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**BARMM Priority Area #1 on ECCD:
Governance and Sustainability of Maternal and
Early Childhood Health and Nutrition**

Covering the Last Mile

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Governance and Delivery in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM): A Governance and Policy Reform Study

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Ateneo de Manila University - Tagpuan Ateneo Center for Dialogue, Research, and Collaboration

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication is in partnership with the Australian Government through The Asia Foundation's Reform-Ed project (Realizing Efficient Governance and Streamlined Reforms in Education). Overall layout and design are by EDCOM II. Cover page photo shows villagers walking towards a wooden bridge in isolated Brgy. Daladap, Mamasapano, Maguindanao on 23 June 2022. Photo by Bong S. Sarmiento/MindaNews.

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC CITATION

Canuday, J. J., Tahir, K., Quetulio-Navarra M., Sescon J., Carbaja R.T., dela Cruz L.C. (2025). *Covering the Last Mile | Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) governance and delivery in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM): A governance and policy reform study*. The Asia Foundation & Tagpuan Ateneo de Manila University Center for Dialogue, Research, and Collaboration.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

4PS	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BERDP	Bangsamoro Education Reform and Development Plan
BLGC	Bangsamoro Local Governance Code
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BPDA	Bangsamoro Planning and Development Authority
CDC	Child Development Center
CDW	Child Development Worker
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
DEPED	Department of Education
DOST-FNRI	Department of Science and Technology - Food and Nutrition Research Institute
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EDCOM II	The Second Congressional Commission on Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IGRB	Intergovernmental Relations Body
KII	Key Informant Interview

LGU	Local Government Unit
LPCP	Local Protection of Children Program
MAFAR	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform
MBHTE	Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education
MFBM	Ministry of Finance, and Budget and Management
MILG	Ministry of the Interior and Local Government
MIPA	Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs
MOH	Ministry of Health
MSSD	Ministry of Social Services and Development
NNC	National Nutrition Council
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
RA	Republic Act
RPAN	Regional Plan of Action for Nutrition
SGA	Special Geographic Area
SLP	Sustainable Livelihood Program
SNP	Supervised Neighborhood Plan
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

This policy paper draws from the research that employed a four-tier data-gathering approach: (1) collection of relevant panel records, (2) high-level reflexive interviews, (3) community focus group discussions, and (4) a multi-sectoral roundtable forum. Guided by a diplomacy approach to early childhood development interventions (Vargas-Barón & Diehl, 2018), these methods informed the situational analysis and the recommendatory framework for collaborative policy reforms in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Panel records covered population surveys, legislation, administrative orders, financing and expenditure reports, relevant policies and programs, and conflict-related emergency data, alongside socioeconomic, health, nutrition, and education indicators. Building on the methods outlined above, this policy note situates Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) challenges and opportunities within the context of BARMM’s evolving governance and socio-political landscape.

ECCD in BARMM has seen modest but uneven improvements. Gains such as the gradual decline in child wasting—from 45% in 2015 to approximately 34% in 2023—suggest the potential of targeted interventions (FNRI, 2023). Yet, these achievements remain fragile. National institutions, including The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), have expressed concern over the region’s prospects, emphasizing that “millions of Filipino children are failing” due to chronic malnutrition, poor health, and inadequate early learning (Ulep et al., 2024). These concerns mirror global findings, with over 250 million children under age five in low- and middle-income countries reported at risk of not reaching their developmental potential (Black et al., 2016).

At the heart of this issue is governance. Nationally, the Early Years Act (Republic Act No. 10410) mandates a multi-sectoral approach to ECCD. However, its implementation has been described as “quixotic at best,” hindered by overlapping mandates, coordination failures, and weak accountability among co-equal executive agencies (Ulep et al., 2024). In BARMM, these challenges are compounded by a governance context and asymmetrical relations with national and local governments.

Although BARMM ministries have introduced key reforms enabled by the Bangsamoro peace process—including new systems for healthcare, education, and social services—these efforts have yet to reach the grassroots level effectively. The involvement of Local Government Units (LGU) in ECCD remains minimal, hindered by resource limitations and their exclusion from core planning and implementation mechanisms. Consequently, ECCD service delivery remains incoherent and uneven, particularly in remote barangays and sitios where needs are most urgent. These constraints are further intensified by decades of armed conflict, displacement, poverty, and climate-related vulnerabilities. Without deeper local engagement and stronger intergovernmental coordination, ECCD in BARMM will continue to fall short of its transformative potential.

This policy paper argues for an integrated, context-sensitive reform agenda that strengthens vertical and horizontal governance linkages while rooting ECCD policies in the lived realities of Bangsamoro communities. Addressing structural barriers—while recognizing the historical and political context of BARMM’s pursuit of self-determination—is essential to achieving inclusive, sustained improvements in the welfare and development of Bangsamoro children.

Analysis of Key Issues and Challenges

Based on the synthesis of the gathered data on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in BARMM, the following key issues emerge:

ECCD in Crisis: Scope and Scale of Deprivation

Despite gains following the establishment of BARMM, the state of ECCD in the region remains critically underdeveloped. Recent analyses by EDCOM II (2024), UNICEF (as cited in EDCOM II, 2024), and the Bangsamoro Education Reform and Development Plan (BERDP, 2021–2035) reveal alarming statistics: 44% of children aged 3–5 years old are not enrolled in any ECCD program, and existing facilities are overburdened with an average

worker-child ratio of 1:35.6, far above the recommended 1:25. Participation among indigenous populations is especially low, at just 3.9%.

Chronic malnutrition is widespread as well, 40% of children under five are stunted, 22.6% are underweight, and 10% are wasting (EDCOM II, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; BERDP, 2021–2035). Data from 2021 place Tawi-Tawi’s stunting prevalence at 32.9%, while earlier records show 38.5% in Basilan (2019) and 39.9% in Maguindanao (2018) as shown on the table below. These conditions are rooted in food insecurity, conflict-driven displacement, and fragile health systems that severely limit children’s developmental outcomes.

TABLE 1
BARMM Provincial Under-5 Stunting and Wasting Trend from 2013 to 2021

Province	Indicators	2013	2015	2018	2019	2021
Basilan	Underweight	11.9	26.6		28	
	Stunting	35.1	48.1		38.5	
	Wasting	8.0	4.4		11.5	
Maguindanao	Underweight	22.4	25.8	23.9		
	Stunting	33.9	45.6	39.9		
	Wasting	11.7	5.9	8.3		
Lanao del Sur	Underweight	25.2	21.1		17.8	
	Stunting	42.0	49.0		33.3	
	Wasting	7.0	5.2		3.2	
Sulu	Underweight	20.9	27.9			
	Stunting	39.8	40.9			
	Wasting	8.5	14.2			
Tawi-Tawi	Underweight	26.5	27.2			23.3
	Stunting	43.3	41.2			32.9
	Wasting	9.5	14.2			7.6

Sources: Ministry of Health. (2025). Consolidated Nutrition Division Data. Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao DOST-FNRI (2020). 2018 Expanded National Nutrition Survey Monograph Series: The food, health and nutrition situation of Maguindanao DOST-FNRI (n.d.). Expanded National Nutrition Survey: 2019 Results Lanao Del Sur

Structural Factors: Poverty, Displacement, and Fragile Autonomy

BARMM has recorded improvements in poverty reduction and economic growth, with poverty incidence declining from 55.9% in 2018 to 23.5% in 2023 (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2024). However, these gains are fragile. The region remains the poorest in the Philippines, and a large “near-poor” population remains highly vulnerable to shocks. Armed conflict, inter-kin and community-level conflicts, and climate-related displacement continue to disrupt ECCD services. In 2023, an estimated 129,056 individuals were displaced in BARMM, many of them young children whose development is most at-risk during times of instability. Field case studies in the flood-plain municipality of Mamasapano (Maguindanao del Sur), the island municipality of Tandubas (Tawi-Tawi), and newly-created municipality of Nabalawag (Special Geographic Area) illustrate how recurrent displacement driven by armed conflict, clan feuds (rido), military operations, and climate-related disasters undermines consistent access to ECCD services. In Mamasapano, for instance, repeated evacuations due to clashes between lead to the closure of Child Development Centers (CDC) and the suspension of learning. Tandubas faces similar challenges, where geographic isolation and local political disputes further disrupt ECCD operations. In Nabalawag, frequent clan-related violence limits the mobility of teachers, child development workers (CDW), and health personnel, leaving children without vital care and support during critical developmental periods.

Despite its autonomy, BARMM’s governance remains in transition, marked by unclear

mandates, uneven devolution, and weak coordination. The Bangsamoro Local Governance Code (BLGC), passed in 2023, remains unenforced, leaving unclear responsibilities between ministries and LGUs. The implementing guidelines for BLGC have taken considerable time for completion creating gaps between the urgency of instituting collaborative and integrative ECCD programs involving the ministries and the LGUs in a phased and capacitative procedures.

ECCD Governance and Delivery: Fragmented but Improving

BARMM’s ECCD delivery is led by three key ministries: Ministry of Health (MOH) for children aged 0–2, Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) for ages 3–4, and Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) for ages 5–6. While this segmentation enables each ministry to focus on its core mandate, it also creates major challenges in coordination, continuity, and child-level tracking, hindering the delivery of integrated child development outcomes. MOH’s first 1,000 days program has expanded in recent years, with budget allocations increasing from PhP26.8M in 2023 to PhP47.3M in 2025. However, service delivery remains uneven, particularly in geographically isolated and conflict-affected areas where access is limited by violence and the shortage of health workers. Similarly, MSSD’s investments in CDCs and supplementary feeding have grown, but remain insufficient: only 1,903 functional CDCs currently serve 2,595 barangays, leaving nearly 400 barangays without any CDC at all. The current CDC/Supervised Neighborhood Play (SNP) workforce numbers just 2,732, meeting only 22% of the estimated 12,106 needed across the region.

A recurring theme in the study is the absence of cohesive and coherent ECCD governance. BARMM ministries, national agencies, and LGUs often operate in silos, with minimal coordination and shared

accountability. ECCD-related program, activities, and project implementation among regional and local government institutions remain less aligned and integral resulting, for instance, in challenges of tracking the actual development of early childhood care beneficiaries. With less collaboration and integration, the use of meager resources had been less optimal. While frameworks like Regional Plan of Action for Nutrition (RPAN) and Local Protection of Children Program (LPCP) led by the provincial provide entry points for multisectoral collaboration, they are not embedded within a unified ECCD governance strategy that clarifies institutional roles, aligns policy timelines, and consolidates resources. This disjointed ecosystem results in duplicative efforts, inefficient resource use, and suboptimal service delivery. It also limits the ability of the region to scale successful models or respond flexibly to complex, cross-cutting developmental needs.

Although BARMM ministries have established closer coordination through the socio-

economic development subcluster, broader intergovernmental collaboration remains weak. LGU roles in ECCD implementation are poorly defined, and engagement with national agencies is inconsistent. In practice, many of BARMM’s ministries continue to mirror the structure and functions of their national counterparts, rather than forging a governance model suited to BARMM’s autonomous and asymmetrical context. As a result, the region has yet to fully leverage its unique governance framework to foster integrated, innovative, and responsive ECCD service delivery.

Financing and Utilization: Trends and Constraints

BARMM’s ECCD budget has expanded significantly, from PhP1.5M in 2022 to PhP148.5M in 2024 as shown in the table below. In addition, budget utilization also improved, reaching 80% in 2023.

TABLE 2
ECCD Budget Appropriation and Utilization (2020-2024)¹

Fiscal Year	Appropriation (PhP)	Obligation (PhP)	BUR	Status
2020	20,313,500.00	-	-	Funds initially allocated for ECCD (including other PAPs) were adjusted and realigned to address immediate needs arising from the pandemic, including livelihood support, emergency aid, and the provision of essential food and non-food items, among others
2021	10,801,300.00	6,415,302.36	59%	As of December 31, 2022
2022	1,499,800.00	1,139,400.00	76%	As of December 31, 2023
2023	52,911,051.00	42,174,800.00	80%	As of July 30, 2024; implementation ongoing with validity extending until December 2024
2024	148,461,500.00	54,490,300.00	37%	As of July 30, 2024; implementation ongoing

¹ Ministry of Social Services and Development (2024). Data on Early Childhood Care and Development in BARMM. Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

However, key challenges persist:

- 1. Last-mile service gaps:** Despite funding, ECCD programs remain inaccessible to thousands of children due to geography, conflict, and workforce shortages.
- 2. Local government underinvestment:** LGUs allocate minimal shares of their budgets to social services and nutrition despite rising levels of income, often prioritizing economic infrastructure instead. A pattern of regional and municipal government financial earnings and allocation illustrates a continuing streak of economic expansion as income rises in the last decade of relative security stability across the autonomous region. Inversely, the pattern of investment

for social services consistently falls only around a percentage of total local government income despite deepening and widespread deterioration of early childhood development across the localities.

- 3. National-regional-local disjunction:** While programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DWSD) like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) operate in BARMM, agencies like the National ECCD Council and National Nutrition Council (NNC) have pulled back support, limiting BARMM's access to national resources and technical assistance.

Policy Recommendations

BARMM continues to face a complex web of structural, social, and institutional barriers in delivering ECCD services. While nominal progress has been made such as increased regional investment, expanded feeding programs, and improved CDC infrastructure systemic issues persist, particularly in reaching the “last mile” as previously discussed. The study’s reform agenda outlines a proposed comprehensive roadmap to transform BARMM’s ECCD governance and programming through three interconnected pillars: **1) ECCD Devolution; 2) ECCD Whole-of-Government Ecosystem; and 3) ECCD Service Delivery.**

ECCD Devolution

While decentralization is a core tenet of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), the study emphasizes that devolution must be capacity-based, not automatic. The recommendation is a phased approach to ensure LGUs are equipped with the data, institutional infrastructure, and human resources necessary to take on ECCD responsibilities responsibly and sustainably.

A two-phase strategy is proposed:

Phase 1: Strategic Policy, Planning and Program Development

This initial phase involves the formation of a technical working group (TWG) composed of the Ministers of the MBHTE, MOH, Ministry of the Interior and Local Government (MILG), and Ministry of Finance, and Budget and Management (MFBM) to lead in the institutionalization of ECCD reforms in BARMM. The TWG, coordinated by the MSSD, spearheads the development

of a data-driven, intersectoral, integrative, collaborative, and coordinative multi-sector ECCD roadmap that aligns the priorities, roles, and timelines of key ministries, local governments, and stakeholders. Once finalized, the BARMM Chief Minister and other high-level regional authorities endorse the roadmap for a two-pronged approach of adoption and implementation involving ministerial programming and a legislative parliamentary process. The first step is the incorporation of the roadmap into a formal BARMM inter-ministerial policy, followed by a rollout across the local government units with the MILG facilitating. The roadmap outlines the programs, activities, and projects for an evidence-based, collaborative, participative, and broad multi-sectoral BARMM ECCD strategic plan. Simultaneously with the first step, the TWG prepares, submits, and shepherds BARMM ECCD parliamentary legislative agenda drawing from the comprehensive regional autonomous roadmap for ECCD.

TWG EXPANSION AND BARMM ECCD LEGISLATION

The existing BARMM ECCD Technical Working Group expands from current key ministerial composition of MSSD, MBHTE, MOH, and MILG. The expansion includes the MFBM, MAFAR, and MIPA among the BARMM ministries and representatives from provincial, city, and municipal local government units, in accordance with their respective capacities.

The main task of the TWG is to develop a comprehensive, integrative, and coordinated BARMM ECCD roadmap for

- Parliamentary legislation;
- Integration of the plan for ministerial and local government programming on the other hand;
- Ideally, the Chief Minister endorses the expanded TWG and its parliamentary.

DEVELOPMENT OF A DATA-DRIVEN, INTER-SECTORAL ECCD ROADMAP

The TWG shall lead the formulation of a regional ECCD roadmap that will serve as the overarching framework for ECCD implementation across BARMM. The roadmap shall be characterized by the following core components:

- Guiding principles and strategic direction;
- A continuum approach addressing all ECCD stages (0-8 years old);
- A convergence framework to ensure effective multi-sectoral coordination;
- Establishment of a unified beneficiary registry system;
- A participatory and consultative planning process;
- Clearly defined goals, objectives, milestones, standards, and a detailed action plan across ECCD stages;
- Clarified roles and responsibilities of National Government Agencies (NGAs), Local Government Units (LGUs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs);
- Coordination and partnership mechanisms;
- A comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system;
- Budgetary requirements and a sustainable financing strategy.

OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE ECCD ROADMAP

Upon completion, the Chief Minister shall formally endorse the ECCD roadmap, recognizing the official implementation framework for the program across the BARMM. Simultaneously, the TWG submits and works with the BARMM parliament in the legislation of a comprehensive regional BARMM ECCD law reflecting the multi-sectoral, coordinative, integrative, and evidence-based programming set in the roadmap.

POLICY ADOPTION BY THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MILG)

The MILG shall adopt the ECCD implementation framework and disseminate it to all LGUs within BARMM. This ensures policy coherence and uniformity across the region as ECCD responsibilities are devolved.

Phase 2: Localization and Implementation Support

The second phase focuses on the localization and operationalization of phased ECCD devolution across BARMM's LGUs. This includes the development of localized ECCD transition plans tailored to the specific capacities, needs, and contexts of individual LGUs. Central to this phase is the establishment of local ECCD

councils or committees that will coordinate and oversee ECCD service delivery at the community level. Throughout this process, the TWG will provide continuous support, capacity-building, and oversight to ensure consistency with the regional ECCD roadmap and to address implementation challenges as they arise.

LOCALIZATION OF ECCD DEVOLUTION TRANSITION PLANS

The TWG shall assist each LGU in crafting a phased ECCD devolution transition plan based on local government capacities and in accordance to the framework provided by the BARMM Local Governance Code.

ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL ECCD COUNCIL / COMMITTEES

Each LGU shall establish a Local ECCD Council or Committee, composed of representatives from CSOs, parents, children's groups, relevant NGAs, and other stakeholders. These bodies shall:

- Approve and fund the local ECCD devolution transition plan;
- Monitor local ECCD performance and address implementation bottlenecks.
- Oversee its implementation;
- Ensure alignment with the regional ECCD roadmap;

ONGOING SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT FROM THE TWG

The ECCD TWG shall continue to provide strategic support through:

- Monitoring and evaluation of ECCD implementation at both regional and local levels;
- Delivering technical guidance, capacity-building, and resource augmentation to LGUs;
- Documenting challenges, best practices, and lessons learned from implementation;
- Providing evidence-based policy recommendations to the Chief Minister and local executives for continuous improvement of ECCD service delivery.

ECCD Whole-of-Government Ecosystem

To address persistent under-coordination, the study recommends systemic reforms anchored in horizontal (inter-ministerial) and vertical (regional-LGU-national) collaboration. These reforms aim to institutionalize shared accountability, align resources, and create a cohesive and coherent ECCD governance system.

a. Budgetary Alignment through the IGRB

The lack of alignment between BARMM regional programs and local government budgeting undermines the efficiency and scale of ECCD delivery. To address this, the study proposes using the Intergovernmental Relations Body (IGRB) to reconcile ECCD budgetary and fiscal governance between national, BARMM, and local levels; engage DBM, DOF, and

BARMM's Ministry of Finance and Budget Management (MFBM) to harmonize planning and fiscal priorities; and integrate ECCD into LGU budget reviews and development planning based on a shared assessment of needs.

b. *Rebuilding BARMM-National Agency Partnerships*

The withdrawal or weakening of national agency engagement such as NNC and the ECCD Council, post-BOL ratification has left BARMM ministries overstretched. The study urges the reactivation and expansion of partnerships between:

- MOH and the NNC for technical support on malnutrition interventions;
- MSSD and DSWD, building on existing 4Ps and SLP implementation; and
- MBHTE and the DepEd Madrasah Program to integrate ECCD into Tahderiyyah and Ibtida'i education.

c. *Integrated and Collaborative ECCD Governance Framework*

The establishment of a parliament-legislated multi-sector integrated BARMM ECCD governing structure coordinated by the MSSD is vital to strategically assess, plan, deliver, align, and evaluate Early Childhood Development (ECD) at varying levels of child development. A coordinative and integrative ECD governance approach to the complex and interconnected factors shaping childhood development requires joint and systematically aligned action from the health, education, nutrition,

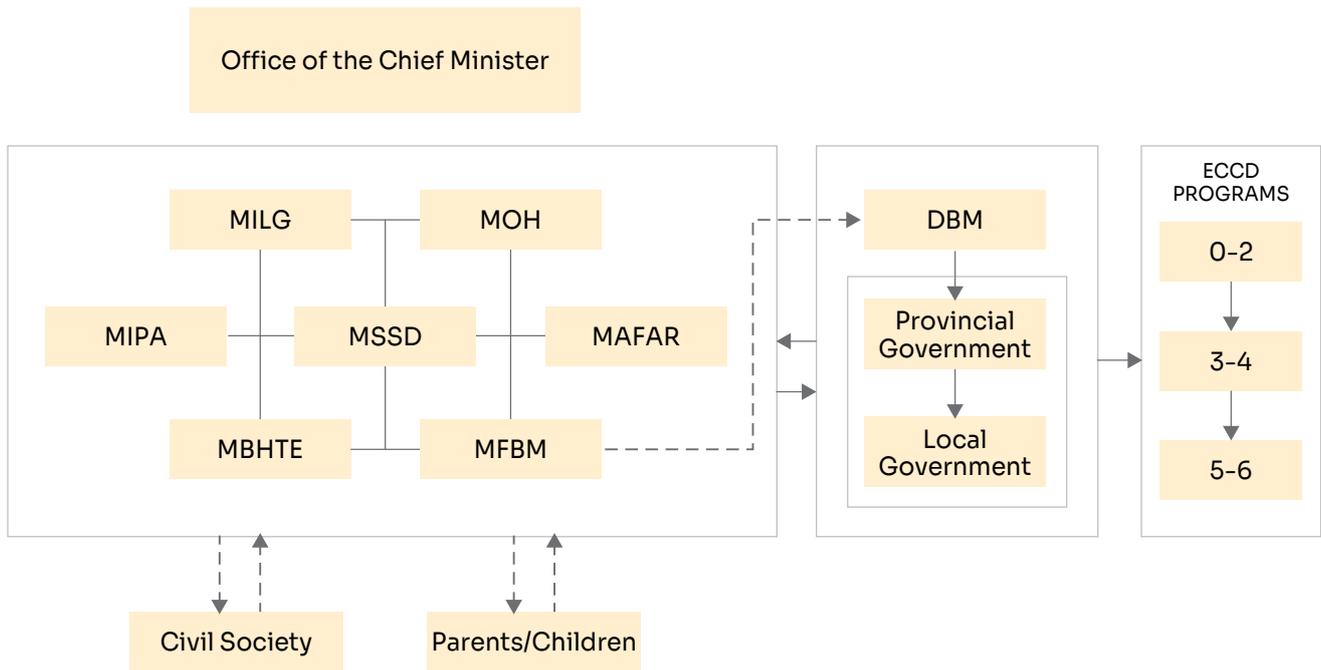
parental, civil society, and financial resource mobilization support. This ECCD governing body and its initiatives require parliamentary legislation and sustained resource support to immediately and continually address the depth and the scale of the early childhood care and education crisis in the BARMM.

The multi-sector ECCD Committee or Cluster should include MOH, MBHTE, MILG, MFBM, and potentially Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR) and Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MIPA). MAFAR plays crucial role in shoring up food and agricultural programs as an additional and critical initiative in addressing malnutrition driven by the paucity of food sources. Given the depth and breadth of the poverty situation of indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro, MIPA provides essential support in crafting cultural-sensitive programs and development action. As the primary body addressing the ECCD situation in BARMM, the BARMM ECCD structure, the group undertake the following:

- Coordinate strategy and policy across sectors;
- Institutionalize local ECCD committees at LGU level;
- Facilitate shared monitoring and accountability mechanisms; and
- Ensure alignment with the Bangsamoro Local Governance Code and support participatory and culturally grounded governance.

FIGURE 1

Proposed Governance Structure for the ECCD Program



d. Nutrition Council and Multi-Sector Malnutrition Response

The proposed BARMM Nutrition Council would function as a formal, multi-sectoral platform that enables the MOH to coordinate more effectively with the MAFAR, NNC, and local food security actors. By institutionalizing this body, BARMM can harmonize efforts across health, agriculture, and social services to address the root causes of child hunger and malnutrition. It also strengthens the region’s capacity to implement a sustained, systems-level response, linking emergency feeding, maternal and child nutrition, livelihood support, and long-term food systems planning under a unified governance framework.

ECCD Service Delivery

To translate strategy into outcomes, the report recommends five foundational reforms to enhance quality, reach, and sustainability of ECCD services.

a. Coherent ECCD Development, Delivery, and Assessment Framework

Currently, ECCD efforts operate without a coherent logic model. The study proposes creating a collaborative framework that:

- Integrates goals, indicators, and developmental milestones across ministries;
- Establishes outcome-oriented metrics beyond outputs (e.g., tracking stunting reduction, learning gains); and
- Embeds participatory monitoring through parent, teacher, and LGU feedback loops.

b. ECCD Resource Mapping and Budget Tagging

To ensure the efficient and equitable use of limited resources, the study recommends that BARMM ministries and LGUs adopt a more systematic approach to ECCD budgeting and planning. This includes conducting comprehensive resource and personnel inventories at the barangay and municipal levels to map existing assets and gaps in service delivery.

In addition, both direct and indirect expenditures related to ECCD such as funding for CDC salaries of CDWs, supplemental feeding programs, and training initiatives should be explicitly tagged within local and regional budgets. This level of budget tagging will help clarify spending priorities and enhance transparency. Finally, LGUs with sufficient capacity and political commitment should be identified and prioritized for phased devolution of ECCD functions, allowing for a more gradual and context-sensitive rollout of responsibilities across the region.

c. Child Registry System: Tracking Across Age Transitions

Currently, BARMM lacks a unified tracking system to monitor children as they transition between ministries namely, the MOH for ages 0–2 years old, the MSSD for ages 3–4, and the MBHTE for age 5 and above. To address this, the development of an integrated and protected child registry system is integral. Such a system would enable ministries to monitor individual children’s health, nutrition, and developmental outcomes over time; ensure that children receive timely support without falling through bureaucratic gaps; and facilitate real-time coordination between agencies at the child level. An effective registry would not only improve service delivery but also provide a vital foundation for data-driven policymaking and inclusive planning.

d. ECCD Workforce Development and Institutional Training

Addressing the chronic shortage and low

eligibility of CDWs and Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers require:

- Establishing a regional ECCD training center, starting in Cotabato City²;
- Offering pre- and in-service training grounded in Bangsamoro cultural and Islamic values;
- Expanding higher education pathways for ECE across higher education institutions (HEI) in BARMM; and
- Creating plantilla positions at the LGU level to professionalize and stabilize the ECCD workforce.

e. Integrating ECCD into the Madrasah Education System

Given the cultural centrality of Islamic education in BARMM, integrating ECCD into existing Tahderiyyah (pre-school) and Ibtida’i (primary) programs offers a scalable, community-rooted platform. This reform should align with MBHTE’s core curriculum and benefit from DepEd’s national Madrasah support.

2 As suggested by BARMM ministry representatives and stakeholders during the multi-sector roundtable discussion and workshop. Cotabato City is also comparatively the most advanced in BARMM.

Institutional Roles and Policy Accountability Matrix for ECCD in BARMM

Effective ECCD reform in BARMM requires clearly defined institutional mandates and coordinated policy accountability across governance levels. This matrix maps the key actors, their roles, responsibilities, and leverage points, for implementing the proposed reform agenda.

TABLE 3
Proposed Institutional Roles and Policy Accountability Matrix for ECCD in BARMM

Policy Recommendation	BARMM Ministries	Bangsamoro Parliament	EDCOM II / Congress
Budgetary Alignment through the IGRB	MFBM, BPDA, MSSD, IGRB	Institutionalize IGRB mechanisms for cross-ministerial budgeting	
Rebuilding BARMM–National Agency Partnerships	MSSD (lead), IGRB		Clarify national agency obligations under RA 10410 post-BOL
Integrated ECCD Governance Framework	MSSD (lead), MOH, MBHTE, BPDA	Adopt regional policy integrating ECCD into multi-ministry programming	
Nutrition Council and Multi-Sector Malnutrition Response	MOH (lead), MSSD, MBHTE, MAFAR	Enact ordinance to formalize BARMM Nutrition Council	Align with national nutrition strategy; fund joint malnutrition response programs
Coherent ECCD Development and Assessment Framework	MBHTE, MSSD, BPDA		
ECCD Resource Mapping and Budget Tagging	MFBM, BPDA, MSSD	Mandate performance-based budgeting for ECCD	
Child Registry System: Tracking Across Age Transitions	MSSD (lead), MOH, MBHTE, BPDA, DICT		
ECCD Workforce Development and Institutional Training	MBHTE (lead), MSSD, CHED, HEIs	Allocate plantilla for CDWs; institutionalize in-service training	Pass ECCD workforce professionalization bill
Integrating ECCD into the Madrasah Education System	MBHTE, DepEd, DMI/ Private Providers	Recognize ECCD Islamic education models under BARMM policy	Amend EYA to formally include Tahderiyah as part of ECCD system

Conclusion: Seizing the Window for Transformative ECCD Reform in BARMM

The path toward lasting peace and self-determination in the Bangsamoro rests not only on the formal frameworks of autonomy and the negotiated foundations of the peace, but on the everyday capacities of its institutions to cultivate an educated and empowered citizenry, with education, beginning in early childhood, at its core. Education is more than a sectoral mandate; it is the foundation upon which the Bangsamoro construct their collective future. Realizing this vision demands a quality and responsive education system, spanning early childhood care and development to higher learning, underpinned by robust governance arrangements that can meet the scale of the task ahead. Committing to foundational learning for ages 0-8 and supporting teachers should be at the center of systemic reforms in education (Gershberg et al, 2025).

Strengthening governance across the entire education ecosystem ensures that reforms are not fragmented, but part of a coherent, long-term strategy that addresses the needs of every learner from the earliest years. Fixing this ecosystem—aligning policies, financing, workforce capacity, infrastructure, and community engagement—is not simply a technical requirement, but a peacebuilding imperative. Learning recovery and governance reform are inseparable: the former cannot be sustained without the latter. Building a strategic, inclusive, feasible, and resilient system—one that guarantees equitable access to ECCD, fosters strong local and regional leadership, and maintains high standards of service delivery—is essential to securing the human capital necessary to consolidate peace, safeguard autonomy, and fulfill the Bangsamoro’s aspirations for generations to come.

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About EDCOM 2

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is a national Commission established through Republic Act No. 11899, tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector, and to propose transformative solutions, from 2023 to 2025. It is composed of lawmakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and is guided by an Advisory Council, and assisted by the Technical Secretariat.



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