



Executive Leadership Council Meeting

Minutes

Thursday, April 22, 2021

9:00am–12:30pm EDT

Attendees: Amanda Devercelli (World Bank), Ana Nieto (UNICEF), Anshu Banerjee (WHO), Bernadette Daelmans (WHO), Bizu Negussie (ChildFund Int.), Borhene Chakroun (UNESCO), Erinna Dia (UNICEF), Ghassan Issa (ANECD), Gerda Verburg (SUN), Joan Lombardi (International Expert, Child and Family Policy), Liana Ghent (ISSA), Lisa Bohmer (Hilton Foundation), Lynette Okengo (AfECN), Muhammad Musa (BRAC International), Peter Laugharn (Hilton Foundation), Rokhaya Diawara (UNESCO), Romilla Karnati (Save the Children), Sanjay Wijesekera (UNICEF), Sheldon Shaeffer (ARNEC), Sherrie Westin (Sesame), Stephen Lye (University of Toronto)

Regrets: Hana Brixi (World Bank Group) Omar Abdi (UNICEF), H.R.H Sara Zeid (Princess of Jordan), Sneha Sheth (Dost Education), Zsuzsana Jakab (WHO)

PATH: Sarah Marjane, Nikolaj Gilbert, Matthew Frey

ECDAN Secretariat: Elizabeth Lule, Adrian Cerezo, Delphine Valette, Selam Geremew, Shekufeh Zonji

Welcome Remarks by Interim Co-chair [Lynette Okengo]

The interim co-chair of the Executive Leadership Council (ELC), Lynette Okengo, welcomed participants to the bi-annual ELC meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance. She emphasized how despite current times being difficult, it is exciting to see ECDAN's growth since its launch in 2016 and how it has benefitted from the support of committed and passionate individuals and organizations prioritizing young children. She reflected on how over the years, early childhood has become prioritized at major events such as the G20, UNGA, and the World Bank Spring Meetings. She emphasized the progress in growing partnerships in various regions, such as the establishment of the Africa Union's Early Childhood Cluster, the ECD Workforce Initiative, high level advocacy in Asia and the Pacific, and rapid response to addressing challenges for children in the Arab Region. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, she appreciated how ECDAN continues work on strengthening political support and the wealth of evidence being generated from many places, such as the World Bank Group's work on childcare.

She thanked everyone for the work they continue to do for the children and reminded everyone that the job ahead is challenging as there is still a lot of progress to be done and reminded partners that we are stronger together.

Meeting Objectives

Lynette Okengo gave an overview of the objectives for the meeting: (i) taking stock of the current COVID-19 crisis facing children and their caregivers in order to refine our joint vision and alignment on emerging priorities for collective action to rebuild stronger and better; (ii) discussing the role of the ELC as champions and change agents for early childhood care and education and early childhood development; and (iii) and establishing governance structures to support the Executive Leadership Committee (ELC) functions and directly advice on ECDAN priorities. Lynette reviewed the meeting agenda and requested approval of the minutes of the October 27, 2020 ELC meeting.

Lynette then introduced Gerda Verburg, thanking her for her work with the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) as the SUN Movement Coordinator and Assistant Secretary General and welcomed her to ECDAN's ELC and the meeting.

The ELC approved the minutes of the last ELC meeting on October 27, 2021.

Remarks by Gerda Verburg (SUN Movement Coordinator)

The SUN Movement Coordinator, Gerda Verburg gave an overview on the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and how in 2010, different stakeholders came together to start a country-led and country-driven SUN movement. Gerda Verburg reviewed the three phases of the SUN movement thus far, which included bringing the different stakeholders and players together, making them work together while focused on implementation and results on the ground. She emphasized the systemic approach required to battle malnutrition worldwide. Gerda also discussed her role on the Executive Leadership Council, which she agreed to take on due to her strong belief in partners' collaboration at the country level. She wants the ELC to more focus on country action, systemic change and the challenges of benchmarks for success. She is interested in the 'so what?' and is hoping to identify the different benchmarks being used by ECDAN to measure progress as well as who is responsible for the efforts and how the implementation is conducted within ECDAN.

Global Partnership Strategy Update by Borhene Chakroun (UNESCO)

Borhene Chakroun from UNESCO was introduced by Joan Lombardi, interim co-chair of the ELC. Borhene Chakroun thanked the ELC members and expressed appreciation for the ECDAN platform. He introduced the global partnership strategy for early childhood framework, emphasizing that this is a mission-driven partner initiative; that it is not a blueprint or a replacement of national reform or policy, but rather a way to understand how to jointly support countries in their agendas. He emphasized that this work should be embedded in the broader ecosystem. The goal of the global partnership strategy hopes to serve is to unite, reinvigorate

and create partnerships for conducting coordinated actions within and across all countries to invest in early childhood care and education (ECCE)/ECD as well as assuring that the fundamental rights of children are protected. The framework includes five strategic areas focusing on access, quality, inclusion and equity, all of which are interconnected, and are critical components of advocacy, policy implementation and capacity development. It requires collective action by stakeholders to influence the agenda at a global, regional and country level. Borhene Chakroun shared that they are currently consulting with different partners and asked for feedback. The goal is to launch the strategy in early July 2021.

After receiving questions and feedback from partners, Borhene clarified that the focus of the strategy was on ECD as a whole and is cross-sectoral. He emphasized that they are working through a mission-driven approach and action plans will be developed to spell out the detailed activities and define roles and responsibilities in support of country priorities.

Program and Operations Progress Update by the ECDAN Secretariat

Elizabeth Lule, the Executive Director of ECDAN, opened the conversation by sharing the huge challenges facing children and families with overlapping crises that have reversed progress on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She indicated that it will require collective action and that all ECDAN partners have huge responsibilities in the COVID-19 recovery process. She reminded the ELC of ECDAN's vision, mission, and the need to work jointly.

Elizabeth presented the Strategic Framework for 2020 to 2023, which was approved in April 2020, and its four main goals: (i) advocate and communicate, (ii) learn and share, (iii) coordinate, connect and align, and (iv) strengthen the network. She shared how the governance structure was developed in consultation with ECDAN's partners, and that the Executive Leadership Council was renamed from Executive Board after ECDAN joined PATH (its new host). Elizabeth explained that the Technical Advisory Group has also been launched, and that ECDAN governance includes the secretariat, an assembly of network members, and other partners.

The Executive Director introduced the Secretariat Team, of whom presented the progress against the 2020-2021 workplan. Delphine Valette presented progress on the Advocacy and Communication work, which included launching calls to action in response to COVID-19 and the Beirut explosion and stepping up engagement with new, influential stakeholders. Childcare was identified by ECDAN partners as an advocacy priority area in mid-2020 and she presented progress made on planning the Global Childcare Campaign.

Shekufeh Zonji gave an overview of Knowledge and Learning Exchange, including its strategic objectives. She highlighted some of the achievements including the growth of the knowledge fellows' program, the several communities of practice, the COVID-19 webinar series, and the creation and development of global goods such as the cost of inaction tool that can be used for advocacy.

Adrian Cerezo shared a snapshot of different analytics, including ECDAN website and social media reach. He presented the ECDAN Gateway 2.0 that will provide a user-friendly

environment and will improve search related tools for the ECD field. The platform will provide a knowledge exchange and learning platform with access to communities of practice who will help with knowledge curation.

For ECDAN's strategic objective 3, which is to Coordinate, Connect and Align with ECD stakeholders, several collaborative efforts and the different memorandums of collaboration that ECDAN has developed with different partners, including the different multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination efforts were reported on.

Elizabeth in looking at Strengthening the Network shared the various risks including financial sustainability, the roadmap to becoming an independent legal entity, operating as a network, while often viewed as an organization, and the growing demand in COVID-19 response and recovery going forward.

Financial Report by ChildFund International and PATH

Bizu Negussie from ChildFund International, who hosted ECDAN for the first two years, shared the consolidated financial reports for ECDAN and the grants he managed on behalf of ECDAN.

Sarah Marjane from PATH shared the administrative and financial update, including how ECDAN is now fully hosted by PATH and that Elizabeth Lule has transitioned to a PATH staff. She shared that ECDAN's budget has increased by almost 30% from 2018 to 2021, and that ECDAN currently has seven core donors and an approximate annual budget of \$1.2 million. Sarah indicated that funding has good financial health and diversity, and that ECDAN has spent about 20% of its budget in Q1 and is currently working on three proposals to close the funding gap.

Technical Advisory Group Update by Romilla Karnati (Save the Children) and Stephen Lye (University of Toronto)

Romilla Karnati from Save the Children and Stephen Lye from the University of Toronto — interim co-chairs — presented on the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Romilla shared the TAG objectives, including providing technical direction to ECDAN'S work, forging connectivity, fostering collective action, and generating alignment of ECDAN's partners to create collective impact for young children. Romilla shared some of the current members and how TAG hopes to expand to draw in missing skills and ensure diversity.

She highlighted that every regional network now has a nominated member on the TAG in order to align the technical priorities of ECDAN with that of the regional networks. The TAG will create a technical resource group focusing on different thematic areas such as climate change, private sector engagement, etc.

Summary of Feedback and Questions on Report by the Secretariat

Feedback from the Executive Leadership Council:

- Partners commended the breadth of expertise in the ELC and recommended that ECDAN should be more goal-oriented and very strategic.
- Partners indicated that it is often easy to get caught up in the acronyms of development, nutrition, or education, but that it is important to place the broader context of early childhood in relation to what different partners are doing.
- The ECDAN website should have clear visibility of regional networks and post financial information in the spirit of transparency.
- The ECDAN partnership should consider whether it is fit for purpose. Measurement and monitoring results is important with more clarity on the accountability framework and what is expected from the ELC members.
- It was also emphasized that partners should understand and collectively consider the context of the response and recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood education and early childhood development.
- Partners agreed that they felt ECDAN fulfills a broad function and is a platform for connecting the several initiatives that support early child development including nurturing care, early learning, protection, and safety in the context of the Nurturing Care Framework.
- They also shared their excitement to see what the network of partners can accomplish together in promoting ECD as a global public policy priority.
- Partners commended the ECDAN Secretariat for the learning events hosted and the selected topics.

Elizabeth Lule thanked the Executive Leadership Council for their feedback and shared that the current approach has been to learn by doing and problem solving, because networks tend to be messy and ECD is complex and multisectoral.

She highlighted that we should consider a strategy refresh in response to the challenges of COVID-19, and agreed that measurement and a robust results framework are important. She responded that accountability is critical for a network and requested an ELC discussion on formulating an accountability framework.

Partner Updates and Reflections on Vision, Alignment, and Priorities for Collective Action in Response to COVID-19 by Interim Co-Chairs and ELC Members

Lynette Okengo from AfECN invited partners to share updates on their work, asking them to focus on two things: (i) their ongoing activities and (ii) suggestions regarding collective action.

Sanjay Wijeskera from UNICEF introduced Erinna Dia, UNICEF's new global lead and the principal advisor who will be leading the work on ECD. Sanjay shared examples of collective action with ECDAN partners including testing the cost of inaction tool in Bulgaria and

Madagascar; developing an interagency parenting framework together with the Ending Violence Against Children Partnership and other partners; playful parenting with support from LEGO Foundation; and a community of practice on early childhood education with Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank. He reported that UNICEF was in the midst of developing its post COVID-19 strategy and made suggestions for collective work in different areas, including addressing mental health of parents and caregivers, equitable use of digital technology to support parents and children, climate change, and supporting children with disabilities and developmental delays, and their families.

Amanda Devercelli from the World Bank Group highlighted childcare as an essential issue in building a country's human capital — not just a women's or child issue — and that this is especially important in the context of COVID-19 recovery and beyond. She highlighted that measurement is an area where the World Bank is collaborating with UNESCO and WHO to measure child development outcomes and the quality of early learning settings. She spoke of the volume that will be released in the fall called “Quality Early Learning, Nurturing Children's Potential” which will identify the key aspects for countries to invest in early childhood education and hopes that the World Bank Early Learning Partnership (ELP) Fellows will link with ECDAN's Knowledge Fellows. She reported on their new ECE capacity building program for policymakers with emerging areas including increased work on parenting, early childhood development in fragile and conflict settings. She reported that the World Bank Group now requires that all education work should be inclusive and address disability.

Sheldon Shaeffer from ARNEC shared that they are working on their medium-term strategy as is UNICEF Bangkok, and they hope to have as much complementary work as possible with them as well as UNESCO and ECDAN. ARNEC is also doing a second webinar series on COVID-19, focusing on different components of the nurturing care framework. He shared that there have already been webinars on healthy nutrition, early learning, responsive caregiving, and that there is an upcoming webinar on safety and security. ARNEC published a major annual publication focused on ECD and the environment and climate change, which can be found on the ARNEC website.

Anshu Banerjee from the WHO shared that his group meets biweekly with a coordination group to see how they can move forward. They have used the nurturing care framework and articulated how it impacts children aged 0–19 in the article “[Principles of Nurturing Care Promote Human Capital and Mitigate Adversities from Pre-conception Through Adolescence](#)” published in the BMJ. He indicated that WHO is figuring out how to better coordinate nutrition, violence against children, mental health, and environmental health in their responses to country needs, and hoping to look at it more holistically. They are also working with regional and country teams to build capacity for implementation — they will have a workshop for 11 countries in the Southeast Asia region and are looking at tracking of indicators in order to strengthen their agenda around early child development.

Liana Ghent from ISSA shared an update on their European ECD campaign: [First Years First Priority](#), which is an advocacy initiative hoping to influence ECD investment in Europe. She shared that the [early childhood workforce initiative](#) that ISSA is working on with R4D provides a compilation of voices from the field, including frontline workers in different sectors. She highlighted that they will now be partnering with the other regional networks on the workforce

initiative, and hope to partner with ECDAN. She shared the link to [ISSA's work at the city level](#), and explained that they are currently working in 30 cities in Europe, supporting decision makers to prioritize and improve the lives of young children.

Borhene Chakroun from UNESCO shared that in addition to the work on the Global Strategy Partnership, the Bureau for Education in Geneva is working to support the development of a holistic early childhood education curriculum. The Institute for Planning is working on capacity building for including ECD in the education sector plans. UNESCO chairs are conducting work on early childhood education and development, which focuses on networking, research, and analysis, as part of the knowledge building work.

Sherrie Westin from the Sesame Workshop spoke about advocacy around ECD. She shared that through its work with LEGO and IRC, Sesame has devoted full effort around advocacy for ECD for children in crisis settings. She indicated that the work is just beginning, and that although Sesame Workshop has always been a nonprofit, advocacy is not always what it has done. She discussed how COVID-19 paused and transformed some agenda on digital ways of reaching children, the need for early childhood education support is more important than ever considering the severe impact the pandemic has had on the learning of children and families. Sherrie shared that Sesame's goal is to increase the information available on what is effective for children's development in crisis settings. She hopes the data and information can contribute to ECDAN's work. She hopes Sesame can serve as a model and catalyst of what can work when you focus on the early critical years for children in crises and humanitarian contexts. and will share more about full strategy at a future board meeting.

ELC Discussion, Governance: Establishment of a Nomination Committee and Interim Steering Committee

Joan Lombardi set forth the following two proposals on behalf of the Interim Co-Chairs. Discussion followed and there were no objectives to either proposal.

Establishing a Nominations Committee and Selecting a Chair

Given that the ELC currently has interim co-chairs, it was proposed that a Nomination Committee be established to develop and manage the selection of a Chair for the Executive Leadership Council. Joan Lombardi asked ELC members to let the Secretariat know if they are interested in serving on the Nominating Committee. The anticipated timeline is: the identification of nominees in the summer of 2021, election in September 2021, and announcement of new chair in October 2021. The new Chair would assume full responsibilities in January of 2022.

Interim Steering Committee (ISC)

The Terms of Reference for the ECDAN Executive Leadership Council, under the task *Guide overall strategy and structure*, includes the establishment of a Steering Committee as a permanent Committee to improve ELC engagement and efficiency. The proposal was to establish an Interim Steering Committee to consider how best to maximize coordination of the ELC with partners and to conduct a refresh review of the ECDAN strategy post-COVID.

It was also suggested that the Interim Steering Committee establish the TOR for the permanent committee. Proposed membership included: representatives from all regions and from the technical advisory committee, at least two volunteers from the ELC, the Interim Co-Chairs and the Executive Director of ECDAN. Joan Lombardi asked ELC members to send suggestions for volunteers to join the Interim Steering Committee to the Secretariat in the upcoming weeks. Plans are for the ISC to meet 2–3 times before October 2021 and to report back to the ELC at the next meeting. UNICEF indicated interest to join the Interim Steering Committee and Gerda Verburg asked for a short one pager on the objectives of the Interim Steering Committee.

DECISION: The ELC agreed to all the governance recommendations above.

Closing Remarks and AOB by Interim Co-Chairs

The Executive Director thanked the Executive Leadership Council for their leadership, commitment, and support to ECDAN. She counts on the ELC to take the agenda forward through collective action and hopes for continued support and engagement from every partner. Elizabeth also thanked the Secretariat staff for their hard work, and the interim co-chairs for excellent chairing of the meeting and the guidance they have provided the Secretariat.

Lynette Okengo and Joan Lombardi gave brief closing remarks and thanked the Executive Director and the Secretariat staff for the work over the past years. They emphasized the importance of ECDAN's work and all its partners and underscored the critical need to work together in order to make a difference in the lives of young children.

Next Steps

- Request for volunteers to join the Nominations Committee by May 6, 2021 and establish a process to select a Chair by October 2021.
- A one pager on objectives of the Interim Committee and on the nomination process.
- Partners to share their nominations for the Interim Steering Committee.