

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes



Tue 31 October 2023, Billund, Denmark

1. Co-chairs' welcome and introduction

The Executive Committee (ExCom) co-chairs:

- 1.1 welcomed all participants to the meeting (see Annex A for complete list of in-person participants) and acknowledged new members to the ExCom - Odinakachi Ahanonou (National CSO representative), Tyler Arnot (international CSO representative from Street Child), Paul St John Frisoli (Lego Foundation), Jessica Hjarrand (Porticus), Amrita Paul (Canada), Frank Mc Manus (Ireland) Jussi Karakoski (Finland) and Rouksana Cardinaux-Simjee (France);
- 1.2 noted that the national CSO representative was unable to attend due to visa issues;
- 1.3 thanked Lego Foundation for hosting and organizing the ExCom meeting in collaboration with the ECW Secretariat, and for facilitating *Power of Play*, an interactive play-based session designed for "learning, holistic skills and well-being for children affected by emergencies and protracted crises" that took place the day before;
- 1.4 updated the ExCom that the HLSG formally approved the 2022 ECW Annual Report on 20 September 2023 in New York, during the week of the UNGA; and
- 1.5 presented the agenda of the meeting and highlighted actions from the previous meeting in Lillehammer, Norway that will be covered in the agenda, such as the update on the Operational Manual and discussions on Climate.

2. Update on Gaza

The ECW Executive Director:

- 2.1 provided an update on the situation of children in Gaza, highlighting that 40% per cent of the war casualties are children;
- 2.2 recognized the critical efforts of partners UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP and CSOs who are providing life-saving emergency relief on the ground including food, shelter, medicine and mental health and psychosocial support to Palestine refugees;
- 2.3 shared recommendations of UNRWA reports on the dire need of (1) mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and (2) creation of safe learning spaces as immediate entry points for education-in-emergencies (EiE) response;
- 2.4 put forward ECW's request to allocate a US\$ 10 million First Emergency Response (FER) and sought for non-objection from the ExCom;

2.5 shared that the more detailed FER application, informed by the latest need assessments from the field, will be shared with the ExCom in due course; and

2.6 urged the ExCom to act with speed, in light of the acute humanitarian crisis in Gaza;

In discussion, the ExCom:

2.7 requested for more information about the FER proposal particularly on needs assessment, aid delivery and risks mitigation to ensure that there is no benefit to Hamas and implementation could be done safely through trusted partners;

2.8 called for increased attention on the needs of teachers and additional capacity for coordinating response efforts in both Gaza and the West Bank; and

2.9 shared specific efforts from their respective organizations in line with the objective of the FER such as formulating joint statements on Gaza (Educational International); delivering food aid (WFP) and initiating recreational activities (UNICEF) for affected populations in Gaza; publishing shared guidelines on EiE (INEE); and activating multiplier co-funding of US\$ 15 million (GPE).

Specific comments from ExCom members:

2.10 FCDO registered that they were supportive of exploring the possibility of ECW funding for emergency education in Gaza as long as it can be done safely through trusted delivery partners. UK would be happy to engage on the detailed design. Ex-Com should note the risk that support could be maliciously diverted (citing recent raids on warehouses); and that support would be focused on life saving, psycho-social and teacher support as opposed to direct education support. The UK also recorded that they were neither abstaining nor agreeing to a non-objection at this moment in time, whilst pending further information on the FER and advice from FCDO colleagues, including on internal decision protocols.

2.11 The European Commission was not in a position of agreeing to a non-objection pending further details on the FER including reassurances of respect of EU restrictive measures.

2.12 Germany abstained from giving their non-objection to the FER as Germany's contribution to ECW is earmarked to development through the Multi-year Resilience Programme (MYRP).

2.13 USAID abstained from giving their non-objection to the FER and requested to ensure that no US funds will go to the response.

2.14 In response to these questions and comments the ECW Executive Director explained that ECW uses the Direct Execution modality in all its investments, whereby funds only go to grantees that have been rigorously assessed under UNICEF's Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) process. In the case of Gaza, the Executive Director reinforced the point that as other potential implementing partners are yet to be identified, only UN agencies (UNRWA and UNICEF) have been selected and thus will receive the funds.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 2.15 The ExCom thus approved through non-objection and abstentions the allocation of the US\$ 10 million FER dedicated for the humanitarian education response in Gaza. The FER will support partners to deliver MHPSS, create protective and alternative learning opportunities and to help generate global funding (see Annex B for the press release published on 1 November 2023). The ExCom will be notified once the fully detailed FER application has been developed.

3. Update on the ECW Operational Manual

The ECW Deputy Director:

- 3.1 presented updates and next steps on the ECW Operational Manual including:
- a) its development timeline from 2017 to 2023;
 - b) scope of the update based primarily on management responses to evaluations and the internal audit; and
 - c) realistic scenarios for timely finalization and approval of the updated Manual (see presentation in Annex C);

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 3.2 proposed the following key changes to the terms of reference for updating the Manual:
- a) deferring decision-making on updating the Operational Manual to the ExCom, not simply at the Executive Director or ExCom Co-Chair level; and
 - b) ensuring the hosting agreement with UNICEF is factored in updating the Operational Manual;
- 3.3 suggested to diversify member representation in the Operational Manual Advisory Group, particularly involving representatives from the Global South;
- 3.4 proposed that the MYRP manual and the Standard Contribution Agreement are also finalized and updated on a rolling basis; and
- 3.5 raised the need for adequate time and additional support and expertise in updating the Operational Manual; agreed on having one fully developed draft version in September 2024 and on using the in-person ExCom in May for a discussion on critical issues.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 3.6 The ExCom approved the TORs for the update of the Operational Manual subject to the changes highlighted during the meeting.

Note: Please refer to the Annex D for the notes from the Operational Manual Advisory Group summarizing the key changes and next steps on updating the Operational Manual and Annex E for the Terms of Reference which have been updated following the comments made at the ExCom meeting.

4. MYRP Portfolio Management

The ECW Deputy Director, with facilitation support from the Lego Foundation:

4.1 introduced the objectives of the session which:

- a) aimed to make progress on the Strategic Plan commitment to reduce the MYRP portfolio;
- b) presented a two-step prioritization methodology to guide the initial process of downsizing the portfolio followed by conducting external independent assessments; and
- c) sought to determine the ExCom's "level of comfort" on the methodology and seek relevant feedback about the factors affecting their decision.

In breakout group exercises, the ExCom shared the following feedback on the MYRP prioritization methodology:

- 4.2 Consider how to communicate to country partners and transition MYRP activities to government actors while analysing potential risks and considering proper timing and government capacity;
- 4.3 Ensure that learning is documented and made available in open learning resources;
- 4.4 Highlight the importance of performance assessments and the prioritization's impact on programme sustainability and social mobilization;
- 4.5 Clarify success indicators and define what is meant by "handover" versus "withdrawal";
- 4.6 Consider the lifecycles of programmes and the different contexts and variations of crises when continuing or phasing out MYRPs;
- 4.7 Ensure that there is continued advocacy when withdrawing from a MYRP-recipient country;
- 4.8 Note the challenges in deprioritizing a country with high emergency needs; handing over MYRPs in countries awash with funds; withdrawing MYRPs in early stages; targeting similar children in similar programs; and programming MYRPs for humanitarian/emergency activities; and
- 4.9 Examine the robustness and completeness of the prioritization criteria, particularly with regard to an "exit strategy";

In the plenary, the ExCom:

- 4.10 expressed their support on the prioritization methodology and proposed revisiting the criteria based on the feedback from the group discussion, including assessments of ECW's performance and relative value-add, and particularly how these criteria align with the rationale of approving a MYRP application and incorporating a sustainability aspect and exit strategy;
- 4.11 discussed whether or not ECW should withdraw MYRPs in Ecuador and Peru when their current funding expires;
- 4.12 noted that Ecuador and Peru's current MYRPs will end in December 2023 and March 2024 respectively, and will undergo a phase out period until December 2026 where an exit strategy in their final application will be required from the two countries;
- 4.13 cautioned against potential risks of the prioritization process being unfair, and therefore proposed that the prioritization methodology and decision-making must be carefully explained;
- 4.14 raised the importance of "sense-checks" to determine (geo)political considerations in retaining MYRPs in selected countries;
- 4.15 proposed engaging an independent consultancy firm to support step two of the methodology on conducting performance assessments, while considering lower cost options drawing on annual review / performance assessments; and
- 4.16 recognized the expectation from humanitarian coordinators to mobilize resources in addition to MYRP funding, and that resource mobilization in EiE is a collective responsibility.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 4.17 Although there was agreement on the use of a two-step methodology, there was no consensus on which countries to phase out from. The ExCom asked the ECW Secretariat to revert back based on the comments raised during the session
- 4.18 The ExCom approved the two-step approach in principle but asked the Secretariat to adapt it based on the criteria discussed during the session (STEP 1 based on ranking; STEP 2 assessment).
- 4.19 The ExCom did not consent to the withdrawal from specific countries based on the list presented under STEP 1. ExCom asked the secretariat to refine and update the list based on the criteria discussed to take a decision on countries at the next ExCom meeting.

5. Climate

The Chief of Strategy, Planning and Accountability and ECW Senior Climate Consultant:

5.1 presented the following key findings and next steps of the *Education and Climate Reflections Paper*:

- a) ECW's strong track record in addressing climate-induced emergencies through the MYRPs and FERs, as well as the integration of disaster risk reduction in ECW programmes;
- b) the need for more climate sensitivity at the design stage of MYRP;
- c) focus areas for ECW efforts, including anticipatory action and preparedness, coordination and partnerships advancing EiEPC agendas (highlighting the role of CSOs, children and young people), and building a track record on inclusion and empowerment; and
- d) reviewing findings, prioritizing action areas, considering necessary resources, producing a climate approach document, and delivering on ECW's seven climate-related Annual Workplan commitments.

In discussion, the ExCom:

5.2 flagged the potential challenge of accrediting ECW for climate funds, and proposed to ECW to explore co-financing, map climate financing, and collaborate with partners to avoid duplications;

5.3 enquired about ECW's intention to create a separate investment window on climate.

6. Annual Workplan

The ECW Chief of Strategy, Planning and Accountability:

6.1 presented the ECW 2024 Annual Workplan, in particular:

- a) its strategic priorities;
- b) achievements as of 2023, including targets that are met, on track, and delayed;
- c) the process for developing the Annual Workplan;
- d) its four strategic priorities; and
- e) a snapshot of ECW's monitoring and reporting platform

In discussion, the ExCom proposed the following actions in line with the 2024 Annual Workplan:

- 6.2 leverage and build upon existing systems and initiatives in all its data and evidence related work, including the Financing Observatory as well as the tracking approach for assessing progress towards improved nexus coherence;
- 6.3 consider the level of ambition and the potential risks of setting too many activities, and ensure that the risk management reporting and safeguarding component of the workplan are in place;
- 6.4 provide the ExCom with progress updates on the current year, ahead of the next meeting, in order to assist participants in formulating views on the Annual Workplan;
- 6.5 update the ExCom on the development of climate-related work, including a staffing plan;
- 6.6 provide more entry-points for youth involvement particularly on political advocacy at the national level, and teacher participation in climate-responsive education;
- 6.7 explore ways to tap climate financing and advancing the mobilization of the acceleration facility;
- 6.8 promote the use of localized impact measurement tools; identify key pledging events and leveraging domestic financing in education (e.g. 2024 is the year of Education in the African Union); and engage civil society in localization;
- 6.9 build on and advance existing efforts related to the nexus and coordination, for example the Initiative for Strengthening Education in Emergencies Coordination (ISEEC);
- 6.10 determine effective ways to frame and strengthen the advocacy on climate and the prioritization of EiE, and how education contributes to other SDGs.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 6.11 The ExCom approved the 2024 Annual Workplan. The Co-chairs confirmed that the Secretariat will circulate a written note responding to the points of clarification raised via email and during the meeting. The Secretariat will share a progress report for 2023 in the first quarter of 2024.

7. 2024 Budget

The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:

- 7.1 presented ECW's financial model for 2023 and 2026 highlighting:
 - a) that for expenditure planning, ECW has worked on 70% of the budget set out in the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan; and
 - b) the goal of keeping operational costs within 7% of programme costs.
- 7.2 invited the ExCom to:

- a) approve 2024 operational budget of US\$ 16,487,976 in alignment with the financial framework for the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan; and
- b) agree that a fair and proportional distribution of operational costs should be pursued from all donors allowing ECW to work with UNICEF as a host to integrate appropriate provisions into relevant legal documents.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 7.3 recognized ECW's effort in keeping the operational costs under 7%;
- 7.4 highlighted the importance of sufficient safeguarding while the recruitment of a safeguarding manager is on pause and noted that ECW's risk management consultants will address safeguarding concerns for the meantime;
- 7.5 encouraged the hiring of more interns to offer ECW a fresh perspective on ways of working;
- 7.6 clarified what is meant by agreeing to a "fair and proportional distribution" and enquired about the discrepancy between the UNICEF's operational charge for earmarked and unearmarked funds that ranges from 5% to 7%.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 7.7 The ExCom agreed that a fair and proportional distribution of operational costs of up to 7% across all contributions should be pursued (except on contributions earmarked to operational costs). ExCom requests ECW to work with its host UNICEF to integrate such a provision into the relevant legal documents.
- 7.8 The ExCom approved the 2024 Secretariat budget.

8. AOB, Summary and Close

The ExCom Co-chairs:

- 8.1 shared that four ExCom meetings are planned for 2024:
 - a) 27 February 2024, Virtual – to report on the previous year's Annual Workplan and actual expenses
 - b) 29 May 2024, In-person, Berlin, Germany – to report on management responses to evaluations, and present the risk management/risk report
 - c) 26 August 2024, Virtual – to present the Annual Result Report, update the status for financing windows, and discuss the HLSG agenda for September 2024

- d) 26 November 2024, Programme Country – to present and seek approval on the Annual Workplan and Secretariat budget for 2025

8.2 asked the ExCom to consider one in-person meeting a year and three virtual meetings;

8.3 offered Marco Grazia (INGO representative) the opportunity to share his farewell message and reflections to the ExCom, and commended him for his passion, valuable contribution, and active engagement with ECW in the last few years; and

8.4 reminded the ExCom about the technical parallel sessions on 1 November 2023.

The ECW Executive Director:

8.5 closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their active participation and thoughtful discussions, and encouraged partners to share advocacy messages on education-in-emergencies with ECW in order to increase partner and programme visibility.

Annexes

Annex A: [List of participants](#)

Annex B: [Press release on ECW FER US\\$10 million for EiE in Gaza](#)

Annex C: [Combined Powerpoint Presentation on Operational Manual, Climate, Annual Workplan, and Budget](#)

Annex D: [Operational Manual Advisory Group Parallel Session Notes](#)

Annex E: [Operational Manual Advisory Group Terms of Reference](#)

Annex F: [Meeting Agenda and Background Papers](#)

Annex F: [Other post-meeting documents, e.g. presentations and notes from parallel sessions](#)