



The global fund for education in emergencies

## Executive Committee Meeting – Minutes

Monday, 30 March 2020

For list of participants, please see the Annex

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### Summary of the outcomes of the meeting

#### 1. Welcome

- The Chair welcomed participants to the call and explained that this was an ad hoc meeting to update on ECW's response to COVID-19. She expressed thanks and support to the ECW Secretariat's rapid mobilisation. The Chair then outlined the agenda items:
  1. ECW update on response to COVID-19 and open discussion
  2. Resources required for the FER window
  3. Preparations for the HLSG

#### 2. ECW update on response to COVID-19

- The ECW Director gave an overview of ECW's approaches and actions taken:
  - ECW has communicated with all its current in-country grantees (both FERs and MYRPs) in 27 countries/contexts affected by conflict, forced displacement and natural disasters, to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis above and beyond already existing crises and the initial assessments and needs.
  - ECW's First Emergency Response Window has been invoked through the EiE Clusters and EiE WGs in-country (which are co-led by the government, UNICEF, Save the Children and UNHCR respectively). UNICEF has supported the clusters and UNHCR has been leading on all refugee situations.
  - The ECW Secretariat has been receiving FER proposals since the weekend and are currently reviewing them for quality control and then approval by the Director.
  - Based on in-country information directly from the field, ECW has produced a summary which will be shared shortly to get an overview of the situation.
  - The pandemic will inevitably impact the design and implementation of the MYRPs which normally require the physical presence of ECW staff working with government institutions, school administration, communities, UN agencies and Civil Society. Grantees are currently not able to proceed with current MYRPs nor develop new ones.
  - ECW has advised MYRP grantees that they re-programme where possible, whilst the preference remains to use the First Emergency Response Window for the immediate onset of the crisis, so to ensure that the MYRPs can resume immediately in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and focus on the protracted crisis, recovery and development envisaged in the MYRPs.
- Graham Lang, Chief of Education gave a briefing on in-country situations and ECW's response. The following was highlighted:
  - A two-track process has been undertaken: First, as the ECW Director highlighted, the ECW Secretariat contacted all its current grantees to ascertain the situation on the ground, the impact on education and the key needs. In parallel, ECW reached out through its grantees and country level coordination mechanisms such as the Education Cluster and Education in Emergencies

Working Groups to request applications to the FER window. Applications from grantees have subsequently come through these EiE coordination mechanisms. In term of the selection of grantees, existing grantees were eligible, as well as new grantees who demonstrated comparative advantages and also had been HACT (Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers) assessed.

- Applications from 23 out of the targeted 27 countries had been received at the time of the ExCom call. The total ask is approx. USD 44 million. By adding pending applications, the overall total is expected to rise to USD 50 million.
  - A snapshot of key needs from applications based on the rough analysis was given: All applications articulated that they supported national response plans. The overall needs expressed by grantees can be categorised in to three main themes: messaging around risks and social protection measures; emergency education measures, including alternative delivery models; upgrading water and sanitation facilities in schools and learning centers. Examples from Bangladesh, Palestine, DRC and Burkina Faso highlighted the need for supporting distance learning, hygiene kits, operationalisation of safe school guidance, training teachers on MHPSS and girls and children with disabilities, etc.
  - ECW had reviewed all applications, which had been developed and submitted rapidly. Where UNICEF was not a grantee and the funds bid for were below USD 3 million, the delegation of authority fell to the ECW Director for approval. Where UNICEF was a grantee, the application would normally be transmitted to ExCom for non-objection as concerns UNICEF's selection as a grantee. Given the imperative to act rapidly and in a coordinated and concerted manner amongst all grantees, Graham sought no-objection from the ExCom to approve UNICEF as a grantee across the board during the ExCom meeting.
- At the Chair's request, the Director noted that USD 23 million were currently available in the FER window. Under normal circumstances, ECW reviews proposals individually as they are submitted depending on the onset or escalation of a crisis in a given country. However, as this is a pandemic, all grantees are currently affected by the crisis, so the 23 applications were reviewed jointly in order to ensure fair distribution of limited resources in relation to the needs.

During the open discussion, the following comments/questions were highlighted:

- UNICEF highlighted the positive collaboration with ECW and the well-enforced coordination at country level whilst leveraging the education sector working groups, LEGs, Education Cluster and other platforms. Inclusivity and speed are essential.
- Porticus asked to see the FER applications in order to see how complementary support could be provided bilaterally.
- UNHCR welcomed ECW's rapid response and highlighted the need to remain flexible and to consider the long-term consequences of the crisis. Lessons can be drawn from the Ebola crisis. Suggested a review and lessons learned process after 3-4 months to track progress and look ahead.
- United States acquired radio education materials, and along with Canada, proposed a separate follow-up meeting to discuss engaging with key actors of distance learning and those who had experience in delivering those skills in the past.
- Germany encouraged ECW in its flexibility to respond to arising needs, both within FER operations and through MYRP reprogramming. Germany also encouraged a structured process to evaluate foreseen medium- to longer-terms needs (mainly for MYRPs). Germany called for additional MYRP funding to be substantiated with detailed information indicating the needs. Germany also raised that due to source of funds, it may be difficult to transition from funding MYRPs to FERs. Finally, Germany supported ECW's proposal to universally approve UNICEF as grantee without seeking separate non-objection for UNICEF in each relevant proposal.
- The United Kingdom asked for further clarification on the equal distribution across countries and noted that as the context varied in each country, the funds disbursed should reflect this. The UK also referred to the economies of scale leading on distance learning such as radio programs. The UK also stressed that FERs approved by the Director were reviewed by the Secretariat's expert

team and not circulated to ExCom for commenting, but only for information. This was important in order to ensure speed.

- INEE shared a curated list of resources to support the EiE response, focused on distance learning, alternative education, e-learning, and psychosocial support:  
<https://inee.org/collections/coronavirus-covid-19>

In response to the above questions, the ECW Secretariat advised the following:

- In response to Porticus's question, the practice is that proposals approved by the Director are shared with ExCom for information and this will continue.
- The Secretariat will follow up with USAID and Canada on interactive distance learning bilaterally.
- The Secretariat reaffirmed the UK's comment that each proposal was reviewed based on context and needs, while bearing in mind the limited funds available. Applications received on the day of the ExCom teleconference had not yet been reviewed. The Secretariat will continue to ensure a quality assessment of all and reconfirmed that needs will be addressed on a country by country basis. The Secretariat will follow up with grantees on economies of scale next week.

### 3. Resources requested for FER Window

- Nasser Faqih, Chief of Partnership briefed the ExCom on resources required for the First Emergency Response Window. Nasser highlighted the following:
  - ECW received 23 applications over the weekend and was expecting 4 more. The level of demand is currently USD 44 million and is expected to increase to USD 50 million once all proposals are received.
  - ECW will need an additional USD 50 million in new resources: USD 23 million to replenish the depleted FER reserves (usually kept at 23 million USD level at all times) and USD 27 million to return back to MYRP reserve for already committed funds.
  - **ECW is appealing to all donors to support ECW with an immediate USD 50 million as early as possible to ensure that future planned MYRP activities for 2020 are not impacted. The MYRP activities are expected to resume immediately after the crisis is over.**

During the Q&A session, the following comments/questions were raised,

- The Netherlands asked about coordination with GPE and their plan.
- Denmark seconded the question on the coordination with GPE. Denmark also stressed the importance of moving fast with the evolving situation on the ground with transparency, taking into consideration the lessons learned from the Ebola crisis. Denmark had no objection on UNICEF as a pre-approved grantee but asked if there are procedural or other decisions like this to be taken during a call, that they be made explicit in the agenda.
- The United Kingdom asked for a deadline for donors to top-up and exactly when they need to make an additional contribution.
- Norway stated their decision to give extra flexibility for funds to be rolled over to the following financial year and asked if other donors agreed, but noted this may not be possible for all donors.
- FSO stated that they were putting together a COVID-19 response plan for contributions and disbursements. They would work closely with the ECW Secretariat to ensure that funds are disbursed rapidly.

In response to the above comments, the Director:

- Welcomed Norway's proposal of rolling over funds to the next financial year.
- Stated that all in-country proposals are coordinated through the humanitarian coordination structure used for the COVID-19 response.

- Advised that ECW has not yet discussed the GPE proposal, but that a meeting was scheduled the following day on Tuesday 31 March between the Director of ECW and her team and the CEO of GPE and her team to discuss coordination.
- GPE advised that the plan had been sent on Friday 27 March to ECW [*one business day ahead of the approval*], and in addition to the meeting planned for the 31st, that ECW staff were also invited to a coordination meeting of GPE grant agents on 3 April.

On the process and timelines of how ExCom could step up and respond to those needs, Nasser added:

- For the first batch of FERs (through June), USD 50 million are needed immediately to ensure that planned work is not disrupted, and that ECW maintains a replenished FER window that can continue to respond if other unforeseen emergencies emerge during this period. In June, situation will be assessed and a second batch considered for July-September, which would require the same amount in additional funding. **It would be ideal to hear back from donors by the first week of April.**

#### 4. Preparations of HLSG Agenda

- The Chair:
  - Asked ExCom members to confirm the participation of their HLSG representative by **Friday 3 April**.
  - Asked ExCom members to advise on whether their HLSG representative intends to make an intervention. Advance notice is required to create a speakers list.
  - Advised that interventions by HLSG members should be kept short (2 minutes for each agenda item) given the short duration of the meeting.
  - Requested ExCom members to be in contact with Nagi on the dial-in preparations.
- The Director:
  - Went over the three agenda items as agreed with the Chair of HLSG as the most essential items for a short 45 minutes HLSG meeting: an update on ECW progress, including response to COVID-19, the ECW resource requirements, and the approval of the Operational Manual.
  - Explained that HLSG meetings, which aimed at inspiring political commitment, tend to do just that thanks to the physical presence of the participants. However, in light of the COVID-19, the HLSG would be convened as teleconference on Skype and more in-depth issues would be rescheduled to the next in-person HLSG, including a presentation by civil society and government partners.

#### 5. Chair's Summary of Decisions and Action Points

- The Chair highlighted the remarkable speed and response from the ECW Secretariat and expressed appreciation of the work in the field with partners. The Chair then noted the following:
  - There was a general agreement among the ExCom members to use FER while protecting the funding allocated for MYRPs. ECW Director will approve the FERs under her delegated authority. ExCom members reached a consensus that ECW could move forward with a universal approval for UNICEF as a grantee in any of the proposals.
  - On the USD 50 million requested for replenishing the first round of FERs, a document would be helpful for donors to use. [The consolidated FER proposals will provide the content and budget].
  - FER proposals approved by the Director will be shared for information only.
  - UNICEF, Save the Children and UNHCR need to be aware of other bilateral resources, ensuring their best utilization and communicate that information with ECW and the ExCom as needed.

- Finally, the Secretariat will reach out to USAID, Canada and the UK to advance the conversation on the distance learning tool and economies of scale and will share information with the wider group.

**6. CoB**

If there is interest in convening another ExCom call before HLSG, the Secretariat will make the necessary arrangements.

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