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## Chapter 1

# Introduction to the Study



Centre for  
Evidence and  
Implementation



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# 1. The case for investment in early childhood development

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*If we change the beginning of the story, we change the whole story.  
— Raffi Cavoukian, Centre for Child Honouring, Canada<sup>1</sup>*

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Early Childhood Development (ECD) lays the foundation for a child’s physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being and is a strong predictor of long-term human development. Young children’s healthy development depends on nurturing care, or the range of interventions encompassing good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning opportunities, and safety and security in the context of families and communities, as well as through service providers.<sup>2</sup> What the youngest children learn and experience in the first few years of life carry a profound and lasting impact on their physical and mental health, and their capacity to learn and relate to others. These aspects of child development do not occur separately but are interconnected and in constant interaction. The example below focuses on this interactive nature in the context of education.

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*For instance, children's well-being both at school and in the family requires the development of positive connections between the two. This involves good communication between parents and children, good communication between parents and teachers, and the delivery of appropriate school-based support for children from disadvantaged family backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>*

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The interconnectivity across nurturing care has implications for how we should understand and look to improve children’s lives and outcomes. Recent evidence and developments in the ECD landscape have shown that children need access to comprehensive programmes and services from before birth to the age of 6 that address health and developmental needs (including early education).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, parents of young children need appropriate and timely supports in order to nurture their child’s growth and development. In fact, the most powerful influencers on a child’s development are their relationships with the adults in their life, including parents and other caregivers.

To be effective, these interventions should be evidence-informed, and need to be available and accessible to families. There has been increasing emphasis and importance placed (by government, organisational leaders, and early childhood practitioners) on the use of evidence to inform practice within the early childhood sector. To optimise outcomes for children and ensure resources are channelled to the most effective services, service providers should contextualise or develop programmes to enhance child and family outcomes, based on the best available research.

## 2. Regional context

Despite ECD being an increased focus of policy and service provision, it is unclear if children are receiving appropriate services in a timely manner or whether comprehensive suites of programmes and services are available to babies, young children, and their families to optimise development. Developments in healthcare, nutrition, and service provision across East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) have drastically improved the under-5 mortality rate. However, the most recent statistics available showed that in 2017, more than 230,000 children died in the first month of life in EAP.<sup>5</sup> While this has been steadily decreasing since 1990, these deaths are primarily concentrated in Indonesia and the Philippines.

## 3. Aims and objectives

### 3.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the current landscape of policy and service provision pertaining to ECD in China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. These four countries were chosen as being those of particular interest to the donors of this study.

### 3.2. Objectives

The study objectives were to:

- 1 Provide comprehensive information to donors, service providers, and government agencies about what ECD policies, programmes and services are currently provided;
- 2 Identify gaps in the ECD system in each country with particular attention to the level of integration of policies, programmes, and services within the ECD landscape;
- 3 Provide recommendations for areas that require additional funding, programming, service integration, or evaluation, in order to strengthen the ECD landscape in each country.

The results of this study will help stakeholders, including existing and potential donors, policymakers, and programme developers to identify where new or enhanced programmes, policy, or funding may be required to enhance ECD or attain the desired outcomes for children and families in China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Opportunities for sector development, collaborative initiatives between stakeholders, and areas for enhanced ECD research and evaluation activities are also outlined in the findings of this study.

## 4. Guiding frameworks

The landscape study drew on two widely used ECD frameworks to guide data collection, synthesis, and reporting of ECD policies, services, and programmes: the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for Early Childhood Development (UNICEF and WHO) and the World Bank’s 25 Key Early Childhood Development Interventions.<sup>5,6</sup> These frameworks were selected because they provide a comprehensive overview of the multisectoral policies, programmes, and services within ECD. The Nurturing Care Framework, in particular, has been widely adopted for the purposes of service provision, sector structure, and ECD evaluations. China, Indonesia, and the Philippines have used the NCF at various points since its launch, primarily to assess the current ECD situation in-country and identify areas for improvement or further investment. Both frameworks draw on research that emphasises the need for a multisector approach to ECD, and both frameworks are applicable to all countries included in the study. More detail about each framework is provided below.

### 4.1. Nurturing Care Framework

The Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development (NCF) is the key framework that guided this landscape study. With the seminal Early Childhood Development series published by the Lancet in 2016 as a backdrop, the NCF further explores and outlines the concept of nurturing care. Nurturing care is defined as the conditions across public policies, programmes and services that promote the holistic development and wellbeing of young children and families.<sup>6</sup>

Launched in 2018 in a collaboration between UNICEF and WHO, the NCF sets out a clear evidence base about how ECD unfolds and the policy and programmatic interventions that can improve ECD outcomes for young children, families, and the community.<sup>6</sup> Through extensive consultation with policymakers, experts, and practitioners from 111 countries, and drawing from both the Global Strategy on Women’s, Children’s and Adolescent’s Health and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the NCF is a “framework for



helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential” that provides strategic directions to support holistic child development (p. 1). Primarily written for policymakers and programme managers at the national and local levels, the NCF provides guidance to identify the cross-sectoral needs for young children and their families, highlighting existing programmes that can be enhanced and further describing the actions that leaders need to take to enhance ECD.

The NCF (see Figure 4-1) captures the essential characteristics that enable the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development of young children. It also emphasises the need for a whole-of-government and whole-of society approach to ensuring the youngest children can thrive. The components of the NCF are described in detail below.



**Figure 4-1. Components of the Nurturing Care Framework**

*Note.* From World Health Organization, United Nations Children’s Fund, & World Bank Group. (2018). *Nurturing care framework for early childhood development* (p. 12). Nurturing Care. Retrieved July 18, 2022, from <https://nurturing-care.org/ncf-for-eed>

### **Adequate Nutrition**

Adequate Nutrition refers to both the diet of the young child and the nutrition and health of the mother during and after pregnancy. At every stage of child development, from what mothers eat during pregnancy, through to breastfeeding and introduction to solid food, the right nutrition is crucial. Nutrients such as protein are vital to the growth of brain cells in the earliest years.<sup>7</sup> For pregnant women, Adequate Nutrition includes supplements of micronutrients such as iron and folic acid. For young children, this includes the early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding up to the age of 6 months, and adequate complementary foods that are diverse and contain the needed micronutrients for the rapid growth of an infant’s body and brain.<sup>8</sup>

### **Good Health**

The component of Good Health focuses on the health and well-being of both young children and their caregivers. Good Health for children is defined as appropriate physical, cognitive, and emotional development; good hygiene; being in a safe environment; and having access to both promotive and preventive healthcare. Within the NCF, the focus on caregiver health recognises that responsive caregiving (care provided to support a child’s development, such as monitoring a child’s physical and emotional condition or utilising

promotive and preventive health services) is also dependent on the physical and mental well-being of the caregiver.

### **Opportunities for Early Learning**

The NCF component of Opportunities for Early Learning includes any interaction (or the absence of) that an infant or young child has with a person, place or object in their environment. This encompasses policies and programmes covering access to and provision of high quality day care, pre-primary and primary education, and other related opportunities in the community or home for early learning. Additionally, this component goes beyond the formal care and education of young children outside the home, and includes the myriad ways in which young children learn, including in the home environment. For infants, this includes adult-child interactions such as eye contact, modelling, and imitation. Play helps stimulate children's minds and bodies. It also gives them an opportunity to practise social roles and learn about aspects of their culture and environment.<sup>9</sup> Learning does not begin in childcare or kindergarten, but from conception and in the earliest years of life.

### **Responsive Caregiving**

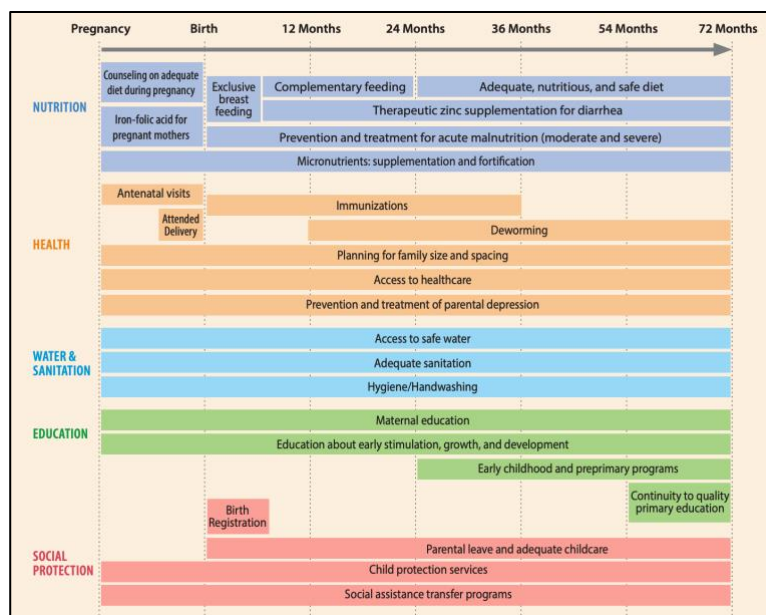
Responsive Caregiving refers primarily to the 'serve-and-return' interactions between caregivers and young children. The interactions within responsive caregiving should be mutually enjoyable, build an emotional bond that helps young children engage with and understand the world around them, and ensure the unique needs of the child are met. For infants, this includes responsive feeding where a mother responds to her infant's cues for both hunger and fullness, and feeds her infant when prompted.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, responsive caregiving includes the understanding that caregivers develop of the child's movements, gestures and verbal requests, and their response to protect the child from injury, activities that enrich learning, and building trusting relationships.

### **Security and Safety**

The NCF component of Security and Safety focuses on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children and families, particularly addressing extreme poverty, environmental risks, and the maltreatment of children (including abuse, maltreatment, neglect, and child trafficking). For pregnant women and young children who are particularly vulnerable to environmental risks, this includes protection from air pollution and environmental chemicals. Additionally, the component considers the protection that children should receive from harsh punishments, such that they feel safe and secure, without high stress and mistrust towards adults.

## **4.2. 25 Key Early Childhood Development Interventions**

The landscape study also utilised the 25 Key Early Childhood Development Interventions outlined by the World Bank to determine which components of parenting and early learning were accounted for within existing programs.<sup>4</sup> The 25 Key ECD Interventions consolidates the evidence and work conducted by the World Bank to provide a straightforward guide for policymakers and programme developers on how best to invest in young children through five integrated packages essential to child growth and development (see Figure 4-2). While this framework is similar to the NCF, it provides more detail about the types of programmes and interventions across the birth to 6-year-old age range that should be provided or made available to families in the areas of nutrition, health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection.



**Figure 4-2. 25 Key Interventions for young children and their families**

Note. From Denboba, A.D., Sayre, R.K., Wodon, Q.T., Elder, L.K., Rawlings, L.B., Lombardi, J. (2014). *Stepping Up Early Childhood Development: Investing in Young Children for High Returns* (p. 3). World Bank, Washington, D.C.

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