

EARLY IS KEY

Mapping the Gaps on Understandings of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh

A research report by the FrameWorks Institute and
BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED)

April 2019

Authors

Eric Lindland, PhD, FrameWorks Institute
Ferdousi Khanom, MSS, BRAC IED
Syeda Sazia Zaman, MSS, BRAC IED
Mitul Dutta, MHSc, BRAC IED
Nashida Ahmed, MA, BRAC IED
Abdullah Al Mas-ud, MEd, BRAC IED
Shamnaz Arifin Mim, MA, BRAC IED

With contributions from

Wasima Parvin, MSc, BRAC IED
Sarwat Sarah Sarwar, BBA, BRAC IED
Ashfi Mehnaz, MSc, BRAC IED



Contents

Introduction	02		
Research Methods	05		
Expert interviews	05		
Cultural model interviews	05		
On-the-street interviews	07		
Research Findings	08		
The expert view	08		
1. What is early childhood development about in Bangladesh?	08		
2. What develops during early childhood?	09		
3. How does development happen during early childhood?	10		
4. What threatens early childhood development in Bangladesh?	10		
5. What can be done to improve early child development outcomes in Bangladesh?	12		
Public, ECD Sector and Ready-made-garment leader views	15		
1. What is early childhood development about?	15		
2. How and when does early childhood development happen?	18		
3. What shapes early childhood development?	20		
4. Who is responsible for early childhood development?	24		
5. How and when does early learning happen?	27		
6. Why does early childhood development matter?	30		
		7. What role should child care centres play in early development and learning?	32
		8. What should be done to improve early development?	34
		Mapping the Gaps and Overlaps in Understanding	38
		Overlaps in understanding	38
		Gaps in understanding	39
		Conclusion	42
		Initial recommendations and future research	42
		About The FrameWorks Institute	48
		About BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED)	48
		Appendix: Methods	49
		Expert interviews	49
		Cultural models interviews	51
		On-the-street interviews	52
		Endnotes	54

Introduction

In 1990, Bangladesh became one of the first member countries to ratify the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), an historic international agreement listing, for the first time, the rights of all children around the world. Ever since, the UNCRC – and the civil, political, economic, social and cultural principles on which it rests – has served as a foundation for subsequent laws and policies pertaining to children in Bangladesh.

In light of this background, it is notable that early childhood development (ECD), as a comprehensive concept and organised field, is fairly new in Bangladesh. And yet, Bangladesh has made major progress in a short period. The government approved the *Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development* (ECCD) policy in 2013 and the *Strategic Operational and Implementation Plan of Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development* (ECCD) policy in 2016. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), the leading ministry for implementation of the policies, is working to introduce a mechanism of ECCD budget preparation across 16 government ministries.

In 2015, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) made explicit reference to ECD – a landmark in the history of global policy development around this issue. Since the adoption of the SDGs, opportunities to take full advantage of the new prominence of ECD in national discourse have emerged. Bangladesh has mapped out lead, co-lead and associate ministries against each target of the SDGs, and the government is preparing an action plan for implementation of the SDGs in alignment with the government's seventh Five Year Plan. Respective ministries are working towards translating the particular targets into actionable programmes in this regard.

Many stakeholders have a role to play in translating national policies and plans into a successful realisation of the SDGs in Bangladesh, including governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of both national and international origin. All involved should clearly understand the critical role that early development plays in shaping the future of children, and nations at large. Through its advocacy and communications, the ECD sector in Bangladesh has and will continue to play a role in helping inform, educate and lead the effort to elevate people's understanding of the science of early development and elevate support for the kinds of policies and programmes that best serve young children's development and learning.

In this context, this report summarises research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED). It is the first step in a larger project aimed at providing a set of recommendations and tools that can strengthen the communications capacity of the ECD sector in Bangladesh and elevate support across Bangladeshi society for child-friendly policies and programmes that align with the science of early childhood development. This research is designed to help those who work in early childhood policy, practice, research and advocacy speak with a more consistent and strategic voice to both public and policy audiences about their field and its work. The goal is to strengthen the social and political will required to build and sustain a strong and enduring infrastructure of supports for young children’s wellbeing and learning in Bangladesh.

This collaborative effort is grounded in the recognition that the process of translating the scientific knowledge that ECD practitioners, advocates and researchers have about early development is anything but a simple, straightforward matter. Rather, it requires careful attention to the kinds of frameworks, grounded in culture, that people bring to interpretations and understandings of ECD. By understanding how people are able to think and reason about an issue, communicators can craft messages that avoid unproductive understandings and elevate new ways of thinking that are better aligned with policy and social change goals. As such, the first phase of research – conducted between October 2017 and March 2019 – involved three interrelated bodies of research and data, as reflected in this report.

First, this report identifies a shared “expert story” of the science and neuroscience of early childhood development. This story explains key issues and challenges in the early childhood development arena in Bangladesh and defines key scientific concepts that must be better understood by people inside and outside the ECD sector in Bangladesh. It addresses (1) what develops during early childhood, (2) how early development happens, (3) threats to early development, and (4) the kinds of policies and programmes that best serve children’s development in Bangladesh.

Second, the report identifies the widely shared but implicit understandings and assumptions (or “cultural models”) of early childhood development among three key populations: (1) the public, (2) the ECD sector, and (3) leaders of ready-made-garment (RMG) factories.¹ These models are used by these three groups to reason about early childhood development and topics relating to it. They shed light not only on *what* people think about development during early childhood but *how* they think about it. As such, they represent the basic contours of the cultural and cognitive landscape into which ECD messaging is being received and interpreted. Identifying them is, therefore, an essential starting point for developing and refining strategies for communicating more effectively about early development. With a solid understanding of this landscape, communicators are better positioned to design messaging that can improve understanding and support for ECD interventions and policies.²

Third, this report compares and contrasts, or “maps the gaps and overlaps,” between the cultural models findings and the expert story of early development. This analysis identifies key areas of congruence and divergence between the science of ECD and the dominant models that structure thinking across the three study populations. In the process, it helps identify the major challenges that communicators face in moving the Bangladeshi conversation forward on issues of early development.

Finally, this report relates the cultural models findings to a parallel body of research that explores current communications practices in the ECD sector in Bangladesh. This research – summarised in a companion Field Frame Analysis (FFA) report³ – provides a summary of how the field of ECD in Bangladesh currently frames this issue. By juxtaposing how Bangladeshis think about ECD and how the field frames it, this report explains how current ECD communications are likely being received and interpreted (in ways both productive and unproductive) by members of all three research populations.

Understanding this intersection of cultural models, communications practices, and the science of early development sets up the report’s final sections. The first outlines preliminary messaging recommendations that, if adopted, will strengthen the communications capacity of the ECD field in Bangladesh. The second suggests directions for further research to develop and test communications tools and strategies that can further strengthen the field’s communications and elevate support for policies and programmes that will help the country realise its Sustainable Development Goals and best serve its children and families.

Research Methods

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

To explore expert understandings of early childhood development in Bangladesh, researchers from BRAC IED conducted 10 face-to-face interviews between November 2017 and January 2018 with academics, researchers, planners and policy experts affiliated with ECD-oriented networks and organisations. These interviews were guided by a set of predetermined topics, including developmental domains, causes, gender roles, resilience, play, early learning, challenges and interventions.

Experts were encouraged to steer the interview in directions they deemed relevant. Interview data were subjected to grounded theory analysis, with attention to common themes and assertions across the interviews. This analysis was then integrated into an existing expert story derived from almost two decades of research into public and expert thinking about ECD. This work reflects a collaboration between the FrameWorks Institute and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University⁴ and is based on interviews with experts in the science and neuroscience of early childhood from the United States, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, Kenya and the United Kingdom.⁵ This integrated expert story was shared with Bangladeshi ECD experts, who comprise a scientific advisory group assembled by the Porticus Foundation to guide this research project. Feedback from this group was incorporated into a final draft of an expert account of early childhood development in Bangladesh.

CULTURAL MODEL INTERVIEWS

BRAC IED researchers conducted 54 in-depth interviews to identify and analyse “cultural models” among members of the three populations identified above. Conducted in Bangla, the interviews were one-on-one, semi-structured, two-hour exchanges that explored a range of topics related to early childhood development. They were recorded with participants’ consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

To sample members of the public and those working in ECD, three regions of the country were selected for research: Dhaka, Chattogram and Khulna.

To sample the public, 22 interviews were conducted, with demographic criteria selected to account for variations in gender, education, age, religious identity, marital status and residential location. Of the 22 members of the public, 11 men and 11 women were interviewed. In terms of education, three participants had no formal education, five had some or had completed primary education, seven had some or completed secondary education and seven had some or completed tertiary education. In terms of age, four were between 18 and 21, four between 22 and 30, eight were between 31 and 50 and six were over 50. By religious identity, 16 identified as Muslim, three as Hindu, two as Buddhist and one as Christian. Eleven were married, seven were unmarried, and four were either widowed or divorced. Finally, 11 were urban residents, five lived in peri- or sub-urban areas and six lived in rural areas.

Twenty participants were interviewed from the ECD sector. They were recruited to represent a range of roles across the three research locations. Two were representatives of government ministries, four were at the directorate level of an organisation, four were mid-level professionals, four were pre-primary school teachers, two were child care providers, two were junior-level researchers and two were community health or family-support workers. Thirteen were women, and seven were men. The majority, 15, had completed tertiary education, while four had secondary education and one had primary education. The age distribution included two people between the ages of 18 and 21; four between 22 and 30; 11 between 31 and 50 and three over 50. Sixteen identified as Muslims and four as Hindus. Thirteen were married, five were unmarried and two were either widowed or divorced. Fourteen were recruited from the city; four from semi-urban areas and two from rural areas.

Ready-made-garment factory leaders were recruited because of the role factories now play as child care providers for their workers. The final sample included 12 factory owners or senior managers, 11 of whom were male and one of whom was female. Of the 12 factories, nine had operational child care centres, while three had onsite facilities that were not yet operational. All were located in the urban and semi-urban areas of Dhaka region.

Adapting analytic techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology, BRAC IED and FrameWorks researchers used a “grounded theory” approach to identify common patterns in the data within and across the three research populations.^{6,7} This approach involved identifying standardised ways of talking across the data sets to reveal commonly made assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections.⁸ The analysis looked at patterns in what was *said* (how things were related, explained and understood) as well as in what was *not* said (assumptions and implied relationships). Analysis centred on ways of understanding that were shared across participants within each research population and among the three populations. These shared understandings and assumptions are the “cultural models” identified in the following analysis.

ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS

To complement the in-depth cultural models interviews, BRAC IED researchers conducted 57 brief “on-the-street” interviews on pavements, parks and other public spaces with members of the public. These video-recorded interviews were conducted in Bangla and were designed to (1) confirm, refine and expand our understanding of the public’s dominant “models” of ECD in Bangladesh and (2) learn new insights from the public’s use of terminology regarding early childhood.

Using opportunistic sampling procedures, these interviews were conducted in three locations: Dhaka, Sylhet and Rangpur. Sylhet and Rangpur are new research locations and complement the cultural models research conducted in Chattogram and Khulna. In each division, researchers approached a diverse sample of members of the public to request interviews. The final on-the-street sample included 34 men and 23 women. In regard to age, seven were between 18 and 21, 18 were between 22 and 30, 25 were between 31 and 50, and seven were over 50. Three participants had primary education, 14 had secondary education and 40 had tertiary education. Researchers used the 14 hours of raw footage generated from these interviews to produce a short video to illustrate dominant models and other important findings.

For more detailed descriptions of methods, please see [Appendix 1](#).

Research Findings

THE EXPERT VIEW

This study presents a summary of the themes that emerged from the analysis of expert interviews. It derives from eight interviews conducted by BRAC IED with Bangladeshi ECD experts, as well as from FrameWorks' previous collaborations with a range of global ECD experts. The expert story of ECD in Bangladesh is organised under the following thematic areas:

1. What is early childhood development about in Bangladesh?
2. What develops during early childhood?
3. How does development happen during early childhood?
4. What threatens early childhood development in Bangladesh?
5. What can be done to improve early childhood development outcomes in Bangladesh?

1. What is early childhood development about in Bangladesh?

- **The challenges of urbanisation.** Rapid urbanisation in Bangladesh has resulted in the growth of large informal urban settlements where many families live in economically marginal conditions and where caretakers struggle to provide adequate access to nutrition, health care and early learning opportunities for their children. These high-density, informal settlements often lack basic infrastructure, including water and sanitation services, and have few open and healthy spaces for children to play and congregate.
- **Translating economic development into improved outcomes for young children.** Bangladesh has made great strides in reducing poverty levels in the country over the past several decades. Poverty reduction, however, has not fully translated into better outcomes for young children. Many children and families still lack access to family leave benefits, to high-quality maternal and child health services, and to child care and early learning facilities. Experts note that greater attention is often given to the quantity than the quality of services provided. They argue that targets and benchmarks need to be set up to understand how improving the quality *and* availability of resources for caregivers and families supports improved health and learning outcomes for children.

- **The need to redefine what early childhood is and when it occurs.** Experts noted that many people in Bangladesh largely misinterpret the period of early childhood. Though government policy clearly defines early childhood as the years from 0–8, the public – and even many ECD sector personnel – lack clarity on this. The public and ECD sector personnel also lack clarity about developmental processes and outcomes. Efforts must be made to help both the public and ECD sector personnel understand the age parameter of early childhood and the key processes of and outcomes of early development.
- **Underinvestment of public resources for ECD.** Few policymakers are fully attuned to the importance of ECD; thus, many fail to support necessary investment in it. Consequently, the national government has allocated little to improving this sector. While the government *has* made substantial investments in educational interventions that target children aged five and over (and that thus qualify within the legal parameters of ECD), few comparable investments target children aged four and under (except in the health sector).

2. What develops during early childhood?

- **The developing brain is central to the story.** The development of a child’s brain, alongside physical and psychological development, is at the heart of the “developmental story”. Brain development starts *in utero*, and connections across regions of the brain grow rapidly and strengthen over time. Simple neuronal circuits develop first, followed by more complex ones that are layered on top in a process that is both genetically driven and contingent on experience.
- **Plasticity is key to the brain story.** Experts pay considerable attention to the brain’s “plasticity” – its capacity to change over time. There are critical windows of opportunity when brain plasticity is at its peak – particularly during early childhood and adolescence. The brain is open to change throughout childhood and across the life course, though its plasticity decreases over time. The policy implications are clear: supporting positive brain development in early childhood produces better outcomes for children across their life spans and is less costly for both individuals and society than later interventions.
- **Foundational skills are set up early.** The foundations for basic visual, auditory, motor and speech capacities are established during the early months and years of a child’s life. Certain inborn emotional and communicative capacities must be activated and strengthened before subsequent cognitive and other skills can develop. The strength of these “executive functions” and “self-regulation” skills depends on the quality of a child’s “environment of relationships”. Executive function skills – such as inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility and working memory – develop in conjunction with each other and “set up” a child’s capacity to regulate a broad range of life skills, competencies and behaviours.

3. How does development happen during early childhood?

- **Genes are manifest in an environment of relationships.** Development is an interaction between children’s genetic makeup and the quality of their environmental experiences. Alongside nutrition, health care and other core supports, the quality of children’s relationship with caregivers fundamentally shapes their emotional and psychological development and establishes key features of their emerging physical and mental health. Under conditions supportive of high-quality caregiving, relationships are stable and characterised by stimulation, play, responsiveness and shared emotional and attentional interactions.
- **Children benefit from “scaffolding” as they explore, engage and experiment with the world around them.** Children first develop simple skills and capacities and gradually layer and build more complex skills on top of them. This “scaffolding” process is important at all stages of skill development. Adults and other more advanced learners can give children opportunities to explore, solve problems and make mistakes by directing their emergent skills towards appropriate tasks and challenges and providing them with mutually enjoyable support and feedback as interactive partners.
- **Early matters.** The earliest months and years of a child’s life, both in the womb and during the first three postnatal years, are foundational to all subsequent development. While the legal definition of ECD in Bangladesh is the years between zero and eight, the first three years are critical to development.

4. What threatens early childhood development in Bangladesh?

- **Chronic stress and other risk factors threaten development.** Within the parameters of shared, species-specific developmental processes, profound differences in outcomes for children are powerfully structured by differential exposure to a range of protective and risk factors, which either support or undermine children’s developing bodies and brains. Poverty, malnutrition, poor access to physical and mental health services and some cultural practices, like dietary restrictions for pregnant mothers or preferential treatment of boys over girls, can undermine development in profound ways, including physical stunting and cognitive deficiencies. Chronic stress factors, such as violence, abuse and neglect, when persistent and unbuffered by caregivers, lead to the pervasive over-activation of the body’s stress response systems in ways that cause physical damage to children’s brains and other organ systems. The over-activation of these systems alters processes of development and leads to long-term negative consequences in multiple domains, including learning, health and social functioning.
- **Inadequate supports for families undermine development.** There is a substantial gap between the ideal conditions that we know support early child development, and the programmes and policies currently in place to create those conditions. Inadequate public services in housing, health,

sanitation, education and household financial support threaten ECD outcomes at a societal level. Furthermore, inadequate prenatal and postnatal care in health, hygiene and nutrition, as well as inadequate efforts to prevent substance abuse and violence, impede the subsequent healthy development in a child.

- **Poverty is a core challenge.** Many children in poverty do not receive adequate time and care from family members because of the financial and time constraints imposed on families. This condition is worse among working mothers. Experts note that Bangladesh has not yet created sufficient supports for economically and socially disadvantaged families, even though they comprise the majority of the population.
- **Inadequate standards for day care centres and pre-schools.** Many day care and pre-school services fail to meet children’s developmental and learning needs. The government of Bangladesh’s approach to regulating these facilities is piecemeal, with few proper standards in place, including for staff training. Few pre-schools, especially private ones, meet minimum quality standards, and many public ones have high teacher-to-student ratios. In addition, providers rely on rote academic-style instruction and testing rather than dynamic and effective learning methods involving play, singing and dancing.
- **Lack of public knowledge.** The public lacks knowledge of the key factors that shape early development, including the value of the mother’s prenatal and postnatal health and its consequences for the earliest brain and body development of the child. Likewise, members of the public – across all classes – lack understanding of how development happens and of the critical importance of regular stimulation and communication for young children’s developing brains. Many families also are not aware of health services during pregnancy and childbirth. Even though safe delivery facilities exist at district and upazila levels in Bangladesh, many families still choose traditional birth attendants because they aren’t aware of these facilities.
- **Inadequate services for marginalised populations.** Services for children with special needs are insufficient, including initial identification of children in need and the management of supports for them and their families. In rural schools, the appropriate infrastructure for disabled children has not yet been developed. And health, nutrition, early learning and early stimulation services for indigenous populations are also insufficient. Children in indigenous communities have limited access to pre-primary education, apart from facilities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. People working or living in tea gardens, remote islands and *haor* (wetland) areas also have limited access to pre-primary schools and other basic services.
- **Environmental toxins.** Many Bangladeshi children are exposed to unsafe levels of environmental toxins that damage developing bodies and brains, such as lead (including in old paint), arsenic (primarily in water), manganese and gas (largely from household fuels) and multiple carcinogens from second-hand cigarette smoke.

- **Traditional gender roles.** In most Bangladeshi communities, fathers take the lead role in making decisions for the family, while mothers are assigned responsibility for day-to-day child care. This disparity does not best serve children's developmental needs, especially in light of changing labour patterns, where both parents work, but where women are left with the bulk of child-rearing and household responsibilities.
- **Positive traditional cultural practices are being lost.** Cultural practices of child caregiving in the past had positive effects for young children. These include: massaging children with oil during winter; allowing them to sunbathe in the morning light for vitamin D production; and singing, dancing reciting poems and engaging in other forms of recreation. These stimulating activities are less common today.

5. What can be done to improve early childhood development outcomes in Bangladesh?

- **Provide ECD education to five key populations.** Experts argue for a broad initiative to elevate knowledge about early childhood development in Bangladesh. First, ECD capacity development is required for policymakers and programme planners. Second, school teachers, university students and college students need to be educated in ECD through school curricula at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Third, religious leaders must be trained to generate awareness on ECD-related messages across religious communities. Fourth, parent/caregiver education programmes are needed to help caregivers and other family and community members understand how to best support young children's brain development through play, communication, stimulation and other shared interactions with their children. Finally, health professionals need to be educated in ECD, as they often have the most professional contact with children and caregivers during the earliest months and years of children's lives.
- **Improve conditions for families, caregivers, communities and children.** Bangladesh needs policies and programmes that support children's development, including high-quality child care and primary care services. Broader community contexts and family circumstances either support or undermine outcomes for children, especially for families in difficult circumstances. By better supporting those who interact with and provide care for children, and strengthening the families and communities around them – through mechanisms such as income support, free health services, family leave, maternal mental health, home visitation and substance abuse treatment and violence prevention programs – public policies can promote positive developmental outcomes for more children. This requires a dedicated public budget for ECD within the annual national budget for children.
- **Use science to better inform policy.** In line with their focus on context and support, experts advocate promoting the science of early childhood development to inform policy and programme impact. They call for

“closing the gap between what we know and what we do” by using innovative science and knowledge – of the factors that affect development and of the effectiveness of various interventions – to guide policy-making and implementation at national levels. Experts also call for extending research to identify areas that require attention to better support children in their early years of development.

- **Give more attention to at-risk populations.** Alongside a broader effort to improve support for children in general, there is a need for a more strategic and well-integrated effort to reach disadvantaged and at-risk children and families. This involves efforts to end discrimination against marginalised populations and to extend services and support to populations that have less access to or are less engaged with the family and child support systems that do exist. There is also a need to establish and maintain political stability across the country.
- **Better coordinate the range of services all children and families need.** Experts argue for the value of increased interagency coordination and accountability across sectors that focus on the health and wellbeing of families and children, including in health, education, social and child protection, and infrastructure.
- **Translate policy into practice.** In 2013, the Bangladesh government approved the *Comprehensive ECCD Policy*, a comprehensive approach to supporting ECD in the country, with the MoWCA serving as the focal ministry for providing overall policy direction and oversight of activities related to children. But experts state that all involved ministries must better and more fully implement the *ECCD Policy* to fulfil its promise and mandate to improve the lives of Bangladesh’s children.

Figure 1: Untranslated Expert Story of Early Childhood Development

1. What is early childhood development about in Bangladesh?	2. What develops during childhood?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge of urbanisation. Growth of large informal settlements where families live in marginal conditions and child-friendly infrastructure is lacking. • Translating prosperity into improved outcomes. Reduced poverty has often not led to better quality services for children and families. • Defining early childhood. Public and many in ECD sector lack attention to early childhood and to key processes and outcomes of early development. • Underinvestment. Too few policymakers are fully attuned to the importance of ECD and therefore investments for children aged 0–4 are low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The developing brain is central to the story. Neuronal connections across the brain grow rapidly and strengthen over time. Simple circuits develop first, with more complex ones layered on top. • Brain plasticity is key. Plasticity is at its peak during early childhood and again during adolescence. Encouraging positive brain development early on produces better outcomes across lifespan. • Foundational skills are set up early. Inborn emotional, communicative and attentional capacities must be activated early as a precondition for development of executive functions and self-regulation skills.
3. How does development happen during early childhood?	4. What threatens early childhood development in Bangladesh?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environments and experiences shape gene expression. Emotional, physical and mental health are structured by interplay between genetics and the quality of a child’s environments and relationships. Ideally, relationships are stable and characterised by stimulation, responsiveness and shared interactions. • Children benefit from “scaffolding” as they explore and engage the world. Children benefit from opportunities to problem-solve and make mistakes and from support and feedback from adults/advanced learners as interactive partners. • Early matters. The earliest months and years of a child’s life, in the womb and during the first 3 post-natal years, are foundational to all subsequent development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic stress and other risk factors threaten development. Alongside poverty, malnutrition and poor access to health services, persistent chronic stress causes physical damage to the brain and other organs, with long-term negative outcomes. • Inadequate supports and standards. Services, including in housing, health, sanitation, maternal health, child care, and early education, must be strengthened, especially for marginalised populations. • Lack of public knowledge. About developmental process and about support services. • Environmental toxins. High exposure to lead, arsenic, manganese, gas, and second-hand smoke. • Traditional gender roles. Fathers have decision-maker power while mothers are assigned day-to-day responsibility. • Loss of cultural practices. Positive caregiving practices are being abandoned – oil massages in winter, sun exposure for vitamin D, use of song and poetry.
5. What can be done to improve early childhood development outcomes in Bangladesh?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ECD education. For policymakers, educators, religious leaders, caregivers, and health professionals to elevate their knowledge. • Improve conditions for communities, families, caregivers and children. Key policy arenas include child care, free health services, maternal mental health, home visitation, life-skills training, and substance abuse and violence prevention programmes. • Use science to inform policy. Promote ECD science to inform policies, programmes and implementation and “close the gap between what we know and what we do.” • More attention to at-risk populations. Need for a more strategic and well-integrated effort to reach marginalised and at-risk children and families. • Better coordinate the services all children and families need. Need for better interagency coordination and accountability across sectors. • Translate policy into practice. The <i>Comprehensive ECCD Policy</i> must be more fully implemented to fulfil its mandate and promise. 	

PUBLIC, ECD SECTOR AND READY-MADE-GARMENT LEADER VIEWS

The following section presents the dominant cultural models that shape how three populations in Bangladesh think about children's early development: (1) members of the public, (2) ECD sector personnel, and (3) factory owners and senior managers in the ready-made-garment (RMG) industry. While these cultural models are always available to people, different ways of thinking may be active at different times. People think about ECD in multiple ways and, at any given time, a particular model is more or less active in shaping their opinions, beliefs and attitudes about it.⁹

Understanding these models offers communicators a critical tool. Some are productive, making it easier for people to take on new perspectives and access information, while others are less so, making it hard to process and understand certain messages. By communicating in ways that activate productive models and background unproductive ones, communicators can ensure that the content they are trying to communicate is truly accessible to the public. This is the essence of framing as a knowledge translation process.

The cultural models findings are organised around the following questions:

1. What is early childhood development about?
2. How and when does early childhood development happen?
3. What shapes early childhood development?
4. Who is responsible for early childhood development?
5. How and when does early learning happen?
6. Why does early childhood development matter?
7. What role should child care centres play in early development and learning?
8. What should be done to improve early development?

Some models were identified among all three populations. These are labelled "Shared Models (x3)". At other times, a model was strongly evident among two of the three populations; these are labelled "Shared Models (x2)". Still others were exclusive to one research population and are labelled as such.

1. What is early childhood development about?

There is *little consensus* among the public, ECD sector or ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leadership about the age parameters of either "childhood" or "early childhood" Responding to questions about *shoishobkal* (childhood) and *prarombhik shoishobkal* (early childhood), members of all three groups answered this question differently and with little consistency. This suggests that communications around "early childhood" are likewise interpreted in divergent ways, at least in terms of the age ranges people associate with the period.

[Childhood] is from their time of birth until six years. You can say five years, until they go to school. Once they reach kindergarten, the childhood years are over. (Public)

Childhood is from five years of age to 12 years. (Public)

From the birth of a child until the age of eight years, we can term as early childhood. (ECD Sector)

Early childhood starts from zero years and continues up to adolescence. (ECD Sector)

From birth up until the age of 13 or 14 could be childhood. (RMG Factory)

Despite the lack of consistency around the term *shoishob*, the on-the-street interviews demonstrated a much more consistent attribution of age with the vernacular term *baccha*, where respondents consistently spoke to the zero-to-five age range. This finding suggests that it is worth exploring whether and how the *baccha* term might be more regularly utilised by ECD communicators to help people focus attention on the earliest months and years of children's lives.

Shared Models (x3)

Two models that define early development were prevalent across all three populations:

- **Meeting Basic Needs.** Members of all three populations – public, ECD sector, and ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leadership – shared a baseline association of children's early development with their dependency on certain basic inputs from parents and other caregivers, including affection, shelter, vaccination and (above all) good nutrition.

The first requirement is food, which is essential for physical need. Apart from this, the caregiver must be supportive. (Public)

A child's proper development solely depends on the family. If the family is caring and supportive, then the child will grow up properly. (ECD Sector)

I think proper nutrition, family support, access to education, health care and obviously safety and security. (RMG Factory)

- **Idealised Childhood.** Across all three study populations, people’s thinking is partially structured by an idealised construction of “childhood” as a simple, innocent and carefree time. This model does not engage the diversity or complexity of different children’s experiences, by class, caste or otherwise. Both members of the public and those in the ECD sector also have the capacity to think and talk about substantial differences in children’s experiences, so this model is not exclusive or omnipotent. It mostly helped to structure thinking early on the interviews, when people were first introduced to the topic of “childhood”.

Childhood is a period with abundant freedom, where no restrictions exist.

(Public)

*By childhood, I envision a tension-free period. Playing or discovering new things every day is childhood. **(ECD Sector)***

*The world is different to a child. It’s a lot more beautiful and exciting. **(RMG Factory)***

Implications

- The lack of consensus about the *age parameters* of childhood undermines efforts to build a coherent set of expectations and policies for how best to support young children and their families in the early stages of their lives. This suggests the need to identify strategies that can establish a more consistent definition of and attention to the earliest years of life. Based on the on-the-street findings, which showed people consistently associating *baccha* with the 0–5 age span, this might mean more regular use of that vernacular term, though more research is required to test this hypothesis.
- The strength of the *Meeting Basic Needs* model among both members of the public and the ECD sector has mixed implications. In Bangladesh, which has high levels of poverty, the provisioning of basic needs, like adequate nutrition, shelter and health care, must not be taken for granted, and there remains a need to push for policies and systems aimed at meeting all children’s physical needs. Yet, the dominant focus on these basics mutes attention to a broader array of supports and inputs that families and children need for healthy development, including adequate stimulation, communication, socialisation and play.
- The *Idealised Childhood* model also has mixed implications. In one respect, it has value in carrying a set of associations about what childhood should be like for children – a period of ample time for carefree exploration, play and learning. Yet, when thinking through this simplified model, people are likely to underestimate the contingency and challenges many children face during early development. That underestimation weakens support for efforts to build interventions and systems that can serve all children, especially those most confronted with chronic or severe stress and challenge.

2. How and when does early development happen?

Shared Model (x3)

Only one model about the process of development was prevalent across all three populations:

- **Across Five Domains.** The study populations share a dominant model of development as happening over time, step-by-step in five domains: physical, mental, language, social and moral. These five domains dominated people's talk about the developmental process. All three populations look first to *physical* outcomes (height, weight, health, mobility) and then to *language* (speech) as markers of positive development – especially children's developed capacity to walk and talk. Though people consistently spoke of mental development, markers and milestones of that type of development are not well modelled in people's thinking, and few spoke to mental milestones – suggesting it is a shallower model.¹⁰

When a child grows, the physical and mental development happens. They learn how to talk, and they learn to understand. (Public)

At various stages, children will start crawling, then will learn to sit, then would walk using support, then they will walk safely, then will speak one word, then two words, then many words. (ECD Sector)

Children need to be taken care of from the early years in order to develop their language or social interaction skills. (RMG Factory)

Shared Model (x2)

One process model was prominent among two populations:

- **Ageing Up.** Both members of the public and ECD sector focus their thinking about children's "early development" on the middle years of childhood. Across the interview data, despite researchers' efforts to shift and maintain the focus on the first three years of childhood, public and ECD informants repeatedly spoke to ages, traits and developments that apply more to older children. This trend included a strong association of early learning with the school years, which are generally thought to start around age three, and the associated idea that the most important forms of learning happen during the years of formal education. This model was less apparent in our interviews with ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leaders, though that may be partly explained by the understood focus on the child care facilities at the factories, which target younger children.

Researcher: *Are there any crucial skills that the children learn and acquire in their early years?*

Respondent: *Yes, they do. Every step is important for them. [...] Whatever he learns is a skill for him. If he tries to climb a tree, it is a skill for him. If he is running, it is a skill. If he is reading or writing, learning to write a new alphabet, it is also a skill for him. (Public)*

When he is one year old, he understands his needs. He knows what he wants. This is his desire, his development. He knows that now. (ECD Sector)

ECD Sector Model

As a consistent, prevalent model, this model was confined to a single research population:

- **Brain + Emotions Are Under Development.** In addition to the five dominant domains of development, members of the ECD sector have *some* awareness of children's brain and emotional development. Their attention to these domains is not as strong as it is to the other five, and these are relatively *shallow* models, with few details about what they are, how they happen or how they can best be supported. There were few references (as in the quote below) to the brain as a physical organ that is actively growing and developing, and even fewer discussions of specific emotional skills like self-regulation or empathy.

By development, we understand both physical and mental development. Their brain cells are increasing. They are also growing physically. [...] The more they are growing, brain cells in their brains are getting connected and they are becoming more conscious. This ability to understand is what development means. Both their physical and mental development. (ECD Sector)

One of the major changes that take place is his emotional change. He wants to express his feelings through his emotions, his likes and dislikes, his near and dear ones, his community, his play, his toys. He tries to express all these through his emotions. (ECD Sector)

Implications

- The *Across Five Domains* model has positive implications in that members of all three populations recognise the multidimensional nature of the development process and that indicators suggest developmental progress. These are important understandings that can be leveraged. However, the ECD sector's shallow modelling, and the public and ready-made-garment leaders' lack of modelling, of the emotional and brain dimensions of development are problematic and undermine efforts to build systems and interventions that support these areas of development.

- The *Ageing Up* model is a central challenge. As long as members of the public and the ECD sector assume that the most important cognitive development happens when a child reaches pre-school or school age, advocates will struggle to build the required focus on the earliest months and years of life as a critical time when key cognitive structures and skills develop in children's brains. This sets up a key task for communicators: how to focus public attention on the need for an integrated ECD policy that devotes increased resources to the 0–3 age span.
- Though a relatively shallow and unelaborated model, the ECD sector's *Brain + Emotions Are Under Development* model is positive and provides an important basis for building a more complete understanding of development in these key domains. Nonetheless, the shallowness of the model, and its absence as a shared model among the public and ready-made-garment leaders, undermines efforts to focus attention on the kinds of inputs children need to foster development in these areas. Communicators should focus on helping members of the sector, and even more so the public and ready-made-garment leaders, better understand the kinds of specific brain and emotional skills that are under development in the early years, and the kinds of interactions and experiences that best support that skill development.

3. What shapes early childhood development?

As described above, the quality of parental care and provisioning of basic needs is seen as the most critical factor shaping a young child's life and future. Beyond those defining factors, several additional shared models emerged consistently across all three populations:

Shared Models (x3)

Five models were prevalent across all populations.

- ***Environments Shape Development.*** Within all populations, the environments that children are exposed to are thought to have an important effect on development. Many features of this environment are thought to be important – cleanliness, social and community interactions, safety, etc.

[Children] need a good environment. They shouldn't be in an environment that has adverse effects on their behaviour. [...] Living in a polluted environment will give them many illnesses. It might even cause them great harm. (Public)

Some children are calm, patient and well mannered. Some children are naughty, restless and aggressive. They are foul-mouthed. All credit goes to the environment. Children are influenced by the environment they live in. (ECD Sector)

Environment is a great factor here. They [are] mainly influenced by their family first and then the society where they live in. [...] They also learn by their peer group. (RMG Factory)

- **A Necessary but Dangerous Outside World.** There are duelling models of the environment beyond the household. In one respect, it is considered positive that children are exposed to people, places, and things beyond the domestic context because they have experiences that expand their understanding. In another way, there is a fear of dangers and corrupting influence in the outside world, so children must be closely guarded.

If we always keep children inside the house, they will not learn to speak properly. When they go out, they meet different people, they learn different things from them. (Public)

If children are exposed to a variety of people, then they will learn a lot of things. You won't be able to keep them at home anymore; they will pay no heed to their mothers. Suddenly, they might say something foul or might behave rudely, hurting their mothers. (Public)

I cannot always keep children inside the house. I will have to take them out one day and allow her to mix with the world outside. Children aged three can run around, walk, talk, and they are eager to go out. We should let them mingle with people living inside and near their house. Now, if the outside environment is not good, then the child will learn bad things, bad language and bad manners and will lose their morals. That's why the learning that they receive from the outside world is very important. (ECD Sector)

[A child] will grow up to become a complete human being by observing the outside environment. If I grow up in an unsafe environment, I will take it for granted that mugging is not a big issue. (RMG Factory)

- **Poverty Undermines Development.** Members of all three populations believe that financial challenges can harm a child's development, both by undermining parents' capacities as caregivers and through undernourishment. There was some tendency to pathologise people on low incomes as incapable of providing good care for their children, with the "uneducated rickshaw driver" emerging as an exemplar.

Families that are poor cannot provide good or nutritious food or appropriate amount of food on a regular basis. Then children cannot be healthy. (Public)

If parents are illiterate or poor, they cannot afford to send their children to school. They cannot teach their children by themselves as well. Money is required to carry on education. These deprived children lose their ways. When other

children of the same area hang out with derailed children, they also become deprived. Their behaviour becomes insolent. In this way, their mind is corrupted. They are then left with no options; they neither have the energy nor the will to mend their ways. (ECD Sector)

If we consider the distribution of economic resources, it is not always equal. Parents cannot always provide the best for their children. Their economic status is a factor here. (RMG Factory)

- **Play Is a Must.** All three populations expressed a strong model of *play* as important for development and learning. It is thought to be key to physical, mental and social development. It is also thought of as inherent to childhood, emerging as a result of children simply being children. There are shared concerns about children having no room or space to play, especially in urban areas, because of the preponderance of “flat culture,” and among low-income residents, because of population density and the crowding of houses and other physical infrastructure.

Children feel good by playing. Through play children are learning. Through play children are exposed to physical exercise. In order to grow, they need to move different organs. Cognitive development will happen. (Public)

Play is very important for child development. Child[ren] are meant to be playing. Their development starts through play. If children are not allowed to play, they will not be themselves. (ECD Sector)

Play has a huge role. Since children do not know anything except play, so it is through play that they learn and develop physically. Like running, if they don't run, they will not grow physically. (RMG Factory)

- **Modern Life Is a Challenge.** All three populations have an underlying sense that contemporary life – especially urban life – challenges children's development. Challenges include hectic work lives for both parents, which compromise their capacity to properly nurture and attend to their children; pervasive access to various forms of digital media with inappropriate content; dense urban living conditions with limited play spaces; access to drugs and other harmful substances and exposure to increasingly prevalent “immoral” behaviour.

Children nowadays are only engrossed in video games. They have a much-altered mentality. [...] They want to take the mobile phone to either listen to music or watch adult films. (Public)

I still remember my childhood. It was surrounded by nature, the sky, trees, a playground. All I see now is concrete slums. I live in a flat. If a child lives there,

she won't have any space to play. [...] She'll either have to play on the computer or watch cartoons or she'll have to play by herself. (ECD Sector)

We are very busy with our lives. Raising children is a "teamwork" but day by day, it is becoming more and more difficult to manage that spare time. The situation is same for any socio-economic status – extreme hard work for financial sustenance, and after maintaining all these, it becomes extremely difficult to make time for children. Even if the parents are willing, they do not have the energy left to do so. (RMG Factory)

Alongside these shared models were two important absences – areas where there was a lack of consensus or a weak or non-existent model.

- **Inattention to Early Stimulation.** There was little talk across the data about the importance of *stimulation*. A few ECD sector and ready-made-garment factory informants did talk about it, but usually with reference to its importance in physical development. It was not addressed by members of the public in any real way.
- **No Shared Model of Resilience.** No clear model emerged among any population about *sources of resilience* in children. In all three populations, people variously spoke to a range of factors: support by parents (and others), a child's willpower and insight, God-given factors, genetics, and children's need to experience struggle in order to develop their capacity to overcome adversity.

Implications

- The *Environments Shape Development* model represents a key understanding shared by members of all three populations. Communicators can invoke this model to draw attention to the kinds of risk and protective factors that surround children and shape their wellbeing. This model also creates room for communicators to emphasise the importance of a broad range of social, community, infrastructure and ecological factors that can and should be improved and strengthened to improve children's environments.
- The *A Necessary but Dangerous Outside World* model has mixed implications. In one respect, it is good that people recognise the value of outside exposures for children, even as they are also attentive to the importance of safeguarding children during their early and most vulnerable years. Yet, this model may cause people to believe that parents must shelter their children from outside dangers rather than recognising that society has a collective responsibility to improve social and community conditions and environments.
- The *Poverty Undermines Development* model can be leveraged in support of efforts to extend resources for struggling families. It opens up a productive space to make the case for cost-effective ways to support families and thereby strengthen children's development.

- The *Play Is a Must* model represents a key understanding that communicators should support and strengthen. If there is one challenge with this model, it is that it rests on the assumption that play is largely self-directed and self-motivated, which can lead caregivers to underestimate the importance of caregivers and other adults taking a proactive, intentional and participatory role in playing with their children and leveraging the power of play to serve children's skill development. As such, communicators should emphasise the role that parents and other adults can play in providing opportunities and spaces for children's play.
- The *Modern Life Is a Challenge* model has mixed implications. In one respect, it provides an important opening for communications about the importance of governments acting to better support children and families in areas like parental leave, housing, minimum wages and child care services. At the same time, it may contribute to a sense of fatalism about modern life, including the idea that some children and families are destined to struggle in the midst of 21st-century life, especially in urban areas.
- The *Inattention to Early Stimulation* model is an important challenge. It suggests a need to educate people across all three populations about the importance of stimulation in early brain development. The fact that a few ECD sector and ready-made-garment factory informants did talk about it, at least in reference to physical development, is constructive, as it provides the basis for building a broader understanding about its importance to brain development.
- The *lack of a shared model of resilience* poses an important challenge and opportunity to communicators: how to help people understand how children's exposure to protective factors early on in life can help them develop their capacity to face hardships later in life. The *Environments Shape Development* model identified earlier can be leveraged in this effort.

4. Who is responsible for early childhood development outcomes?

Shared Models (x3)

Three models were prevalent across all three populations:

- ***A Hierarchy of Responsibilities.*** All three populations articulated a hierarchical model of responsibilities, in which mothers come first, followed by fathers, other family members, and, lastly, neighbours and community members. Government is also believed to hold overarching responsibility for children's health and education at the population level.

Parents are definitely important, but neighbours, siblings and relatives should all play important roles. (ECD Sector)

Family, school, society, government. One person alone can't do it. Everyone needs to put in an effort. (ECD Sector)

Before attending pre-school, first come parents and then other members of the family. (RMG Factory)

- **Gendered Parental Responsibility.** There is a strongly gendered modelling of parental responsibility in which mothers are held primarily responsible for young children while fathers are associated with income responsibilities to the mother and family. There is also a linked gendering of physical space: the home is the feminine domain, whereas the public sphere is masculinised. Participants also hold an alternate model of “equal responsibility” between mother and father, but it is much weaker overall.

Mothers are the ones taking care of children, and their love is unparalleled. There is no alternative to mother. [...] What a mother is for a child cannot be expressed in words. A child's life is meaningless without his mother, and he cannot function without his mother. (Public)

The responsibilities are not identical. [...] Because a mother teaches many things at home, and the child follows the mother. But he also follows his father. [...] A father will take them out, make them familiar with the outside environment. (ECD Sector)

Mother's responsibility is more, but father has some important role too, I think. (RMG Factory)

- **“We Are All Responsible”.** People in all three groups also draw on a highly generalised model of collective responsibility for children's wellbeing – the idea that it is “everyone's responsibility” to help children grow up well.

Everybody in the society. First, effort should be taken from family. Then everybody in the society is needed. Because a society forms by each family. Everybody in the society has responsibility. Society, state, everybody has responsibility. (Public)

I think it's everyone's duty. If we all can carry out this duty, then no children of Bangladesh will remain deprived; all children will grow up adequately. (ECD Sector)

As citizens, it is the responsibility of all of us. (RMG Factory)

Shared Model (x2)

One model was strong in two populations:

- **Underperforming Government.** In addition to consistently holding government responsible for children's development as part of a broader model of shared responsibility, both ECD sector personnel and ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leaders also often asserted that government is not doing as much as it should or often claims to do.

The government has not really done much for the development of these children. There should have been more playgrounds with play items for them where they could play. Also, there should have been play centres with different facilities. (ECD Sector)

Government can take steps such as parenting programme or early stimulation programme before going to pre-play. They can do some work through local government. But they don't have such programmes. (ECD Sector)

The government is not yet qualified enough to [...] do social welfare activities. I think the government funds in these sectors are not properly utilised. The government is in such a "hand-to-mouth" situation that they are yet to acquire the capacity to work in these sectors. (RMG Factory)

Since the government is unreliable, non-government organisations are at work. Actually, the government does not have the capacity to do this sort of welfare. (RMG Factory)

Implications

- The *Hierarchy of Responsibilities* model has mixed implications, and care must be taken to deploy it effectively in communications. To the extent that it is grounded in a recognition that parents, and especially mothers, bear most responsibility for the care of their young children, it can help set up and strengthen the idea that parents and mothers need broader support. At the same time, this model can easily cause people to over-emphasise the home as a private family arena and the mother as an individual actor. Communicators should strengthen the recognition that public institutions play a critical role in supporting and empowering mothers, parents and other family members in their roles as caregivers and facilitators of children's healthy development.
- As noted in the expert story, the *Gendered Parental Responsibilities* model is problematic because it allocates primary day-to-day responsibility for child care to mothers while reserving overall decision-making power to fathers. Communications that emphasise the caregiving role that men play, and that strengthen women's role as decision-makers, strengthen thinking about a more balanced and equal role for both mothers and fathers in the development of their children.

- The “*We Are All Responsible*” model has mixed implications. In one respect, it is positive that people have a strong model of collective, society-level responsibility for children’s development. This has the capacity to strengthen support for collective and publicly funded interventions on behalf of children’s health, learning and overall development. At the same time, the model’s vagueness may dilute efforts to build concrete, specific interventions and institutions. Communicators must identify collective and public institutions that embody – or should embody – our shared social responsibility for children’s development and speak in concrete and pragmatic ways about how institutions realise that responsibility.
- The *Underperforming Government* model also has mixed implications. On the plus side, it is grounded in expectations about the role that government should play that are seen as unmet. Yet, at times, this model was accompanied by a tone of pessimism and resignation about government’s capacity to meet those expectations. Communicators should support those expectations and government’s ability to meet them.

5. How and when does early learning happen?

Shared Models (x3)

Three models were prevalent across all three populations:

- **Mimicry.** All three populations consider observation and mimicry to be primary means by which children learn throughout childhood.

In such early age, they are observing, but they are learning automatically about what we are doing. (Public)

It is a sort of development when a child desires to scribble something by watching someone else. He wants to read when he sees someone else reading [...] or wants to play by watching others playing. This is a cognitive development. Trying to mimic others. This imitation attempt is development. (ECD Sector)

They learn some things from observation. For example, they observe their parents’ actions or of others’ around them. (RMG Factory)

- **Learning Through Play.** All three populations make a strong link between play and early learning. Much of it is focused on the idea of hands-on learning – that children learn best when they have a chance to manipulate, experience and solve problems in the physical/material world.

Children feel good by playing. They are learning many things by playing. Through play children are learning. (Public)

Play is very important for child development. Children are meant to be playing. Their development starts through play. (ECD Sector)

A child learns everything through play. Whatever he learns, even education, he will learn his alphabets through play. I am referring to very small kids. So, a child will learn through play. (RMG Factory)

- **Real Learning Begins in School.** Members of the public and (at times) members of both the ECD sector and ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leadership sometimes defaulted to a model that is nested in the broader *Ageing Up* model described earlier: the idea that important learning really begins when a child reaches the age of formal schooling.

Most of them, I think they start learning from the time they start going to school. (Public)

I think an immense growth takes place in their psyche at the age of three, three-and-a-half. [...] Before the age of three, children want to engage in play a lot, it's true. But whatever vague skills they do develop before age three barely influence them, I believe. It probably just lends them a place where they can start thinking. (ECD Sector)

I think it is not that important to learn anything before attending primary school. Children should be given freedom. Before attending primary school, they must be given freedom. (RMG Factory)

Shared Models (x2)

Two models were evident among two research populations:

- **Learning Begins at Birth.** ECD personnel and ready-made-garment factory leaders frequently invoked the idea that learning begins right at birth. This model, however, was *not* strongly articulated among members of the public. This may have to do with the conventional usage of the Bengali word for learning (*shekha*) and its use in everyday language to reference scholastic learning. If so, it may be that people can think about children's learning before the age of three but are not accustomed to thinking and talking about those developments as "learning" in the traditional sense. That said, as the following quotes demonstrate, there is a strong and easily articulated model of "unimportant" learning happening before two-and-a-half or three years of age.

All healthy children start learning from birth. [...] I think from zero years, a child observes and learns. This learning is revealed in the later years or when they get the right opportunity. (ECD Sector)

They start to learn right after birth. In fact, learning starts from conception. When [a] child starts listening in mother's womb, he/she basically starts learning. (RMG Factory)

- **Nothing Important Happens Early On.** While members of the public are sometimes able to think about the physical and linguistic abilities that develop during the early years of life, there is also a robust model that “nothing important happens” during this period. Several ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leaders also argued that learning begins later, after the child has established some awareness and mental processing capacity.

Researcher: According to you, early childhood means three-to-four-to-five years. This age period falls under early childhood. Does anything important take place in this period?

Respondent: Actually, nothing important happens. Not at this age. (Public)

The first three years are not so important, because children don't understand many things. (Public)

Children begin to learn the moment they gain awareness. I am not sure, but I think after the age of three. (RMG Factory)

Children start learning when they are one-and-a-half or two years of age. (RMG Factory)

Implications

- The *Mimicry* model has mixed implications. It has the potential to draw attention to the quality of the environments and relationships around a child, which is a positive entailment. At the same time, it is a largely one-sided model of learning, focused on a child's seemingly innate capacity to learn through observation and osmosis. In that way, it takes attention away from the need for adults and older children to be active and intentional participants, stimulators and scaffolders of children's early learning. It also obscures the fact that children are themselves active, not passive, participants in the learning process.
- The *Learning Through Play* model has mixed implications. On the positive side, it provides an important foundation for communicating about the importance of play in children's lives. In its current form, however, it does not include a strong role for caregivers as facilitators of or active co-participants in play. As such, communicators need tools and strategies to expand this model and bring caregivers in as active players.

- The *Learning Begins at Birth* model is one of the most positive models identified in the research. It provides a key basis for structuring thinking about the importance of skill development in the earliest months and years of a child's life. The weakness of the model among members of the public suggests the need to identify messaging strategies that can build and strengthen it in public thinking and more consistently foreground it in the thinking of ECD and ready-made-garment factory leadership populations.
- The strength of the *Real Learning Begins in School* model suggests that communicators must take care to contextualise references to “early learning”, as they cannot assume people are thinking about learning in the first three years of life. This model poses a significant challenge and runs counter to efforts to build support for learning interventions during the first three years of life. Communicators need strategies and tools to help people understand that foundational learning happens before children reach school age and that early experiences and relationships are central to it.
- The *Nothing Important Happens Early On* model poses a fundamental challenge. Communicators need strategies and tools to help people understand that fundamental skills are developing in the first three years of life and, again, that early experiences and relationships are central to it.

6. Why does early childhood development matter?

Shared Models (x3)

Three models were prevalent across all three populations:

- **Foundational to Life.** Running throughout people's talk is a deep assumption that the events and happenings of early childhood are foundational to later outcomes for a person – in terms of health, education, capacities, ethics and behaviour in general. There is a consistent, shared model that “early shapes later”, and that some things become relatively “set” during childhood.

It is the starting point. If development doesn't take place from the very beginning of life, then the whole life will be wasted. So, we all need to be concerned about early years development, and special attention should be given to this period. (Public)

Early childhood is very important because we learn all the important skills of our life during this time. Nobody can deny this. [...] How we were taught to behave when we were little ha[s] stayed with us. That's why early childhood is so important. (ECD Sector)

Children's foundations are built up on the initial basic skills. When they will be grown up, they will of course learn more skills. So, later life success depends on these basic skills. (RMG Factory)

- **Danger of Delinquency.** A strong linkage was made between improper inputs during children’s development and the likelihood of social delinquency when children reach adolescence and young adulthood. People repeatedly spoke to the need for clear moral instruction and role modeling and to protect children from corrupting influences.

The development of a child means a good citizen for the country. If the development is not so well, then we don't get a good citizen. The child needs a good development as he has to take responsibility for his family, for his country. (Public)

When a child's life becomes tough, it hampers their growth. The children of the slum don't have their parents supporting them. Street children need the support they don't get. As a result, they become aggressive, addicted to drugs, which in the future leads to harm to the society and ultimate[ly] the country. (ECD Sector)

If we cannot ensure their basic needs in the civil society then they will fall away from mainstream and might get involved in some extremist line or get involved with other activists. That can be anti-social activity or any other random X, Y or Z. (RMG Factory)

- **Future of the Nation.** There is a shared sense that the future of the nation depends on developmental outcomes, specifically in terms of whether the children of today become the ethical, productive and responsible citizens of tomorrow, or something more negative.

Children should be taken care from early childhood. How they should eat, behave – that means totally taken care of. This will make them complete. In the future, they will do something for our country. (Public)

These children are going to be a part of our future society. If they go astray, we all will be sufferers. Therefore, I feel it is every individual's duty to ensure that the children around them grow up in safe environments. Otherwise, the future world will be a world of chaos, which is already happening. (ECD Sector)

These garment factories' workers are basically women. [...] You should give them support. How their kids are growing up? Their kids are future productive forces. What are you doing for them? What are we doing in our factories? [...] How are their children being raised? They are not becoming proper human. This needs to be taken care of. (RMG Factory)

Implications

- The *Foundational to Life* model has mixed implications. It is highly constructive in focusing attention on the earlier stages of a child's life. Communicators can leverage this model to emphasise the importance of the very first months and years in a child's life and to help expand people's thinking about what is foundational to development – going beyond nutrition, immunisation and the current shortlist of “basics” to include important brain and emotional development in young children. At the same time, the model may contribute to a sense of fatalism about whether children who experience adversity early in life, especially in poor, urban contexts, can ever experience positive developmental outcomes later on.
- Related to this, the *Danger of Delinquency* model has mixed implications. In one respect, it is grounded in an understanding that children's exposures and experiences during their early years may have lasting impacts later on. However, its narrow focus on moral hazards can lead to judgement and detract from efforts to draw attention to more pervasive and systemic environmental hazards. Likewise, its focus on negative impacts can detract from helping people see the positive collective benefits of investing in children's early development.
- The *Future of the Nation* is generally constructive in drawing attention to the collective benefits that result from helping children do well. Still, as with the *Danger of Delinquency* model, there is an undercurrent of negative thinking about how some children pose a future threat to the nation. As such, communicators should consistently make a *positive* case for how collective, public investments in support of children and families will result in positive outcomes shared by all members of society.

7. What role should child care centres play in early development and learning?

Shared Models (x3)

Only one model was prevalent across all three populations:

- ***Physical Safety and Care.*** Among all three research populations, the predominant model of day care/child care facilities is as places where children's *physical* needs can be met – where they can be kept safe, clean and well fed.

You should keep the place clean and tidy. Since a lot of children are kept there, it easily gets messy. It doesn't look good. The caretakers should feed the children properly. They should keep clean and wash their hands before feeding them.

(Public)

The parents can be tension-free. Since both parents work, they have to worry about where to leave their kids. They know at least they can keep their children at a safe place for a price. (ECD Sector)

First of all, security of the children must be ensured. [...] Other than this, healthy environment. (RMG Factory)

Ready-made-garment (RMG) Factory Leadership Models

- **Centres Are Learning Locations.** In addition to their focus on meeting children's physical needs, ready-made-garment factory leaders went further and spoke of child care centres as places where early learning activities should also be regularly included.

Since the children spend their time with the caregivers at the child care centres, they can learn certain skills, such as social skills, reading and writing, etc. Because all modern child care centres [are] well equipped in this area – in many cases, better equipped than homes because they have resources such as pencils, drawing books, colours, etc., to teach children. (RMG Factory)

We try to ensure that children play and they learn something while playing. We give them toys so that they can have fun. (RMG Factory)

Because of the nature of the engagement with the ready-made-garment factory leaders, the research also generated more detailed data from them about child care facilities and *factory* child care facilities specifically. Two additional models emerged from this RMG data, specifically leaders' rationales for investing in factory child care facilities:

- **Compliance.** Factory leaders explained the existence of their onsite centres as a matter of compliance with government requirements. This practical/legal explanation generally came first.

It is compulsory nowadays. There is no other way. A factory must have a child care [facility] from the start. (RMG Factory)

This is a legal requirement. A factory must have it. (RMG Factory)

- A **"Win-Win"**. Factory leaders also consistently invoked the shared benefits of child care centres for both the factory and working mothers. They help the factory retain skilled workers and boost workers' morale and motivation. At the same time, they help put working mothers' minds at ease and address a key challenge parents face in their lives. They also give breastfeeding mothers access to their children during the workday.

Ultimately, the workers also feel happy because their children are near them. The mothers get time to breastfeed their children. It brings mental peace, and it is also better for them. (RMG Factory)

The impact of this is that the five, six or 10 workers who keep their children in the child care centre, they can be mentally relieved and can work with mental satisfaction. They do not carry tension; they work tension-free. (RMG Factory)

Implications

- The *Physical Safety and Care* model has mixed implications. It is positive that members of all three populations understand that child care centres should serve the physical needs of children and provide a minimum standard of physical care. However, this model limits thinking about the broader role child care centres can and should play as locations of early learning and stimulation.
- The ready-made-garment factory leaders' *Compliance* model is positive in that it acknowledges the legal obligation factories have to their workers. Its strength could also be seen as negative in that it suggests that child care facilities have been built *only* as a matter of compliance – not because they are seen as intrinsically valuable or as a matter of moral or ethical responsibility.
- The “*Win-Win*” model has positive implications in that it provides a strong rationale for building and sustaining quality onsite child care services in factory spaces. In arguing that both factories and workers benefit from the services, it provides an argument for improving those same services to that mutual benefit.

8. What should be done to improve early development?

Members of both the ECD sector and the public struggled to articulate actions *government* can take to better serve the development of young children between the ages of zero and three. Instead, members of both populations often tended to “age up” their solutions, focusing on outside play spaces and overall improvements in health and education services. That said, most responses to the question of “What should be done to improve outcomes for children?” resulted in talk about *public* solutions.

Shared Models (x3)

Two models were common to all three study populations:

- **More Play Spaces.** Members of both the public and ECD sector consistently argued for the expansion of dedicated public play spaces for children. The strength of this “solution” is grounded in two models identified above – the tendency to *Age Up* and the idea that *Play Is a Must*. Though not quite

as strong a pattern among ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leaders, it was also offered by some as a solution to enhance children's development.

We can make separate places for playing. We can make parks for them. In parks there will be toys to play. Government can take steps. (Public)

The government has not really done much for the development of these children. There should have been more playgrounds with play items for them where they could play. (ECD Sector)

The government can implement laws stating that every Union must have a child park, which will have enough space for children to play. (RMG Factory)

- **Improve Health and Education Services.** All three populations invoked the need for government to improve health and education services and access to those services.

There are many families who cannot afford to buy books or study materials. The government can provide free study materials for children who are two or three years old, especially for children from poor families. Then the parents will be relieved. (Public)

If we think from pregnancy, then we have to start thinking about the mother. If the mother receives the proper nutrition, vaccination and care, then the child will grow up healthy. If government made the vaccination free, then it would be better. Otherwise they are not getting the nutrition. (ECD Sector)

The government must build better clinics, better physicians or accessibility to all clinic services to solve health care problems faced by people. Also, they should provide school and college education to those who want to study. (RMG Factory)

Shared Models (x2)

One model was shared by two study populations:

- **Awareness Raising.** ECD personnel and ready-made-garment (RMG) factory leaders shared a model that many parents lack sufficient knowledge about children's developmental needs and would benefit from targeted parenting education programmes that raise awareness and understanding.

The teachers of the local areas should be trained more rigorously. Parents should also be trained. Then this topic of how to nurture children should be put forward in social assemblies, with the topic written on large banners. Has anyone ever witnessed such an event? (ECD Sector)

If we talk about small children, even newborns, I think new parents should be trained how to take care of newborns. Although in our context, we pass down the knowledge [of] child care from grandmothers to mothers, from generation to generation, but it is not enough. Because not all learning that is passed down is right. There can be flawed teachings. So, it is important to educate the parents about child care and child-rearing. [...] Parents should be educated about basic hygiene, taking care of children, how to hold them, how to drive with children, etc. [...] Some kind of intervention is required here. (RMG Factory)

RMG Factory Leadership Model

- **More Public Child Care Centres.** RMG factory leaders were the only population that consistently called for more publicly financed child care facilities, arguing that those of factories, NGOs and other private organisations cannot meet demand. They spoke of the inability of their own factory centres to meet demand among worker populations and to broader demands for high-quality child care services in communities surrounding factories.

The government can take many measures. They can establish government child care centres. The fact is, since we do not have any child care centres from the government, we have to create our own factory-based child care centers. If the government could establish child care centres, they could have asked the factory owners to make contributions or provide donations. The government could make this mandatory for factory owners. (RMG Factory)

The government can take some steps. Generally, it is observed that the three-year-old children have two needs. One is their nutritious food and another is hygiene. Keeping them healthy and safe. So, if the government wants, it can establish day care centres where children will be provided nutritious food to those who need it at an affordable price. And to keep the children healthy, the government can provide easy-to-find medical facility. (RMG Factory)

No members of any population were attuned to the special needs of children with disabilities or to the heightened public responsibility to serve and support them. That topic was only faintly present in the interview data.

Implications

- The *More Play Spaces* model has mixed implications. On the positive side, all three populations are attuned to the importance of children's play and to the idea that communities and government should prioritise play and build an infrastructure to enable it. On the negative side, the prevalence of this "solution" is partly grounded in the *Ageing Up* model and the greater ease with which people think about older children's development. It also

demonstrates the extent to which people struggle to arrive at other ways that public institutions can improve outcomes for children in the first years of their lives.

- The *Awareness Raising* model provides a positive basis for supporting efforts to provide training and assistance to caregivers to build their caregiving capacity. To complement this model, communicators should build attention to the need for a broader public infrastructure of supports around caregivers, including in health, education and employment. This approach recognises that providing caregivers with more and better information is more effective when there are systems of social protection and support around them.
- The *Improve Health and Education Services* model has mixed implications. It is positive that people look to government and expect it to strengthen health and educational services that benefit children's overall wellbeing. Yet it also identifies a relatively narrow scope for government intervention. Likewise, the focus on schooling likely results from the *Ageing Up* model, which detracts attention from early development. At the same time, the valuing of education provides an opportunity to make the case for expanding and improving the early learning infrastructure in pre-schools and early learning centres nationally. More generally, communicators need strategies to help people consider a broader role for public institutions in supporting parents, families and children, including in social services, child care, financial support and other ways.
- The ready-made-garment factory leaders' *More Public Child Care Centres* model has mixed implications. In one respect, it is good that this influential sector is encouraging government to take a more expansive role in meeting the substantial demand for quality child care services. Yet this model can also detract from the sector's sense of responsibility to its workforce and to building and sustaining a long-term child care infrastructure at the factory level and across the industry.
- The *lack of attention to disabilities* across all three study populations is a significant challenge. It suggests that communicators need strategies to raise awareness of the extra challenges faced by children with disabilities and their families.

Mapping the Gaps and Overlaps in Understanding

This analysis aims to: (1) document how experts talk about and explain early childhood development; (2) establish how three Bangladeshi populations understand these same issues; and (3) compare and “map” these explanations and understandings to identify the overlaps and gaps between the perspectives of these groups. We now turn to this third task.

To start, a note on the definition of age parameters is in order. Though the legal definition for “early childhood” in Bangladesh is from 0–8 years of age, experts agreed that 0–5 is a better parameter. They also pointed to the “first 1,000 days” and to the first two or three postnatal years as particularly critical. Across their explanations, experts noted inconsistent uses of the term “early childhood” in Bangladesh among the public and even among ECD sector personnel. The age parameters of “early childhood” were defined in various ways, including from conception to eight; 0–6 months; 0–4 years; 1–5 years, and so on. Because experts understand that there are multiple age definitions of early childhood, this relationship between expert and non-expert thinking is more gap than overlap. That said, both bodies of data (expert and non-expert) point to a clear inconsistency in how the age parameters of early childhood are defined.

OVERLAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

There are important overlaps between the perspectives of experts and the research populations. These overlaps provide solid ground for engaging the public, ECD sector personnel and ready-made-garment factory leaders and from which greater understanding can be built. That said, several overlaps are relatively superficial and obscure deeper gaps between experts and the research populations. Communicators need strategies for leveraging these overlaps while avoiding inadvertently triggering more unproductive ways of thinking.

Experts and the three research populations share the following understandings:

1. Parents (or other primary caregivers) and family members generally play a foundational developmental role as the primary agents in a child's life.
2. Development proceeds through a gradual, step-by-step process marked by milestones.
3. Nutritional quality is a fundamental factor shaping children's early development.
4. Physical, mental, social and language development are key domains.
5. Environments matter, both within and beyond the household.
6. Poverty presents a central challenge to children's development.
7. Urbanisation has brought new challenges, including congestion, urban poverty and a lack of play spaces.
8. Dual working parents in urban areas face unique challenges.
9. Play is recognised as a necessary and healthy feature of children's development and as a primary mechanism for learning.
10. Investments should be made in parenting education to raise public awareness and knowledge about the importance of early development and how parents and other caregivers can best support development.
11. Children's early development is foundational to the rest of their lives and significantly affects the shared, collective future of Bangladesh.

In addition to these four-way overlaps, there was a more targeted overlap between experts and ready-made-garment factory leaders, both of whom argued for a systematic investment at the national level in quality child care services. Both also assume that child care centres should be built and sustained as important locations for children's early learning.

GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

Alongside these overlaps are gaps in understanding between experts and one or more research population. The most pronounced gaps were between experts and members of the public, and many were in areas where public thinking is highly generalised, vague or "thin". These are areas where people's thinking is not necessarily incorrect, but incomplete, and where they can benefit from exposure to new and different ways of framing the issues. In the conclusion, this study offers initial recommendations for addressing these gaps; in later phases of this project, we will develop and test communications strategies to bridge them.

1. **Development: *Early Focus vs. Ageing Up*.** Experts have a clear focus on the importance of the earliest months and years of a child's life and on the early stage of childhood as a key period for intervention. Public thinking about development is *not* structured by a distinct category of early childhood, and both members of the public and the ECD sector often focus on the middle, school-going years of childhood over earlier years.
2. **Childhood: *Differentiated vs. Idealised*.** Experts consistently emphasise children's differential exposure to a range of risk and protective factors

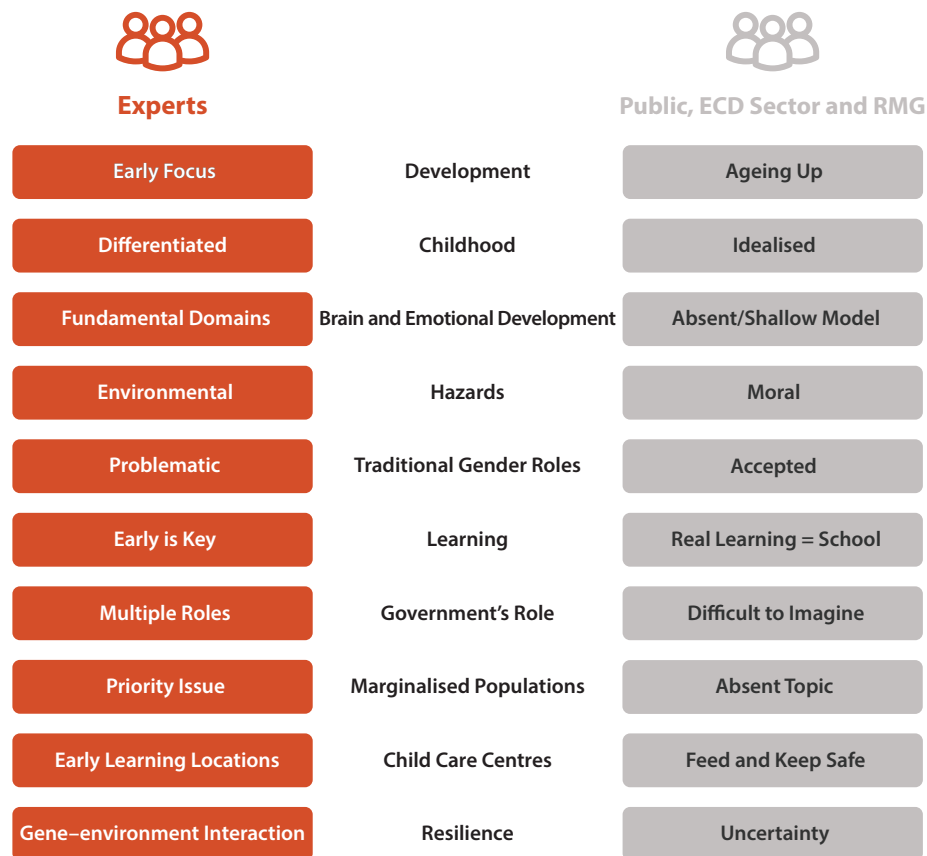
and speak of how they lead to highly varied developmental outcomes for children across region, class, disability and other factors. While members of all research populations also have the capacity to understand differences in outcomes, their thinking is also at times structured by an idealised model of childhood that obscures these differences and the social, economic and political factors that contribute to them.

3. **Brain and Emotional Development: *Fundamental Domains vs. Shallow or Absent Models*.** Experts speak of a range of key brain and emotional functions that are under development during the early months and years of a child's life, including executive function and self-regulation skills. ECD sector personnel have only weak and shallow models of these domains, while members of the public and ready-made-garment leaders do not have a model of developments in these areas.
4. **Hazards: *Environmental vs. Moral*.** Experts pay considerable attention to pervasive environmental health hazards in Bangladesh that threaten children's development, including exposure to second-hand smoke and toxins like lead and arsenic. Both the public and ECD sector personnel also focus on "moral" threats to children, such as "poor parenting" and exposure to "moral corruption" from technologies and people outside the household.
5. **Traditional Gender Roles: *Problematic vs. Accepted*.** Experts spoke of a disconnect in traditional gender norms, which give decision-making power to men but allocate responsibility for children's health and development to women. Experts say a more balanced distribution of power and responsibility would better support development. Among the other three populations, traditional gender norms were taken as a given and often reaffirmed.
6. **Learning: *Early Is Key vs. Real Learning Begins in School*.** Experts consistently speak to the importance of learning and skill development in the early months and years of a child's life. While ECD personnel also articulated a "learning begins at birth" model, their thinking is also sometimes structured by the idea that "real" learning begins in school. Members of the public generally default to this latter model, and often believe that "nothing important happens" before the school-going years.
7. **Government's Role in Early Childhood: *Multiple Proposals vs. Difficult to Imagine*.** Experts speak of a wide range of public policy interventions that can improve outcomes for children in areas such as family leave, maternal mental health, child care, home visitation, substance abuse treatment, violence prevention and others. But the public and ECD sector personnel struggled to articulate a targeted role for governmental beyond traditional investments in health care and education and tended to "age up" their responses to talk about investments in public park infrastructure.
8. **Marginalised Populations: *Priority Issue vs. Absent Topic*.** Alongside attention to the need for national policy and implementation initiatives that serve all Bangladeshi children, experts were highly attuned to the special needs of marginalised populations, including isolated populations, ethnic minority populations and children with disabilities and their caregivers.

Attention to these marginalised populations was not evident in the data across our three research populations.

9. **Child Care Centres: *Early Learning vs. Feed and Keep Safe*.** Experts assert that child care centres should play a critical role as early learning centers and that centre leaders and staff should be well trained in early learning modalities. The public and many ECD sector personnel default to a more conventional and limited model of child care centres as places to keep children safe, clean and well fed.
10. **Resilience: *Gene–environment Interaction vs. Uncertainty*.** Experts acknowledge that resilience in children is a complex outcome that is not yet fully understood. However, they share an understanding that both genetic predisposition and environmental experiences play a key role and that exposure to protective factors (supportive relationships, scaffolded problem-solving, etc.) early in life can build resilience over the long term. There was no consensus model to explain resilience among the three research populations, and many participants struggled to explain why children are more or less resilient in the face of life challenges.

Figure 2: Mapping the Gaps



Conclusion

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research report identifies the dominant cultural models that structure how members of three key populations – members of the public, ECD sector personnel and ready-made-garment factory leaders – understand early childhood development. It has also outlined the dominant gaps and overlaps between these understandings and those of early childhood experts and scientists. In so doing, it lays the groundwork for initial, preliminary guidelines that the early childhood sector in Bangladesh can use to strengthen its communications capacity. Applying these recommendations will align people's thinking with the science of early development and elevate support for policies and programmes that serve children's health, development and early learning.

Importantly, members of the public, ECD sector and factory leadership are aligned with experts in many aspects of their thinking about ECD. They recognise that basic inputs are critical for child development, that environments and poverty matter, that childhood development is foundational to the rest of life, that developmental milestones happen across multiple domains, that government has a key role to play in supporting positive development, that urbanisation and technology have brought new challenges to children and families and that children's play is both necessary and a key mechanism for learning.

Yet, alongside these commonalities are gaps in understanding between experts and one or more research populations. These include gaps about the age parameters of early childhood, brain and emotional development, the importance of the early months and years of a child's life, traditional gender roles in child-rearing, the role child care centres should play in children's development and learning, and the diverse ways public institutions can better support children and families.

These findings take on added significance in light of a complementary and parallel body of research that explores dominant communications practices used by the ECD sector in Bangladesh. This analysis of current framing practices – what FrameWorks calls a *Field Frame Analysis* – reviews public-facing communications materials from 23 organisations in the ECD field in Bangladesh. It then analyses them to identify the dominant narratives that are used to frame issues around early childhood development in the country.¹¹

Comparing the cultural models and Field Frame Analysis findings shows a set of key overlaps between public, ECD sector, and factory leader thinking, and the field's communications practices. While one major overlap – the understanding of the importance of children's play – is very positive, three other overlaps present key challenges to building understanding of and support for policy implementation around ECD. As in the cultural models research, the Field Frame Analysis finds that the field rarely discusses brain and emotional development in young children; when it does, the discussion is shallow. Likewise, the Field Frame Analysis shows an inconsistent and often unstated definition of the age parameters of early childhood, a trend also prevalent in all three populations. Finally, both sets of data showed a central focus on the role of mothers, parents and families, but much weaker attention to the role that public and community institutions play in supporting early development. All three overlaps suggest that some current communications practices within the ECD sector in Bangladesh are reinforcing existing patterns of thinking that undermine efforts to build a coherent set of expectations and interventions that support young children and their families in the early stages of a child's life.

Researchers also observed important differences. The Field Frame Analysis showed that the ECD sector in Bangladesh consistently uses communications to point to the importance of the first 1,000 days (or the zero-to-three-years timespan) of a child's life. Meanwhile, the cultural models data shows a consistent *Ageing Up* model, with frequent dismissal of the importance of the early years by members of both the public and ready-made-garment factory sector. Another important difference is between the sector's strong emphasis in its communications on maternal wellbeing and the healthy treatment of the mother, and the little attention paid to maternal wellbeing in the cultural models data across all three populations. Finally, while the cultural models findings show a consistent focus on children's basic needs as critical elements of their development and defines those needs in traditional terms of nutrition, nurturance, cleanliness and health care, the ECD sector calls for a focus beyond health, hygiene and nutrition to focus on additional factors like communication, socialisation, stimulation and play. Overall, these differences show that the ECD sector is communicating about children's early development in ways that will push thinking in new and more productive directions.

That said, more work must be done to improve the ECD sector's communications capacity so it can better elevate understanding of the science of early development and support for interventions that serve young children's health, skill development and learning.

In service of those goals, we offer the following preliminary communications recommendations:

- **Emphasise and define “early”.** As many organisations already do, ECD communicators should consistently emphasise the importance of the “first 1,000 days” or “0–3 years” as a critical phase of early childhood in order to better establish these age parameters in the field and more broadly. This work is critical in light of the lack of consensus about the age parameters of early childhood and the strength of the *Ageing Up* and *Nothing Important Happens Early On* models. While further research is conducted, the sector might consider experimenting with the vernacular term *baccha* to leverage the fact that people already associate this term with the months and years of life before a child reaches school age.
- **Expand the list of “basics” to include stimulation, communication and play.** Because people often default to a focus on physical safety and care for young children at the expense of important early skill development, communicators should repeatedly emphasise the importance of interaction and stimulation for children from day one. These are not just nice “additions”; they are fundamental ingredients for healthy development. Communicators can leverage the existing *Play Is a Must* model but should build on it by situating caregivers as co-participants in play. This will help build the idea that interactive play is especially powerful for young children and that play is not something that small children should be left to do on their own.
- **Talk about the *brain* as a physical organ.** Communicators must convey the message that the brain is an important physical organ that is continuously built during the early years. This will give people something concrete to think about as the locus for skill-development and more clearly define what is often a somewhat vague and generalised model of “mental” or “cognitive” development.
- **Speak consistently to children’s *emotional skills* during the early years.** To help build a model of early emotional development, communicators should speak to young children’s need for opportunities to practice *emotional skills*, like self-regulation, from very early on in life. As part of this, communicators can give examples for how this skill development can be encouraged, through exploratory play, problem-solving, and child–caregiver interactions and communications throughout the early years.
- **Define the foundational skills that constitute early learning.** When discussing the importance of giving children “early learning” opportunities, communicators should define the kinds of skills that are under development to help people break away from a rigid model of learning as an academic category that is usually associated with older children. People need help understanding that (1) early learning is *not* academic learning, neither in terms of content nor process and (2) that foundational learning happens

before children reach school age. Communicators should continue to point to interactions between young children and adults or older children as a key mechanism for early learning, emphasising that early experiences and relationships are central to it.

- **Identify specific ways to improve the environments and systems that surround families.** Communicators can leverage the strength of the *Environments Shape Development* model to help draw attention to the need to create better circumstances not only *within* but also *around* families. While the model of parental and family responsibility is already strong, people need help seeing how communities and government can better serve families with young children. More specifically, alongside important improvements to health and education, people need help seeing *additional* ways government can support positive early development in children.
- **Avoid reinforcing the generic “We Are All Responsible” model.** There is a vagueness to this model that threatens to dilute efforts to build support for concrete, specific interventions and institutions. Communicators should point to those collective and public institutions that have realised this shared vision of social responsibility and speak in concrete and pragmatic ways about how that responsibility can be further realised.
- **Situate fathers and other male relatives as central actors in young children’s healthy developmental progress.** In Bangladesh, a model of men as strong and active co-participants in nurturing and communicating with young children is emerging, but it is often subsumed by a traditional gender model that ascribes most responsibility to mothers. Communicators should continue to situate fathers and other male caregivers as central actors in supporting their children’s emotional, language and brain development.
- **Showcase child care centres as locations for early learning.** When messaging about child care, communicators should describe child care and day care centres as locations for early stimulation and learning to expand people’s vision for the role they play in young children’s development.

Communicators can use these initial recommendations to create more effective messages about early childhood development in Bangladesh. Further research is needed to test and develop framing tools and strategies that can overcome the deepest gaps and challenges identified in this report and more fully strengthen the sector’s communications. These challenges include:

- The strength of the *Ageing Up* model, which distracts many people – including many in the ECD sector – from understanding and maintaining a focus on the critical developments during the earliest years of a child’s life.
- The weak attention to young children’s *brain and emotional development* and to the factors and conditions that best support it. Understanding of how children’s brains and emotions develop is also poor.

- The strength of the *Modern Life Is a Challenge* model and the sense of fatalism that accompanies it about whether and how some children – especially those in urban poverty – have even a possibility to experience positive developmental outcomes. This fatalism is also evident in people’s fear of the *Danger of Delinquency* as a negative outcome when development goes awry.
- People’s lack of understanding about the factors and processes that build resilience in young children.
- The strength of the *Nothing Important Happens Early On* model and the assumption that the most important learning does not begin until the school years.
- A conventional model of child care and day care facilities as places to keep children safe, clean and well fed but not as locations for early learning and skill development.
- The need to help people see the myriad ways that *communities and public institutions* can better support young children and their parents and families. Currently, many people struggle to visualise steps that can be taken *outside* the household to better support early development.

To address these and other challenges, possible next steps include testing existing communications tools that have proven to be effective in other countries and developing and testing new tools specifically for Bangladeshi audiences. Moving forward, the following steps should be considered for future research:

- Identify and test *values* that strengthen people’s understandings of *why* early childhood development is an important area of national investment and the kind of *positive, collective outcomes* that will result. This research can identify strategies to counter *fatalism* about the possibility of arriving at good developmental outcomes for all Bangladeshi children.
- Test a range of *explanatory metaphors* and other tools that have been developed and tested in other countries and that help people understand early development. These might include:
 - *Brain architecture* – to help explain how brains develop and why “early” matters
 - *Serve and return* – to explain the importance of reciprocity in early stimulation and interaction
 - *Amplifying development* – to emphasise the importance of high-quality child care services
 - *Resilience scale* – to help explain the role of risk and protective factors
 - *Overloaded* – to emphasise the importance of support for parents who are struggling

- *Weaving skill ropes* – to help people visualise the integrated nature of skill development, including social, emotional and cognitive skills
- *Born to learn* – to help people understand that learning happens from the onset of life
- *Skill begets skill* – to refocus thinking on the early childhood years and the sequential and cumulative process of skill development.
- Develop and test *new explanatory metaphors* that target gaps and challenges specific to Bangladesh and those that are particularly problematic or deeply rooted. These include the *Ageing Up* model; the weak understanding of early emotional and brain development and the factors that contribute to them; and people's difficulty in understanding what kinds of interventions – at community, regional, and national levels – can best serve young children's development.

The ECD community in Bangladesh can use the findings and recommendations in this report as they continue to improve and refine their communications strategies and capacity. It is our hope that this report – and the future research it anticipates – will help ECD advocates and organisations build a shared narrative framework to improve and reframe the discourse about the early developmental needs and capacities of children in Bangladesh. In conducting this work, we hope to advance the broader effort to elevate support for the policies and interventions that best serve the early development of all children in Bangladesh.

ABOUT THE FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by framing the public discourse about social problems. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis®, a multi-method, multidisciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, conducts, publishes, explains, and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organisations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues – the environment, government, race, children's issues, and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth – ranging from qualitative, quantitative, and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, eWorkshops, advertising campaigns, FrameChecks®, and in-depth FrameLab study engagements. In 2015, it was named one of nine organisations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Foundation's Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

ABOUT BRAC INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (BRAC IED)

BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED) is an institute within BRAC University, committed to creating an engaged, empathetic, and empowered generation. It works with a population from birth to age 18 by pioneering solutions and providing leadership across three areas of focus: *Teaching and Learning*, *Mental Health and Early Childhood Development and Play*. Its work across all areas spans research, model development, direct service delivery, programme evaluation, advocacy, and capacity building. To reach children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or displaced, the institute ensures that the solutions designed are low-cost and adaptable to different cultural contexts. Learn more at www.bracied.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the FrameWorks Institute.

Please follow standard APA rules for citation, with FrameWorks Institute as publisher: Lindland, E., Khanom, F., Zaman, S.S., Dutta, M., Ahmed, N., Mas-ud, A. A., and Mim, S. A. (2019). *Early Is Key: Mapping the Gaps on Understandings of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; and Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Educational Development.

© FrameWorks Institute and BRAC Institute of Educational Development

Appendix: Methods

Culture can be understood as an extensive and heterogeneous collection of cognitive constructs – or “cultural models” – that are shared by the members of a community and that structure how those people understand the world around them.¹² For the past 20 years, the FrameWorks Institute has carried out cultural models research in countries around the world to help communicators in nonprofit and advocacy organisations more effectively frame their messaging. By better understanding the kinds of implicit assumptions and understandings that people bring to a topic, this approach has helped communicators be more strategic in their public messaging.

Such cultural models research is generally the first stage in FrameWorks’ Strategic Frame Analysis® approach to communications research and practice. It involves in-depth, semi-structured interviewing that probes and explores the kinds of assumptions and understandings that people bring to a topic based on their pre-existing knowledge base.¹³ This approach allows researchers to map the cultural and cognitive “landscape” on an issue, and better understand how it shapes people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. It also provides a strong basis for predicting how people interpret the messaging and communications they receive from organisations and, in turn, for how that messaging can be reframed to more effectively shape people’s understandings and commitments.

Researchers from FrameWorks and BRAC IED applied this approach to the subject of early childhood education in Bangladesh, with the goal of delivering a communications strategy to that sector that has the power to change how the public, policymakers, business people and others both think about and act on this issue. For this project, the research team conducted and analysed in-depth interviews with experts, members of the public, people who work in the early childhood development sector, and owners and senior managers at ready-made-garment factories. This in-depth interview data was supplemented by a series of short “on-the-street” video interviews with members of the public.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

The expert interviews conducted were designed to capture expert and scientific understandings of early childhood development. BRAC IED researchers conducted 10 face-to-face, one-hour interviews with directors, academics,

researchers, advocates, planners, advisors and policy experts, all of whom were affiliated with early childhood development-oriented networks and organisations. Initially, the research team compiled a list of 15 possible experts to include in the research; of those, 10 were available for interviews between November 2017 and January 2018 and were approached to participate in the study.

Researchers used an open interview style, based on a topic guide, to collect data. This style was designed to capture the interviewees' understandings of early childhood development and to allow them to explore their own outlooks and reflections on the issue, as connected with their field-specific knowledge and expertise. It also allowed them to express how they interpret the principles and viewpoints of lay people and other concerned individuals. Interviewers pursued general early childhood development topics, such as developmental domains, factors shaping development, responsibilities, gender roles, resilience, play and learning, and interventions. Experts were also encouraged to steer the interview in any directions that they deemed relevant.

The analysis of the expert interviews followed the principles of grounded theory analysis. As such, interviewers paid attention to thematic units – passages with similar topics scattered across interviews – which allowed them to assess the meaning and significance of the experts' statements. The analysis was then integrated into an existing “Expert Story of Early Childhood Development” that has emerged over two decades of collaboration between the FrameWorks Institute and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, based on interviews with early childhood development experts in the United States, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, Kenya and the United Kingdom.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and verified for validity. Researchers then applied coded themes to statements and sections as they emerged in the data. After the coding process, thematically comparable passages from different interviews were tied together to form categories. The results were continually revisited in light of other relevant passages in the interviews to examine whether they were complete and valid. This process identified commonalities and differences across interviews, which were elaborated on and categorised by drawing on the theoretical knowledge base of the three researchers involved in the data analysis. These categories were then arranged according to their internal relationships with each other through a process of theoretical generalisation. When representing the results of the experts' interviews, researchers took a reconstructive approach to frame the empirically generalised findings.

Researchers shared their initial insights into experts' messages with a group of Bangladeshi early childhood development experts comprising a scientific advisory group for this research project. Researchers used this group's feedback to generate a final draft of the “Expert Story of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh”.

CULTURAL MODELS INTERVIEWS

Grounded in FrameWorks' Strategic Frame Analysis® approach to communications research and practice, researchers conducted a series of in-depth interviews to explore the shared, culturally constructed and often taken-for-granted patterns that structure how people think about early childhood development in Bangladesh. These “cultural models” are critical to investigate because individuals use internalised versions of culturally transmitted knowledge to interpret the world around them and interact with it.¹⁴ This includes their interpretations of messaging about young children's early development, learning and health.

Cultural models interviews were conducted with members of three populations: the public, the early childhood development sectors and leaders of ready-made-garment factories. Alongside the public, who represent the bulk of Bangladesh's population, researchers identified ready-made-garment factory owners and senior managers as an important population for research due to the increasingly prevalent and critical role these factories play as locations for daily child care. Members of the early childhood development sector were chosen because of the critical role they play in a range of institutions across Bangladeshi society that are involved in the care and education of young children. To ensure a diversity of professional roles were accounted for in the sector, researchers interviewed early childhood development professionals from the Directorate of Primary Education, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare, as well as the heads and subheads of programmatic institutions, public and private child care providers, pre-primary school teachers, community health and family support workers, designers, trainers and managers of early childhood development curricula, and researchers from Bangladeshi universities.

In total, researchers conducted 54 recorded, one-on-one cultural models interviews with members of the public, ready-made-garment factory leaders and sector professionals. These two-hour, semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit stories and messages that indicated the shared and durable cultural models that participants used to make sense of their world. The interviews delved into people's thinking about the ages of childhood, about what factors shape early development, about the developmental process, about who has responsibility for children, about effective solutions and interventions for issues surrounding early childhood development, and about a range of other related topics including play, early learning and children's resilience.

The interviews were transcribed, after which researchers used MAXQDA qualitative analysis software to code and analyse the assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections that were commonly made both within and across interviews. A sub-section of the transcripts were translated into English so that a FrameWorks researcher could join the BRAC IED researchers in analysing the interview data. Researchers were all siloed from each other during the coding and analysis process, with each researcher analysing a sub-section of the interview data in isolation.

For each researcher, codes were drawn together into themes, enabling them to present the findings in a coherent and meaningful way. During this process, researchers “read between lines” in the sense that they discerned patterns from what was said (how things were related, explained and understood) and what was not said (assumptions and implied relationships).

Researchers’ individual analyses were then shared and discussed with their counterparts, and the group revisited transcripts to confirm findings concerning new codes and models. In many cases, the analysis revealed conflicting models that participants brought to bear on the same issue. In such cases, one of the conflicting ways of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other, in the sense that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants’ thinking.

ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS

On-the-street interviews were conducted to first, demonstrate and confirm the findings from the in-depth cultural models research, and second, refine or expand on those findings. Researchers conducted the on-the-street interviews in September 2018 in the Dhaka, Sylhet and Rangpur divisions of Bangladesh. Sylhet and Rangpur were new locations to this study, complementing previous cultural models research conducted in the cities of Chattogram and Khulna. In each division, researchers interviewed a wide range of participants (most of whom were pedestrians) who varied by age, gender and educational status.

Before data collection began, a diverse sampling matrix was prepared for the selection of research participants. Researchers interviewed 57 participants in one day on pavements, in parks, tea gardens, historic sites, zoos and other public spaces. Members of the public were recruited on-the-spot following an “opportunistic” sampling procedure. Interviews consisted of 12 open questions with follow-ups.

Ideal locations for on-the-street interviews are those that have sufficient foot traffic to facilitate recruitment but are not overly crowded or noisy. Interested people were approached for the interviews and given information about the background and purpose of the study. They were asked to give recorded, informed verbal consent. Each interview lasted approximately 12–15 minutes and, in total for each location, yielded a minimum of four hours of raw footage (including starts/stops and occasional “throwaway” interviews). A videographer recorded the interviews for analysis.

The total 14 hours of raw footage collected was processed and assembled by a video editor into three raw reels – one for each location. The editor then sent the footage to analysts for individualised coding and analysis, using the qualitative software MAXQDA. Working with such software was particularly useful because coded data was easily retrievable in the later stages of the study. After coding separately, each analyst sent a “code segments” text file

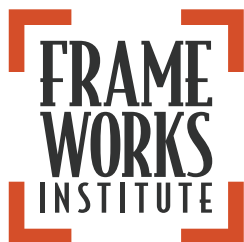
to the video editor, who created a first draft reel demonstrating the dominant cultural models and other findings. Jointly, the analysts also sent a script to help the video editor assemble the reels. The video editor and researchers continued to pass the reels back and forth to each other in order to refine them. English subtitles were inserted for all non-English speech.

To generate rich and nuanced findings, researchers became “familiar with the whole interview” by watching the video-recording and re-listening to all or parts of the audio recording. After this vital stage of interpretation, researchers carefully viewed the interviews and applied both deductive and inductive coding approaches, which involved pre-selected coding based on the cultural models research and the interview guide, as well as open (unrestricted) coding generated from the data.

To analyse the large qualitative data sets, researchers used a spreadsheet to generate a matrix and to “chart” data into it. This process involved summarizing the data by category from each interview. To do so, the researchers had to balance the need to reduce the data and, at the same time, retain the original meaning and “feel” of the interviewees’ words. On average, it took about half a day per hour of video-recorded interviews to chart data into the matrix. Finally, the researchers identified the commonalities and differences among the data sets, generating typologies, interrogating theoretical concepts (either prior concepts or those that emerged from the data) and mapping connections between categories to explore relationships and/or causality.

Endnotes

1. On cultural models, see Quinn, N. and Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland and N. Quinn (Eds.). *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (pp. 3–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Tannen, D. (1993). Introduction. In *Framing in Discourse* (pp. 3–56). New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Sarwar, S. S., Mehnaz, A., Parvin, W., Mas-ud, A. A., Khanom, F., Zaman, S.S., Dutta, M. and Nichols, J. and Lindland, E. (2019). *Narratives of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh: A Field Frame Analysis*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
4. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu>
5. www.frameworksinstitute.org/international-issues.html
6. Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. L. (1990.) Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*. 13 (1): 3–21. See also Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.
7. A subset of the original Bangla interview transcripts were translated into English for analysis by a FrameWorks Institute researcher to complement the analysis of the original Bangla transcripts by BRAC IED researchers.
8. Quinn, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Finding Culture in Talk: A Collection of Methods*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
9. For more on how people hold multiple cultural models in mind, see Chapter Two, ‘Rethinking culture as models’. In Shore, B. (1996). *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*. New York: Oxford University Press.
10. When describing a model as “shallow,” we mean that it is a model that is vague or lacking in details or specifics. In these cases, while people can use the model to think about something at a surface level, the model does not contribute much explanatory power or depth of understanding for them. In such cases, during interviewing, when asked to expand on their thinking, research participants often shift topics or repeat themselves.
11. Sarwar, S. S., Mehnaz, A., Parvin, W., Mas-ud, A. A., Khanom, F., Zaman, S.S., Dutta, M., Nichols, J. and Lindland, E. (2019). *Narratives of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh: A Field Frame Analysis*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
12. Quinn, N. and Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.). *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (pp. 3–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. Brown, P. (2006). Cognitive Anthropology. In: C. Jourdan and K. Tuite (Eds.). *Studies in the Social and Cultural foundations of Language: Language, Culture, and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. Gatewood, B. John. 2012. Cultural Models, Consensus Analysis, and the Social Organization of Knowledge. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 4: 362–371.



**A research report by the FrameWorks Institute and
BRAC Institute of Educational Development**

April 2019