EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN EMERGENCIES COORDINATOR LEARNING COHORT INITIATIVE

Sesame Workshop (SW) launched a partnership with the University of Virginia's Humanitarian Collaborative (UVA) in January 2021 to gain a better understanding of how ECD coordination models operate in a variety of humanitarian contexts. The work began with a series of pre-scoping interviews with key stakeholders in the ECD in emergencies (ECDiE) community, which revealed that there was a strong interest among these stakeholders in learning more about existing coordination models and how they are working in real-time. These pre-scoping findings informed the launch of a real-time learning cohort in October 2021.

WHAT IS THE ECDIE COORDINATOR LEARNING COHORT?

This initiative is intended to advance the advocacy objectives of the Play to Learn (PTL) program, a collaboration between Sesame Workshop, the LEGO Foundation, BRAC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and NYU Global TIES for Children. The overarching advocacy objective of PTL is to see local, national, and international humanitarian stakeholders prioritize and invest in high-quality ECD programs that utilize learning through play approaches in crisis and conflict response. Multi-sectoral coordination at the crisis- or country-level is essential to the provision of comprehensive ECD services, and it is a prerequisite to promote increased prioritization of and investment in ECD in humanitarian response. Therefore, it is critical to the success of PTL's advocacy goal to contribute to strengthening ECD coordination in crisis settings.

When the first phase of the cohort initiative launched in October 2021, it included three individuals funded through the PTL project to support coordination efforts in Bangladesh, Colombia, and parts of the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon). During the first phase, the cohort members exchanged learnings from their work, including insights about the coordination structures in their contexts. Building on these insights, the cohort and key stakeholders in the ECDiE community expressed interest in a deeper focus on the specific role of an individual ECDiE coordinator at the country or crisis level.

Given this, Sesame Workshop and UVA are launching a second phase of the cohort in October 2022 focusing on better understanding the different roles that individual ECDiE coordinators* can play at the country or crisis level. This focus will enable the cohort to generate more concrete, actionable learnings about why and how humanitarian stakeholders should invest in deploying ECDiE coordinators in other contexts. Therefore, the cohort membership will be expanded to learn from more individuals with different roles in a broader variety of contexts.

During phase two, this initiative aims to:

- Create a small cohort of ECDiE coordinators working at the country or crisis level to exchange learnings in a small community of practice
- Better understand the different roles ECDiE coordinators can play at the country or crisis level
- Gather lessons learned from the coordinators' work to share with key humanitarian stakeholders and inform similar work in other contexts.
- Generate learnings on why and how humanitarian actors, donors, and host governments should invest in deploying ECDiE coordinators in other contexts

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*Please note that in the specific context of this report, the term "ECDiE coordinator" refers to individuals supporting ECD coordination within and/or across clusters/sectors at the country or crisis level. This is not necessarily a formal "coordinator" position within the cluster system. The coordinator role will vary by context. For example, the role could be leading a cross-cluster ECD Working Group, or representing ECD in a coordination body focusing on other cross-cutting themes such as disability inclusion, coordinating ECD services within a cluster, or working on ECD as a member of a national civil service, etc.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT?

This report provides a succinct summary of the activities undertaken during the first phase of the Learning Cohort, from October 2021 to September 2022. In the first phase of this Learning Cohort, Sesame Workshop and UVA:

- Facilitated a series of cohort meetings to discuss challenges, successes, and learnings. Ad hoc meetings were held with individual cohort members to explore emerging issues between the full cohort meetings.

- Worked with the cohort members to assess and facilitate the provision of support, including providing them with tools, resources, and capacity support. These tools and resources were compiled into an online resource hub available to cohort members.
- Synthesized and shared learnings with the broader ECDiE community, including the Moving Minds Alliance and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) ECD Working Group, on a quarterly basis.

TOPICS DISCUSSED AND LESSONS LEARNED

During the four meetings of the cohort held during Phase 1, four topics were selected for discussion:

1. What are the specific contextual factors that affect (support or impede) ECDiE coordination and which elements of the coordination structure itself impact (support or impede) progress on ECDiE coordination?

2. To what extent are the coordination efforts directly related to needs assessments, norms and standards for programming, planning processes (Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP), Joint Response Plans (JRP)), funding appeals, advocacy, and policy efforts?

3. Who "leads" on ECD in country and what effects does that have on ECD coordination?

4. Increased advocacy around ECD prioritization: how is it done, and is it demand driven by donors?

A brief description is provided on the findings of the discussions below.

Topic 1: What are the specific contextual factors that affect (support or impede) ECDiE coordination and which elements of the coordination structure itself impact (support or impede) progress on ECDiE coordination?

It became clear that decisions about which government department or internationally coordinated humanitarian cluster is responsible for ECD are a key determinant in the extent to which ECD is successfully coordinated and programmed. In some contexts, ECD is hosted by the Department/Ministry of Education, or Women's and Children's Affairs, or Social Affairs, or Public Health. This contrasts with the international humanitarian coordination system where ECD is primarily housed under the Education Cluster.

Bangladesh

At the national level, ECD services in Bangladesh are housed under several ministries, including the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. However, the connections between the Government's coordination efforts and the ECDiE-facing work in the Rohingya refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar are tenuous. Currently the Rohingya response is led by the humanitarian system, and ECD services are coordinated by the ECD Working Group (ECDWG), which is housed under the Education Sector within the Inter-Sectoral Coordination Mechanism that oversees the provision of services. Barriers to government engagement and involvement seem to be additionally complicated by the fact that the Ministry of Education does not permit officials to attend any meetings organised by non-governmental organisations.

Colombia

In Colombia, Sesame Workshop and UNICEF co-lead the inter-sectoral ECD in Emergencies Working Group (ECDiE WG) which was created in February 2021 under the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Cluster, which is coordinated by the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration (GIFMM in its Spanish acronym) led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The EiE cluster

also coordinates the response and advocates on children's issues with the broader Colombian Humanitarian Team (EHP) led by the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator and serviced by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which addresses the armed conflict, natural disasters, COVID-19 and other sanitary emergencies in the country.

Middle East (including Lebanon and Jordan)

Country-level coordination is, on the whole, challenging and nascent (see sections on Lebanon and Jordan). The International Rescue Committee (IRC) worked with the Knowledge to Policy Center (K2P) at the American University of Beirut to draft an assessment of ECD policy needs and existing ECD advocacy coordination in humanitarian and national systems across Lebanon and Jordan. While ECD is seen as a national priority across the two countries, the assessment identified weak coordination, funding limitations, and the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities as the primary factors impacting implementation of ECD related programs and policies in both countries.

Jordan

The Jordanian government has led on various ECD related policies and strategies, including the Jordanian Action Plan for Children, National Early Childhood Development Strategy, National Strategy for Human Resource Development (NSHRD), Strategy for Inclusive Education, and the National Standard Operating Procedures for Working with Children. To promote ECD, the National Council on Family Affairs (NCFA), the semi-governmental designated coordinating body for ECD-related activities, established a national ECD team in 2018 with an agenda driven by the blueprint for ECD set by the NSHRD 2016-2025.

While not responsible or fully empowered (due to its semi-governmental status) to directly implement the activities listed in the NSHRD, the national ECD team aims to strengthen coordination among the different actors to support government entities in their implementation of the reform activities included in this strategy. This work covers all of Jordan and is not specific to humanitarian/refugee settings.

There is no active cluster system in Jordan at this time and the government is solely responsible for overseeing services to crisis affected populations. The government has included refugees in relevant policies and strategies and acknowledges this population as key recipients for ECD service delivery.

The NCFA is developing ECD indicators to improve the monitoring of ECD outcomes. However, the implementation of policies and strategies is insufficient and accountability mechanisms are lacking, partly due to a lack of funding.

To improve ECD outcomes in the country, primary recommendations coming out of the analysis undertaken by K2P (in the assessment referenced above) include strengthening capacity and mandate of the NCFA to advocate for ECD and strengthening the capacity of the ECD National Committee; establishing sustainable financing mechanisms for ECD; and promoting collaboration with the private sector to increase access to ECD services.

Lebanon

Since the 1980s, a political stalemate has dominated the Lebanese policy environment, making it difficult to establish the institutions necessary to deliver quality ECD services. The compounded crises have shifted the focus toward essential services such as health and education. Unlike in Jordan, refugees are seldom included in policies and strategies in Lebanon. Vertical and horizontal coordination challenges exist for the government and its partners in servicing ECD coordination needs between the various existing in-country coordination structures

The government's Ministry of Social Affairs has created a coordination platform - the High Council for Childhood (HCC) - to support its Intersectoral Commission on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and is also responsible for coordination among humanitarian and development actors. The HCC has been in the process of finalizing an ECD strategy for many years. Despite ongoing challenges, some progress has been made in the development of a coordination platform through the establishment of an ECD Task Force headed by the

Ministry of Public Health with health and nutrition as its focus. Implementing humanitarian INGOs remain primarily responsible for coordination for refugees and migratory populations.

To improve ECD outcomes in the country, some recommendations coming out of the K2P analysis include developing a national ECD strategy with a clear action plan and defined roles and responsibility; strengthening capacity for the current ECD task force and the HCC; building an ECD coalition specifically for advocating within the humanitarian sector; establishing ECD indicators linked to global indicators such as the Nurturing Care Framework and/or Sustainable Development Goals; and establishing sustainable financing mechanisms.

Topic 2: To what extent are the coordination efforts directly related to needs assessments, norms and standards for programming, planning processes (HRPs, JRPs), funding appeals, advocacy and policy efforts?

Bangladesh

The ECD Working Group in Cox's Bazar falls within the overall humanitarian coordination structure and thus is locked into that structure's needs assessment processes, and subject to norms and standards for programming, planning and funding processes. Since 2020, the ECDWG co-chairs have joined the regular Education Sector coordination meetings, and the ECDWG has supported the Education Sector in ECD-related planning for the JRP. For example, in 2021 the ECDWG collaborated with researchers from NYU Global TIES for Children to complete a mapping and gap analysis of ECD programs in Cox's Bazar, and the ECDWG shared the Preliminary Mapping Report with the Education Sector to help inform future planning and coordination of ECD programming.

Colombia

Systematic interventions by the Sesame Workshop ECDiE coordinator to include ECD in the humanitarian assessment processes ultimately led to inclusion of ECD language in the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), which is the overarching coordination report for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. A detailed brief on the process is available on Sesame Workshop's website here.

Jordan and Lebanon

In both Jordan and Lebanon, governments are the oversight bodies, meaning that government bodies are not relying on humanitarian tools (such as HRPs) to drive ECD priorities in either context. In Jordan, refugees are an implicit part of service delivery. In Lebanon, refugees are generally not prioritized, and a large portion of Lebanese citizens also are unable to access services given the compounding crises and limited resources.

Where coordination does occur, it is often rather in programme implementation than policy structures. In Jordan, the NCFA as an existing coordinating body provides a theoretical direct partner for envisioning potential change to prioritize coordination. In Lebanon, finetuning accountability and adequate external resourcing (given the extreme stress on the Lebanese economy) is required before planning process or advocacy will result in ECD prioritization.

Topic 3: Who "leads" on ECD in country and what effects does that have on ECD coordination?

Across all the countries included in the cohort, governments are allocating time, attention, and coordination resources to ECD. As noted earlier in this report, the approach taken by governments, and the allocation of coordination responsibility can have a major bearing on how ECD **in Emergencies** is addressed. For example, in Bangladesh, there is limited connectivity between the Government's work and coordination on ECD and the structures and coordination mechanism that has been established in the refugee context in Cox's Bazar. A key learning from the work of the cohort is the importance of engaging governments on ECDiE, especially in protracted refugee contexts where the provision of services to children caught in emergency situations needs to be prioritised. The work of ECDiE coordinators in these contexts is central to shifting the dial. A brief overview of leadership follows:

Bangladesh

The international humanitarian system-led efforts for adequate ECDiE coordination under the Education Sector and coordinated across sectors through the Inter-Sector Coordination Group are well-established. The ECDWG co-chairs have ensured regular attendance at Education Sector coordination meetings, where they have provided updates from the Working Group and raised pertinent ECD-related issues. Updates from ECDWG are now a standing agenda item for Education Sector coordination meetings. Education partners are using ECD-related documents that were developed by ECDWG during the development of the annual JRP, and, for last two years, the ECDWG has been providing technical inputs and support to the Education Sector for ECD-related planning for the JRP.

The Government of Bangladesh faces challenges in ECDiE with the now 30 year-long Rohingya refugee crisis and a stated preference for repatriation of the Rohingya caseload to Myanmar when conditions permit this to be done in line with internationally agreed principles and practice.

Colombia

The Government of Colombia has had a coordination structure in place for ECD for many years, which has ensured an institutional culture based on coordination rather than siloed action. This condition ensures that leadership is in place for coordinating ECD. In this context the humanitarian system has less structured experience in this topic.

Jordan

Acknowledgment of ECD priorities is evident by the government through its decision to establish the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA). The NCFA is semi-independent, serving as a direct link to the prime minister while guiding cabinet ministries.

Lebanon

In addition to the information included in Topic 2 above, across the board the ministries that consider ECD as part of their mandate – Social Affairs (MOSA), Public Health (MOPH), and Education and Higher Education (MEHE) – are strong ECD supporters and "lead" on ECD in their various areas of focus whether it be nutrition, day-care, or early education. Implementing humanitarian INGOs remain primarily responsible for coordination for refugees and migratory populations.

Topic 4: Increased advocacy around ECD prioritization: how is it done and is it demand driven by donors?

Bangladesh

A November 2021 workshop convened by the ECDiE Working Group in Cox's Bazar found that there was insufficient advocacy on ECDiE with the government and called for the development of advocacy guidance to elevate ECDiE in ongoing humanitarian advocacy with the government. Advocacy with sector and government stakeholders was flagged as a key role for ECDWG in 2022 and prioritising ECD in the JRP 2022 was flagged as a goal for the group.

Since ECDiE is not a donor priority, the ECDiE working group is mapping potential donors to explain how and why prioritizing ECD would be in the best interests of children and donors with the aim of convincing the latter to provide dedicated funding for ECDiE related programmes.

Colombia

The LEGO Foundation has been an important provider of predictable funding for ECD activities. Consistent work by the ECDiE Coordinator has led to the inclusion of ECDiE in needs assessment methodology in preparation for the annual response plans and led to specific interventions and coordinated actions between sectors to ensure a holistic response to the needs of young children and their families, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women.

As ECDiE is starting to be separately identified as a priority in funding documents, assessing donor responsiveness will be a task to be undertaken during phase 2 of this project.

Finally, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) offers government loans that support ECD. More broadly the Bank is providing loans on preferential terms when at least part of the beneficiary group is a migrant population; aiming to support inclusive government programming.

The detailed brief provides further information on the work in Colombia.

Jordan and Lebanon

In Jordan, the government has formulated an ambitious and somewhat idealistic plan to seek funding for purposes of sustaining ECD delivery. However, there is some uncertainty amongst ECD actors as to whether it simply serves the government's political interest to emphasize the need for this service. Most relevant stakeholders are considered strong allies for ECD advocacy, but prioritization varies. The NCFA has moderate power due to its mandate which does not allow it to hold any entity accountable.

UN agencies (particularly UNICEF) and certain INGOs are considered powerful in influencing ECD policies due to the dependence of the government on humanitarian agency funding. Although there has been support for ECD in Jordan, weak governance for ECD, lack of policy implementation, and insufficient funding have hindered progress on advocacy.

In Lebanon, research from K2P has indicated ECD has no opponents. However, power to influence change in ECD policies varies, and across the board resource constraints make the environment especially challenging. UN agencies and certain INGOs are influential due to the dependence of the government on humanitarian agency funding. Local NGOs and institutions lack influence for policy changes.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COHORT PROCESS

The initial analysis as part of the pre-scoping exercise has been found to be correct: there is a clear appetite for knowledge, information exchange and learning, with the primary interest being on the role and function of the ECDiE Coordinator. The first meetings provided time and space for the cohort members to compare and contrast the coordination mechanisms across the four countries, including through sharing the members' terms of reference and available documentation on the role and function of the ECDiE Working Groups or Task Force. That alone proved to be a potentially valuable resource for others, providing informal mentoring and guidance on "how to" set up coordination structures in other countries.

Cohort meetings also delved into questions of concern and issues that the cohort members identified as priority issues (per the four key questions above). Placing the subject matter prioritisation with the members reinforced adherence to the initial vision of the cohort "to monitor and review the trajectory of coordination efforts and, where possible, identify common success factors, challenges, and other considerations." While more limited than originally envisioned, the project also enabled SW "to share these considerations with the broader ECDiE community, aiming to also inform future ECDiE coordination efforts at the country- or crisis-level globally."

Meetings also examined the situation in one country (Colombia), providing a 'deep dive' for both the coordinators and for the researchers. While this exercise revealed a wealth of information and posed a number of key questions around why coordination flourished in some locations and not in others, it also revealed that undertaking such an exercise across the entire cohort would be highly resource intensive and thus beyond the scope of resources available under this project.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING POINTS

Recognising the primacy of States to manage and organise response to crises and disasters considerable emphasis was placed on the need to learn from countries that have successfully engaged with government-led ECD coordination structures and to understand processes, systems and incentives at play in these situations.

ECDiE coordination succeeds most in an environment of cross-sectoral collaboration among national, regional, and international stakeholders. However, as it stands no individual agency is taking a lead at the international level to support cross-sectoral integration in the way this has previously been done for other identified priorities (e.g., Accountability to Affected People, (AAP), Gender-based Violence (GBV), Cash programming), with IASC leadership being facilitated either by OCHA (AAP, GBV) or through a specialised coordination entity such as the Cash Learning Project (CALP). This is problematic in the currently configured humanitarian system since there is no clear advocate for ECDiE. Thus, cohort members were keen to understand the connection between their work and the United Nations system, both in terms of where ECDiE sits in the cluster coordination system (where applied) and how ECDiE can be more systematically included in UN-led humanitarian planning/funding documents.

That said, cohort members considered that ECDiE is a relatively new and potentially innovative way to include the cross-sector/cross-cluster needs of children impacted by conflict and crisis. Evidence gathered through Phase 1 of the Cohort Project shows that innovation in approach and engaging with humanitarian tools, mechanisms and systems can pay off. At the same time ECDiE coordination arrives in the humanitarian system at a time of inherent (but not unreformable) complexity of that system and at a time when many humanitarian actors are calling for reform - again providing an opportunity to reach reformers in the system and to work with them to promote change and/or adaptation.

Programmatically Cohort Members were keen for:

- Development of specific indicators for ECD where lack of clarity makes reporting difficult and demotivates active interest.

- Guidance and support on increasing advocacy efforts both country-specific and generic.

- Creation of a "how to" guide on ECDiE coordination with generic tips and tricks adaptable to context.