



BỘ LAO ĐỘNG - THƯƠNG BINH VÀ XÃ HỘI
MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INVALIDS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS - MOLISA



ARNEC
Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

2019 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD)

*Working across sectors to promote nurturing and sustainable
environments for young children.*

*Hanoi, Viet Nam
4-6 December 2019*

Conference Concept Note

Young children's ability to reach their full potential depends on the quality of the environments that surround them. Some may be immediate, such as home and community environments, whereas others are more pervasive, including conflict, migration, disasters, and environmental pollution. Still others may be impending, such as the catastrophic consequences of climate change on young children and families if we do not act now. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory sets forth a model of how these diverse and interrelated environments interact to influence children's development over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Last year's conference focused on the five components of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF): good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving; security and safety, and opportunities for early learning¹. This year's conference will explore how the environments surrounding a child, including the physical environment, affect each component of the framework. Addressing the threats found within each of these current and future environments requires a common understanding of how each environment shapes children's development for better or for worse, and how multi-sectoral programs and policies can bring about safe, sustainable and stimulating environments that allow all young children, especially the most marginalised, to thrive.

As early childhood development practitioners and activists, we have the responsibility to enable all young children to grow and learn in nurturing and sustainable environments today. We must also be committed to bring about the integrated program and policy changes needed to preserve the social and physical environments in which they will exist as adults.

Conference Theme and Objectives

This year's conference aims to bring about strong awareness among policy makers and practitioners of the substantial threats to young children's present and future environments, as well as opportunities to protect these environments. It strives to generate momentum in the region around cross-sectoral programs and policies that can promote nurturing and sustainable environments. As such, this year's conference adopts the following theme: ***Working across sectors to promote nurturing and sustainable environments for young children.***

¹ In May 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank Group and UNICEF, together with other development partners, launched the Nurturing Care Framework, which describes how policies and services can support parents, families, other caregivers and communities in providing nurturing care for young children. It highlights proven best practices and reinforces the need for integrated programs. The Framework has five key components and highlights the importance of enabling environments for nurturing care.

Specifically, the conference aims to:

- **Raise awareness** among policy makers and practitioners of the threats to young children's development and the opportunities within the dynamic environments surrounding them;
- **Strengthen advocacy efforts** within the region to protect and improve young children's present and future environments;
- **Share knowledge, tools and noteworthy practices** of successful multi-sectoral program models that mitigate the impact of harmful environments on young children and promote nurturing and sustainable environments that allow young children to thrive.
- **Strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships** among existing and potential stakeholders to create the nurturing and sustainable environmental contexts that support the optimal development of young children.

The overall questions that the conference seeks to address are:

1. What are the major threats to young children's development within the environments in which they develop?
2. What promising partnerships, programs and policies can address the threats to young children and promote nurturing and sustainable environments?
3. What can we learn from existing initiatives, interventions and innovations which demonstrate results in addressing threats to young children's development within their different environments?
4. What concrete actions can we take to protect and enhance these environments to ensure that young children receive nurturing care?

The Conference aims to bring together over 500 participants, including Ministers, parliamentarians and other high-level policy-makers, academics, practitioners and many others committed to advancing ECD outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Conference Sub-Themes

The conference sub-themes provide opportunities for presenters to share their experiences of multi-sectoral, integrated programs that address threats to young children's development in different environments or aim to create more nurturing and sustainable environments.



Subtheme 1: The policy environment: Government policies create the social and economic conditions that determine the quality of young children's environments - at home and in communities. These policies can have effects on children and their families of harmful environments and ultimately improve child development outcomes.

Within Subtheme 1, we will seek to understand:

- a) How have actors in the region brought about policy changes that protect children's physical environment?
- b) What multi-sectoral partnerships are needed to bring about more effective policies for young children's development?
- c) What policy changes must be prioritized to bring about nurturing and sustainable environments for young children?



Subtheme 2: The physical environment: Air, water, noise and soil pollution, as well as climate change, all endanger children's development. Air pollution has been found to impair cognitive development and cause neurological behavioural problems among children (WHO, 2005). Pollution is also associated with some of the most serious killers of young children, including pneumonia which claims the lives of 920,000 children under five years of age annually (UNICEF, 2016). Climate change is likely to exacerbate children's vulnerability through livelihood insecurity, crop failure, disease, migration and relocation due to rising sea levels, water

scarcity and mortality from extreme weather events (UNICEF, 2011). Thus, ensuring a safe and sustainable physical environment is fundamental to enable children to reach their full developmental potential.

Within Subtheme 2, we will seek to understand:

- a) What risks within the physical environment threaten young children's development in this region?
- b) How can governments, multilaterals, civil society, the private sector, and communities mitigate the effects of these risks on young children and their families?
- c) What actions must be taken to create a nurturing and sustainable physical environment for young children?



Subtheme 3: The community environment: Communities affected by disasters, displacement, urbanization, violence or socio-economic marginalization due to changes in their physical environment are in greatest need of nurturing care interventions but are also the most challenging to serve. At the same time, empowered communities can bring about meaningful and lasting change in children's lives.

Within Subtheme 3, we will seek to understand:

- a) How have communities been affected by environmental changes (e.g. climate change, migration, disasters, etc.) and what is the impact on young children and their families?
- b) How have communities and services responded to these environmental changes to provide young children with nurturing care?
- c) How can programs support service providers across sectors, such as health, education, nutrition, and child protection, in fragile communities to provide nurturing care interventions and protect young children's environment?



Subtheme 4: The home environment: Supportive family environments are essential to enable young children to succeed. However, many children live in contexts where they experience toxic stress at home, including witnessing or directly experiencing violence (Conway, Raposa, Hammen, & Brennan, 2018). The damaging impact of poverty on children’s neurobiological development is now well understood (Blair & Raver, 2016; Dahmen et al., 2018; Eachus & Cunliffe, 2018), as is the role of early intervention and prevention programmes in mitigating these impacts (Black et al., 2017; Britto et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2017). In the context of

changing physical environments, children are experiencing cumulative risk factors for toxic stress as families face increased economic instability and forced migration due to climate change and other impacts on their physical environments.

Within Subtheme 4, we will seek to understand:

- a) What do we know about the compounding risk factors of physical environments (e.g. food insecurity, climate change, urbanization, etc.) and/or community environments (e.g. violence, migration, disasters, conflicts and displacement) on young children’s home environments, and how can we address these issues through multi-sectoral programs?
- b) How have changes to families’ physical environments affected children’s experiences of nurturing care?
- c) How can we strengthen engagement with other sectors such as social protection, women’s empowerment, etc., to improve nurturing care for young children and build resilient families?

Conference Host and Organizers

The Regional ECD Conference is organised by ARNEC together with its core team and partners: UNICEF-EAPRO and ROSA, UNESCO, Open Society Foundations, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Save the Children, Plan International and ChildFund International. ARNEC will also engage other networks and organisations in the Region like the Pacific Regional Council for ECD (PRC4ECD), South Asia Forum of Early Childhood Development Professionals (SAFECDP), Southeast Asian Minister Organization Regional Center for Early Childhood, Care Education and Parenting (SEAMEO CECCEP) and World Forum Foundation (WFF).

The Government of Vietnam primarily through the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) serves as the host of the Conference.



Format of the Conference

The Conference will have a combination of:

- Plenary sessions with keynote speakers/resource persons covering the conference theme and sub-themes;
- A Ministerial Roundtable Discussion of the Ministers and Vice-Ministers in charge of ECD/ECCE (tentative);
- Panel discussions with experts and country representatives covering each of the sub-themes;
- Concurrent paper presentations from ECD researchers and practitioners whose papers are accepted through ARNEC's call for proposals; and
- A marketplace or exhibit of organisations working for ECD.

Pre-conference workshops and/or study visits

ARNEC will also organise pre-conference workshops to be held a day before the actual conference. Topics for pre-conference workshops are still to be determined but may include the following: (i) ECD Parenting and Play; (ii) ECD and Disaster Risk Reduction; (iii) the Urban Environment and ECD; (iv) Child Care, Decent Work and Gender Equality; and (v) Child Protection, Violence against young children.

Pre-conference study visits will also be organized by MOLISA, Vietnam which will showcase ECD programmes/services near Hanoi.



Working together for Early Childhood

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