

Building Futures

Using Metaphors and Values to Tell a Story of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh

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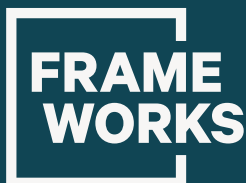


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Executive Summary

Early childhood development (ECD) is critical for lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing, yet public understanding of what shapes it remains limited. This research, conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and the BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED), BRAC University, tested new communication frames—including metaphors and values—to identify those that improve understanding and build support for ECD investments across Bangladesh. An iterative research methodology—moving from qualitative to quantitative and back to qualitative—guided the process, with each phase building on insights from the previous one. The study included rapid On-the-Street interviews with 72 participants, two waves of national surveys reaching a total of 4,551 individuals, and six Peer Discourse Sessions involving 60 participants overall. Findings show that framing early childhood as essential to *National Progress* (জাতীয় উন্নয়ন) and *Equal Opportunities for All* (সবার জন্য সমান সুযোগ) positions ECD as a shared national responsibility. The value of *Shared Responsibility* (সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব) taps into Bangladesh’s strong sense of collective identity and history of achieving progress through united effort. When ECD is linked to these values, people express greater confidence that the nation can and will make the investments needed to improve outcomes for all children. Findings also show that metaphors such as *Brain Building* (মস্তিষ্কের নির্মাণ), *Playing Catch* (বল ছোড়াছুড়ি খেলা), *Weaving Skills Rope* (দড়ি বুনন দক্ষতা), and the *Resilience Scale* (সহনশীলতার দাঁড়িপাল্লা) make developmental science more tangible and understandable, showing how nurturing relationships, supportive environments, and access to services build skills, good brain development, and resilience in children from the earliest years. This research shows that *how* we communicate about ECD matters as much as *what* we communicate. By weaving metaphors and values into a clear narrative that connects children’s development to concrete solutions, communicators can make ECD understandable and urgent—motivating collective investment that helps all children thrive and drives the nation’s progress.



Introduction

Bangladesh was one of the first countries to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the early 1990s. Ever since, that framework of children's fundamental civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights has influenced the laws and plans for children in Bangladesh.

Building on this enduring dedication, the nation has witnessed a significant evolution in its approach to early childhood development (ECD). The Government of Bangladesh's endorsement of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy in 2013,¹ followed by the Strategic Operational and Implementation Plan of the ECCD Policy in 2016,² has been instrumental in this progress. The explicit inclusion of ECD within the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 constituted a significant milestone,³ elevating its global policy position. Since the adoption of the SDGs, Bangladesh has strategically leveraged this enhanced prominence to further its national ECD agenda.

The successful realization of the SDGs in Bangladesh necessitates the concerted efforts of a diverse array of stakeholders, encompassing both governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of both national and international origin. A collective understanding of the critical role of early development in shaping the developmental trajectories of children and the nation at large remains paramount for all involved. Recognizing this need, the ECD sector in Bangladesh continues to play a vital role through its advocacy and communication initiatives, striving to enhance public understanding of the scientific groundwork of early development and to garner increased support for evidence-based policies and programs that ideally serve the developmental and learning needs of young children.

While the ECD sector in Bangladesh actively promotes investments in programs and services to support children's early development, a fundamental obstacle remains—many people lack a deep understanding of the developmental processes that play out during the early years and into school-age years, including the key cognitive and socioemotional skills that are developing during this key early window. There are in fact large gaps between the expert knowledge of early childhood scientists and the everyday assumptions, perceptions, and understandings of the public. ECD is a critical investment for a nation's progress, yet public awareness and policy prioritization often lag behind. This gap underscores the need for effective framing to expand public perception and strengthen people's understandings and mindsets.⁴ Effective framing ensures that ECD is not just seen as a child welfare issue but as a fundamental driver of education, health, and economic development. In Bangladesh, where early childhood policies are still evolving, strategic communication is essential to shaping public narratives, mobilizing support, and influencing policy action. Strategic and intentional framing can drive positive social change, as frames influence how people interpret issues and determine who is responsible for addressing them.

This report—the culmination of a series of research activities undertaken by the FrameWorks Institute and the BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED), BRAC University—describes a set of empirically tested framing strategies, embedded within a larger narrative framework, that can effectively improve understanding of and support for ECD in Bangladesh.

WHAT ARE MINDSETS, AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Cultural mindsets, also known as cultural models, are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world and how we make decisions. Some mindsets make it easy for people to think of our current social arrangements as normal and right, while other mindsets facilitate productive critique and support for positive change. What's more, multiple mindsets are available in a culture, in opinion groups, and even within individuals. One mindset or another can be strengthened by what people see or hear. This makes it important for communicators to understand mindsets and how to navigate them.

WHY DO STRATEGIC FRAMING RESEARCH?

Communicating about scientific topics such as ECD is not always straightforward, as people use preexisting cultural understandings to structure their interpretations of any messaging to which they are exposed. Communicators can be more strategic and effective in framing their messages when they have a deeper understanding of people's assumptions and thinking, as the way an issue is "framed" strongly influences the chance that the public will embrace new ideas and solutions. Frames shape the way people attribute responsibility, understand how an issue works, and support specific solutions. Knowing how to frame ECD issues, therefore, is a vital component in creating real and sustained change in the lives of children across Bangladesh.

Research Background

This report and the research that informs it are follow-ups to a first phase of framing research supported by Porticus Bangladesh and conducted by FrameWorks and BRAC IED in 2017–2019. That work used FrameWorks' Strategic Frame Analysis™ method to create a detailed map of how key stakeholders understand and think about children's early development, and to compare and contrast these understandings to the science of early development.⁵ That research also sought to better understand the sector's narrative and communication practices at the time.⁶

In this first phase of research, researchers conducted and analyzed interviews with ECD experts in Bangladesh to identify consensus understandings of the science of ECD, the state of the ECD sector in Bangladesh, and the key challenges and issues facing families and young children in the country. This analysis was then integrated into an existing expert story developed through nearly two decades of research into public and expert thinking about ECD. That body of work, a collaboration between the FrameWorks and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (HCDC), is based on interviews with early childhood science and neuroscience experts from the United States, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, Kenya, and the United Kingdom. The integrated expert story was subsequently shared with Bangladeshi ECD experts convened by the Porticus Foundation as a scientific advisory group for this project. Their feedback informed the final draft of an expert account of ECD in Bangladesh.

In parallel, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore how three key populations—members of the general public, junior workers in the ECD sector, and ready-made garment (RMG) factory leaders—perceived and understood ECD. These interviews were aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the dominant cultural “models”—key assumptions, understandings, and patterns of thought—that structure how people think about children's early development.

The findings from these two research streams were then compared to identify overlaps and gaps between expert perspectives and those of the nonexperts. To further contextualize these insights, researchers analyzed how ECD is currently communicated in Bangladesh. This was done through a *Field Frame Analysis* of communications materials from leading national and international organizations working in the ECD sector.⁷ Finally, On-the-Street (OTS) interviews—short, rapid one-on-one interviews—were conducted to further capture public perceptions of ECD, providing additional insight into how people outside the field understand and engage with the issue.

The comparison between experts and nonexperts and their relative understandings of early developmental processes and outcomes in children revealed several important overlaps and gaps.

Key Overlaps

The research revealed several areas where nonexpert perspectives aligned with those of ECD scientists and experts. Both groups recognized the following:

- Basic inputs—such as affection, good nutrition, adequate shelter, and immunization—are critical for healthy early development.
- Development unfolds across multiple domains, including physical, mental, social, language, and moral growth.
- The quality of a child’s environment plays a vital role in shaping outcomes.
- Poverty can undermine healthy development.
- Early childhood lays the foundation for later life.
- Government has an important role to play in supporting children’s development.
- Urbanization and technology create challenges for children and families.
- Play is essential for children’s learning.

Key Gaps

Despite these overlaps, the research identified significant gaps between expert and nonexpert groups (members of the public, RMG factory leaders, and junior ECD personnel):

- Many people—including those in the ECD sector—underestimate the importance of the earliest years, focusing instead on school age as the key stage of development.
- Nonexperts often overlook the importance of brain and emotional development in young children, as well as the factors that shape these processes.
- There is widespread fatalism about whether children, especially those in urban poverty, can achieve positive developmental outcomes.
- Experts see child care centers as essential for early learning, while nonexperts view them primarily as places to meet basic needs (safety, hygiene, food).
- Experts highlight a wide range of policy interventions that could improve outcomes, but nonexperts struggle to imagine government responsibilities beyond traditional supports.
- Experts see traditional gender roles—men as decision-makers, women as caregivers—as problematic, while nonexperts accept them as natural.
- Experts emphasize varied risk and protective factors that influence children’s outcomes, while nonexperts tend to rely on an idealized model of childhood.
- Experts stress the earliest years as crucial for intervention, whereas nonexperts, including some ECD personnel, “age up” and focus more on school years.

Based on these findings, researchers offered several preliminary recommendations for the ECD sector in Bangladesh. They emphasized the need to clearly define the “early” years of development and to highlight the brain as a vital physical organ during this period, alongside a more consistent focus on children’s emotional skills. They recommended that professionals articulate more clearly the foundational skills that begin developing before school age and explain what is already underway in those years. The research also pointed to the importance of identifying concrete ways to strengthen the child’s ecological environment—including family, neighborhood, and school—and underscored the value of emphasizing shared responsibility, particularly the role of fathers and male caregivers. Finally, it recommended positioning child care centers not only as places that meet basic needs but also as critical settings for early learning.⁸

A second phase of research, which provides the basis for this report, seeks to address the challenges identified in the first phase. It has involved developing and testing a range of reframing tools and strategies in order to identify those that can most effectively be used by ECD advocates to both strengthen people’s understandings of early childhood and build support for public and private investments in early childhood policies and programs. Specifically, five metaphors and one phrase were tested for their effectiveness in improving public understanding of ECD, and six values were tested to determine which are best suited to build support for investments in the ECD sector in Bangladesh.

Telling a Science-Based Story of Early Childhood Development

Over the past two decades, FrameWorks has collaborated closely with the HCDC and other partners to develop a strategic communications approach to tell a clear, compelling, and science-based story of children’s early development.⁹ This work combines insights from developmental science with communications research to create metaphors that make complex concepts about early childhood accessible to the public. By translating scientific findings into vivid, everyday images, these metaphors clarify how children’s early experiences shape lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing, while also highlighting the roles of caregivers, communities, and public systems in supporting positive development.¹⁰

For this second phase of research in Bangladesh, FrameWorks and BRAC IED researchers tested a set of metaphors that have already proved effective in other national contexts in helping people better understand early developmental processes in children. In consultation with an Advisory Board convened by Porticus Bangladesh, five metaphors (*Brain Architecture*, *Toxic Stress*, *Serve and Return*, *Resilience Scale*, *Weaving Skills Rope*) and one phrase (*Born to Learn*) were chosen for adaptation and testing in the context of Bangladesh. Alongside these, a set of values—initially five and later expanded to six (*Adaptability*, *National Progress*, *Human Potential*, *Shared Responsibility*, *Equal Opportunities for All*, and *Empathy*)—were developed for testing to determine their effectiveness in building public support for public and private investments in ECD policies and programs.

Specifically, the research aimed to do the following:

- Contextualize and test the five metaphors and one phrase to evaluate their effectiveness in elevating public understanding of early development, thereby improving child-rearing and care practices at the family and community levels.
- Develop and test the set of values to determine which, if any, effectively build support for early childhood as a policy priority and area of investment in Bangladesh, as measured through frame-testing.

Methods

The research employed an iterative approach to data collection across urban and rural areas in five divisions of Bangladesh, engaging participants with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, education, and economic status. Tools were simplified for comprehension, accommodating participants whose education ranged from no literacy to postgraduate levels. All research was conducted in Bangla, and all frame elements—metaphors, values, and the phrase—were tested in this language. Researchers collected data directly for the qualitative components—On-the-Street (OTS) interviews and Peer Discourse Sessions (PDS)—while trained field research assistants administered the quantitative surveys. Prior to starting the research the Institutional Review Board at the James P. Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, reviewed the research proposal and provided ethical clearance (Protocol No. IRB-17 September’23-030).

Contextualization of Research Tools

To contextualize for Bangladesh, all research tools were translated from English to Bangla and piloted in both urban and rural areas of the country. The goal was to ensure that the tools used familiar language, were easy to understand, and effectively communicated meaning to diverse audiences. During piloting, the team simplified difficult words and long sentences, replaced complex terminology with everyday language, and adjusted phrasing to match natural speech.

To further improve accessibility, 10 BRAC IED para-counselors—experienced in regional dialects and linguistic diversity—provided feedback. For example, one important change was adding the English word *brain* alongside the Bangla term *mastishka*, since many people found the Bangla term difficult to grasp. This decision aligns with research on “language contact” in Bangladesh, where English words are increasingly integrated into everyday Bangla through media and cultural exchange.¹¹ Piloting confirmed that including the English word *brain* improved comprehension.

Metaphors were also contextualized and elaborated. For example, the *Resilience Scale* metaphor was adapted by replacing an original pencil-balancing demonstration with the familiar *daripalla* (traditional weighing scale) to make the concept more culturally resonant. Interview questions were reformulated, and conversational techniques such as repetition, prompts, and rapport-building encouraged participants to share richer, more detailed responses.

Deliberate piloting was essential because Bangladesh is characterized by significant linguistic, geographic, cultural, and educational diversity. Everyday Bangla differs from formal Bangla, and regional dialects vary widely, making careful language choice critical for comprehension.¹² Educational differences further affected how participants interpreted the tools, underscoring the need for clear, simple wording to avoid confusion and ensure that questions were accessible to people with a wide range of literacy levels.

Iterative Methodology: Qualitative → Quantitative → Qualitative

An iterative methodology was adopted to allow flexibility and adaptation throughout the research process.¹³ Each phase built upon insights from the previous stage: qualitative OTS interviews informed the design of a two-wave quantitative survey, and findings from the survey guided the final qualitative Peer Discourse Session (PDS). This iterative approach enabled continuous discovery of participant experiences and meaning-making, ensuring that research tools were refined to better address the research questions.

On the Street (OTS) Interviews

OTS interviews involved 72 participants from Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Barishal divisions, selected through opportunistic sampling.¹⁴ Thought-provoking questions and interventions assessed changes in participants' thinking before and after exposure to the research frames.

Quantitative Experiment

The quantitative experiment was conducted in two waves with participants aged 18–60 years, selected via simple random sampling from a nationally representative dataset constructed by BRAC IED across 100 *upazilas* (subdistricts). The first wave included 2,992 participants, and the second wave included 1,559. In each wave, a fraction of participants received no intervention, while the remainder were exposed to key interventions (metaphors, values, and the phrase). Measurement tools, pilot-tested across diverse locations, contained 25 items each. Wave 1 results were flat and inconclusive, whereas Wave 2 produced meaningful findings.

Peer Discourse Sessions (PDS)

Six PDS sessions were conducted in Dhaka, Jashore, and Sylhet, with 10 participants in each session.¹⁵ These sessions explored default ways of thinking about early childhood, and then examined how participants understood, communicated, modified, and applied the frame interventions. They also explored how new meanings emerged around the frames during group discussions.

Purpose of the Methods

For OTS interviews and PDS, the focus was on assessing whether the frames were effective and how effective they were across the diversity of participant contexts, rather than on cataloging unique individual understandings. The quantitative survey aimed to identify which values were most effective in generating public and private support for ECD investments in Bangladesh.

For readers seeking additional detail, a *Methods and Findings Supplement* accompanies this report, providing a comprehensive overview of the research design, data collection procedures, and key findings from each phase of the study.

Reframing Strategies

In this section, we provide seven framing strategies organized into four core themes that form a cohesive narrative strategy that can advance conversations about children's early development. The reframing strategies in this resource are meant to be used together and flexibly adapted. For each strategy, we provide information about why this approach is important based on the research, as well as examples of what it looks like in written communications.

WHY METAPHORS? WHY VALUES?

Central to this Phase 2 research is the exploration of framing strategies, particularly the use of metaphors and values. *Metaphors* serve as tools, or primes, to build public understanding of complex concepts by drawing comparisons between a familiar concept, like an everyday object or process, and a less familiar one, in order to aid critical thinking and logical understanding of that concept. For example, for this research, a *daripalla* (measuring scale) was employed to explain the concept of resilience by invoking the idea that positive and negative factors can be loaded on a child in the same way weights are loaded on a scale. Effective metaphors share key characteristics: They improve comprehension, foster detailed discussions, aid in problem-solving, counteract unproductive thinking patterns, are easily shared, and are self-correcting. In the context of child development, metaphors can redirect thinking away from unproductive problematic cultural mindsets or “models”—default patterns of thinking and understanding shared across a society and culture—toward more productive understandings.¹⁶ Good metaphors simplify abstract ideas, making them relatable and easier to grasp. In the context of ECD, effective metaphors can build deeper understanding of key concepts, making them ideal tools for building public understanding of child development processes and outcomes. The metaphors that were developed and tested for this research are described in greater detail below.

Values serve a different kind of framing function, and appealing to shared values is a key part of successful issue framing. Values answer core questions for people about why something matters and what's at stake around an issue. An effective value can motivate engagement and serve as an organizing principle that shapes people's understandings and subsequent decisions about a topic. Without a value to anchor a message, people can struggle to see the point of engaging with the issue. As such, in Phase 2, values testing was included to determine whether one or more values were effective in building support for the importance of ECD—and how effective they were—both as a topic and as a potential scope for investment. The values tested were *National Progress*, *Human Potential*, *Shared Responsibility*, *Adaptability*, *Equal Opportunities for All*, and *Empathy*. A more detailed description of these values is outlined in the following sections.

Core Theme 1: Building Support for Investments in ECD across the Nation

Two recommendations—both of which are organized around a value—aim to elevate the importance of early childhood as a topic for the nation, and thereby build support for investments in ECD across Bangladesh.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Use the value of *National Progress* (জাতীয় উন্নয়ন) to talk about why investments in early childhood matter for the nation.

This value is useful for setting up communications about the importance of both public and private investments in systems and institutions that support young children's health, learning, and development. By linking a universal, intrinsically good concept like progress for the nation to the specific topic of early development, it reinforces and strengthens an underlying sense people already have that their collective future as a people can be advanced through a shared commitment to their nation's children.

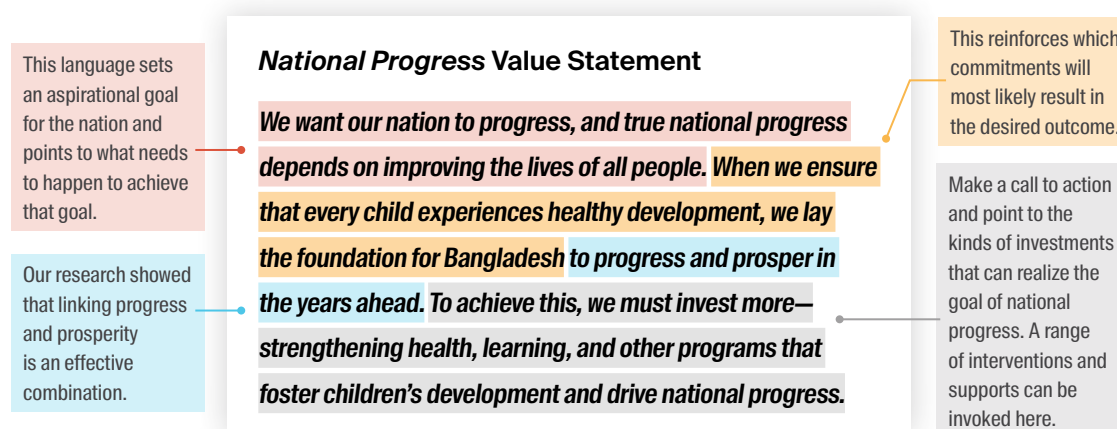
Using and building on this value provides a way to clearly articulate why investments in early childhood are so important. It frames those investments not only as something good to do for children and families but also as something beneficial for the nation.

As a value, *National Progress* (জাতীয় উন্নয়ন) can also be linked to the idea of national prosperity (জাতীয় সমৃদ্ধি), as our research shows that linking prosperity to progress is an effective frame for strengthening people's support for early childhood interventions and investments.

This value frame is a theme, not a script. That means it can be evoked and expressed in multiple ways rather than using the exact same wording each time. Given the effectiveness of this values-based message, it's crucial to rely on it often.

What It Looks Like

This graphic presents a sample value statement at its center, with surrounding explanations that show how it can be used to reinforce commitments to national progress—offering a model advocates can adapt in their own messaging.



Why This Matters

Using universal, collective values in communications lets people know what is at stake and can generate support and optimism for the solutions you are proposing. Across the different values tested with the people in Bangladesh, we found that *National Progress* helps shift thinking in particularly useful ways. In quantitative testing, it was effective in increasing people's understanding that the country can be effective in improving outcomes for young children, and—more than any other value tested—it strengthened people's understanding that the government can play a lead role in that effort.¹⁷ To that end, the value can be used to counteract any fatalistic tendency people might have about improving outcomes for children in the country. Instead, it can be used to strengthen people's understanding that meaningful progress is possible and that public agencies both can and should be key to that progress.

The *National Progress* value can also broaden people's understanding of who is responsible for early childhood outcomes. The *National Progress* value helped expand the public's existing understanding of parents and families as primarily responsible to help them see how society as a whole is collectively responsible.¹⁸ Reinforcing this broader, societal model of responsibility can increase public support for both public and private investments in systems and interventions that more effectively support children and families.

During research, the value helped people connect a broad aspiration like national progress to concrete infrastructure and services at the community level. In PDS, participants who used this value to advocate for a preprimary center said it clearly linked investment in young children to developing the nation's human resources and ensuring future prosperity. They explained, “Preschool education would help in human resource development, which would ultimately contribute to national progress.” They also noted, “Dropout rates in rural areas could be reduced through preschool exposure, thus increasing the literacy rate and eventually turning young children into national assets.” In this way, communicators can use *National Progress* to connect community-level interventions with the broader goal of building a more prosperous nation.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Use the value of *Equal Opportunities for All* (সবার জন্য সমান সুযোগ) to talk about how Bangladesh can improve outcomes for all of its children, including those most vulnerable.

Across this research, most people expressed a desire that every child could experience healthy development, but many lacked a clear understanding of how that goal might be effectively pursued. And because they attributed so much responsibility for child outcomes to parents and family life, they often struggled to identify the broader factors at the community, municipal, or regional level that also shape and determine outcomes for children.

The value of *Equal Opportunities for All* (সবার জন্য সমান সুযোগ) is useful to set up communications about the importance of building equitable access to resources and opportunities that foster

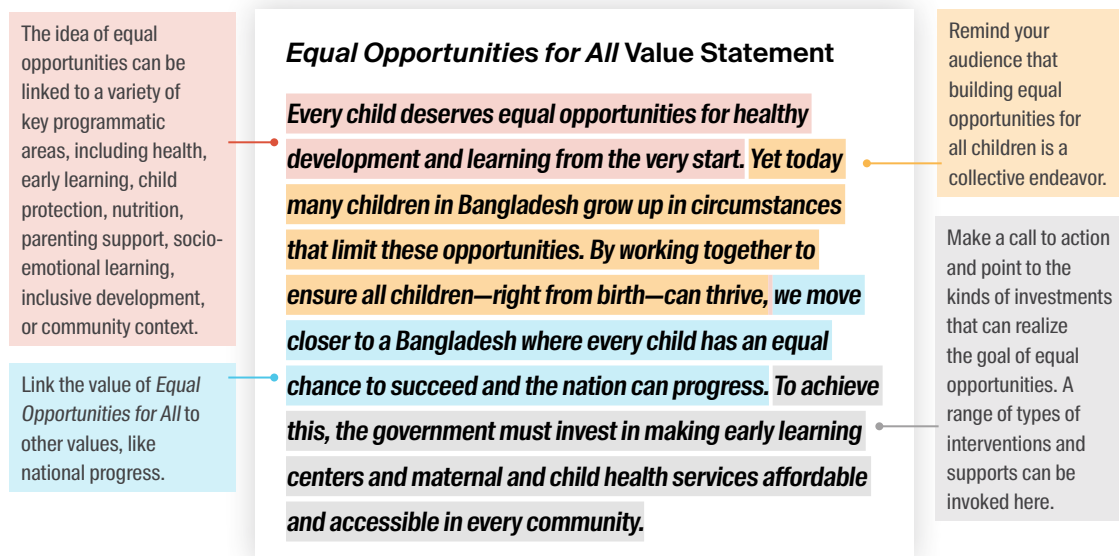
positive development outcomes for children. It leverages a core underlying understanding people have that every child deserves an opportunity to experience health, learning, and support, and to have a chance for success and happiness in life.

To use this value effectively, link *Equal Opportunities for All* to concrete examples at the local level. The message is most powerful when illustrated with *what* equal opportunity looks like in communities—such as equitable access to quality child care and early learning, maternal and child health services, nutrition programs, parenting education, public play spaces, and integrated ECD services.

As with *National Progress*, it is important to remember that this value of *Equal Opportunities for All* is a theme, not a script. It can be evoked and expressed in multiple ways across messaging.

What It Looks Like

This graphic presents a sample value statement at its center, with surrounding explanations that show how it can be used to build the case for giving all children an equal opportunity to thrive.



Why This Matters

During PDS testing, participants described *Equal Opportunities for All* as a broad and foundational value—one that supports other important goals and principles. They expressed a commitment to equal opportunity as an essential way for children to reach their full potential and as a prerequisite for national progress. Participants also viewed the value as a reflection of an empathetic society—one that embraces shared responsibility for the healthy development of all children. Some connected it directly to human rights, using it to position children as fundamental rights-holders.

In those PDS, the value also helped focus attention on persistent inequalities across regions, including class divisions, social exclusion, geographic barriers, group-based marginalization, and unequal access to resources. In doing so, it prompted participants to consider what kinds of investments could expand opportunities for the children and families who need them most.

Consequently, this value can be a powerful tool for motivating calls to improve services and infrastructure in historically underserved communities.

In quantitative testing, the value increased people's understanding that the Bangladeshi government will prioritize ECD investments and policies, and that these actions can meaningfully improve children's lives.¹⁹ This suggests communicators can use *Equal Opportunities for All* to make a compelling case for both the worthwhileness and effectiveness of ECD interventions.

Finally, testing showed the value broadened people's sense of responsibility for ECD outcomes beyond the family to include public and governmental agencies. While Bangladeshi people already see parents as the primary caregivers, *Equal Opportunities for All* helps people recognize a wider societal and national responsibility to ensure every child can experience healthy development and learning.

Our research indicates that many Bangladeshis strongly support increased government investment in public infrastructure and services generally. The challenge, then, is directing this broad support toward ECD specifically. Findings show that framing ECD investments through the values of *National Progress* and *Equal Opportunities for All* effectively focuses public attention on ECD's importance as a pathway to building a better Bangladesh.

The values of *National Progress* and *Equal Opportunities for All* were strongest in building people's confidence that the government can and will take actions to support children's early development (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients against the value interventions predicting the composite average scores concerning the *Government Efficacy* battery

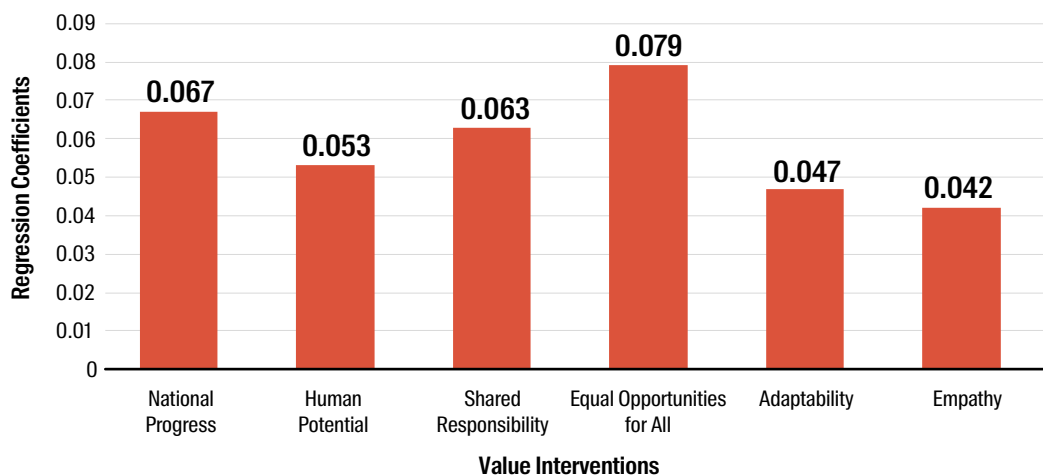
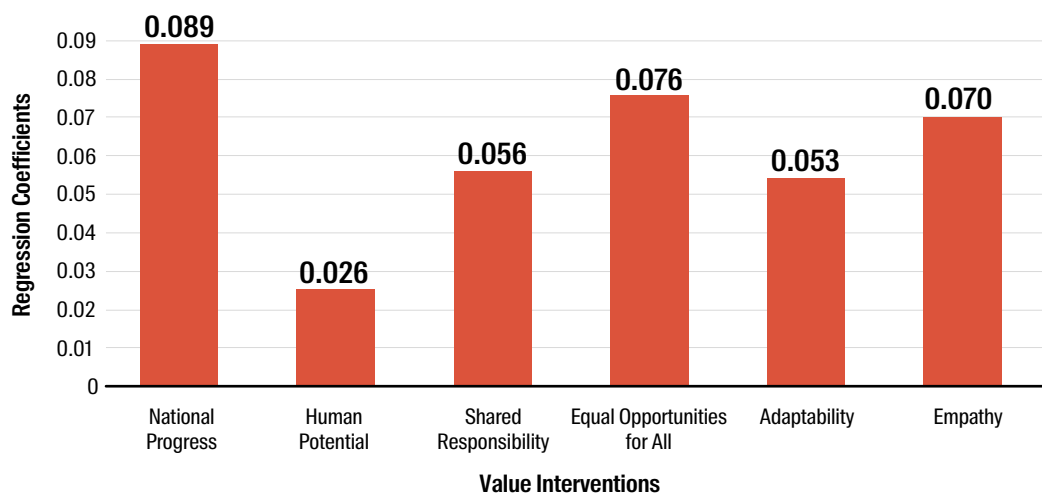


Figure 2 indicates that the values of *National Progress* and *Equal Opportunities for All* were most effective in increasing public recognition that healthy child development is not solely a parental responsibility but also an appropriate domain for government action and investment.^{20, 21}

Figure 2. Standardized regression coefficients against the value interventions predicting scores of a parent responsibility measure “Healthy child development is a matter for parents and families; it is inappropriate for the government to get involved”



Core Theme 2: Building Public Understanding of Developmental Processes

The recommendations in this theme aim to strengthen and build people’s understanding of how young children develop in order to boost their support for interventions and investments that improve developmental outcomes for children.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Use the metaphor of *Brain Building* (মস্তিষ্কের নির্মাণ) to communicate about the foundational importance of the earliest months and years of children’s lives for their neurological development.

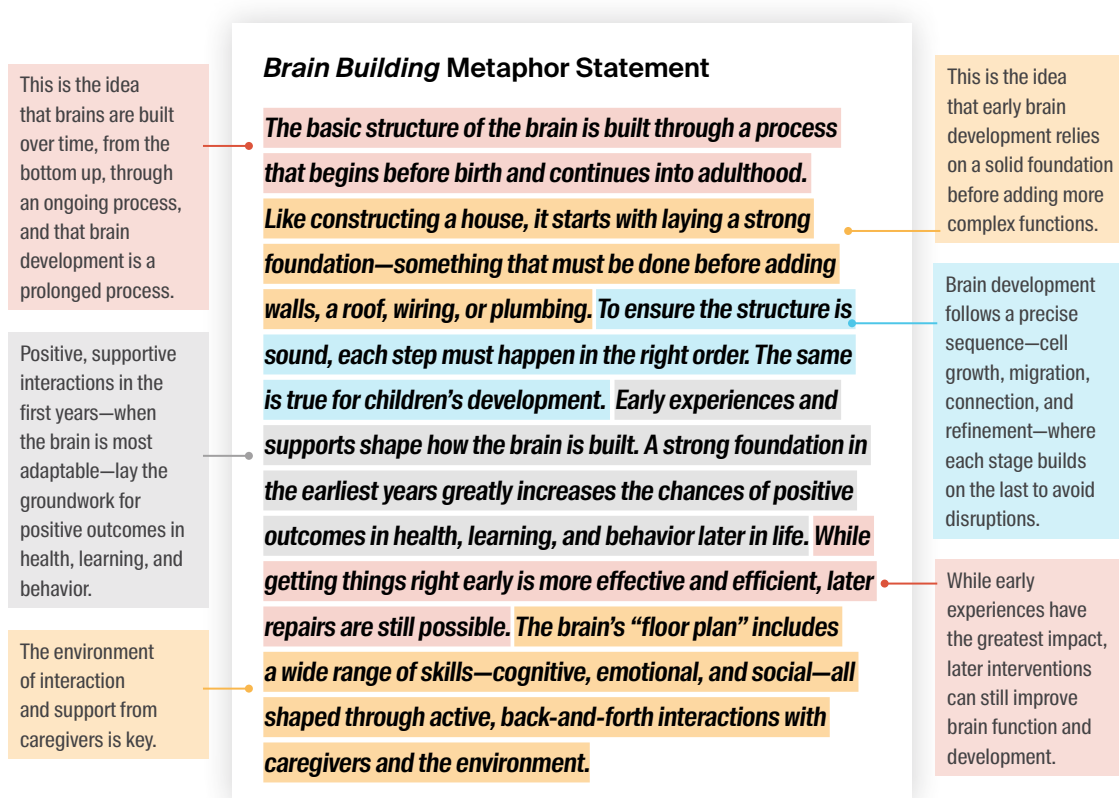
Across our research in Bangladesh we’ve seen that many people assume that the most important learning that happens for a child is during the school-age years. This metaphor offers a way to reset that understanding and put important focus on the crucial skill development that is happening in utero and in the first months and years of life, including key executive function and self-regulation skills. It communicates that development follows an orderly process and that—just like building a house—brain development unfolds in a predictable sequence. It highlights the foundational role of early experiences and the extent to which early interactions shape the strength or fragility of the

brain's foundations. In the process, it points to the importance of early investments in children, as building a solid foundation reduces the need for costly “repairs” later on.

This metaphor has proved useful in multiple other national contexts, helping shift people's orientation toward critical developmental windows, especially in early childhood. When it was tested in the US, UK, Australia, South Africa, and Kenya, the metaphor was explained in terms of “brain architecture,” building off the comparison to the architecture of a house. For this research, all of which was conducted in Bangla, initial piloting showed that the *brain architecture* (মস্তিষ্কের স্থাপত্য) term was not well understood by many people, especially among more rural and lower literacy populations. Terms like *structure* (কাঠামো) and *formation* (গঠন) were much better understood, as was the active process language of *building* (নির্মাণ). The result was a new title for the metaphor in Bangla—মস্তিষ্কের নির্মাণ—or *Brain Building*. Across these subtle shifts in language, the core comparison between the building of a child's brain to the building of a house has remained the same.

What It Looks Like

This graphic presents a sample iteration of the metaphor at its center, with surrounding explanations that show how it can be used to explain the brain-building process and the role of positive, stimulating environments for brain formation.



Why This Matters

The strength of the *Brain Building* metaphor lies in how effectively and quickly it helps people grasp early brain development by building on what they already understand about constructing a house. People know that houses aren't built automatically—they require planning, quality materials, and a strong foundation. The metaphor helps them see children's brains in the same way. It reinforces the idea that healthy brains also don't emerge automatically; rather, that they depend on supportive relationships and enriching interactions (e.g., *“emotional exchange”*; *“giving children ideas about new things through play”*). It strengthens the idea that early experiences shape brain development, that construction follows a specific sequence, and that starting with a solid foundation is essential for long-term stability and success (e.g., *“If the foundation is strong, a five- or 10-story building can be developed. Children's brains are like this”*).

People's ability to rethink brain development in more productive ways based on the comparison to house-building was evident in our qualitative research. During both OTS interviews and PDS, people demonstrated a meaningful shift in their thinking after exposure to the metaphor. It moved people's thinking from a cultural model that emphasizes older children (*“aging up”*) to a recognition of the critical role early experiences play in shaping brain development. Several people spoke about the importance of maternal health during pregnancy and how it can shape a child's developing brain, and many talked about the importance of a nurturing environment during the earliest months and years of a child's life when the child's *“foundation”* is being laid.

In both OTS interviews and PDS, the metaphor increased discussion about the importance of stimulation through adult-child interactions such as playing, singing, storytelling, rhyming, and drawing. Participants noted that these activities nurture the developing brain by strengthening connections between children and their environment. The metaphor also prompted deeper reflection: some participants suggested that an infant's brain is prepared for certain types of experiences at birth, while others highlighted the child's role as an active agent in shaping their own learning and development.

After engaging with the metaphor during PDS, participants spoke more about the need to build parents' and caregivers' capacity—within both families and child care settings—and emphasized how programs, seminars, and collaboration among government, NGOs, and researchers can support healthy brain development, national progress, and children's long-term success. In this way, the metaphor effectively draws attention to the importance of both the home and the broader environment in shaping early development.

Notably, in both OTS interviews and PDS, participants frequently repeated and elaborated on the metaphor in their own words, demonstrating its transmissibility. Once introduced, the metaphor spread from person to person, suggesting its potential to become embedded within a community's shared ways of talking and thinking. During PDS, its reemergence during later values discussions was a strong indicator of its resonance, *“stickiness,”* and communicability.

CHILDREN ARE BORN TO LEARN

During ECD research in Kenya, conducted in collaboration with UNICEF and the Africa Early Childhood Network, FrameWorks developed and tested the simple phrase that children are “born to learn.” This phrase effectively focused attention on the idea that children have an inborn capacity to learn and that learning begins at birth.²² Building on this, we tested a similar phrase in Bangla: জন্ম থেকেই শিখি, which translates best as “learning begins at birth.” We found that this phrase can help communicators challenge the aging-up model of thinking, which assumes that childhood development only becomes important at school age. Across both OTS interviews and PDS, the phrase encouraged participants to adopt an “aging down” perspective, recognizing the significance of informal early learning. By highlighting that children start learning from birth, communicators can emphasize the quality of caregiving and the environment in the earliest months and years. The phrase also positions early learning centers—such as child care or day care facilities—as extensions of the learning that begins at home from day one. It can be used on its own or alongside the *Brain Building* metaphor to reinforce the idea that key learning and development start from the very beginning of life.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Emphasize the importance of child–adult interactions by comparing them to a game of *Playing Catch* (বল ছোড়াছুড়ি খেলা) in which the back-and-forth between child and adult is what makes the game possible.

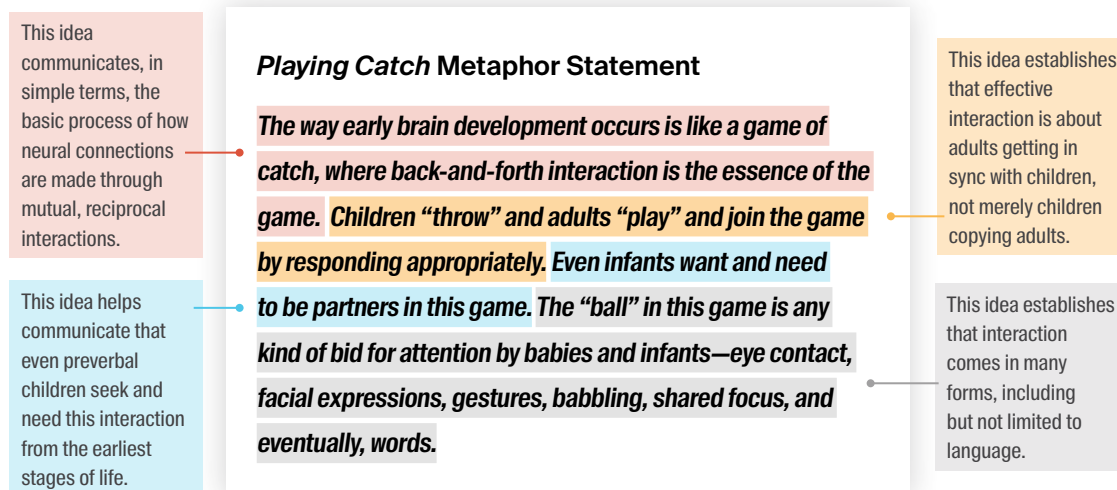
In Bangladesh, people recognize many key inputs to children’s healthy development—especially good nutrition and a loving, stable family life where children feel safe and supported. What is less well understood is the critical role of regular interaction and stimulation from caregivers in shaping brain development. When infants express themselves through eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, or vocalizations, they are reaching out for a response. Adults must respond in kind, creating a back-and-forth that strengthens communication, nurtures relationships, and stimulates brain growth.

In other countries, researchers have tested a tennis metaphor—the idea of “serve and return”—to explain this dynamic. A child’s expression is the “serve,” and the adult’s response is the “return.” Without the return, the game ends. This metaphor has proven effective in helping people understand the importance of responsive interactions for healthy brain development.

Because tennis is not widely played in Bangladesh, researchers adapted the idea to the more relatable game of playing catch (বল ছোড়াছুড়ি খেলা). Here, a child’s expression is like tossing a ball to an adult. The game only continues if the adult catches the ball and throws it back—responding to the child and encouraging their expressiveness, skill development, and learning.

What It Looks Like

This graphic features a sample version of the metaphor at its center, with surrounding explanations showing how it can be used to highlight the importance of responsive caregiving and stimulating interactions for brain development.



Why This Matters

In both OTS interviews and PDS, the *Playing Catch* metaphor helped participants understand that early child–adult interactions—or the absence of them—have a lasting impact on all subsequent development and learning. It clarified that interaction and stimulation are essential for building healthy brains. In PDS, participants often reframed it as a “give and take” (দেয়া-নেয়া) game, linking it directly to their own interactions with children. Many emphasized that children continue to “play” as long as parents remain engaged, highlighting the reciprocal nature of development. This back-and-forth was described as essential to holistic development from birth, supporting physical, cognitive, and emotional growth.

The metaphor proved highly communicable in PDS, as small groups could effectively teach it to other groups. By framing development as a reciprocal exchange, participants highlighted the crucial role of parents and caregivers in responding to children’s expressions. It not only clarified the importance of interaction but also conveyed a sense of efficacy—showing that responsive engagement directly contributes to building the next generation.

PDS also yielded important lessons for deploying the *Playing Catch* metaphor. Communicators should emphasize the dynamic back-and-forth (আদান-প্রদান) and give-and-take (দেয়া-নেয়া) of child–adult interactions to counter the notion that parenting is merely about giving children more time. While time matters, the quality of interaction is equally critical. The metaphor illustrates that both child and caregiver are active participants, each playing a vital role.

It is also important to stress that this interactive give-and-take is more than play—it is a key driver of young children’s brain development. The metaphor can further be used to highlight environments that support such interactions, pointing to policy-level factors such as child–teacher ratios, age-appropriate curricula, quality child care centers, parental leave, and caregiver mental health supports that enable or constrain these essential exchanges.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

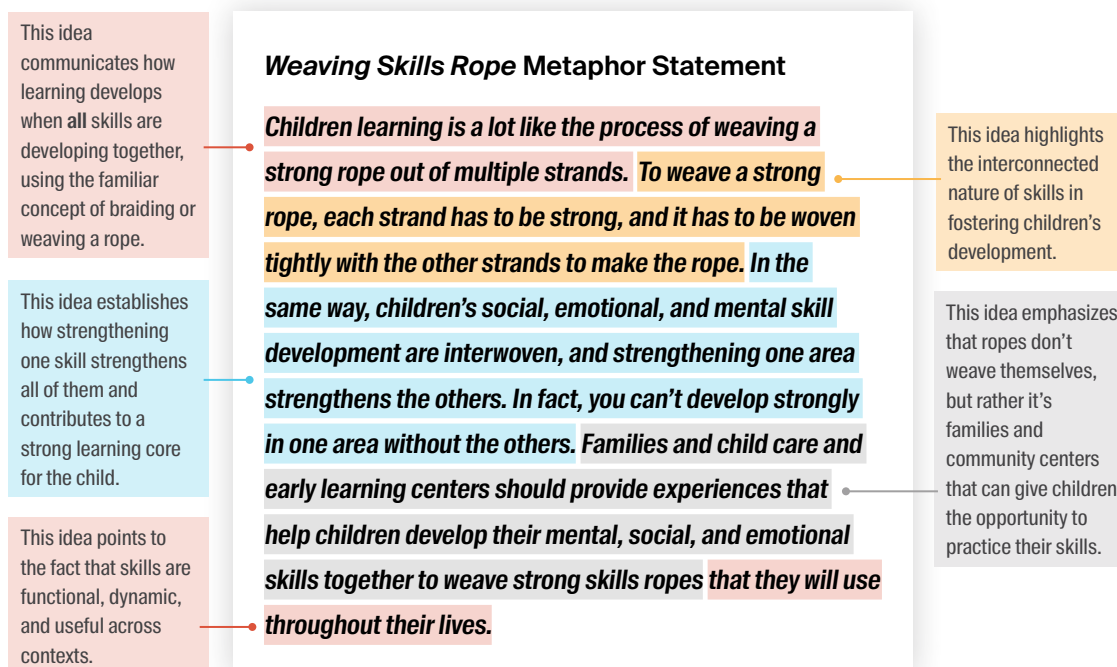
As part of a whole-child development framework, use the metaphor of *Weaving Skills Rope* (দড়ি বুনন দক্ষতা) to emphasize the integrated nature of skill development.

At the heart of whole-child development is the understanding that cognitive, emotional, and social skills are deeply interconnected. These skills develop together in the early years, shaping and reinforcing one another to form the foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. However, in Bangladesh, people often view these areas of development in isolation—focusing on specific skills like language, physical abilities, or manners as separate categories and emphasizing their individual components. The idea that these skills develop in a synchronized, mutually reinforcing way is rarely discussed. As a result, some areas of development may be prioritized over others, rather than being nurtured as part of a unified whole.

The *Weaving Skills Rope* (দড়ি বুনন দক্ষতা) metaphor offers a simple and accessible way to convey the integrated nature of skill development by comparing it to braiding a rope from separate strands. Like any effective metaphor, it draws on something familiar and easy to visualize to help people grasp a concept that is more complex or less well understood.

What It Looks Like

This graphic features a sample version of the metaphor at its center, with surrounding explanations highlighting the various features of the metaphor and the conceptual work they do.



Why This Matters

The *Weaving Skills Rope* metaphor effectively conveys the integrated nature of skill development. It illustrates that social, emotional, and cognitive abilities grow together—like strands braided into a strong rope—to create durable learning capacities that support children throughout life. By fostering these interconnected skills early, children build a foundation that is resilient under pressure and provides lasting benefits into adulthood.

Across both OTS interviews and PDS, most participants understood the metaphor and could explain its meaning. It helped them see that skills develop in concert, with each domain equally important for healthy growth and wellbeing. As one OTS interview participant stated, “If one strand is weak or small, then the others will also unravel and won’t be strong. It is the same here; all three have the same level of importance.” In PDS, participants often drew on personal experiences—recalling lessons from their own childhoods or combining examples of skills—and compared them to the strands of a rope. The process of rope-making reinforced the idea that development does not happen in isolation but is woven together, especially in the early years. If one “strand” is less nurtured than the other, then children will not grow as holistic individuals. Even when OTS interview participants could not define the concept precisely, they shared relevant activities, such as socialization and family education, that linked to the three developmental domains.

Importantly, both OTS interview and PDS participants emphasized the act of weaving or braiding as the key insight: Development is an active process of integration. This also underscored that children’s growth is not the sole responsibility of parents; communities and systems play a critical role. In some PDS discussions, the metaphor was expanded further: According to one PDS participant, “Just as jute strands must be soaked and dried before weaving slowly to make a rope, if we do not take the time and effort to foster children’s developmental skills at the right time, then children will not develop into well-rounded individuals properly.” Thus, participants highlighted how children need nurturing environments for their skills to grow strong and the need to foster a broader understanding of collective responsibility for child development.

Because of its cultural relevance in Bangladesh—where rope-making is widely familiar—this metaphor has strong potential for use in parent engagement, facilitator training, and curriculum materials. For the OTS interviews and PDS, while the metaphor was focused on only three areas of child development, the metaphor itself is durable and multipurpose; it can be expanded to include “weaving” a diverse group of developmental skills for children, not just three. Further, it helps explain core concepts such as early development, learning, parenting, and caregiving in a relatable way. Its familiarity also allows people to extend the metaphor, creating new positive associations from their own experience. Finally, it aligns with national ECCD policy priorities, supporting advocacy for early interventions and caregiver education as vital to school readiness and long-term national progress.

Core Theme 3: Drawing Attention to the Impacts of Adversity and the Importance of Community Supports for Families and Children

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Explain that resilience is the ability children have to do well and bounce back from adversity, and use the *Resilience Scale* (সহনশীলতার দাঁড়িপাল্লা) metaphor to emphasize how community-level supports for children and families can build resilience in children.

The topic of resilience is a central concern within the ECD field because it speaks to a child's ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity—a capacity that has lifelong implications. Because the early years are a highly sensitive and formative period of brain development, both positive and negative experiences leave a deep imprint. Adversities like poverty, neglect, or violence can pose serious risks—but when balanced by strong, supportive relationships and nurturing environments, children are far more likely to thrive. Yet our research showed that most members of the public do not understand the concept of resilience well and understand even less about what factors contribute to it.

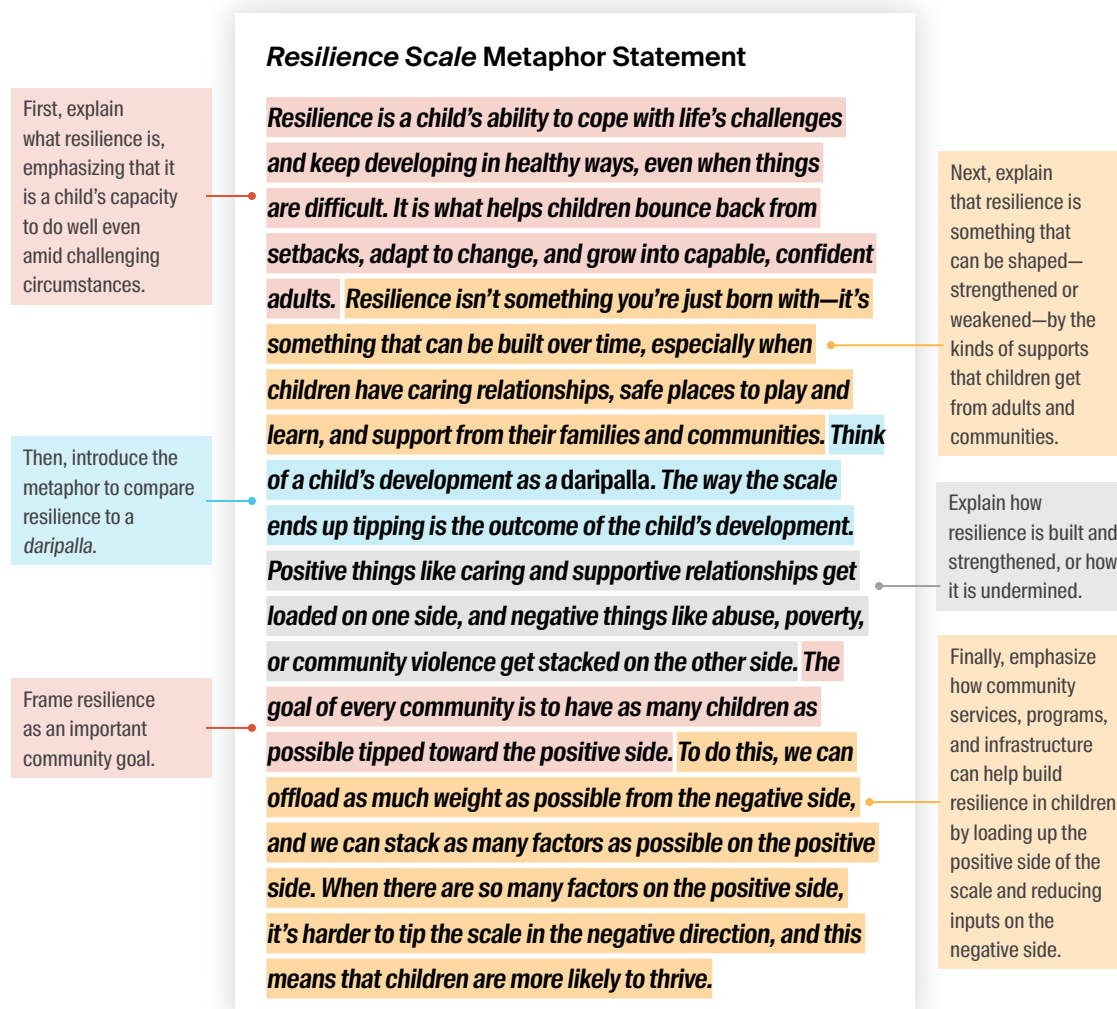
To make both the idea and importance of resilience more accessible, a metaphor (first developed in the US in collaboration with HCDC that compares resilience in child development to a scale) was tested. For the Bangladesh context, researchers chose to make that comparison to a traditional market weighing scale. For that comparison, it was found that the term *daripalla* (দাঁড়িপাল্লা) resonated more with the diverse group of participants than the more formal term *scale* (পরিমাপক).

In this metaphor, the way the *daripalla* scale tips reflects a child's overall developmental outcome. This metaphor offers a culturally resonant way to introduce the concept of child resilience through an object that is immediately familiar and tangible to most people, allowing audiences to easily grasp how positive factors can outweigh negative influences in a child's development and foster their ability to thrive despite adversity.

Importantly, we found that for most people, we had to first explain what resilience is before using the *daripalla* idea to explain the role communities play in strengthening or weakening it.

What It Looks Like

This graphic features a sample version of the metaphor at its center, including an initial definition of resilience, with surrounding explanations showing how the metaphor can be used to explain the processes and factors that shape resilience.



Why This Matters

The *Resilience Scale* (সহনশীলতার দাঁড়িপাল্লা) metaphor does important work by making the abstract idea of resilience more tangible, visual, and actionable. After hearing the metaphor in OTS interviews, people better understood that resilience is not simply about bouncing back or toughing it out—it depends on what is added to or removed from each side of a child's developmental balance. In PDS, the metaphor also helped shift conversations away from blaming family mistakes toward recognizing the broader role of systems, communities, and policies in shaping children's outcomes.

The metaphor also reinforces that resilience is not something a child simply has or lacks—it can be built through caregiving, supportive communities, and protective systems. In OTS interviews, a participant who had previously emphasized the family’s role in isolation later described children as the “backbone of our nation” and stressed the importance of reducing negative influences while expanding opportunities. Similarly, in PDS, the metaphor shifted discussions from focusing on children’s traits or morals to considering how adults can actively support resilience, and participants explicitly stated that “deliberate actions are required to replace negative influences.”

When paired with a clear explanation of the Bangla meaning of *resilience*, the *Resilience Scale* (with or without a physical scale as a demonstration) helps broaden understanding to include the impact of environmental and societal factors. It also empowers adults by showing how their actions—through caregiving, community support, and advocacy—can tip the balance toward positive outcomes.

In short, the *Resilience Scale* (সহনশীলতার দাঁড়িপাল্লা) metaphor helps demystify the concept of resilience, strengthens public understanding, and supports advocacy for environments and investments that give all children a fair chance to thrive.

A CALL FOR MORE RESEARCH ON STRESS

Stress is a complex issue with significant implications for children’s early development. In many Western countries, the public often views stress as beneficial for children, believing it makes them stronger. To address this misconception, FrameWorks, in partnership with the HCDC, developed a three-part model to distinguish between types and levels of stress in children:

- **Positive stress** (ইতিবাচক মানসিক চাপ): Brief, mild stress responses that help children develop coping skills—such as starting preschool, meeting new people, or visiting an unfamiliar place—when experienced in a safe, supportive environment
- **Tolerable stress** (সহনীয় মানসিক চাপ): More intense or serious events—like the death of a loved one, natural disasters, or a frightening accident—that become manageable with strong emotional support and stable relationships, allowing children to recover without lasting harm
- **Toxic stress** (বিষাক্ত মানসিক চাপ): Strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the stress response that can disrupt brain development, weaken the immune system, and increase the risk of long-term physical and mental health problems; stress that can stem from domestic violence, abuse, or adverse societal conditions such as persistent poverty, food insecurity, community violence, or systemic discrimination; stress that arises not only from the event itself but from the absence of stable, nurturing adult relationships to help the child recover

This framework was designed to help audiences in the US and elsewhere understand how severe and chronic stress can harm children’s development.

In our research in Bangladesh, this three-part model was also tested. While some research participants found it useful, others found it confusing—particularly the idea that some forms of stress could be positive. Unlike in the Western context, people in Bangladesh already widely recognize that stress can harm children, with a strong focus on stress within the family, especially conflict or violence between parents or caregivers.

Our findings suggest that more research is needed to determine how best to discuss and frame the issue of stress for a Bangladeshi audience. Given the tendency to focus on the family as the main source of harmful stress, future research could explore ways to widen the lens on stress to better explain how broader community conditions—such as poverty, violence, and marginalization—create toxic stress for many children. Further study is also needed to find effective ways to help people differentiate between positive, tolerable, and toxic stress.

Core Theme 4: Encouraging a National Identity Organized around Improving Outcomes for Children

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Use the value of *Shared Responsibility* (সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব) to assert a national will and national capacity to collectively improve outcomes for children across the nation.

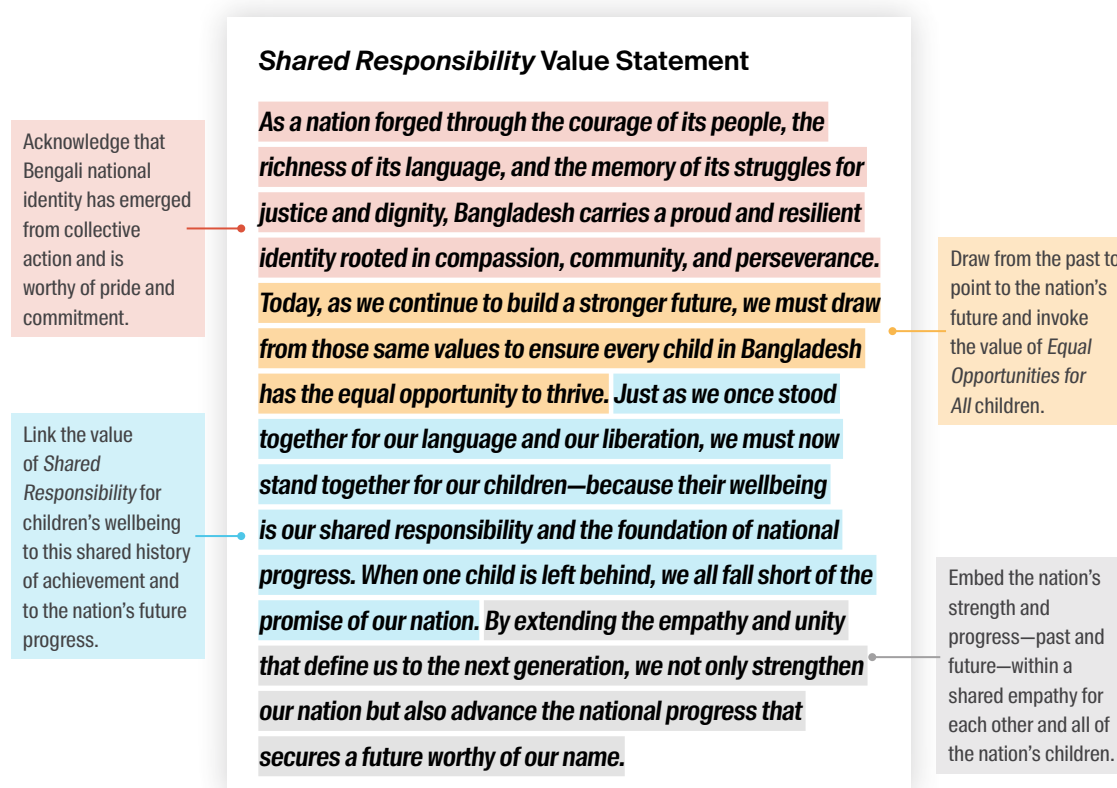
Bangladeshis share a strong national identity organized around their language, their sovereignty, and their resilience as a people who have fought for their freedom and self-determination across their history. All of the most important achievements of the nation have been accomplished through collective efforts, often involving significant struggle and sacrifice. This collective action is rooted in a sense of shared responsibility, empathy for one another, and a deep understanding that their futures and fates are fundamentally interconnected.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, the research for this project showed that the value of *Shared Responsibility* (সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব) is effective in strengthening people's understanding that Bangladeshis, when acting together, can accomplish good outcomes on behalf of the nation's children. In quantitative testing, results showed that *Shared Responsibility*, along with *National Progress* (জাতীয় উন্নয়ন), performed significantly better than the control group—and better than the other values tested—to boost people's sense that Bangladesh will, as a society, act to make necessary investments in young children's development and that those investments will pay off in better developmental outcomes for those children.²³

Notably, the value of *Empathy* (সহমর্মিতা) performed well across several outcome measures. It increased support for the idea that responsibility for early childhood outcomes extends beyond the family, creating opportunities for communicators to highlight the roles of communities and government. *Empathy* also strengthened people's support for the idea that Bangladesh, as a society, can effectively improve outcomes for children and reinforced the view that ECD is a national priority. Although its results were somewhat less consistent than those of other recommended values, *Empathy* appears to be a valuable complement, helping to reinforce and amplify the impact of the other values.²⁴

What This Looks Like

This graphic presents a sample value statement at its center, with surrounding explanations that show how it can build the case for developing a national identity focused on improving outcomes for children.



Why This Matters

Local and community-level initiatives are essential to advancing the ECD sector in Bangladesh. Community leaders are often best placed to understand which programs and services can most effectively support children's learning, health, and development. Many of the frames recommended in this report can be applied by local communicators to deepen community understanding of ECD and to strengthen parents and caregivers in their ability to nurture their children's healthy

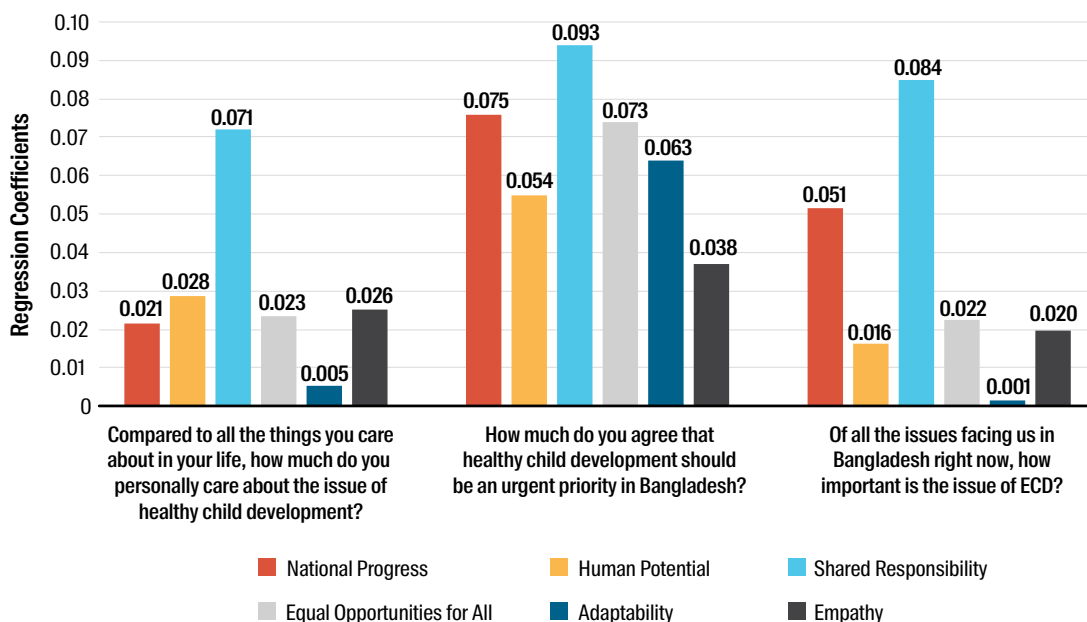
growth. The same is true across all levels of local and regional administrative organization—union *parishads*, *upazilas*, districts, and divisions.

At the same time, the national government has a critically important role to play in promoting the ECD agenda and strengthening long-term commitments to it. To that end, ECD must be framed as a national priority—one directly connected to the identity and aspirations of the Bangladeshi people as they seek to build a stronger, healthier, more resilient, and more prosperous country. Findings from our quantitative research show that the value of *Shared Responsibility* (সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব) resonates strongly with the public in ways that reinforce a sense of collective efficacy²⁵—the understanding that positive change is both possible and most likely to happen when people act together. Findings also show that *Shared Responsibility* raises the perceived importance of ECD and positions children’s healthy development as a central concern for the nation.²⁶

Bangladeshis already hold a strong sense of national identity. By linking the future of the nation’s children to that identity, ECD can be elevated to new levels of public importance and commitment, both among citizens and the leaders who represent them.

Figure 3 demonstrates how *Shared Responsibility* boosts people’s support for the idea that ECD is a critically important domain for Bangladeshi society and should be considered a priority for the nation.

Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients against the value interventions predicting scores in three measures under *Salience*



Conclusion

The evidence from this research makes clear that the way we communicate about ECD matters just as much as the content itself. Metaphors (রূপক) and values (মূল্যবোধ) are not merely communication tools in isolation; they are building blocks for a larger narrative that can shift understanding, strengthen public will, and expand support for investments in children.

Each of the frames tested in this project—whether it calls for equal opportunities for all (সবার জন্য সমান সুযোগ) children, the playful back-and-forth (আদান-প্রদান) of responsive interactions, or the weaving of skills into a strong rope (দড়ি বুনন দক্ষতা)—does important conceptual work. On their own, these metaphors and values clarify complex developmental processes, ground ECD in everyday experience, and highlight why investing in children benefits everyone. But together, they can be woven into a broader and more powerful story: one that shows how children’s early development unfolds, why it requires sustained collective commitment, and how it connects directly to the nation’s progress (জাতির উন্নতি) and future prosperity (ভবিষ্যতের সমৃদ্ধি).

For ECD communicators, this means adopting a narrative approach to public engagement. Rather than presenting isolated facts or abstract arguments, we should tell stories that connect children’s experiences to caregivers’ actions, communities’ roles, and governments’ responsibilities. A strong narrative not only explains how development happens but also makes visible the infrastructure—from parenting programs and community-based initiatives to early learning services and national policies—that sustains children’s growth. By embedding solutions directly into the story, communicators help audiences see that change is possible and that investments in ECD are both practical and urgent. In this way, communication becomes more than raising awareness: It becomes a strategy for building consensus, motivating action, and anchoring public investment.

To illustrate what such a narrative approach can look like when these frames are integrated into a single, compelling story, consider the following model messaging:

All children are born to survive and thrive, yet too many face life conditions and a lack of opportunities that undermine those innate capacities. As a nation, we must change that by supporting every child’s wellbeing from the very beginning—because that is what allows them to grow and flourish.

Children are also born to learn, but their brains are not built all at once. They develop step-by-step, like constructing a strong house where each layer rests on the foundation below. From the very first months, children need responsive care and playful interactions with caregivers—like a game of catch, where every smile, gesture, and word tossed back and forth strengthens their brain-building. As they grow, their cognitive, social, and emotional skills develop together, woven like strands twisted into strong ropes that support lifelong learning and wellbeing. Just as vital is resilience—the ability to cope and grow strong even when life is difficult. Whether resilience is built up or worn down depends on the supports surrounding each child. Picture it like a scale: When children have caring relationships and safe, supportive environments, the scale tips toward resilience, but when stress piles up without enough support, it tips the other way, making it harder for them to thrive.

By investing in children's early development and the supports that nurture it, Bangladesh can ensure that every child can reach their full potential, that no community is left behind, and that the nation as a whole moves forward. Building young brains is not the work of families alone; it is a shared responsibility—one that calls for empathy, commitment, and collective action. Investing in children's earliest years is an investment in national progress, in opportunity for all, and in the bright future of Bangladesh.

প্রতিটি শিশু ভালোভাবে বেঁচে থাকার ও বেড়ে ওঠার সামর্থ্য ও সম্ভাবনা নিয়ে জন্ম গ্রহণ করে। কিন্তু অনেক শিশুই এমন পরিস্থিতিতে বেড়ে ওঠে যা তাদের এই জন্মগত সক্ষমতাকে বাধাগ্রস্ত করে। জাতি হিসেবে, আমাদের এটি পরিবর্তন করতে হবে। প্রত্যেক শিশুর সুন্দরভাবে বেড়ে ওঠা ও কল্যাণের জন্য শুরু থেকেই সহায়তা প্রদান করতে হবে। কেননা, এই সহায়তাই শিশুর বেড়ে ওঠা এবং বিকাশের পথ সুগম করে।

শিশুরা শেখার জন্যেও জন্মগ্রহণ করে, কিন্তু তাদের মস্তিষ্কের পরিপূর্ণ বিকাশ একবারে সম্পূর্ণ হয় না। এটি বিকশিত হয় ধাপে ধাপে। একটি বাড়ি নির্মাণের ক্ষেত্রে ঠিক যেমন প্রতিটি স্তর তার আগের স্তরের উপর ভিত্তি করে তৈরি হয়। শিশুর জন্মের প্রথম মাস থেকেই তার মস্তিষ্কের বিকাশের জন্য সংবেদনশীল যত্ন এবং শিশু ও যত্নকারীর পারস্পরিক আনন্দময় যোগাযোগ প্রয়োজন। উদাহরণ হিসেবে বল ছোড়াছুড়ি খেলার কথা বলা যায়, যেখানে শিশুর প্রতিটি হাসি, অঙ্গভঙ্গি ও শব্দ আদান-প্রদান তার মস্তিষ্ক গঠনের ভিত্তি মজবুত করে। শিশুরা যখন বড় হতে থাকে, তখন তাদের বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক, সামাজিক এবং আবেগিক দক্ষতাসমূহ একসাথে বিকশিত হতে থাকে। এটা অনেকটা কয়েকটা সুতা একসাথে বুনে একটা শক্ত দড়ি তৈরি করার মতো, যা তাদের আজীবন শেখার এবং ভালো থাকায় সহায়তা করে। জীবনের কঠিন সময় মোকাবিলা করা এবং ভালোভাবে বেড়ে ওঠার জন্য সহনশীল হওয়াও শিশুর জন্য সমান গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। সহনশীলতা কতটা তৈরি বা বাধাগ্রস্ত হবে, তা নির্ভর করে শিশু তার চারপাশ থেকে কী ধরনের সহায়তা বা সমর্থন পাচ্ছে তার উপর। আমরা এটাকে একটা দাঁড়িপাল্লা মতো করে ভাবতে পারি। যত্নশীল সম্পর্ক, নিরাপদ এবং সহায়ক পরিবেশ সহনশীলতার মাত্রা বাড়িয়ে দেয়। তার মানে, দাঁড়িপাল্লাটিতে সহনশীলতার মাত্রা বেড়ে যাওয়ার দিকটি ভারি হয়ে যায়। কিন্তু যথেষ্ট সহায়তা না থাকার ফলে যদি শিশুর মানসিক চাপ বেড়ে যায়, তাহলে দাঁড়িপাল্লাটি অন্য দিকে ঝুঁকে পড়তে পারে, তার মানে তাদের বেড়ে ওঠা কঠিন হয়ে পড়তে পারে।

শিশুদের প্রারম্ভিক বিকাশে এবং এর সহায়তাকারী ব্যবস্থায় বিনিয়োগের মাধ্যমে বাংলাদেশ তার প্রতিটি শিশুর পূর্ণ সম্ভাবনার স্তরে পৌঁছা নিশ্চিত করতে পারে, যেখানে কোনো সম্প্রদায় পিছিয়ে থাকবে না এবং পুরো জাতি সামগ্রিকভাবে এগিয়ে যাবে। ছোট শিশুদের মস্তিষ্কের বিকাশের সহায়তা করা শুধু পরিবারের একার কাজ নয়, বরং এটি একটি সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব। যার জন্য সহমর্মিতা, প্রতিশ্রুতি এবং সম্মিলিত পদক্ষেপ প্রয়োজন। আমরা যখন শিশুদের জীবনের শুরুর বছরগুলোতে বিনিয়োগ করি তখন আমরা জাতীয় উন্নয়ন, সবার জন্য সমান সুযোগ এবং বাংলাদেশের উজ্জ্বল ভবিষ্যতে বিনিয়োগ করি।

This model is not a prescription but an example—illustrating how tested metaphors, values, and solutions can be woven into a story that makes ECD both understandable and urgent. The intention is to offer communicators, advocates, and policymakers a set of tools they can draw from and adapt in ways that resonate within their own contexts and issues.

The challenge and opportunity ahead lie in shaping narratives that reflect local voices, strengthen shared responsibility for children's development, and connect ECD to broader aspirations for the nation. By doing so, Bangladesh can build a stronger public case for investment in young children and secure a foundation for the country's continued progress and prosperity.

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Endnotes

1. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. (2013). *Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy*. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. This policy is the key cross-sectoral framework guiding ECCD initiatives in Bangladesh, and it covers the developmental period from prenatal stages through the beginning of primary school.
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5. Lindland, E., Khanom, F., Zaman, S. S., Dutta, M., Ahmed, N., Al Masud, A., & Mim, S. A. (2019). *Early is key: Mapping the gaps on understandings of early childhood development in Bangladesh*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/early-is-key-mapping-the-gaps-on-understandings-of-early-childhood-development-in-bangladesh/>
6. Read a summary of FrameWorks' methodology at Lindland, E. H., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2012). Sensical translations: Three case studies in applied cognitive communications. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 36(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2153-9588.2012.01092.x>
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8. The findings and implications from this first phase of research were presented to stakeholders at a convening hosted by BRAC IED in April 2019. The event aimed to share the research insights and build consensus and enthusiasm around the idea that Bangladesh's ECD sector can strengthen its communications practices to more effectively convey the science of early development.
9. These partners include, in Brazil, the Núcleo Ciência Pela Infância, including the Fundação Maria Cecília Souto Vidigal and the University of São Paulo in Brazil; in Canada, the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative; in Australia, the Royal Children's Hospital, the Telethon Kids Institute, the Minderoo Foundation, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the Parenting Research Centre, Early Childhood Australia, and UNICEF Australia; in Kenya, the Africa Early Childhood Network and UNICEF; in South Africa, the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, the Institute for Life Course Health Research at Stellenbosch University, and Ilifa Labantwana; in the UK, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Big Lottery Fund, Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; and, alongside HCDC in the US, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the A. L. Mailman Family Foundation, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, and Leading for Kids.

10. In FrameWorks' collaborations with the Harvard Center on the Developing Child and other partners, among the most widely used metaphors are *Brain Architecture* and *Toxic Stress*. *Brain Architecture* conveys that a child's brain is built over time, like a house's foundation, with early experiences shaping its strength and stability. *Toxic Stress* illustrates the damaging effects of prolonged, unbuffered adversity on brain development, underscoring the importance of stable relationships and supportive environments. Other core metaphors include *Serve and Return*, which captures the back-and-forth interactions that strengthen neural connections; *Weaving Skills Rope*, showing how cognitive, social, and emotional capacities develop in tandem; and *Resilience Scale*, which helps people understand how protective factors can counterbalance risks. Additionally, metaphors such as *Levelness* (comparing mental health to a balanced table), *Air Traffic Control* (describing executive function as coordinating thoughts and actions), and *Overloaded* (illustrating caregiver stress and the buffering role of social supports) make related concepts more accessible.
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16. On cultural mindsets, also known as cultural models, see Quinn, N., & Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language and thought* (pp. 3–40). Cambridge University Press. See also Shore, B. (1991). Two births of meaning: A cultural anthropology of metaphor. *American Anthropologist*, 93(1), 1–17.
17. In the Wave 2 quantitative testing results, *National Progress* moved two of the Collective Efficacy measures ($p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.01$, respectively) and the Government Efficacy battery ($p < 0.05$). (See Tables 1, 3, and 5 in the *Methods and Findings Supplement*.)
18. The *National Progress* value also helped to overcome individualistic thinking about parental responsibility in the quantitative experiment ($p < 0.01$). (See Table 2 in the *Methods and Findings Supplement*.) More people were willing to disagree with the idea that *only* parents were responsible for child outcomes after exposure to the value.
19. The *Equal Opportunities for All* value moved outcomes on the Government Efficacy battery and a measure (item) on Parent Responsibility, with a statistically significant margin of $p < 0.05$ each. (See Tables 1 and 2 in the *Methods and Findings Supplement*.)
20. This Parental Responsibility measure was negatively worded and therefore reverse-scored to reflect support for the idea that ECD is not solely a parental responsibility but also a public one.
21. Note the strength of the *Empathy* (সহমর্মিতা) value, alongside those of *National Progress* and *Equal Opportunities for All*. Later in this report, we discuss the important supporting role the *Empathy* value can play in ECD communications.

22. See Lindland, E., O'Neil, M., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Reframing early childhood development and learning in Kenya: A message brief*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/reframing-early-childhood-development-and-learning-in-kenya/#Communications%20Tools>
23. The quantitative analysis showed that *National Progress* moved one battery (Table 1) and four items (Tables 2, 3, 5, and 7), while *Shared Responsibility* moved six items (Tables 3–8) and the value *Empathy* moved four items (Tables 2, 5, 9, and 10). The levels of statistical significance ranged from $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.001$.
24. The quantitative analysis showed that *Empathy* moved items on responsibility, collective efficacy, and salience. The levels of statistical significance ranged from $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.001$. See Tables 2, 5, and 9.
25. The quantitative analysis showed that *Shared Responsibility*, alongside *National Progress*, significantly moved three items in the Collective Efficacy battery. The margins of statistical significance were $p < 0.05$ for each. (See Tables 3–5 in the *Methods and Findings Supplement*.)
26. *Shared Responsibility* significantly moved three Salience measures related to “personally caring about healthy child development” ($p < 0.05$), “Child development should be an urgent priority in Bangladesh” ($p < 0.01$) and “Importance of ECD compared to the other issues” ($p < 0.01$). (See Tables 6–8 in the *Methods and Findings Supplement*.)

About FrameWorks

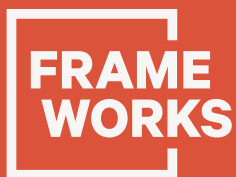
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Building Futures

Using Metaphors and Values to
Tell a Story of Early Childhood
Development in Bangladesh

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