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The Philippines

Combining Training with Job Security to Improve the Quality of the Childcare Workforce

Country Brief Snapshot

The establishment of the *Early Years Act* and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council in the Philippines have increased awareness of the importance of early childhood development (ECD) programs. In particular, there is growing attention to improving the quality of childcare services for children under the age of 4, demonstrated by the introduction of National Child Development Centers (NCDCs) as well as training initiatives to strengthen the workforce that delivers them. However, due to the decentralized nature of the system and insufficient resources, the quality of these centers varies significantly across Local Government Units (LGUs). Remuneration, training opportunities, and worker profiles are diverse, and poor working conditions and limited job security prevent workers' ability to consistently impact children's develop-ment. Nationally supported training efforts offered by government and non-government entities have been beneficial for improving knowledge and skills of personnel. In parallel, several local authorities are addressing working conditions and job security through the introduction of local ordinances which provide guidelines on hiring, compensation, and dismissal processes.

Introduction: ECCD Context and Policy Developments in the Philippines[1]

The Philippines is home to 17 million children ages 0-6, less than half of whom are enrolled in childcare, kindergarten, or grade 1.[2] To improve early childhood development services, the Government passed the *Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act* in 2000, which formally recognized the need for an ECCD system.[3] The creation of the Early Childhood Care and Development Council (ECCD Council) in 2009 marked an important milestone toward promoting the wellbeing of young children under the *ECCD Act* and to ensuring that the objectives of the National ECCD System are achieved.[4,5] In 2013, the *Early Years Act*[6] called for the establishment of an ECCD system that covers comprehensive health, nutrition, early education, and social services for children between the ages of 0-8, with children ages 0-4 falling under the auspices of the ECCD Council, and children ages 5-8 under the Department of Education. The Department of Education, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Health, National Nutrition Council, and Union of Local Authorities are represented within the ECCD Council and are encouraged to provide financial and technical support toward the implementation of the National ECCD System. Local Government Units (LGUs) are expected to oversee public programs in their respective areas and implement all related services.

Background on Childcare Services

In the Philippines, childcare services for children ages 0-4 are overseen by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which receives technical assistance and resources from the ECCD Council. In 1977, a presidential decree required each *barangay*[7] to establish at least one childcare center in its area of jurisdiction. This resulted in the expansion of childcare centers in the country.[8] However, in 2011, 34 years after this decree, 4,570 of 42,026 *barangays* did not have their own childcare center. Although there were 51,797 centers in the Philippines at that time, a State-of-the-Art Review of Day Care Services revealed that center-based childcare services only reached about 20 percent of the target population. This finding highlighted the need for more than one childcare center per *barangay* to guarantee widespread access to services for all children from 0-4.[9,10]

In addition to expanded access, there is a critical need to improve the quality of childcare services. While centers were originally established to support working families, they have evolved to increasingly provide more support in early learning. A 2009 survey of childcare workers found that 64 percent of respondents desired additional training on topics such as the principles of child development, planning/designing a curriculum, developmental stages of children, creating profiles of children, and rights of children.[11]

In 2015, the national government issued formal guidelines and requirements for public child development centers and set conditions for granting licenses to private ones. In addition, a joint flagship project of the ECCD Council and select LGUs led to the creation of 200 National Child Development Centers (NCDCs), also referred to as *bulilit* centers, located in select municipalities across 70 of the country's 81 provinces. NCDCs serve as model centers which introduce best practices in the community for supporting children ages 0-4, serve as a laboratory for conducting research that will promote the continuing education and/or professionalization of ECCD service providers, and act as a resource center for caregivers and the community at large.[12]

In determining where to open NCDCs, the leadership and management capacity of the local government are considered, and efforts are made to establish centers in high need areas, cities, and municipalities. While the Council provides funds for construction and teaching materials, the LGUs are responsible for providing the land for centers, supporting teacher salaries, and overall management. An LGU's ability to provide this support is, therefore, a consideration in determining where to open an NCDC. There are currently 536 *bulilit* centers in the country, with another 119 in various stages of development.[13] The establishment of these centers reflects an important effort to improve the quality of childcare services; however, they occupy a small proportion of the overall landscape of childcare service provision.

Policy Challenges

Growing attention has been paid in the Philippines to transforming childcare centers into high-quality early learning environments. However, owing to the decentralized nature of service provision, local governments have varying financial and technical capacity to support frontline workers delivering childcare services. This leads to diverse profiles and arrangements for personnel and variable program quality. For example, childcare personnel are often not offered adequate pay or training, which inhibits their effectiveness in day to day work with young children. This lack of support is further compounded by job instability arising from inadequate protection from political cycles, as discussed below.

Policy Responses

Government officials and civil society organizations have worked at the local and national levels to introduce training initiatives to enhance the knowledge and skills of the childcare workforce. The ECCD Council, along with NGOs, such as Save the Children, have partnered with local governments to increase access to training and support for personnel. These initiatives have been complemented by other advocacy activities that have led to new local and national policies, which provide protection for personnel from dismissal. The following sections provide an overview of this workforce, its challenges, and the approaches that have been introduced to increase their knowledge and skills, as well as job stability.

The Childcare Workforce in the Philippines

In 2015, the ECCD Council Governing Board approved a decree that established and defined the roles and qualifications for staff members who work in Day Care or Child Development Centers. The two main roles in the childcare workforce are Child Development Teachers (CDTs) and Child Development Workers (CDWs). While their required qualifications and responsibilities (outlined in Table 1) are similar, CDTs are required to have completed schooling in Early Childhood Education or Elementary Education. Despite the presence of these guidelines, there is limited oversight of the CDT and CDW hiring processes at the local level (e.g. Child Development Workers are typically high school graduates).[14]

Unlike public kindergarten teachers whose work is overseen by the Department of Education, CDTs and CDWs do not typically hold licenses, which would allow a pathway to professional status.

Table 1: Qualification Requirements for Child Development Teachers and Workers

Requirements	Child Development Teacher[15]	Child Development Worker
Education	• Bachelor's Degree in <u>Childhood Education or Elementary Education</u> preferably with Specialization on Early Childhood or any degree related to Education, such as Psychology, Child Study, Family Life and Child Development.	*Bachelor's Degree in any field*
Training Requirements	• Attend basic trainings or seminars related to Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) or Early Childhood Education (ECE)	*Same as Child Development Teacher*
Other	• Skills on community mobilization and effective oral communication, and preferably computer literacy; • Experience working with children; demonstrated love for children; and • A *Barangay* Certificate/National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Clearance with three (3) Character References.	*Same as Child Development Teacher*
Responsibilities	• To implement the programs and projects for the integrated services of health, nutrition, early learning and social services for children, 0 to 4 years old enrolled in Child Development Centers; • To conduct training on Family Support Program to parents in the community; • To provide assistance in terms of training other CDTs, CDWs, and other service providers in the implementation of the different ECCD programs upon request by the City/Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers; • To assist City/Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers in his/her work related to ECCD.	*Same as Child Development Teacher*

As a result of their higher qualifications, CDTs are able to work in National Child Development Centers (NCDCs) while CDWs are not. While CDTs are viewed as full-time employees, CDWs have recently begun transitioning from volunteer positions to paid roles within local governments. This transition depends on the availability of funds from LGUs and the number of open positions to support additional permanent staff members[16] Regarding compensation, LGUs are still responsible for appointing and remunerating both CDWs and CDTs.[17]

While a beginning CDT working in the public sector was scheduled to be paid 20,179 pesos (about US$390) per month in 2018,[18] the actual amount received varies based on the local government's monthly salary schedules and is often much lower. Although the 2015 Standards and Guidelines outline that CDWs should have the same salary as CDTs,[19] CDWs are often offered an honorarium from local barangays instead, especially when they are not permanently employed. This honorarium can be as low as 800 pesos per month (US$15) and as high as 8,000 pesos per month (US$150) depending on the city (some wealthier cities may have the ability to make CDWs full-time employees and/or to allow CDWs bonuses throughout the year).[20]

Supervision of these workers is provided by Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers or City Social Welfare Development Officers.[21] These supervisors are responsible for monitoring centers, assessing training needs among service providers, and liaising with mayors to advocate for ECCD programs and additional training needs.[22]

Challenges Facing the Childcare Workforce

- **Decentralization leads to uneven training and working conditions for childcare workers.** Because local barangays fund and design their own trainings for CDTs and CDWs, there is minimal standardization across the country. Additionally, due to limited resources, the ECCD Council's support is weighted toward NCDCs, which are only part of the childcare landscape. In addition, as of 2018, no national policy supports the tenure, or hiring and dismissal, of childcare personnel. This leaves the working conditions and job security of the workforce under the jurisdiction of elected officials at the local level.[23] Additionally, transportation costs associated with getting to university or training facilities, which may not be covered through local budgets, may prohibit childcare personnel from pursuing new development opportunities, especially for those living in rural areas. Furthermore, achieving equitable pay for CDWs and CDTs is difficult, particularly in rural areas where local authorities usually do not have the available funds to integrate all childcare personnel into a formal employment system.[24]

- **Limitations in local budgets constrain opportunities for providing personnel with training and ongoing support.** Spending guidelines at the barangay level, which restrict personnel allocations to 45 percent of budgets, limit investment in training and worker formalization.[25] The scale of training needed to support this workforce is massive; however, to date, the ECCD Council has only trained 475 CDTs and 419 CDWs despite the presence of 49,000 child development workers in the system.[26] While civil society organizations complement training offered by the ECCD Council, such offerings are limited to specific geographical areas.

- **Changes in leadership lead to workforce turnover, as childcare personnel are not excluded from the impacts of political changes.** Particularly if local governments do not view ECCD programs as a priority, the election of new barangay mayors can lead to changes in childcare personnel. While the ECCD Council management team visits these newly elected mayors to brief them on ECCD programs and training initiatives, politically motivated hiring is common. Frequent turnover thus undermines investment in training programs for the childcare workforce and the stability of childcare services.[27]

A Promising Approach: Advancing Training and Professional Development Priorities and Personnel Protection

As of 2018, the ECCD Council as well as various NGOs (including Save the Children), have initiated training programs for both CDTs and CDWs. While these programs have been beneficial, they have yet to be implemented at scale. Furthermore, even with standardized, effective training, the sustainability of efforts remains threatened in the face of limited employment protection policies for ECCD personnel. In response, government officials at the national and local levels along with NGO partners have come to understand the need to simultaneously support two areas: (a) professionalization of the workforce through training opportunities and (b) initiatives to improve working conditions and rates of retention. While these initiatives have evolved separately, they highlight the need for employing different approaches to supporting and strengthening the early childhood workforce.

Onboarding

One key component of the ECCD Council's efforts to better support childcare personnel is through induction programs. ECCD Council representatives and trainers may travel to local *barangays* to introduce the National Early Learning Framework (NELF) and National Early Learning Curriculum (NELC) and discuss developmentally appropriate services. However, sessions are dependent on the Council's budget, and typically local governments must fund the venue and materials while the Council provides trainers for the sessions. Although CDTs and CDWs receive the same onboarding sessions, CDTs are more likely to participate in such sessions since they work in NCDCs for which the Council is active in monitoring results.[28]

In-Service Training and Supervision

The ECCD Council has initiated a number of training opportunities to support childcare personnel. For example, the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program (ECTEP) is a six-week training program that provides CDTs with 18 units of Early Childhood Education, as well as experience employing newly learned strategies through a practicum in a Child Development Center. Between 2014 and 2017, 322 CDTs were trained under this initiative.[29] Similarly, the Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP) offers CDWs an opportunity to gain technical knowledge and skills for implementing ECCD programs. Through lectures, workshops, and center visits, workers are encouraged to learn how to bridge their newly acquired knowledge with their teaching practice.[30] Although CDWs do not work in NCDCs, they may be recommended by the Mayor to attend Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs (ECTEP) run by teacher education institutions. After CDWs have successfully completed six weeks of training and 18 units of coursework in ECCD, they become CDTs. [31]The ECCD Council also partners with state universities to offer training for supervisors through which they earn 12 units of credit geared toward their leadership and managerial skills.

Creating Policies and Action Plans to Improve Retention of Childcare Personnel

Given the decentralized nature of childcare services, efforts to address issues in retention have taken different forms. They have largely focused on instituting ordinances which explicitly provide guidelines on hiring, compensation, and dismissal of workers. The following are examples of approaches which have been taken across different cities and municipalities in the country.

Navotas City

To address challenges in retaining trained childcare personnel, cities have developed and begun to incorporate policies and guidelines to improve the status of these workers. For example, Navotas City, which has gradually expanded the number of childcare centers in its municipality, has promoted 18 of 20 childcare workers to regular employees (the remaining two workers were not promoted due to lack of qualifications). The establishment of a city ordinance has enabled these 18 workers to receive regular compensation and benefits, which include a clothing allowance, a midyear bonus, and overtime pay.

Gains from the adoption of this ordinance and the subsequent promotion of childcare workers have reduced parental fees (which contribute to personnel pay) and increased the focus on addressing quality issues. Since workers no longer rely on parental contributions, they can focus more on the quality of services and less on increasing the number of students enrolled. In addition, the City has begun hiring permanent assistants to support CDWs such that there are now two assistants per center. To ensure that gains are sustained, the city established a Committee on Discipline, which handles dismissal of childcare workers and has continued to work on instituting guidelines to clarify the recipients, requirements and services offered by programs. Despite the initial success of the guidelines, some challenges have been encountered including inconsistent *barangay* support, and issues around contracting.[32]

Undergirding these changes has been an increasing budget for ECD programs in Navotas City, which was partly facilitated by a greater availability of information on the existing capacity of childcare personnel as well as the potential benefits of additional support.

Mayorga Municipality

Since political turnover can have an impact on the status of childcare workers, in 2012 the Municipality of Mayorga instituted an ordinance, which provides guidelines for the hiring and dismissal of childcare workers, and established a Day Care Workers Board. The ordinance specifies that workers, among other requirements, must reside in the *barangay* in which they hope to serve, be willing to undergo training and accreditation, and be able to serve for a minimum of two years. Similarly, the ordinance outlines grounds for termination, which include excessive absenteeism.

The Day Care Workers Board is envisioned to play a major role in enforcing these guidelines in hiring and termination proceedings. It is comprised of several members including the Mayor, Social Welfare and Development Officer, and President of the Day Care Workers Association. For example, to hire childcare workers, a *barangay* council must submit a list of prospective hires to the Day Care Workers Board who will then evaluate and endorse certain candidates who can then be hired by *barangay* councils. For dismissal, *barangays* are required to submit reports and a rationale for dismissal, which are then investigated by the Board who makes a final determination.[33]

Additional efforts facilitated by civil society to advance worker protection policies are detailed in Box 1.

Box 1: Partnership between Government and Civil Society to Advance Personnel Protection

In April 2016, Save the Children conducted a workshop focused on creating ordinances at the local level to support the hiring, retention, and dismissal of childcare workers. The goal of the "writeshop" was to enable local leaders to draft policies that would lead to the professionalization of childcare workers and enable a better working environment in order to prevent well-trained personnel from leaving their jobs. The writeshop involved childcare and social workers, as well as representatives from LGUs of six cities across the country, and officials from the Department of Interior and Local Government and the Department of Social Welfare and Development. During the writeshop, participants from different LGUs learned about efforts in different cities/municipalities to support childcare personnel and were then assisted in drafting policy statements which reflected the challenges encountered in their communities and the actions they hoped could be taken to address them. The statements crafted by participants reflected interest in institutionalizing ECCD programs, professionalizing service providers, and revising existing ordinances to establish security of tenure and benefits for service providers. Participants also developed action plans for operationalizing these policy statements. Plans prioritized activities such as conducting dialogue with various government officials, reviewing existing ordinances and laws, identifying ECCD champions, and planning and budgeting for implementation of future ordinances. Save the Children staff also committed to support LGUs in achieving goals set out in their action plans through, for example, helping to identify champions and providing additional support in understanding ECCD policies and ordinances.

The writeshop was successful in sparking interest and providing guidance around developing policies to improve retention of the early childhood workforce. However, there were some challenges in sustaining momentum in some LGUs after the writeshop. For example, when key decision-makers were not the ones present, it was difficult to get buy-in on the language of policies later on. Additionally, given the number of priorities and services for which officials in LGUs are responsible, it is important to provide follow-up support to ensure that the beneficial effects of the writeshop are sustained.

Sources: Save the Children. 2016. "Report on Policy Writeshop on Hiring, Retention, and Dismissal of Day Care Workers."; Key Informant Interview with Expert 2. (4.5.18).

National-Level Initiatives

There have also been efforts to introduce policies at the national level. For example, in 2017, the House of Representatives passed a set of worker guidelines known as the "Magna Carta" for day care workers, which is going through review and has not yet been approved by the Senate. This Magna Carta calls for the creation of official government positions for childcare workers, entitling them to a salary and additional compensation, such

as overtime pay, as well as benefits such as participation in the Government Insurance Scheme. The bill also mandates that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) provide continuing education and skills training and knowledge enhancement programs for childcare workers. [34] While a national policy would not eliminate the responsibility of local governments for financing pay for childcare workers, the Magna Carta would include some provisions for subsidies from the national government for smaller municipalities.

Reflections on Implementation: Enablers and Barriers

The following section reflects on the enabling environment in the Philippines for improving the quality of the childcare workforce. It highlights factors that have facilitated the introduction of training and job protection policies as well as those that have created barriers to implementation.

Enabling Conditions

- **Parallel efforts at local and national levels:** Neither local nor national government entities have the resources or authority to address the challenges facing the childcare workforce alone, although they can effect change by partnering and working on parallel efforts. For example, national-level stakeholders like the ECCD Council have provided technical expertise and some funding for training initiatives in response to requests from local governments, which in turn have provided their own resources. In the case of job protection policies, there are instances of local governments successfully implementing ordinances, while a debate occurs on the national stage that could lead to the adoption of a national policy to reinforce and enhance local policies.

- **Strong civil society partners:** Civil society organizations like Save the Children have been important partners in providing technical support and promoting lesson sharing around the workforce. This has been helpful in disseminating locally-developed approaches to different areas of the country.

Barriers to Implementation

- **Low status of childcare workers.** Since community members do not often perceive childcare workers as skilled, it can be difficult to introduce efforts that increase support for these personnel. Although the introduction of the role of CDT has assisted professionalization efforts, there are some who believe that it has created disparities in working conditions of the two main categories of workers.

- **Lack of active participation from key decision makers:** Experience with policy writeshops in the Philippines suggests that the most progress can be made when key decision makers are at the table during the policy drafting process to weigh-in on the language and content in real time. In some instances, these individuals were not present which stalled momentum once the writeshop was complete. Active involvement from key decision makers may spur heightened interest and thus, lead to faster, more tangible action regarding protections for personnel. Representatives from government entities that oversee LGUs, such as the Department of Interior, should also be present, as they ensure the laws and mandates that local governments need to follow. [35]

- **Budgetary constraints:** Local governments are generally responsible for financing pay and training for childcare workers though they often do not have adequate resources for this support. The ECCD Council has limited resources as well, which means that their support can only be provided to select areas, including those with the ability to take on certain costs.

Policy Lessons

As policymakers look to introduce training and policies to provide job protection for the early childhood workforce, the following are lessons to consider from the Philippines' experience.

Sensitize locally elected officials to the importance of ECD and the critical role of childcare workers. Members of the ECCD Council in the Philippines have sought to raise awareness among locally elected officials on the importance of ECD in order to prevent worker turnover and changing support for childcare programs. Creating champions at the local level may help to ensure that ECD remains a priority over time, and assist in facilitating relationships between local and national governments, as well as NGOs, in order to garner support for trainings and other activities that aim to strengthen the workforce.[36]

Impacts of training and professional development efforts cannot be sustained if they are not also paired with efforts to improve the working conditions of personnel. In the Philippines, both government officials and civil society representatives have recognized the importance of protecting their investments in workforce development. In order to ensure the benefits of training are sustained in the long-term and safeguarded against turnover in leadership, it is important to also introduce policies which address the poor working conditions and job security that members of the early childhood workforce face.

Formalizing childcare personnel roles is important for quality and equity though it can be challenging to ensure enough resources for both pay and ongoing support. In the Philippines, Child Development Workers have recently transitioned from volunteer positions to paid roles within local governments. While this has been beneficial for improving the status of these workers, there are still challenges related to providing both types of existing childcare personnel with training and ongoing support given the scale of resources needed. Financial and technical support from the central level and non-governmental partners can help in addressing gaps.

Endnotes

1 We extend our gratitude to the following individuals who offered invaluable insights as key informants: Maya Nayos (Save the Children), Micah Denise del Mundo, Dr. Teresita Inciong, and Dr. Yolanda Quijano (ECCD Council).

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7 In the Philippines, local government units (LGUs) are divided into three levels: provinces and independent cities which are comprised of component cities and municipalities which are further divided into *barangays*, the smallest level of government.

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The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative is a global, multi-sectoral effort to mobilize countries and international partners to support and empower those who work with families and children under age 8. This initiative is jointly led by Results for Development (R4D) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), and supported by a consortium of funders including Bernard van Leer Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and ELMA Foundation.

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