

# MINUTES

## Executive Committee Meeting

Tue 27 August 2024, Virtual

### 1. Co-chairs' welcome and introduction

#### **The Executive Committee (ExCom) co-chairs:**

- 1.1 welcomed all participants to the meeting and introduced new ExCom members joining the meeting for the first time – Pia Britto (UNICEF) and Natasha de Marcken (USAID), and thanked their respective predecessors Rob Jenkins and LeAnna Marr for their strong support and valuable contributions to ECW;
- 1.2 noted that a new representative from France's Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs will soon be joining the ExCom, taking over the role of Rouksana Cardinaux-Simjee;
- 1.3 thanked members for the good feedback on the in-person ExCom meeting in Berlin in May;
- 1.4 thanked the ECW Secretariat for well preparing the background documents of the meeting and sharing the presentations in advance;
- 1.5 highlighted the two main agenda items for the meeting – (a) the endorsement of the 2023 Annual Results Report, and (b) discussion of the key issues in updating Operational Manual and decision on its timeline;
- 1.6 explained that comments on the Draft Climate Finance Paper will be collected in writing;
- 1.7 asked participants for consent to record the meeting. No objections were raised.

*[Note: See Annex A for the list of participants]*

### 2. Executive Director's Update

#### **The ECW Executive Director:**

- 2.1 welcomed the two new ExCom members, recognizing ECW's strong longstanding collaboration with UNICEF and USAID;
- 2.2 reaffirmed that ECW's top priority is to ensure children receive quality education and to use taxpayers' money effectively;
- 2.3 stressed that ECW's focus should be on field operations, delivering results, and maintaining accountability to all stakeholders;
- 2.4 highlighted ECW's strengths as a global fund, evidenced by successful audits and evaluations, ensuring funding utilization has passed all tests;

- 2.5 recognized the effectiveness of the ExCom in facilitating ECW to operate with humanitarian speed and development depth;
- 2.6 updated on various country engagements:
  - 2.6.1 In Eastern DRC: highlighted the severe violations of international law impacting school-age children; reported the successful MYRP reaching over 70,000 children, and an emergency response supporting 20,000 students and teachers;
  - 2.6.2 In Haiti: reported on US\$15.8 million investment focusing on teacher retention and catch-up classes amid gang violence and internal displacement;
  - 2.6.3 In Ukraine: highlighted the US\$26.9 million investment in response to the war in Ukraine, including support for refugees in Moldova, and upcoming travel to Ukraine for the Summit with First Ladies and Gentlemen in September;
  - 2.6.4 In Gaza: commended the ExCom for swift approval of US\$10 million funding for UNRWA and UNICEF; announced additional US\$2 million approval for the Norwegian Refugee Council for education and psychosocial services;
  - 2.6.5 In Afghanistan: highlighted the Taliban's continued ban on girls' secondary education; and emphasized the need for innovative solutions and continued support from various organizations beyond advocacy;
  - 2.6.6 In Sudan: reported on the largest internal displacement crisis globally, with 10.7 million displaced persons and 2.1 million refugees; mentioned efforts in Egypt to support refugees, with a call for additional funding to address a US\$6.9 million deficit.
- 2.7 highlighted ECW's robust financial progress, progressing towards 70% of the strategic plan's financial requirements through 2026 and that 30% is still needed to fully meet the \$20 million target.

**In discussion, the ExCom:**

- 2.8 raised whether current conditions in Egypt are conducive to effectively supporting Sudanese refugee children in light of recent developments and potential barriers such as new residency requirements, school closures and processing delays;
- 2.9 inquired about the estimates of Palestinian children from Gaza in Egypt who may face educational barriers and whether they are included in the Regional Refugee Response Plan, which currently addresses only Sudanese refugees.

**In response, the ECW Executive Director:**

- 2.10 acknowledged the major protection challenge posed by new residency requirements in Egypt, with UNHCR actively engaged in supporting over 400,000 Sudanese refugees, many of whom are children needing education despite an overstretched public school system;

- 2.11 clarified that UNHCR handles all refugees except Palestinians, who fall under UNRWA's responsibility; however, UNRWA has no official presence in Egypt, and Palestinian refugees are not included in the Regional Response Plan;
- 2.12 suggested reaching out to ECW's Chief of Partnerships Nasser Faqih (nfaqih@unicef.org) for more information on Palestinian education initiatives in Gaza and the West Bank.

### 3. Finance Update

#### **The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:**

- 3.1 recalled ECW's financial framework aiming for US\$1.5 billion in the Strategic Plan (with 6% reserved for operations and risk, allocating 66% to MYRPs, 25% for FERs, and the remainder 3% to the AF) and the decision to adjust the target to 70% for planning purposes to avoid overextending resources;
- 3.2 reported that 62% has already been mobilized, with confidence in reaching the full 70% within the strategic period;
- 3.3 presented ECW's financial situation, noting that with US\$928 million pledged and \$444 million committed, there remains a balance of US\$484 million, ensuring a stable financial position;
- 3.4 discussed the status of the investment windows, whereby there is 98.7% progress toward the US\$235.6 million target, with slight variations in allocations, maintaining solid progress and on-target disbursements;
- 3.5 shared that there are significant investments in Western and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa, with particular emphasis on Gaza and Lebanon.

*[Note: See Annex C for Finance Update Presentation]*

### 4. 2023 Annual Results Report

#### **The ExCom Co-chairs:**

- 4.1 opened the session by thanking ExCom members for providing feedback on the draft 2023 Annual Results Report, acknowledging that this practice is highly valuable. The feedback helps to identify issues, which is essential for refining the Report;
- 4.2 emphasized that the draft Report is crucial for maintaining an overview, interfacing with partners, and supporting advocacy efforts. The Report serves as a key reference in national and international work.

#### **The ECW Chief of Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting:**

- 4.3 presented the results report and thanked the ExCom for their feedback;

- 4.4 highlighted the key features of the report, including the new theory of change, modular structure, and the focus on learning and accountability;
- 4.5 discussed the report's modular approach with text boxes serving different purposes for learning and accountability, and introduced the scorecard method with a traffic light system for ease of reading and tracking progress;
- 4.6 emphasized transparency with evidence bases and strength ratings for each indicator;
- 4.7 provided a comprehensive overview of achievements and challenges related to the results including:
  - 4.7.1 Children reached: 5.6 million children reached in the past year and 11 million since inception, albeit challenges related to increased cost per child and the need for strategic discussions;
  - 4.7.2 Diversity and targets: progress on diversity targets, including achievements and ongoing challenges in reaching girls, children with disabilities, and pre-primary education;
  - 4.7.3 Participation: 95% of FERs/MYRPs reported increased participation; of programmes reporting increased participation, 72% showed gender-equitable improvements;
  - 4.7.4 Learning outcomes: 80% of MYRPs (eight MYRPs) reported improved literacy and numeracy, amid challenges in measuring outcomes and the need for realistic expectations in emergency settings.
  - 4.7.5 SEL measurement: improvements in SEL measurement, with the majority of three out of four reporting better SEL and well-being outcomes in ECW-supported learning spaces, although the evidence base is currently small;
  - 4.7.6 Nexus coordination: MYRP grantees and partners self-assessed their contributions to improve nexus coordination and coherence; 6 MYRPs reported that they significantly contributed to strengthening nexus coherence;
  - 4.7.7 Localization: 24% of funds transferred to local and national partners as directly as possible, falling short of the 30% target; self-assessments indicating significant contributions to improved engagement with national and local partners and affected populations;
  - 4.7.8 Tracking knowledge products: tracking and assessing the production, quality, sharing, and usage by partners.
  - 4.7.9 EiEPC financing: a trend of increased funding with a recent slight decrease; the need to safeguard investments and address funding shortfalls.
- 4.8 Shared next steps and action points including:

- 4.8.1 Strengthening measurement: Work on enhancing the measurement of learning outcomes and social norm changes, aiming to include more data and improve tracking mechanisms.
- 4.8.2 Improving nexus coordination: Implement measures to integrate more recently developed nexus concepts in MYRPs and adjust reporting templates to capture richer and more accurate data.
- 4.8.3 Funding and resource mobilization: Develop strategies to increase the percentage of funds transferred to local and national partners as directly as possible and improve the tracking of funding delivery chains; streamline decision-making processes to enhance fund disbursement speed while maintaining participatory processes; continue robust advocacy and facilitate innovative partnerships to support resource mobilization.

4.9 thanked ECW's M&E team and the broader ECW Secretariat for their significant efforts in preparing the Report.

*[Note: See Annex D & E for ARR Background Paper and Presentation]*

#### **In discussion, the ExCom:**

- 4.10 congratulated ECW for producing what could be its best annual report yet and acknowledged its importance for securing donor support and resource mobilization, while noting the need to address funding gaps, disability rates, focus on teachers, and stronger data collection and evidence building;
- 4.11 acknowledged the thorough presentation and detailed report, appreciating the scorecard system and transparency in showcasing both achievements and challenges, especially regarding learning and accountability in education in emergencies;
- 4.12 highlighted the achievement of reaching 5.6 million children, and emphasized the need for further efforts and attention to challenging situations;
- 4.13 stressed the importance of understanding whether increased costs per child are contributing to better access or learning outcomes;
- 4.14 inquired about strategies to speed up the delivery of education in crisis situations and improve initial response times linked to ECW funds;
- 4.15 asked how "forgotten crises" are identified and whether more could be done to highlight and address these crises while balancing the US\$1.5 billion funding target with depth and quality of reach;
- 4.16 emphasized the need for clarity and detailed reporting of sample sizes to enhance the reliability of results, while also advocating for investment in holistic learning outcomes
- 4.17 asked how the ETRG is engaged in the Annual Results Report and proposed a better involvement of the group.

4.18 emphasized the importance of the Report for governance and oversight, particularly in relation to resource allocation and sector-wide lessons learned and requested further insights on challenges faced in data collection and reporting.

**In response, the ECW Chief of Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting explained that:**

4.19 The evidence base for learning outcomes is derived from 26 or 27 MYRPs, with 30% reporting either partial or solid evidence. Out of these, 60% have solid evidence, which consists of at least two data points. Efforts are ongoing to enhance measurement tools and advocate for more comprehensive data collection, despite resistance within the humanitarian field;

4.20 Forgotten crises are identified using media coverage and funding patterns, guided by ECHO's definition.

4.21 Analyzing cost drivers and conducting value-for-money assessments are planned to better understand cost variations across agencies and improve program design;

4.22 The report emphasizes transparency and the importance of detailed evidence in driving accountability and mobilizing resources. This openness helps in constructive dialogue and advocacy, contributing to more effective resource mobilization and program development.

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS**

4.23 The ExCom unanimously endorsed the 2023 Annual Results Report, commending it for its outstanding quality and excellence.

**5. Operational Manual: Timeline and consensus on key issues**

**The Chair of the Operational Manual Advisory Group:**

5.1 thanked members of the Operational Manual Advisory Group, the ECW Secretariat, and consultant Ann Lund for their hard work and collaborative efforts in updating the Operational Manual;

5.2 recalled that the rationale for updating the Operational Manual, which is driven by audit findings, ECW's rapid growth, and the need for improved governance, accountability, transparency, and decision-making processes;

5.3 emphasized that the update process is a major change management effort, addressing issues to enhance impact and realign practices with the Operational Manual;

5.4 described the process of compiling and refining issues identified; using a traffic light scoring system to integrate solutions into the new draft of the Operation Manual; and involving a diverse group of stakeholders, including donor countries and various organizations;

- 5.5 addressed the complications introduced by the new hosting arrangements and standard operating procedures (SOPs), requiring alignment and coherence with the updated Operational Manual;
- 5.6 recognized concerns about the impact of changes on the ECW Secretariat's staff, including stability and institutional memory, and the need for discussions with UNICEF to ensure stability and effective governance;
- 5.7 highlighted the importance of balancing governance and services provided by UNICEF with the need for ECW to retain autonomy and flexibility as it matures;
- 5.8 mentioned that some recommendations or directions for updating the Operational Manual might need adjustment based on ongoing negotiations and agreements related to the hosting arrangement and SOPs.
- 5.9 recognized the significant changes facing ECW and the need to maintain focus on delivering its mandate, and raised concerns about conflicts of interest related to the hosting arrangement, and the importance of setting up proper firewalls and transparency measures;
- 5.10 recalled the agreed changes to the Operational Manual, including governance, accountability, transparency, and procedural aspects, and noted the introduction of voting mechanisms and formal documentation practices;
- 5.11 confirmed that Rt Hon Gordon Brown will continue as High-level Steering Group (HLSG) Chair until a successor is appointed, with a working group to support the recruitment process;
- 5.12 emphasized the need to finalize the division of responsibilities between the HLSG and ExCom for effective decision-making, and to review and potentially adjust their compositions to enhance representation and effectiveness;
- 5.13 introduced a critical issues paper to highlight matters which are expected to subsequently be raised to the HLSG, covering governance, recruitment, conflict of interest, and delegation of responsibilities; the paper had been discussed in the OMAG, will be presented to the HLSG chair, but also needs to be shared with ExCom in a timely manner;
- 5.14 presented the timeline for finalizing the Operational Manual, hosting review, and recruitment of a new HLSG Chair, with a focus on ensuring a smooth transition and continued progress;
- 5.15 called on ECW's Chief of Finance and Operations to provide further details on the hosting arrangement and SOPs.

**The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:**

- 5.16 shared the status of the key documents including the Hosting Arrangement which is nearing finalization with ongoing negotiations with UNICEF;

5.17 highlighted the changes in the UNICEF Procedures for Hosted Funds and Partnerships, which raise concerns on relinquishing special conditions of staff members, staff recruitment, mobility and rotation, affecting ECW's institutional knowledge and unique value add.

5.18 shared that efforts are being made by ECW's Senior Management Team such as managing staff concerns and keeping staff motivated and aligned with the ECW mission;

5.19 explained that the hosting review planned for 2025 is part of an ongoing commitment and has been included in the Strategic Plan and Evaluation Plan for some time; and stressed that the review must be handled carefully and be anchored in the HLSG.

*[Note: See Annexes F, G, & H for a copy of the UNICEF Hosting Arrangement, UNICEF Procedure on Hosted Funds and Partnerships, and related presentation]*

**In discussion, the ExCom:**

5.20 commended Judith Herbertson's leadership as Chair of the Operational Manual Advisory Group, and expressed satisfaction with the progress of updating the Manual;

5.21 noted concerns about the recommendation not to extend the term of the current HLSG Chair, given the unique added value that the UN Special Envoy for Global Education brings to ECW. Change can cause instability and thus the process of finding a new HLSG Chair (with Global South experience) needs to be smooth;

5.22 emphasized the importance of maintaining complementarity and autonomy within the ECW staffing, given their successful integration of various education emergency sector components;

5.23 raised the following concerns related to the impact and implications of the new UNICEF SOPs on hosted funds such as:

5.23.1 potential impacts of SOP changes on the autonomy and complementarity of ECW staffing;

5.23.2 potential conflicts of interest and the need for mitigation strategies;

5.23.3 impact of temporary staffing measures at UNICEF on ECW;

5.23.4 the clarity of roles and hosting arrangements at the country level, and the need to balance diversification and localization with organizational efficiencies;

5.23.5 clarity on auditing processes and managing the loss of technical expertise due to staff rotations;

5.24 noted strong involvement from the HLSG Chair in discussions about hosting arrangements and procedures;

5.25 noted that GPE staff is not on rotation;



5.26 noted the response of the UNICEF Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM): a) confirming that legal colleagues have been appointed to discuss concerns about staffing rotations and will meet with ECW; b) explaining that UNICEF's rotation policy is established and not new, and emphasizing support for managing the transition effectively; c) clarifying that UNICEF has provisions for non-rotation for highly specialized positions, and staffing freezes typically do not apply to hosted funds; d) stating that both internal and external audits apply to all hosted funds.

**In response, the Chair of the Operational Manual Advisory Group:**

5.27 emphasized need to finalize the Operational Manual next year, given the importance of maintaining stability and clear procedures in ECW;

5.28 welcomed the suggestion of considering the Global South for the HLSG Chair position, and agreed to discuss it with Rt Hon Gordon Brown;

5.29 mentioned that the current HLSG Chair feels that leadership changes can benefit ECW and that clarity in procedures is essential to avoid uncertainty.

**In addition, the ECW Executive Director:**

5.30 proposed considering an extension of the current HLSG chair's term until the end of the current strategic plan period to ensure stability, while recognizing the importance of leadership transitions;

5.31 stressed the need to consider all viewpoints and stakeholders, including civil society, in decision-making, and commended Judith Herbertson for her leadership handling the discussions for the timely revision of the Operational Manual.

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS**

5.32 The ExCom approved the new timeline for the revision of the Operational Manual and noted that ExCom is looking forward to receiving timely the critical issues paper which will feed into the HLSG meeting on 26 September 2024.

**6. HLSG September 2024 Meeting Agenda**

**The ECW Executive Director:**

6.1 presented the agenda of the HLSG meeting on 26 September 2024;

6.2 stressed that high-level political support is crucial and encouraged government ministers to be present at the meeting;

6.3 offered adjusting the meeting date to 23 September and adopting a hybrid meeting format to maximize attendance and ensure the highest level of representation;

6.4 highlighted that the succession of the HLSG Chair will be discussed under AOB in the agenda;

[Note: See Annex I for the draft HLSG Meeting Agenda]

**In discussion, the ExCom:**

- 6.5 appreciated the offer of a new date and online participation, but proposed to keep the original date as scheduled;
- 6.6 agreed that high-level representation is crucial to show respect to global stakeholders, while recognizing the difficulty for some ministers and heads of organization to attend.
- 6.7 pointed out that it is not common practice to take decisions under AOB.

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS**

- 6.8 The ExCom agreed to keep the HLSG meeting date of 26 September 2024 and will support the Secretariat in securing high-level representation in the meeting. The Secretariat has opened the meeting for online participation and have shared the necessary logistical information.

**7. AOB and Close**

**The ExCom:**

- 7.1 noted the preference of most members for holding future ExCom meetings consecutively with the GPE Board meetings;
- 7.2 noted that Dean Brooks, INEE Director, will soon be transitioning to a new role, and the search for his successor is currently underway.
- 7.3 noted TheirWorld's *Act for Early Years Symposium* during UNGA on 25 September 2024 (For more information, email [jvanfleet@theirworld.org](mailto:jvanfleet@theirworld.org)).

**The ExCom co-chairs:**

- 7.4 closed the meeting by thanking all meeting participants for the rich and productive discussions.

**Annexes**

**Annex A:** [List of Participants](#)

**Annex B:** [Agenda](#)

**Annex C:** [Finance Update Presentation](#)

**Annex D:** [ARR Background Paper](#)

**Annex E:** [ARR Presentation](#)

**Annex F:** [UNICEF Hosting Arrangement](#)

**Annex G:** [UNICEF Procedures for Hosted Funds and Partnerships](#)

**Annex H:** [Status of Key Documents and Hosting Review Presentation](#)

**Annex I:** [Draft HLSG Meeting Agenda](#)