Report
on
the National Seminar
on
Early Childhood Care and Education

The Philippines

26-28 January, 2005

1 Prepared by Feny de los Angeles-Bautista to serve as a summary of the workshop. This is not intended to be a detailed documentation of workshop proceedings.
This national seminar was organized by the Council of the Welfare of Children of the Government of the Philippines with the support of UNESCO Asia Pacific Bureau for Education, UNICEF Philippines and in collaboration with Community of Learners Foundation (COLF). Key stakeholders in ECCD programme and policy development at the national level, representatives from the regional and local government units implementing ECCD programmes convened in order to: 1) arrive at consensus on the main challenges and key issues related to the fulfilment of the goals for ECCD within the context of the National EFA Plan, CHILD 21 and overall human and social development goals of the Government of the Philippines; 2) identify pertinent, cost effective strategies for expanding and improving the quality of comprehensive, integrated early childhood care and development, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (EFA goal 1) as mandated by national law i.e. Republic Act 8980 “The Early Childhood Care and Development Act.”

Through a combination of plenary presentations, small-group discussions and workshops, the ECCD seminar provided a venue for information exchange, consensus-building and collaborative work towards existing and proposed national programming approaches within a decentralized context for service delivery, standards and frameworks for curriculum, child development assessment including the development of a referral system for children with special needs and disabilities, training and supervision of service providers, monitoring and evaluation of ECCD programmes.

In her opening speech, Ms. Lina B. Laigo, Executive Director of the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), acknowledged the seminar as a timely contribution to capacity-building efforts necessary for the continuing improvement of the quality of ECCD in the Philippines and ensuring access to quality ECCD services for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Filipino children. She noted the significance of such an opportunity to convene stakeholders representing the crucial levels of participation by government and by members of civil society. She expressed the government’s interest in taking a critical look at the status of ECCD in the Philippines and applying such an analytical perspective to the task at hand especially for the CWC which is responsible for facilitating and building partnerships among the different stakeholders in ECCD policy and programme development from the local government levels up to the national level. She noted the timeliness of the seminar given the ongoing initiatives of the CWC and its partners in fulfilling its mandate as the National Coordinating Council for ECCD. CWC’s work will surely be assisted and enriched by this information exchange about programme experiences by local government units and some partner non-government organizations, like the Community of Learners Foundation, who have been supporting local government partners in implementing integrated ECCD programmes within a decentralized context. Furthermore, the seminar offered a valuable opportunity to collaborate on specific tasks that require immediate attention such as the development of a viable referral system for identifying developmental problems and disabilities in early childhood. She thanked UNESCO and UNICEF Philippines for the support and expressed the hope that the results of the seminar will be put to good use by all in their respective areas of work to improve the quality of life for young Filipino children from the first years of their lives.

In his opening message, UNICEF Country Representative Nicholas Alipui extended a collective challenge for all the stakeholders and advocates for ECCD to work together in order to fulfil and promote the rights of all children. This shared vision for Filipino children has been articulated through Child 21. Enabling national policies e.g.
national laws such as the ECCD Act has complemented it. Both serve as excellent frameworks for ensuring that every child gets the best possible start to life. By giving the necessary attention to the early childhood years and identifying the areas where actions must now be taken, we can pre-empt the loss of the next generation. He noted that a sense of urgency is amplified by national indicators relevant to ECCD, for example: the fact that four out of one hundred Filipino children die before age five, or as many as nine out of a hundred, in some provinces; fifteen out of a hundred children are malnourished; and seventy out of a hundred are not served by some form of early childhood development programmes that support their learning.

Dr. Alipui reaffirmed that UNICEF considers ECCD as its topmost priority because it is the stage of childhood wherein there are potentially lifelong debilitating consequences for children due to factors, which put them at very high risk, threatening both their survival and their development. These factors e.g. malnourished pregnant and lactating mothers, childhood diseases and malnutrition, neglect and abuse is largely attributed to the high incidence of poverty among Filipino families. These risk factors are heightened by the lack of accessible, good quality ECCD services and programmes needed to support young children and their caregivers. Large disparities persist between provinces and regions affecting the availability and quality of basic ECCD service delivery, which is the responsibility of local government units i.e. at the level of the barangay (village) up to the municipality or city. As a result, children who are born into poverty and live in the poorer provinces and regions are further disadvantaged, because all these limitations in human and material resources in turn affect the reach and quality of basic ECCD services. Thus, UNICEF is committed to supporting local government units in order to help them fill in the gaps and eventually reduce these disparities. Local government leaders and ECCD service providers are assisted through various capacity-building efforts including the promotion of effective practices and lessons learned from the successful experiences of local governments. UNICEF acknowledged that national policies like the ECCD Act emphasize the importance of supporting families as caregivers of young children. UNICEF also continues to invest in advocacy efforts aimed at promoting increased investments in ECCD by the local government units.

On behalf of UNESCO, Annelene Rør, Associate Expert from the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok echoed this acknowledgement that in the Philippines there is much to build on because constructive elements are present such as a comprehensive policy framework to guide effective and responsive programming for young children. By providing the legal and policy framework, she said, Filipinos have embarked on an essential journey to ensure a fair start in life for all children. In order to reach the goals of Education for All, the individual child’s early childhood experience is of vital importance. The positive correlation between quality early childhood experience and performance in primary school is well established. Research has also shown that investment in the early years outperforms other public policy options in terms of savings on remedial programmes. For children from poor families, early childhood is a time-bound opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. And children at risk of being marginalised because of disabilities have a much greater chance to reach their potential if they are beneficiaries of early identification and intervention.

Ms. Rør expressed UNESCO’s hope that this seminar provides a venue for the exchange of experiences and ideas in the Philippines as well as from neighbouring countries in order to expand access to quality ECCE programmes, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. She explained that the starting point for the national seminar is a study commissioned by UNESCO Bangkok called “Early
Childhood Care and Education in South East Asia: Working for Access, Quality and Inclusion in Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam”, carried out by Feny de los Angeles-Bautista.

As agreed by the organizers, the seminar would provide a venue for arriving at consensus on the main challenges the Philippines is facing in fulfilling the national goals related to ECCD. That way, the seminar would be instrumental in addressing the challenges the Philippines is facing.

Ms. Rør reiterated the importance of providing *quality*, cost effective programmes, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. She stressed that “the promotion of quality ECCD necessarily includes child-friendly learning and developmentally appropriate programming and practices that benefit all children” and examples of such ECCE programmes were part of the agenda. She reminded participants that “in pluralistic societies it is impossible to unilaterally impose only one particular approach to ECCE” so it is “necessary to promote practices which serve the best interests of young learners in their own social and cultural context thereby helping them make the most of their active learning capacity by accommodating their diverse needs.” Thus, “good practices” should be seen as bottom-up strategies rather than policies mandating everyone to adopt certain approaches and methods.

In starting her presentation of the study on ECCE in three countries, which was commissioned by UNESCO, Feny de los Angeles-Bautista noted the significant achievements of many East Asian countries, including the Philippines, in regard to expanding access and improving the quality of ECCD programmes. She cited the Report at the End of Decade Regional Assessment for EFA in 2000, which was prepared by the UNESCO Regional Office, which stated: “The most dramatic achievement is in the area of early childhood education and development. Kindergartens, nurseries, day care centers have literally bloomed in the region in dramatic numbers. We have an increase of almost 50% in the last ten years. Gains have been registered in many of the countries of Southeast Asia. What is interesting is not just the numbers, but also the financing formulae. Unlike primary schooling, early childhood depends on community support, on NGOs, on the private sector and that is a source of great inspiration for the neighbouring countries as well as for the other sectors of education for all.”

The diversity in life situations of Filipino families who are the primary caregivers and first educators of young children provide an interesting and challenging context for ECCD programmes in the Philippines. Multicultural influences blend with indigenous Filipino culture and are reflected in adults’ or parents’ views about children and childhood, their child-rearing practices as well as their expectations regarding young children’s emerging competencies during the early childhood years. These expectations are closely linked to their aspirations for their children whose early childhood years culminate in their anticipated entry into the formal school system as first grade pupils at age six. More than half of all Filipino families are able to provide for all the essential needs of their children from the pre-natal period through childbirth and the first years of life. For most of these families, this includes paying for the costs of basic health care, providing reliable child care support particularly in the case of households with two parents working fulltime outside the home, and the costs of their children’s participation in early childhood education programmes. However, at least one third of Filipino families who live in poverty are barely able or unable to cope with the challenge of providing for their children’s basic needs. Many factors impede their ability to fulfill the essential requirements of care giving and
educating infants and young children. Thus, the challenge for the ECCD practitioners, service providers and policy makers continues to be the expansion of access to quality ECCD programmes for a significant number of young children.

Ms. de los Angeles-Bautista provided an overview on the status of early childhood care and development in the Philippines by focusing on the strengths and achievements so far. There has been a moderate increase in participation and coverage rates. Diverse programme approaches are applied and innovative and responsive programme models appropriate for various social, cultural & economic contexts exist. Enabling and essential policies exist and over the past decade these have been revised or improved as needed. Policies and programming approaches within a rights based framework are increasingly anchored on sound and updated scientific knowledge about child development combined with experiences of effective ECCD programmes. These are home-grown programmes that apply principles supportive of meaningful parent-child relationships, strengthen families as caregivers and demonstrate culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate early childhood education curriculum and practices.

The national ECCD Act (R.A. 8980) combined with other child-focused laws and policies provides a good example of cutting edge, comprehensive national policy that is linked to child protection efforts as articulated by the Comprehensive Program for Child Protection and the strategic framework for child-focused development efforts articulated in the policy document more widely known in the Philippines as “Child 21.” Both of these national policy and programme frameworks built on valuable lessons learned from over two decades of implementing the GOP-UNICEF Country Programme for Children which made significant investments by supporting ECCD programmes and policy development in key stages of the evolution and development of the components of what is now the national ECCD programme.

National policies and programmes are moving in constructive directions as evidenced by these positive trends: 1) increasing efforts to promote integrated ECCD programming in decentralized contexts for service delivery with multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral collaboration; 2) increasing attention is being given to parent education, child development screening and assessment; 3) more attention to mobilizing community participation and support for ECCD and advocacy with local government leaders resulting in a significant increase in public financing for ECCD as well as private sector support for community-based ECCD programmes; 4) a growing number of effective models and viable approaches to human resource development that provide a solid base on which to build a national network to support a competent workforce of ECCD service providers; 5) more examples of constructive partnerships between local government units, national government agencies and non-government organizations focused on improving the quality of ECCE programmes and linked to community development efforts as well as enhancing governance and programme management.

Ms. de los Angeles-Bautista said that ensuring access to quality ECCD programmes for all Filipino children is the primary challenge. There is a need to reduce urban-rural, rich-poor and other disparities in access to quality ECCD programmes. There must be greater attention to more focused and responsive programmes and services for marginalized children who are at-risk: children in poor rural and urban communities, children of indigenous tribal communities, disabled children from low-income families, children in situations of armed conflict and migrant children, children affected by HIV-Aids.
But at the same time, these and other challenges present opportunities for supporting and enhancing the quality of ECCD programmes. These include: 1) advocacy for stronger political commitment so that ECCD will be seen as integral to poverty alleviation and eradication programmes and social and human development justifying increased public financing; 2) intensify social mobilization for increased private sector and philanthropic support; 3) targeted and coordinated planning among government agencies, financing and systematic monitoring of ECCD programmes that build on successful pilot programmes; 4) sustain and diversify parent education and support systems that reflect changing lifestyles of Filipino families and blend indigenous childrearing practices with other developmentally appropriate practices; 5) build consensus on ECCD indicators (national & local) frameworks for quality standards, complementary approaches; 6) Upgrade and consolidate qualifications of service providers by developing a viable, national scheme for various groups e.g. day care workers, preschool teachers, program administrators matched by sufficient resources for in-service capacity-building, improved supervision, continuing professional development and reforms in pre-service education.

Ms. Marilyn Manuel, Deputy Executive Director for ECCD of the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) gave a comprehensive update on the status of implementation of the most recently enacted national law (R.A. 8980) that institutionalized a comprehensive national policy and ECCD programme. It also promotes an integrated, multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to ECCD service delivery and programme implementation that is most appropriate for the Philippines where local government units from the village to municipality or city levels assume primary responsibility for delivery of public social services including ECCD. Another significant feature of the “ECCD Act” is that it builds on existing structures and mechanisms for coordination and collaboration by designating existing child-focused national and regional councils with counterpart local inter-agency councils or committees as the ECCD focal points from the national to local levels. CWC has been leading efforts to activate Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPC), which must now assume the task of coordinating ECCD programme implementation at the local levels. In addition to ensuring that ECCD is integral to broader child rights promotion and protection efforts and is made more visible, these are essential concrete steps towards expanding access and enhancing the quality of ECCD programs as it also activates essential advocacy and social mobilization processes. With increasing awareness of and appreciation for the importance of early childhood care and development among all the stakeholders i.e. parents, caregivers, service providers, political leaders and others in the public sector it is expected that participation and support for ECCD programmes will also increase.

By allocating public funds for the effective implementation of the national ECCD programme over a specified period, the ECCD Act also provides for affirmative action on behalf of disadvantaged young children who do not yet have access to ECCD services and are at-risk due to a combination of factors that create difficult life conditions i.e. poverty, illiteracy and low educational attainment of caregivers, physical distance and isolation, cultural diversity. Since 2003 the Council for the Welfare of Children has been coordinating with the various levels of government and partners in civil society for the phased implementation of the national ECCD programme.\(^1\) By 2005, a total of 89 municipalities and five highly urbanized cities in

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\(^1\) Starting with the first batch of participating provinces located in four Regions: 5, 7, 9 and the National Capital Region.
23 provinces that are located in eleven regions are implementing the features of the national ECCD programme. It is expected that more of the disadvantaged young children who were previously not served will be reached as the participating regions include the Cordillera Autonomous Region in the farthest North, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in the South and provinces in the Central and Southern parts of Luzon where there are many impoverished families and indigenous tribal cultural groups who live in remote, isolated rural areas as well as urban poor communities in the large cities.

Within this context of leading renewed national advocacy for ECCD within the context of poverty alleviation and social development programmes, the Council for the Welfare of Children launched the “Bright Child” project which seeks to provide a “brand name” for integrated ECCD programming and convergent service delivery also with a special emphasis on the parts of the country with a high incidence of child malnutrition. In addition, CWC has organized various task forces and committees at the national level to undertake policy development tasks as mandated by the ECCD Act e.g. the formulation of national standards for ECCD programmes, for ECCD curriculum, pre-service education of ECCD service providers, content of in-service training for ECCD service providers, parent education curriculum.

The national seminar provided a timely and valuable opportunity for information-sharing among various stakeholders in ECCD who are involved in various aspects of ECCD: in programme implementation within the public as well as private sector; in partnerships with government and/or non-government organizations to fund ECCD programmes or provide technical support through capacity-building efforts; in pre-service education for teachers or health professionals; in child protection services and advocacy networks; in research that supports the development of specific components of the national ECCD programmes.

Examples of ECCD programmes that are implemented in a decentralized context include the following: 1) the Home-based ECCD programme "Learn and Play" that is being implemented in urban poor communities in the city of Manila. Ms. Socorro Arevalo, Project Director of Kababaihan ng Maynila, a city-based women’s organization, introduced this project, which involved the recruitment and training of parent volunteers who were responsible for organizing group activities for children in their own homes. These homes were designated as "Learn and Play houses." The project was designed to augment the day care program of the city government given the severely limited amount of resources available to establish a sufficient number of day care centres to serve all the children aged three to five.

2) The Kinder Plus Project: an integrated ECCD project that was implemented by the Department of Education in collaboration with 18 municipalities in three provinces located in Central Luzon, fifteen of which were in Nueva Ecija province. The pilot project was linked to the ECCD Act during its inception and was designed to demonstrate how the features of the law could be operationalized by the stakeholders from the local government units in collaboration with ECCD-focused NGOs and national government agencies involved in ECCD. By providing intensive and strategic inputs for capacity-building of all ECCD service providers at the village levels and their supervisors at the municipality levels and reinforcing existing public ECCD services and programmes, the Kinder Plus project was able to demonstrate a successful approach to working for access to quality ECCD programmes in rural communities with very low coverage and participation rates. To amplify the crucial role of the inter-agency ECCD teams at the local levels, Ms. Myrna Malapit, Municipal
Social Welfare Officer and Mr. Telesforo Domingo, Municipal Planning and Development Officer, shared their experiences in implementing Kinder Plus with an emphasis on the visible and concrete benefits to young children and parents that generated a new and special kind of energy in these remote rural villages and strengthened their resolve to continue prioritizing ECCD for all 53 villages of their municipality.

3) The experiences of the City ECCD Team of Kidapawan City Central Mindanao in its successful implementation of an integrated approach to ECCD programming as one of the project sites of the Philippine ECD Project. The ECD Project is implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and selected local government units and financed through a loan package from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The project covers 37 out of the city's 40 barangays (village).

Ms. Erlinda Doblas, Social Welfare and Development Officer, explained how the City government organized itself with a technical working group that eventually transformed itself as the leading and coordinating inter-agency ECCD team at the city level and organized their village-based counterparts. Their leadership and advocacy for ECCD was instrumental in achieving the goals of their local investment plan for ECCD which by the third year of project implementation resulted in constructing seven barangay health stations, ten day care centers, two day care moms' home, and the renovation of six barangay health stations and eight day care centers. More importantly, the project has invested in the recruitment and training of eight child development workers who conduct supplementary feeding as well as monitor and assist nutrition workers from their “radiation areas” as they implement the feeding program; and facilitate parent education (PES) sessions in coordination with barangay ECD teams. The ECD Project also provided for training and increased financial incentives for existing ECCD service providers such as the day care workers, rural health midwives and community health workers. Kidapawan City has broke new ground in the delivery of maternal and child health care and support services. This includes the addition of Barangay Health & Nutrition Posts constructed by the barangay government, which serve as satellite health center designed to reach the children, and parents who live in remote villages, which are far from the health facilities. The village-based ECCD service providers converge here once a week to provide basic health services and facilitate children’s playgroups.

4) Ms. Cherlita Garade, Social Welfare and Development Officer, shared the experiences of the ECCD team from the province of Zamboanga, Sibugay in implementing the national ECCD program with support from the Council for the Welfare of Children and the Regional Council for the Welfare of Children. The ECCD system has been institutionalized in Siay and Payao municipality starting 2003. Provincial Council for the Protection of Children (PCPC) is now functional and seeks to expand the coverage of ECCD programmes to three out of the eleven municipalities over a three-year period. A Provincial Development Plan for Children adopted by Sanggunian Pangalawigan (Provincial Council) ensures that the four basic ECCD interventions i.e. the day care, the maternal and child health, home-based care and parent education are sustained. Local Councils for the Protection of Children are being organized in the other eleven municipalities and these councils will be responsible for the development of Local ECCD Plans. She also talked about some of the issues; problems encountered during this initial stage of implementation but expressed optimism that these will be resolved as the project continues.

The participants worked in small groups to discuss the issues and challenges affecting ECCD in the Philippines and to identify the strategies, interventions that
have worked for effective ECCD programs that provide care and learning experiences of sufficient quality at least and very high quality at best. Limited or no access to ECCD programmes continues to be a problem for a considerable number of children for different reasons. Very often parents’ lack of awareness and understanding about very young children’s needs and of the importance of attending to early childhood care and development pre-empts their access to ECCD programmes even when these are available. In other cases, the ECCD services are not available or accessible due to the physical distance and isolation especially for those who live in remote, underdeveloped rural areas. Or they may live in congested slum communities where there is a dearth of basic social services. In either case, all the working groups recommended that one of the priorities should be sustained and intensified advocacy with local political leaders and chief executives who are responsible for the implementation of ECCD programmes given the decentralized context for ECCD service delivery in the Philippines. The other set of issues all relate to the need to improve the quality of ECCD services and programmes. The working groups recommend that more attention and more resources should be given to ECCD programmes especially those, which should serve the disadvantaged children. This includes allocating sufficient resources to implement effective capacity-building programmes for all the ECCD service providers e.g. day care workers, health workers, rural health midwives and teachers and their supervisors. If all the provisions of R.A. 8980 The Early Childhood Care and Development Act were to be implemented these issues and problems related to access and quality will be resolved. Effective implementation of curriculum frameworks and standards, licensing procedures, development of guidelines, supervision of ECCD service providers and monitoring of the private sector’s compliance with prescribed guidelines is heavily dependent on effective inter-agency and multi-sectoral collaboration from the local government level up to the national level.

The national workshop itself was designed to propel such efforts to fulfill all the objectives of the ECCD Act. The organizing committee agreed that the second major focus of the workshop would be on the matter of setting a viable identification, screening and referral system that begins at the village or barangay level. It was the first time that representatives of the various disciplines (special education, health, social welfare concerned with disability in early childhood) from the government agencies at national level, to the local government units and partners in civil society at all levels met. There were panel presentations involving educators, various health professionals who work in different contexts i.e. clinical-paediatricians, psychologists, therapists or tertiary health care facilities; non-government organizations implementing community-based programmes for children with disabilities.

Dr. Teresita Inciong, Director of the Bureau of Elementary Education presented an overview of the special education programs of the Department of Education. These are implemented through the public school system. She described the current system of identification and screening of children within the school system. She described the early intervention programs that are being implemented but pointed out the need to expand these in order to reach out to disabled children particularly from poor families. She made recommendations for future directions to take in order to fulfil the goals of education for all. These include the promotion of health and safety among parents and community members, the systematic identification, assessment and evaluation of children at risk for disability. There should be a serious investment in human
resource development if these directions are to be pursued; Thus the need for advocacy to generate community support.

Dr. Juanita Basilio, from the National Center for Disease Prevention, control of the Department of Health gave a comprehensive overview of the maternal and child health services provided by the government through public health facilities. Since health care service delivery is also a function of local government units, there is a need to ensure that the local chief executives understand and fulfil their responsibilities. Dr. Basilo said that the major challenge is the development and implementation of a comprehensive program for disability prevention. The Philippines have a user-friendly, standardized screening tool for child development, which was already used within the Philippine ECD Project and the Kinder Plus Project. In the Kinder Plus project, parent education materials linked to the Philippine ECD Checklist and screening kits for the village-level ECCD service providers were also developed and introduced during the workshops conducted by COLF for Kinder Plus. In addition, the Department of Health recently introduced newborn screening within the public health system.

Dr. Bernadette Madrid from the Child Protection unit of the U.P. College of Medicine and Philippine General Hospital introduced the Child Protection Network, which has been actively creating linkages among NGOs and health professionals involved in programmes for the care and rehabilitation of victims of various forms of child abuse. Dr. Alexis Reyes and Dr Lourdes Ledesma talked about child development assessment and the roles that developmental pediatricians and clinical psychologists in a multidisciplinary approach to inclusive ECCD programming.

The workshop groups then worked on identifying and prioritising the tasks, policy and programme issues in regard to developing inclusive ECCD programmes for children with disabilities. They proposed different approaches to organizing such a referral system the developed these proposals and comments will be studied and discussed further by a Task Force to be convened by the Council for the Welfare of Children.

To conclude the workshop, Fe Nograbog of UNICEF Philippines synthesized the issues that were identified throughout the seminar. First is the problem of access and low coverage especially in poor or remote communities. There are many reasons why children are unable to participate in ECCD programs: the lack of awareness among parents; lack of alternative options to preschool classes which are not always accessible to families who either live too far from the school or cannot afford the costs of sending their children to preschool; inadequate implementation of existing programmes and enforcement of policies that should compel all those responsible for the provision of services to do so in a way that really reaches the children who need these. Second is the problem of programme sustainability and quality of public ECCD programmes especially in a decentralized context when local government chief executives are not committed to these programmes. Intensified advocacy efforts are needed to mobilize political support from local leaders and from the community. In order to improve the quality of ECCD programmes, such as the day care service, the national government must work to install different cost-sharing and financing mechanisms and prioritise the local government units which have very limited financial and material resources and ECCD service providers who are not adequately prepared nor supervised. Third is the need for organizing a functional monitoring and evaluation system for ECCD including the identification and documentation of childhood disabilities.