On October 9-12, 100 colleagues, including from 10 country delegations, attended the DG ECHO hosted Education Cluster Annual Partners Meeting. The theme of the meeting was the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, with four panels exploring components of this broader theme.

A more detailed report will follow shortly outlining key recommendations and ways forward. The main take-aways from the meeting as well as follow-up actions for the Global Education Cluster are highlighted below.

Opening Speakers

Christos Stylianides, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management, opened by reiterating his “passion and obsession” for Education in Emergencies, stressing how he has seen first-hand how it can bring hope and courage to people living in crisis. In most contexts, he remarked, humanitarian and development education work is undertaken in parallel, and urged this to be better linked. Within DG ECHO’s portfolio, longer term action (up to 24 months) for EiE is explicitly encouraged.

Mr. Stylianides announced the EU’s increase in support to education with 8% of their humanitarian budget dedicated to EiE in 2018. DG ECHO’s Enhanced Response Capacity tool will also fund the Education Cluster with EUR 1 million over the next two years to strengthen the capacity of Education Clusters and coordination teams at the country level.

Tove Wang, CEO, Save the Children Norway stated that the EU’s support was an inspiration and saw this as a call to action to increase efforts and ensure country clusters have what they need to deliver coordinated responses. Sikander Khan, Director, Geneva Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF, restated this gratitude, noting how far the system has come to collectively meet the needs of affected people.

Keynote speaker Abdul Wassay Arian, General Director, Planning and Evaluation, Afghanistan MoE relayed Afghanistan’s achievements in education over the past 16 years. In this context, meaningful and sustainable action requires development and humanitarian assistance to be delivered concurrently, including joint analysis, programming and definition of roles. Community Based Education in the form of outreach classes of formal hub-schools has been a successful strategy in provision of emergency education and enrolling out of school children in hard to reach areas.

Yasmine Sherif, Director, Education Cannot Wait Fund, described the Fund’s commitment to strengthening the Cluster as a way to bring actors together in protracted crises, and a future vehicle for ECW. She stressed the need to move education from the margins of humanitarian prioritization to the center, through a strong narrative about how it enables achievement of other humanitarian and development commitments. She called on colleagues to continue to fight for education as the key sector driving the nexus, with collective planning and response essential in advancing this approach.

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1 The first day, October 9th, was an opportunity for country delegates to explore the themes of the meeting.
**Key points from Panel 1:** Planning and Strategy for Education in Emergencies in Protracted Humanitarian Crises

**Using the strategy to build a strong education narrative:** A strategy is the foundational document to articulate needs, define response and implementation modalities, raise funds and monitor the response. The nexus is contingent on both sides having ‘its house in order’ and a credible, collectively built strategy is the vehicle to demonstrating that. A solid strategy which articulates a detailed narrative about education’s role in addressing solutions to a crisis, can also more effectively shape and influence the HRP.

**Addressing root causes and strengthening national systems:** The Whole of Syria and Nigeria are examples of how strategies have been used to work more strategically and with a long term view. The WoS response has focused on quality and system strengthening, supporting host countries in strengthening their national policy frameworks for when the crisis ends. The crisis has also been an opportunity to bring all actors together – development, stabilization and humanitarian – through the Humanitarian Dialogue Exchange to promote a culture of trust and mutual understanding. In Nigeria, the main drivers for emergency response are deeply rooted in development causes such as climate change, socio economic exclusion, and poverty. Forums to engage in discussions bridging these are lacking, but the strategy development process is a way to promote harmonized planning to address these underlying drivers.

**Strategy development process is critical:** The process of strategy development, is as important as its outcome. It has been used as a capacity building opportunity as well as a way to unify partners, including the MoE and local actors, to analyze needs and strategize together. On the development side, the planning process is one that needs to be country led with the government deciding priorities; participatory, to gain commitment from a wide range of stakeholders; and well organized with technical working groups, to address specific areas of focus. On the humanitarian side, ensuring the strategy is informed by solid evidence requires budget, time and capacity. It must be rigid enough to direct a harmonized and coordinated approach, but flexible enough to adjust as new evidence and needs emerge. It requires consultation across a wide range of stakeholders to identify the risks they are facing including and starting with, as much as possible, affected communities. Finally, alignment and continuity are essential and to achieve this, mutual involvement is key: the Cluster needs to be aware of the longer term vision, development partners need to build upon foundations achieved through humanitarian action and both need to involve the other in strategy development process.

**Putting strategies to use:** To be effective, the plans need to be used by all stakeholders: by donors to make funding decisions, by partners on implementation modalities, and by other stakeholders as they determine needs and priorities.

**Next steps for the Global Education Cluster:** With ECHO support, GEC is currently rolling out Strategy Development Guidance to select countries. By the end of 2018, after dissemination and piloting, the guidance will be refined and finalized. The GEC aims to have Cluster Strategies in place for all suitable countries by the end of 2019.

**Key Points from Panel 2:** Putting Evidence at the Core of EiE Responses

**Joint assessment as a means to strengthen collaboration, and utilize collective resources and expertise:** The Education Cluster, as the summation of its partners, should be the primary mechanism for the consolidation and dissemination of evidence. When partners contribute to joint assessment, it
becomes a shared piece of work, and the collaborative spirit carries into the planning and response phases.

Assessment isn’t about data collection, but about sense-making: The education sector needs evidence to make its case and to shape the narrative about the importance of education. Data can be a powerful tool for this kind of advocacy: demonstrating that IDP students are more likely to pass primary exams than regular students, attests to EiE’s positive impact while community prioritization can help to place education within a multi-sectoral response.

Plan for the evidence that needs to be gathered: Determine what decisions need to be informed, the timeframe for making those decisions, and the data that already exists that can be used. However, assessments are not a one-off activities but rather an evolving understanding of the situation, with ongoing updates as necessary.

Invest in analysis: The sector has a plethora of tools for gathering data but expertise in interpreting and analysing that data is lacking. Part of the problem is that the sector is not always clear on what it needs to know. Furthermore, the tendency is to assume that unless primary data is collected, then an assessment has not been done. Use the considerable amounts of data and resources that exist.

Don’t be precisely wrong, be approximately right: There may be times when there is insufficient evidence to make a decision, but be transparent on how the decision was made, and the evidence that was used to make that decision. This is applicable for all stakeholders; clusters in how they prioritize, agencies in how programming is determined, and donors in how they allocate.

Next steps for the Global Education Cluster: Through the ECHO contribution, and with feedback from partners, the GEC will be developing a needs assessment training module to be completed by mid-2018. The training will be rolled out the second half of 2018 until the end of 2019. The GEC will also provide direct support to needs assessment in at least 3 countries over this period through Rapid Response Team and other arrangements.

Key Points from Panel 3: Localization of Education Responses and Accountability to Affected People

Put people at the center: Too often humanitarian actors struggle to feed the ‘system,’ disconnected from the original purpose of our work – to put people in crisis at the center. Twenty-five years ago when the ICRC Code of Conduct was signed, all actors committed to principles of accountability and localization, but as the sector grows and becomes more professionalized, the sector needs to be reminded of these foundational principles.

Strive to be as local as possible, as international as necessary: On any dimension of a programme and at any given time, determine the degree of localization and the appropriate configuration between international and national actors.

Partnership and institutional capacity: Our partnership models are typically sub-granting relationships, where local NGOs provide the majority of services and internationals deliver funds. The role of the coordinator should be to create a culture of equity by helping to facilitate inclusive partnership; but this can only be done with the consensus of the partnership. Local NGOs need institutional funding to respond to shocks as well as coaching and mentoring models that sustainably work to build capacity. Positive models of partnership must first be exhibited by UN agencies and INGOs.

Risk transfers in conflict settings create a danger for local staff and colleagues: In many cases local actors are taking on the risk, reaching places where others cannot. This kind of risk transfer demonstrates the inequity in these relationships. Collaboration with local partners must be crafted with respect, protection and honesty.
Next steps for the Global Education Cluster: By second quarter of 2018, the AAP Guidance for Cluster Coordinators will be finalized and rolled out. From early 2018 until end 2019, the GEC and Child Protection Area of Responsibility will further test and validate the localization approach in three countries with capacity development activities (coaching and mentoring) and continued support.

Key Points from Panel 4: Cash-based Interventions for Education in Emergencies

The use of cash in protracted crises is only increasing: This modality is being promoted as an essential response to shocks on social protection systems during crisis. In some contexts, multipurpose cash helps ensure people’s preferences are at the center and moves from activity based responses to more holistic approaches. Key donors see multi-purpose cash as a way to get their limited budgets to stretch and have a meaningful impact on an emergency.

Education is not a traditional cash sector and engagement has been low: This lack of engagement has been due to weak understanding of the modality itself partially underpinned by a lack of evidence to its effectiveness in support of education. Where it has been used for education, implementation has been done through partnership, for example in Turkey, where the owner is the Government, partners are the Turkish Red Crescent and local banks. However, this is a very particular circumstance where institutions like banks are fully functional and where there is the ability to register and follow-up with the target population, conditions unlike very many cluster country contexts.

Preparedness is essential: Within the education sector, cash could be a modality to provide, for example, a source of funding for school operations including facilities and materials to improve the learning environment and quality of education. This is only possible if there has been proper preparation. Conducting pilots with cash as a preparedness measure would strengthen its use during crisis. Furthermore, with regard to multipurpose cash, linking with cash working groups to determine the education information needed to feed into the minimum expenditure basket should be done in advance.

Some pre-requisites for using cash: Transferring cash isn’t complicated, but it requires being comfortable with the modality and investing in a relationship with the cash working group to better understand each other’s approaches, and desired outcomes. Using cash also requires proper infrastructure and banking systems, and an ability to follow-up with target populations, both of which may not be possible in some contexts.

Next steps for the Global Education Cluster: GEC, in conjunction with CaLP and OCHA, will engage in building evidence on the use of cash for education in emergencies. The study will be completed by mid-2018 and disseminated by the end of that year.