



# Multi Sectoral Symposium on Early Childhood Development

## MEETING NOTES

DATE AND TIME	24 Nov 2022/ 9am – 12pm
LOCATION	Online via Zoom Facebook Livestream; the recording can be accessed at: <a href="https://fb.watch/h7MKUEoskN/">https://fb.watch/h7MKUEoskN/</a>
AUTHOR	Vanessa Goeh
PRESENTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sen. Risa Hontiveros, Chairperson, Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations, &amp; Gender Equality</li><li>• Senate of the Philippines</li><li>• Bo Stjerne Thomsen, PhD, Chair of Learning through Play, Lego Foundation</li><li>• Tim Huang, Chief Impact Officer, OneSky Foundation</li><li>• Vo Thi Hien, Program Director, OneSky Foundation</li><li>• Dr Gayatri Kembhavi-Tam, Pediatric Physical Therapist, Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI)</li><li>• Esther Goh, ECD Specialist, Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI)</li><li>• Beverly Lorraine C. Ho, MD, MPH, OIC – Undersecretary, Department of Health</li></ul>
PARTICIPANTS	• >200 participants on Zoom and 142 on ECCD Council Facebook page
APC STAFF	Stacey Choe, Suyin Liu, Vanessa Goeh

### Primary Agenda

The Philippine Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, in collaboration with the Asia Philanthropy Circle and its member organisations in the Philippines, organised a symposium that brought together key players in early childhood development, including policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector, to share best practice in creating programs and safe spaces, to discuss on multi-sectoral partnerships, and government policies and to discuss the importance of child-centered policies that protect children's mental health.



## Summary of Discussion

- In the Philippines, there are gaps in early childhood care. Many Filipino children in their primary school years lack basic literacy skills. According to statistics, 30% of Filipino children under the age of five are stunted as a result of malnutrition. As there is a strong connection between the gut and the brain, these also have an impact on children's cognitive and emotional health.
- Good mental health starts from the womb and infancy, as a baby's attachment to their primary caregiver is formed and their needs are met, a stable mind can start to develop. To properly shape and support children's development and well-being, the community must ensure that primary caregivers receive assistance before, during, and after pregnancy as well. The 2018 mental health law aims to seriously address problems like post-partum depression, which is typically left untreated and is stigmatised.
- More research and studies into the effectiveness of various ECD interventions can assist with the implementation of evidence-based ECD programmes across various stakeholders, resulting in longer term outcomes and the proper attainment of developmental goals for young children. This can increase the knowledge and capacity of various field stakeholders as a result. Similarly, it can contribute to the development of credibility for local actors and win the support of government stakeholders by providing evidence and data.

## Speaker Presentation

### The Lego Foundation

- In any environment, key characteristics of play include meaningful experiences, active engagement, an iterative process in which the child can test and try out different things, social interactions that reinforce learning and help to detect the mental states of others, and joy, which facilitates motivation and interest and is related to memory, attention, and creativity.
- According to research, play promotes basic functions such as self-control, which improves emotional and behavioural regulation and attention. Free play aids in coping and anxiety management, particularly in stressful situations. The social interaction component is important here because it not only fosters social relationships but also strengthens the child's protective mechanism. Young children can gain control of events, rules, and processes through play, allowing them to gain mastery, reduce anxiety, and cope with stress.
  - For example, at the Lego Foundation's play workshops in Mexico, children engaged in pretend play while dressed as superheroes, with the goal of honing their ability to control their own behaviour and their ability to imagine that they can have new skills.
- The presence of caregivers is an essential component of play. Neurological studies have shown that adults' flexibility and resilience directly influence how children respond to uncertainty and change, and thus their level of mental health. Play also strengthens caregiver-child relationships, assists adults in gaining a deeper understanding of their children, and has been shown to benefit the caregiver's own emotional well-being in terms of stress and depression.
  - The Lego Foundation supported a home visiting programme that seeks to promote positive parenting stimulating environments, and it allows the dyad opportunities to test different ideas and builds self-esteem, parenting enjoyment, and positive relationships with them in the early years.



- In cases where parents find it difficult to engage in play because of multiple stressors in their daily lives, the Neighbourhood Villages programme was cited as an example of a full-service model that supports job opportunities while also providing clothes and toys to support physical activities for families. This addresses a wide range of community needs, paving the way for positive impact.
- Play can be done by utilising an already existing environment in which positive space has been created by the community using materials and resources from the local environment. Play leaders in Bangladesh and East Africa will assist parents in developing toys with their children, providing a physically active outdoor experiences and stimulating a social safe environment where they can relax and focus with stimulation such as books and imagery.
- The role of play can be introduced in various context. For example, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, children use play to not only develop cognitively but also to cope with the stressful situations that come with being displaced. In Denmark, a Hospital for Children and Families will be built in 5 years where play will be an integrated part of the treatment and can be structured and systematised. This helps a child understand the procedures they are subjected to and attempts to stimulate what happens during a treatment.

### OneSky

- OneSky's dual programme model of providing affordable child care boosts the morale of child care providers as skilled professionals, providing peace of mind to working parents by providing responsive care and learning through play that fosters their holistic and social-emotional development. The programme also offered high-quality training and opportunities for graduated providers to continue upskilling and professional development. As a result, there are overall benefits to the care practices, mental health, and well-being of the community.
- OneSky's implementation efforts include collaborating with governments at multiple levels, specifically with the Department of Education and Training, to recruit home-based childcare providers in cohorts of 40 through their existing database, and obtaining in-kind support to implement a comprehensive training programme. For the ELC, they employed the public-private partnership model to encourage the deployment of social resources, partnering with the government to provide the land and 70% of the construction costs, while OneSky and the parents collaborated to run the ELC, thus mobilising both public and private resources to implement and provide high quality care.
- OneSky makes use of the online environment to promote a sense of belonging and support among children, parents, and caregivers, enhancing wellbeing and education on various levels throughout the community. During the Covid-19 lockdown, networks of parents, teachers, and children were connected via Messenger, Zello, and Zoom in order to support and encourage one another. Over a thousand HBC providers use the IBigFamily online learning platform, which has a robust digital learning/content library that complements and extends classroom training, offers additional resources on topics that encourage professional development, and enables them to connect with other HBC trainers—creating an active community of practise.

### CEI:

- The following gaps have been identified within the sector: ways to reduce the double burden of overnutrition and undernutrition, support caregiver mental health, address barriers to immunisation,



support workforce training and capacity building, support early learning opportunities, promote positive and responsive caregiving practises, and improve support and access to social assistance programmes in rural communities.

- Additional support for LGU implementation is required, despite the current scope of federal programmes, LGUs are frequently ill-equipped and underfunded to establish early learning and care spaces. As a result, local governments must increase their capacity and knowledge about the importance of early learning, as well as establish and sustain early learning opportunities.
- Areas of strength across the Three countries have a strong focus on children, families, and the community around them, as well as an increasing emphasis on positive parenting and responsive caregiving, as well as an upward trend in public and private investment in ECCD.
- Across the three countries, areas of need revolve around the issue of accessing accurate and readily available data to stakeholders and system actors, ensuring effective coordination among stakeholders, developing a sufficient and well-trained workforce that is recognised by the community, a need for independently conducted evaluations to contribute to the evidence base both locally and regionally, and a more robust policy and regulatory environment that revolves around the community.

## Q&A

- **What topics do you think we should start looking into in terms of play and children's mental health?**
  - To develop a coherent language in the academic field, to collaborate and develop deeper interventions, and to begin testing and experimenting with various initiatives. ensuring that the research is locally contextualised by conducting a community survey, identifying and studying the barriers and assets that can be used or addressed in positively engaging children
- **How do you advocate play in the Philippines community which has not been well received by our constituents, do you have any advice for local government units/ community to change the perception of the community regarding play instead of solely focusing on pre-academic skills and academic skills?**
  - It is a challenge that we see in many communities and countries around the world, which is why we have dedicated one part of our initiative to a play movement, so the bottom-up movement and mobilisation of parents to support play.
  - We still see that policy and trust and leadership from the government are important, as the plays adopted into legislation demonstrate the belief in the power of play.
  - Debunk myths about play. Use studies to demonstrate the effects of play on emotional regulation, language development, self-regulation, and sustained attention in school. Recognise that the majority of existing research supports academic/school readiness and social-emotional development. While describing the benefits of play, it is important to make it possible for parents to engage in play within the context of their daily activities, time, and setting. Highlight how play benefits parents by helping them understand their children better.
- **How have you engaged parents with varying levels of literacy since establishing HBC?**
  - Creating a simple and practical curriculum that emphasises on-the-job training rather than knowledge and attitude change toward children. Allow the staff to sit next to them and read the material to them so that they can contribute and integrate their learnings into the training.



- Offered a parenting programme with 18 lessons delivered one hour per week to provide information and knowledge on early childhood development. Here, parents become teachers and teachers become assistants, capitalising on the community's strengths, assets, and talent while cultivating a closer relationship between parents and teachers.
- **From the LGU perspective, how do utilise the findings of CEI's study to create programmes for children and mental health?**
  - Examine what services are available for caregiver mental health and whether you require more information about what mental health is and what your needs are. Going back to workforce training, the development of teachers and workers, and providing local information to identify and support young children, can in turn improve the mental health of children.
  - Extra support and more dialogue with the people of the community would be needed on how policies should be implemented locally. There is a disconnect between the national policies and on-the-ground barangays and LGUs; more oversight and support is required, perhaps requiring efforts from organisations and NGOs.
- **What were the factors that attributed to the sustainability of your programmes?**
  - OneSky's Early Learning Center, which provided quality learning and care for young children, served as a national demonstration model, with teachers and ECCE caregivers from various HBC within and outside the province brought in to observe the practises, which were recognised by Vietnam's Ministry of Education. Hence, policymakers and those who influenced the levers observed how the programmes work on the ground and the value of responsive care.
  - Increasing credibility through evidence and data; collaborating with Harvard University on impact evaluation; gaining government buy-in over time; telling the child's story; using video and demonstration; making it come alive for policymakers

## Key Takeaways

- Through multi-sectoral collaboration, it is necessary to form partnerships with government entities, to mobilise community assets and resources to make programme implementation more feasible, thus designing programmes that create a safe and stimulating environment for young children, and sustain the efforts of the various stakeholders in maintaining the level of responsive care within the community.
- Creating a community and network of care providers, as well as connections with parents and children, can improve overall community well-being, particularly in underserved areas. It can also ensure the ongoing development of caregiving skills for young children, as well as provide a sense of support for the various groups involved in early childhood development in dealing with the various systemic stressors encountered.
- Additional research and studies into the efficacy of various ECD interventions can help with the implementation of evidence-based ECD programmes across numerous stakeholders, leading to long-term outcomes and the right attainment of developmental goals for young children. The same is true for gaining the confidence of government stakeholders and their support through facts and evidence.