Impacting early childhood policy in East Asia and the Pacific through contextually-appropriate assessment of early child development

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Outline

- Summary of Impact
- Underpinning Research
- Engagement
- Impacts Achieved
- Research Team

Summary of the Impact
International level

- A Best of UNICEF Research award for "policy impact, innovative design, thoughtful use of available data, methodological rigour and potential replicability in both the country of origin and other country contexts"

- Lauded as one of the major events influencing early childhood development policy and practice in the 2017 Lancet series on Early Childhood Development

- An important input for a monitoring indicator of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 4.2

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Validation, Finalization and Adoption of the East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS)

Nirmala Rao, Jin Sun, Marie Ng, Yvonne Becher, Diana Lee, Patrick Ip and John Bacon-Shone

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

Culturally sensitive testing

Monitoring early childhood development is clearly vital and yet there are at present no globally accepted tests that can be applied in all of the world's regions. In part this is due to concerns that assessment tools conceived in developed Western countries may not be appropriate in some cultural contexts. Yet the need for such testing is most acute in countries where a large proportion of children often suffer poor developmental outcomes and where government investment in early childhood development is limited.

To this end, the East Asia and Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) have been conceived and trialled over the period since 2010 – the first such assessment tool to have been originated, developed and validated specifically with children from the East Asia and the Pacific region in mind. Following an initial piloting in three countries, Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu participated in the

PANEL COMMENT

This large-scale research project aimed to provide Asian countries with a standard and reliable measurement tool to assess the holistic development of children from 3 to 5 years. This research is thoroughly conceptualised and directly engages with UNICEF's core work. There is important potential for policy impact and development of policy tools.

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Summary of the Impact
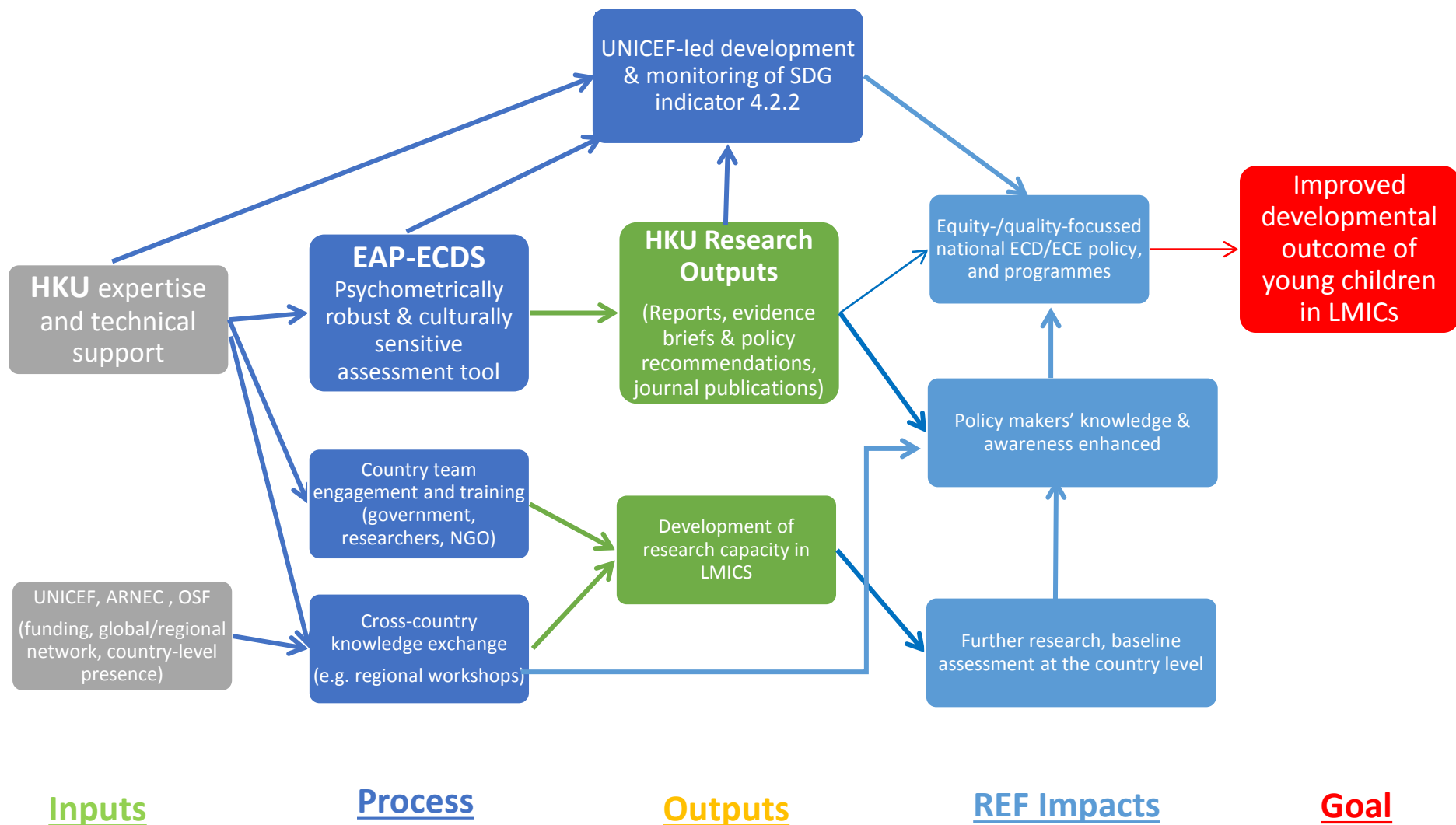## Country level

- First developmental assessment tool created on the basis of the culture and values of a world region

- Population-based *direct* assessment tool of *holistic* development of young children

- Equity-focussed national early childhood policy development

- Development of research capacity in eight low- and medium income countries (LMIC) in the East Asia-Pacific region

East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS)
Theory of Change

UNICEF-led development & monitoring of SDG indicator 4.2.2

HKU expertise and technical support

EAP-ECDS Psychometrically robust & culturally sensitive assessment tool

HKU Research Outputs (Reports, evidence briefs & policy recommendations, journal publications)

Equity-/quality-focussed national ECD/ECE policy, and programmes

Improved developmental outcome of young children in LMICs

Country team engagement and training (government, researchers, NGO)

UNICEF, ARNEC , OSF (funding, global/regional network, country-level presence)

Cross-country knowledge exchange (e.g. regional workshops)

Development of research capacity in LMICS

Policy makers' knowledge & awareness enhanced

Further research, baseline assessment at the country level

Inputs   Process   Outputs   REF Impacts   Goal
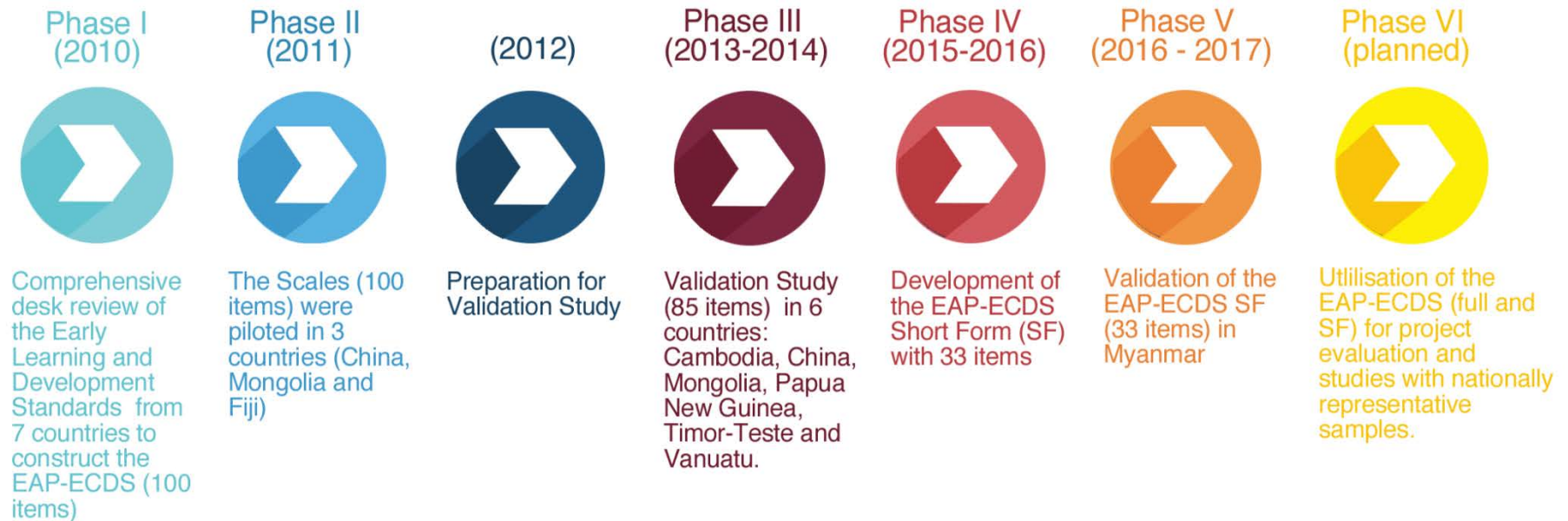
Underpinning Research

Main objective of the EAP-ECDS project

To develop a psychometrically robust and contextually appropriate measure of early child development (ECD) to equip stakeholders across East Asia and the Pacific with a common measurement tool to assess the holistic developmental progress of children ranging in age from 3 to 5 years

Underpinning Research
EAP-ECDS Project Implementation

Phase I (2010)	Phase II (2011)	(2012)	Phase III (2013-2014)	Phase IV (2015-2016)	Phase V (2016 - 2017)	Phase VI (planned)
Comprehensive desk review of the Early Learning and Development Standards from 7 countries to construct the EAP-ECDS (100 items)	The Scales (100 items) were piloted in 3 countries (China, Mongolia and Fiji)	Preparation for Validation Study	Validation Study (85 items) in 6 countries: Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Teste and Vanuatu.	Development of the EAP-ECDS Short Form (SF) with 33 items	Validation of the EAP-ECDS SF (33 items) in Myanmar	Utilisation of the EAP-ECDS (full and SF) for project evaluation and studies with nationally representative samples.

In **Phase VI** (2018-2019), **an impact case study** will be carried out.

Engagement
Participating countries
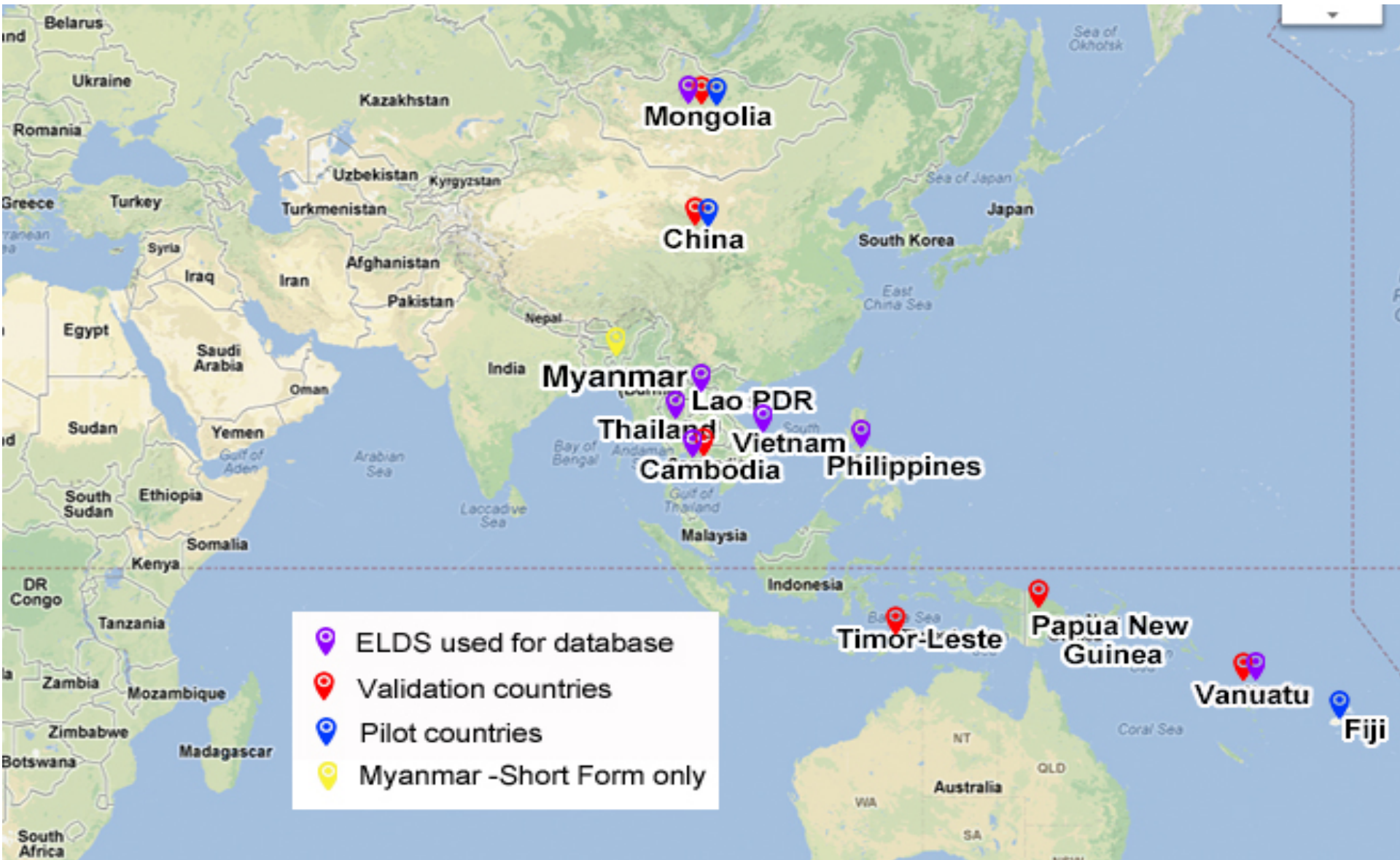
Engagement

Partners and Process

- Technical support for EAP-ECDS development & finalisation
- Training country teams
- Providing training, quality assurance & advice in data collection
- Data analysis and writing reports and evidence briefs

Country teams:
- Organisation of country consultation meetings and training workshops
- Translation and adaptation and of EAP-ECDS
- Data collection and back translation
- Country-level follow up

- Funding
- Engaging governments and key stakeholders
- Country-level follow up and support for policy and programme development
- Global leader of SDG4.2.2 monitoring

- Organisation of regional workshops, training of trainers
- Dissemination through Asia-Pacific Regional ECD Conference, website, publications
- Custodian of EAP-ECDS to facilitate further administration

Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

Impacts Achieved
Beneficiaries

1. Participating countries
- ❖ Governments/policy makers: EAP-ECDS provide evidence and recommendations for policy development and programming
- ❖ Researchers in LMICs: research capacity developed through HKU's technical support and training

2. ARNEC – as the custodian of EAP-ECDS, the regional network is now equipped with a cutting-edge regional assessment tool to respond to country capacity development needs and further strengthen its partnerships

3. UNICEF – as a global leader of SDG Indicator 4.2.2 Monitoring, it has been informed by HKU research outputs and PI's technical inputs to the indicator development process; Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) complemented with direct assessment based on EAP-ECDS

Impacts Achieved
Country Level

1. Contributions to National Early Childhood Policy Development
- Generation of country-specific findings and recommendations for **8 countries**: Cambodia, China, Fiji, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Timor-Leste and Vanuatu

- Development of more equity-focussed national early childhood policy
  - Myanmar ECCD Policy, 2014
  - Cambodia: National Action Plan on ECCD 2014-2018, 2014
  - Fiji: Policy in Early Childhood Education, 2013
  - Mongolia: National Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education, 2015

- PNG commissioned the HKU team to develop a baseline survey of preschool facilities and minimum operating standards and to help draft their national early childhood care and education policy

- Cambodia: HKU was asked to conduct an in-depth study on the differences among population groups; to give a second training as part of the training programme for ECE curriculum revision

- Vanuatu is using the findings for curriculum review and teacher training

Impacts Achieved

Country Level

2. Development of research capacity in LMICs

- HKU team trained a local research team of each country and closely advised the data collection process

    ⇒ **Transfer of research** skills (e.g. sampling, survey methods, data collection and analysis) and **quality assurance** through HKU training and technical support of country research teams

    ⇒ Successful piloting and administration in all participating countries demonstrate the positive outcome of this approach
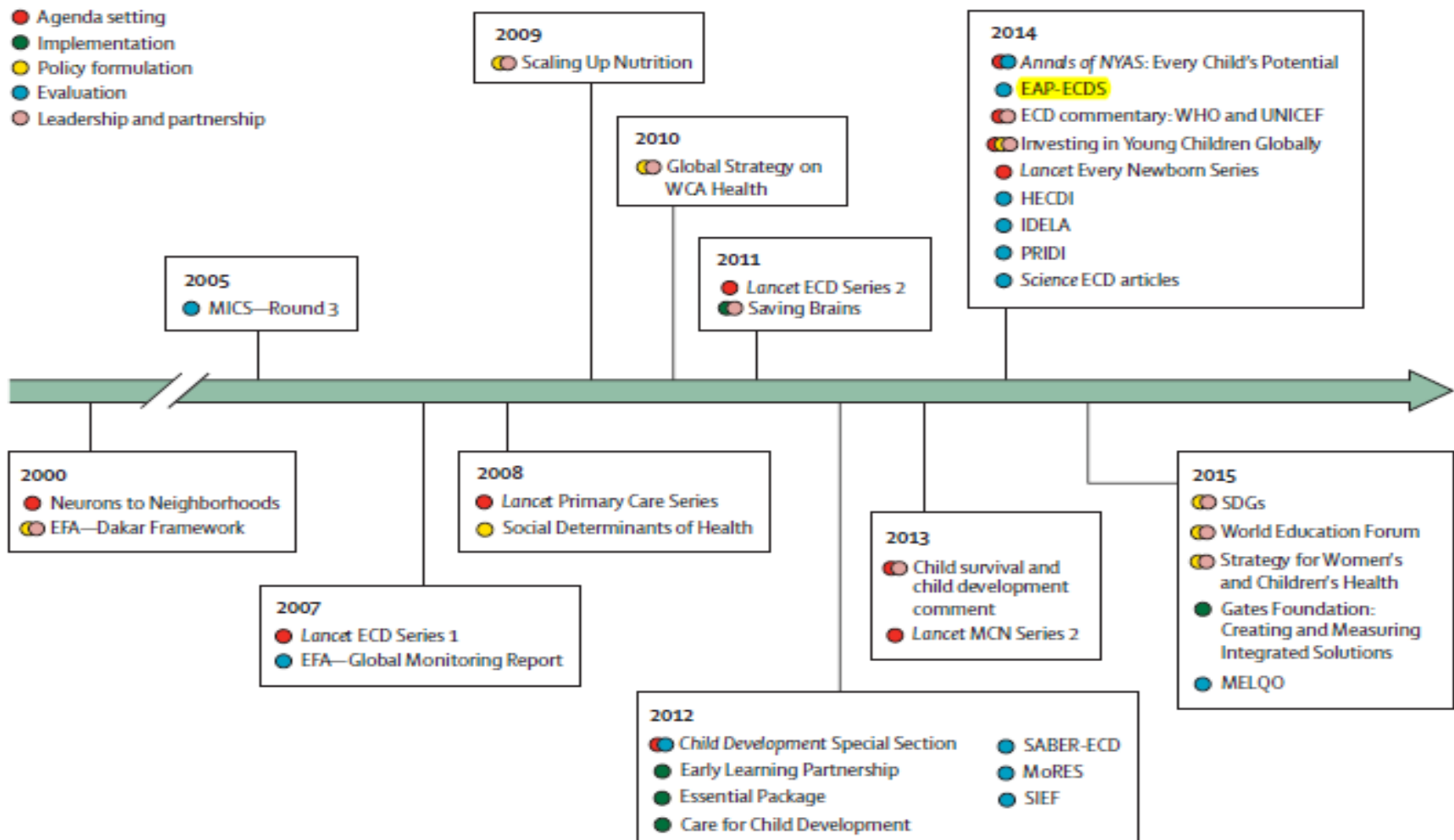
Impacts Achieved
Country Level

2. Development of research capacity in LMICs (cont'd)

- EAP-ECDS have been used in Cambodia, China and Papua New Guinea (PNG) for baseline assessment and programme evaluation

- HKU team conducted in July 2017 a **regional training of trainers** organised by ARNEC, with participants from Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Timor Leste and Viet Nam

  ⇒ Cambodia, Malaysia, Timor Leste and VietNam showed interst to adapt and implement the EAP-ECDS

  ⇒ Cambodia and Viet Nam had been trained to administer the EAP-ECDS Short Form in December 2017

Impacts Achieved
Global Level

Timeline of events influencing ECD policies and practice

Legend:
- Agenda setting (red)
- Implementation (green)
- Policy formulation (yellow)
- Evaluation (blue)
- Leadership and partnership (pink)

2009
- Scaling Up Nutrition

2010
- Global Strategy on WCA Health

2011
- Lancet ECD Series 2
- Saving Brains

2014
- Annals of NYAS: Every Child's Potential
- EAP-ECDS
- ECD commentary: WHO and UNICEF
- Investing in Young Children Globally
- Lancet Every Newborn Series
- HECDI
- IDELA
- PRIDI
- Science ECD articles

2005
- MICS—Round 3

2000
- Neurons to Neighborhoods
- EFA—Dakar Framework

2008
- Lancet Primary Care Series
- Social Determinants of Health

2007
- Lancet ECD Series 1
- EFA—Global Monitoring Report

2013
- Child survival and child development comment
- Lancet MCN Series 2

2015
- SDGs
- World Education Forum
- Strategy for Women's and Children's Health
- Gates Foundation: Creating and Measuring Integrated Solutions
- MELQO

2012
- Child Development Special Section
- Early Learning Partnership
- Essential Package
- Care for Child Development
- SABER-ECD
- MoRES
- SIEF

Impacts Achieved

Global Level

Contribution to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.2

- EAP-ECDS widely cited and recognized; a Best of UNICEF Research Award

- PI invited to high-level international technical meetings that discussed the monitoring of the SDG Target 4.2.

- Team is developing a tool to measure SDG 4.2 which is largely influenced by the EAP-ECDS

Best of UNICEF Research 2015

Impacts Achieved
Global Level

Contribution to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.2

- Expected contribution to SDG Indicator 4.2.1 development and monitoring (*the percentage of children under age 5 years who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being*)

    ⇒ to complement the Early Childhood Development Index (or ECDI), developed by UNICEF, which is collected through MICS parent survey and still requires development and testing.

    ⇒ EAP-ECDS are one of a handful of tools being considered to inform and complement the improved ECDI through direct child assessment

Research Team

The HKU Network for Early Childhood Development and Education Research http://hkece.edu.hku.hk/ in the Faculty of Education conducts research on early childhood development and education, which provides evidence for early childhood policy-making.

We have:

- developed psychometrically robust and culturally-sensitive measures of both Early Child Development (ECD) and the quality of early childhood education (ECE);

- evaluated early childhood programmes

- analysed early educational policy in the Asia-Pacific region

- conducted empirical studies looking at the interplay of culture, policy and pedagogy in the early years

- examined early language and literacy development in Hong Kong's multilingual context

Research Team

- Nirmala Rao (Principal Investigator)
- Yvonne Becher, Faculty Fellow and Clinical Child Psychologist from the Child Development Centre
- Phases I and II Co-I's: Pat Engle (dec.) and Jin Sun (PDF at HKU and now Assistant Professor at EUHK)
- Phase III Co-I: Marie Ng (former Assistant Professor at HKU and now Associate Professor at University of Washington).
- Other researchers involved since Phase III: Diana Lee and Carrie Lau (Faculty of Education), Patrick Ip (LKS Faculty of Medicine) John Bacon-Shone (Faculty of Social Sciences), Eva Chen, Ben Richards, Mami Umayahara

Nirmala RAO Yvonne BECHER Diana LEE Jin SUN

Ben RICHARDS Patrick IP John BACON-SHONE

Carrie LAU Mami UMAYAHARA Eva CHEN Marie NG

Thank You!

The University of Hong Kong