teachers and Educators
- 3) Standard of Content, Process and Assessment
- 4) Standard for Means and Facility, Management and Funding

In Malaysia, the SKPM (or Standard Kualiti Pendidikan Malaysia) has a specific section on preschool regarding the development of the preschool students; the observation and checklist of the various components based on the National Preschool Curriculum are used (ARNEC and SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012). South Korea has committed to firm quality assurance mechanisms in its ECCE policy (OECD, 2004). Here below is another case of good practice from Singapore:

## Box 5: Quality standards and assurance mechanisms - Singapore

In Singapore, the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF) sets the **standards for quality care and learning practices** for infants, toddlers and nursery children. It identifies outcomes for learning and development, and gives guidelines for educators. Moreover, Singapore has developed the Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK), which includes:

- registration and regulation/licensing – to guarantee that pre-schools comply with minimum operational standards;
- annual self-appraisal;
- quality rating by external assessors.

Pre-schools that have met the above mentioned requirements may apply for **SPARK certification**; the **accreditation** differentiates the quality levels of pre-schools by means of a Quality Rating Scale. Every certification is valid for three years.

(adapted by author from MoE Singapore, n.a.)

Wong and Li (2010) examined the role of self-evaluation and external inspection as main elements of a quality assurance mechanism in Hong Kong kindergartens. They found that to have an effective quality assurance mechanism both external and internal evaluation should be included, so as to obtain school improvement and empowerment. They also consider process-oriented assessment appropriate to an early childhood context.

The Indian quality ECCE standards (MoWCD India, 2012b) represent the minimum for accreditation and grading. The procedures for certification are also specified. The ECCD policy (MoWCD India, 2012a) explains that those are basic quality standards and further details will be given to all services, hence they represent a regulatory framework.

## Box 6: Quality Standards - India

<p><b>Standard I: Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher/Adult- child interaction</li> <li>• Child - child</li> <li>• Child – environment/material</li> <li>• Staff- family Interaction</li> <li>• Intra staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard II: Health nutrition, personal care and routine</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health (check-up, first aid, immunisation, handling illness)</li> <li>• Nutrition</li> <li>• Hygiene</li> <li>• Habit formation</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard III: Protective Care and Safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult supervision</li> <li>• Socio/Emotional protection</li> <li>• Physical safety</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard IV: Infrastructure/ physical environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space, building, outdoors (size, ventilation, light, disabled friendly)</li> <li>• Aesthetics , cleanliness, green area</li> </ul>	<p><b>Standard VI: Children experiences and learning opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation</li> <li>• Encourage child to make choices and participate in play</li> <li>• Foster child's language and literacy abilities</li> <li>• Develop problem solving and mathematical abilities</li> <li>• Promote each child's physical abilities</li> <li>• Nurture development and maintenance of relationships</li> <li>• Cultivate enjoyment of and participation in expressive arts</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard VII: Assessment and outcome measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment methods</li> <li>• Assessment reporting</li> <li>• Facilitating development through assessment</li> <li>• Staff assessment and development</li> <li>• Programme assessment (staff meeting, parent feedback)</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard VIII: Managing to support quality System</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher education and on site professional</li> <li>• development, opportunity for capacity building at all</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety and approach</li> <li>• Water facility</li> <li>• Toilet facility</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard V: Organisation and Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmeme philosophy and methods</li> <li>• Documentation and records</li> <li>• Programmeme planning</li> <li>• Parent involvement</li> <li>• Financial management(fee, salary, fund allocation)</li> <li>• Staffing(adequacy, professional qualifications, professional development opportunities, reflective practitioners)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• administrative levels, career path for the staff</li> <li>• Monitoring and supportive supervision</li> <li>• Research</li> </ul>
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(MoWCD India, 2012b)

Finally, the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) were reviewed in the region by ARNEC to find indicators able to capture child development by age group in the region. The objective is to find a systematic way to evaluate child development as defined by each country, to apply it and to proceed further, based on the results of the evaluation (Miyahara and Meyers, 2008). The authors also affirm that the development of ELDS has enabled some countries of the region to formulate their own framework in the recent years, using their terminology and reflecting national perspectives and culture. At the same time, holistic child development was addressed and a more standardised Asian ELDS model was adopted based on validated indicators from the region. For instance, in Bangladesh the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs issued its ELDS (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010).

#### 6.2.4 Context-sensitiveness and the ‘relevance criterion’

During the last regional ECD conference, the need to find local definitions of quality ECCE which are responsive to local needs was reiterated along with the recognition of cultural and context diversity (ARNEC, 2011a, Horn, 2008. Addressing these issues can increase the community’s ownership too (Yousafzai, 2010).

The appropriateness regards the type of service provider, the indicators used (ARNEC, 2011c), and the quality assurance practices, keeping in mind the aim of child holistic development of the children living in *those* countries (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). The issue is important also because (pre)schools are key sites for the continuation and transmission of culture (Tobin, 2005), and as the author (2009) notes that some years later on in China and Japan, despite the influence of foreign concepts the uniqueness of each culture and system is maintained. Instead of applying universal standards, the author suggests finding definitions responsive to the people’s concerns and interests, by engaging in a dialogue with the local communities (Tobin, 2005).

The use of mother tongue in the ECCE services can represent a way of taking into account the local needs and cultures, and it is stressed in many reports (ARNEC, 2011b, Raver et al., 2010, Rao and Sun, 2010a, Yousafzai, 2010). This notwithstanding, from a survey conducted in South East Asian countries, it seems that only in a few cases resource books in different languages are available for children over three years (Udommana, 2012). This latter author (2012) also

calls for a further investigation on the support for ethnic minorities and indigenous communities in the region, and UNICEF and UNESCO (2012) suggest increasing the analysis and sharing of the local experiences on the topic.

To address context sensitiveness and relevance, flexible solutions are crucial. This means, for instance, supplementing home-based care and creating settings other than the Western centre-based model (ARNEC, 2011b). The centrality of the topic is proven by the next ECD regional conference, which will deal with the continuity of learning care between the home and the centre (ARNEC website).

Rao (2010) talks about contextual appropriateness as a key dimension of quality, along with flexible solutions. This acknowledges that centre-based programmes can offer a higher quality service compared to home-based ones (Rao and Sun, 2010a). However, the survey conducted in South East Asian countries showed that community-based programmes are present in all the participating countries (Udommana, 2012). Flexible solutions are also mentioned in the Indian ECCE policy (MoWCD India, 2012a), along with relevance to the child and her family as one of the quality standards (MoWCD India, 2012b). A report from the regional offices of UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) shows countries which include family- and home-based ECCE programmes in their national policies, and examples of non-formal education along with centre-based initiatives for children, literacy training for mothers and parent education programmes, and ECCE programmes attached to primary schools: in other words, a variety of solutions aiming to meet the local needs.

The Bangladeshi ECCD framework (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009) talks about culturally appropriate programmes. From a study conducted in some NGO-run preschools in a slum in Dhaka, the practical needs of the children and their families are to be taken into account for the service to be relevant, and for the programme to eventually succeed. These needs can be related to the proximity of the service, the direct and indirect costs (e.g. stationery and school uniforms), and the possibility for the children to receive a meal and spend some time in a safe and secure place (Profeta, 2010b).

### **6.2.5 Parental and community involvement, and support for parents**

This topic is cited in most of the literature analysed. It is evident that parents', families' and the communities' involvement is a shared priority, despite the prevalence of programmes and activities implemented in the region to promote it. The SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2012, p. 49) report on South East Asia claims a:

‘Lack of the involvement and awareness of parent, community and local leaders for the importance of ECD programmes necessary to provide and sustain quality child development.’

UNICEF and UNESCO (2012) also report a limited parental awareness.

The involvement of ECCE service personnel, policy makers, civil society organisations, parents and families (Kyoung, 2012, Yamamoto and Li, 2012), for the formulation and implementation of concerned policies is claimed by many parties (McMullen et al., 2005, MoPME Bangladesh, 2008, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010, Vennam et al., 2009, Profeta, 2010b). Moreover, parents' beliefs need to be considered as they influence the choice of sending the children to a preschool (Kyoung, 2012). Children in the preschools should be



listened too, through age-appropriate activities and tools, as to include their voice and respect their right to be active members of their world (see the Convention on the Right of the Child). Hence, definitions can be negotiated through broad-based consultations among stakeholders (ARNEC, 2011b), and engaging in a dialogue with the communities concerned (Tobin, 2005). In synthesis, parental and community involvement – especially when the child and her family at the centre (ARNEC, 2011c) - is key for the programme to be effective (ARNEC, 2011b). Consequently, parental involvement can be regarded as a key quality dimension to be measured (Rao et al., 2003, Rao and Sun, 2010a), that can promote local ownership (Raver et al., 2010) and local support (ARNEC, 2011b).

SEAMEO- INNOTECH (2012) foresees the involvement of these stakeholders in ECCD:

- International Organisations
- NGOs
- Academies
- Private Sector
- Religious Groups
- Parents/Family
- Community

Operationally, activities of awareness raising (ARNEC UNICEF, 2008) can be organised to promote the community's and parents' mobilisation for (quality) ECCE (ARNEC, 2011c), and also to foster evidence-based advocacy and ECCE policy development (Rao and Sun, 2010a). ARNEC (2011b) highlights the activities of parent education (especially to improve responsive care abilities) and those that address the need to receive support at home; these latter can also facilitate the transition from home to school/centre. Other studies have stressed the importance of responsive feeding and psychosocial stimulation that the children receive at home, from parents and other caregivers (Hamadani et al., 2006, Moore et al., 2006). Furthermore, the survey conducted in South East Asia (Udommana, 2012) confirmed the importance of parents support and services, home-based programmes, parent-teacher communication, and parent support of the child's learning. The Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and parent volunteers were types of parental participations common to all the countries surveyed.

The SEAMEO-INNOTECH report (2011) envisages parents' involvement in ECCD for the activities of:

- Monitoring/reporting
- Home-based learning
- Co-management of ECCD Centre
- As resource person/provider

Good practices from the region are, for example, the cascade model in Bangladesh, where stakeholders are involved at different levels (ARNEC, 2011c), and integrated ECCE programmes which offer parenting courses and support to parent education in Myanmar (ARNEC, 2011b). In the policy documents, the Bangladeshi MOPME (2008) mentions community participation, parental mobilisation and orientation sessions in increasing awareness; the ECCD framework (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009) cites community engagement, ownership and parent's support; and the ELDS (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2010) considers involving family as a key principal. Partnership with family and community is a quality standard in India (MoWCD India, 2012b), and in the Korean ECCE policy (OECD, 2004) parents participation is

encouraged. In Pakistan, the level of support given to mothers and the engagement with other caregivers such as fathers are considered features of the quality of the parenting programmes (Yousafzai, 2010). In the Philippines, in the Parent Effectiveness Service the Government gives support to all caregivers, particularly poor groups. It offers a variety of activities and training, and special efforts are made in involving fathers in ECCE (Rao and Sun, 2010a).

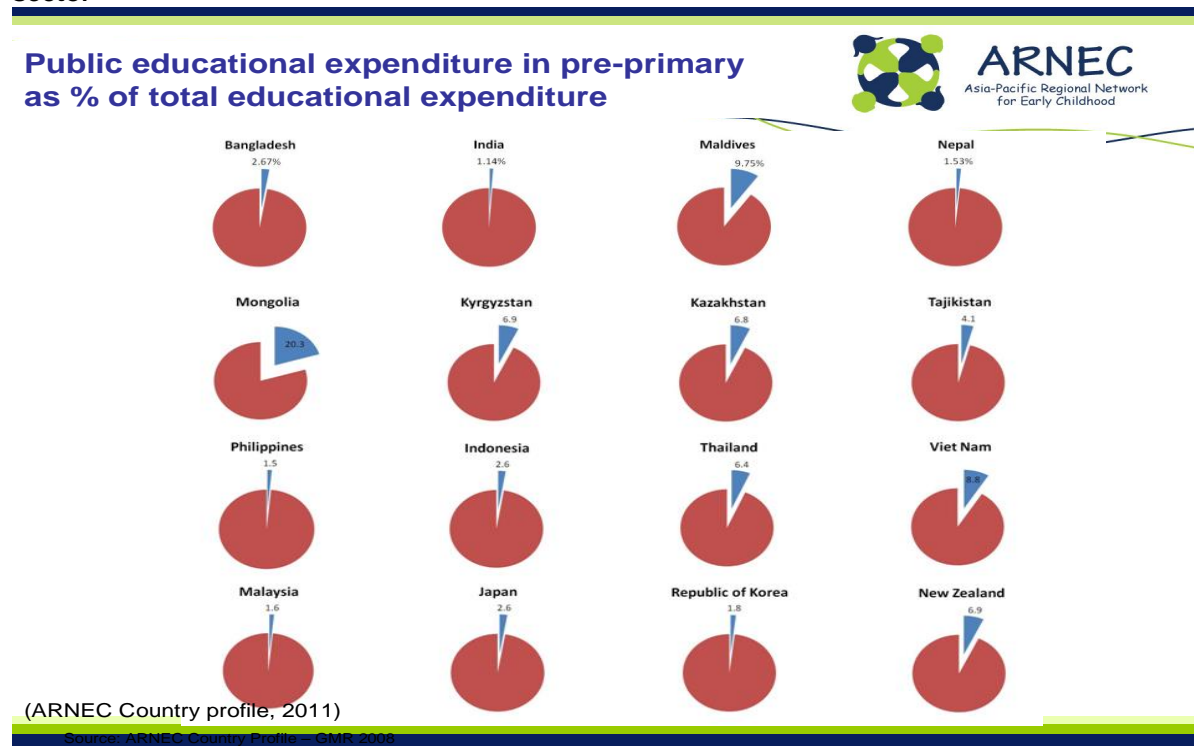
The Government of Singapore (MCYS, n.a.) engaged in an extensive consultative process to develop the EYDF, including experts, professionals, parents, practitioners and supervisors from a variety of child care organisations. Moreover, in the pillars of the EYDF there are: the Involved Family and the Engaged Community.

In conclusion, parental and community involvement here means the people's involvement in the planning, implementation and M&E of the ECCE service – including awareness raising and mobilisation activities – as a factor influencing the quality of ECCE. At the same time, the importance of parents' and other community members' participation in the definition of quality of ECCE has been stressed. Quality ECCE programmes should be able to support parents, with specific activities and *ad hoc* ECCE solutions for their children.

### 6.2.6 Cost-effectiveness and sustainability

The need to increase the budget allocated to ECCE is actual and widely shared (Horn, 2008; UNESCO et al., 2012). In fact, although the budget for the preschool sector has recently increased, the majority of the funds for education are still allocated to the primary years (Rao and Sun, 2010a; Kim and Umayahara, 2010), as shown in the mapping survey conducted by ARNEC:

**Figure 4: Level of expenditure in pre-primary compared with total education sector**



Therefore some studies (e.g. van Ravens on ECCE in Bangladesh) have advocated for an expansion of ECCE to reach the underserved by trying to demonstrate the affordability and cost-effectiveness of the project, and its (financial) sustainability. However, as UNESCO et al. (2012, p. 25) comment on the regional situation: '...costing of ECCE for reducing disparities ... continues to be a challenge...'


Here sustainability means the persistence over the years of the quality elements and standards reached, especially practitioners' practices with the children, and 'whether or not it will be possible to maintain this level of programme quality when it is scaled up' (Rao, 2010). In this respect, rigorous M&E is recommended for the sustainability of existing quality programmes and their eventual adaptation and replication (ARNEC, 2011c). Moreover, it has been pointed out that sustainability can be a problem for some developing countries of the Southeast region where quality assurance relies heavily on foreign aid (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011, Rao, 2010, Horn, 2008). Finally, in the last ECD conference (ARNEC, 2011a) environmental sustainability was recommended as a consideration too (ARNEC, 2011a).

#### **6.2.7 Governance of ECCE: coordination, integration and continuity**

Topical issues, not only in the region but also in the international scenario, and governance of ECCE/ECD seems particularly relevant for the need of coordination, integration and cooperation between the various agencies involved - including ministries, NGOs, international organisations and the private sector (Gwang-Jo and Mami, 2010, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009, MoPME Bangladesh, 2008, UNESCO et al., 2012, ARNEC, 2011a) - and encompassing the education, health, nutrition, safety and child protection sectors (Vennam et al., 2009, Rao and Sun, 2010b, ARNEC, 2011a). Here below is a table showing the ministries involved in ECCD in the South Asia, from the mapping survey conducted by ARNEC in 2012 (Lata, 2012):

**Table 4: Ministries involved in ECCD**

## Ministerial Responsibilities and Coordination



**ARNEC**  
Asia-Pacific Regional Network  
for Early Childhood

(ARNEC Mapping Survey, 2012)

	Ministry of Education	Ministry Child Development and Women Affairs	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Social Welfare	Ministry of Social Justice	Ministry of Rural Development	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Ministry of Labour	Ministry of Human Resource Development
Bangladesh	Primary and Mass Education (5-		Health and Family Welfare (<5)						
Bhutan									
Sri Lanka		with Ministry of Provincial Councils							
India			Health and Family Welfare						
Nepal						Local Development			
Pakistan	Directorate of Education			Social Welfare and Women's Development					
			Responsible Ministry			Associated Ministries			

(Lata, 2012)

This integration and coordination are aimed at the continuity and consistency of the child's developmental path from 0 to 8 years (ARNEC, 2011c; Horn, 2008; MoWCD India, 2012a). Moreover, there should also be some coordination and integration of the ECD policies, as part of a concerted pro-poor strategy (UNESCO, 2006a; OECD, 2001; Horn, 2008).

While many countries have taken important steps forward in the direction of integrated ECCE programmes (UNESCO et al., 2012), coordination remains a challenge in the region (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), and fragmentation, overlapping and dispersion of responsibilities are actual risks (Horn, 2008, Plan Bangladesh, 2008, Kim and Umayahara, 2010; Rao and Sun, 2010a). Another actual issue is the decentralisation of ECCE services without sufficient resources allocated and capacity building at the field level (Kim and Umayahara, 2010). Moreover, the continuity of the commitment and notably the consistency of the level of investment of the state and non-state actor (ARNEC UNICEF, 2008) represent a main enabling factor for quality ECCE (ARNEC, 2011b).

In the case of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) for the provision of ECCE services, issues of quality may arise in poorly regulated services. On the other hand, the presence of the private sector can allow for more parental choice and efficiency; but disadvantaged children may be excluded (Kim and Umayahara, 2010). Here it seems crucial to define the responsibilities of all the actors for decision making and delivery (Rao and Sun, 2010a), and to maintain the

regulatory role of the state (Muñoz, 2012, Rao et al., 2003), as the official report from South-East Asia points out:

‘Most countries in Southeast Asia rely on the private sector to provide childcare and pre-primary education to children 0-6 years old. Unfortunately, not all countries have a system for private childcare and preschools to comply with quality standards.’

(SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

### 6.2.8 Equitable access to quality ECCE and inclusive practices

Despite a general increase of ECCE provision in the region - see for example the pre-primary gross enrolment rate from 1990 to 2009 (UNESCO et al., 2012) - there is still a situation of unequal access ((Kim and Umayahara, 2010; UNESCO, 2011a, UNESCO, 2011b; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). The main factor impeding equitable access to quality ECCE seems to be poverty (UNESCO et al., 2012), hence the children who could benefit more from ECCE are *de facto* largely excluded (Rao and Sun, 2010a).

The availability of relevant information (e.g. disaggregated data) would help target the communities most in need in the first place, and ECCE interventions could address the inequalities (Rao and Sun, 2010a). Kim (2010) points out that recently the focus was on efficiency more than equity, and he underlines the role of (good) governance to increase equitable access to quality education.

Differences in the provision of quality ECCE between urban and rural areas is widely acknowledged in the region (Zhai and Gao, 2008, ARNEC UNICEF, 2008). For instance, in China, inequities were found between geographical areas – e.g. in the rural area the level of qualifications of the teachers is usually lower – and the types of provider (Zhai and Gao, 2008). In India, the quality of education provided by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is variable between and within states (Rao, 2010), and significant differences are also between private and public preschools, which may increase the pre-existing economic and geographical inequalities of the children (Vennam et al., 2009). Universal access to ECCE is declared in the policies, for instance in Bangladesh and India (MoPME Bangladesh, 2008, MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009, MoWCD India, 2012a).

However, in the effort to expand access, it should take into account the risk that a quick and wide increase in access might compromise the levels of quality already reached, as Rao and Sun (2010, p....) warn:

‘Governments should ensure that an increase in provision of ECCE is not associated with a decrease in the quality of the services provided.’

Gender equity can also be addressed in the ECCE programmes (UNESCO et al., 2012, Rao and Sun, 2010a), starting from the equal inclusion of boys and girls<sup>5</sup> (Raver et al., 2010), and going beyond it by dealing with diversity in treatment and socialisation (UNESCO et al., 2012). Raver et al. (2010) support the purposeful employment of female staff in ECCE services to empower women and pursue gender equality, and suggest that empowerment of mothers and caregivers can be a feature of a quality ECCE programme (Raver et al., 2010). From Pakistani experiences, Yousafzai (2010) confirms the importance of addressing gender equality and the inclusion of all families.

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<sup>5</sup> Here caution on the interpretation of the disaggregated data should be used

Equitable ECCE also means the inclusion of children with disabilities, a priority issue for quality ECCE in the region, from the policy level (ARNEC, 2011b, ARNEC, 2011a). Moreover, participating in ECCE programmes can contribute positively to the identification, treatment, and prevention of the handicaps (Rao and Sun, 2010).

According to de Los Angeles-Bantista (2004), inclusive practices should be part of the curriculum. In the survey conducted in the South-East region, Udommana (2012) found issues regarding inclusion in:

- National Plans of Action for Children
- ECCD guidelines
- Teacher training material
- Teaching-learning practices

The author also affirmed that the majority of the countries had some types of support for children with disabilities (Ibid.). The inclusion of children with a disability is mentioned in the Indian and Bangladeshi policies (MoWCA Bangladesh, 2009, MoWCD India, 2012b), and the Korean ECCE policy (OECD, 2004) intends to target children with disadvantaged backgrounds and with special needs.

Therefore, there is a need to prioritise underprivileged children (ARNEC, 2011b, UNESCO et al., 2012, Rao and Sun, 2010a, ARNEC, 2011a), to promote inclusive practices in the ECCE centres and pre-schools (and to document the experiences), and to support the implementation of the related policies.

### **6.2.9 Quality ECCE/ECD in emergency contexts**

Due to the vast areas exposed to natural and manmade disasters, this is a topical issue in the region and many countries are paying significant attention to this issue (Cologon and Hayden, 2010; The SEAMEO-ARNEC ECCD Research team, 2011; Udommana, 2012; Tran, 2011; UNICEF, 2011; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Therefore the sharing of lessons-learned and good practices from experiences in the region can be very useful and form a knowledge base to define standards of quality ECCE/ECD in emergency contexts.

In the e-discussion organised by ARNEC on ECD in emergency (Cologon and Hayden, 2010), seven major issues were raised during the e-discussion:

- 1) Advocacy and awareness raising
- 2) Integration
- 3) Parent participation
- 4) Community efficacy; involving all the community is key
- 5) Mobilising resources
- 6) Addressing the emergency – before, during and after
- 7) Education and training

Moreover, the participants highlighted the need to develop relevant policies before an emergency, which specify strategies and roles of the communities.

In the last ECD conference (ARNEC, 2011a), representatives from Sri Lanka expressed these concerns and recommendations:

- The lack of institutional mechanisms for communication and cooperation between ECD and disaster risk management (DRM)
- The need to concentrate on how to continue learning in these circumstances
- How to target specifically young children with disabilities and women

From Australia, Cologon and Hayden proposed a bilateral approach including the physical (e.g. infrastructure) and the social (e.g. attitudes, inclusion).

Among the lessons learned and shared were:

- Importance to locally adapt tools and finding appropriate indicators
- Involving all the community, especially indigenous groups
- The importance of community ownership to build trust
- Multi-sectoral networking
- Development of capacity assessment tools on ECCD in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) (in some cases by adapting international indicators, such as the assessment tool formulated by the Macquarie University in Australia, and adapted to the Bangladeshi context).

To respond to the need for integration of ECD in Disaster Risk Reduction interventions outlined above (UNICEF, 2011; Rao and Sun, 2010a; ARNEC, 2011a), Hayden and Cologon (2011) developed a guidebook. Here the authors consider it crucial to have an informed community, and therefore the involvement of the community and particularly the children is considered an integral part of the DRR and recovery process. They also give particular attention to the social variables (as mentioned above) and highlight community level activities for young children. A thorough needs assessment at the community level is also fundamental.

The activities that can be implemented after the need assessment include, among others (Hayden et al., 2010):

- Art and health play-based therapy
- Child friendly spaces (CFS)
- Activities in the classroom
- Psycho-social interventions

From UNICEF's (2011) experience in Central Asia and Caucasus, a strategic framework to integrate ECD activities with DRR interventions comprises these eight actions:

1. Outreach to young children not having access to preschools
2. Combine expertise in both disaster risk reduction and ECD
3. Invest in systematic capacity building
4. Emphasise the family connection
5. Highlight young children's vulnerability
6. Define criteria for a safe pre-school and community based child care centre
7. Develop criteria for good practices
8. Promote participation and coordination at implementation level

The report also shows the example of Plan International in the Philippines, where DRR was integrated into early childhood programmes through the drama activities and focus group

discussions, safe school campaigns and play-based psycho-social coping exercises (UNICEF, 2011).

Finally, the child friendly spaces (CFSs) represent a first response to the needs of children in emergency and an entry point to work with the concerned communities. They aim to respond to the children's needs of protection, psychosocial well-being, and (non-formal) education, and are considered transitional structures (Global Education Cluster et al., 2011).

#### **6.2.10 Focus on 0-3 years old children: A regional priority**

The last ECD regional conference and other recent reports highlighted the need to focus on the 0-3 age group (Kim and Umayahara, 2010; ARNEC, 2011a; Udommana, 2012), as these are the years when the greatest brain development occurs and therefore the quality of ECD/ECCE received can play a significant role in the child's development. This notwithstanding is an area still largely neglected by development funds.

The ECD programmes for young children increasingly include nutrition and early stimulation (Hamadani et al., 2006; Moore et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2011a) as crucial components, and especially nutrition has become a priority sector of future development cooperation (see Copenhagen consensus).

Hence it can be argued that quality ECD/ECCE should target this age group, and with a focus on nutritional needs and early stimulation, but always looking at child development in a holistic manner.



## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1 Elements to draft a conceptual framework of quality ECCE in the Asia-Pacific Region

In this paper, elements considered in the literature reviewed on the quality of ECCE in the region have been identified and analysed. The findings have been organised in a scheme, (Figure 5) in the attempt to provide a useable knowledge-base for the formulation of regional framework(s) on the quality of ECCE. The two main categories of 'ECCE quality dimensions at the child and programme level' and 'Factors related to the quality of ECCE at systems level' have been maintained.

**Figure 5: Elements for conceptual framework(s) on quality of ECCE in the Asia-Pacific region**

FACTORS OF QUALITY OF ECCE AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL		
Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system	Governance of ECD/ECCE Participation and engagement level by the concerned agencies and level of consistency, continuity and integration	Budget allocation for ECD/ECCE
The 'equality' criterion of quality ECCE	<b>DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY OF ECCE AT CHILD &amp; PROGRAMME LEVEL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic develop. goals</li> <li>• Learning outcomes &amp; assess. systems</li> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Teacher/caregiver training &amp; status</li> <li>• Teaching &amp; learning approaches</li> <li>• Physical environment &amp; other resources</li> <li>• Programme management</li> <li>• Programme philosophy</li> </ul>	Relevance to the context and local needs
Inclusive ECD/ECCE		Linkage/partnership with parents and the local community
ECCE/ECD in emergency contexts		Attention to 0-3 year old children

Below are some discussion points and recommendations pertinent to the dimensions and factors identified.

**A. At the child and programme level, within the quality dimensions identified there are some characteristics which are consistent with the international definitions outlined in chapter 5, while others have aspects unique to the Asia Pacific region. The main points are briefly summarised here below:**

1. The concept of **holistic child development** is widely acknowledged by the Asia Pacific countries, consistent with the international literature. However, the number of domains considered and the terminology used may vary, and in particular the importance given to each dimension may be different by country. For example, a significant part of the literature considered has focused on cognitive development, whereas other domains such as, the socio-emotional and creative domains have been less analysed. This may be due to the issue of transition to primary school, and/or with the aim of tackling situations of unsatisfactory performance in core competencies at primary level. In any case, this multifaceted scenario shows the importance of understanding the reasons in each context - particularly the socio-cultural and economic context. Furthermore, an increased attention on interventions in the field of nutrition, early stimulation and responsive feeding, especially for very young children (Hamadani et al., 2006; UNESCO et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2006), seems to show a focus on health. One question may be whether the education component of ECD/ECCE will be given equal attention. In conclusion, a further effort to address child development holistically and in an integrated manner is recommended, so as to assure consistency between policies, implementation and research.

2. **Learning outcomes** define desired results from the preschool experience, conceived mainly as quality targets (Taguma et al., 2012). While in some cases the desired outcomes are defined in a broad sense, at the level of the child, the programme, the educator, the family and the community (MCYS, n.a.), it seems that in many other cases attention is paid to children's performance (achievements) but not to the learning experience, which might compromise the uniqueness of the preschool experience. In conclusion, if learning outcomes can be usefully included in a quality framework, these questions should be addressed:

'... should programmes that produce such results be deemed to be of high quality simply because they produce those outcomes? Should RESULTS (particularly cognitive learning and test scores) be accepted as THE indicator of quality? Is it possible that programmes can be judged as of good quality and NOT produce the desired results? Conversely, is it possible that desired outcomes can be obtained in programs that might not be considered, by other measures, of good quality.'

(Myers, 2006:15)

3. The **systems to assess child's learning** used in the region are several (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011), and in general it seems particularly noteworthy when the assessment is supposed to be formative and continuous, and aims to meet children's development needs (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012a), as well as improving the quality of education. Anyhow, it is recommended that the assessment looks at the whole learning experience – instead of focusing on the child's achievements only – and takes into consideration the uniqueness of the pre-primary school, which differs from the primary school. Finally, consistency between holistic development, learning goals and the assessment systems should be addressed further.

4. The need to focus on **transition to primary schools** seems to be common to some countries in Asia Pacific - especially those with a high number of children out of school in the primary years - and the above mentioned 'risk of schoolification' is present in some studies conducted in the region.

5. The **curriculum** is a key element of quality (see for instance curriculum centred ECCE policy in Korea), and a variety of curricula are in use in the region. Whilst common elements have

been identified within the region, the flexibility of the content and its application has been also highlighted. Moreover, curricular continuity between preschool and primary school, the relation between the written and enacted curriculum, and the relevance to the child's life has been also emphasised. Possible divergences between the curriculum and the socio-cultural context (especially parents' beliefs) have been presented.

**6. Teacher/caregiver training and status** represent a determining dimension of quality of ECCE, considered in much of the literature analysed. This category encompasses pre- and in-service training, and continuous professional development, which should be coherently linked. Training approaches and elements of training for teachers have been mentioned, which can be usefully referred to in the formulation of the regional frameworks: for instance the types of providers (government, NGOs, or private institutions); the approaches (participatory, experiential, referring to DAP) and consistency with the teaching approaches applied with the children; continuity between pre-service and in-service training; consistency with the concept of holistic development; adoption of the cascade model. Furthermore, the importance of also considering other staff training and status has been pointed out, and particularly the training for the centre's leadership seems relevant. There are differences in duration and types of training, educational level and qualification required between and within the countries, and significant disparities especially between the urban and rural areas. It is therefore recommended addressing these disparities in ways appropriate to each context, and to consider the need for further harmonisation between the countries.

Finally, more attention to the concept of holistic development and to the pedagogical process in training is also suggested.

**7. Teaching and learning approaches** are factors that have often been neglected in studies on the quality of education (Alexander, 2008), although they can say a great deal on what happens in the classroom and how the child learns. In the region, there seems to be a call to focus on the teacher/caregiver-child interaction, and some features such as experiential learning, the child-centred approach, play-based and child-friendly teaching and learning are highlighted. Context-appropriateness of some approaches such as the child-centred approach is discussed. In this regard, national consultations among stakeholders at different levels – particularly at field level - can be very informative and help find definitions which are locally relevant, and that can be synthesised regionally.

**8. Regarding the physical environment and other resources**, in some cases indications are given (mainly on the physical structures), but the lack of assurance mechanisms is claimed. Again context and particularly cultural appropriateness are evoked, along with the need to be responsive to children's needs, e.g. an environment that can offer social interactions, group activities, and offer adequate outdoor/indoor space for physical activities. Some documents underline the concept of development appropriate material, and/or refer to the child-centred approach to define the physical environment. A recommendation here is to include multiple variables to define and measure the quality of ECCE - as this paper has tried to do - and therefore avoiding the risk of equating quality with physical/material resources.

**9. Organisation and management** is considered a quality dimension and standards or/and frameworks are defined in some countries. However, this dimension is little discussed in the literature analysed. It is suggested that more importance is given to this dimension in the quality frameworks, and to further investigate the good practices in the region.

10. **Programme philosophy** is mentioned several times in the literature analysed. It is part of the quality standards in some countries and can be a variable that parents take into account when choosing a (pre)school. Therefore, it is an element of quality which should not be overlooked when elaborating regional framework(s).

11. In general, the literature on the Asia Pacific region analysed seems to consistently support **integrated programmes, involvement of the local community and support for parents**. This integration of sectors seems highly complex in practice and a situation of fragmentation is claimed, as explained better in the section below on quality at systems level.

12. Finally, a lack of attention to the **process of defining quality** is reported in some international literature, and the issue seems to apply to the regional context too. Particularly, it is recommended that various stakeholders be involved in the process, from the field to the central level, and professionals from different sectors in planning, consultation and decision making fora. This, with the aim of formulating *relevant* definitions of quality, and to foster ownership and accountability.

**B. As to the factor related to the quality of ECCE at systems level, the following conclusions can be drawn:**

#### **1. Need for a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system**

Rigorous and regular M&E is needed to assess the programmes, its impact and the short and longer effects on child development and learning. Impact evaluation seems particularly current and relevant.

The quality of ECCE should be evaluated by using a variety of indicators and involving different stakeholders. The opportunity to combine external and internal assessment as part of the quality assurance mechanism seems an important point, which can also enhance practitioners' and parents' ownership, and promote accountability. A monitoring and evaluation system is supposed to be:

- Able to collect the relevant information
- Coherently linked to the implementation of the quality frameworks and concerned policies
- Supported by coordination and continuity amongst ECCE services and concerned agencies, ministries and non-state actors

Furthermore, the data gathered through assessment and inspections should be able to inform all stakeholders, especially practitioners so as to allow for teaching and learning practices' improvements and eventually quality enhancement.

The collection of relevant, accurate and reliable data was mentioned as a priority in the region. Hence, the need to identify indicators and instruments relevant for the region which are coherent with the conceptual frameworks on quality and particularly with the concept of child holistic development. Some indicators are commonly used, such as the child-caregiver/teacher ratio (with some reservations on its comparative use), a number of international instruments have been locally adapted (e.g. ECERS), and other tools have been nationally developed. The regional literature seems to confirm the use of the international scales (e.g. ECERS) - with local adaptations - but also provides examples of locally developed instruments. The use of process indicators is encouraged too. Hence, there seems to be a dearth of knowledge which can inform

the elaboration of regional conceptual frameworks. Internal evaluation and teacher's self-evaluation are mentioned in the regional literature too, although it is not clear how and if it is implemented.

There is a need to define regional standards and regulatory frameworks. (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Moreover, quality assurance mechanisms supported by appropriate legal bases at a national level seem to be insufficiently established. Here, the role of the state to guarantee conformity of the ECCD services with the standards has been emphasised. Also, there seems to be a need to find a common understanding of the relevant terminology at regional level. A noteworthy case is represented by the ELDS, already developed by many countries. Finally, it can be added that caution should be used in the definition and application of the standards, due to the variability of local circumstances between and within countries, and anyway to think beyond regulations and minimum standards (Arnold, Athens). Moreover, contradictions may arise between the intention to respect context diversity and the project of defining regional standards.

## **2. Budget allocation for ECD/ECCE**

Along with the need to increase the budget allocated to ECCE, there is also a need to assess the costs of sustaining the quality of ECCE and to scale-up the good practices, in order to reach the underserved and reduce disparities. The search and piloting of innovative financial schemes is very current (e.g. a project of Corporate Social Responsibility from Indonesia presented in the last ECD Conference, Jakarta 2012); here it is recommended clarifying the role of the state to ensure minimum levels of quality and equitable access, as better explained in the point 5 below on the Governance of ECCE.

## **3. Relevance to the context and local needs**

There seems to be a widely recognised significance of the context, particularly in respect to culture and responsiveness to local needs. Hence flexible solutions regarding, for example, the type of service (e.g. centre-based or community based) are highlighted, along with relevance to the child and her family. Related to this latter point, there is the issue on the mother tongue as language of instruction/care, which seems to be inadequately addressed. However, this statement from the ongoing discussions on the educational goals post-2015 applies well to this situation too:

‘... combining universal aspirations and country-determined targets, and setting context-relevant goals... These may result in greater global consensus, desirable in itself, but may also reduce the political intelligibility and appeal of any future goals, rendering them relatively limited in terms of influence.’

(Burnett and Felsman, 2012)

## **4. Linkage/partnership with parents and the local community**

The importance of the involvement of the families and the larger community in ECCE programmes is reiterated, demonstrating that this represents a key dimension of quality in the region. However, a more effective partnership with families and communities is recommended, which can also improve the community's ownership and mobilisation for an increased quality of the ECCE services. Therefore, a feature of ‘quality’ of ECCE might be the level of participation of the families and community members to the negotiations on quality.

Limited parental awareness of the concept of child holistic development was also recognised as a challenge, as well as the need to include support for parents (mothers and fathers) in the

ECCE interventions; parenting courses and parental education (especially to improve responsive care abilities) are examples.

### **5. Governance of ECD/ECCE. Participation and engagement level by the concerned agencies and level of consistency, continuity and integration**

Continuity and consistency of ECCE/ECD policies and services (practices) was noted also during the literature review, especially between relevant agencies and the sectors involved (especially in the case of integrated programmes). Continuity between home and ECCE service, and from preschool to primary schools has been stressed to ensure quality, otherwise defined as ‘a seamless curriculum from preschool through to the early grades’ (ARNEC, 2011a). Continuity of Governments’ and other providers’ commitment is also crucial, especially to ensure sustainability. Consistency between the dimensions of quality is also recommended, notably between curriculum, teaching practices, teacher training and assessment systems.

The issue of the governance of ECCE affects all levels, from the management and leadership at school/ECCE service level, to the Ministry level (from micro to macro level). Whilst some countries still have to develop specific policies and legal bases, a main complexity remains their implementation, where fragmentation and overlapping often occur. Here issues of coordination and collaboration between concerned governmental and non-governmental actors are pivotal.

Finally, in a scenario of multiple providers, it is recommended defining the regulatory role of the state to ensure quality of ECCE in all the services and equitable access to quality ECCE.

### **6. The ‘equality’ criterion of quality ECCE**

Albeit the enrolment in pre-primary programmes has increased in the recent years, there is still unequal access to quality ECCE. The underprivileged children, who could benefit more from participating in the ECCE services, are often excluded. Differences exist also between and across countries, and especially between urban and rural areas. Therefore ‘equitability’ can be considered a criterion of quality. Moreover, it is very important to implement strategies to prioritise and target the underprivileged children, and to monitor this with appropriate disaggregated data.

### **7. Inclusive ECD/ECCE**

Inclusion is also a regional issue, along with respect for diversity. Inclusive policies and practices are encouraged, especially for children with disabilities. However, policies and practices should address all excluded groups (e.g. gender, minority groups), not only people with disabilities. Hence, equal inclusion of boys and girls should be guaranteed, and gender equality pursued in the ECCE programmes. Moreover, the purposeful inclusion of mothers and caregivers in ECD/ECCE programmes can be a way of fostering their empowerment. The use of the mother tongue in the ECCE service can be also a way of pursuing the inclusion of minority groups. Finally, there seems to be a need to derive viable solutions from the policies and conceptual frameworks, which take into account the context and resources available, both financial and human.

### **8. ECCE/ECD in emergency**

ECCE/ECD in emergency contexts is certainly a relevant topic in a region largely exposed to natural disasters. It has been claimed that ECD should be integrated with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies and programmes. Moreover, sharing good practices and lessons learned from the region is encouraged, which can usefully inform the elaboration of regional conceptual frameworks. The role of the community is crucial; hence it should be involved in all

the phases and kept informed, including the children. Other vulnerable subjects such as women and people with disabilities should be targeted specifically. Activities for children have been cited, including the child friendly spaces (CFSs), and the need to investigate how to continue learning in those situations has been raised.

### **9. Attention to 0-3 year children**

Finally, although it is recommended that the ECD/ECCE policies address children from 0-8 years (Udommana 2012, Rao in Britto, etc) focus on the neglected segment of 0-3 years is highlighted. Here nutrition and early stimulation in ECD services seem to be essential components.

### **7.2 Issues to be further investigated**

Below are some points that have been inadequately addressed by the literature analysed and therefore may deserve further investigation:

1. The collection of relevant and disaggregated data should be increased, and the information should be made available to concerned stakeholders in a timely manner.
2. An analysis of the ecological system (as in the conceptual frameworks in Annex 2 and 3) may provide insights for local definitions of the quality of ECCE in the region, and particularly in identifying enabling environments and bottlenecks.
3. There seems to be a gap in the research regarding the definitions of quality ECCE from practitioners', families', field officers' and children's viewpoints. Their definitions can contribute to the elaboration of national frameworks negotiated amongst stakeholders, and can eventually validate identified dimensions, indicators and standards.
4. In more detail, teachers' beliefs and behaviours should be further investigated, especially in relation to the implementation of the curriculum, and the teaching and learning practices.
5. Further research on the instruments used (particularly international tools) from the specific experiences in the countries can shed light on their validity in different contexts.
6. Organisation and management might be further investigated, perhaps in connection with to the broader issue of governance.
7. More information regarding the processes of defining quality adopted, as well as studying ways to include relevant process indicators, may help defining comprehensive regional frameworks on quality of ECCE.
8. Finally, this paper was an attempt to draw elements for conceptual frameworks of quality ECCE in the Asia Pacific region, from an analysis of a section of the literature available. Subsequent consultations with local stakeholders, especially practitioners, implementers at different levels, and representatives of parents and communities are recommended, with the hope to make this contribution relevant to the people engaged in the education and care of the Asian Pacific children.

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# Annexure

## Annex 1 List of documents analysed on quality of ECCE in the Asia Pacific region

1	ABOUD, F. E. & HOSSAIN, K. 2010. The impact of preprimary school on primary school achievement in Bangladesh. <i>Early Childhood Research Quarterly</i> , In Press.
2	Armeccin, G., Behrman, J., Duazo, P., Ghuman, S., Gultiano, S., & King, E., et al. (2006). Early childhood development through an integrated program: Evidence from the Philippines. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3922. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
3	ARNEC 2011b. Quality Early Childhood Matters: Making a Critical Investment for a Country's Future. Booklet
4	ARNEC 2011c. Special Edition: Noteworthy Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Practices 2010. <i>ARNEC Connections. Working together for early childhood.</i>
5	ARNEC. 2011. Asia Pacific Regional Conference on ECD. Early Experiences matter: Policies and Practices for Ensuring Holistic Development for Very Young Children. In: NTUC CENTRE, ed., 2011a Singapore, ARNEC SEED Institute,
6	COLOGON, K. & HAYDEN, J. 2010. Perspectives on ECD in Emergency in the Asia Pacific Region. In: ARNEC (ed.) <i>SYNOPSIS OF ARNEC EDISCUSSION</i>
7	De Los Angeles Bantista, F, Early childhood care and education in South-East Asia: Working for access, quality and inclusion in Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam, UNESCO BANGKOK 2004.
8	KIM G. & Umayahara, U. 2010. Early Childhood Care and Education: Building the Foundation for Lifelong Learning and the Future of the Nations of Asia and the Pacific. <i>International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy</i> by Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 4, 1-13.
9	Hamadani, J. D. et al. (2006), Psychosocial stimulation improves the development of undernourished children in rural Bangladesh. <i>Journal of nutrition</i>
10	Hayden, J. & Cologon, K. (2011) Disaster Risk Reduction and Young Children. Assessing Needs at the Community level. A Guidebook for the Asia-Pacific region
11	Hayden, J., Dunn, R., & Cologon, K. (2010) Early Childhood Care and Development in Emergency Situations: An Annotated Bibliography. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), The Early Childhood in Emergencies Working Group (EEWG), Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD).
12	Horn R (2008), Early Childhood Policy. Getting it right. Lessons learned in Asia
13	Hossain, K (2011) Bangladesh ECD Programs – SUCCEED an early learning for school success program. In Britto...
14	IES (Institute of Education Sciences) (2002) Effects of Preschool Curriculum Programs on School Readiness
15	KYOUNG, J. K. 2012. Expanding the Current Definition of Program Quality: Exploring Parents' Notions of What Makes a Good Program. <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education</i> , 6.
16	M. N. C. Wong a , X. Christine Wang b & Hui Li Accountability and Quality in Early Childhood Education: Perspectives From Asia
17	MCMULLEN, & others, P.-Y. 2005. Comparing beliefs about appropriate practice among early childhood education and care professionals from the U.S., China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey. <i>Early Childhood Research Quarterly</i> , 20, 451-464.
18	MCYS (2011) Early years development framework (EYDF)
19	MCYS. And CDN (n.a.) Quality Promotion and Good Practices
20	MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT 2012a. National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2012. Draft Government of India.
21	MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT 2012b. Quality Standards for ECCE (Draft). Government of India.
22	Miyahara, J and Meyers, C (2008) Early Learning and Development Standards in East Asia and the Pacific: Experiences from the eight countries (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i>
23	MOE Singapore (n.a), Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK)
24	MOE Singapore, Kindergarten curriculum farmework
25	MOE Singapore, Learning outcomes
26	MONTIE, J. E., XIANG, Z. & SCHWEINHART, L. J. 2006. Preschool experience in 10 countries: Cognitive and language performance at age 7. <i>Early Childhood Research Quarterly</i> 313-331
27	Moore, A C, Akhter, S, Aboud, F E, Responsive complementary feeding in rural Bangladesh, social science and medicine, Elsevier 62
28	MOORE, A. C., AKHTER, S. & ABOUD, F. E. 2008. Evaluating an improved quality preschool program in rural Bangladesh. <i>International Journal of Educational Development</i> , 28, 118-131.

29	MOPME 2008. Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education. <i>In</i> : MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND MASS EDUCATION (ed.). Dhaka, Bangladesh.
30	MOWCA 2009. Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). Policy Framework. <i>In</i> : MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFAIRS (ed.). Dhaka.
31	MOWCA 2010. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) Bangladesh <i>In</i> : MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFAIRS (ed.).
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## **Annex 2 The International Commitments: EFA goals and MDGs**

### **EFA Goals and MDGs**

Six Education for All (EFA) Goals

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education;

Goal 2: Increasing access to universal primary education;

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs;

Goal 4: Improving levels of adult literacy by 50% by 2015;

Goal 5: Achieving gender equality in primary and secondary education by 2015;

Goal 6: Improving the quality of education

### **Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

Goal 1: Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger;

Goal 2: Achieving universal primary education;

Goal 3: Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women;

Goal 4: Reducing child mortality;

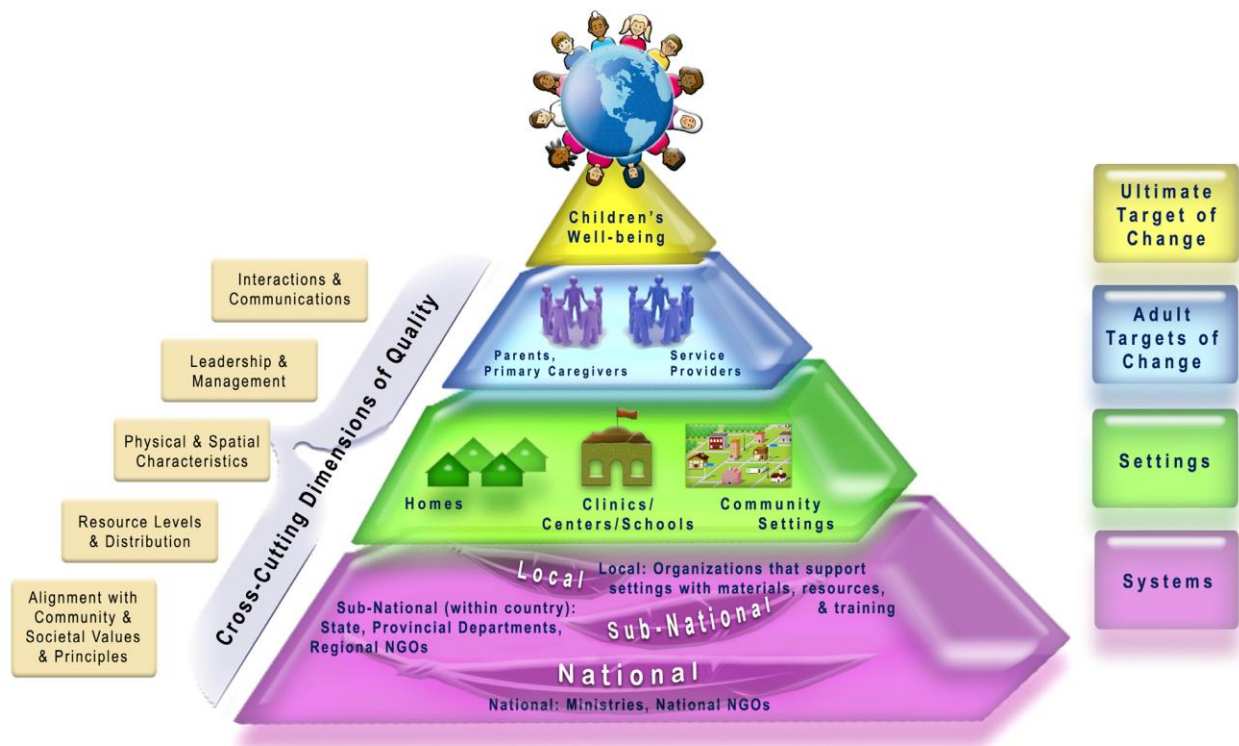
Goal 5: Improving maternal health;

Goal 6: Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;

Goal 7: Ensuring environmental sustainability;

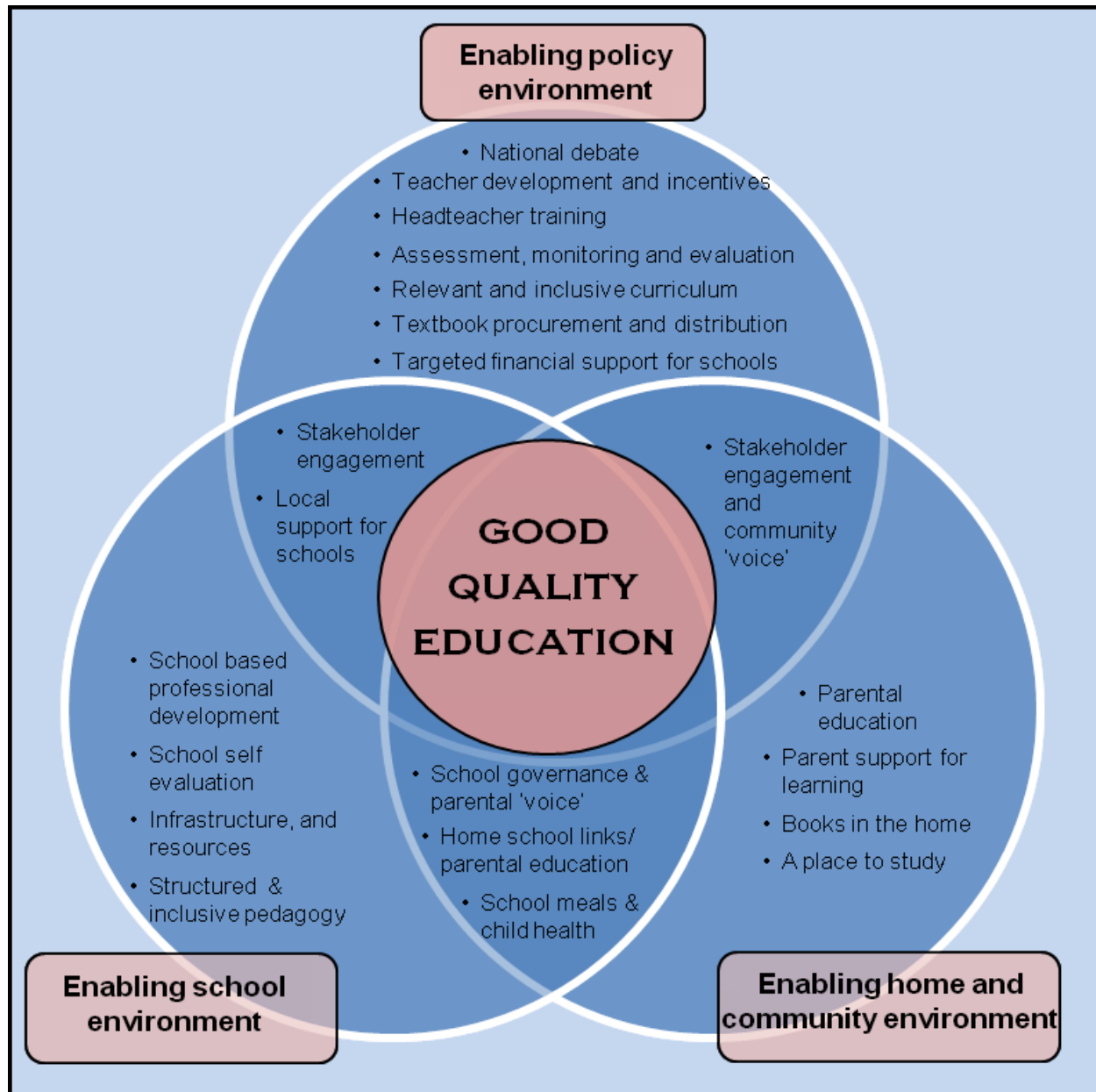
Goal 8: Developing a global partnership for development

### Annex 3 Ecological Setting and Systems Levels and Cross-Cutting Quality Dimensions



(Britto et al., 2011, p. 10)

#### Annex 4 EdQual's Framework for implementing quality



(Tikly, 2010, p. n.a.)