

Monday, 27 May, 2024

ECRN Fund Annual Meeting Session Report: Fatherhood and Male Engagement

At the 2024 ARNEC regional conference in Penang, Malaysia, representatives from the four regional networks currently supported by the [Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund \(ECRN Fund\)](#), as well as the Latin American network Somos Crianza, were part of a session designed to explore opportunities for networks to advance fatherhood and male engagement in early childhood. Regional networks and their members were joined by members and partners who are currently working on this issue to add to a collective perspective of challenges and gaps, as well as untapped opportunities¹.

The session was designed by the four regional networks and was organized around the following learning questions:

- How are regional networks uniquely positioned to advance fatherhood and male engagement in ECD?
- Where are there gaps in noteworthy or successful practices or understanding of approaches and solutions?
- Are there joint priorities that could benefit from collaboration?

Overview of regional network activities and approaches²

Network	Focus/purpose	Approaches	Core activities to date
AfECN	Inform the creation of a roadmap towards a regional strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence generation • Knowledge sharing, capacity building of stakeholders in gender transformative approaches in male engagement. • Convening 	Mapped existing programs and shared knowledge through webinars, consultations and convening
ANECD	Increase reach and scale of content availability to meet Arab-speaking families where they are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot programs • Holistic, integrated, inclusive programs • Evidence generation • Digitization of content • Creation of the Urjouha parenting resource HUB • Produce content <i>in the region for the</i> 	Developed and implemented parenting program that is designed for fathers and mothers as a unit, with an emphasis on cross-sector work, mentoring

¹ A full list of attendees can be found at the end of this report.

² More detailed descriptions of the work being done by each regional network can be found at the end of this report.



		<i>region</i>	
ARNEC	Increase awareness on fatherhood and male engagement within the overall advocacy for responsive caregiving and parenting. Facilitates learning amongst countries given the different models and approaches implemented by partners in addressing gender norms, behavior and policy, and creating new roles for fathers at the country and community levels, building on opportunities within the cultural context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evidence generation at the country level on behavior and systems change ● Government engagement and policy change, both at the national and local level 	Harvested the learning from existing programmes of partners and members and disseminated it in the region
ISSA	Support policy change / uptake, including at the local / city and national levels, as well as improving practices in early childhood services and n home environments, laying the foundation for driving a movement across Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scale impact by lifting up the diverse and contextual work being done by members and connecting them with each other ● Development of evidence and advocacy tools; pre- and in-service training packages targeting cross-sector professions, and sharing with the network and regional/global partners. 	Multi-year large scale initiative: <i>Engaging Men in Nurturing Care</i> ; brought together insights from multiple partners, both ISSA members and global partners, to create and disseminate ground-tested practices

Challenges and opportunities identified by regional networks from their current work

The four regional networks identified several challenges and opportunities that are emerging from their work addressing fatherhood and male engagement as networks supporting collective work and as Secretariats supporting the work of members and partners.



Challenges

- **Complex cultural issue**
 - Restrictive gender norms
 - "People don't want to talk about it"
- **Underdeveloped child support system**
- **Restrictive policies and laws**
 - Access for men to services and programs
 - Good laws and practices are not enough without norms change
- **Not on public agenda, lack of public awareness** about roles for fathers
- **Different national context and levers**, even within regions
- **Lack of holistic inclusive approaches that deal with fathers engagement among the complete family** rather than as a stand alone activity or goal
- **Violence-based and toxic masculinity discourse is overshadowing** and prevails in the mainstream narrative regarding men involvement in care

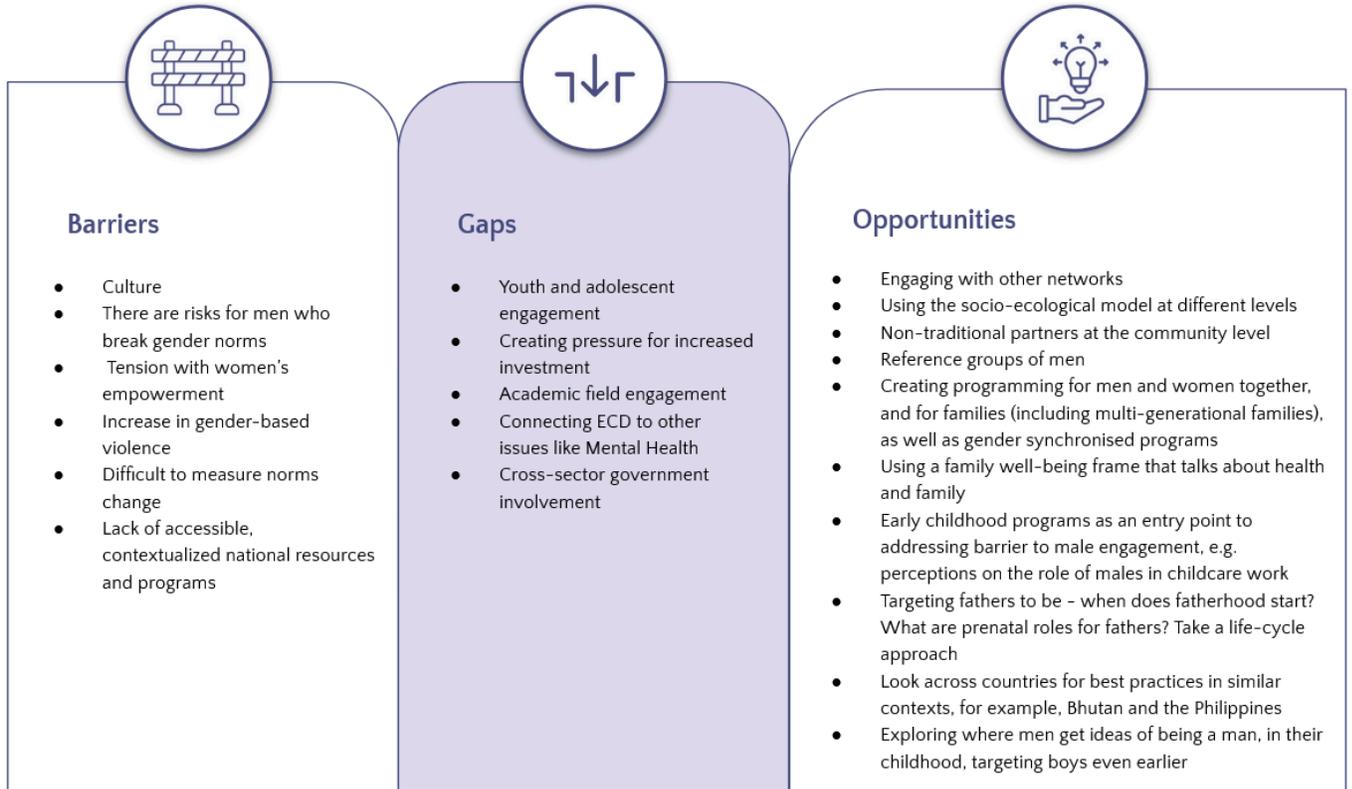


Opportunities

- **Lifting up local context and problem solving** that can be shared, especially with investments in research that generates local evidence
- **Policy change** that includes both developing new laws and updating existing laws, which can be a lighter lift
- **Mapping what works** at multiple levels – local, national, regional
- **Raising awareness** through advocacy
- **Creating roles for and partnerships with non-traditional partners**, for example, faith-based organisations, government officials, private companies/employers and members of the armed forces, and leveraging other male-friendly institutions and practices
- **Capturing positive stories** about fathers that address stereotyped roles for men
- **Adding fathers to the agenda** of existing programs
- **Increased evidence generation** and data
- **Leveraging other movements** and networks

Additional thought partner reflections

Attendees from global organizations and national and local networks within the regions added their perspectives on additional barriers, gaps and opportunities in advancing work on fatherhood and male engagement.



Looking ahead

The regional networks closed the session with a discussion of different ways to move forward, both within their regions and across regions. The discussion yielded potential approaches to both advancing the work and for joint learning on priority interventions to share what they are learning and access field-level best practices.



Within regions

- Continue context-specific work that focuses on country-level solutions and generates information on new approaches and strategies
- Generate more evidence on the benefits of male engagement
- Formation of strategic partnerships
- Whole systems approach
- In-region knowledge sharing using communities of practice and other models
- Build on existing resources



Across regions

- Test common messaging
- Emphasise learning and expand knowledge sharing of local- and regional-level work through joint evidence base creation that:
 - Includes concrete approaches to advocacy and policy
 - Maps existing resources and practices
 - Maps entry points into the work
 - Supports external stakeholders in the ECD field to expand field-level knowledge
 - Demonstrates the scale of work at the regional level
 - Package and share what is being learned in regions to provide the field with an evidence base that emphasises context and diverse approaches to change
- Explore methods for monitoring impact in policy change, systems change and norms change, including attitudes, beliefs and behaviours
- Contribute to an overall theory of change on Fatherhood and Male Engagement with different approaches that contribute to common goals

In addition to direct support for the regional networks, the ECRN Fund supports a process for joint learning for the networks and their members and partners on issues that they prioritize. The following topics emerged from this session as opportunities for future joint learning and knowledge sharing as work at the regional level moves forward:



Joint learning opportunities

- How to apply a families and well-being lens in different contexts
- How to tackle norms change within and across different contexts
- Strategies for leveraging non-traditional partners
- Approaches to policy and advocacy work related to fatherhood and male engagement within and across different contexts
- Approaches to monitoring impact for policy change and changes to norms, including cultural attitudes, beliefs and behaviours

Resources to Support Advancing Fatherhood and Male Engagement

These resources were produced by the regional networks and their local, national and global partners.

- [Promoting Men's Engagement in Early Childhood Development: A Programming and Influencing Package](#) – Includes resources developed for programmes that aim to increase male engagement in nurturing care and early childhood development (ECD), as well as in maternal health and wellbeing. Guidance is provided on how to work with men directly to promote their involvement in the nurturing care, learning and education of their young children. Considerations for working with healthcare providers and community health workers and with communities and leaders is included, as well as tools and templates on policy influencing and social and behavior change communication campaigns in favor of men's engagement. (Plan International, ARNEC's partner)
- [BE KINDER: unraveling paths to address gender stereotypes in education and early childhood](#) – This book brings together some of the KINDER project's key contributions to the construction of a transformative and gender-sensitive education. The chapter, Positive gender socialization at home and school for transformative change, was authored by the ISSA Secretariat's Program Director, Dr. Mihaela Ionescu, and Junior Program Manager, Ayça Alaylı. It provides a deeper understanding of gender transformative approaches and the pathways of applying gender transformative methodologies in parenting and education. (ISSA)
- [Supporting Families for Gender Transformative Parenting – Challenging gender norms and gender inequalities to create a more equitable environment for all children to thrive](#) – This training resource package provides evidence-based information, recommendations, and training modules for frontline workers to support parents in implementing gender-transformative parenting practices at home and support positive gender socialization of children aging between 0 to 18, covering all childhood periods: early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence. (ISSA)
- [Supporting Families for Nurturing Care -- Module 5: Engaging Fathers](#) – The full collection of nurturing care modules ([found here](#)) empower home visitors to take a strengths-based approach that promotes nurturing relationships between the caregiver and child as well as contributing to risk reduction by supporting and referring families to other services when necessary. Module 5 specifically addresses why engaging with fathers is becoming more important in policy and in practices, how fathers impact infants, children and mothers, and the impact of fatherhood on men, and how to engage productively with fathers when visiting families. (ISSA)
- [Evidence on the Effects of Engaging Fathers on Reducing Violence Against Children in the Home and even Intimate Partner Violence](#) – This brief lays out the evidence showing that some changes happen to men's brains upon becoming fathers. It highlights the importance of Fathers' involvement, even those who experienced violence during childhood, and how it can improve the paternal connection. It offers concrete examples of how social norms improve or hinder the father's engagement. (ANECD)
- [The Best Practices for Engaging Men and fathers in Programs](#) -- This brief provides a synopsis of a few Programs offered especially for men/fathers to improve Early Childhood Development (ECD) and parental collaboration. It will show how programs are designed to promote active, involved parenting, parenting skills, fathers' engagement in caregiving, parent-child interaction and relationship quality, and violence reduction; as well as key evaluation findings, implementation challenges, lessons learned, and considerations for future adaptations. (ANECD)

Additional details on how regional networks are addressing Fatherhood and Male Engagement in ECD

ANECD:

The Health, Early Learning, Protection Parenting Program (HEPPP) is an innovative, holistic, integrated, inclusive, evidence-based program designed to support fathers and mothers together as a unit throughout their parenting journey with their children under the age of 8.

The program provides a framework of concepts, knowledge, and activities that help develop parents' practices in raising children and it consists of 38 digital topics/sessions related to issues concerning parents of young children, divided into four primary axes: 1- Responsive Parenting, 2- Early Learning, 3- Mental Health for Caregivers, and 4- Mental Health for Children.

The program was initially piloted in 3 countries (Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan), validated through research on its impact, and has been designed throughout the past years to be implemented in 3 models (in-person, remotely, and hybrid).

The program also recruits and trains mentors who are responsible to regularly follow-up with both parents to ensure the effectiveness of the content provided.

Urjouha (Swing in Arabic) is the parenting hub that complements the HEPPP through providing professional support and guidance for parents and caregivers on their journey from pregnancy until the age of 8 years.

It is a platform that offers mentoring, sharing, and communication for Arabic-speaking mothers, fathers, and caregivers. Urjouha also provides additional content and readings related to the HEPPP topics in the form of articles, podcasts, videos, and more.

In terms of male engagement, both Urjouha and HEPPP adopt an inclusive approach which considers fathers as a necessary component for the whole caregiving cycle and neither as a supportive entity or a unit that should be targeted separately.

AfECN:

AfECN's activities have evolved mainly around evidence generation and knowledge sharing, focused on the following areas:

- Evidence generation on Considerations for a regional roadmap for the acceleration of male engagement in positive parenting. This report provided insights for a regional roadmap for acceleration of male engagement in positive parenting. The paper clarified key concepts such as positive parenting, male engagement etc; provided a context analysis of male engagement in Africa – barriers, policies, achievements, gaps etc. Also looked into approaches & issues to consider in developing for a regional strategic plan
- Literature Review of Male engagement in Childcare and child development in Africa: The aim of this report was to make knowledge explicit through the findings from a literature study. The findings showed that there are multi-level barriers that limit male engagement in childcare. Literature review found gaps in the following areas: policy, research, advocacy, institutional access and programming, in terms of male engagement work. Also found that each area presents opportunities to accelerate the work of male engagement.
- Mapping of Fatherhood Programmes in Africa Region: This involved mapping of male engagement programmes implemented by various partners across the region.

- Webinar Series on Male Engagement in ECD, held in May 2021: These were evidence based webinars series delivered in French, Portuguese and English to cover the sub-regional language groupings. AfECN partnered with PROMUNDO who led a series of webinars that offered an opportunity to learn and share practical skills and strategies for effectively engaging men in ECD. The knowledge gained, resources and tools from the sessions were also to input into discussions of designing a regional fatherhood program
- AfECN Convenings: AfECN's ECD Conferences have also been used to highlight, advocate and knowledge share on the issue of male engagement. In March 2023, AfECN Convened the Southern Africa Regional Conference and in March 2024, the Eastern Africa Regional Conference both of which have had dedicated sessions on Male Engagement. AfECN is in the process of planning for the Western Africa Conference to be held in 2025, which will also be another opportunity.
- National Dialogues in Childcare: AfECN has recently (2024) launched the National Childcare Dialogues Initiative in 5 countries, which will also include evidence generation, advocacy and policy engagement on male engagement in childcare in 5 countries.

ISSA:

ISSA's thematic work in the area of gender/engaging men has focused on several approaches:

- Engaging Men in Nurturing Care (EMINC) – *a systemic approach* – This multi-year initiative brings together existing expertise from gender equality, masculinities, fatherhood, early childhood development, parenting programs, human and children's rights, to create local champions to successfully implement policies, programs and practices that promote gender-balanced environments at home, in services and in communities. An important focus of the initiative is capacity building for professionals working with young children and families across sectors, on areas of men engagement in nurturing care, gender equity and early childhood development. There is also a component of building evidence for a compelling narrative, and a strong advocacy component, to tackle social norms and policies. The initiative builds on other large collaborations which include the partnership with Equipundo, where they brought the knowledge on toxic masculinity and we brought the content on fatherhood, ECD and education.
- Supporting Families for Gender Transformative Parenting – This initiative provides evidence-based information, recommendations, and training modules for frontline workers to support parents in implementing gender-transformative parenting practices at home and support positive gender socialization of children aging between 0 to 18, covering all childhood periods: early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence.
- Supporting Families for Nurturing Care/Resource Package for Home Visitors – This initiative focuses on how home visitors can help deliver personalized care and assistance directly to families and communities in need. The 24 modules in the package (see links above in resources) were developed through a consultative process which involved more than 20 national and international experts, including front line workforce – the home visiting patronage nurses. The modules address topics not routinely covered in pre-service or in-service nursing and medical education, such as engaging fathers, and empower home visitors to take a strengths-based approach that promotes nurturing care and relationships between the caregiver and the child.

Session attendees



NAME	ORGANIZATION/AFFILIATION
Lynette Okengo	African Early Childhood Network (AfECN)
Given Daka	African Early Childhood Network (AfECN)
Joylet Gende	Malawi National ECD Network
Ghassan Issa	Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD)
Mohamad Albekai	Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD)
Beya Guezzi	Tunisian Network for Early Childhood
Joel Lasam	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)
Evelyn Santiago	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)
Cliff Meyers	ARNEC, Board of Directors
Newelle Magas	ECCD Council, Philippines
Himigbayan Santiago	ECCD Council, Philippines
Mega Indrawati	HI-ECD Coalition, Indonesia
Dwi Purwestri	HI-ECD Coalition, Indonesia
Nicole Rodger	Plan International
Syifa Andina	Plan International, HI-ECD, ARNEC National Rep for Indonesia
Jayanti Prakash	Sesame Workshop, India
Liana Ghent	International Step-by-Step Association (ISSA)
Zorica Trkic	International Step-by-Step Association (ISSA)
Miroslav Sklenka	Wide Open School NGO, ISSA Member in Slovakia
Giulia Barnhinsel	Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund
Rosemary Heenan	Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund
Carolina Turriago	Somos Crianza: ECD coalition in Latin America
Jane West	Two Lilies Fund
Amanda Welsh	Network Impact

Alan Barbieri	The Human Safety Net
Hui Fang	UBS Optimus Foundation (TBC)

About the ECRN Fund

The Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund (ECRN Fund) is a philanthropic initiative that supports strong, resilient and representative networks to advance early childhood development. The ECRN Fund currently supports and uplifts the work of four regional early childhood networks, spanning over 100 countries:



Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD) - Established in 2014 and hosted by the Arab Resource Collective (ARC), the Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD) is a participatory and collaborative network of local, regional, and international organizations, governments, experts, and academics in Arab countries.



Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) - The African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) is a registered non-profit, established in 2015 to serve as a platform to champion excellence and collaboration in protecting children's rights, influence policy and practice, strengthen partnerships, and share experiences and knowledge in ECD on the African continent.



Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) - Established in February 2008, the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) builds strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the agenda on and investment in early childhood.



International Step by Step Association (ISSA) - Established in 1999, the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) facilitates learning and collaboration across sectors, disciplines and borders in Europe and Central Asia, to advocate for and support competent Early Childhood Systems.

About Network Impact



This session was facilitated by Network Impact, who also prepared this report. For more than a decade, Network Impact has been a field leader in network strategy and evaluation. They support networks and their members and partners, funders, and the emerging field of network builders who are building networks for social impact by providing consulting, tool-building, and research services. Learn more at: <https://www.networkimpact.org/>