



NEWS FLASH

Citing ECD-environment linkages

2020 ARNEC Connections out soon, calls for sustainable environments for young children



The 2020 ARNEC Connections will be made available in the ARNEC website at <https://arnek.net>.

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Young children are exposed to environmental risks in the Asia-Pacific region and, according to UNICEF, among the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

This summarises the context around which ECD experts and practitioners shared their thought pieces in the 2020 ARNEC Connections on the state of environmental health and how risks in the physical environment affect the safety, security, and well-being of young children in the region.

With the theme *Ensuring the well-being of young children amidst environmental risks in the Asia-Pacific region*, the 2020 ARNEC Connections reinforces the key agreements during the 2019 Regional Conference on ECD and the Ha Noi Call to Action that emerged from it signifying the inter-linkages between ECD and the environment.

This year's edition covers advocacies for clean air and the negative effects of air pollution on the development of young children, including policy and program solutions to address this in Bhutan and Mongolia; the importance of urban design and ECD

services in European and Asian cities, including a case addressing barriers to young children’s learning in Da Nang, Viet Nam; and a reflexive approach to supporting brain development among the young through nature play.

Professor Margaret Sims of the Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia is the lead editor of the 2020 ARNEC Connections. It will be out in January 2021.

The WHO (2020) estimates that “...about one quarter of deaths of children under 5 could be prevented through healthier environments.”

The authors and their contributions, 2020 ARNEC Connections

Kidong Park, WHO Representative in Viet Nam	Clean air for children’s health
Peck Gee Chua, Global Leader for Young Children in Asia-Pacific	Air pollution and ECD in the Asia-Pacific region
Karma Gayleg, ECCD Specialist, Ministry of Education, Bhutan	Environment for healthy development of young children: the policies and practices of a carbon-negative country
Ulziisaikhan Sereeter, Early Childhood Officer, UNICEF Mongolia	Early childhood development and air pollution in Mongolia
Chau Nguyen Thi, Education Advisor, WVOB Education for development, Viet Nam	
Lieve MRD Leroy, Education Advisor, WVOB Education for development, Viet Nam	Growing up in cities: empowering early childhood services in Da Nang, Viet Nam to deal with urban barriers to learning
Duy Nguyen Din Khuong, CTIES Project Coordinator, WVOB Education for development, Viet Nam	
Silvana Noemi Raquel Birchenough, Principal Ecologist, Marine Climate Change Centre (IMC3), Cefas Lowestoft Laboratory, UK	Raising awareness of climate change and ocean acidification effects on young children’s development
Maria Raquel Da Costa, ECD Consultant, ECD Consultancy Services	
Caroline Essame, CEO and Founder of CreateCATT, Senior Arts and Occupational Therapist and Educator, Singapore	Nature and the brain: the answer is in the trees
Julien Vincelot, Urban95 Coordinator, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Netherlands	Green-blue schoolyards: an effective investment for early childhood, nature, and climate
Esther Goh, Early Childhood Specialist, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Netherlands	

ARNEC to OSF: ‘We will continue your ECD legacy in the Asia-Pacific region’



ARNEC provides a tribute to the OSF in honour of its 26-year Early Childhood Program and support to regional ECD networks

“This is not goodbye, but a beginning for ARNEC to continue your legacy promoting the development of young children in the region.”

This was the overall message of the ARNEC community to the Open Society Foundations (OSF) following the closure of the 26-year Early Childhood Program (ECP). The ECP has supported ARNEC and other regional networks in Europe, Africa, and the Arab regions, as well as other national networks promoting ECD in diverse socioeconomic and institutional contexts.

The ARNEC tribute, which was created and shown on video, was a mixture of messages from present and past ECD champions in the ARNEC Board and Steering Committee, and National Representatives, including photos of ARNEC and OSF milestones.

The partnership between OSF and ARNEC has helped evolve the network for early childhood in the region and was instrumental in the growth of ARNEC in ECD advocacy.

The tribute was led by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) in celebration of the ISSA Connects week-long online gatherings and focused on the contribution and legacy of the ECP entitled *Building Blocks for the Early Years Field* hosted by ISSA, the African Early Childhood Network, the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development, and ARNEC on 8 December 2020.

ARNEC sustains learning groups on playful parenting, network development

ARNEC has initiated two learning groups on responsive caregiving and playful parenting, and strengthening national ECD networks.

Establishing Communities of Practice or learning groups is one of the ARNEC platforms to connect the ECD community and to foster learning and knowledge exchange in support of ECD policies, programs, projects or activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

The first learning group, with 25 members from 11 countries in the region, is on responsive caregiving with a focus on 'playful parenting', which has emerged as a result of very strong resonance from the ECD community during the ARNEC webinar series on young children amidst COVID-19. With the renewed focus on the home as a safe space for families and young children, there is a compelling need for developing strong bonds between caregiver and young child through play and creating purposeful opportunities to support the social-emotional development of young children.

The second learning group has initiated conversations on making national ECD networks effective mechanisms for multi-sectoral approaches to ECD through advocacy and research, designing and



Members of the learning groups meet online.

implementing evidence-based programs, and learning from diverse institutional and partnership models for ECD. It has 21 members from seven countries. Gains include Bhutan's consultations leading to the establishment of district-level ECD networks and the mapping of ECD issues and opportunities in India to inform possibilities for network development.

Neelima Chopra, one of the ARNEC National Representatives for India, is facilitating the learning agenda of both groups.

Members reflect on network development, collaboration for ECD priorities in the region

Members of the Learning Group participated in a year-end online meeting on 23 December 2020 to assess the gains in the last three months and the directions in the next year.

Executive Director Teresita G. Inciong of the ECCD Council Philippines responded to Karma Gayleg, ECCD Specialist, Ministry of Education in Bhutan, who shared how the partnership with the ECCD Council of the Philippines helped in defining the ECD governance and policies in Bhutan.

"Together we can do better for young children in the region," stressed Director Inciong extolling the value of collaboration among national and local ECD networks and agencies, where the role of the government is important, as much as that of civil society and the private sector.

Two areas were identified as opportunities for collaboration at the regional level: improving the advocacy for the operationalisation of the nurturing care framework and documenting good practices on COVID-19 response, particularly on responsive caregiving and parenting.



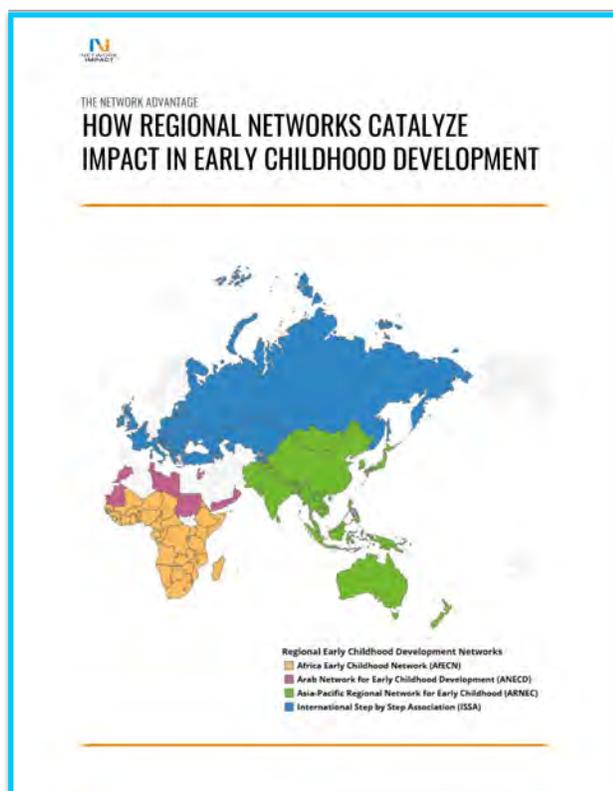
Members of the learning group on network development hold a year-end meeting.

The group cited the importance of learning from ECD practices of institutions or members of the learning group under diverse country or local contexts, governance models, and investments for young children.

During the mentimeter-aided reflection, one member quipped: “As a group with common ground on ECD, we are really supporting each other. Throughout the discussions I have learned to adjust my approach to strengthen the networks in my country.”

At the polls, members strongly agreed on the relevance and usefulness of the learning group. The feedback would be the basis for defining the learning agenda to support ECD and network development in 2021.

Spotlight on ARNEC: What is ARNEC’s network advantage, impact?



The report articulates the network advantage of ARNEC and other regional networks for ECD outcomes. Available in <https://arnec.net/highlight-details?id=70>

Examining the increased capacity and the results from cross-sector work for ECD, a report entitled *How Regional Networks Catalyze Impact in Early Childhood Development* has been released with ARNEC as one of the four regional networks cited for unique advantage to advance the ECD agenda.

Prepared by Network Impact with support from the Porticus Foundation and the Open Society Foundations, the report provides an overview of the work of networks for ECD, some case studies demonstrating the unique advantage and

position of each network, the capacity to be agile during the pandemic, as well as opportunities for learning, collaboration, and action.

ARNEC, according to the report, has created spaces for cross-country collaboration highlighting the trust and relationships among countries to learn from each other to build ECD networks and institutions. The case of Bhutan, Cambodia and the Philippines was cited with ARNEC facilitating the learning journey on ECD governance, policy development, multi-year, multi-sectoral investment programming, and service delivery and fostering innovations for national ECD networks.

ARNEC's agility when COVID-19 hit the Asia-Pacific region was also stressed in the report, particularly developing a response strategy that put ECD at the center of COVID-19 response. The same report cited ARNEC's launch of a baseline survey on the perceptions of the ECD community on the impacts of the pandemic on young children; holding webinars and creating mechanisms for peer learning; and producing advocacy tools for network members. The report also presents the network advantage and impacts of ISSA, AfECN, and ANECD in the field of ECD in their respective regions.

Addressing conditions of disparity heightened by COVID-19

ARNEC, partners gear for webinar series on nurturing care for young children

The second webinar series has started. The webinar recording, documentation summary, and copies of presentation of the first webinar are available in the ARNEC website by clicking this link <https://ar nec.net/resource?id=246>

ARNEC ended its first webinar series in April-July 2020 with a bold statement: "COVID-19 has worsened the disparities among peoples and communities, and the poor carry the weight of the pandemic on their shoulders. We cannot allow more young children to be left behind as a result of the pandemic. The call for addressing equity issues in ECD as magnified by the pandemic is more urgent now than ever."

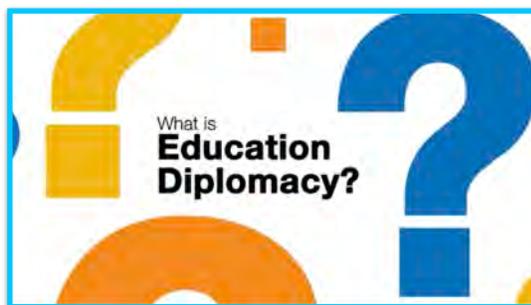
This has been the motivation for holding the second webinar series with the theme *Nurturing care for young children: seeking solutions for addressing disparities heightened by the impact of COVID-19*. As the effects of the pandemic are long-term, there is a compelling need to seek out



community-specific and localised solutions to promote nurturing care for young children, particularly in terms of responsive caregiving, health and nutrition, early learning, and safety and protection, and to redesign policies, programs, and systems at the national level to promote inclusive ECD and target the most vulnerable families.

The second webinar series is a collaboration among ARNEC, UNICEF, UNESCO, Plan International, Save the Children, and ChildFund Alliance and aims to mobilise the ECD community in the region, particularly practitioners, policy makers, and advocates at the country level, to share community, local and/or country-level solutions which adapt nurturing care practices and ECD programmes to the current realities and long-term effects of COVID-19.

The first webinar in the series, held on 14 December 2020, focused on early learning opportunities with Mita Gupta of UNICEF-ROSA as moderator. The speakers were Dr. Kate Moriarty of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Rokhaya Diawara of UNESCO, Karma Gayleg of the Ministry of Education in Bhutan, and Nikki Reyes, ECCD Council of the Philippines. The recording, documentation and presentations are available in the ARNEC website. The next one will be held in January 2021 focusing on health and nutrition for young children during and beyond the pandemic.



ARNEC supports training on play & education diplomacy for institutional members, NatReps, and partners

In its commitment to raise competencies and capacities for ECD, ARNEC has invested in two learning opportunities for institutional members, NatReps, and partners in the second half of 2020. The first training was on developmental play held in July 2020.

As an offshoot of the webinar on playful parenting, ARNEC tapped the expertise of one of the resource persons in the ARNEC webinar series, Caroline Essame, author of developmental play

and CEO of CreateCATT Singapore, who facilitated the training of 34 participants from 13 countries in three batches on 16 and 17 July 2020.

As a result of the training, play-focused resources of CreateCATT have been translated into local languages in other countries in the region, which were useful especially during the pandemic.

The other training, conducted in December 2020, was on *Education Diplomacy: Achieving Collective Action for Early Childhood Development* with 25 participants from 12 countries. Childhood Education International (CEI) designed and facilitated the training that recognises the unique role diplomacy plays in promoting the importance of early childhood education and fostering collaboration with groups for positive change.

Breakout discussions in small groups was a feature of the training to encourage discussions and reflections. In addition to useful resources, CEI has provided a workbook including a summary of key points to all participants. In return, participants will work on an action project to use and demonstrate the new competencies learned from the training.

ARNEC surmounts COVID-19 challenges with agility and results

Executive Director Evelyn D. Santiago reflects on ARNEC's adjustments in 2020



ARNEC issued a statement on the need to protect the development and well-being of young children as soon as WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Then ARNEC immediately developed a strategy putting ECD at the centre of COVID-19 response and addressing impacts on the most vulnerable young children and their families.

We had to swiftly rethink and reshape our work and listen to the ECD community in the region. ARNEC initiated a survey on the views of the ECD community on the impacts of the pandemic on young children and ECD services. The regional and national reports cited the 'pandemic burden' borne by marginalised families and communities, which were useful in advocating for policy and program adjustments for ECD at the country level.

ARNEC also heeded the call of the ECD community to provide a platform for sharing good practices addressing the needs of young children and their families during the pandemic. Together with our partners and institutional members, we quickly established mechanisms for peer learning and exchange where countries shared practical approaches and strategies on how they were responding to the pandemic with an ECD lens.

We offered various network support mechanisms, including curating learning resources, holding webinars, providing training opportunities, and facilitating learning groups.

Doing all of these was not easy - it exacted a toll on the Secretariat, but we are proud of what we achieved as a result of the connections and relationships we sustained in the region and beyond.

The year 2020 was tough but we emerged stronger and more committed to pursue holistic and inclusive early childhood development in the region.



ECD-related events

Q1 2021

ARNEC webinar on health and nutrition of young children

11 January 2021, 3-4:30PM SG time

UNESCO-led high-level meeting with ministers and development partners on the Global Partnership Strategy (GPS), an initiative of Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands

28 January 2021

ECCE Council Malaysia's virtual international conference on reimagining early childhood care and education

27-28 February 2021



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