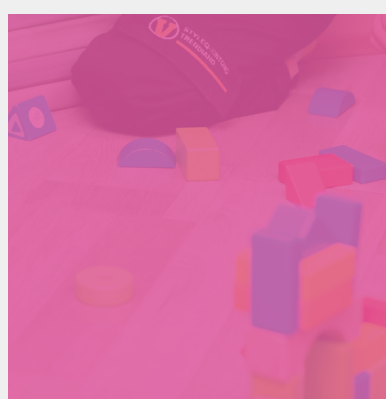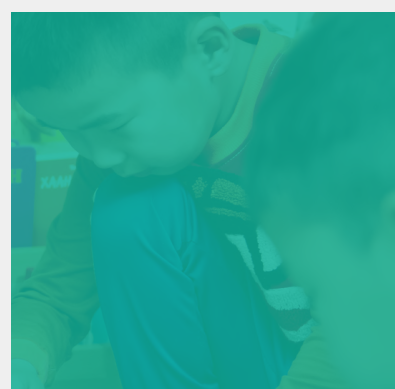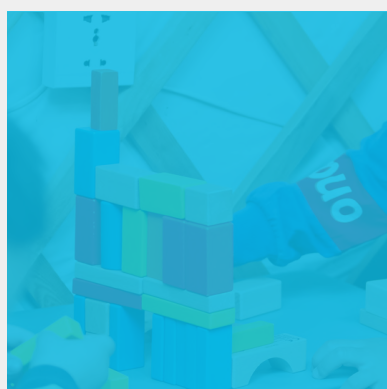# MONGOLIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

PROGRESS REPORT
March 2022 - December 2024

ABOUT THE REPORT

Established in 2022, the Mongolian Early Childhood Development Network (MECDN) is co-led by the Lorinet Foundation and UNICEF Mongolia, with endorsement from the Ministry of Education of Mongolia (formerly the Ministry of Education and Science). The network serves as a platform for connectivity, awareness-building, policy engagement, and evidence-based knowledge advancement, ultimately strengthening Mongolia's early childhood ecosystem.

Through this report, Lorinet Foundation shares the MECDN's progress and achievements during its formation period, while outlining future priorities. The outcomes and insights gained validate the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts and highlight the importance of collective action in advancing the well-being of Mongolia's youngest children.

As a philanthropic organisation committed to strengthening Mongolia's early childhood ecosystem, Lorinet Foundation is encouraged by the impact of our contributions and the network's progress. We remain dedicated to fostering an environment that promotes connectivity, knowledge exchange, and collective actions among key stakeholders.

ABOUT LORINET FOUNDATION

Lorinet Foundation is a family foundation dedicated to enabling positive and sustainable impact on the lives of children, youth, and families living in vulnerable communities in Mongolia. We deliver impact by granting financial and non-financial support to a portfolio of carefully selected organisations and through a number of initiatives that aim at promoting social innovation in Mongolia.
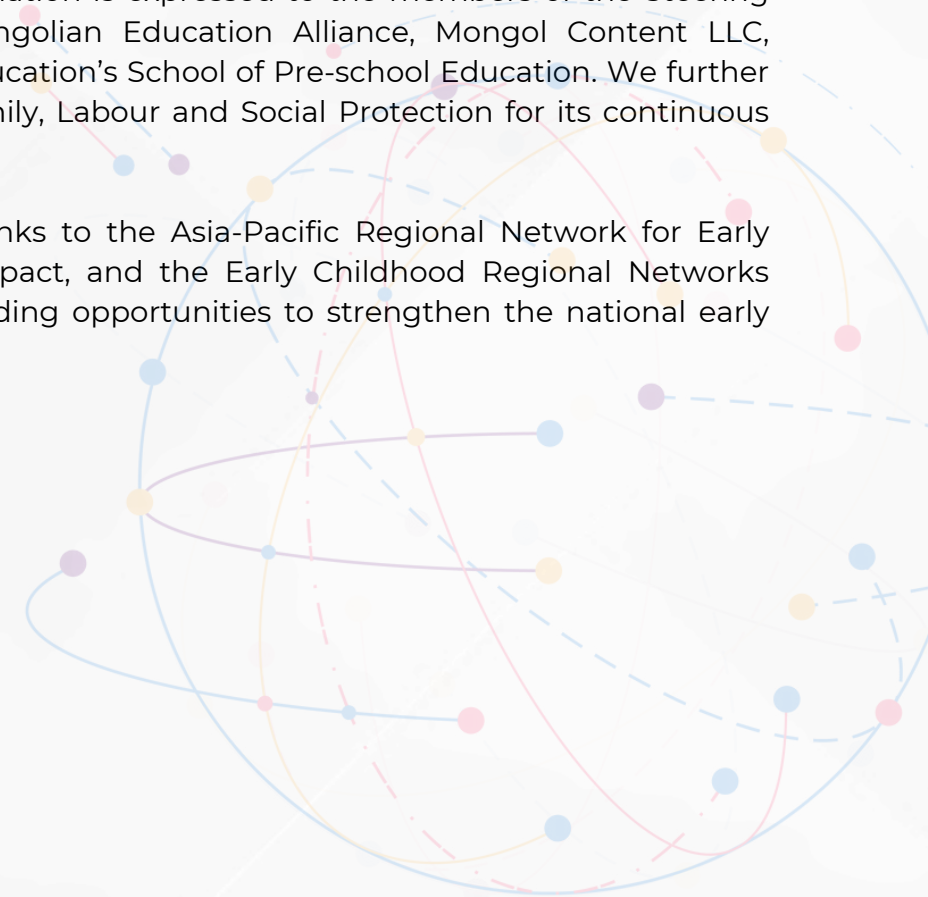
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS

ARNEC – Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood

CNCF – Christina Noble Children's Foundation

ECD – Early Childhood Development

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

MECDN – Mongolian Early Childhood Development Network

MFSLP – Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Protection

MOE – Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Education and Science)

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

WV Mongolia – World Vision Mongolia

CONTENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD) in any country requires an engagement of multiple sectors and stakeholders, making networks an ideal platform for driving coordinated actions. Networks provide critical infrastructure to connect diverse actors, fostering cross-learning, alignment, and collaboration.

The fragmented nature of Mongolia's early childhood development ecosystem resulted in the disconnect that limited the exchange of practices, led to duplication of efforts, and hindered collaboration. To address these challenges, Lorinet Foundation and UNICEF Mongolia, with endorsement from the Ministry of Education (MOE), jointly established the MECDN in 2022.

GOAL

To connect local stakeholders dedicated to advancing early childhood development and strengthen the coordination and collaboration among them.

KEY FUNCTIONS

- **Connectivity & Learning**: Enable knowledge and practice exchange, foster collaboration among the members, and build their capacity.

- **Awareness Building**: Raise public awareness about the importance of integrated early childhood development, particularly among parents and caregivers.

- **Policy Engagement**: Encourage and support members' active participation in the development and implementation of relevant policies.

- **Evidence-based Knowledge Advancement**: Develop and disseminate evidence-based knowledge to support informed decision-making by ecosystem stakeholders.

Since its inception, MECDN has rapidly evolved into a dynamic platform, convening over 30 institutional players across early childhood protection, education, nutrition, and health. These members represent academia, development partners, international and local non-governmental organisations as well as private and public sectors, underscoring MECDN's role as a unifying platform.

During the formation phase (2022-2024), various initiatives were piloted to deliver network's core functions, strengthen governance and identify pathways for further advancement.

At the member level, MECDN has played a pivotal role as a connector, facilitating the exchange of critical information and fostering more coordinated efforts. Members consistently recognise the platform's ability to bridge gaps, share best practices, and drive collaboration.

At the wider ecosystem level, MECDN has been instrumental in engaging key government bodies and contributed towards shaping the major thematic policies. Its increasing importance was underscored by its close engagement with the inter-ministerial National ECD Council.

The establishment of the Steering Committee and Secretariat in November 2024 marks a key milestone in the network's growth, laying the foundation for the next stabilising phase (2025-2026). This phase will focus on strengthening co-ownership among members and guide the transition to a more structured governance model.

2. EFFORTS AT GLANCE

CONNECTIVITY & LEARNING

- **12 quarterly meetings**:
  - 7 field visits for on-the-ground learning and practice exchange
  - 3 capacity-building sessions based on member needs
  - 2 policy consultations
- Deployed **quarterly newsletters** and multiple digital communication channels

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

- Facilitated **thematic policy consultations**:
  - National Policy on Promoting Integrated ECD
  - Childcare Service Law
- Presented the network's work at the inter-ministerial **National ECD Council**
- Co-organised the **National ECD Forum**

+30 DIVERSE MEMBERS

- Development partners and INGOs
- Local NGOs & grass-root community-based organisations
- Government agencies
- Private sector representatives
- Academic and research institutions

PUBLIC AWARENESS BUILDING

- Launched a **social media page** to promote ECD awareness
  - **+50** visual materials created
  - **+2.4K** followers, **+205K** reach, **+10K** interactions

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE

- Participated in **regional capacity-building training** offered by ARNEC, funded by the Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund
- Conducted **multiple surveys** to assess member needs and network's health
- Successful formation of the **Steering Committee and Secretariat**

3. KEY EVENTS TIMELINE

Jan – Feb 2022 – MECDN formation consultations between Lorinet Foundation, UNICEF Mongolia, and MOE

Mar 2022 – First all-member meeting to align on priorities and key functions

Aug 2022 – Field visit to parenting and early reading programmes (OneSky, Mongolian Education Alliance)

Oct 2022 – Policy consultation on 'Promoting Integrated ECD'

May 2023 – MECDN launch ceremony at the National ECD Forum

Aug - Oct 2023 – Participation in capacity-building sessions on strengthening national ECD networks (ARNEC)

Sep 2023 – Field visit to a community-based and local government-run ECD centre

Apr 2024 – Field visit to the teacher training School of Pre-School Education

Nov 2023 – Policy consultation on the revision of the Childcare Service Law

Sep 2024 – Field visit to community-based programmes of Christina Noble Children's Foundation and Veloo Foundation

Jun 2024 – Field visit to Good Neighbors & member capacity-building training on 'Nutrition' and 'Design Thinking'

Dec 2024 – All-member approval of the revised Terms of Reference

Nov 2024 – First convening of the newly formed Steering Committee

4. IMPACT & OUTCOMES

4.1. MEMBER IMPACT

The active engagement and sustained interest of key ecosystem players in MECDN underscore its vital role in strengthening Mongolia's ECD ecosystem. By fostering collaboration and creating a shared platform for multi-sectoral stakeholders, MECDN has become a valuable connector facilitating knowledge and practice exchange. Insights from the member surveys confirm MECDN's ability to bridge gaps and foster synergies.

Collaborative Learning and Tangible Impact:
We joined MECDN to learn from others. One tangible result was the integration of fellow member OneSky's play-kit tool into our grant proposal, which secured a $20,000 grant.
– Munguntsetseg, Programme Resource
and Quality Director, WV Mongolia

Enhancing Intervention Quality:
MECDN allows us to promote our work to the wider ecosystem while also providing learning opportunities to improve the accessibility and quality of our interventions.
– Good Neighbors Mongolia

Access to evidence & Bridging Grassroots X Government:
MECDN allows us to access evidence-based knowledge. Moreover, it offers unique never seen before bridging support for the smaller grassroots organisations to engage with government players, allowing us to share feedback and address barriers more effectively. – Munkhtuya, Kindergarten Principal, CNCF

Comprehensive Resource Platform:
It is a one-stop resource platform that provides a holistic understanding of different aspects and solutions of the integrated ECD. Field visits provide unique opportunities for the private sector players like us. One such visit to the Let's Read Project site resulted in our company's in-kind contribution to the project. – Otgontuya, Head of Division, Mongol Content LLC

Practical Learning Through Field Visits:
Field visits are extremely useful and practical learning tools. After members visited our Family Centre, UNICEF Mongolia not only invited us to explore a partnership on their community engagement pilot but also used our centre model for the establishment of similar ECD centre. – Gereltuya, Programme Director, OneSky

Advancing Academic Research:
Thanks to MECDN, our master's programme students were able to use data and results from the Let's Read project's baseline survey in their research papers.
– School of Pre-School Education

Cross-capacity Development:
Through field visits and regular engagements we have formulated a formal partnership with OneSky. Our kindergarten staff and teachers have attended a high-quality family skills training programme further enhancing their teaching practices.
– Veloo Foundation & CNCF

Collaborating for Collective Growth:
For networks to thrive, each member must actively contribute and collaborate. At GerHub, leveraging our design thinking expertise, we assisted with developing MECDN's logo and brand book and conducted training sessions in design thinking.
– Enkhjin (Kusha), CEO, GerHub

4.2. WIDER IMPACT

4.2.1. POLICY AND GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

The Ministry of Education (MOE) played a pivotal role as an endorser in the successful launch of the MECDN, generating immediate interest from major stakeholders. Following the launch, the MOE demonstrated continued leadership by inviting MECDN to contribute to the revision of the National Policy on Promotion of Integrated Early Childhood Development. This engagement provided an opportunity for the members to share feedback and recommendations, resulting in a stronger policy document adopted by the government in 2023.

To further promote MECDN, MOE included its official launch ceremony in the agenda of the 2023 National ECD Forum. Co-organised by multiple government agencies, the event brought together early childhood sector public officials and service providers from all 21 provinces, highlighting MECDN's growing prominence.

Recognising the integrated nature of ECD, MOE also facilitated the engagement of other key government stakeholders such as the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Protection (MFLSP). As a result, MFLSP officials became actively involved in network's activities and invited selected members to contribute to the revision of the Childcare Service Law.

MECDN's rising profile led to further recognition when it was invited by the newly established inter-ministerial National Council on Integrated ECD, which is represented by the Education, Health, and Social Protection ministries. This engagement laid the foundation for ongoing engagement and exploration of synergies with the council's priorities.

4.2.2. PUBLIC AWARENESS

Members have consistently emphasised the critical need to raise public awareness about the importance of ECD, particularly among parents and caregivers. This focus is seen as essential for driving societal and cultural changes, further validating the co-leads' original proposition to choosing public awareness as one of MECDN's core functions.

To address this need, a dedicated social media page featuring high-quality local language thematic content was launched in collaboration with member organisation, Mongol Content LLC. Leveraging their outreach and influence, Lorinet Foundation, UNICEF Mongolia, and the MOE actively promoted this digital resource among parent and teacher groups, public servants across all 21 provinces, and at various thematic events.

4.3. STRENGTHENED GOVERNANCE

Co-leads, Lorinet Foundation and UNICEF Mongolia, in addition to leading the delivery of the MECDN's core functions, have also dedicated efforts to strengthen the network's governance.

- **Targeted Membership Expansion**: Outreach to new members from the health sector, private teacher training institutions, and rural-area non-profits, resulting in broader representation and engagement.

- **Capacity Building for Network Development**: Participation in a three-month-long training on network development by ARNEC, delivered by Impact Network, and funded by the Early Childhood Regional Network Fund. This training provided valuable insights into network growth stages, strategic planning and assessment tools. Insights and tools were immediately applied, including conducting member surveys and network health checks to better identify needs, align objectives, and assess the effectiveness.

- **Governance Strengthening**: Series of smaller group meetings with experienced members were organised to refine the Terms of Reference (ToR) and explore pathways for deeper collaboration and sustainability. These efforts culminated in reaching a significant milestone – the establishment of the Steering Committee and Secretariat in November 2024.

5. NEXT STEP

Building on its successful formation, MECDN is moving into the next phase, focusing on further strengthening and stabilisation of the network. This phase will serve as a base for the MECDN to further progress through next stages of network development: from connectivity to alignment, and ultimately to collaboration, with latter requiring the highest levels of commitment and trust. While original leads Lorinet Foundation and UNICEF Mongolia will continue to champion, the formation of the Steering Committee is expected to create a favourable environment for more shared responsibility model and greater co-ownership among its members.

HIGH-LEVEL PLAN FOR 2025-2026:

|		
➔	**CONNECTIVITY & LEARNING**	• Expand membership to include underrepresented sectors and rural areas • Focus on effective connectivity, cross-learning and capacity-building strategies
➔	**AWARENESS BUILDING**	• Develop and deliver public awareness building strategy for parents, caregivers, and workforce
➔	**POLICY ENGAGEMENT**	• Collaborate with the National ECD Council • Bridge the grass-root players with policymakers
➔	**EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT**	• Disseminate evidence-based knowledge to support informed decision-making among diverse stakeholders

6. OUR MEMBERS

STEERING COMMITTEE

GOVERNMENT/AGENCY

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION
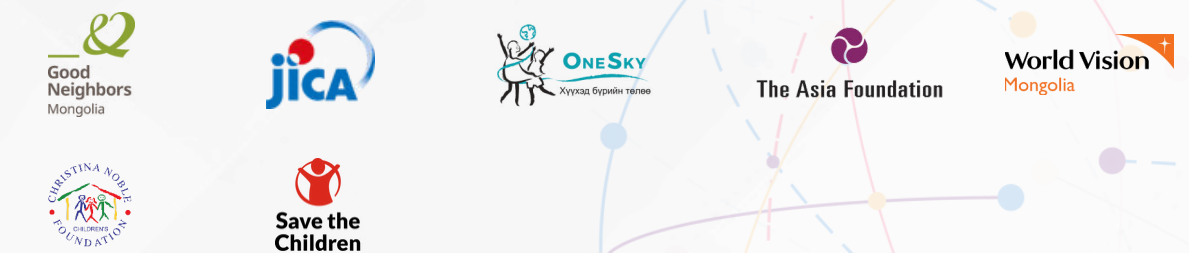
LOCAL NGO, ACADEMIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATION