

ECW Initial Investments

LESSONS LEARNED – AUGUST 2016 TO MAY 2017

Authors and acknowledgements:

This paper was written by Anna Maria Tammi and Jesper Andersen and peer reviewed by Tarald Brautaset, Kate Greany, Nina Papadopoulos, Jo Bourne, and Lisa Bender.

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Acronyms

DFID	UK’s Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HLSG	High Level Steering Group
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
LEG	Local Education Group
TT	ECW Task Team
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: firstly, to document the initial investments process, and secondly, to draw lessons learned from this experience for future proposal development processes – specifically how ECW could best organize and support them in order to achieve its objectives. The paper is informed by ECW’s operating model, which at the moment leaves room to determine how the grant process for multi-year investments should be operationalized at the country level.

The paper is based on interviews¹ with key stakeholders involved in the initial investments process, including in-country partners (both grantees, LEG members and Education Cluster), facilitators of process and program preparation, senior officials from partner agencies responsible for moving forward the initial investments, and technical experts who reviewed initial investment proposals.

The first part of the paper describes how the initial investments were arrived at, including the interim structures that were put in place for review and approval of grants, the grant process, and the facilitation support that was provided to the initial investment countries. The second part draws lessons learned from the initial investments for future grant processes and how ECW could best support them.

Lessons learned

Lesson #1: Initial assessment. Assess the political context, existing coordination structures, and the institutional dynamics between stakeholders prior to launching a proposal development process.

During the initial investments process, ECW created unnecessary confusion at the country level because of an absence of guidance to accompany the call for applications. ECW communicated an expectation for a joint concept note – and later on full proposal – from partners, but did not provide guidance around who should lead the process or how that should be decided. In some initial investment contexts the ambiguity around leadership subsequently created tensions between

partners on the ground. Furthermore, the initial investments demonstrated that in conflict environments it can be disruptive, and at worst counter-productive, to launch a proposal development process without a robust understanding of the political context.

Going forward, ECW should carry out an initial assessment in order to understand the political context, existing coordination structures, institutional relationships, and local capacity in a given country. This would allow ECW to determine guidance that minimizes the risk of tensions between partners, particularly around who should lead the proposal development or how that decision should be made if left to the country level. Furthermore, in countries with an active conflict or a fragile political settlement, a critical objective for an initial assessment would be to gain a robust understanding of how ECW can support education with a Do No Harm approach. An initial assessment would also allow ECW to determine the level and type of support required from ECW to potentially facilitate the proposal development process.

Lesson #2: Co-creation at the local level. Initial assessment should guide the design of the proposal development process in each context, but co-creation should be a fixed feature of that process.

Initial investments demonstrate that co-creation, or consultative meetings that bring together all diverse group of stakeholders, can lead to programs that are better aligned with ECW objectives and principles. The concrete benefits of co-creation to initial investments can be seen in higher quality technical proposals and institutionalized collaboration. The ECW initial investments process brought together conflicting sides in Yemen, international humanitarian and development partners in Syria, and education and refugee authorities in Ethiopia.

At the same time as initial investments exemplify the benefits of co-creation, they also demonstrate some pitfalls which – if not mitigated – can complicate the process. For example, there was no clear guidance from

¹ Approximately 20 interviews were undertaken in March-May 2017. Responses have been used anonymously.

ECW on the consultative process and steps to be taken, or how a grantee should be selected. This situation created concerns among partners and was mentioned frequently in discussions for this paper. It was also clear that during initial investments partners struggled to conduct a consultative process in the tight timeframe given by ECW.

Going forward, the timeline suggested by the ECW operational model will be a good starting point (3-4 months for joint proposal development). Secondly, ECW should continue to build on existing structures for proposal development where possible, particularly education sector groups and other significant actors in coordination. Where ECW can play a catalytic role is in bringing the Education Cluster structures together with education sector groups, involving government partners outside education who work on refugee/IDP issues, and by bringing in private sector partners where relevant. Thirdly, co-creation should be a fixed feature of the proposal development process, and it is beneficial to start it at the level of senior agency leads (above the technical level). Finally, ECW should offer guidance on required steps to the process (if any), including on grantee selection.

Lesson #3: Facilitation. Facilitation support from ECW can greatly ease the process of co-creation at the local level and thus ensure stronger and more comprehensive program proposals.

All initial investments benefited from facilitation support during the proposal development process. While partners saw it as instrumental in bringing stakeholders together, pushing for new thinking, setting joint priorities, and in helping partners understand what ECW was trying to achieve, there is broad agreement that it should have been provided in a timelier manner.

Two types of facilitation were discernible during the initial investments: partnership facilitation and technical facilitation. It was clear that different types of skills-sets were required for these two types of facilitation. Facilitators found it useful to work in a team of two, rather than alone, and this also allowed to match different skill-sets to any one country. The initial investments demonstrate that such facilitators do not necessarily need to come from 'in-house', but it is critical that facilitators have a high degree of knowledge of ECW.

Going forward, and based on thorough initial assessment, ECW should identify the type of facilitation needed and mobilize facilitators with the right skill-sets in a timely manner. Facilitation could be organized in a number of ways – through ECW Secretariat staff, independent consultants, experts from partner agencies, or a mix of these. However, facilitators should never have a stake in the outcome of the process. Given that facilitators need to be completely familiar with ECW objectives and principles, pre-accreditation or pairing an external facilitator with an ECW Secretariat staff member could be solutions.

Lesson #4: Guidance and learning. ECW should strive to be an efficient fund that keeps transaction costs low for country partners. Key to this will be providing partners with more guidance – and as a first step developing such guidance where it is lacking.

On all fronts, ECW should strive to be an efficient donor that adds as little burden on country partners as possible. Beyond setting out a clearer proposal development process from the beginning, ECW should also look for opportunities to reduce transaction costs during that process. The initial investments show that providing more guidance to partners around ECW objectives and principles as well as the required program templates will be an important way to save time and efforts on the ground. In the near future ECW will also need to develop further guidance around its grant rules, for instance around re-programming of grants.

There remains a large learning agenda for ECW. Firstly, it will be useful to draw lessons from the implementation of initial investments and from other sectors, where relevant. For example, resilience programs may hold lessons about what can constitute bridging humanitarian and development efforts and under what circumstances that can lead to improved outcomes for beneficiaries. Secondly, operationalizing ECW principles will be an important area of learning for the fund. While this paper ends with a brief summary of how key stakeholders involved in the initial investments process see principles such as innovation, sustainability, and bridging humanitarian and development efforts, these concepts will need to be further developed within the framework of the forthcoming strategy, future operational guidance, and next funding allocation processes.

Getting to initial investments: Interim grant process

The High Level Steering Group agreed during the launch of ECW in May 2016 that a number of initial investments should be developed to serve as deliberate pilots. The HLSG agreed to support initial investments to demonstrate an immediate contribution to increasing children and youth's access to safe, quality education and illustrate the principles of greater coordination, strategy, and innovation in the delivery and catalytic financing of education in emergencies. The initial investments were deliberate pilots, allowing the fund to learn by doing – as such, learning from the investments is key for future ECW processes.

Interim structures

Three Task Teams (TTs) were established shortly after the launch of ECW to take forward various streams of work. The teams were primarily manned with senior officials from HLSG member agencies and donors to ECW. TT1 focused on advocacy and fundraising and TT2 on the development of ECW's operational design and results framework. TT3 was responsible for moving forward the initial investments, utilizing the first pledges from donors to ECW.

As ECW's operational and results frameworks were still being developed until early 2017, an interim process to allocate, review, and approve initial investments was designed. In addition to TT3, interim structures included a Recommendation Panel with delegated authority from the HLSG to approve proposals, and a team of external concept note and proposal evaluators. The Recommendation Panel was made up of senior officials from donors represented on the HLSG. The interim processes and guidance were specific to initial investments – ECW's operational and results framework was approved by HLSG in February 2017 and came into effect immediately. Monitoring and evaluation of initial investments is currently being aligned to the approved ECW results framework.

Call for applications

Before a Request for Proposals could be launched, the HLSG agreed on an interim process and list of overall criteria to identify countries that would be invited to present a concept note. The list of countries invited to present a concept note included Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Syria, Myanmar, and Yemen. Three global partners (Global Education Cluster, UNHCR, and INEE) were also invited to present a concept note. In early August 2016, ECW communicated the call for applications to Education Cluster leads and other key education partners with formal coordination roles (UNHCR and local education group leads) in the seven countries, inviting education partners working in each country to submit a concept note. Partners were given roughly 4 weeks to submit a concept note.

Following review of concept notes, HLSG invited full proposals from Chad, Ethiopia, Syria, and Yemen for financial support from the ECW Breakthrough Fund. Concept notes from all seven invited countries were first reviewed by an independent review team and a technical recommendation was provided to the Recommendation Panel, consisting of senior-level officials. The scoring criteria for concept notes is detailed in the Annex. The Panel recommended four countries to the HLSG (Chad, Ethiopia, Syria, and Yemen) and in September 2016, HLSG decided to invite these four countries to prepare a full proposal. In addition, HLSG also invited three global partners (Global Education Cluster, UNHCR, and INEE) to prepare a proposal for funding through the ECW Acceleration Facility. The HLSG meeting also decided to invite a concept note from Lebanon.

Partners whose concept notes were not successful were encouraged to resubmit in 2017. Partners from Cameroon, Kenya, and Myanmar were provided with feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their concept notes in October 2016 and were encouraged to resubmit when the Breakthrough Fund is fully operational in 2017. For Lebanon, which was on a slightly different timeline than other countries, a

concept note was received and reviewed in December 2016. The Recommendation Panel did not recommend that the country advances to the full proposal stage at that moment, but requested the ECW Secretariat to continue dialogue with country partners to develop a revised concept note.

Request for Proposals

To guide partners in the development of full program proposals, interim guidance was developed by a smaller working group. A sub-working group under Task Team 3 was established for this purpose, which included representatives from USAID, EC, UNHCR, and GPE. The resulting Request for Proposals guided applicants on the outcomes to be achieved, performance indicators to be applied, program requirements, and defined evaluation criteria for proposals.

The Request for Proposals laid out that each project should seek to achieve a common set of broad outcomes and comply with certain programmatic requirements. The broad outcomes that projects should aim to achieve were: (i) Context and population appropriate, strategic, and agile responses in place to support education needs in crises; (ii) Expanded access appropriate to affected populations, resulting in higher retention, transition, and completion rates; (iii) Improved conditions for learning outcomes in place; and (iv) Safe and conflict- and disaster-sensitive education available in crisis contexts. In addition, program requirements were established around value for money, gender, inclusive education, partnership, and special considerations for refugee populations.

The Request for Proposals was sent out to the four initial investment countries in mid-October with a deadline of November 15 for the submission of a full proposal. The Request for Proposals detailed that in addition to a main proposal, applicants were required to submit a cost proposal, Logical Framework, and risk matrix, as well as respond to technical questions that the Recommendation Panel and Technical Review Team had raised. The technical questions were specific to each application.

It quickly became clear that partners needed more time to develop joint proposals, particularly given the challenging contexts in Syria and Yemen. The deadline for proposals from Chad and Ethiopia was subsequently extended from mid-November to early December to allow partners more time for consultations. In the cases of Yemen and Syria the deadline for submission was extended to mid-January and mid-February, respectively. The extensions were considered on a case by case basis as ECW wanted partners to succeed and therefore realized the need for being adaptive in different contexts.

Facilitation support

ECW also realized during the proposal development process that it might need to offer more direct support to facilitate a consultative process. In the cases of Syria and Yemen, where conflicts were ongoing, education partners were based in different countries, and joint planning between different coordination structures was limited, ECW made a decision to offer direct facilitation support to the process.

Facilitators were subsequently engaged in November 2016 for Syria, Yemen, as well as the Global Partners Group. Facilitators were not responsible for writing the proposals for the applicants, but instead focused on bringing partners together for a consultative proposal development process and providing guidance to partners on delivering the Theory of Change, the Logical Framework, budget, and risk matrix.

Facilitators were mobilized from agencies with available staff capacity to support the work. For Syria and Yemen, facilitators from a TT3 partner agency were mobilized. For the Global Partners Group, an independent consultant was hired to facilitate in the first instance, and facilitation was provided at a later point directly by TT3 partners and the ECW Secretariat. While ECW was unable to provide facilitation support to Ethiopia, the UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office was able to mobilize an independent facilitator at country level to support the program development process.

Facilitators worked with partners remotely, but also through workshops that brought education stakeholders together at the country level. In the case of Syria two workshops were organized: the first in November 2016 in Amman, and a second in January 2017 in Istanbul. A workshop with the Global Partners Group was facilitated in March 2017 in Geneva. A face-to-face consultation and workshop was organized in April for Yemen. A face-to-face consultation meeting with all stakeholders also took place in Ethiopia, facilitated by the independent expert recruited locally.

Review and approval

Full proposals were first reviewed by an independent expert team, which also produced a technical evaluation note with strengths and weaknesses of each program proposal. Three independent consultants with strong technical expertise on education in emergencies operations and programming scored the proposals and provided written feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for programmatic improvement. The scoring criteria, which included technical design, sustainability, the cost proposal, and past performance of the applicant, are detailed in the Annex. The scores of consultants were averaged to provide an overall technical score for each proposal. The experts, led by a TT3 partner, also held discussions by phone to agree on a recommendation and key points to highlight to the Recommendation Panel in a technical evaluation note.

The Recommendation Panel approved the initial investments between January and April 2017, requesting a revised proposal in two instances. The Panel reviewed full proposals and the independent technical evaluation note in detail and held discussions face-to-face or by phone on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals vis-à-vis the selection criteria. The Panel, with delegated authority from the High Level Steering Group, approved the proposal from Chad partners in January 2017 and the proposal from Syria partners in February 2017. The proposal from Yemen partners was conditionally approved in February 2017 as well. The Panel, having reviewed the first submissions from Ethiopia and the Global Partners Group, requested a revised proposal in order

to achieve greater alignment with ECW objectives. Revised proposals from both were subsequently approved in February 2017 and April 2017, respectively.

Finalization and technical support

Given a number of observations attached to the approval of initial investments, the Recommendation Panel requested partners in Chad, Syria, and Yemen to address these in order to ensure full alignment with ECW objectives. The Recommendation Panel provided partners with technical observations and questions that it wished partners to consider when finalizing the program design. It also asked partners to respond to these questions in a brief report. The Yemen proposal, which received significant comments, required a final endorsement from the Recommendation Panel which was given in May 2017. Ethiopia and the Global Partners, both of whom were requested to submit a revised proposal, were not required to address additional technical questions.

To support alignment of final program designs with ECW objectives in Chad and Yemen, ECW also decided to offer further facilitation support. In the case of Chad this took the form of a technical expert mission by two facilitators mobilized from two different TT3 partner agencies. A mission and in-country workshop subsequently took place in March 2017 in N'Djamena. Rather than the partnership facilitation in the case of Syria, the Chad support focused on refining the technical design of the program. In the case of Yemen, a technical workshop took place with partners in April 2017 in Beirut to finalize the program design and ensure the program would cover the entire country.

Learning for future investments: Lessons for the grant process

Lesson #1: Initial assessment

Assess the political context, existing coordination structures, and the institutional dynamics between stakeholders prior to launching a proposal development process.

ECW created unnecessary confusion during the initial investments process because of an absence of guidance to accompany the call for applications. ECW communicated the call for applications to Education Cluster leads and to other key education partners, particularly those with formal coordination roles (UNHCR and local education group leads), in the seven identified countries. ECW communicated an expectation for a joint concept note – and later on full proposal – from partners, but did not provide guidance around who should lead the process or how that should be decided. Education Cluster leads assumed leadership of the proposal development process, particularly in light of the tight timeline given from ECW to submit a proposal. In some initial investment contexts the ambiguity around leadership subsequently created tensions between partners on the ground.

In conflict environments, the initial investments demonstrated that it can be disruptive, and at worst counter-productive, to launch a proposal development process without a robust understanding of the political context. In the case of Yemen, it was challenging for ECW to assess in the absence of an initial context assessment whether the proposal had involved all relevant stakeholders and embodied a Do No Harm approach. In a second phase, the proposal was refined together with technical representation from both sides of the divided country. However, had ECW not engaged with both sides, an ECW investment in Yemen could have been perceived as partisan, fueling tensions and increasing inequity between children and youth caught in different locations. In the case of Syria, it was equally important to understand the political context and the wider

humanitarian response and explore the risks and opportunities of different partnerships.

For future investments:

ECW should carry out an initial assessment in order to be able to provide partners with context-driven guidance on the proposal development process. As with the initial investments, without an initial assessment it will be challenging for ECW to give guidance to partners on who should lead the proposal development process or how that decision should be made at country level. Currently the ECW operational model does not specify guidance on designating a lead or a decision-making process at country level for the proposal development process. Understanding the political context, existing coordination structures, institutional relationships, and local capacity would allow ECW to create context-driven guidance for proposal development that minimizes the risk of tensions and grievances between partners. As part of this, it would be advisable for ECW to develop criteria on conflict of interest that can also guide the designation of a pen-holder for the process. An initial assessment would also allow ECW to determine the level and type of support required from ECW to potentially facilitate the proposal development process.

Furthermore, in countries with an active conflict or a fragile political settlement, a critical objective for an initial assessment would be to gain a robust understanding of how ECW can support education with a Do No Harm approach. There is general agreement that political authorities should be part of the solution, and that under the right conditions education has an opportunity to provide common ground between competing political entities. However, the decision about whether and how to engage with government/political entities in a proposal development process should be underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the risks that a particular approach entails to children, youth, and

teachers. As already mentioned, if an ECW investment is considered to be partisan, this could be putting more children and youth at risk.

In conflict contexts, ECW should keep a focus on its goal of reaching children and youth and therefore, where necessary, bring authorities together as a means to an end. In other words, if there are grounds to believe that bringing in competing sides to the proposal development process will increase ECW's chances of reaching more children and youth, improving quality, and/or strengthening the system. Meanwhile, always treating education as an opportunity to provide common ground between competing parties could shift the focus away from education results.

In practical terms, the initial assessment could happen remotely through calls with stakeholders and review of secondary data and reports, but in some cases it may be best to conduct an in-country mission. The assessment mission should aim to connect with key education and humanitarian partners, particularly those with formal coordination roles. In addition to education sector groups and Education Clusters these could include UN agencies, heads of donor coordination groups, UN Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators, and GPE. If the assessment is done through an in-country mission, it would also allow the ECW representative to attend relevant meetings of education sector groups and Education Cluster to explain the fund's model and principles.

An initial assessment should aim to address the following questions:

- Who are the main stakeholders that should be involved in developing an ECW proposal, including potential private sector partners? Are there government stakeholders outside the Ministry of Education who should be included? What influence and resources do the different stakeholders bring to bear on the process?
- To what extent do existing coordination structures (LEG and Education Cluster, where activated) function effectively and interact with each other?

Is there sufficient political capital in either to bring all stakeholders together to develop a proposal? If not, which stakeholder(s) should ECW designate to lead the process?

- What (if any) are the major conflicts of interest or grievances between stakeholders/ coordination structures that have the potential to complicate joint proposal development? Are there indications that providing independent facilitation to the process would be helpful?
- In conflict environments, how should ECW engage with competing political entities? Will bringing in competing sides to the proposal development process increase ECW's chances of reaching more children and young people, improving quality, and/or strengthening the system? Are there conditions linked to donors' humanitarian/development financing streams to ECW that influence this question?
- Whether the proposal is developed among international partners only or competing political entities are brought in, what are the risks in each and the minimum risk mitigation measures ECW would need to put in place in order to maintain a Do No Harm approach?

It would be advisable that the initial assessment findings are documented, particularly on risk and potential conflicts of interest. Having written records of findings, including assumptions, risks, and potential conflicts of interest (if any), will be useful in ensuring that decisions made about the subsequent proposal development process are based on the best possible knowledge. It will also demonstrate ECW's commitment to taking robust measures in order to ensure Do No Harm, either to beneficiaries or stakeholder relationships on the ground.

ECW should consider by whom such initial assessment would best be conducted and the level of effort it would need. The initial assessment could be undertaken by ECW Secretariat staff or possibly by independent consultants. In the former case, ECW would need to consider the implication on its staffing. Sourcing expertise for this purpose from partner

agencies that could be potential recipients of funding on the ground should be approached with caution. Regarding the level of effort required, ECW could, as a first step, explore with partner agencies their experience with such assessment missions to approximate the length of missions. The first few initial assessments that ECW carries out would give richer insight into such questions, so the fund should keep learning on this point.

Lesson #2: Co-creation at the local level

Initial assessment should guide the design of the proposal development process in each context, but co-creation should be a fixed feature of that process.

Initial investments demonstrate that co-creation, or consultative meetings that bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, can lead to programs that are better aligned with ECW objectives and principles. Co-creation not only helps to bring about a comprehensive understanding of needs, but also pushes thinking around new kinds approaches to the problem and partnerships that can help towards addressing that particular problem. As such, co-creation can lead to programs that are better aligned with ECW principles such as innovation and bridging humanitarian and development efforts.

The concrete benefits of co-creation to initial investments can be seen in higher quality technical proposals and institutionalized collaboration. Consultative workshops allowed stakeholders to push each other to identify where ECW funds could have the greatest added value, how program designs could be more robust and go further on issues such as learning and M&E, as well as to reflect how collaboration could be sustained and even institutionalized going forward. All these areas should, in turn, allow ECW to better reach its beneficiary outcomes. Some examples of co-creation and its benefits across the initial investments include:

- In **Chad**, the ECW proposal development process elicited strong commitment from stakeholders and provided an opportunity for the Ministry of

Education to think strategically about how to use resources from different partners strategically. Co-creation helped to identify linkages to programs being funded by other partners such as GPE and to explore how investments in communities and teachers made through such programs could be sustained by ECW.

- In **Ethiopia**, the ECW proposal development process made space for the Ministry of Education and Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) to come together to work through how to deliver a program collaboratively. Consultative meetings with stakeholders encouraged a stronger relationship between the two entities, who – as a result – are now in the process of drafting an MoU to institutionalize collaboration and make responsibilities clearer.
- In **Syria**, the ECW proposal development process triggered reflection around the longer-term needs for Syrian children and youth and how partners could come together to further critical agendas. Co-creation resulted in the creation of a formal structure for coordination and information-sharing between the Syria Education Development Partners Group and Whole of Syria, a UN humanitarian coordination mechanism – two coordination structures that did not have a strong working relationship before. Education is now being looked at as a potential model for enforcing the continuum of humanitarian and development work in other sectors of the Syria response.
- In **Yemen**, the ECW proposal development process brought together education authorities from the divided parties of Aden and Sana’a to explore how an education response could reach children and young people throughout the country. Co-creation also pushed the program to identify the gaps in the current education response and ways to try and address them, for instance through alternative learning programs.
- In the case of the **Global Partners Group**, the ECW proposal development process brought together three key agencies in the EiE space, who nevertheless had not collaborated in such an

endeavor before. Co-creation helped to focus a joint work program on delivering harmonized guidance and tools as well as to explore ways that the program can add value to ECW country investments.

At the same time as initial investments exemplify the benefits of co-creation, they also demonstrate some pitfalls which – if not mitigated – can complicate the process. As already mentioned, the absence of guidance around who should lead the proposal development process created unnecessary confusion and tension between partners. Furthermore, as there was no clear guidance on the consultative process and steps to be taken, Cluster Leads made different interpretations on what a joint proposal meant. In a few cases the proposal development process subsequently created grievances as other partners felt that the process was not consultative and inclusive enough.

Additionally, there was a lack of guidance from ECW on how a grantee should be selected. ECW expected grantee selection to happen in a participatory way among partners on the ground. However, given Education Cluster leads had assumed leadership of the proposal development process, this also resulted in UNICEF country offices assuming the role of grantee in initial investments. This situation created concerns among partners and was mentioned frequently in discussions for this paper.

It was also clear that during initial investments partners struggled to conduct a consultative process in the tight timeframe given by ECW. After concept notes were approved, partners were given roughly four weeks to submit a full proposal. This was even in contexts where education partners were based in different countries and joint planning between different coordination structures had been limited in the past. As mentioned previously, deadlines were subsequently extended for all proposals according to context. While partners were all able to come to joint proposals in the end, a more ample timeframe from the beginning would have allowed country partners to plan better and develop the proposal more efficiently.

For future investments:

Firstly, the timeline suggested by the ECW operational model will be a good starting point for future processes. The ECW operational model suggests a 3-4 month consultative process for developing multi-year investment proposals – based on the initial investments process this is a more realistic timeframe. However, the fund should keep drawing lessons on multi-year investments, as the process may be possible even in a shorter timeframe with initial assessment, clearer guidance on the process, and potential facilitation support from the beginning.

Secondly, ECW should continue to build on existing structures for proposal development where possible, particularly education sector groups and other significant actors in coordination. Given ECW's objective of bridging humanitarian and development interventions, ECW programs need to continue linking to sector planning processes. Other significant actors in coordination might include (such UNCHR in refugee settings or local leaders in highly privatized systems). Where ECW can play a catalytic role is in bringing the Education Cluster structures together with education sector groups, involving government partners outside education who work on refugee/IDP issues, and by bringing in private sector partners where relevant.

Thirdly, co-creation should be a fixed feature of the proposal development process, and it is beneficial to start it at the level of senior agency leads. Involving senior agency leads (i.e. senior officials, above technical level) in a first workshop is particularly useful in contexts where stakeholders or coordination structures do not have strong pre-existing relationships. Identifying strategic challenges upfront and establishing common parameters and a vision between agency leads will substantially ease the subsequent proposal development at a technical level.

Finally, ECW should offer guidance on required steps to the process (if any), including on grantee selection. It should be recognized that when resources are made available in a context where they are scarce, the potential for an opaque process is high in the absence of guidance from ECW. ECW should lay out a process

for how it expects partners to jointly and transparently determine a grantee at the country level. This will be critical to ensure that ECW achieves a diversification of grantees. The negative impact of not ensuring such a process for ECW's reputation would be high. Linked to this is the importance of communicating transparently to the public on funding decisions once they have been made.

Lesson #3: Facilitation

Facilitation support from ECW can greatly ease the process of co-creation at the local level and thus ensure stronger and more comprehensive program proposals.

All initial investments, both country investments and the Acceleration facility investment, benefited from facilitation support during the proposal development process. The feedback on facilitation from country partners is that it was instrumental in bringing stakeholders together, pushing for new thinking, setting joint priorities, and in helping partners understand what ECW was trying to achieve.

However, there is broad agreement that it should have been provided in a timelier manner. Facilitators were mobilized to countries only at the point where partners had already developed drafts of their full proposals, or in two cases already submitted them to ECW. Time and efforts spent by partners prior to facilitation could have been saved in all cases by mobilizing facilitation earlier.

Two types of facilitation were discernible during the initial investments: partnership facilitation and technical facilitation. For instance, in Syria, ECW focused on providing partnership facilitation given that education partners were based in different countries and joint planning between different coordination structures had been limited in the past. Two workshops were subsequently facilitated, where partners could better understand each other's coordination mechanisms and brainstorm on a focus for the ECW program. Meanwhile, in Chad the facilitation focused on refining the technical design of

the program and providing guidance to partners on delivering required parts of the proposal: the Theory of Change, the LogFrame, budget, and risk matrix. This was also done through a workshop-modality.

It was clear that different types of skills-sets were required for these two types of facilitation. In one case ECW misjudged the type of facilitation that would be required and matched a technical education expert to a process that would have required partnership facilitation. ECW recognized this at a later point and subsequently mobilized two facilitators who focused on the process and partnership aspects. The country facilitation mobilized by ECW to Syria, Chad, and Yemen all entailed two facilitators for each country. Facilitators found it useful to work in a team of two, rather than alone, and this also allowed to match different skill-sets to any one country.

The initial investments experience demonstrates that such facilitators do not necessarily need to come from 'in-house'. During initial investments facilitators for country investments came from GPE, USAID, and DFID. While facilitators represented the ECW Secretariat during their engagement with partners in country, the model of sourcing expertise from different agencies worked well. As noted above, what was important was that these facilitators had the right skill-sets for what was needed in each case. Additionally, country partners highlighted the importance of facilitators having no stake in the outcome of the process.

Furthermore, facilitators needed to be highly familiar with ECW objectives. Facilitators mobilized directly by ECW were already highly familiar with ECW objectives and principles. It is noteworthy to compare this with the experience in Ethiopia, where ECW was not able to mobilize a facilitator. Partners on the ground subsequently recruited an independent expert locally and considered this to be critical for the proposal development. However, Ethiopia was the only country application which was not approved in the first instance, suggesting that it may have been helpful for the expert to be briefed on ECW objectives and principles.

For future investments:

Based on thorough initial assessment, identify the type of facilitation that would be most helpful and mobilize facilitators with the right skill-set in a timely manner. Where the initial assessment points to relationships between education stakeholders and/or coordination structures that are strained or weak, it is likely that partnership facilitation will be helpful. In such contexts, more important than education expertise will be for the facilitator to grasp the relationships, potential grievances, and red lines between stakeholders/structures and subsequently steer a consultative process that builds trust between partners. Meanwhile, in other contexts where relationships between different stakeholders and coordination mechanisms are strong, more targeted technical facilitation may be more useful. Whichever type of facilitation is mobilized, it should be done early in order to save partners' time and efforts on the ground.

Facilitation could be organized in a number of ways, but the facilitator should never have a stake in the outcome of the process. Facilitators could be ECW Secretariat staff, but they could also be independent consultants, experts from partner agencies, or a mix of these. As one donor partner noted during discussions for this paper, agencies might be happy to provide such expertise to ECW in the future as well. Casting a wide net for sourcing facilitators could also allow ECW to draw upon diverse skill-sets and country knowledge, when needed. However, ECW should ensure that facilitators are not from agencies who could be funding recipients at country level.

Given that facilitators need to be completely familiar with ECW objectives and principles, pre-accreditation or pairing with an ECW Secretariat staff member may be solutions. Initial investments demonstrated that facilitators should be fully familiar with ECW objectives and principles. As such, ECW could think of ways to pre-accredit facilitators who come from partner agencies or are independent experts. An alternative or additional approach could be to pair an 'outside' facilitator with an ECW Secretariat staff member. This could offer the best of both worlds – ensuring full knowledge of ECW, allowing ECW to draw on specific

skill-sets when needed, and allowing facilitators to work in pairs. If ECW were to facilitate all investments itself, and do so in teams of two – which was found to be useful during initial investments – the implication for staffing would be significant.

Lessons learned and good practices during the initial investments process that can inform future facilitation support include the following:

Prior to launching facilitation

- Based on the findings of initial assessment, ECW Secretariat should define the type of facilitation support to be offered to country partners.
- ECW Secretariat should provide facilitators (whether ECW Secretariat staff, independent experts, or partner agency staff) with Terms of Reference regarding their role and type of support needed in the context.
- If facilitators do not come from 'in-house', ECW Secretariat should ensure that facilitators are highly familiar with ECW objectives and principles. This could be done for instance through pre-accrediting facilitators, who could then be drawn from a roster based on the skill-set needed for each context.
- Facilitators should become familiar with the results of initial assessment and define the issues that need facilitating. Facilitators should keep in mind that the majority of contexts where ECW programs will be implemented have significant governance challenges and inequities between population groups. It should not be assumed that groups that are working towards the same goals.
- ECW Secretariat should introduce the facilitators to country partners, together with their Terms of Reference.

Good practice for in-country facilitation

- If necessary, facilitators should conduct additional bilateral discussions with stakeholders, particularly if the initial assessment points to substantial challenges in the country context (e.g. fragmented relationships, grievances, conflicts of interest, etc).

- Facilitation of an ECW proposal should be closely coordinated with other organizations (e.g. GPE) who provide support to country dialogue for planning and system strengthening.
- Facilitators should liaise with the relevant coordination structures (LEG, Education Cluster, etc.) to organize for a consultative workshop and the stakeholders to be invited to it.
- The consultative workshop should be for two days at minimum, and should divide strategic and technical issues. The first part of the workshop should focus on identifying strategic challenges and establishing common parameters and a vision. It is conducive to have agency heads at this discussion. Technical questions should be discussed as a second step.
- Where possible, relevant ministry representatives should be asked to play a role in moderating some sessions.
- Facilitators should ensure adequate time to plan next steps at the end of the workshop and determine the level of support partners will need to accomplish them. Facilitators should work towards ensuring that agreements and next steps are communicated to all stakeholders by those leading the proposal development process.
- Facilitators should be prepared to stay in-country after the workshop to work with the stakeholders leading proposal development in order to provide guidance on e.g. templates.
- If at any point the facilitator is not accepted by all stakeholders, the facilitator should step aside and seek advice from the ECW Secretariat.

After facilitation in-country

- If facilitators do not come from 'in-house', a written account of the mission should be provided to ECW Secretariat, detailing the agreements made by partners, the agreed next steps, and key issues/challenges that ECW should be aware of when reviewing the proposal and monitoring the program's implementation.
- ECW Secretariat and facilitators should determine whether follow up support is likely to be required in the context. Sometimes a follow up workshop at country level may be needed. Next steps for either continuing or closing out the facilitation

should be planned and communicated to the country partners.

Finally, it is worth keeping ECW in learning mode regarding facilitation support. It is possible that having an initial assessment of structures and institutional relationships in place in the beginning, together with greater guidance around ECW expectations and principles, may mean that ECW needs to support the proposal development process much less in certain contexts.

Lesson #4: Guidance and learning

ECW should strive to be an efficient fund that keeps transaction costs low for country partners. Key to this will be providing partners with more guidance – and as a first step developing such guidance, where it is lacking.

On all fronts, ECW should strive to be an efficient donor that adds as little burden on country partners as possible. Country partners can often be stretched in terms of human resources, with supporting multiple missions from different partners, reporting to multiple different donors, while simultaneously trying to deliver results in difficult settings. As such ECW processes should be as lean and understandable as possible for partners – this paper has already made some suggestions about how a proposal development process could be more efficient in the future and thus save partners' time and efforts.

Beyond a clearer process from the beginning, ECW should also look for opportunities to reduce transaction costs during that process. One example would be to conduct facilitation missions as joint missions with other partners. For instance in the case of Chad, the technical facilitators from ECW coordinated their country mission with the Country Lead from GPE, who was then also able to brief facilitators on the country context and make introductions to country partners. In the case of Yemen, ECW facilitators coordinated with GPE and the local education group and were able to benefit from a sector planning meeting which partners were already

planning. An ECW workshop was subsequently organized back to back with the sector planning meeting in Beirut.

The initial investments process could have been made easier for country partners with more guidance around ECW objectives and principles. During the initial investments process, a lack of guidance on ECW principles led to first iterations of proposals which were perceived by independent reviewers and donors to be insufficiently aligned to ECW objectives, including on areas such as inclusion and quality of education. At the same time partners had a difficult time understanding what ECW was looking for and what ECW principles such as ‘innovative’ and ‘catalytic’ should look like in practice. Time and efforts of partners would likely have been saved if there had been clear definitions and examples of ECW principles from the start.

Partners would also have needed more guidance on ECW templates. Grantees noted that more support would have been appreciated on the grant templates required by ECW, particularly on results frameworks. At the same time some grantees found certain templates helpful: it was mentioned that the mandatory gender analysis and M&E template that disaggregates target numbers by beneficiary type were useful ways of trying to put theoretical concepts into practice.

ECW will also need to develop further guidance around its grant rules. Issues that still need to be determined include re-programming in cases where the situation on the ground changes substantially during program implementation, potential rules around sub-granting, and rules and minimum safeguards for procurement in conflict environments and allocation of resources to government. Partners all expressed that it would be helpful if there was clear guidance and a focal point/s for them to contact at the ECW Secretariat.

Lessons from implementation of initial investments and from other sectors should be added to ECW’s learning agenda. ECW could reflect on how it might encourage its grantees to share implementation challenges and solutions with each other – this was

mentioned as something useful to the country level. Overall, many participants to this study highlighted the limited learning in the EiE field generally and hoped that ECW would develop case studies based on the initial investments or future programs. The usefulness of exploring lessons learned from other sectors was also highlighted, particularly on the issue of bridging humanitarian and development interventions. ECW could look into the examples and analysis available of where resilience efforts have been successful at bridging humanitarian and development efforts and under what circumstances, in order to inform its own efforts.

Operationalizing ECW principles

Operationalizing ECW principles – within the bounds of a strategy – will be an important area of learning for ECW. During initial investments a set of principles were applied in order to evaluate program proposals – interventions were hoped to be catalytic, innovative, further the bridging of humanitarian and development efforts, and have an element of sustainability. It was clear during the initial investments process that these concepts were not clear to partners. This section is a brief summary of how key stakeholders involved in the initial investments process see these principles. As such, it can be a useful starting point for further developing these concepts within the framework of the strategy, future operational guidance, and next funding allocation processes.

Bridging humanitarian and development efforts

There is a clear need to better understand and document bridging – what constitutes bridging, what actually works, and under what circumstances. However, discussions around this paper suggest that ECW programs can work towards bridging at various levels, including through partnerships, policy, programming, or financing.

Partnerships. Initial investments demonstrate that it is possible for ECW to further the continuum between humanitarian and development efforts through fostering or reinforcing partnerships, even in complex environments. ECW initial investments had a

clear added value through the co-creation process by bringing together different types of actors: in Yemen conflicting sides, in Syria international humanitarian and development actors, and in Ethiopia education and refugee authorities. Going forward, the co-creation process can continue to be a way to bring together Local Education Groups, Education Cluster structures, government agencies with mandates on education/refugees/IDPs, and private sector partners, where relevant.

A critical task for ECW programs will be to monitor and measure how collaboration is sustained during investments and, even more so, the actual impact that improved coordination and collaboration has on children and young people's access to education and learning. There are already some examples of this in initial investments: for instance the ECW program in Syria includes indicators to monitor joint coordination at an output and outcome level. The ECW Results Framework includes an indicator on quality, inclusive humanitarian and development plans, and this is a good start. It will also be useful to encourage partners to include context-related monitoring and evaluation around coordination efforts, as these may not always take the form of a plan. Not only would it hold partners more accountable to sustain collaboration but it would also build the evidence base on demonstrating the link between improved coordination and improved education outcomes for children and youth.

***Policy level.* In future multi-year investments, which will have a time span of 3-5 years, a clear opportunity for ECW programs to have added value is through reinforcing the humanitarian-development continuum at the policy level.** This will naturally look different depending on the context, but ECW could encourage programs to include engagement with local education authorities around integrating refugees and IDPs into Education Sector Plans and strengthening disaster preparedness in Education Sector Plans. Overall, ECW investments should be encouraged to engage with the policy environment (and relevant actors within and outside education) in the context – whatever that might be.

Beyond strengthening the emergency and preparedness angle in sector planning, ECW could

also encourage the reverse. This would be to encourage humanitarian partners to reflect on the longer-term and how interventions could help in saving the education system from collapse in conflict environments. The ECW initial investment in Syria is an example where the ECW proposal development process provided an opportunity for humanitarian partners to reflect on a longer-term approach and how they could support efforts also at system-level.

***Programming.* At a technical level, bridging humanitarian and development interventions could be exemplified by linkages between programs funded by different actors or programming that allows for transitions.** Bridging at the technical level could be exemplified or instance by robust linkages between an ECW-funded program and sector planning. In Chad, the ECW initial investment process allowed education authorities to reflect comprehensively on linkages between different education programs in the country. Bridging could also happen through interventions such as accelerated learning programs that bridge non-formal and formal education systems and allow children and youth to transition from one to the other, either in conflict or protracted crisis settings. In Yemen the ECW program will help to inform a process of establishing a Transitional Education Sector Plan becoming the basis for longer term development focused support.

***Financing.* ECW can naturally play a role in bridging humanitarian and development interventions through financing.** In Chad, the ECW initial investment will provide a financing bridge between now and the start of the next GPE program. Such financial bridging can be incredibly important in sustaining the education gains made thus far in countries.

ECW can also strengthen the humanitarian-development continuum through operationalizing it in its own funding windows. Where possible, ECW should strive to link its first response funding to multi-year investments in the same context. Making multi-year investments from ECW and/or other partners' part of the discussions for first response would also help to push other agendas, such as encouraging longer-term reflection.

Catalytic and Innovative

During the initial investments process there was a desire particularly to see programs that furthered innovation in emergency and attempted to unlock new and interesting forms of financing. However, these two areas seemed to be the weakest in the proposals that were received. Proposals were limited in their articulation of how ECW funding would help agencies or countries unlock further funding.

At a basic level, innovation could mean a policy, intervention, technology, coordination function or partnership that is currently not happening. Catalytic refers rather to the impact we expect that innovation to have. For example, an innovation could create space and opportunity for additional investment, change the way that donors or education programs are functioning, or have a large knock-off effect in loosening specific bottlenecks in the education sector, and therefore be catalytic.

A prerequisite to being catalytic is having a strong mapping about what is being done in the sector. ECW should encourage comprehensive mapping of interventions being carried out by different partners and a brainstorming around where an ECW program could create a pivot in the operating environment. An important part going forward will also be to measure how interventions are catalytic and why/why not.

Some ways that innovation could be exemplified in ECW programs include:

- **Improved efficiency:** New, improved, or borrowed modalities/approaches/technology that allow for greater efficiency and thus improved outcomes to children and youth.
- **Stronger partnerships:** Establishing new partnerships between coordination structures or bringing new partners into existing partnerships, such as private sector partners or non-traditional donors.
- **Greater accountability:** Approaches that allow for greater inclusion of beneficiary voices in program design and monitoring.
- **Building the evidence-base:** Implementing evaluation alongside programs to study

interventions or linking up with other actors to allow others to study programs.

- **Measuring quality of education and learning:** While measuring quality of education and learning outcomes should be a standard feature of ECW-funded programs, finding new or improved ways to measure them, or borrowing ways to do so from other contexts can count as innovation.

ECW also has an opportunity to be a catalyst not just through the programs its funds, but also through its networks. The High-Level Steering Group of ECW brings together a group of people with an incredible amount of influence between them. Finding longer-term solutions for refugee and IDP populations, for example integrating refugees into education sector planning and transitioning children into the formal schooling system, can require high-level political dialogue and advocacy. As such, inspiring political commitment has already been identified as one of ECW's strategic functions. Members of the High-Level Steering Group could play critical roles in furthering such discussions.

In practice, when a multi-year investment is approved, the ECW Secretariat could analyze the potential political bottlenecks that exist in the particular context and bring these to the HLSG. Members of the group could then further these points by including bilateral meetings or talking points in missions if travelling to the particular country/region, and ensure that the agencies they preside over are also engaged in dialogue around these issues at country level. This is particularly pertinent for institutions with both diplomatic and development functions.

Sustainability

Initial investments show that sustainability in crisis contexts often means investing in students, teachers, and communities. In contexts such as Chad, Syria, and Yemen, it is challenging for partners to demonstrate that programs will be financially sustained after the ECW program ends. However, the key for these programs is then to sustain the benefits gained – the skills of children, youth, and teachers, and the improvements to the system. As such, interventions

such as funding teachers' salaries – which from a financial sustainability aspect can be seen as unsustainable – can in many contexts be crucial to save the education system. What is key is for ECW to encourage partners to be specific about the kind of sustainability that programs entail – whether at institutional, financial, or student level.

ECW should not necessarily ask programs to demonstrate financial sustainability, but rather to be specific about assumptions. Given that ECW aims to support innovation and bridging humanitarian and development interventions, partners may test out new approaches and partnerships during an ECW program and find that they indeed do have a catalytic effect in pulling new financing to the country. Sometimes it may work, other times not, but asking partners to demonstrate this at the get-go is also asking them to predict the future. What is important is for ECW to encourage partners to be specific about their logic and assumptions in how a new approach or partnership could lead to financial sustainability during the program's lifetime and then to analyze assumptions and outcomes during and after the program.

Annex

Scoring criteria for concept notes

Context & Specific Education Needs*	Q1.	All questions get a score of 2, 1 or 0
	1.1.	Demonstrates context knowledge
	1.2.	Risk Mitigation measures in place
	1.3.	Targets specific education needs
	1.4.	Multi-partner development of concept note
Evidence & Do No Harm*	Q2.	
	2.1.	Interventions are evidence based
	2.2.	Includes access to safe and protective learning opportunities
	2.3.	Demonstrates DNH
Immediate Impact & Building Capacity*	Q3.	
	3.1.	Immediate Impact
	3.2.	Build on and strengthen capacity of existing mechanisms
	3.3.	Focus on underserved children and youth
	3.4.	Contributes to improved coordination
New Partners & Innovation	Q.4	
	4.1	Engages private or non-traditional partners
	4.2	New/innovative approaches to funding
	4.3	New/innovative approaches to programs
Strengthening predictability & Leveraging Support	Q.5	
	5.1	Support transitions (short-term responses to medium-term planning into longer-term support)
	5.2	Improves integration of refugees in ESP
	5.3	Leverages new resources
	5.4	Engages high level political support
	Q 6	
Program and Financial management capacity	6.1	Demonstrates a clear program management structure
	6.2	Demonstrates a clear financial management structure and reporting arrangement
	6.3	Demonstrates clear risk mitigation measures

* Essential Criteria (in orange) must equal at least 15 points

Scoring criteria for full proposals

Criteria	Weight/Importance
Technical Proposal	50
Technical Approach	25
Risk Management	10
Partnership Approach	15
Sustainability of the action	15
Multiplier effects (replication, extension)	5
Sustainable at financial, institutional, policy, environmental (if applicable) level	10

Cost Proposal	25
Reasonable	5
Realistic	5
Value for Money	15
Past Performance	10
Core competency	5
Financial and operational capacity	5
TOTAL	100