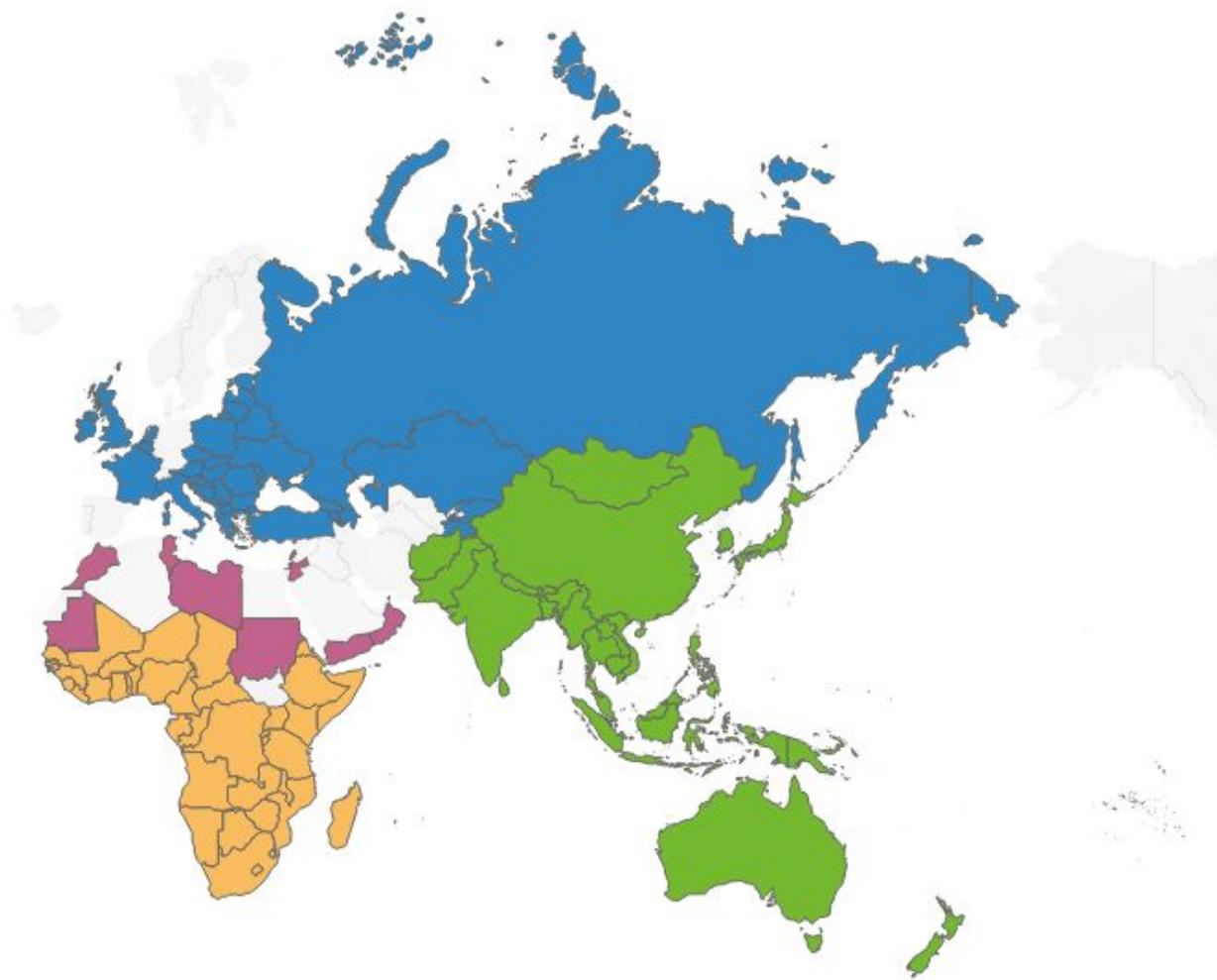


THE NETWORK ADVANTAGE

# HOW REGIONAL NETWORKS CATALYZE IMPACT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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**Regional Early Childhood Development Networks**

- Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN)
  - Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD)
  - Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)
  - International Step by Step Association (ISSA)
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## INTRODUCTION

In over 100 countries<sup>1</sup> in four regions, the past decade has seen a dramatic increase in the collective capacity for comprehensive cross-sector work advancing Early Childhood Development (ECD). Critical to this accomplishment have been four regional ECD networks.

These networks are rights-based, with core operating principles dedicated to quality, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, partnerships and accountability. All four are high-performing, with initiatives that have set the stage for advancing ECD work. This report takes a systematic look at what uniquely and collectively positions these networks to make an impact.

This report builds on interviews with political leaders, senior civil servants, INGO's, academics and heads of national networks. It identifies the unique advantages of regional networks in the ECD sector, examining how these can be leveraged for greater impact, especially in times of crisis and recovery.

In a recent review of progress, the UN emphasized that *"the transformation required to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 is not yet advancing at the speed or scale required."*<sup>2</sup> In addition, calls were made to bolster *"local action to accelerate implementation"* and to improve the engagement, coordination and alignment across levels of implementation of policy making, from local to national to regional and international.

In the ecosystem of actors and organizations working toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 -- to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education<sup>3</sup> -- regional ECD networks are well-positioned to strengthen and leverage their network advantage in order to achieve transformational change more effectively and efficiently.

And, as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic become more widely known, the need for transformational change to policies, systems and supports for young children and their families, especially the most vulnerable children, will become even more acute.

This report is organized in the following sections:

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<sup>1</sup> ISSA covers 42 countries; ARNEC covers 42 countries; AfECN covers the entire Sub-Saharan Africa region, all African Union states in the EDEC Cluster, and partner networks in 18 countries; ANECD covers 10 countries.

<sup>2</sup> Special Edition: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Report of the Secretary General. May 8, 2019: <https://undocs.org/E/2019/68>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

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- **An overview of networks**
  - **How regional networks advance ECD**
  - **Regional network case studies**
  - **The imperative for ECD networks in COVID-19 response and recovery**
  - **Opportunities for learning, collaboration and action**

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## AN OVERVIEW OF NETWORKS

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*Networks connect the dots between different countries and stakeholders. They offer comprehensive answers to the policy conversations, and they have more weight, all members are weighing in, there's the power of collective intelligence and influence.*

-ISSA Stakeholder, Policymaker

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Over the last decade, social change agents and their funders have increasingly organized in social impact networks to address the world's most pressing problems. This is because networks are uniquely powerful vehicles for achieving ambitious goals. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations observed that networks “hold the potential for generating impact at scale exponentially greater than the sum of their individual parts.”<sup>4</sup> Through

their connections, networks can assemble and activate diverse people, gather and communicate vital information, develop and scale innovative solutions, influence policy and practice across sectors and confer legitimacy by engaging actors at all levels<sup>5</sup>. A network's unique ability to organize for increased impact is called the network advantage.

<b>SOCIAL IMPACT NETWORK</b>	<b>Individuals and/or organizations that join together as peers to advance a social goal.</b>
<b><u>GENERATIVE</u> SOCIAL IMPACT NETWORK</b>	<b>Members work together, adapt over time and generate multiple, ongoing kinds of social impact.</b>

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<sup>4</sup> Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, “Cracking the Network Code: Four Principles for Grantmakers”: <https://www.maine philanthropy.org/sites/default/files/2013geo-network-code-exec-summary.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Madeleine Taylor and Peter Plastrik, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press. 2014;

Kania, John and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2011);

Jane Wei-Skillern and Sonia Marciano, “The Networked Nonprofit,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2008);

Monitor Institute, “Connected Citizens: The Power, Potential and Peril of Networks,”

<http://www.knightfoundation.org/publications/connected-citizens-power-potential-and-peril-netwo/>.

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Many change agents who engage in network building hope to build networks of individuals and organizations to address a complex issue by working together, adapting over time, and generating a sustained flow of activities and impacts. We call these generative social-impact networks—generative because they are designed to be a platform for creating multiple, ongoing kinds of social impact, not just accomplishing a single outcome<sup>6</sup>.

In generative social impact networks, members deliberately build, strengthen and maintain ties so that they can be activated again and again. Generative social impact networks are typically distributed, flexible and adaptive so that capacity can be mobilized when needed. These networks are well placed to address complicated problems in the following cases:

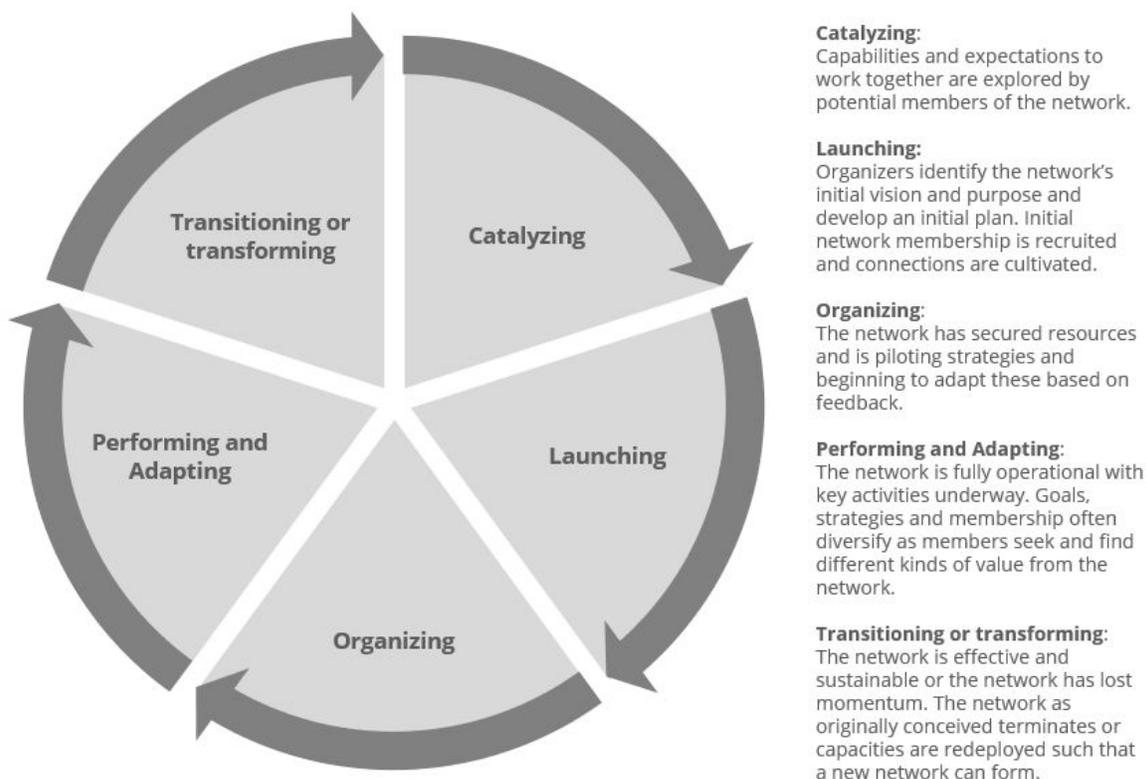
<b>THE PROBLEM YOU ARE TRYING TO ADDRESS...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>...has no clear recipe or formula for success</li><li>...cuts across sectors or fields of practice</li><li>...is evolving and require solutions to evolve with it</li><li>...cannot be addressed effectively by any single individual or organization</li></ul>
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It takes time to build networks and show results and, as they evolve, networks tend to move through distinct stages of development although not necessarily at a similar or even pace. The graphic below (Figure 1) describes five main stages of network development<sup>7</sup>. At each stage, the network’s focus and activities evolve:

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<sup>6</sup> Madeleine Taylor and Peter Plastrik, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press. 2014  
<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Monitor Institute/GEO, *Catalyzing Networks for Social Change*, 2011, and iScale’s *Next Generation in Network Evolution*, 2009.

**FIGURE 1: STAGES OF NETWORK DEVELOPMENT**



Networks in the later stages of organizing, performing and adapting have tested pathways to impact and are focused on strategically deploying key network mechanisms to achieve results<sup>8</sup>. All four of the regional ECD networks have evolved to be Organizing, Performing and Adapting, and are considering how to build on past successes to leverage the unique benefits of organizing as a network to better capture their network advantage going forward<sup>9</sup>.

Members of regional ECD networks may collaborate in other ways (e.g., in coalitions or independent partnerships), but as generative networks their work brings advantages compared to other collaboration models.<sup>10</sup> Networks are not time-limited like coalitions and alliances tend to be, and can accommodate and engage more partners. Compared to membership-based associations, work and leadership is distributed within networks, requiring less centralized capacity, which can lead to greater overall capacity.

<sup>8</sup>Monitor Institute, "Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A Funder's Guide," [http://www.monitorinstitute.com/downloads/what-we-think/catalyzing-networks/Catalyzing\\_Networks\\_for\\_Social\\_Change.pdf](http://www.monitorinstitute.com/downloads/what-we-think/catalyzing-networks/Catalyzing_Networks_for_Social_Change.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See the Appendix for key questions by network development stage.

<sup>10</sup> See the Appendix for a comparison chart of generative networks and other types of collective action models.

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In addition to supporting networks with the resources they need to achieve particular results, funders increasingly invest in networked capacity as a “premiere” collective action model. Social movements need networks embedded within them to deliver results in a sustained way while narrow coalitions must evolve into more flexible forms in order to address new issues as they arise<sup>11</sup>. In each permutation, networks emerge because they bring an added advantage. Because the four regional ECD networks are more advanced networks, they are able to produce results across the range of diverse partners needed for ECD work<sup>12</sup>. Within their regions, each of the networks is well-established, highly visible and influential across a variety of targets, often including regional governing bodies. This level of maturity in structure and strategy enables them to facilitate and drive change, as well as serve as the connective tissue, infrastructure and collective voice for the sector.

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<sup>11</sup> Heather McLeod Grant. Building Networks and Movements for Social Change. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building\\_networks\\_and\\_movements\\_for\\_social\\_change](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_networks_and_movements_for_social_change)

<sup>12</sup> An overview of each network trajectory is included in the Appendix.

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## HOW REGIONAL NETWORKS ADVANCE ECD

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*So much of ECD is out of the public, in spaces that are not publicly funded — not health, not education, not social welfare — so it has been left to faith-based organizations and private society, CSOs. And the network is the only forum to pull all of those actors together, otherwise they are a disparate bunch of people delivering services.*

-AfECN Stakeholder, INGO

”

### SEVEN PRIMARY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED BY REGIONAL ECD NETWORKS

1. **Mainstreaming ECD as a public sector imperative**
2. **Building the cross-sector connections needed for ECD to advance**
3. **Carving out a space for government connection, capacity building and engagement**
4. **Expanding reach and capacity through national network building**
5. **Linking the ground and the global for idea generation and more effective implementation**
6. **Creating readiness for effective policy change**
7. **Laying the foundations for effective crisis response and recovery**

Multiple stakeholders interviewed for this report noted that ECD is both “everyone’s problem and no one’s problem”. It requires policy and budgetary allocations from multiple sectors that are already addressing their own substantive issues. The array of different contexts across countries and regions requires different configurations of public and private partners to identify gaps and address ECD effectively.

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As a result of the significant investment in regional ECD networks to date, all four networks have contributed to outcomes and impacts that have advanced the field. Notably, these impacts are not one-time results but rather a foundation for the overall capacity of the ECD sector. Linkages and processes are in place to address current issues and advance emerging issues such as the impact of climate change and, more recently, COVID-19, on vulnerable young children.

Seven primary outcomes achieved by regional ECD networks serve as a bedrock for greater impact in the sector:

### **I. MAINSTREAMING ECD AS A PUBLIC SECTOR IMPERATIVE**

In the beginning of the global push for ECD, it was new to both NGOs and government. For under-resourced countries, ECD was largely donor-funded, not mainstreamed within the government. The largest pressure was from civil society groups, which were often siloed and fractured before networks were established to connect them. ECD advocates in each region shifted perspectives from an emphasis on childcare and the private sector to the science of human development and the need for public support and investment in human capital. Now that the ideas behind ECD have effectively been mainstreamed and a role for the public sector has been more clearly defined, work can expand to focus on quality, improvement and scaling up.

### **II. BUILDING THE CROSS-SECTOR CONNECTIONS NEEDED FOR ECD TO ADVANCE**

Each network has members from different issue sectors, such as health, education, and protection or social services. These cross-sector members also perform different functions in their work as policymakers, members of civil society organizations, academics and practitioners. Through their engagement with regional ECD networks, these diverse members across sectors and functions have built muscle memory for effective collaboration in order to develop, implement and improve comprehensive national policies and programs.

### **III. CARVING OUT A SPACE FOR GOVERNMENT CONNECTION, CAPACITY BUILDING AND ENGAGEMENT**

Decision makers at different levels play a role in policy formation, implementation and improvement. By connecting ministers across countries, all four networks have created the space needed to share best practices for effective national-level ECD plans in different contexts. For example, ANECD facilitated connections between country-level ministries so that Jordan, Lebanon and Oman could build the relationships needed to both learn from each other and work on common projects.

### **IV. EXPANDING REACH AND CAPACITY THROUGH NATIONAL NETWORK BUILDING**

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Advancing ECD at the national level relies on having a national infrastructure. To expand the supportive infrastructure in member countries, each regional network is focused on supporting national networks in different ways. For example:

- AfECN's National Advocacy program collaborates with national advocacy partners in ensuring ECD is included in national policies.
- ARNEC is currently facilitating a learning group among members from different countries on multi-sectoral approaches to ECD with a focus on developing/strengthening national ECD networks.
- ISSA supports work on the inclusion of Roma children and increasing diversity in the workforce by empowering more Roma practitioners in 11 countries, as well as supporting an ECD campaign by three national networks.
- ANECD connects national networks with networks in other regions to learn about their structures and processes and to use cross-regional lessons to build their national capacity.

## V. LINKING THE GROUND TO THE GLOBAL

Each network has a process for working with members to interpret and refine global research into practical methods that work on the ground. Likewise, best practices from countries in regions elevate new ideas and models to inform global action. ANECD works to revise traditional ECD frameworks by bringing member experience, perspective and terminology to the work, including lifting up the voices of marginalized populations, which results in the credibility and authenticity needed for ECD programs to resonate with regional actors. In 2019, AfECN brought the experiences of national actors to bear on advocacy for increased government expenditure during the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7) in Yokohama. The collaborative advocacy of the partners in support of ECD was reflected in both the [Yokohama Declaration](#) and its accompanying [Action Plan](#)<sup>13</sup>.

## VI. CREATING READINESS FOR EFFECTIVE POLICY CHANGE

Regional ECD networks have supported the public and political will needed for sustainable change. The networks are able to fill gaps in advocacy and policy making capacity by supporting countries with tools to influence policy development and technical assistance to support implementation.

## VII. LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

In times of crisis, networks are able to light up as needed, with different configurations of members taking on different tasks to be responsive to new issues and challenges. Leveraging the existing capacity for networks in a crisis allows them to play critical roles in

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<sup>13</sup> Yokohama Declaration 2019 Advancing Africa's Development through People, Technology and Innovation. 30 August, 2019. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama_declaration_en.pdf)

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both crisis and recovery. All four regional networks have developed strategies for addressing a spectrum of crises, from political instability to man-made and natural disasters. In each instance, the networks have found a way to respond to issues on the ground while leveraging ECD's emphasis on resilience for children and families.

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## REGIONAL ECD NETWORK CASE STUDIES

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*For ECD, a network is the only game in town. Other sectors are built on UN humanitarian response structure, so they follow siloed sectors. ANECD launched in the development sector bringing both development and humanitarian ECD actors. That brings flexibility and liberation, not being influenced by certain agendas, being less political without the power dynamics of influencing parties.*

-ANECD Stakeholder, INGO

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### NETWORK MECHANISMS

**Key knowledge transfer**  
**Peer learning and exchange to spark and scale innovation**  
**Organizing for impact**  
**Fostering resilience and adaptation**

Each regional ECD network uses mechanisms to achieve results at different scales, and they often weave mechanisms together to produce multiple advantages and impacts. The examples below demonstrate the unique ways that they each leverage the advantage of working as a network.

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## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

# ISSA

## FEEDING A CYCLE OF INNOVATION AND LEARNING

### MISSION

To be an international learning community powered by the leading early childhood experts in Europe and Central Asia. The network unites and supports professionals and partners to deliver high quality early years services equitably. The network challenges existing knowledge and practice and co-constructs new approaches and models.

### CORE MEMBERSHIP

92 full voting member organizations from 42 countries, three non-voting affiliate members from governmental bodies/agencies

In 2012, as a member of the European Commission's working group on ECD, ISSA leveraged best practices from the network to help produce a proposed European Quality Framework for Early Education and Care. Over the next two years, ISSA promoted the framework to network members to pilot and refine practical ways to implement the framework on the ground in different member contexts. For many ISSA members, implementation of the framework meant their countries had to shift from decades of focusing on child care to intentionally supporting child development and well-being. The ECD quality framework made recommendations on five pillars of staff and inclusion that would have to be implemented across a region with very different systems. Some countries had integrated systems contained within the ministries of education,

others had split systems across sectors within social services, health and education. ISSA produced training modules for the framework and encouraged peer exchange and dialogue on resources for implementation. This early preparation with network members helped to create a readiness for the policy change needed to implement the Commission framework at the national level after its passage in 2019.

In Romania, ISSA's member organization helped influence a 2011 Law on Education, which for the first time mentioned children under the age of three. Working with ISSA as a technical partner, ECD advocates in Romania were able to further change the law to lower the starting age of compulsory education and to ensure that there would also be trained staff for the education of children under three. A network of business partners that ISSA had helped to support in Romania was critical to the successful efforts to change the Fiscal Code to support increased access to and the quality of early years services. ISSA connected its Romanian member organization to ReadyNation International, an organization that promotes public policies and programs that build a stronger workforce and economy through investments in children. In 2016, ISSA's member established a new organization, ReadyNation Romania, which now boasts over 100 business leaders. Although ECD was a new topic for them, these business leaders were able to incorporate ECD into how they talked about the future workforce in Romania, particularly about how foundational early years are to a child's development, and the long-term benefits to society of supporting ECD. The support from these unexpected partners helped to sway policymakers to implement a more comprehensive law and incentivize the participation of businesses through a tax credit. In October 2019, after several years of

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drafting proposals, advocacy and campaigning in the media to build both public and political will for change, the Romanian Parliament adopted an amendment to the Fiscal Code so that companies benefited from a tax credit when they paid for early education services for employees' children.<sup>14</sup>

ISSA also invests heavily in peer learning to create knowledge and promote shared expertise; and in technical assistance for the implementation and uptake of new models, frameworks and policies. This pairing of intensive support for peer exchange and technical assistance for implementation makes it possible for ISSA to support significant in-country change, as noted above, as well as to take new models to scale. Because the network's core strategy is guided by the regional landscape and member context, its priorities are responsive to the needs and concerns of members.

In 2012, in Belgium, an ISSA member adapted a professional development method for early childhood educators' reflection that had been created in France for ECD professionals. Called the WANDA method, ISSA leveraged peer learning to refine the WANDA model across a range of member contexts. From 2013-2020, the WANDA method was tested, refined and re-adapted by members in nine countries. In addition, ISSA's connection to the grassroots through member countries enabled the network to identify questions and issues in the field and address them by weaving diverse perspectives into what would become best practices. ISSA's support for learning, testing and adaptation across contexts eventually enabled the network to

scale the WANDA method to all members, many of whom continue to use it to improve quality of practice.

## NETWORK MECHANISMS:

### KEY KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Building the infrastructure to support multiple channels for knowledge dissemination - from global advancements in ECD to local perspectives on existing models -- provides network members a core knowledge base to work from

### PEER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

Intensive support for peer learning, through joint learning labs and formal regional structures, paired with support for capacity building and implementation, supports a highly effective engine for advancing ECD based on member experience and knowledge

### ORGANIZING FOR IMPACT

Technical assistance to members for building support throughout the phases of the policy change cycle, from development, to implementation, creates readiness for change in member countries and the capacity to organize through networks to catalyze change

### FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Supporting experimentation and adaptation of existing models within member contexts and based on their local knowledge strengthens both the practice of ECD and the sector in the region

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<sup>14</sup> AmCham Romania, "Romanian Parliament adopts tax credit for early education and a package of incentives for companies investing in education," October 20, 2020. <https://www.amcham.ro/news-from-members/romanian-parliament-adopts-tax-credit-for-early-education-and-a-package-of-incentives-for-companies-investing-in-education>

# ANECD

## CONNECTING RESEARCH TO POLICY AND PLANNING FOR INSTABILITY WITH RESILIENCE

### MISSION

To mobilize expertise and resources for the full development of every young child and for a better future.

### CORE MEMBERSHIP

Governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutions, academics and individual experts from Arab countries with a record of accomplishment in ECD

### Connecting research to policy

In May 2018, ANECD launched a joint research project on kindergarten enrollment in eight Arabic Countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan, and Oman. The first of its kind study *"linked the reality of early childhood in the Arab world to international standards while examining the readiness of the early childhood system in its various components in Arab countries"*<sup>15</sup>. In order to undertake the research, national coordinators were trained on data collection and analysis techniques. The results revealed that for many ANECD members, kindergarten and preschool institutional enrollment was only around 50%, meaning that 50% of the total number of children of preschool age were still outside these institutions. The full spectrum of results ranged between 1% in Yemen before the war, to 98% in Gulf states, highlighting great disparities in the region.

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<sup>15</sup> ANECD, Executive Summary of the Study on Increasing Enrollment Ratios in Kindergarten Programs in Arab countries

The research also showed a commitment to sustainable development goals related to preschool, and that countries were working on strategies and plans to address young children's education. However, the lack of available and consistent data made it more difficult for countries to use research to inform policy decision making. As a result, ANECD made additional plans to produce research tools and methodologies for members to support subsequent research, with the goal of establishing "trends" indicators to measure progress over time.

In Oman, the Ministry of Education was planning its strategic vision for 2020-2040 at around the same time that ANECD's research results were released. The results prompted changes to their overall plan. Enrollment numbers were low, so the Ministry adopted the study recommendations and created a target to increase enrollment in kindergartens from 50% to 70%, to have free and reduced cost for enrollment, and to establish a concerted effort to increase teacher competencies and capacities. In Tunisia, where ANECD was also supporting a national ECD working group with member partners, the research on enrollment also had a direct impact on ECD strategy. Laws were amended and strategies and programs were changed to incorporate initiatives on positive parenting and to increase enrollment of vulnerable populations.

In addition to the region's landmark study on kindergarten enrollment, ANECD also works to build the capacity of countries to access and use global research. Working with Plan International in Jordan, ANECD supported the creation of an ECD working group under the umbrella of the National Council's General Secretary for Family Affairs (NCF). ECD stakeholders from multiple sectors were invited to participate, and ANECD conducted a team-building training course using the Arabic version of "The Science of ECD -- A-SECD", a

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Red River College training course that was Arabised by ANECD. The working group is now an independent member of ANECD and has its own two-year strategic plan. Similar efforts are planned in Egypt, Lebanon and five other countries in the region.

### **Planning for instability with resilience**

While working on joint research to establish a baseline for standards around early childhood education systems, ANECD was also actively planning how to address the impact on children of multiple factors that lead to instability in the region — from conflict, to displacement, to natural and man-made disasters. As a result of their strategic planning process with member engagement, a core focus area was established on child protection and enabling children’s development in all phases of emergencies. The focus area supports embedding ECD as an integrated approach in emergency planning, response and early recovery. Long term goals for the region include building back better ECD systems by connecting local resilience initiatives with national, inter-regional and global plans, and strengthening preparedness and capacities to respond during emergencies.

Some work in this focus area has already begun. Before COVID-19, a responsive parenting project that addressed displaced children was already underway in Lebanon and Jordan for refugees and host communities. The Health, Education and Protection Parenting Program (HEPPP) had originally been piloted in disadvantaged communities in Egypt and Lebanon, and was adapted by ANECD and network partners for refugee settings. Then, in August 2020, two massive explosions tore through the city of Beirut adding a man-made disaster to the ongoing crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in the location of the network’s coordinating agency. A crisis plan for Lebanon was generated by ANECD members from different

Arab countries. ANECD adapted the HEPPP program again by digitizing it to respond to COVID-19 challenges and in response to the crisis in Beirut. Their network of in-country volunteers has become critical for implementing the program and providing psychosocial support to children and families impacted by the explosion.

ANECD’s deep knowledge and experience addressing emergencies as a network brings a core adaptive competency to the region. ANECD also has the added flexibility of its origins as a civil society network that could operate outside of the changing political contexts in member countries. For network members, the rapidly changing context creates openings to influence policies and bring in new ideas.

### **NETWORK MECHANISMS:**

#### **KEY KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**

Applying international standards to study baseline levels of ECD-related programs in the region creates powerful tools to support agenda setting in member countries

#### **PEER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE**

Supporting national ECD working groups that connect cross-sector stakeholders and connecting them with networks in other regions exposes national network leads to the structures and processes of effective network building

#### **ORGANIZING FOR IMPACT**

Strong relationships that can be leveraged to connect local resilience initiatives to regional and global frameworks support a cycle of influence from the ground up and vice versa

#### **FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION**

A focus on rapidly adapting models across contexts and creating strategies to integrate ECD in crisis response bolsters the ECD sector in the region

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## ASIA PACIFIC REGION

# ARNEC

## CREATING SPACES FOR CROSS-COUNTRY COLLABORATION

**MISSION** To share knowledge and advocate for children's rights, and inclusive and holistic ECD

**CORE MEMBERSHIP** Three Core Team members who sit in the governance structure of the network; 25 institutional members; and over 3,000 individual members; coming from multilateral organisations, academic institutions, international NGOs, and government agencies that actively promote ECD and whose objectives align with those of ARNEC

In 2007, inside the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Bhutan, people had limited understanding of early childhood development (ECD). Policymakers considered ECD as part of the private sector, and ECD programs were new enough that they were not yet yielding the kind of tangible results that support an increase in public and political will. MOE officials and technical staff within the Ministry saw participating in a network as an opportunity to learn what different countries in the region were doing. For a country that had never had an ECD program, learning about how other ministries in the region were actively supporting ECD prompted questions about where government fits in. As part of their participation in ARNEC activities, Bhutan sends its delegation to the annual regional conference, where they are able to learn from best practices in ECD other countries.

After learning from ARNEC events and conferences, where multi-sectoral approaches to ECD were discussed, Bhutan wanted to have a deeper understanding of how countries are able to adopt holistic approaches to ECD. One such country was the Philippines, which had a more established ECD policy and structure for coordinating ECD across sectors. With ARNEC support, a group of MOE officials and technical staff from Bhutan went to the Philippines to learn about multi-sectoral collaboration on ECD. ARNEC connected the Bhutan group with the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council of the Philippines and other ECD stakeholders in the country and structured a **'learning journey'** on ECD governance, policy development, multi-year and multi-sectoral investment programming, and service delivery. That knowledge exchange with peers in their region helped Bhutan learn how to further strengthen their ECD initiative. The Ministry of Education is now leading the development of a 10-year multi-sectoral ECD strategic plan with UNICEF. ARNEC is supporting the establishment of a national ECD network, which will play a critical role in the implementation of the ECD strategic plan. As a result of continuing engagement with ARNEC members in other countries, Bhutan is able to follow trends and then update their own policies and practices with new knowledge. Bhutan's policymakers have built a practice that examines new information and science, assesses potential value, and when determined to be beneficial, adopts new models by building them into a policy framework and making them sustainable. This policy making practice contributes to an overall capacity for supporting ECD in the Education Ministry. When international agencies approach them with new ideas, they can evaluate them, mainstream them, and then invest their own funds to keep them going.

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The team from Bhutan was not the only team of country-level policymakers that visited the Philippines with ARNEC support. Members of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia attended ARNEC’s annual regional conference in 2008. As a result of their engagement with ARNEC, they also sent a delegation to visit the Philippines. Members of the Ministry brought back an evaluation of policy and practice in the Philippines and used it to draft a comprehensive ECD plan. They then used the plan to advocate for adoption of a similar ECD policy. It was Cambodia’s first cross-sector policy, and involved health and 11 other ministries, as well as development partners. Each year, Cambodia also sends its delegation to ARNEC conferences to support their learning and engagement, and in 2017, the Cambodian government hosted the regional conference. The convening was supported by the government and other ECD stakeholders in Cambodia, and the Prime Minister delivered an opening speech to 700 participants that included global ECD practitioners, academia, development partners and policymakers. ARNEC worked with the Cambodian government to build their capacity to convene a diverse group of ECD stakeholders and to design a high-level meeting of Ministers and senior government officials in charge of ECD. Cambodia also shared the financial costs of the conference.

Over time, ARNEC’s powerful ability to convene NGOs, INGOs, academia and government in one place has enabled governments to translate learning from their peers to their own context. As one ARNEC policymaker stakeholder that was interviewed for this report commented, *“when governments*

*are not in networks, no matter how good the information or knowledge, the government won’t take it, won’t buy it, they will be unconvinced.”* As members of networks, governments learn to build connections with their peers to support continued improvement of country-level policies and practices. With short-term funding cycles that demand results it can be especially hard to coordinate evidence across sectors. By having access to best practices through ARNEC’s convenings, policymakers are able to apply what they learn and strengthen their commitment to change and continuous improvement.

#### NETWORK MECHANISMS:

##### KEY KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Convenings and knowledge dissemination strategies provide a platform for new ideas, innovative models, and evidence-based practices

##### PEER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

Spaces designed for shared experiences and challenges, best practices, and solutions across sectors and within sectors support deeper learning

##### ORGANIZING FOR IMPACT

Intentionally connecting Ministers, policymakers, the academe, and field practitioners across the region to support policy change and quality implementation

##### FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Developing a clear strategy in responding to a crisis (e.g., COVID-19) amplifying voices of the regional ECD community and allowing cross-country sharing of program innovations

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## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

# AfECN

## CREATING SPACE WITHIN GOVERNMENT FOR IMPACT

### MISSION

To serve as a platform for the promotion of excellence and collaboration in protecting children's rights, influencing policy and practice through advocacy, strengthened partnership and sharing of experience and knowledge.

### CORE MEMBERSHIP

387 members, including national network partners in 18 countries, as well as active engagement with AU member states

One of the key differences between networks and other collective action models is the sustained capacity to produce coordinated outcomes. As early as 2010, AfECN realized that there were narrow, time bound efforts to work on ECD on the continent like task forces, but they were disconnected, and disbanded once their specific goals were accomplished. Stakeholders described the early ECD landscape as being *"like herding cats,"* where activities did not contribute to a larger, collective goal. Network leaders asked themselves how they could connect those smaller collaborations for ongoing work. As the network created mechanisms to connect member countries to each other and focused on supporting in-country capacity for ECD, they strategized about how to create sustained and coordinated impact on the continental level.

Within the African Union (AU), the African Union Commission (AUC) works on the

implementation of policies and high-level advocacy work on "harmonizing the continent". Specialized Technical Committees (STCs) are thematic Committees that work in close collaboration with AUC departments on specific issues. Cross-sector issues like ECD often present a challenge to governing bodies. From experience with implementation, the AUC knew that partners were critical to the successful implementation of their policy frameworks. They also knew that an institutional framework would need to be in place for partners to help implement cross-sector policies, connect siloed departments or advocate for issues at a higher continental level.

While AfECN had recognized that ad-hoc efforts were a barrier to sustained regional capacity for ECD, the AUC recognized the need to strengthen collaboration with technical partners. They saw value in establishing formal relationships with outside collective action efforts and sustaining impact through meaningful partnerships. It was clear that without the legitimacy of a mechanism within the AU, recommendations based on research or coming solely from outside organizations were unlikely to get real traction and influence policy. To address this barrier, the AUC established a "cluster" mechanism within the department of Human Resources, Science and Technology to institutionalize external partnerships. AfECN saw a key opportunity to be part of the cluster system and was appointed to serve as a coordinator for the ECD cluster. By partnering with AfECN, the AUC was able to bring the strength of the network's collective work and perspective into a highly effective, institutionalized partnership inside the AU. For the AUC, AfECN was considered a high-functioning network who could connect the regional government to member states, development partners and other stakeholders.

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Launched in 2018, the ECD cluster supports implementation of activities to support achievement of ECED objectives of the Continental Education Strategy. The ECED Cluster is touted as an example of good practice within the broader cluster approach. Through the STC, the cluster engages ministers and presents stakeholder recommendations that are discussed by the STC. Recommendations that are accepted are endorsed. Government representatives from member countries can then act on those recommendations. If a member country does not have the capacity or readiness needed to implement a recommendation, AfECN is able to provide support through the network's other capacity building mechanisms.

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, AfECN was able to quickly leverage and adapt the cluster and its working groups as mechanisms to develop an ECD COVID-19 strategy, share best practices, raise awareness about how to support young children, and examine mental health and caregiver well-being. As one AfECN academic stakeholder noted, *"ECD networks showed the way for governments to mobilize, because they can mobilize faster than governments, especially if they are influential"*.

## NETWORK MECHANISMS:

### KEY KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Creating mechanisms for knowledge creation and dissemination, like the ECED Cluster Research Working Group, provides a top down and bottom up cycle for gap identification and elevating the voices of those with lived experience

### PEER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

Providing partners to work jointly to develop frameworks and guide their implementation ensures a strong knowledge infrastructure rooted in practical application

### ORGANIZING FOR IMPACT

Connecting shorter-term efforts to promote change into a network with ongoing capacity builds the Continent's overall ECD infrastructure

### FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Strong and effective presence within regional government can be leveraged and adapted to address emerging issues

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## THE IMPERATIVE FOR ECD NETWORKS IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

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*The impact of COVID is not time-bound, the impact of trauma and adversity on children is long-lasting, so a resilience focus is critical to address the impact on learning, development and well-being.*

-AfECN Stakeholder, INGO

”

The ECD sector has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is broad agreement that decades of progress are at risk of being lost. The pandemic will increase inequities in education that were already daunting, as current data suggest that remote learning remains out of reach for an estimated 500 million children. School closures in 190 countries are projected to reverse gains in access to education, and children have also lost access to services provided through schools.<sup>16</sup> Lockdown measures associated with the COVID-19 emergency also come with heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse. Children in conflict settings, as well as those living in unsanitary and crowded conditions such as refugees and displaced children, are also at considerable risk.<sup>17</sup>

As noted in earlier sections of this report, the regional ECD networks were able to draw on their prior experience with crises to respond to COVID-19 by mobilizing the following network strategies:

### SCALE SOLUTIONS QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY

Networks offer key advantages in a crisis, including the ability to scale solutions more rapidly and widely by aligning and activating large numbers of people and organizations.

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations [United Nations Statistics Division \(UNSD\)](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/), Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>

<sup>17</sup> ANECD, Draft Strategy uplifted to COVID Response, May, 2020.

<p><b>SHINE A LIGHT ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS</b></p>	<p>With their distributed leadership and collective capacity, networks that are committed to inclusion and diversity can share their core work across members to ensure that vulnerable children in the context of the crisis do not get left behind.</p>
<p><b>KEEP CORE ECD ISSUES ON THE AGENDA</b></p>	<p>Against the backdrop of any crisis, including a global pandemic, the immediate need for emergency health care services for the broad population often means that issues that organizations have fought hard to elevate at the national, regional or international stage may fall out of focus while advocates lose hard-won gains. In addition, funding streams and other resources may be redirected away from innovative and new programs. A steady drum beat from ECD networks representing the collective voice of their members helps to keep network priorities front and center for decision makers and the general public. Individual efforts by members in their own countries contribute to an echo chamber of supportive messaging.</p>
<p><b>DETECT EMERGING RISKS EARLY</b></p>	<p>One way to think about a network is a web of sensors monitoring conditions on the ground around the world. When one alarm goes off, other network members are quickly activated to explore how widespread the issue is, whether others have successfully addressed a similar issue, and whether there is an opportunity to work together to raise the profile of the problem and promote successful ways to address it.</p>
<p><b>PROVIDE A TWO-WAY PATHWAY FOR RESOURCES</b></p>	<p>The need to move large amounts of aid and other resources quickly often means that intermediaries tasked with distribution may lack the local intelligence they need to steer resources effectively and responsively. In addition, they often lack the connections and capacity to learn quickly from what is working on the ground. Networks that have the linkages and experience to work at the local, national, regional and international levels help to bridge those gaps.</p>
<p><b>QUICKLY ACTIVATE MUSCLE MEMORY FOR COLLABORATION AND PRACTICE EXCHANGE</b></p>	<p>Over time, Networks develop a “muscle memory” for collaboration and information sharing, another capacity that gives networks an advantage when addressing a crisis. Existing networks that have a proven track record of working together to identify gaps in services, test new models and improve practices have the connections they need to help organizations learn from each other, work together and adapt.</p>
<p><b>OPERATE DURING A CRISIS <i>AND</i> PLAN FOR RECOVERY</b></p>	<p>In order to sustain the network for future work, it is critical for the core work of a network to continue at multiple levels. While some members are engaging in crisis response, other clusters of members can plan ahead, incorporating what they are learning from their peers in real-time about the capacities and resources that will be needed.</p>

## REGIONAL ECD NETWORK RESPONSE

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Across all four regional ECD networks, members shared their COVID-19 experiences through webinars for broad-based knowledge sharing, and in smaller joint learning environments for more intense practice exchange to refine and adapt tools and processes that are effective. They curated and shared relevant resources through multiple channels for their members and the wider ECD community. They conducted joint research and collaborated on response and recovery planning. ARNEC and ISSA were among the first networks to respond, which meant that they were able to share resources, activities and events with the other regional ECD networks and their members.

### ARNEC:

When the pandemic hit the Asia-Pacific region, ARNEC developed a response strategy to advocate for putting ECD at the center of COVID-19 response. Specific strategies included:

**Launching a baseline survey to assess impact** — ARNEC immediately launched a baseline survey in the region. They produced reports for the region and for some countries. Many countries did not have the capacity to conduct their own surveys at the onset of the pandemic; ARNEC was able to fill that capacity gap so that countries could rely on the network's survey to adjust their programs and advocate for ECD. Survey results were also used to amplify the voices of the ECD community.

**Quickly establishing mechanisms for peer learning and exchange** — ARNEC adapted existing mechanisms and created new ones to support both the rapid dissemination of resources and deeper practice and strategy exchange.

- They curated and shared learning resources broadly with their network in response to high demand from members.
- The network drew from partners and members in 30 countries to provide content on best practices in COVID-19 response for a series of webinars that drew over 4,000 participants.
- The network established and supported communities of practice and two Learning Groups to encourage peer exchange. Nearly 20 countries are participating in learning from each other on Responsive Caregiving and Playful Parenting and on Taking a Multisectoral Approach to ECD.
- ARNEC created knowledge platforms such as ARNEC Conversations, an open space for practitioners and advocates to share their views to the ECD community in the region on any ECD topic.
- The Education Minister of Cambodia provided a keynote address to a panel of senior government officials that was convened to look into how governments are addressing the situation of the most vulnerable groups of young children in their COVID-19 response and recovery plans.
- Case studies of innovative practices will be produced and shared.

**Producing advocacy tools by and for network members** — Results of the network's baseline survey were used in conjunction with innovative practices identified during webinars to create advocacy tools for countries to use. Information on how countries are redesigning and adapting ECD policies and programs in response to COVID-19 were also shared widely within the region.

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## ISSA:

ISSA swiftly reshaped its programmatic work and network support mechanisms using online tools: webinars, trainings, a forum for members and Joint Learning Labs, which together reached close to 5000 participants in the first months of the pandemic. Additional strategies included:

### Sharing resources and lifting up grassroots knowledge and innovation:

- An analysis of COVID-19 survey data, group discussions and joint learning opportunities by ISSA revealed a “thirst for knowledge and learning from new approaches and experiences of others to respond to the crisis.”<sup>18</sup> In response, ISSA intensified its efforts to share curated resources on its three knowledge hubs - the ISSA website, the ECWI website and the Romani Early Years Network (REYN) to support the COVID-19 responses of its members working at the grass-roots in 42 countries. Innovative approaches from members and the voices of practitioners in the frontlines around the world were captured and shared widely.
- Using resources from ISSA, member organizations adopted bottom-up approaches to ensure that they designed and provided interventions that were responsive to families’ and children’s needs. They also engaged volunteers to help support emergency interventions and established networks of support.

### Initiating calls to action

- ISSA’s joint statement calling for greater public investment in accessible and affordable cross-sector ECD programs was signed by 100 organizations across Europe.
- ISSA released a call for action on behalf of Romani Children and mobilized several other European networks.
- Together with R4D, ISSA released five priority actions to strengthen the early childhood workforce globally.

Highlights from AfECN and ANECD include:

## AfECN:

In addition to the development of a COVID-19 strategy with the AU ECD Cluster noted in the AfECN case study:

- AfECN documented and shared stories on the response of governments, development partners, CSO’s and practitioners in a blog series themed Building Back Better: Stories of Hope and Resilience in the face of COVID-19 Pandemic. The shared stories of how to support transformation ensured that children, families and ECD practitioners became visible through the voices of different actors in the network.

## ANECD:

In addition to developing a crisis plan for Lebanon and adapting the HEPPP program noted in the ANECD case study:

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<sup>18</sup> ISSA: OVERVIEW OF ISSA’S APPROACHES AMIDST COVID-19 March – July 2020

- 
- ANECD held a meeting on children at risk because of poverty and COVID-19, discussed special care needs, and gathered policies from different countries to exchange best practices throughout the network.
  - Members from Oman were able to use the recommendations from that meeting in conversations with several Gulf states that are not ANECD members and still engage them in the findings, signaling both ANECD's extended reach and the needs of the ECD sector in the Arab region.

## QUESTIONS REGIONAL ECD NETWORKS CAN ANSWER

There is no definitive date for when the COVID-19 crisis will end and a recovery phase will begin. When asked what the top priorities and opportunities for a recovery period should be, regional network members and stakeholders were quick to emphasize that planning for recovery needs to begin now. There are core areas of cross-network work that will be critical in a recovery phase, such as assessing the impact of the pandemic, bolstering support for ECD and, in some cases, rebuilding the ECD workforce. Within countries and through regional frameworks, there are opportunities to redesign and reimagine ECD programs through the lens of adaptation and resilience. Several core questions emerged from the research about what the needs in the sector will be and how networks could respond:

### WHO IS AND WILL BECOME VULNERABLE?

Understanding which children were affected most by the pandemic will be critical to identifying the gaps and weaknesses in ECD systems and assessing how children in ECD programs were exposed during the pandemic. As a result of the devastating economic impact of the pandemic, an analysis by Save the Children and UNICEF estimates that 150 million additional children are living in multidimensional poverty, which has a long-lasting impact on children's outcomes<sup>19</sup>, and the United Nations notes that refugee and internally displaced children, as well as those living in detention and situations of active conflict are especially vulnerable<sup>20</sup>. These findings add to those marginalized groups who faced significant barriers before the pandemic, including children with delays and disabilities, those living in informal settlements and remote communities, and children of ethnic and linguistic minorities. Regional networks can work with their members to assess levels of trauma and on the ground impacts and consequences for vulnerable children, and then share that knowledge across networks and with global partners to inform an inclusive and comprehensive recovery strategy.

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<sup>19</sup> UNICEF COVID-19 Data Hub, October, 2020:  
[https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm\\_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm\\_medium=homepage&utm\\_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-banner](https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-banner)

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children:  
<https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/2631/file/Policy%20Brief:%20The%20Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20children.pdf>

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## WHAT INTERVENTIONS AND SOLUTIONS WORKED?

The work by networks to identify and share best practices at a time with limited resources will continue to be necessary. By not only lifting up practical solutions informed by work on the ground but also supporting the adaptation and implementation of those solutions across contexts, regional ECD networks can more effectively scale what works.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ECD WORKFORCE?

Even before COVID, research across networks on the ECD workforce revealed the sector's lack of practitioner capacity. The system was fragmented and tools to help organizations assess skills and capacity used different frameworks, making a global view of the state of the workforce and what was needed to improve it difficult. According to UNESCO, "the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of schools in 188 countries, affecting more than 1.5 billion students and 63 million primary and secondary teachers worldwide."<sup>21</sup> The regional ECD networks are well-positioned to work with their members to standardize workforce assessments, identify gaps, and paint a picture of what the compounding and dynamic impacts of COVID-19 have been. In partnership with UNESCO, ISSA and ARNEC have already jointly designed a survey to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the ECD workforce, craft policy recommendations and identify practical solutions. AfECN produced a workforce gaps analysis report and is monitoring the changing dynamics of the ECD workforce, including practitioners who lost their income and were forced to seek other employment, depleting an already inadequate infrastructure.

## WHAT IS NEEDED TO BUILD BACK A BETTER SYSTEM?

Resilience is built into ECD frameworks that support children, families and communities. Regional ECD networks will be important players in driving the message that a deeper investment in programs that promote resilience are critical. Through their members, they also have the ability to lift up the voices of young children, whose perspectives are often missing from program design. Networks are well-positioned to assess how to improve existing interventions with new tools to effectively reach and engage more children and families. And, with their cross-sector orientation, networks can identify what actors or sectors are missing from the conversation of how to use the opportunity of a recovery period to improve and transform systems. For example:

- **MORE EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**  
Redesigning preschools with more flexible models that give agency and power to communities to respond to changing contexts and expanding access to technology and capitalizing on the new roles parents have learned to play in remote learning.

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<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, ISSA, ARNEC, Take a Survey: COVID-19 and Early Childhood Education Workforce: <https://en.unesco.org/news/take-survey-covid-19-and-early-childhood-education-workforce>

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- **MORE EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**  
Supporting home-based interventions has emerged as a key government strategy across regions to support families while ECD and pre-primary facilities are closed. Cross-country and cross-regional sharing of best practices to enrich context-responsive caregiving and play-focused strategies is essential to build regional capacity to learn from these early successes.
  - **BETTER CONNECT ECD PROGRAMS TO RESILIENCE INITIATIVES AND PLANS FOR CRISIS RESPONSE**  
ECD initiatives should be connected with local resilience initiatives and national, inter-regional and global plans to strengthen preparedness and the capacity to respond during emergencies.

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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING, COLLABORATION AND ACTION

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*There should be learning groups where the networks share the multi-sector approach from different countries. The regions should all coordinate, put their lessons on the table, and then ask, which countries need the most help?*

-ARNEC Stakeholder, Policymaker

”

Each of the four regional ECD networks has unique capacities and strategies for achieving impact. By increasing their connections to each other and supporting cross-network collaboration, the kinds of network advantages that have made the networks successful in their regions have the potential to create even greater impact. The following areas of opportunity for the four regional networks and their strategic partners were identified through this research:

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FOUR REGIONAL ECD NETWORKS

#### **STRENGTHEN CROSS NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE TO ADDRESS EMERGING ISSUES:**

Work has already begun between ARNEC and ISSA to create joint tools to assess workforce capacity, and both ARNEC and ANECD have an explicit focus on parenting, climate change, and environmental issues and how these impact the most vulnerable young children. Intentionally creating capacity for cross-network collaboration on emerging issues would yield a stronger infrastructure organized to respond to both global trends and issues that are surfaced from members working in and across communities.

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### EXAMPLE: THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

The [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative](#) is a global, multi-sectoral effort to produce knowledge and equip decision makers with tools and resources to support the development of a quality early childhood workforce at scale. Initially led by ISSA and Results for Development (R4D), all four regional ECD networks are now partnering to ensure that country capacity in the regions is built to address the most critical issues related to early childhood workforce. The collaboration is leveraging the networks' collective strengths in national ECD capacity building, cross-country learning and building public and political will to catalyze efforts for the early childhood workforce at the country, regional and global levels. Together they are working to ensure that:

- Sound evidence is produced to influence country workforce policies,
- The early childhood workforce stays high on regional and national agendas,
- There is increased investment and support to improve the working conditions of ECD providers, and
- There is greater overall recognition of the ECD workforce's pivotal role.

### STRENGTHEN PEER EXCHANGE TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES FOR OPERATIONS AND STRATEGY

When asked what they wanted to learn from this research, network stakeholders especially noted the desire to share best practices for sustainability, engagement and changes in structure as networks evolve over time. In the same way that the regional ECD networks have effectively connected networks of ECD advocates, they themselves have the need to share strategies for advocacy and the strategic communications needed to build both political and public will. An intentional emphasis on sharing best practices and needs will also support a shift toward more strategic alignment across the four networks. When members of networks are more aligned, they are able to create and promote a shared vision<sup>22</sup>. Alignment also paves the way for more collective action between the networks in the future. The regional ECD networks have already laid the groundwork for increased alignment by collaborating on common multi-year strategies and shared outcomes, and by identifying areas across regions for future shared learning and collaboration.

### EXTEND SCALE AND REACH

Increase support in each network for intentional national network building to create deeper infrastructure for the sector. Creating a network of networks by strengthening linkages between the regions and then identifying how to target support to areas in greater need emerged as a possible cross-network strategy to explore. In addition, there have been conversations with potential network members and coordinating organizations in Latin America. Supporting an additional regional ECD network would be a step towards world-wide regional capacity for the sector.

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<sup>22</sup> From Network Impact's Connect-Align-Produce Framework, which can be found in the Appendix.

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## CONTINUE TO EXPLORE EFFECTIVE ROLES FOR GOVERNMENT

Defining positive and effective roles for governments to play in advancing ECD is a core achievement of all four regional ECD networks. While great progress has been made in engagement strategies for government, every network was interested in better understanding how their peers have succeeded or failed to meaningfully engage government stakeholders in order to improve their work. Because public sector investment and support is core to comprehensive ECD policies, continuing to refine strategies for engaging government as thought partners and network peers is a critical way to ensure that they continue to be part of problem definition and solution implementation.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUNDERS AND NETWORK PARTNERS

### INVEST IN REGIONAL NETWORKS AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE ECD SECTOR

Taken together, the four regional ECD networks form a connective infrastructure for the ECD sector. The networks are at a mature stage where they have developed successful strategies and are working toward greater alignment across regions to further bolster the sector. Their work advancing ECD has resulted in both outcomes for the sector - better practices and improved policies and frameworks -- as well as deep knowledge about how to connect the sector for greater impact. Investing in the networks collectively as infrastructure to support the ECD sector would build on past successes and scale the networks' ability to drive change. Effective support for networks takes different forms at different times in the stages of network development. To maximize progress, investors should consider supporting the networks as a backbone for the sector, as well as key players in specific initiatives.

### MATCHING NETWORK SUPPORT TO STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

#### EARLIER STAGES

Support for systems mapping (where does the network fit?), convening, connecting and facilitation

#### MORE MATURE NETWORKS

Support for core infrastructure or backbone (to continue to create impact), support for specific projects and initiatives

### ENGAGE REGIONAL ECD NETWORKS AS THOUGHT PARTNERS FOR STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

At a meeting of the Global Early Childhood Funders Group in November 2020, a longtime supporter of regional ECD networks described the relationship between funders and networks saying, *"We need networks more than they need us."* Often funders think of regional and global networks as an insurance policy, serving as a set of stable intermediary

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organizations that have links to smaller organizations with less capacity. The networks can support those smaller organizations with direct funding, infrastructure support and capacity building. As a result, funders invest not only in work happening directly in communities, but in the capacity to connect and advance that work.

Networks partner with funders in other ways. Regional ECD networks are able to define and elevate stakeholders who are credible and connect with voices on the ground, which brings authenticity and legitimacy to the work. They can help broaden program design as they connect research with practice, then refine research, improve practices and share back lessons learned. They are also a guide to local and national contexts and players. In the same way that funders support networks to do systems mapping to advance their network building strategies, networks can support the systems mapping at the local, national and regional levels that funders need to see in order to consider how work within and across contexts could be better connected. One funder who worked with ISSA noted, *"first we were going to hire a consultant for this piece of work, and then we thought, if we partner with ISSA, we can access a whole range of experts, expertise and resources."* ISSA's ability to leverage its diverse members to act as a strategic intermediary for a group of the funder's grantees provided stronger support than the funder would otherwise have found.

## IN CLOSING...

The 'Network Advantage' described in this report demonstrates how regional ECD networks create sector-level impact and serve as a model for collective action. ECD spans traditional sector divides and engages numerous types of organizations and actors. Regional networks are critical for bringing together these diverse players to advance common goals and scale solutions over time. As one ARNEC INGO stakeholder remarked, *"without the network, we could not have scaled the issue and would be far behind. But instead we can feel the shift, new ideas, bigger partnerships."*

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## WITH THANKS

This report was made possible through the enthusiastic engagement and support of Porticus, the Open Society Foundations' Early Childhood Program, AfECN, ANECD, ARNEC and ISSA. Our sincerest thanks to everyone involved for their thought partnership and time.

## ABOUT NETWORK IMPACT

Network Impact (NI) is accelerating and spreading the use of networks to advance positive change. NI provides consulting, tool-building, and research services to support social-impact networks, foundations, and the emerging field of network builders. NI are leaders in the field of network strategy and evaluation, having developed and implemented numerous evaluations for a variety of different types of networks - including complex, multi-stakeholder networks. In 2014, they authored in partnership with the Center for Evaluation Innovation The State of Network Evaluation framing paper and network evaluation casebook. This research was also summarized in the article "Network Evaluation in Practice: Approaches and Applications" for The Foundation Review in 2015.

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## APPENDIX:

### COMPARISON OF GENERATIVE NETWORKS AND OTHER COLLECTIVE ACTION MODELS

Compared to other collective action models, generative networks have specific advantages:

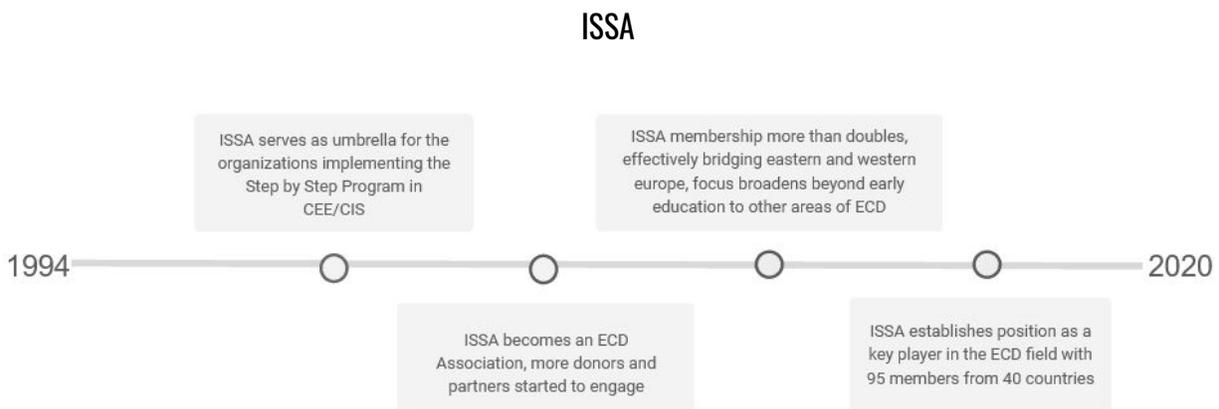
COLLECTIVE ACTION MODEL	DISTINGUISHING FEATURES	DIFFERENCE FROM A GENERATIVE NETWORK
<b>COALITION OR ALLIANCE</b>	A temporary alignment of organizations to achieve a specific objective such as electing a candidate or securing adoption of a new public policy. Usually disbands when the effort has been completed.	Narrower in purpose/scope than a network. Relationships and activities focused entirely on the desired result. (Some alliances reorganize as a generative network once their campaign is over.)
<b>MEMBERSHIP-BASED ASSOCIATION OR ORGANIZATION</b>	Organized mainly to pool resources and provide dues-paying members with services, often for professional development or representation within public-policy arenas. Association or organization staff does most of the work.	More staff-driven, less member-to-member relationship-driven than a network. Focus is on serving members rather than members collaborating with each other. (Members in a network may also pay dues.)
<b>COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE</b>	Organizations and individuals that are loosely aligned and coordinated around the development, adoption, and spread of innovative practices and/or to address a particular set of problems or opportunities.	Participants typically lack a firm sense of “membership identity” and do not make explicit reciprocal commitments to each other. Communities of practice often have many sub-networks.
<b>MOVEMENT</b>	Large numbers of people loosely aligned around a large cause (e.g., civil rights, environmental protection). Their passion ignited by a desire to right a wrong.	Less coherent, focused, and coordinated—and much larger, sprawling—than a generative network. A movement may contain networks; networks may spawn a movement.

### KEY QUESTIONS BY NETWORK DEVELOPMENT STAGE

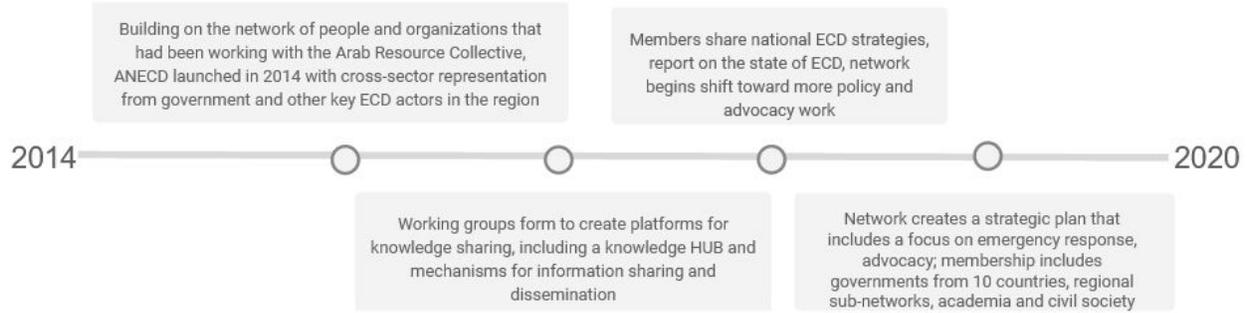
As they move through stages of development, networks consider key design and performance questions to help them continuously improve:

STAGE	KEY QUESTIONS
CATALYZE	<p>What issue / problem will the network address?</p> <p>Who are the key stakeholders?</p> <p>What is the network's initial vision and purpose?</p>
LAUNCH	<p>Who are the network's members?</p> <p>How are they connected?</p> <p>What are the network's initial value propositions?</p> <p>What strategies will the network pilot?</p> <p>What resources does the network have?</p>
ORGANIZE	<p>What infrastructure is in place to support the network and how well it is working?</p> <p>How are the members working together to meet shared goals?</p> <p>Is the network beginning to deliver on key value propositions?</p> <p>What are the network's initial activities and outputs?</p>
PERFORM/ADAPT	<p>Is the network spreading and deepening effective strategies and structures?</p> <p>Is the network diversifying and delivering on key value propositions?</p> <p>Are collective results being achieved?</p> <p>Is there a sound sustainability plan?</p>

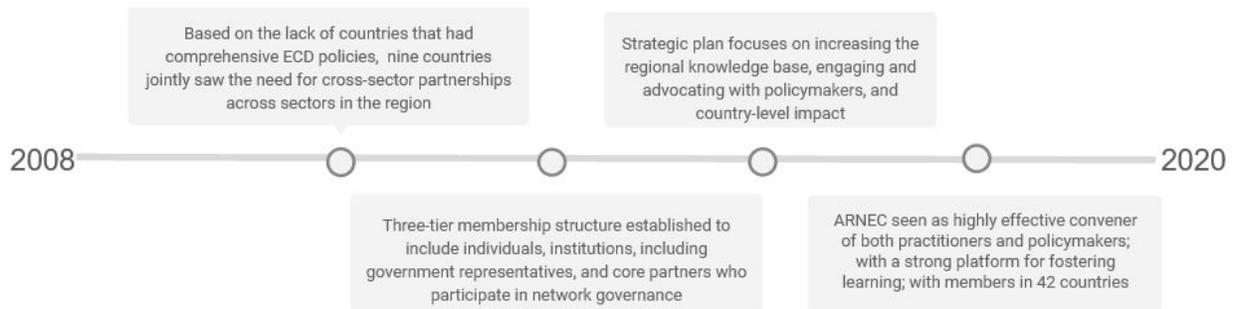
## OVERVIEW OF NETWORK TRAJECTORIES



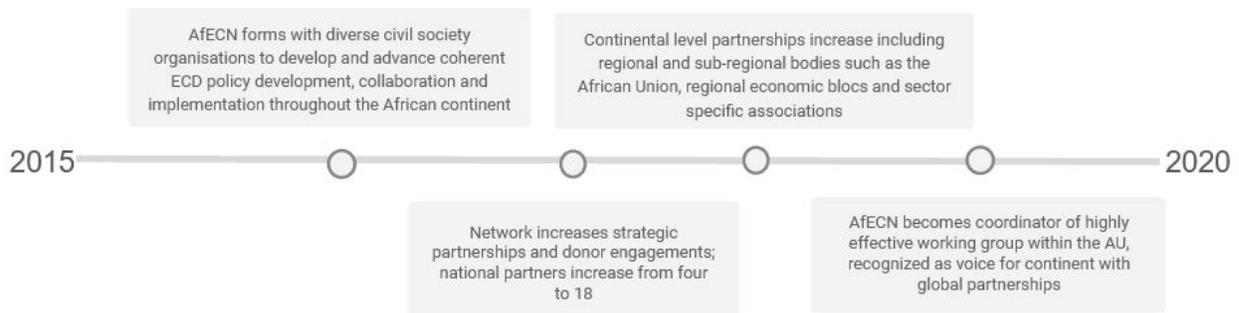
## ANECD



## ARNEC

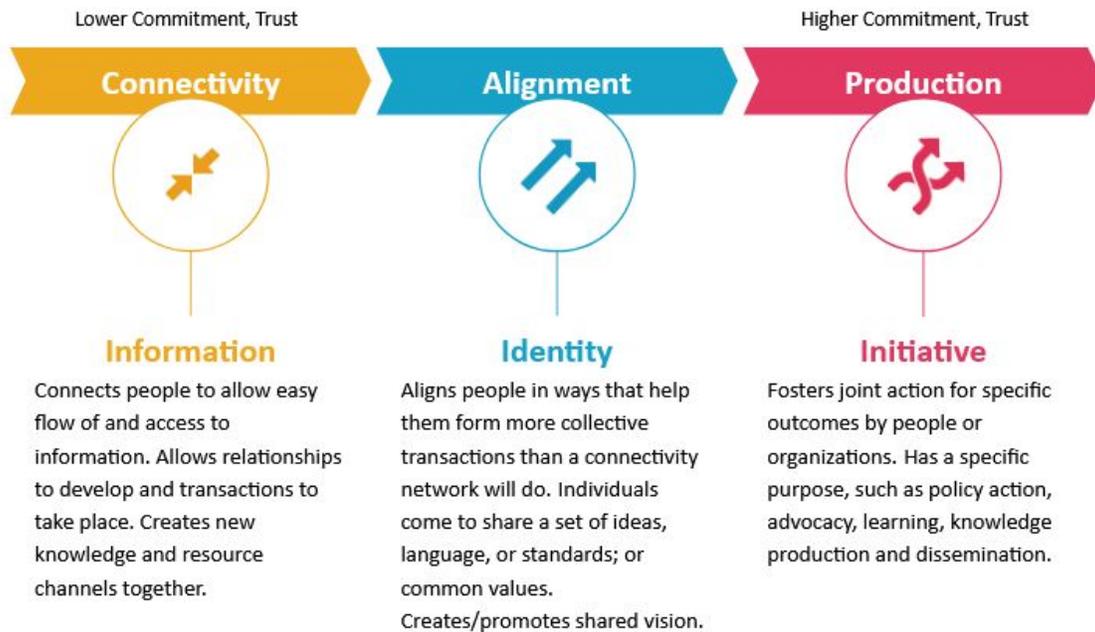


## AfECN



## THE CONNECT -- ALIGN -- PRODUCE FRAMEWORK

Generative social impact networks have three main functions, or stages:



## METHODS

To inform this report, Network Impact conducted extensive desk research, followed by diagnostic interviews with regional ECD network leads. A framework for the report with key questions was generated to inform a series of stakeholder interviews. In November 2020, Network Impact also attended a meeting of global early childhood funders and presented an executive summary of a draft version of this report. Highlights from that discussion were also integrated into this final report. Below are details of each of these phases of the research.

### DESK RESEARCH

Documents that describe all four regional networks:

- Comparison of Regional Network Strategies November 2019
- Regional Networks A Bird's Eye View
- Strengthening RNs Initiative - Indicators
- Logic Model\_Regional Networks as Collaborative Platform
- Shared outcomes framework

Documents specific to each regional network:

NETWORK	DOCUMENTS
ISSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of ISSA as a Regional Network</li> <li>• ISSA Strategy 2019-2023</li> <li>• ISSA Goals and Initiatives (links)</li> <li>• ISSA's PLAs</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples from ISSA for Case Study</li> <li>• More info on 1 Example - ISSA's work REsource Package HV - Strengthening the Regional Networks Initiative</li> <li>• Narrative report - ECM 2019 Translation and dissemination - ISSA Members</li> <li>• Summary of Outreach - ECM 2019 Translated Articles - ISSA members</li> <li>• Detailed Overview of ISSA Webinars, July 2020</li> <li>• Overview of ISSA's Approach Amidst COVID-19, March-July, 2020</li> </ul>
<b>ARNEC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of ARNEC as a Regional Network November 2019</li> <li>• ARNEC COVID-19 Response Strategy_final version_30April2020</li> <li>• ARNEC StratPlan Vision 2020 30Nov2016_Short Version_Final</li> <li>• Strategic Framework_2021-2025_draft_as of_May32020</li> <li>• Examples from ARNEC for Case Study</li> <li>• ARNEC Webinar Series Overview-Young Children amidst COVID-19_Updated_15May</li> <li>• Final Call to Action 23Dec2019</li> <li>• Final Noteworthy ECD Parenting Programmes_resource packs_2019_web</li> <li>• High Level Meeting 2019 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on ECD Hanoi 5Dec2019</li> <li>• Noteworthy Practices_Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in ECCE in the Asia Pacific Region</li> <li>• Regional ECD Conference Highlights 2019 Ha Noi REgional ECD Convergence_web</li> <li>• ARNEC COVID-19 and ECD Presentation</li> <li>• COP_Learning Groups_Concept Note_082420_core group</li> <li>• Webinar Series Highlights with Evaluation Data Sept2020</li> </ul>
<b>ANECD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-Description of Regional Networks ANECD-final 1909017</li> <li>• 2-ANECD Draft2 Strategy</li> <li>• 3-ANECD draft strategy Uplifted to COVID19 response 2020-05-18</li> <li>• 4-ANECD case studies 2020</li> <li>• 5-ANECD-Regional ECD mobilisation_A-SECD</li> <li>• 6-ANECD-SECD_summary_eng</li> <li>• 7-ANECD Research on Kindergarten Enrollment Rates in Arabic Countries</li> <li>• 8-RCQE STUDY-EX SUM ENG 2019</li> </ul>
<b>AfECN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of AfECN as a Regional Network November 2019</li> <li>• AfECN strategic plan 2016-2020</li> <li>• 3fold</li> <li>• SI AfECN. 2019</li> <li>• AU CESA Journal Vol 4</li> <li>• AU CESA Journal Vol 5</li> <li>• ECED Cluster Paper on ECD</li> <li>• Examples from AfECN for Case Study</li> <li>• STC-EST 3 Ministerial Session Report</li> </ul>

## INTERVIEWS

List of diagnostic interviews:

NETWORK	INTERVIEWEE(S)	DATE
ISSA	Liana Ghent, Mihaela Ionescu	6/24/20
ARNEC	Evelyn Santiago	6/29/20

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	Sheldon Shaeffer	6/30/20
<b>ANECD</b>	Dr. Ghassan Issa	6/30/20
<b>AfECN</b>	Lynette Okengo	7/17/20

List of stakeholder interviews:

<b>NETWORK</b>	<b>INTERVIEWEES</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>ANECD</b>	Muna Abbas	9/8/20	Plan International Jordan, member of Executive committee
	Dr. Mohamad Matar	10/8/20	Coordinator of Palestinian national ECD network, ANECD research coordinator
	Beya Guezzi	10/19/20	Deputy Director of Inspection and Educational Innovation at the Ministry of Women, Families and Seniors, Tunisia
	Amur Alaisri	10/27/20	Former Ministry of Education responsible for ECD, Oman
<b>ARNEC</b>	Karma Gayleg	9/16/20	Bhutan's Ministry of Education, former Steering Committee member
	Neelima Chopra	9/17/20	National Representatives for India
	Prak Kosal	9/24/20 // 9/25/20	Director of ECE in Cambodia Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
	Sara Dang	9/29/20 // 9/30/20	Save the Children, Chair of ARNEC Executive Committee
<b>AfECN</b>	Maniza Ntekim	10/14	ECD Regional Advisor (UNICEF ESARO)
	Prof Hasina Ebrahim	10/12	Convener of the ECED Cluster research working group
	Caroline Dusabe	10/12	ECD Regional advisor Save the Children and convener Quality working group of the ECED Cluster
	Mich-Seth Owusu	10/9	Development Leader & Innovator, Expert Program Coordinator, African Union

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ISSA	Carmen Lica	10/6	Director of the Center for Education and Professional Development Step by Step Romania (CEPD)
	Ine Hostyn	10/2	Artevelede University, Teacher Training College on Early Years Pedagogy, Ghent, Belgium
	Deepa Grover	10/7	Currently a new Board member of ISSA, Former senior staff on ECD at the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
	Jelena Zajeganovic	10/5	Jelena Zajeganovic, UNICEF Office in Serbia
	Geraldine Libreau	10/5	Géraldine Libreau, Policy officer – Early Childhood Education and Care, European Commission, Directorate General: Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

## NOTES

1. ISSA covers 40 countries; ARNEC covers 42 countries; AfECN covers the entire Sub-Saharan Africa region, all African Union states in the EDEC Cluster, and partner networks in 18 countries; ANECD covers 10 countries.
2. Special Edition: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Report of the Secretary General. May 8, 2019: <https://undocs.org/E/2019/68>
3. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
4. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, "Cracking the Network Code: Four Principles for Grantmakers": <https://www.maine philanthropy.org/sites/default/files/2013geo-network-code-exec-summary.pdf>
5. Madeleine Taylor and Peter Plastrik, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press. 2014; Kania, John and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2011); Jane Wei-Skillern and Sonia Marciano, "The Networked Nonprofit," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2008); Monitor Institute, "Connected Citizens: The Power, Potential and Peril of Networks," <http://www.knightfoundation.org/publications/connected-citizens-power-potential-and-peril-netwo/>.
6. Madeleine Taylor and Peter Plastrik, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press. 2014
7. Adapted from Monitor Institute/GEO, *Catalyzing Networks for Social Change*, 2011, and iScale's *Next Generation in Network Evolution*, 2009.
8. Monitor Institute, "Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A Funder's Guide," [http://www.monitorinstitute.com/downloads/what-we-think/catalyzing-networks/Catalyzing\\_Networks\\_for\\_Social\\_Change.pdf](http://www.monitorinstitute.com/downloads/what-we-think/catalyzing-networks/Catalyzing_Networks_for_Social_Change.pdf)
9. See above for key questions by network development stage.
10. See above for a comparison chart of generative networks and other types of collective action models.
11. Heather McLeod Grant. *Building Networks and Movements for Social Change*. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building\\_networks\\_and\\_movements\\_for\\_social\\_change](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_networks_and_movements_for_social_change)
12. An overview of each network trajectory is included above.

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13. Yokohama Declaration 2019 Advancing Africa's Development through People, Technology and Innovation. 30 August, 2019.  
[https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama_declaration_en.pdf)
  14. AmCham Romania, "Romanian Parliament adopts tax credit for early education and a package of incentives for companies investing in education," October 20, 2020.  
<https://www.amcham.ro/news-from-members/romanian-parliament-adopts-tax-credit-for-early-education-and-a-package-of-incentives-for-companies-investing-in-education>
  15. ANECD, Executive Summary of the Study on Increasing Enrollment Ratios in Kindergarten Programs in Arab countries
  16. United Nations [United Nations Statistics Division \(UNSD\)](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/), Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020:  
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>
  17. ANECD, Draft Strategy uplifted to COVID Response, May, 2020.
  18. ISSA: OVERVIEW OF ISSA'S APPROACHES AMIDST COVID-19 March – July 2020
  19. UNICEF COVID-19 Data Hub, October, 2020:  
[https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm\\_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm\\_medium=homepage&utm\\_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-banner](https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-banner)
  20. United Nations Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children:  
<https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/2631/file/Policy%20Brief:%20The%20Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20children.pdf>
  21. UNESCO, ISSA, ARNEC, Take a Survey: COVID-19 and Early Childhood Education Workforce:  
<https://en.unesco.org/news/take-survey-covid-19-and-early-childhood-education-workforce>
  22. From Network Impact's Connect-Align-Produce Framework, which can be found in the Appendix.