

## High-Level Steering Group Virtual Meeting Minutes

12 April 2021

### 1. Chair's Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed the participants, particularly acknowledging the new members from civil society, including Jordan Hatter of Help4Refugees representing youth, Susan Hopgood of Education International representing teachers, Refaat Sabbah of the Arab Coalition for Education for All representing national NGOs, and Michael Messenger of World Vision Canada representing international NGOs.

The Chair went on to thank Mark Lowcock (OCHA) for his tremendous support for and engagement with ECW during his tenure as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, noting that this would be Mr Lowcock's last HLSG meeting in this capacity.

He underlined that the number of crisis-affected children and youth globally has now risen to 128 million and that it is upon the HLSG to ensure that ECW is able to meet its financial target of US\$ 1.8 billion. He highlighted that two decisions were being considered for approval at this meeting, including the extension of the Strategic Plan until the end of 2022 and the new Case for Investment.

In introducing the next agenda item, he thanked ECW Director Yasmine Sherif and the entire ECW Secretariat for their great work since the last HLSG meeting in September 2020.

### 2. Global Update from the ECW Director

After thanking the Chair and the other members of the HLSG for their continued leadership and support, the ECW Director reported that by the end of March, ECW had managed to reach almost five million children and youth under a "whole-of-child" approach.

The ECW Director highlighted that almost 40 per cent of ECW's beneficiaries are now forcibly displaced, including 29 per cent who are refugees and 10 per cent who are internally displaced. She also highlighted that the number of children reached at the pre-primary level is rising, recognising in this regard the important contributions of the LEGO Foundation, Theirworld and UNICEF.

She urged those at the bottom of the donor list to top up their support so that ECW would be able to achieve its targets. In order to do so, at least US\$ 400 million will be needed for the years 2021 and 2022. She added that if ECW's Multi-Year Resilience Programmes (MYRPs) were to be fully funded, some 16 million more children and youth can be reached.

She mentioned that ECW continues to move quickly and maintains close contact with its country-level partners, even more so during the pandemic. She referred to recent missions to Burkina Faso, Burundi, and Lebanon, and upcoming missions to the DRC, Haiti, Nigeria, and Libya. In noting that the ECW Office in Geneva had grown considerably since the last HLSG meeting, she expressed her sincere appreciation to the Government of Switzerland, NRC, and UNICEF for hosting ECW there, as well as for UNICEF's hosting in New York, where ECW's main office is located.

Kitty van der Heijden, Director-General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands highlighted some of ECW's achievements that stood out from the Netherlands' perspective, including its holistic approach in supporting activities, the fact that almost 5 million children had been reached while also nearly achieving gender parity, and the fact that ECW exceeded the Grand Bargain target of channelling 25 per cent of its funding to local and national responders.

The Netherlands fully supports the extension of the Strategic Plan, citing as justifications the obstacles faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the need for the different programme evaluations to be completed. As for the new Strategic Plan, she expressed hope that ECW would continue to focus on investing in mental health and psychosocial support services, addressing the needs of children with disabilities, building the capacities of local and national responders; and supporting youth in addition to pre-primary and primary-school aged children.

In expressing continued support for and congratulating ECW, Stephan Schönemann, Under-Secretary for Development Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark highlighted the importance of reaching especially girls and adolescent girls, something that ECW has done so well in recent years. He also commended the swift response ECW provided in funding programmes addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and underlined the importance of continuing to support children's education in Burkina Faso and other countries across the Sahel.

Carin Jämtin, Director-General of the Swedish International Development Agency reiterated Sweden's strong support for ECW, highlighting the unearmarked Swedish funding for the ECW-facilitated MYRP for Afghanistan. She also stressed the importance of aligning education support with national plans and strategies and of stepping up efforts to leverage domestic financing.

As one of ECW's founding members, Tariq Al Gurg, Chief Executive Officer of Dubai Cares congratulated ECW on the great progress made to date, noting that it was no

longer a start-up fund but a leading education actor. Referencing the RewirEd initiative, he stressed the critical importance of technology and the need to address the digital divide. He also called for a stronger focus on accelerated education as a means of recovering lost learning, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

H.E. Tarek Majzoub, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon recalled the multiple shocks his country had suffered in recent years, including the economic, fiscal, and monetary crisis and the massive blast in the port of Beirut that had left more than 300,000 people homeless. He stressed the importance of continued support from the international community for his country and his people and vowed to continue to work very closely with ECW to put in place a robust and inclusive multi-year programme for Lebanon.

Michelle Winthrop, Development Policy Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland commended ECW for its tireless efforts to promote equality and equity across all its programmes, not just by targeting girls and adolescent girls but by tailoring interventions to their specific needs. She indicated that Ireland would be giving consideration to its future support to ECW later this year - and that the Irish DFAT would be pleased to support ECW's resource mobilisation efforts.

### **3. Approval of Extension of the Strategic Plan**

Following an introduction by the Chair, the ECW Director explained the rationale for requesting an extension of the current Strategic Plan until the end of 2022. In addition to highlighting the challenge of initiating a new strategic planning exercise at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to for ECW strategic donor partners and new ones to help reach the \$1.8 billion financial target in the current plan, she stressed that ECW is not alone in extending its strategic plan; many others operating in crises, including UNOCHA and UNRWA, have put forward similar requests.

In addition to noting that she would also be in favour of extending Strategic Plan, Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) underlined the importance of providing a safe learning environment, particularly for girls and adolescent girls. She added that in this regard, the Learning Passport platform that is being rolled out in Nigeria could serve as a model for reaching forcibly displaced children and youth through digital remote learning platforms in other countries and contexts.

Vijay Rangarajan, Director-General for the Americas and Overseas Territories of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom reiterated the centrality of education in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to step up investments and build back better. He added that as one of ECW's staunchest supporters, the United Kingdom would use the G7 Presidency to try to prevail upon its members and guests to step up their support for girls' education.

Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council thanked ECW and its donors for enabling NRC and other frontline organisations to reach many more children and youth across the war zones in which they operate. In recollecting the recent attacks on humanitarians and humanitarian facilities in north-eastern Nigeria, he also called upon the international community to do more to protect frontline aid workers and prevent them from having to suspend their operations.

Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) commended ECW for successfully delivering on the pledge it made during the Global Refugee Forum, especially when it comes to facilitating and investing in multi-year programmes for refugee and host community children and youth, and to making available more funds for secondary education.

While noting that all the speakers supported the extension of the current Strategic Plan, the Chair highlighted the fact that this comes with a great responsibility to raise more money for ECW to reach the current Strategic Plan target of \$1.8 billion, allowing ECW to deliver inclusive and continued quality education to 9 million children and youth left furthest behind by 2021/22.

#### **4. ECW's Case for Investment and Resource Needs**

Martin Seychell, Deputy Director-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission noted that the European Union made a bold commitment to increase its spending on education a few years ago. This support is being channelled both through its country programmes as well as through effective global-level initiatives, such as ECW. He congratulated ECW on a very strong Case for Investment and called upon the other members of the HLSG to do their utmost to ensure that ECW's funding targets are met.

H.E. Karina Gould, Minister of International Development of Canada wholeheartedly endorsed the new Case for Investment and mentioned that as a longstanding partner, Canada stands ready to support ECW in its fundraising efforts. She added that Canada is committed to ensuring that no child is left behind and that she was very pleased to announce that Canada is contributing an additional CAD 7 million towards ECW's COVID-19 response.

She concluded by recognising ECW's leadership role and by reiterating that Canada is committed to playing its part to ensure that ECW will be able to continue its critical work in the years to come.

H.E. Dag-Inge Ulstein, Minister of International Development of Norway thanked the Chair for continuously stepping up and inspiring others to do the same, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that education is one of the most effective tools to protect crisis-affected children, particularly girls, from (sexual) exploitation and abuse and that it is therefore essential to keep investing in our

collective commitment of leaving no one behind. He concluded by saying that Norway is very proud to be amongst ECW's largest donors and that he would very much welcome a dialogue with ECW about how Norway could support its fundraising efforts.

Manuel Bessler, Deputy Director-General and Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation recalled that the number of conflicts and natural disasters globally continues to rise and that therefore an instrument such as ECW is vital. He reaffirmed Switzerland's strong support for ECW, also in the context of the newly established Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies and indicated that Switzerland would be pleased to co-host the launch of the new Case for Investment in Geneva.

In expressing continued support for and congratulating ECW, Melanie Schultz van Haegen, Chief Executive Officer of Porticus said that Porticus would be very happy to reach out and encourage other non-traditional donors to engage with and support ECW, including through the International Education Funders Group (IEFG).

In her video message, Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships recalled that ECW was established to help reach those left furthest behind, while also ensuring greater humanitarian-development coherence. She added that education is a top priority for the European Union and that more must be done to protect and increase financing for education during this critical time. She announced a top-up contribution of EUR 6.5 million and called upon other leaders to step up their support for ECW as well.

In congratulating ECW on its achievements, Ingolf Dietrich, Director of the 2030 Agenda of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany endorsed both the extension of the Strategic Plan and the Case for Investment. Evoking the importance of reliable multi-year financing, he announced that Germany plans to make larger and more regular contributions to ECW from next year onwards.

In expressing strong support for the Case for Investment, Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) thanked ECW for ensuring an integrated, multisectoral approach and reiterated WFP's commitment to working very closely with ECW to ensure that all school-aged children have access to school meals and are healthy and ready to learn.

Jaime Saavedra, Global Director of the Education Practice of the World Bank praised ECW for building partnerships with a wide range of UN and non-UN actors and for exceeding the Grand Bargain target of channelling 25% of its resources to local and national responders. He added that the World Bank remains committed to delivering on the joint pledge made during the Global Refugee Forum to ensure more effective, efficient, and aligned education assistance in refugee-hosting countries.

In commending ECW for the very impressive results attained to date, Sarah Bouchie, Chief Impact Officer of the LEGO Foundation said that she was happy to endorse the Case for Investment and throw her support behind investing in ECW. She stressed the importance of continuing to invest in early childhood development and education in line with global commitments, and thanked ECW for consistently providing disaggregated data, not only when it comes to the number of children reached by category but also to the number of children reached by level.

During his first HLSG meeting, Michael Messenger, Chief Executive Officer of World Vision Canada announced that he stood ready to work with the other elected civil society representatives to support ECW's mission. He joined previous speakers in endorsing the new Case for Investment and also suggested that ECW develop a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy.

Highlighting the tremendous support provided in the aftermath of the Beirut explosion, Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joined others in commending ECW for the great progress made to date. She noted that ECW and the programmes that it supports and facilitates will be key to achieving SDG4 and to ensuring that no one is left behind. She highlighted the importance of working together and thanked ECW for its continued support for and engagement with reshaping the international education architecture.

In endorsing the extension of the Strategic Plan, LeAnna Marr, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator of USAID recalled its strong commitment to education in emergencies and protracted crises. She added that USAID was not yet in a position to make a new pledge but that the incoming administrator would be poised to continue its support to ECW. She concluded by highlighting the importance of bringing in the private sector and by offering support in reaching out to companies, corporate foundations, and other private organisations.

Representing national NGOs, Refaat Sabbah, General Secretary of the Arab Coalition for Education for All highlighted that this was his first HLSG meeting and that during his tenure, he would try to offer a field perspective, especially when it comes to the specific challenges of operating in warzones.

In addition to underscoring the importance of providing multi-year funding, Vijay Rangarajan, Director-General for the Americas and Overseas Territories of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom highlighted the fact that the education assistance that ECW provides really strengthens resilience and that it helps countries and communities to recover and even thrive.

Tariq Al Gurg, Chief Executive Officer of Dubai Cares invited ECW to launch its new Case for Investment during the RewirEd Summit that will take place in Dubai from 12 to 14 December 2021.

Representing some 32.5 million educators across the globe, Susan Hopgood, President of Education International highlighted their support for the new Case for Investment and their willingness to support ECW's resource mobilisation efforts. She added that technology cannot replace teachers and in-school learning, but that it is an important tool and that more needs to be done to bridge the digital divide. She underscored that the inequality gap is widening and that Education International had developed in this regard an "equity tool" that would address alleviating the gap, which it would be glad to share with the other members of the HLSG.

In his closing remarks, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator mentioned that the most important take-away from the meeting was that everyone recognised that ECW is doing a great job. He added that it is the poorest people in the poorest countries who are bearing the brunt of this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis and that we need to do much more, or we will pay the price, as the consequences of today's lack of financing will be felt for generations.

## **6. Chair's Closing and Summary of Decisions**

The Chair listed the key take-aways from the meeting, including that both the extension of the Strategic Plan and the Case for Investment were approved. He thanked everyone for their valuable contributions and for their continued support for and engagement with ECW. He noted that the next HLSG meeting will be held in September, in the margins of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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