

PROMOTING COUNTRY-BASED HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP FOR ECDiE

PHASE II: DISCUSSION BRIEF

How Can We Join Together with Country-Based Humanitarian Leaders?



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INTRODUCTION

1. What You Will Learn

This brief is intended to **spark discussion about potential entry points** for Sesame Workshop and its partners on how best to engage country-based humanitarian leaders to increase prioritization and investment in Early Childhood Development in Emergencies (ECDiE). It builds on a Phase I Desk Review¹ that was completed in October 2020 and a Phase II stakeholder interview process. It presents findings across two key areas:

- The overarching obstacles and opportunities that should be taken into consideration; and
- Potential entry points and action areas for Sesame Workshop and its partners.

Together, these findings aim to **increase Sesame’s knowledge leadership** on how best to promote ECDiE at the country-level and provide a more evidence-based pathway to **decide what concrete initiatives** Sesame or its partners may want to engage in.

2. Where Our Knowledge Comes From

The majority of the findings in this brief are based on a series of semi-structured interviews with **current and former humanitarian coordinators, humanitarian policy experts, country-based program officers, and experts working on related thematic and populations specific agendas**. From October 2020 to January 2021, researchers interviewed individuals who serve (or formerly served) in leadership roles at organizations including the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP), Save the Children, UNICEF, UNOCHA, and UNDGO and who held or hold leadership positions in countries including South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Barbados.

With a collective breadth of sector-specific knowledge, keen understanding of humanitarian coordination as it currently exists, and personal experience weighing incentives for country-level prioritization, interviewees provided key insights into the humanitarian system and the obstacles and opportunities for ECDiE advocacy.

It is worth mentioning that the findings presented rely on the opinions and expertise of key informants, and as such, may be disputed or require further assessment. Nevertheless, opinions were often triangulated and/or supported by findings in the Phase I Desk Review. They therefore provide a strong basis for further discussion and offer a potential direction for action for Sesame Workshop and its partners. It should also be noted that the process of conducting interviews allowed us to start to increase awareness and generate interest and buy-in for the ECDiE agenda, laying the groundwork for some specific engagements detailed below.

3. What We Build On – A Focus on the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) System

As the Phase I report states, change is hard. Humanitarian aid systems tend to be especially durable and self-replicating. Nevertheless, it concluded that change at the country-level can be effectively driven at the individual level and **pinpointed the Humanitarian Coordinator system as a key entry point**. HCs² are the leaders who have oversight of established humanitarian tools and services (such as the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and Central Emergency Response Funds (CERF)³ etc.) and oversee the cluster

¹ The Phase I research included a desk review of over 70 sources and asked three questions to better understand: ‘who’ is best positioned in the current humanitarian system to lead change; ‘where and in which functional areas’ of the broad terms of reference of humanitarian leaders, ECD actors could most help leaders engage and promote change; and ‘how’ leaders are driven to take on change-the behaviors one should expect to observe in humanitarian leaders as take part transformational action. The desk review is based on an examination of over 70 sources from academic and grey literature. Documents reviewed included theoretical literature on humanitarian leadership; policy documents on leadership practices on ECDiE; operational documents on the role, responsibilities, and power of humanitarian coordinators; academic scholarship on the incentives that leaders follow; policy and operational case studies on other cross-cutting agendas (cash and voucher assistance, accountability to affected populations), and policy and operational case studies on other population-specific agenda (age, disability, gender and protection).

² See Annex 2 for further information on designation of Humanitarian Coordinators

³ The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is a document prepared for a protracted or sudden onset emergency that requires international humanitarian assistance. The plan articulates a request for funding and the shared vision of how international humanitarian actors plan to respond to the assessed needs. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a humanitarian fund established by the General Assembly in 2006 to enable timelier and more reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts.

coordination system⁴ and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)⁵ in the countries where they serve. Thus, they are uniquely positioned to provide leadership on thematic issues which do not easily “fit” into the current humanitarian architecture. In addition, as the highest-ranking country-level officials in the United Nations (UN) system, they have a powerful platform to highlight agendas that they feel strongly about to donors, higher-level UN officials, and their country-teams. As such, they are well placed to serve as spokespeople for the ECDiE agenda.

The Phase II interviews were therefore based on the concept **of a potential pilot cohort of three to five HCs** who could serve as ‘ECDiE champions of change’ through clear stages of engagement such as:

- Recruitment of HCs deemed to be a ‘good fit’ and forming a peer cohort (see Annex 1);
- Developing ECDiE literacy and individual visions of engagement;
- Defining key country-based target actions (e.g. inclusion of ECDiE in HRP, CERF, etc.);
- Providing the necessary partnerships and modalities of support (at national and global level); and
- Selection of global events in which HCs could join Sesame and others at various high-level speaking events to help promote ECDiE and give a crisis-context perspective.

These forms of engagement are suggested from research in Phase I, which indicated that leadership change agendas are most successful when they include: (a) Cognitive Support: HCs having comprehensive literacy and an understanding of how and why ECD is important to humanitarian response; (b) Affective Support: HCs becoming emotionally, morally, and socially invested in the issue of ECDiE (e.g. ECD is integrated into their personal value systems and social networks); and (c) Behavioral Support: Once HCs have achieved a saturation point of ECD knowledge and investment, they are provided with clear and simple opportunities to act.

The findings below further analyze the incentives and opportunities for developing such a cohort. Findings range from overarching contextual realities to specific partnership targets. However, it should be noted from the outset that although this brief is rooted in thinking about how to use the HC system as an anchoring point for influencing country-level leadership, **the interviews generated knowledge that may be critical in helping develop country-based ECDiE advocacy more broadly**. Therefore, the findings below can be **read BOTH in the context of designing interventions targeting the HC system and as stand-alone recommendations** to be adapted to country-based ECDiE advocacy efforts more broadly.

FINDINGS

4. The Obstacles – What Needs to be Considered When Working at the Country Level

In order to understand where and how to engage with the humanitarian system, it is important to consider the broader context currently facing humanitarian leaders at the country level. The research team identified five main obstacles that that need to be taken into consideration. These obstacles include both global- and country-level challenges.

(i) Over Saturation of Thematic Cross-Sectoral and Population-Specific Issues

- The list of thematic cross-sectoral and population specific issues⁶ for which actors have been trying to secure increased investment and prioritization between 2017-2021 includes Cash Transfer Programming, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), Disability and Inclusion, Older People, Accountability to Affected People (AAP), Localization, Humanitarian-Development Nexus, Gender, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Climate, and many others. Given this saturation (and the reality that after many years cash transfers still only account for about 16 percent of programme spending, and grave issues like addressing sexual abuse and exploitation by aid workers remain only partially addressed), **it may be challenging for ECDiE advocates to follow in the footsteps of previous reform agendas and add ECDiE to the queue of**

⁴ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach>

⁵ See Annex 2

⁶ For the rest of the paper when we refer to ‘thematic issues’ we are referring to all of these specialized agendas including both multi-sectoral issues and population specific agendas.

humanitarian system mainstreaming issues. Instead, ECDiE partners may want to consider learning from best practice on these past thematic initiatives but also try novel approaches.

(ii) Lack of Understanding of ECDiE

- Interviews revealed that **most country-level humanitarian leaders have a poor understanding of ECDiE.** While most were aware of the importance of focusing on children’s development, there was limited understanding of what that means in concrete terms or how programmatic interventions can be used to support ECD. **They tended to view ECDiE through an education lens,** likely influenced by the relative success of the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) initiative born at the World Humanitarian Summit, while overlooking other necessary components of holistic ECDiE programming. Most had not heard of the Nurturing Care Framework and many did not understand how this framework could be translated into specific steps that could be taken on ECDiE.
- A key question that emerged was **whether ECDiE is a population- and age-specific agenda** to be addressed separately by each cluster **or a new cross-sectoral initiative** that requires enhanced coherence and coordination between clusters.
- Another common misconception regarding ECDiE programming is lack of **clarity on where the gap in services is, since there are several prominent humanitarian actors with clear mandates for children.** Many spoke of their operating assumption that organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children, or ECW have ECD as the central part of their humanitarian work and therefore ECD does not require the engagement of the wider humanitarian system. Collectively, the lack of understanding of ECDiE created uncertainty among country-level leaders about who is responsible for the development of young children, what that actually entails, which actors need to be coordinated, and where the gaps are in funding and implementation.

(iii) Unrealistic Demands of RC/HCs at the Country-Level

- In most cases, it is the UN’s Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs⁷) who are now being tasked to address many of the thematic agendas mentioned above often without the required institutional support or additional resources. A rapid scan of available literature shows that **HCs are considered to hold either all or some of the responsibility for more than 40 separate thematic areas:**
 - Accountability to Affected People
 - Age inclusion
 - Cash coordination
 - Chair of the Humanitarian Country Team
 - Cluster management and oversight (including set up when needed and oversee cluster coordination)
 - CMCoordination decisions – military escorts for convoys, use of military assets per Oslo Guidelines
 - Communicating effectively
 - Community engagement coordination
 - Coordinated needs assessment and joint analysis
 - Disability inclusion
 - Enhancing emergency preparedness
 - Ensuring compliance with humanitarian standards
 - Environment and climate change
 - Gender equality
 - Gender-based violence
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Humanitarian / Development / Peace collaboration
 - Humanitarian response analysis and planning
 - Information management system coordination
 - Integrating disaster risk reduction into the humanitarian programme cycle
 - Inter-agency contingency planning
 - Localization
 - Managing the emergency response
 - Mental health and psychosocial support

⁷ See Annex 2 for an understanding of the relationship between the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator functions

- Migrant response coordination
 - Mobilizing financing and partnerships
 - Monitoring and evaluation
 - Needs assessment strategizing and coordination
 - Negotiating and facilitating access
 - NGO coordination
 - Overseeing staff training and preparedness
 - Oversight of humanitarian program cycle
 - Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
 - Protection of civilians
 - Public representation of the UN country team
 - Refugee response coordination
 - Reporting results to donors
 - Responding to Health crises
 - Sanctions and counter terrorism
 - Women’s empowerment
 - Working towards sustainability
- While ECDiE programming can strengthen the implementation of some of these agendas, **it will more than likely be viewed as an added item on an already long to-do list and therefore be met with passivity or resistance by already over-extended country-level humanitarian leaders.**
 - The 2019/2020 UN reform process has impacted country-level leaders who carry responsibility for achieving its success. Ensuring the relevance of the UN to its Member States is largely vested in RC/HCs and driven from the highest echelons of the UN system. RC/HCs and country teams are under considerable pressure to ensure success against these initiatives. **Several new and time-consuming ‘scorecards’ have been developed and rolled out to country-level**, often with either no or very limited supporting resource provision. As a result, humanitarian leaders—particularly RC/HCs—have limited bandwidth for initiatives which are not on the priority list of the UN Chief Executives Board.
 - RC/HCs are also increasingly under pressure to strengthen engagement with and provide support to governments and civil society development agendas in the achievement of the SDGs. **This requires navigating entirely different coordination structures, national level priorities, and frameworks.** However, this pressure may also present an opportunity for ECDiE given that many aspects of ECDiE, especially around linkages to development, economic and societal wellbeing, offer opportunities to meet Country Teams’ goals for outcome-oriented engagement with government and civil society counterparts.
 - Most HCs operate in extremely uncertain and high-pressure environments where they have to address consistent operational and funding challenges and the populations they serve face life-threatening circumstances. This results in many not having the time or understanding to best support ‘specialized’ needs. **Thus, consideration should be given to piloting ECDiE work in less high-pressure operational humanitarian environments (such as Uganda, Uzbekistan, etc).**

(iv) Siloed Cluster System

- The cluster system, the current humanitarian coordination mechanism put into place 15 years ago as part of an overhaul of the humanitarian system, has several design flaws when viewed from the perspective of cross-sectoral and population-specific issues such as ECDiE. As such, **identifying strategic and operational entry points to engage with the cluster system is far from straightforward**, especially in the case of ECDiE where inter-sectoral coordination is required but often focused on a limited number of already defined issues which are considered to provide the best value for money and time. The splintering of ECD issues within this structure (education, mother and child health, nutrition, etc.) is a major challenge to any attempt to recast ECD as a holistic approach to childhood development.
- The cluster system has, albeit inadvertently, institutionalized the power of cluster lead agencies within the established system, meaning that **territoriality and turf issues will manifest themselves around a push for greater cross-system coherence on ECDiE.** Managing this dynamic for the benefit

of that coherence will be challenging. Mandates will be rolled out and positions taken, especially if financial resources are attached to an ECDiE mainstreaming agenda.

(v) Limitations of Reform Agendas

- While many country-level **humanitarian leaders expressed a desire for change by increasing the focus on people and families rather than sectors and coordination structures**, the pressures generated by funding needs, a lack of clear organizational incentives, and limited intellectual space to conceptualize differently makes this hard to achieve. **Most change efforts are large-scale policy reform agendas** such as the 2005 (Humanitarian Reform), 2012 (Transformative Agenda)⁸ and 2016 (Agenda for Humanity and Grand Bargain⁹). These have supported some system-wide improvement, and allowed for new thematic and specialized agendas to enter into operations (e.g. Accountability to Affected People, Cash Transfer, Localization), but their ability to really foment meaningful change in the ways people receive assistance is limited, and none of these initiatives have led to the kind of transformational change endorsed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. In addition, the fact that these large change agendas emerge every few years with a plethora of buzz words and new donor pressures means that country-level **leaders are often caught up in large-scale headquarters driven-policy change exercises and are thus unable to focus on creative and innovative on-the-ground changes in the way aid is delivered at the household level.**
- While there is limited evidence as yet, it appears that during 2020 **the international donor system may have reverted to increasing its funding to the UN and multilateral agencies and decreased resource flows to other smaller humanitarian and local/national actors.** This move is poorly aligned with commitments made in the Grand Bargain but positively aligned with donors' domestic agendas to transfer risk to the multilateral system at a time where pandemic restrictions limit direct risk management capacities, while remaining able to publicize fulfillment of their global responsibilities. While this is an obstacle to good local programming, **now may be a timely opportunity to engage HCs and the UN system to affect change, particularly with some well-targeted resources.**

5. The Entry Points - How We Can Engage and Incentivize Change

Taking these obstacles and contextual realities into consideration, this section of the **Brief provides a menu of options for consideration by Sesame and its partners.** To the extent possible, these options have been grouped into broad categories of action but **can be viewed as 'stand-alone' initiatives or done in tandem.** In addition, while they are rooted in thinking about how to influence the HC system, **they are also applicable to other country-based (and even global) advocacy efforts.**

(i) Literacy and Communication Initiatives

- **Use a creative communications strategy, or 'Don't train, motivate!':** As noted above, interviews revealed that **most country-level humanitarian leaders have a poor understanding of ECDiE and what they can do about it.** HCs in particular are overwhelmed with formal guidance memos or advocacy briefs. Therefore, literacy and communications initiatives need to take a fresh approach. Humanitarian communications tend to underplay visual/storytelling aspects while over-emphasizing jargon and policy. It was restated multiple times that materials should **not take a 'guidance/training' or 'consensus policy language' approach** (meaning a document drafted by many organizations that includes language from all). ECDiE is an emotive issue and tailoring communications materials accordingly may assist in accelerating promotion and take up of an ECDiE agenda. **Sesame Workshop, Lego, and other aligned groups such as Comic Relief have a distinct comparative advantage on communication,** especially in the fun, novel, and unique way that effective ECDiE communication requires. Sesame's efforts should rely on the principles of "stickiness"¹⁰ to develop their communication materials—simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and stories.

⁸ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda#:~:text=The%20Humanitarian%20Reform%20process%20was,%2C%20accountability%2C%20responsibility%20and%20partnership>

⁹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020>

¹⁰ From "Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die" by Chip and Dan Heath.

- One idea was that Sesame could leverage Sesame Street programming to present the story of the life of a family in humanitarian crisis, demonstrating the needs they face, the threats to development that crisis imposes. Numerous respondents expressed the view that the creation of the Sesame puppets for Rohingya refugees was a highly visible initiative which sparked interest and joy.
- Another example comes from a CALP-organized campaign to boost support for expanding cash transfer programming via a high-level, visually appealing website (“[The Power of Financial Aid](#)”) that outlines the evidence supporting the benefits of cash transfer programming. Although predominately targeted at the public to promote common knowledge on cash transfers, the website was also useful in increasing cash transfer literacy for the wider humanitarian system.
- **Develop one definition:** While there exists a broad literature on ECD and some excellent operational guidance on ECDiE, country-level leaders noted when reviewing them that none seemed to lay out a clear, brief 1-2 sentence definition suitable for leaders in crisis contexts (this was also noted to be the case with many of the other thematic issues like MHPSS, Localization, Nexus, AAP, etc.).¹¹ It was suggested that the development of one simple, public facing campaign on defining and communicating ECDiE to everyone from HCs to national governments and families themselves would be extremely well received.
- **Involve country leaders, or ‘Do something, don’t talk about it’:** One idea suggested was to include HCs and/or other country-level leaders in developing these definitions and communications materials (such as short film, PR piece or poster series describing what ECDiE and the ‘family’ experience in crisis is, as noted above). This resonates well with the behavioral psychology theory that having country-level leaders ‘do something’ immediately versus talking about it is a better way to gain traction. Involving these leaders in the process (but with the ECDiE actors doing the work) would allow the humanitarian leader to develop both cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement and provides them with a clear ‘deliverable’ for which they can also share credit. Another idea is that Sesame’s new ‘models’ could be ‘rolled-out’ by HCs. This could give HCs something concrete to promote which in turn would help make them champions of the issue.
- **Inclusion of ECDiE in formal guidance materials or leadership events:** Although the findings clearly indicate that taking a ‘standard’ training approach may not yield comprehensive results, there are still added benefits to pursuing inclusion of ECDiE language in established materials and formal leadership events. To date, annual meetings and trainings have not yet included ECDiE, and thus there is an opportunity for creative advocacy. In addition, the advent of virtual trainings and materials make it easier to get time with HCs and insert language into non-printed materials. A specific target is the upcoming launch of the ‘Leadership in Humanitarian Action’ handbook for RCs and HCs that has a ‘WebBook’ (the UVA team has already made a soft request to do this and has some indications this may be possible). Another opportunity could be the annual HC retreat which includes a ‘Partners Day’ where presentations are heard on thematic issues. This could be an excellent target for Sesame.

(ii) Messaging Themes

- **‘It’s not what you can do for ECDiE; it’s what ECDiE can do for you’:** In terms of advocacy messaging, one approach may be to present ECDiE not as the ‘neglected needs of children and their caregivers’ or ‘what the humanitarian system needs to do to promote ECDiE’ but instead focus on ‘what ECDiE can do to help change the humanitarian system into what it wants to be’. Country-level **humanitarian leaders are inundated and often experience intense feelings of guilt or urgency, which can lead to empathy fatigue, feeling overwhelmed, and consequently becoming less engaged. Therefore, one proposal is to develop messaging that highlights the comparative advantage of ECDiE.** This should focus on the financial business case (value for money), the strong research evidence base, its proven

¹¹ See an example of how OCHA has developed such guidance for its staff on mandate issues here: https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf

ability to make progress on the SDGs, and how ECDiE implicitly supports progress on the other thematic agendas as noted above (MHPSS, Localization, Nexus, AAP, etc.).

- **Families First!**: Another possibility on messaging could be framing ECDiE as ‘a family-first’ proposition, focusing on articulating the specific needs of families with young children living in humanitarian crisis. Such a shift could support broader advocacy for change in the humanitarian system rather than presenting ECDiE as yet another specific population group requiring attention. Also proposed was that **ECDiE prioritization be framed as revolutionary rather than evolutionary with the stark message that the system needs to switch focus from sectoral approaches to dealing with the totality of the person and the family.** This approach could allow many actors to enter the space and make changes. It will also recognize the central role of caregivers in ECDiE programming and promotes the notion that ECDiE goes beyond early childhood education (increasing the range of ECDiE actors and avoiding competition with ECW). **Posing questions such as “what would Cox’s Bazaar look like if we took a family-centered approach?”** and modeling interventions on that basis may be helpful in shaping this more concretely.

This approach could also highlight the importance of early childhood development in the broader context of the family, community, and country, thereby supporting an affirmative vision for the future of children who have spent most of their lives amidst conflict and crisis. In a world in which protracted conflict and crisis is becoming more common, investment in early childhood development can be the key that unlocks lasting peace and long-term development, and the family-based approach offers a strong basis for advocacy across the humanitarian-peacebuilding-development nexus.

- **Agenda twinning:** Literacy campaigns could also demonstrate **how ECDiE advocacy efforts align with other thematic agendas,** thereby reinforcing the understanding of ECDiE stakeholders that the humanitarian dimensions of ECD are intrinsically linked to development, peacebuilding, and localization. ECDiE can be marketed as a subset of broader work surrounding ECD in the development context, ultimately supporting the capacity of governments to do better on ECDiE. This messaging will sit well with HCs who are under pressure to demonstrate that their work resonates with and supports the UN 2030 Agenda. It may also help catalyze concrete actions for HCs struggling to figure out how to make progress in some of these other areas.

(iii) Choosing Country Contexts and Individuals

- **Target lower-intensity crises:** Careful selection of countries based on a broad and flexible set of criteria was suggested. Key informants suggested that focusing on countries which have large scale and high-speed ongoing humanitarian emergencies (e.g. Syria, Yemen) may heighten the profile of ECDiE but will present far greater challenges rolling out what may be perceived as a human resource-intensive initiative that places an additional burden on already over-stretched agencies and HCs. A suggestion was made to focus on EU accession countries in the Balkans or the two countries involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict. While still complex environments, these countries may:
 - have greater bandwidth to absorb new initiatives;
 - have an increased desire/capacity to link thematic issues like ECDiE to their country engagement programs and thus influence national stakeholders (e.g. Governments and civil society actors); and
 - are in arguably significant need of certain elements of ECDiE as part of conflict mitigation and prevention strategies.
- **Target leaders:** Finding the ‘right’ leaders to target for engagement is as important as defining what we are asking them to do. Research has shown that finding individuals that have the right cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacity is key. Any efforts should carefully select which leaders to target for communications based on considerations including prior experience with ECD, personal connections to young children, desire to try something new, and willingness to become collaborative champions of the ECDiE agenda.

As a first step, the team did an initial scoping of potential individuals who may be receptive to partnership on promoting ECDiE at the country-level. In Annex 1 is a list of HCs who were recommended to lean into innovation and thematic issues and have backgrounds in early childhood development. The list is intended as a starting point to help selection only. Additional consideration should be given to the current ECDiE capacity in various countries and the focus countries chosen by the Moving Minds Alliance and Play to Learn.

(iv) In-Country Capacity Support

Despite the broad nature of the tasks assigned to them Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators do not have access to significant direct resourcing. They are supported by a small team (usually 4-6 staff) funded by Member States through the Special Purpose Trust Fund. OCHA also provides support to the HC function through the provision of an OCHA office. UN Agencies also cost-share some of the resource provision for the Resident Coordinator function. However for work undertaken as Humanitarian Coordinator resources are very limited. Thus any extra requests for HC engagement on thematic issues will, most likely, need to be underwritten with some financial or operational support. The following may be options worth pursuing:

- **CashCap/Procap/Gencap models:** Many other agendas have used the deployment of a dedicated advisor. There could be consideration to developing an “ECDiECap” (or ECD dedicated capacity) who is provided through the UN’s standby partnership program. They could be deployed to support the HC and HCT to pursue a concrete plan of work to mainstream ECDiE into the priorities and strategy of the humanitarian country team, and, by extension, national actors. There may also be value in linking up with already existing capacities such as CashCap (CALP), Global Nexus Advisors, and ProCAP both to learn lessons and identify complementarities. There have been mixed results on these initiatives. They are often reported as being expensive, requiring a lot of headquarters engagement, and can result in leaders defaulting responsibility. Nevertheless, they have also had positive results. Nexus advisors established following agreement on the Grand Bargain agenda were widely praised and saw success in implementing a cross-cutting agenda that requires significant coordination efforts, much like ECDiE. CashCap advisors showed similar success, increasing the technical knowledge of country teams and leading the sustainable implementation of cash transfer programs.
- **National Officers.** Similar to the ‘cap’ advisors, some thematic issues are raising funding for national officers to support RC/HCs help mainstream agendas. This is happening with the Disability and Inclusion agenda. However, it is unclear if this is a useful method. In general, it was felt that the value of offering capacity support would widely vary from country to country.
- **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)¹²:** Just below the HC in any country is the Humanitarian Country Team, generally made up of the country directors for a number of UN agencies and INGOs. Sesame Workshop could work to facilitate strategic and operational partnerships between these team members and also simultaneously target them with the knowledge they need to be leaders on ECDiE as well. This engagement could also help identify HCT members who can serve as internal advocates for ECDiE.

(v) Humanitarian Coordination Tools and Services

While there was universal agreement on the need for financial and human resources to “get ECDiE onto the agenda,” there was less consensus on what might be most useful. However, the two tools mentioned as the most straightforward are the HRP and the CERF.

- **The HRP:** One potential area that could see concrete gains is inclusion of a predictable space for ECDiE in HRPs and the accompanying ability to mobilize resources through the appeals process. Evidence from the Cash Transfer agenda indicates that this is still a useful way to help mainstream thematic areas in response. To do this, increased engagement would be needed with OCHA headquarters, as well as simultaneous advocacy toward HCs and OCHA Heads of Office and key in-country partners. Another option is to improve the ability of those same country-level and global partners to include ECDiE in response planning themselves through guidance documents and other

¹² See Annex 2 for further information on HCTs

tools. This approach was used successfully by DFID to increase disability inclusion in HRPs. It has also already been used by the UVA Humanitarian Collaborative, Sesame Workshop, and other partners during COVID-19 response planning, providing a basis of knowledge and connections to build on in future efforts.

- **The CERF:** Advocacy for CERF allocations and other pooled funding mechanisms managed by the UN and other entities to include an ECDiE component would support take up at the country level and enhance focus on ECDiE. This would require lobbying with OCHA at headquarters, UN agencies, programs and funds, and other fund managers. There would also need to be broad literacy on what constitutes ECDiE. Last year the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) defined four high priority areas (the ‘4 strategic steers’) for CERF funding allocations, with clear messaging to humanitarian agencies on why these areas were prioritised. If this becomes an annual exercise, there could be an advocacy effort to include ECDiE as an ERC priority.

(vi) Linking ECDiE to other Initiatives and Agendas

In addition to the possibility of linking to many of the other thematic agendas listed previously there are also larger programs with linkages to ECDiE that the ECDiE community can consider leveraging.

- **‘Link to peacebuilding’:** As many in the humanitarian system look for more sustainable solutions to complex and protracted crises, investment in ECDiE offers a concrete strategy to increase the ability of a community to recover post-crisis. By supporting healthy development and fostering patterns of non-violence and compassion, **ECDiE programing is an essential building block to enable communities to emerge from crisis and secure long-lasting peace.** As such, there may be an opportunity for ECDiE actors to work with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office or other actors working on the so-called triple nexus agenda to link ECDiE with current and emerging peacebuilding efforts.
- **‘Link to leadership’:** Leadership also continues to be a ‘buzz word’ in humanitarian aid and there is an increase in the number of platforms and initiatives focused on leadership. USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance has made large grants in this area including for the establishment of the still nascent Global Executive Leadership Initiative, the UN’s Peer-to-Peer program and work undertaken by other OCHA teams. It may be worthwhile to assess what some of these initiatives are and then see if/how **the ECDiE advocacy community can offer them ‘case studies’** to use in these efforts that help train on leadership but also increase literacy and advocacy on these issues.
- **‘Link to the Countdown to 2030’:** The ‘Countdown to 2030’—a global collaboration to track progress of life-saving interventions for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition—is committed to establishing a global monitoring and accountability system for ECD. **In 2020, the Countdown launched 138 expanded country profiles highlighting progress made at the country-level on ECD as well as the significant gaps remaining. The ECDiE advocacy community could link with Countdown** partners to learn from country progress, provide resources and expertise to build on progress made, and target already identified ECDiE gaps at the country-level.
- **‘Link to UNDS reforms’:** The reforms to the UN Development System (UNDS), underway since the start of 2019, have focused on scaling up partnerships between entities of the UN system and with external partners. There is also an increased focus on the coordinated and joined up work of the UN at country-level, results monitoring and greater system oversight by RC/HCs. In this new environment, **HCs are looking for initiatives which will:**
 - boost coherence amongst members of the teams they lead, which includes the Humanitarian Country Team;
 - enhance the value of UN (and other) programming to recipient states and affected populations; and
 - show obvious and tangible results which will enhance their leadership credentials at country level, as well as in the context of their career progression.

As above, it could be fruitful to see if/how the ECDiE advocacy community could offer ‘ECDiE case studies’ to further their work and achieve these efforts. Finding ways to **present ECDiE in such a way**

that programs can help accelerate joint results between international humanitarian actors under the coordination mandate of the HC with civil society, national governments, and the private sector is a viable and useful option. Additionally, demonstrating through communications materials and a robust evidence base that work on ECDiE is not simply another sectoral intervention but rather an initiative linked to country-wide goals such as economic transformation and growth would be useful.

- **Join the next reform effort – ABC:** It was clear from discussions with respondents that there is frustration with the current cluster approach. Some respondents suggested that the cluster approach looks set to be superseded by new arrangements in the foreseeable future, although without clear articulation of what these arrangements might be, while others noted that an alternative coordination paradigm was emerging around Area-Based Coordination (ABC). Area-based coordination is nascent and focused on the following proposition put forward in October 2020 by Jeremy Konyndyk, Patrick Saez, and Rose Worden at the Center for Global Development (CGD):

“[T]he core humanitarian coordination and planning architecture—the cluster system—is beset by persistent weaknesses. It is dominated by large international aid organizations and is much less accessible to local frontline actors and governments. It organizes humanitarian action around major technical sectors rather than applying a holistic, people-centered approach to relief priorities. It siloes humanitarian planning and fundraising through sectoral siloes, producing fragmented funding and program implementation. It is heavily centralized, and weak at the frontlines. The net result is a coordination and planning system in which the needs and priorities of affected people are intermediated through an architecture oriented more toward the prerogatives of major aid agencies.

A reorientation is badly needed: toward a coordination and planning system that is foundationally organized around the needs of frontline aid recipients rather than the global sectors and mandates of the aid agencies that exist to serve them. A hybrid next-generation coordination and planning architecture, centered around principles borrowed from area-based programming, could retain strengths of the existing coordination architecture while addressing many of its weaknesses”¹³

The CDG study posits that there is a disconnect between the articulation of needs by affected people and the way in which the international humanitarian system is organised to respond to those needs. Academic discourse recognizes this and has proposed a series of fixes¹⁴, but take up has been limited. However, ECDiE may offer a good model to infuse into this discussion as it is clearly a cross-cutting issue in the humanitarian lexicon which encompasses young children and their family’s access to a broad range of services. For example, a recent assessment for the INEE ECDiE Task Team found that ECDiE interventions are predominantly implemented in community centers, suggesting an opportunity for integration across these interventions to meet the holistic needs of children and caregivers.¹⁵

As donors and others begin to more seriously critique the effectiveness of that system and the rising interest in adoption of area-based coordination (which is being trialed through the Area-Based Approach Working Group within the Global CCCM Cluster¹⁶) **there may be value in investing resources in considering how best to position ECDiE not in the current system, but in an area-based coordination environment** and, as and where necessary, advocating robustly for ABC as the way forward.

(vii) Partnership Incentives

- **The World Bank:** There was considerable interest (especially by HCs) in the role of the World Bank. Emphasizing cooperation rather than competition through a formal partnership development process for ECDiE may be useful, building on the 2017 United Nations–World Bank Partnership

¹³ CGD Policy Paper 184 (October 2020): Inclusive Coordination: Building an Area-Based Humanitarian Coordination Model (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/inclusive-coordination-konyndyk-saez-worden.pdf>)

¹⁴ For example, <https://www.odi.org/hpg/remake-aid/>,

¹⁵ Bassett et. Al. (Forthcoming). Assessment of Early Childhood Development Programming in Humanitarian Settings.

¹⁶ <https://ccmcluster.org/global/Area-based-Approach-Working-Group>

Framework for Crisis-Affected Situations¹⁷, which is highlighted in the 2019 Annual Report¹⁸. Many HCs also indicated that engagement with the World Bank helps them build their credibility and reputation.

- **UN’s Peacebuilding Support Office:** Partnerships with the UN’s Peacebuilding Support Office were also suggested given the propensity for programming to take place in conflict-affected countries. The 2017-2019 Peacebuilding Fund Strategy¹⁹ mentions children twice, so there is likely ample scope to open dialogue with the Peace Building Support Office to better familiarize it with ECDiE.
- **Education Cannot Wait:** Several HCs emphasized the role of Education Cannot Wait (ECW) as a central actor in the humanitarian system when it came to prioritization of early childhood education. Established at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to help reposition education as a priority on the humanitarian agenda, the ECW fund is administered by UNICEF and has mobilized over \$600 million in resources toward education in emergencies. **Opening dialogue and engaging ECW leadership to explore opportunities for collaboration or simply garnering public support for ECDiE advocacy from ECW may strengthen ECDiE advocacy work and increase prioritization in the humanitarian system.**
- **Affected Populations:** HCs, like all humanitarian actors, are ultimately accountable to the people they serve. Increased indication of need for ECDiE services from those affected by crisis should ultimately be the biggest driver behind a country-level leader’s commitment to ECDiE. **Sesame Workshop should increase outreach toward those living in crisis with young children and provide a platform to uplift their experience and needs to HCs and other country-level leaders.** They should also work to empower affected populations to know their rights and the rights of their children and to advocate for those rights toward humanitarian organizations. This should be done in tandem with efforts to link the ECDiE agenda to the AAP agenda, as well as MEA&L efforts to improve ECDiE programming.
- **Other national shows:** Another suggestion was that Sesame could partner with another national/local children’s show and then involve the Humanitarian Coordinator and National Ministry or World Bank office to do an ECDiE campaign.

(viii) High-Level Support for ECDiE

HCs were unanimous on the importance of the need for ‘top-down’ messaging from the most senior leaders in the humanitarian system to support systemic change at the country-level. While it might be possible to find several HCs who would welcome roll out of a different approach to ECDiE, it is unlikely that take up will be significant without a signal of clear and tangible support (and

Disrupting the system

As we have seen through the tumultuous events of the past year, disruption of systems often reveals their fragility. Like other systems, the humanitarian system is frail, is working beyond what was ever expected of it, and is demonstrably unable to facilitate significant transformation through the work of people and organizations within it.

Disruption is most likely to succeed in improving the status quo if it comes from external parties who have a legitimate interest in seeking positive change and hold the tools to exert influence. Sesame Workshop has positioned themselves as such a party.

Congruent with some of the points and conclusions of the Phase I report, several respondents suggested that efforts to better align ECDiE in the international system may be best achieved by causing some disruption to the system to advocate for change. While the adoption of a family-focused approach to ECDiE would already challenge the current organization of the system, disruption to the system would require several things to happen:

ECDiE advocates would need to join forces with other like-minded entities and organizations within (and on the fringes of) the humanitarian system to reach a common understanding of the shortcomings in the established system in the context of cross-sectoral themes and issues. The group should internalize the need to disrupt the current system, recognizing that:

- The humanitarian system has a well-developed resistance to change, managing to generate significant “busyness” without any actual movement.
- The system has demonstrably captured change as a way of making the system strengthen itself, and effective change happens through disruption rather than “project management” of that change.
- The cluster system has become its own self-perpetuating industry and is based on sectoral logic, which sits poorly across organizational and thematic logic.

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/partnerships/un-worldbank-partnership>

¹⁸ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/542911571851125027/pdf/United-Nations-World-Bank-Partnership-Framework-for-Crisis-Affected-Situations-2019-UN-WB-Partnership-Monitoring-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_sp_2017-19_final_180327.pdf

pressure) from UN agency headquarters. Given the current limited visibility of ECDiE and the absence of a clear advocate for change from within humanitarian agencies, it is also realistic to expect that any recalibration of this thematic priority will not come unprompted from within the UN system. A few suggestions are below.

- **NGO Leaders:** Seek out a non-UN high-level advocate to become the key interlocutor with the UN on ECDiE. David Miliband, CEO at the International Rescue Committee, was suggested as a possible candidate but there are likely others with a similar level of access and influence. The objective here would be to exert moral pressure on the UN to align its efforts with foregoing proposals in this report.
- **UN Foundation:** Consider partnering with the UN Foundation, which already has a track record on raising attention and resources for children’s issues²⁰. Quite apart from its financial resources, the Foundation is highly influential with senior officials in the UN as well as with other influencers.
- **Key Donors:** Work with a key (possibly emerging) donor to become a key advocate for change on this issue. While traditional donors likely would be prepared to associate themselves with such an initiative, it may be more usefully led by an emerging donor from the BRICS group or a G20 nation given their lack of attachment to the humanitarian status quo and a likely desire to “make a mark” in the international arena. RO Korea, Indonesia (in the process of setting up its own aid agency), and South Africa may be worth considering.
- **Deputy Secretary General:** The Deputy Secretary-General was often mentioned as the figure **most likely to be able to influence HCs**.
- **Incoming UN Senior Officials:** In the context of the ever-shifting UN world, there may also be opportunities to engage with new senior UN officials. While the current Secretary-General has signaled his intention to run for a second term²¹ (from 2021 – 2026), the change of administration in the United States will likely lead to new appointments in leadership at UNICEF and the World Food Program within the next 12 months and at OCHA imminently, following the announcement by the Emergency Relief Coordinator of his return to the UK²². Reaching out to incoming agency heads and new ERC prior to them taking up their posts with a clear set of messages and articulation of how support to change in the humanitarian system may be a useful avenue to pursue, and assumes some urgency now with OCHA.
- **Headquarter Units and Initiatives:** In addition to leaders, currently there are numerous entities and initiatives that Sesame may also want to partner with in developing an HC cohort. For example, the UN’s Peer-to-Peer program²³, the UN Development Coordination Office²⁴ and OCHA’s Humanitarian Leadership Strengthening Section.²⁵
- **HC visibility:** Linked to high-level support, it was often mentioned that **giving HCs a chance to ‘shine’ and have time or relationships with these high-level figures would be a significant incentive**, especially if in this context they can also present ‘evidence-based best practice’ on how ECDiE programming in their country is having results. As Sesame and its partners advance advocacy strategies or can demonstrate success, it is crucial that the stories of these successes are shared widely.

²⁰ <https://www.everywomaneverychild.org/commitment/united-nations-foundation/>

²¹ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212561.shtml#:~:text=Guterres%20informed%20the%20president%20of,told%20a%20daily%20new%20briefing>

²² <https://twitter.com/UNReliefChief/status/1358536960256733185?s=20>

²³ <https://www.deliveraidbetter.org/>

²⁴ <https://unsdg.un.org/about/development-coordination-office>

²⁵ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/humanitarian-leadership/hlsu-who-we-are-and-what-we-do>

6. The Big Picture and Next Steps

This report has outlined some of the challenges facing the ECDiE community in increasing prioritization and investment in ECD at the country-level and provided a menu of key entry points, summarized in the table to the right.

While this list is structured around findings that help indicate how best to incentivize and influence Humanitarian Coordinators and the HC system, many could be considered as initiatives or investments that may best be undertaken as a part of broader efforts to impact the humanitarian system as a whole.

Regardless of the extent of engagement with the HC system, it has become clear that there are many potential avenues through which Sesame Workshop can work to incentivize change. Recognizing the various alternatives available to change-seekers, potential next steps include:

(a) A workshop between UVA Humanitarian Collaborative, Sesame Workshop colleagues, and maybe others to review these findings and think through:

- Where and how Sesame may want to undertake pilot initiatives or activities on its own;
- Where and how Sesame may want to undertake pilot initiatives or activities with partners; and
- Where and how Sesame may want to advocate that partners take action.

(b) A series of presentations to partners and other interested parties to:

- Share findings and demonstrate knowledge leadership in this area; and
- Generate further actions or buy-in on decisions made on the issues above.

Through collaborative discernment of desired pilot initiatives and engagement with partners to generate buy-in, Sesame Workshop can continue to build momentum toward effectively incentivizing prioritization and investment in ECDiE by humanitarian leaders at the country-le

Ways We Can Engage and Incentivize Change
<p>Literacy and Communication Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't train, motivate - Develop one ECDiE definition - Involve country leaders - Inclusion in formal guidance materials or leadership events
<p>Messaging Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's not what you can do for ECDiE, it's what ECDiE can do for you - Families first - Agenda twining
<p>Choosing Country Contexts and Individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target lower-intensity crises - Target leaders
<p>In-Country Capacity Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CashCap/ProCap/GenCap models - National Officers - UN Country Team
<p>Humanitarian Coordination Tools and Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) - The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)
<p>Linking ECDiE To Other Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link to peacebuilding - Link to leadership - Link to the Countdown to 2030 - Link to UNDS reforms - Join the next reform effort – ABC
<p>Partnership Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The World Bank - UN's Peacebuilding Support Office - Education Cannot Wait - Affected populations - Other national shows
<p>High-Level Support for ECDiE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-UN - UN Foundation - Key donors - Deputy Secretary General - Incoming UN Senior Officials - Headquarter Units and Initiatives - HC visibility

Annex 1 - Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams

Below is a brief overview from official guidance documents of when HCs are designated to be placed in countries and the background on the establishment and function of a UNCT. We have also included a graphic of how a HCT looks in one context (oPt).

1. Humanitarian Coordinator Designation

- (a) Where the impacts of a humanitarian crisis require a HC to be designated, and where the UN Resident Coordinator in place has the right profile to serve as HC, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), following consultations with the Inter Agency Standing Committee at heads of agency level, will confirm his/her designation.
- (b) In a limited number of situations where the RC is not considered to have the necessary humanitarian profile, the ERC may, following consultation with the IASC, chose to appoint a HC outside the Resident Coordinator system.
- (c) In instances where one operational UN agency or NGO is providing most of the humanitarian assistance, the ERC may consider designating that agency or NGO representative as HC, acting under the authority of and reporting to the ERC.
- (d) In certain situations, where there is a need to designate regional coordinators for crises that go beyond national borders, the ERC may consider assigning such functions to a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator working with RCs and HCs in several countries.
- (e) The ERC, in consultation with the IASC, may also chose to designate a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator to support the RC or HC in carrying out humanitarian coordination functions, either across the country or for a specific geographical area.
- (f) Deployment of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator has become increasingly common, in particular in situations where multiple or large-scale crises require dedicated coordination capacity under the HC's leadership to enable effective delivery of aid in a safe manner.

2. Establishment and Operation of a Humanitarian Country Team

- (a) A Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is set up at the outset of a humanitarian crisis to bring together operationally relevant actors in a humanitarian response. This will include country directors (or equivalent) of relevant UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and in some cases donors.
- (b) The HCT is chaired by the UN 's Resident Coordinator (RC), or by a designated Humanitarian Coordinator, should such a designation have been provided by the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator.
- (c) It is the highest-level international humanitarian body in the country. It is primarily responsible for strategic decision-making, to facilitate the centrality of protection and adequate, efficient and needs-based response and preparedness.
- (d) To enable effective and representative decision-making, its membership should be inclusive of a range of relevant stakeholders, including representatives from women-led organizations.
- (e) The United Nations Country Team and HCT coexist; they do not replace each other. The RC is responsible for ensuring complementarity between the two entities. The RC may also decide to set up a separate forum to facilitate information sharing with the broader humanitarian community or with donors.
- (f) Following its initiation, the HCT's immediate decisions will address urgent operational humanitarian matters. The RC and HCT will need to decide quickly on which additional coordination structures and expertise, if any, are required to support the response (e.g. clusters).
- (g) Through the HCT, the RC is required to lead an annual Coordination Architecture Review to ensure that coordination structures in place remain appropriate and relevant to the changing context.

- (h) OCHA supports the RC/HC throughout the process to make sure that an appropriate architecture is put in place, in line with IASC guidance and procedures. OCHA’s role is to support the RC/HC in his/her coordination function as secretariat to the HCT, ensuring that effective links are made with other coordination bodies such as the ICCG/ISCG.
- (i) Many HCTs have now existed for decades and have well-established practices and procedures, given that they are operating in protracted crisis environments.

Example of Humanitarian Country Team Structure – occupied Palestinian territories

