

MINUTES

Executive Committee Meeting



Tue 26 March 2024, Virtual Meeting

1. Co-chairs' welcome and introduction

The Executive Committee (ExCom) co-chairs:

- 1.1 opened the meeting with the news on the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza for the month of Ramadan;
- 1.2 welcomed all participants to the meeting and acknowledged new ExCom members joining the meeting for the first time - Odinakachi Ahanonu (National CSO representative), Margarita Focas Licht (GPE), and Simeon Mwanza (Porticus);
- 1.3 welcomed and introduced ECW's new Chief of Education, Dianah Nelsen.
- 1.4 commended the ECW Secretariat for the successful organization of the joint mission to Nigeria on 19-23 February and shared their key takeaways and observations, notably:
 - a) the effective coordination of the Education cluster;
 - b) well-integrated mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) components in ECW-funded initiatives;
 - c) impressive work of local CSOs;
 - d) access to and engagement with high-ranking officials in Nigeria;
 - e) interaction with children and youth, and ECW grantees;
 - f) the need for further advocacy and funding especially for the Northwestern region of the country.
- 1.5 mentioned that objectives and outcomes related to the Nigeria mission were shared in ECW's monthly Operational Update and also outlined in a mission report;
- 1.6 summarized the key outcomes of the last ExCom meeting in Billund, Denmark and outlined the agenda items for the virtual meeting.

2. Executive Director's Update

The ECW Executive Director:

- 2.1 provided an update on the disruption of education for children and adolescents worldwide due to conflict, forced displacement, and climate disasters, and underlined the urgency of the situation, with widespread destruction of schools and significant forced displacement, paralleling the magnitude of crises seen since the Second World War.
- 2.2 highlighted the disregard for international humanitarian law and the Safe School Declaration, emphasizing the critical need to prioritize support for affected children, adolescents, and teachers.

- 2.3 underlined the co-chairs' key observations from the Nigeria mission, particularly the need for additional resources for education in emergencies.
- 2.4 highlighted the success of the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) in Nigeria in providing educational support and rehabilitation for survivors of sexual violence, particularly adolescent girls affected by Boko Haram.
- 2.5 provided an update on the situation in DRC where:
- a) GSF plans to replicate their learning model from Nigeria in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for over 724,000 children facing education disruption due to conflict and climate shocks, particularly in North Kivu;
 - b) a First Emergency Response (FER) grant of US\$ 2 million is underway to mitigate the escalating crisis in the country.
- 2.6 stressed the importance of additional support from strategic donor partners and humanitarian coordinators, and strengthening funding mechanisms in-country, drawing on a funding model where donor investment is expected to leverage contributions from other stakeholders and citing best practices from the EU, USAID and UK;
- 2.7 provided an update on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza where:
- a) over 625,000 school children have lost access to education since October 2023 along with significant damage to school buildings;
 - b) the ExCom's approval of the US\$10 million FER for Gaza will fund MHPSS and creating safe learning spaces for children
 - c) ongoing efforts by UNRWA, and UNICEF provide comprehensive support for children in Gaza, alongside efforts by Sigrid Kaag, Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, UNESCO and WFP in coordinating efforts for reconstruction and education system recovery in Gaza;
 - d) ECW plans to support NRC's Better Learning program, where teachers are being trained to provide MHPSS, to complement the work of UNWRA and UNICEF, aimed to address mental health issues faced by children, including chronic stress and complex post-traumatic stress disorder;
- 2.8 discussed the catastrophic situation in Sudan where:
- a) over 8.1 million persons have been displaced from April 2023, including 6.3 million internationally displaced and 1.3 million displaced to neighboring countries.
 - b) over 53,000 individuals have been newly displaced over the last few weeks; .
 - c) ECW was first to respond to the refugee flows into the country in line with the regional refugee response plan;
 - d) collaboration between UNHCR, Jesuit Refugee Service and other CSOs is remarkably visible;
 - e) UNHCR provided immediate protection and assistance to refugees even in the toughest conditions;
 - f) it is critically important fund the regional refugee response plan to provide education services to new arrivals to the extent possible.
- 2.9 provided an update on the situation in Haiti where:

- a) the unprecedented levels of human rights violations and gang violence in the country urgently demand for humanitarian assistance especially for the 3 million affected children;
- b) ECW plans to respond to Haiti with a US\$ 2.5 million FER against total needs of US \$28.6 million. The FER will enable continuity of education and we will continue to encourage other donors to come in alongside us to support the huge needs;

2.10 provided an update on Ukraine and highlighted:

- a) that the war continues with no end in sight, where education is an intentional causality with over 3,500 education institutions damaged or destroyed and over 530 children killed;
- b) the ExCom's approval of the US\$ 18 million Multi-year Resilience Program (MYRP) for Ukraine;
- c) launch of the MYRP on 12 March 2024, attended by Ukraine's Minister of Education and Science Oksen Lisovyi;
- d) the valuable support of donors particularly the Government of Germany, Porticus, and Japan (first time donor with US\$ 3million contribution) and collaboration with GPE and the Global Business Coalition in designing the MYRP.

2.11 emphasized the crucial role of the private sector in generating additional funding;

2.12 reiterated the importance of collaboration, resource mobilization, and advocacy to effectively address the root cause of conflicts and humanitarian crises worldwide.

3. 2023 financial overview and 2024 investment window allocations

The ExCom co-chair:

3.1 explained the purpose of the agenda item which sought the ExCom's formal endorsement of the 2023 budget usage report and updated the ExCom on the 2024 investment window allocations.

The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:

3.2 reintroduced ECW's 2023-26 Strategic Plan Financial Framework and explained that it ensures alignment of operational expenses with the 7% threshold annually and that programmatic expenditure is guided by the resources mobilized, currently targeted at US\$1,050 million (70% of US\$1.5 billion);

3.3 provided an overview of (a) disbursements for different funding windows in 2023, noting variances due to delays in project execution and revised timelines, and (b) operational costs, including adjustments made for staffing plan implementation;

3.4 assured the ExCom that despite the variations over the strategic period, the financial framework per year is the same and ECW remains on target.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 3.5 acknowledged ECW efforts in recruiting staff and sought clarification on how underspending is managed in order to meet the funding target;
- 3.6 noted the complexity of managing multi-year grants where funding cannot be immediately raised considering the absorption capacity on the ground and agreements in place.
- 3.7 noted that ECW's plans to address underspending by balancing disbursements over the strategic period and ensuring alignment with the 7% threshold for operational expenses;
- 3.8 suggested exploring new funding sources and innovative mechanisms, and that in the meantime ECW needs to be pragmatic and plan with currently available funding;

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 3.9 The ExCom formally endorsed the 2023 budget usage report.

4. MYRP Portfolio Management

The ECW Deputy Director:

- 4.1 presented the proposed approaches for managing the MYRP portfolio as follows:
 - a) removing countries from the existing list via a combination of independent assessments and country-led design processes.
 - b) adding countries to the list, as and when they are suggested, by evaluating them against criteria which will be produced as part of the independent assessments.
- 4.2 discussed the process and timeline for independent assessments, whereby ECW:
 - a) has contracted the consultancy firm Mokoro to conduct the independent assessments and develop the criteria for adding and removing countries;
 - b) continues to engage with the Education Technical Reference Group and Gender Reference Group in defining the scope of the independent assessments, in which interested ExCom members are also invited to participate including in a meeting scheduled on 3 April.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 4.3 asked whether it would be more efficient to conduct the independent assessments by country partners themselves, rather than an external company. There was also some concerns raised in relation to the proposed timeline which means that any withdrawals would not come into effect until the beginning of the next strategic planning period and it was suggested that renewal periods are thus shortened where possible.
- 4.4 stressed the importance of ensuring that exit strategies are developed in each case where programme closure is agreed. In this regard, GPE offered to engage in discussions around programme continuity. ExCom also requested that the proposed criteria upon which to assess adding or removing countries comes back for further discussion and approval in due course.

- 4.5 recommended formulating a short decision language in the future instead of referring to long papers and suggested to use the ETRG to develop a specific decision language to be tabled to ExCom, and to use the ETRG more for technical discussions.

In response:

- 4.6 The Deputy Director highlighted that the use of an external company (Mokoro) to conduct independent assessments will bring greater objectivity and credibility to the process and avoid a conflict of interest whereby countries are evaluating their own programmes.
- 4.7 The ECW Secretariat will accelerate the processes as much as possible, noting that it is important to exit carefully and give enough time to hand over programmes which will continue to be funded from other sources. Collaboration with continuity with GPE is welcomed, noting that ECW MYRP funding intentionally covers both humanitarian and development aspects in protracted crises as this nexus programming is at the heart of the MYRP approach. The criteria to be developed by Mokoro will be presented to ExCom in due course.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 4.8 The ExCom approved the approach to managing the MYRP portfolio.

5. Update on the revision of the ECW Operational Manual (OM)

The Chair of the OM Advisory Group:

- 5.1 acknowledged the efforts of advisory group and everyone involved in revision of the OM, particularly the OM consultant ;
- 5.2 shared that in order to allow OM Advisory Group members to share their priorities and perspectives on the OM revision, the OM consultant is engaging in one-on-one meetings with members which will continue on into April;
- 5.3 presented the key issues to be identified in the revision of the OM, which includes ECW's:
- a) high-level governance
 - b) ExCom representation
 - c) decision making
 - d) leadership on different issues
 - e) hosting agreement
- 5.4 shared the timeline for the OM revision, whereby a first complete draft of the revised OM will be ready in June 2024, followed by a final version for the ExCom meeting in August so that it can subsequently be submitted for approval by the HLSG at their meeting in September;

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 5.5 noted that the process for the OM revision is on track;

- 5.6 commended the Chair of the OM Advisory Group and the ECW Deputy Director for spearheading the revision of the OM;
- 5.7 commended the growth of ECW under its Executive Director's leadership and the need for the updated OM to reflect this success;
- 5.8 underlined the need to delineate roles and responsibilities between the HLSG, ExCom and reference groups and empower reference groups by bringing greater rigour and consistency into how they operate;
- 5.9 stressed the importance of meaningful and diverse participation and representation in ECW's governance, with increased presence from the global South.

6. UNICEF Hosting Agreement

The UNICEF Deputy Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management:

- 6.1 updated the ExCom on the status of the draft hosting agreement which outlines standard operating procedures governing UNICEF-hosted funds, such as their governance arrangements, roles of different entities, conflict of interest management, contractual status of employees, financial management, external relations, and termination procedures, among others;
- 6.2 informed the ExCom that feedback on the draft is expected by 22 April, with the aim to finalize the agreement by end of May 2024.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 6.3 proposed that the timeline for finalizing the hosting agreement incorporates bilateral meetings with stakeholders, for example with the EU, to ensure alignment with existing partnership agreements with UN entities;
- 6.4 noted that ECW's Chief of Finance and Operations will be the focal point of the ECW Secretariat to address matters pertinent to finalizing the hosting agreement.

7. HLSG meeting agenda

The ECW Executive Director:

- 7.1 presented the agenda and objectives of the meeting, emphasizing the two focus areas for plenary discussion: (a) education in the context of escalating crises and (b) resource mobilization for the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan;
- 7.2 emphasized the importance of physical attendance in the HLSG meeting and encouraged the ExCom to ensure the participation of their principal HLSG members;
- 7.3 welcomed the possibility of virtual participation and receiving official statements related to the agenda items from principal members who are unable to attend the meeting in-person;

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 7.4 proposed including Haiti as among the conflict-affected countries to be tackled in the HLSG meeting and noted UNESCO's interest to speak on Haiti during the meeting;
- 7.5 acknowledged leveraging private sector partnerships for resource mobilization and the LEGO Foundation's continued support in ECW's resource mobilization efforts.

8. AOB, Summary and Close

The ExCom:

- 8.1 noted the convergence of views on the frequency of ExCom meetings, towards moving it to three meetings a year from 2025 onwards, with one in-person and two virtual meetings; this will then be reflected in the updated OM;
- 8.2 noted that it is crucial to follow up on commitments made during the Transforming Education Summit, ensuring that education in emergencies is prioritized in the Summit of the Future;
- 8.3 noted that the next in-person meeting will take place in Berlin, Germany on 29 May 2024 which will include:
 - a) pre-meetings and an evening reception on 28 May
 - b) thematic sessions on 30 May
 - c) optional activities, such as a visit to German schools, which integrate the inclusion of refugees and children with disabilities;
- 8.4 noted that the ExCom meeting in Berlin will be followed by the GPE Board meeting, which ECW has been welcomed to attend, and that ECW is welcome to join a multilateral agency constituency of the GPE Board.

The ExCom co-chairs adjourned the meeting with thanks to all attendees.

Annexes

Annex A: [List of Participants](#)

Annex B: [Nigeria Mission Report](#)

Annex C: [Agenda and Background Papers](#)

Annex D: [Finance Presentation](#)