Executive Leadership Council Meeting Minutes

May 7, 2025
9:00-11:30 AM EST

In Attendance:

- **Executive Leadership Council Members:** Borhene Chakroun (Co-Chair, UNESCO), Lynette Okengo (Co-Chair, AfECN), Joan Lombardi (Early Opportunities), Mark Tomlinson (Stellenbosch University), Liana Ghent (ISSA), Lisa Bohmer (Hilton Foundation), Sheldon Shaeffer (ARNEC), Anshu Banerjee (WHO), George K. Werner (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Center), Boniface Kakhobwe (UNICEF), Chemba Raghavan (UNICEF), Eduardo de Campos Quieroz (Bracell Foundation), Melissa Kelly (WBG), Rokhaya Diawara (UNESCO)

- **ECDAN Secretariat:** Elizabeth Lule, Sarah Marjane, Emily Gilkinson, Brett Weisel, Shekufeh Zonji, Harper Lagares, Katherine Shek, Caroline Mochoge

Apologies: Muhammad Musa (BRAC IED), Ghassan Issa (ANECD), Kammerle Schneider (PATH), Joanne Raisin (SUN Movement), Sherrie Westin (Sesame Workshop), Rukmini Banerji (Pratham Education Foundation)

Welcome and Agenda

The co-chair welcomed ELC members to the meeting and expressed gratitude for members making time to be there.

The ELC unanimously adopted the agenda.

The ELC unanimously approved the minutes of the last regular ELC meeting held on September 19, 2024, and the ad hoc meeting held on March 11, 2025.

The co-chair asked ELC members to declare conflicts of interest regarding today's agenda. **No conflicts were shared.**

Past Action Items

The Executive Director (ED) reported on matters arising from the previous two meetings and their status. Action was taken on all items and several items that were still in progress were to be discussed during the meeting, including the global statement responding to the current situation, the document clarifying the structure of advisory groups and working groups, and the ELC evaluation tool.

The ELC discussed the partner statement on the impact of cuts to foreign aid that the ELC had asked the Secretariat to prepare at the ad hoc meeting in March. The statement was prepared by the Secretariat and was sent to the Global Policy and Advocacy Advisory Group (GPAAG) for inputs and subsequently to ELC members for their inputs. ELC comments were incorporated into the statement and a disclaimer was included. Several ELC members expressed concern that their organization's policies prohibit them from endorsing such a statement. Key takeaways from the discussion included:

- The statement language could be used by partners for talking points at different events and occasions without having it be published.
- Clarify further what the objective is of publishing the statement. The initial objective had been to raise awareness, take a stand about the impact of the foreign cuts to the well-being of young children and their caregivers, provide an aligned narrative, and outline what ECDAN as a network will do to respond.
- Adjust the language to make it less political and more about calling for action to increase and improve investments.

Action: The GPAAG will revisit the statement language and use during their upcoming meeting and provide a recommendation back to the ELC.

Committee Reports

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Chair shared that they are exploring potential collaboration with the Center for Exponential Change about systems change and innovation and planning a workshop for TAG members to explore how the TAG could operate more effectively. He also shared that they are considering the impact of foreign aid reductions on ECDAN partners. The TAG proposed to survey ECDAN members and prepare a synthesis of the results from other partners' surveys.

Comments and questions from the ELC members included:

- It is important to clarify the purpose of the survey and how the information would be used.
- The TAG may want to consider consultations or key informant interviews instead of the survey.
- It would be good to know which sectors or sources are being supported or preferred to make up funding gaps that have emerged.
- It would be good to know how organizations are handling deletion of data and evidence and working to preserve it.
- What is a mechanism for ongoing information gathering to capture the evolution of challenges?

Action: The TAG chair will work with the Secretariat and TAG members to prepare a draft survey that can be shared with the ELC.

The GPAAG Chair reported that GPAAG had been reconstituted and has had two meetings. The GPAAG is still reflecting on how to make the meeting and engagement more effective. Currently there are two working groups under GPAAG, one on childcare and one on climate.

2025 Work Plan and Budget

The Executive Director (ED) shared highlights of the top priorities within each strategic objective of the strategy.

- Strategic Objective 1: Build a Movement:
  - Unlock financing through Act for Early Years campaign.
  - Kickoff of technical financing working group, including discussions on innovative financing and UNESCO global monitoring report.
  - Prepare for financing forum and pledging summit.
  - Build partnerships for Cities, Care, and Climate intersections.
- Strategic Objective 2: Exchange Knowledge and Learning:
  - Update and improve the ECD Knowledge Gateway.
  - Develop learning agenda and partnership around early trauma.
  - Continue Knowledge Fellows program.
- Strategic Objective 3: Advocate for Action:
  - Influence COP30 negotiations and grow ECD access to climate financing.
  - Hold capacity-strengthening workshops on climate advocacy.
  - Launch CARE Initiative in three countries, with goal of building coalitions at the country level.

ECDAN's Director of Finance and Operations presented the 2025 budget noting that this is the first year that the ECDAN budget has decreased since its inception. The 2025 budget has decreased by 22%. ECDAN anticipates funding from five different philanthropic donors. Key cost drivers are personnel and partnerships. The Secretariat is exploring cost reduction measures in 2025 and 2026.

The ELC noted that ECDAN is in a unique position to use its learning platform to share new knowledge and resources among partners to minimize duplication and increase economies of scale. The ELC encourages all partners to share materials.

The ELC unanimously approved the 2025 workplan and budget.

ECDAN Governance

To follow up on action items from the September meeting, the ED shared that inactive ELC members rotated off and the process of revising the ECDAN constitution to reflect the new strategy is underway. Revisions will be discussed with the ELC at the next meeting

ELC questions included:

- Is the nominations committee looking to add new ELC members?
- What is the process for revising the ECDAN constitution?

The ED proposed not to add new members and have a smaller ELC. Some revisions to the constitution are basic to reflect the new strategy but the questions of rotation and membership will be discussed by the nominations committee who will make recommendations to the ELC.

Action: The Secretariat and nominations committee will propose revisions to the ECDAN constitution and share recommended revisions with the ELC for discussion and approval at the next meeting.

At the September meeting the ELC agreed to conduct a self-evaluation, which is a good practice for all boards to improve effectiveness and engagement. Reflections on the draft self-evaluation that had been shared with the ELC included:

- Categorizing the survey questions around ELC functions.
- Some of the questions are repetitive when asked about the ELC as a whole and then as an individual ELC member.

The ED clarified that the questions around the ELC functions are in the first section of the survey and that the individual questions are important for self-reflection and are designed to be similar as it would be useful to see if there is a discrepancy between individual and group ratings.

Action: The ELC approved the self-evaluation tool drafted. They requested the ED to send it out by the end of May and give ELC members three weeks to respond. The findings will be discussed at the next meeting.

Secretariat Updates

The Secretariat's first quarter report was shared in advance of the meeting. The ED shared highlights including achievements during the year to date and priority actions in the coming months.

ECDAN's Director of Finance and Operations presented the Q1 expenditure report. She highlighted that total expenditure in Q1 is 13% of the annual budget, which aligns with plans for the rest of the year.

The Senior Program Officer shared some insights from the annual member survey conducted at the end of 2024. The results affirmed the value of ECDAN's platform offerings, especially learning webinars, though members requested more interaction within smaller groups. The top themes that members expressed most interest in learning more about and discussing within network activities included disability, climate, and parent support, in descending order.

Questions from the ELC included:

- Is funding for 2026 secured? Could some funds from 2025 be saved for 2026?
- Could ECDAN utilize breakout rooms during webinars for more interactive small-group connections?

The ED clarified that ECDAN currently has multi-year commitments from its core donors. ECDAN is financially well-positioned for 2026 and some of 2027. On breakout rooms, it was explained that we use breakout rooms for smaller communities of practice, but it is much more difficult with larger learning webinars that usually have more than 300 participants. The Secretariat will continue to improve interactive engagement between partners.

The ED shared that she would like ECDAN to pursue legal registration as a 501(c)3 to become a legal entity using the name ECDAN or Friends of ECDAN. ECDAN would still be hosted at PATH for the time being to allow a smoother transition to a sustainable and independent network in the future. A 501(c)3 would require a small board of three to five members including US residents as a subset of the ELC. ELC members asked what the relationship of the current ELC would be with the 501(c)3 board.

Action: The ELC directed the ED to prepare proposal for registering ECDAN or Friends of ECDAN in advance of the next ELC meeting.

Partner Updates

ELC members were asked to prepare a slide with updates that could be shared with the meeting minutes. UNICEF, ISSA, and ARNEC shared slides in advance.

- UNICEF: A new director of Child Nutrition and Early Childhood Development has been hired, Dr. Joan Matji. Chemba will invite Dr. Matji to a future ELC meeting. UNICEF's online learning course on Financing for ECD will be launched in June 2025.
- ISSA: They recently launched CHAVORE Initiative, which focuses on the mental health of children and launched a compendium of good practices on engaging men in nurturing care. They also released a brief on psychological first aid and trauma-informed approaches.
- ARNEC: They are preparing for their regional conference and pre-conference workshops in Manila in July. They are continuing their ECD and climate change workshops with country stakeholders and integrating social and emotional learning into teacher training.

Closing and Action Items

The ELC had a closed session to provide feedback to the ED.

Action items that were agreed upon in the meeting include:

- The GPAAG will revisit the partner statement during their upcoming meeting and propose a way forward to the ELC.
- The TAG will work with the Secretariat to prepare a draft survey to capture insight on the impact of the current and evolving funding cuts situation.
- The Secretariat and nominations committee will review the ECDAN constitution and ELC membership composition and share proposed revisions with the ELC for discussion and approval at the next meeting.
- The ED will set up the self-evaluation tool online and send the survey out by the end of May/early June and the ELC will respond in three weeks.
- The ED will prepare proposal for registering ECDAN or Friends of ECDAN as a 501(c)3 to be circulated in advance of the next ELC meeting and added to the agenda for discussion.