Innovating for early childhood development: what have we learned to strengthen programming for nurturing care?

Meeting Report

Geneva, Switzerland, 13-14 June 2019

unicef for every child

WORLD BANK GROUP

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ECDAN Early Childhood Development Action Network

The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health

IN SUPPORT OF EVERY WOMAN EVERY CHILD FOR HEALTHY AND EMPOWERED WOMEN, CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Acknowledgements

This document is the report of the technical meeting convened by the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank Group, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and the ECD Action Network (ECDAN), on the theme of 'Innovating for early childhood development: what have we learned to strengthen programming for nurturing care?'. The meeting was part of an initiative to develop implementation resources to accompany *Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children to survive and thrive to transform health and human potential*. The partners are thankful for the invaluable contributions of participants in the preparation of the meeting. WHO acknowledges the financial contributions to this work of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, the Conrad N Hilton Foundation and the King Baudouin Foundation, United States of America. Christina Laurenzi and Bettina Schwethelm prepared the first draft of the report, and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

Acronyms

AfECN	Africa Early Childhood Network
ANECD	Arab Network for Early Childhood Development
ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Network for Early Childhood
CHW	Community health worker
ECD	Early childhood development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ISSA	International Step by Step Association
MCA	Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PMNCH	The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
R4D	Results for Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPRING	Sustainable Programme Incorporating Nutrition and Games
TTC	Timed Targeted Counseling
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

In follow-up of the launch of *Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children to survive and thrive to transform health and human potential* (referred to in this document as the *Framework*) *(1)* in May 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank Group, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) convened a meeting in June 2019 to take stock of implementation and define future strategic directions, implementation guidance, and partnerships for accelerated actions in support of nurturing care in countries.

A rapid assessment revealed that events have been held in over 30 countries to sensitize policy-makers and other stakeholders on the *Framework*. In many countries, entry points for action were identified and workplans developed to take the *Framework* forward within the health sector and beyond. Common steps included local adaptation, integration of missing elements in services, system strengthening and communication for development.

Results from an innovation survey and research portfolio analysis showed a diverse set of interventions and approaches being implemented to strengthen young children's development. Most included attention to responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning, and community-based delivery platforms were commonly used. As proposed reporting guidelines for implementation were only recently published, *(2)* the findings from the survey did not permit firm conclusions on effective programming attributes nor on costs of implementation. However, during the meeting several issues were highlighted repeatedly as factors for success (see **Box 1**).

To address the current gaps in knowledge, it is no longer sufficient to invest in small-scale or efficacy research. Effectiveness trials are now more commonly carried out, but implementation research embedded in national programming is needed to elicit information on the factors that influence effectiveness, scalability and sustainability of interventions for nurturing care in real-life systems.

Box 1.

Factors for success in implementing the Framework

- High-level political commitment
- Multisector engagement
- Coordination mechanisms that transcend sectors
- Community engagement and ownership
- Adaptation to local contexts
- Building on available systems and services
- Incremental scaling-up of do-able actions
- Enabling policies
- Predictable financing

The universal progressive approach promoted in the *Framework* sets an ambitious agenda. Incremental investment in doable actions is a practical way forward. Vulnerable populations will benefit the most, and efforts should focus on reaching them from the beginning, while maintaining a broad vision of the policies, services and information needed to create enabling environments for all.

To maintain the current momentum and ensure timely responses to country needs for technical assistance, informal working groups are being formed to address advocacy, implementation, knowledge and learning exchange, and monitoring and evaluation. Each working group will develop a time-bound workplan to build the tools and support the processes that are needed to ensure that every child is able to develop to his/her full potential, leaving no child behind.

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