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Evaluation of the Global Education Cluster Action, 2017-2019: "Strengthening Coordination of Education in Emergencies"

VOLUME I – MAIN REPORT

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PREFACE

In 2019, an estimated 75 million children had their education interrupted by humanitarian crises around the world.[1] This alarming figure is not an anomaly, but rather reflects an ongoing trend in which crises – growing in number and complexity and lasting longer on average than was the case even a few years ago – are preventing children from realizing their rights and reaching their full potential. This already dire situation has been thrown into even sharper relief with the COVID-19 crisis: As of May 2020, an estimated 1.29 billion children in 186 countries were affected by school closures. The right to education is under threat as never before, requiring predictable, timely and effective response that links to longer-term development programming, ensuring that children have equitable access to quality learning in all contexts and at all stages of education.

In 2017, in response to this evolving operating context, the Global Education Cluster (GEC), co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children International, developed and implemented a project known as "the GEC Action", with the aim of strengthening the capacities of education clusters/working groups (EC/WGs) to deliver timely, effective responses at country level. This evaluation of the GEC Action, which was commissioned and conducted between November 2019 and February 2020, was particularly timely in offering a learning opportunity to inform the process of development of the new GEC strategy (2020-2021), while also reflecting on the results achieved throughout the project's implementation.

The evaluation was conducted by a team of independent, experienced evaluators and practitioners in the field of humanitarian assistance and education in emergencies (EiE). I would like to thank the evaluation team comprising Andrew Lawday, Soledad Posada Varela and Allison Anderson for their efforts throughout the process.

The evaluation suggests that, in the countries reviewed, the GEC Action effectively strengthened the capacities of EC/WGs to develop EiE strategies and needs assessments, and was generally relevant and efficient. It also points to a few areas that require strengthening, including performance monitoring, sequencing of activities, and support for capacity-building of partners at sub-national levels, among others. The evaluation makes a number of recommendations with regard to project design (for future iterations as well as for similar capacity-building programmes); monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning; resourcing; and accountability.

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[1]   Global Education Cluster, "Annual Report", Geneva, 2019, page 1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is increasingly recognized as a priority in humanitarian response, with a greater realization from donors and partners alike that interrupting education in crises has devastating consequences for children, youth and communities. Since 2007, coordination and collaboration around education in humanitarian crises at the global level has been the responsibility of the global education cluster (GEC). Co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children International, the global cluster brings together non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring predictable, well-coordinated and equitable provision of education for children affected by humanitarian crises. Specifically, the GEC focuses on strengthening the capacity of education clusters/ working groups (EC/WGs) at the country level to deliver predictable, timely, effective and appropriate responses.

Following a mid-term review of the GEC Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, the global cluster launched a revised strategy for 2017-2019. The revised strategy and associated results framework focus on three strategic areas: (i) partnerships to promote a collective approach; (ii) accountability to affected populations and for its own performance and results; and (iii) strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus to ensure alignment and sustainability in education programming.

In line with this strategy, the GEC developed and implemented a project entitled "Strengthening Coordination of Education in Emergencies, 2017-2019", hereinafter referred to as "the GEC Action". Funded through contributions from the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian

Aid Operations of the European Commission (DG ECHO), UNICEF, Save the Children, and other donors, the project aimed "to improve the effectiveness of education in emergency (EiE) responses in countries affected by large-scale humanitarian emergencies and other crises" (see GEC Action diagram, Annex D).

More specifically, the GEC Action aimed to "strengthen the capacity of education clusters/ coordination teams at the country level to develop and deliver predictable, timely, effective and appropriate education responses that sustain education during emergencies and are aligned with longer-term education plans".

It is important to recognize that the intended 'beneficiaries' of the GEC Action were frontline service providers. In this sense, the GEC Action

is a complementary humanitarian activity aimed at strengthening the capacities of EC/WG teams at country level, rather than providing direct services to children or people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Evaluation purpose and scope

The main purpose of the present evaluation is to analyse 'what worked where and how' in the GEC Action and to offer lessons learned for GEC managers and other users. It also serves an accountability function by providing an independent assessment of the GEC Action against its intended results and the ten judgement criteria presented in the evaluation framework (see Annex B).

The scope of the evaluation is intentionally limited. The temporal focus is on the duration of the GEC Action from 1 November 2017 to 1 November 2019. The geographic focus is on GEC results at the country level, with a primary focus on countries that received the majority of GEC support. The thematic focus is on the operational activities of the GEC Action and EC/WG teams, and results achieved in terms of core skills obtained, needs assessment methodology used, and EiE strategies developed.

Two in-depth country case studies were conducted in Bangladesh and North East (NE) region of Nigeria, including a document review and country visits for stakeholder consultations. In addition, a broader multi-country case study was conducted among eight EC/WGs assisted by the GEC Action, involving a document review and key informant interviews with the EC/WG coordinators and an online mini-survey among partners.

Selected findings

Key findings of the evaluation include the following:

- The GEC Action was effective at strengthening the capacities of EC/WGs to develop improved EiE strategies and needs assessments in countries that received the most support.

- The GEC Action was generally well-aligned with both the coordination needs of EC/WGs and the GEC strategy. It addressed systemic and well-recognized EiE coordination capacity gaps and provided an appropriate mix of mutually reinforcing services to EC/WGs, as intended in the GEC strategy.

- However, GEC supply did not always coincide with EC/WG demand, and questions arose about the availability, combination and sequencing of services. Without consistent cluster coordination performance monitoring (CCPM), the GEC also lacked systematic information about EC/WG coordination gaps to guide implementation.

- The GEC Action was implemented in an efficient way. It managed to provide an impressive number of services in a short time and at relatively low cost, and partnership agreements allowed the GEC Action to leverage some useful additional resources.

- Across the countries assisted, EC/WGs were mostly functional even without support provided under the GEC Action, but capacity was often insufficient to enable development of joint plans or multi-year coordination approaches.

- Most EC/WGs sought to promote EiE connectedness with development-oriented education actors and strategies. EC/WGs

frequently conducted needs assessments in collaboration with ministries of education and developed comprehensive EiE strategies explicitly aligned with ministry of education priorities, national education strategies, sector plans, and/or development coordination strategies. However, needs assessments were rarely conducted in collaboration with local education groups, and EC/WGs faced various challenges in actually achieving 'connectedness' to development in EiE strategies, despite their efforts to do so.

- In addition, while progress was made in including governments and national NGOs in strategy development and implementation, results would have been stronger with a more explicit focus on building the capacities of government partners and NGOs, especially at subnational level.

Conclusions

1. EiE Outcomes

The GEC Action strengthened EC/WG strategy-development processes in the nine most assisted countries, resulting in the publication of standalone EiE strategies that went beyond the requirements of contributing to the humanitarian response plan. These strategies are expected to guide partners in their implementation of an effective, timely and quality emergency response.

The GEC Action strengthened the capacities of EC/WGs for needs assessment, resulting in evolving competencies for secondary data review, increased awareness of skill gaps (notably in data analysis and information management) and advanced skills in joint needs assessments.

The GEC Action may have contributed to more effective responses in the countries assisted. The evaluation team argues that the strengthened EC/WG strategy development processes made possible through GEC support

have likely also helped the delivery of more "predictable, timely, effective and appropriate education responses".

At the humanitarian system level, the GEC Action produced useful updated EiE guidance and tools, and increased global and regional EiE coordination skills. The GEC training activities conducted at global and regional levels raised awareness of applied coordination requirements and core competencies among a growing community of EiE actors. To some extent, this contributed to building global and regional 'talent' pools of potential cluster coordinators. In one or two cases, there was evidence of coordinators planning and implementing improved coordination and more effective EiE responses after completing a regional training (NE Nigeria, Cameroon).

2. The GEC Action

GEC support services directly strengthened EC/WG capacities. The improvements in EC/WG capabilities were achieved by the delivery of support services that were to some extent tailored, mixed and mutually reinforcing. During the period 2017-2019, these mixed services were applied proactively in 19 countries, thereby maximizing coverage in response to demand or when supply was available. Country-level training and coaching were seen as particularly effective. It also seems clear that the new joint education needs assessment (JENA) training is appreciated thanks to its innovative coaching and 'learning by doing' design. Without this mix of applied services, it is unlikely EC/WG capacities would have been enhanced by the GEC.

The GEC Action design enabled proactive implementation of activities. The project design allowed enough flexibility in implementation to include a range of GEC activities and a proactive delivery-focused approach. This was a suitable design for a start-up phase that favoured practical, actionable plans and their implementation. The project was designed to address acute emergencies, for example through rapid deployment of rapid response team (RRT) capacity, but it was also able to adapt to the requirements of protracted emergencies.

The GEC had the required resources to function from 2017-2019. The GEC Action benefited substantially from essential financial and human resources made possible through funding from DG ECHO as well as policy support form the European Union. Funding from DG ECHO enabled the GEC to carry out its core functions, and to leverage additional resources from partners, leading to the development of a larger project with Education Cannot Wait. During this time, GEC human resources and expert service providers quadrupled in number. The increased resources in part reflected growing policy interest in EiE, but the GEC strategy revision and proactive leadership during this phase was an essential element.

3. EC/WG requirements

Strengthening capacities required a basic level of EC/WG functionality and willingness. The GEC Action presupposed the existence of a functioning EC/WG that was aware of its own capacity gaps and willing to invest the time, effort and resources necessary to address them. This could not be taken for granted, as EC/WGs and coordinators were often under-resourced, overworked and absorbed by operational demands.

Strengthening EC/WG capacities required dedicated and competent coordination actors. Most importantly, there was a need for dedicated (i.e. not 'double-hatted') cluster coordinators with the right competencies, fixed-term contracts and enough time and

space to carry out this demanding work. There was also a need for a dedicated information management officer. Without these dedicated and competent coordination actors, the functionality of the EC/WG could not be assured and it would have been difficult or impossible for the GEC to strengthen EC/WG capacities.

Dedicated and competent coordination actors required strategic investments by cluster lead agencies (CLAs). Above all, it was necessary for the UNICEF representative and the Save the Children country director to invest strategically in the EC/WG as an effective means of fulfilling their obligations to children in emergencies beyond their own programmes, and to hold themselves accountable for the effectiveness of this modality and meeting collective targets.

EC/WG functionality depended on EiE partners participating in and jointly owning the mechanism. Participation could be indicated by the number of partners involved in needs assessment and strategy development; by the diversity of partners involved (government actors, international and national NGOs, and United Nations agencies); or by the quality/degree of involvement of key EiE actors. Ultimately, participation depended on partners perceiving an interest in their participation. Strengthened capacity and GEC support was often associated with increased participation, so a circular dynamic appeared to be at work whereby increased participation led to better coordination, which in turn led to increased participation.

Recommendations

A summary of recommendations is included below:

R1: Building on results achieved during the 2017-2019 period, the next GEC Action or capacity-building programme should aim more explicitly at generating outcomes, i.e. improving EiE responses.

R2: Recognizing the importance of its 'mixed support services' modality, the GEC should reinforce these with improved prioritization, packaging and sequencing.

R3: Building on the intervention logic, the GEC should develop a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) framework and costed MEAL plan to support accountability, learning and strategic decision-making and to guide implementation.

R4: Considering the importance of coordination actors and their reliance on 'strategic investments', CLAs and partners should confirm their global commitments to resourcing EC/WGs.

R5: To ensure the GEC delivers efficient services and sustains achievements, the CLAs should urgently review their co-leadership responsibilities at global and country levels.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CCs	Cluster Coordinators
CCCT	Cluster Core Coordination Training
CCPM	Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring
CLA	Cluster Lead Agency
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission
EC	European Commission
EC/WG	Education Cluster/Working Group
ECT	Education Cluster Team
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
HR	Human Resources
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee

INEE	Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies
IM	Information Management
IMO	Information Management Officer
JC	Judgement Criteria
JENA	Joint Education Needs Assessment
JRP	Joint Response Plan
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LEG	Local Education Group
LGA	Local Government Authorities
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education
NA	Needs Assessment
NE	North East
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCA	Programme Cooperation Agreement
RG	Reference Group
RRT	Rapid Response Team
SC	Save the Children
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

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BACKGROUND
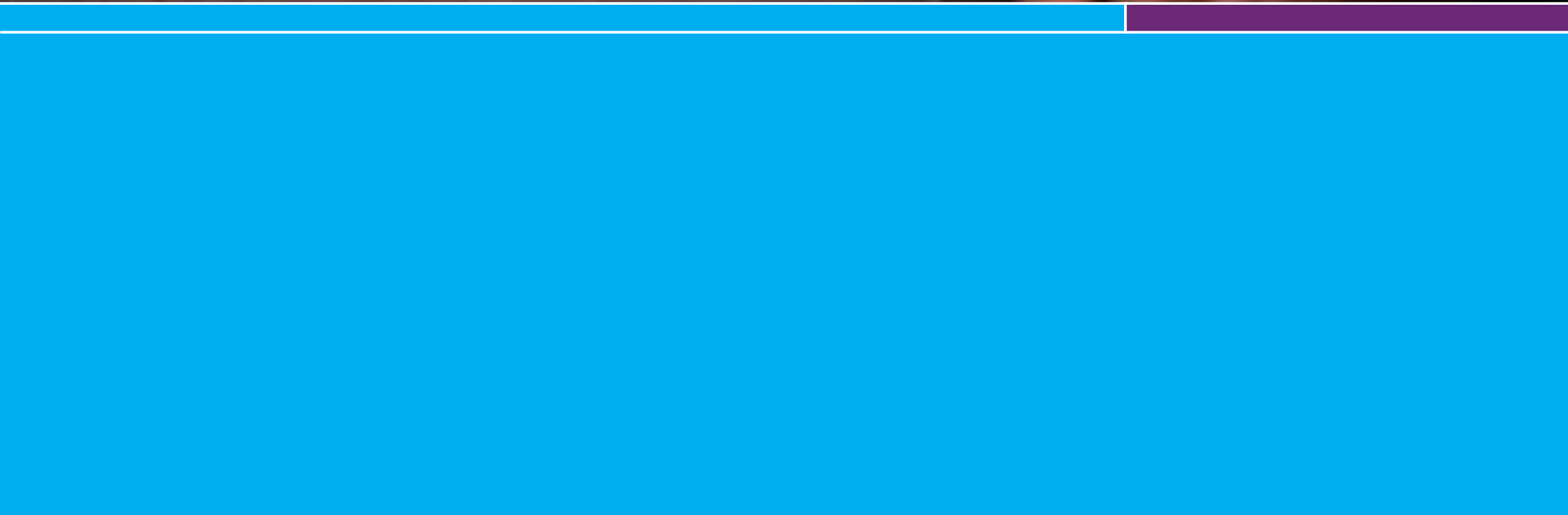
Education in humanitarian action

The humanitarian landscape has changed significantly in recent years. By 2017-18, humanitarian needs had reached unprecedented levels worldwide, crises were becoming ever more complex and protracted, and global displacement was at an all-time high.[2] In this context, tens of millions of children require education assistance in humanitarian situations across the globe: According to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), more than 75 million children and young people were in urgent need of educational support in 35 crisis-affected countries worldwide in 2016.[3]

In recent years, education has become increasingly accepted as a humanitarian priority, with a greater realization from donors and partners alike that interrupting education in crises has devastating consequences for children, youth and communities.[4] The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) drew increased attention to education in emergencies (EiE), and the ECW fund[5] was created to bring together governments, humanitarian and development actors to deliver a more collaborative and rapid response.

At the global level, the global education cluster (GEC) is the main forum for coordination and collaboration around education in humanitarian crises. Established in 2007 and co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children International, the global cluster brings together non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring predictable, well-coordinated and equitable provision of education for children affected by humanitarian crises. Specifically, the GEC focuses on strengthening the capacity of education clusters/working groups (EC/WGs) at the country level to deliver predictable, timely, effective and appropriate responses. At the time of writing this report, there were 25 countries with an active education cluster in place, while 'cluster-like' coordination mechanisms were in place in all other countries with a humanitarian response plan (HRP).

The Global Education Cluster Steering Group, composed of representatives from the cluster lead agencies (CLAs) – UNICEF and Save the Children – is the GEC governance and oversight body, while the Strategic Advisory Group contributes to the overall strategic work of the global cluster on behalf of the broader partnership. The GEC is staffed by two global cluster coordinators, one from each CLA, supported by a team of technical experts, including deployable rapid response team (RRT) members as well as knowledge and information management, communication and advocacy, and administrative support.

Following a mid-term review of the GEC Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, the global cluster launched a revised strategy for 2017-2019. The revised strategy and associated results framework focus on three strategic areas: (i) partnerships to promote a collective approach; (ii) accountability to affected populations and for its own performance and results; and (iii) strengthening the humanitarian-development

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2   United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Global Humanitarian Overview, 2018", OCHA, Geneva, 2018.

3   Nicolai, S., et. al., "Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a fund for education in emergencies", Overseas Development Institute, London, 2016.

4   Global Education Cluster, "Strategic Plan, 2015-2019" (revised 2017), GEC, Geneva, 2017.

5   The broad mandate of ECW is to "generate greater shared political, operational and financial commitment to meet the educational needs of millions of children and young people affected by crises, with a focus on more agile, connected and faster response across the humanitarian development nexus in order to support sustainable education systems".

nexus to ensure alignment and sustainability in education programming. The cluster also established a set of minimum standards, the "6+1 Minimum Requirements for National Humanitarian Education Coordination Platforms", highlighting the centrality of coordinated planning and response.

The GEC Action

The object of this evaluation is a global education cluster project entitled "Strengthening Coordination of Education in Emergencies, 2017-2019", hereinafter referred to as "the GEC Action". The GEC Action was funded with a contribution from the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission (DG ECHO) of US $1.15 million, a UNICEF contribution of US $638,773, a contribution from Save the Children of US $212,616, and contributions from other donors worth US $127,261. The project was implemented through programme cooperation agreements (PCAs) in partnership with Save the Children (SC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and IMPACT Initiatives, with additional resources being committed by these actors. It began in August 2017 and was scheduled to last 24 months.

As stated in the revised proposal for GEC Action, the overall objective of the project was "to improve the effectiveness of education in emergency (EiE) responses in countries affected by large-scale humanitarian emergencies and other crises" (see GEC Action diagram, Annex D).

More specifically, it aimed to "strengthen the capacity of education clusters/coordination teams at the country level to develop and deliver predictable, timely, effective and appropriate education responses that sustain education during emergencies and are aligned with longer-term education plans".

The GEC Action included two outcome-level results:

- **Result 1:** Education clusters/coordination teams in countries supported by the GEC are able to develop comprehensive EiE strategies. Toward this result, the project aimed to increase the number of clusters/coordination teams with a comprehensive EiE strategy in place from three to nine.

- **Result 2:** Education clusters/coordination teams in countries supported by the GEC have the tools and skills needed to undertake comprehensive needs assessments. Toward this result, the project aimed to increase the number of countries supported by the GEC that follow the recommended needs assessment methodology from zero to three.

To achieve these results, the GEC would undertake these activities:

- **Activity 1.1:** Support capacity development activities for cluster partners, local organizations and national coordination mechanisms in ten countries.

- **Activity 1.2:** Organize two global and three regional core skills trainings for cluster partners.

- **Activity 1.3:** Provide knowledge management services and remote support to 20+ countries.

- **Activity 1.4:** Develop and disseminate operational guidance on the use of cash in EiE interventions.

- **Activity 2.1:** Develop, test and roll out a needs assessment training module tailored to local partners.

- **Activity 2.2:** Deploy rapid response team members to support needs assessments and/or information management in three countries.

According to information collected at the inception stage, 19 EC/WGs received support services from the GEC during the period 2017-2019. The 'most assisted' included:

Bangladesh, Chad, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, the State of Palestine, Somalia, Ukraine and Yemen (see Table 1).

It is important to recognize that the intended 'beneficiaries' of the GEC Action were frontline service providers. In this sense, the GEC Action is a complementary humanitarian activity aimed at strengthening the capacities of EC/WG teams at country level, rather than providing direct services to children or people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Table 1. EiE responses supported by the GEC (2017-2019)

EiE response country	Country Core Coordination training	Guidance for developing education cluster strategies / Strategy package	Joint education needs assessment training / coaching programme (pilot)	Training on cash and voucher assistance and EiE
Bangladesh	■			
Burundi		■		
Central African Republic		■		
Chad	■	■		
Democratic Republic of the Congo	■			
Ethiopia		■		
Iraq	■			■
Liberia		■		
Libya			■	
Mali	■			
Myanmar	■	■		
Nepal		■		
Nigeria		■	■	
Northeast Syria	■			
State of Palestine	■			
Somalia	■	■		
South Sudan	■			
Ukraine	■	■		■
Yemen	■	■		

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EVALUATION DESIGN

Purpose and scope

The primary purpose of this evaluation (see Terms of Reference, Annex A) is learning and its secondary purpose is accountability. In this context, learning refers to analysing 'what worked where and how' in the GEC Action and offering lessons learned to serve the specific needs of GEC managers and other users. Accountability refers to conducting an independent assessment of the GEC Action against its intended results and the ten judgement criteria defined at the inception stage and presented in the evaluation framework (see Annex B).

The intended primary users of the evaluation are GEC managers, the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, and the DG ECHO education in emergencies coordinator, focal points and experts. It is expected they will use the lessons learned from this evaluation to inform the design and implementation of a future GEC Action, as well as to inform the GEC Strategy, 2020-2021.

The scope of the evaluation is intentionally limited. The temporal focus is on the duration of the GEC Action from 1 November 2017 to 1 November 2019. The geographic focus is on GEC results at the country level, with a primary focus on countries that received the majority of GEC support (ten countries, as reflected in Table 1 above). The thematic focus is on the operational activities of the GEC Action and EC/WG teams, and results achieved in terms of core skills obtained, needs assessments (NA) methodology used, and EiE strategies developed. Consequently, the evaluation does not focus on DG ECHO policy and funding inputs, the wider strategic and organizational effectiveness of the GEC, or sustainability of the GEC Action.

Methodology

In an effort to prioritize practical learning for specific users and deliver within a very short timeframe, the evaluators used an approach that may be characterized as:

- Learning-focused: using an analytical approach aimed at understanding 'what works where' and inspired by 'realist evaluation';[6]
- Rapid: involving rigorous planning, mainly qualitative methods (key informant interviews), iterative analysis conducted synchronously with data collection, inter-active discussion of emerging findings, and delivery of early findings immediately after field stage – an approach inspired by 'real time evaluation' approaches;[7] and
- User-centred: prioritizing evidence and learning inputs through structured dialogue ahead of more formalized and time-consuming report-writing and commenting processes.

The evaluation was carried out from December 2019 to March 2020. During the inception phase, the evaluators worked with the reference group (RG) to refine the purpose and scope, mapped sources, reviewed the context, developed a programme theory and assessment framework, defined limitations and developed a risk-informed workplan. The evaluation team and the RG also selected two countries – namely, Bangladesh and Nigeria – for in-depth case studies, while the remaining targeted countries were combined for a multi-country case study in order to inform the evaluation. An inception report was prepared, discussed and approved.

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[6]   Westhorp, G., "Realist Impact Evaluation: An introduction," Overseas Development Institute, London, 2014.

[7]   Cosgrave, John, et al., "Real-time Evaluations of Humanitarian Action: An ALNAP guide", pilot version, ALNAP, 2009.

In the data collection and analysis phase, the evaluators conducted a desk review of documents collected, consulted global stakeholders, conducted a remote multi-country case study and two country-based case studies, fielded a survey to EC/WG actors across eight countries, and held weekly seminars as a team about emerging findings and learning. This work was mainly done in the second half of January 2020 and was extremely intensive.

During the evidence and learning phase, the evaluators collated evidence from the case studies and other methods, developed a synthesis analysis, prepared a presentation of emerging findings, facilitated a learning work-shop with users in Brussels on 10 February 2020, collected submissions from users and prepared a draft report. Thereafter, the team received and reviewed a range of further comments and prepared this final report.

Programme theory

At an initial stage, a 'programme theory' was constructed to help understand how the GEC Action was expected to work and to allow investigation of how it worked in practice. This theory provided a conceptual framework for developing evaluation questions (EQs) and to guide learning. It posited that the Action's intended outcomes required a favourable context, characterized by the willingness and ability of EC/WGs to take up support provided. The hypothesis was:

- IF … the GEC Action provides capacity-building and operational support to EC/WGs, through tailored training, a helpdesk function, guidance on cash and voucher assistance /EiE, and/or rapid response teams

- AND … EC/WGs are willing and able to take up the support provided

- THEN … EC/WGs will have the necessary/applicable core skills, apply the recommended methodology for needs assessment, and establish comprehensive EiE strategies

- AND in turn, this will contribute to more effective EiE responses.

Figure 1. Programme theory for the GEC Action

GEC ACTION
- Tailored capacity-building and operational support

+

EC/WG Context
- Willing and able to take up support

=

ACTION RESULTS
- EC/WG has **core skills**
- EC/WG applies **needs assessment methodology**
- EC/WG establishes **comprehensive EiE strategy**

ACTION OUTCOME/ IMPACT
- Contributes to more effective EiE response
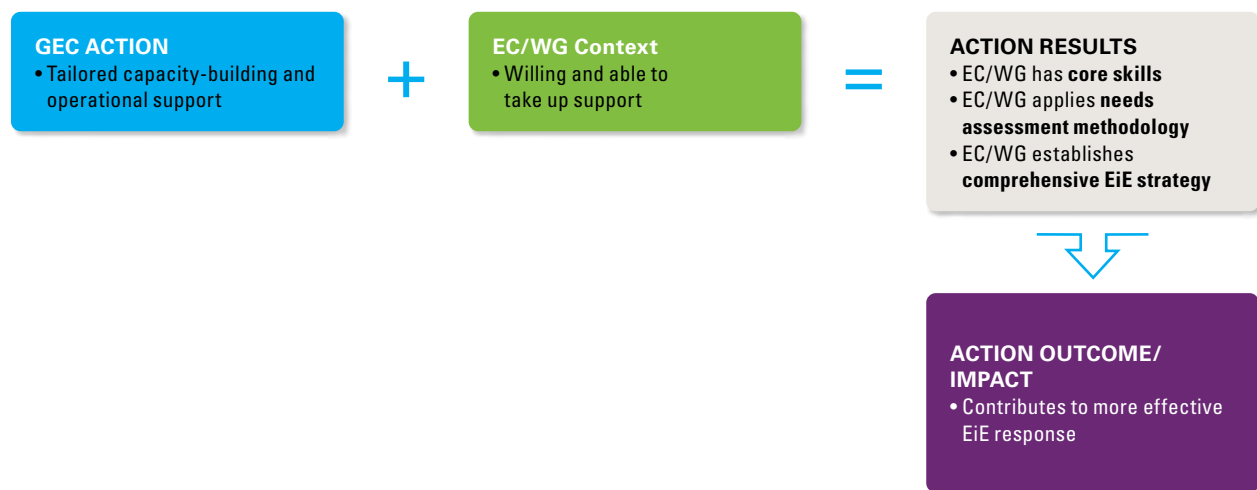
Evaluation framework

Based on the programme theory, an evaluation framework (Annex B) was developed for the evaluation questions and to guide the evaluation process (see Table 2).

To facilitate assessments, ten judgement criteria (JC) were developed to define 'what good looks like' for each EQ (see Annex B).

Table 2: Evaluation criteria and questions

Overall question	What worked where, how and to what extent in the GEC Action to develop EiE coordination capacities?
EQ 1. GEC Effectiveness	How and to what extent did the GEC Action achieve intended results? What were the key limiting/enabling factors?
EQ 2. GEC Relevance:	How / to what extent was the GEC Action at country level aligned with the needs of education clusters and the GEC strategy?
EQ 3. GEC Efficiency	How / to what extent was the GEC Action implemented efficiently?
EQ 4. EC/WG Coordination	How and to what extent did the EC/WGs have the capacity to carry out core cluster functions for needs assessment and strategy (before and/or independent of the GEC Action)?
EQ 5. EC/WG Connectedness	How and to what extent did the EC/WG promote connectedness with relevant development coordination mechanisms?

Data collection and analysis

Two in-depth country case studies were conducted in Bangladesh and North East (NE) region of Nigeria, including a document review and country visits for stakeholder consultations. In addition, a multi-country case study was conducted among eight EC/WGs assisted by the GEC Action, involving a document review and key informant interviews with the EC/WG coordinators and an online mini-survey among partners (46 survey respondents from eight countries) (see Annex E for survey results).

Bangladesh[8] and NE Nigeria[9] were selected as case studies from among the countries most assisted by the GEC on the basis of emergency type, RG advice as to which would offer best learning opportunities, and practical considerations. The multi-country case study countries were those judged to have received most assistance from the GEC.

A learning workshop was held on February 10 with the GEC and DG ECHO users to consider emerging findings, specific lessons and implications for future GEC programmes, and to generate a draft report. This final report responds to comments received on the draft report.

The various lines of evidence described above were collated in an evidence tool, which allowed for further triangulation to develop findings. The latter were validated

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[8] In Bangladesh, a UNICEF 'Level 3' emergency was designated until December 2018. The EC/WG received country core coordination training (CCCT), developed a new EiE strategy, and was to be supported through the ECW partnership.

[9] In northeast Nigeria, a UNICEF 'Level 3' emergency was designated until January 2019; a 'Level 2' emergency remains in effect. The EC/WG piloted the GEC strategy development package in 2017, developed a new EiE strategy, and piloted the joint education needs assessment coaching programme.

through iterative discussions within the team and subsequently with users at the learning workshop.

The evaluation was carried out in line with recognized standards and good practices in evaluation, as outlined in the United Nations Evaluation Group ethical standards for evaluation and other relevant guidance.

Limitations

In conducting desk research of around 70 documents (see Annex F for all sources), two challenges emerged. First, it became clear that the GEC Action had not been able to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities as intended, which meant that consistent evidence on progress compared to indicators was not available. This problem was addressed by making maximum use of interim reporting, user feedback, and a range of other documents including related EiE evaluations, and also

relying on evidence generated by stakeholder consultations (78 in total) and through the case studies. Second, it became clear that it would be insufficient to assess the GEC Action only through the case studies without collecting a further layer information from the global level about the GEC Action as a whole. This required conducting a range of additional interviews with global stakeholders and collecting available documentary evidence at the global level. In line with the learning objective, the evidence generated was more indicative of 'what works' among the EC/WGs most assisted by the GEC, and not necessarily 'representative' of all EC/WGs assisted.

In addition, since the evaluation was focused on GEC support services, it did not involve consultation with children or people in need of assistance and did not significantly consider gender, equity and inclusion as would be appropriate in an evaluation of direct assistance.

3

EVALUATION FINDINGS
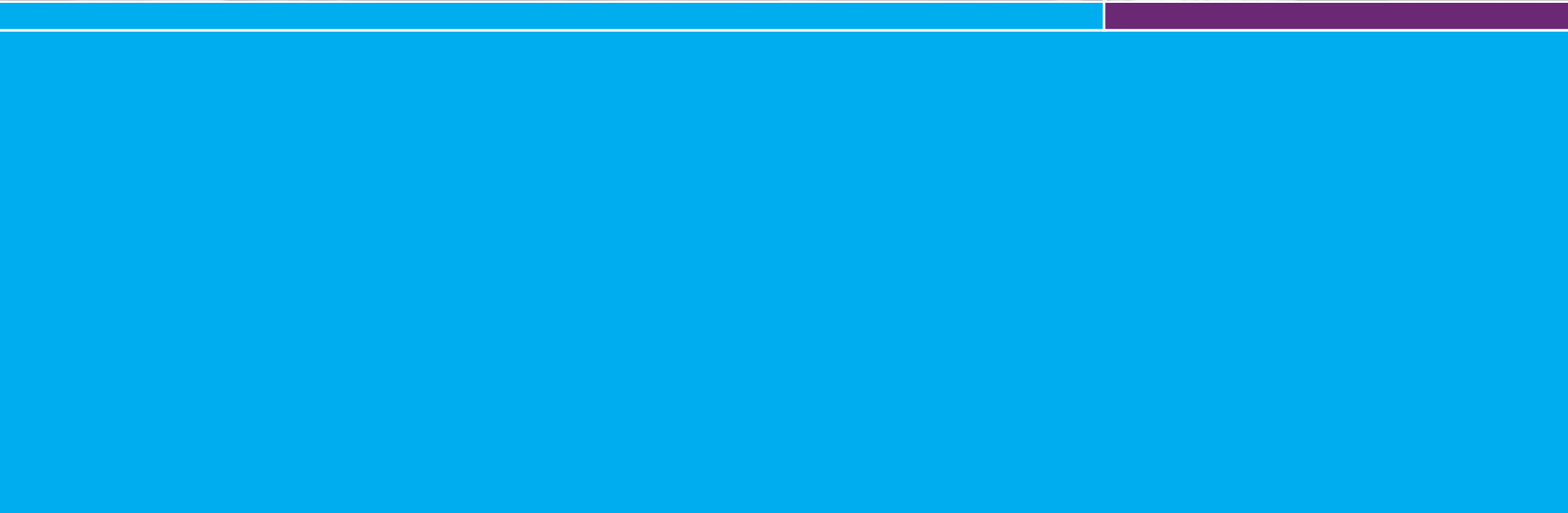
1. Effectiveness of the GEC Action

EQ 1:
How and to what extent did the GEC Action achieve intended results? What were the key limiting/enabling factors?

Key Finding:

- The GEC Action was effective at strengthening the capacities of EC/WGs to develop improved EiE strategies and needs assessments in countries that received the most support. In nine countries, EC/WGs were able to develop higher quality 'comprehensive' strategies and showed evolving capacities for needs assessments, and two countries, Nigeria and Libya, showed 'advanced' capacities following a pilot coaching in late 2019 on the new joint education needs assessment (JENA) methodology. These results indicate the GEC Action achieved its intended results in the countries assisted, which is an important first step to ensuring more effective, timely and quality EiE responses.

The GEC Action and the existing capacities of the EC/WGs were both key factors that enabled achievement of these results. The GEC Action was a critical factor as it developed the guidance and tools through which the strategies and joint needs assessments could be improved, provided a mix of support services, and delivered these services in an effective and efficient way. The results depended to an even larger degree on the EC/WGs, their existing capacities, awareness and willingness;

their leadership, coordinators, information managers; the investments of CLAs; and the participation of partners (see conclusions for more on 'how' results were achieved).

1.1 Strategy development capacity

In nine of the countries that received the most support from the GEC, EC/WGs were able to develop 'comprehensive' strategies as per the GEC Strategy Guide, with important contributions from the GEC.[10] As of end 2019, GEC implementation actors reported that EC/WGs had developed comprehensive strategies in Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, and Ukraine and had almost completed them in Chad, State of Palestine, and Yemen. In a survey conducted across these countries, 35 out of 47 EC/WG actors felt they were able to develop 'effective strategies' after GEC support. In NE Nigeria, growing capacities for strategy development were found over the period. 'Strategic' functions (such as planning and implementing cluster strategies) were assessed to be satisfactory or good by 2019, and an effective coordination process was in place to begin developing a multi-year strategy in 2020. In Bangladesh, strategy development capacity was strengthened by the joint response plan (JRP) process, cluster core coordination training (CCCT), and now multi-year strategy development.

1.2 Needs assessments capacity

EC/WGs had varied capabilities to conduct needs assessments, ranging from 'recognized gaps' to 'improving abilities' and 'advanced capabilities', depending on the type of GEC support received. In JENA pilot countries

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[10] The evidence shows strategies were 'comprehensive', in that they were developed according to new guidance aimed at supporting "an effective, timely, and quality emergency response" (GEC 2018, "Guide to Developing Education Cluster Strategies", p1). This goes beyond providing EiE inputs to the HNO and HRP processes, and is expected to prepare EC/WGs to develop joint plans with humanitarian actors and bridge humanitarian-development divides in the area of education.

in the CCCT acquired increased skills for needs assessments, secondary data review, calculating numbers of people in need, analysing data, etc. However, it remained a mixed picture, with some EC/WGs recognizing persistent gaps in needs assessment abilities, a lack of confidence in this area, and the need for more support. In Bangladesh, the quality of needs assessments remained questionable and was described by one informant as an "Achilles heel".

2. Relevance of the GEC Action

EQ 2:
How and to what extent was the Action at country level aligned with the needs of education clusters and the GEC strategy?

Key Findings:

- The GEC Action was generally well-aligned with both the coordination needs of EC/WGs and the GEC strategy. It addressed systemic and well-recognized EiE coordination capacity gaps and provided an appropriate mix of mutually reinforcing services to EC/WGs, as intended in the GEC strategy. These support services were adequately tailored to contexts, often coincided with specific EC/WG needs, and were taken up appreciatively in cases reviewed.

- However, GEC supply did not always coincide with EC/WG demand, some GEC services were inevitably more appreciated than others, and questions arose about the availability, combination and sequencing of services. Without consistent cluster coordination performance monitoring (CCPM), the GEC also lacked systematic information about EC/WG coordination gaps to guide implementation.

(NE Nigeria and Libya), EC/WGs reported advanced needs assessments capabilities. In NE Nigeria, JENA data collection in 19 local government authorities (LGAs) provided more reliable information for humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) processes, and the seven EC/WG participants trained felt empowered to conduct the required needs assessments, including the next JENA. They also went on to use GEC tools to conduct needs assessments for their own organizations. In Libya, EC/WG participants felt able to develop strategy and contribute to the HRP 2020.

Aside from JENA pilot countries, other EC/WGs reported evolving and improving needs assessment capacities as well. Almost two-thirds of EC/WGs members across the nine countries agreed they had the tools/skills needed for needs assessments after GEC support, some highlighting RRT deployments as important in this regard. In Somalia, RRT and REACH partners provided specialist help to the EC/WG, carrying out large-scale data analysis that provided the information management officer (IMO) with considerable information. More broadly, many participants

The GEC Action is well aligned with the intention of the GEC strategy to support EC/WGs through direct and remote field support, guidance and capacity support. It is also aligned with the ECW aim to strengthen the capacity of education clusters to coordinate EiE response, and with the wider goal of the European Union (EU) to provide support to EiE capacity-building. Notably, the CCCT is cited in the EU policy document itself as a good practice.[11]

2.1 Relevance to EC/WG needs

In its design, the GEC Action explicitly addressed four EiE 'problem statements', which described capacity gaps in EC/WG coordination, information management, cash and voucher assistance (CVA) coordination, and humanitarian-development coordination. These gaps were identified at the global level in line with evidence emerging from recent evaluations and research.[12] In its implementation, GEC support activities were generally tailored to identified capacity needs of EC/WGs through in-country consultation processes (e.g. adaptation of CCCT guidance and tools and CCPM for Somalia, Yemen and Bangladesh).

Overall, stakeholders perceived that the GEC Action provided an appropriate mix of support activities to EC/WGs, as intended in the GEC strategy.[13] EC/WG stakeholders across all countries assisted felt the mix of direct and remote support activities was appropriate to addressing key EiE coordination issues, and that the mix of operational support and capacity-building is mutually reinforcing and resulted in meaningful support to EC/WGs to strengthen cluster coordination.

In Bangladesh, GEC services were seen as an appropriate and comprehensive mix of operational support and capacity-building that was fairly well aligned with EC/WG priority needs, and went some way towards addressing a general demand for more experience and lessons learned-sharing between education clusters/countries and more information-sharing by GEC about its services. In NE Nigeria, the mix of activities corresponded with WG expectations that the GEC should provide normative support, quick deployments, tools and guidance, and good practice sharing. GEC support services were much appreciated by EiE partners, integrated into the working group's training strategy, and even cited as a reason for participation in the EC/WG.

GEC services were appropriate in different ways. In general, the most highly appreciated services were CCCT at all levels, RRT deployments, and JENA coaching, because each of these provided crucial cluster coordination/information management skills and promoted an inclusive approach to EiE.

- Global/regional CCCT were perceived as high-quality, providing crucial skills for cluster coordinators and IMOs and key partners while also providing the benefit of learning from and connecting with other countries in the training.

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[11] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises", Brussels, 2018.

[12] Mokoro, Ltd., "UNICEF Education in Humanitarian Settings: Evaluation report, 2014-2018", United Nations Children's Fund, draft January 2020.

[13] The GEC strategy undertakes to support EC/WGs in delivering core services per the IASC cluster coordination reference module, 2015, through: (i) Direct and remote field support to country clusters; (ii) providing guidance and capacity through training, development of tools and procedures, and knowledge management (GEC Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, revised 2017).

- Country-based CCCT and strategy development were perceived as an inclusive, effective approach to providing crucial skills for education cluster teams and country-based partners, especially when followed up with RRT deployment to support strategy development.

- JENA coaching was received only in Libya and Nigeria during the evaluation period and was a rushed process, but it was perceived as particularly helpful, innovative and empowering.

- Remote and direct RRT support was perceived as responsive and helpful, despite some timing issues in terms of scheduling conflicts between GEC and EC/WGs that impeded effectiveness.

- Help desk support received mixed reviews, with a lack of knowledge of, and engagement with, the service in most countries, but generally positive perceptions from those that did make use of the service (mainly IMOs) for superficial information (i.e. not in-depth support).

- CVA guidance also received mixed reviews, with some countries perceiving it as relevant and others questioning the 'top-down' approach by which it was developed.

Despite these overall positive perceptions, there were limitations. While the GEC Action aimed at strengthening EC/WGs to more effectively carry out their core coordination functions as defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), their specific coordination needs and priorities were often diverse and more wide-ranging, and the GEC Action was not designed to meet all of these needs and priorities. GEC services did not always coincide with EC/WG priorities as they saw them, sometimes requiring upstream 'advocacy' to stimulate demand among key EiE coordination actors (e.g. Ukraine). The disconnect between priorities defined by the IASC and the immediate priorities of EC/WGs explains why few EC/WGs demanded CVA coordination support or felt able to take up JENA coaching in late 2019.

In addition, the GEC Action struggled to systematically prioritize its support to EC/WG coordination needs in the absence of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) information. CCPMs conducted for Somalia (2017), Yemen (2017) and Bangladesh (2019) demonstrated the relevance of consolidating needs assessment guidance, strengthening capacity to use it, and building capacity for strategic response planning across the humanitarian-development nexus. But CCPMs were not conducted systematically, and the wider MEL activities of the GEC Action did not occur as expected, thereby making it difficult to target and prioritize specific support to EC/WGs and to implement the Action in a way governed by evidence and learning. This challenge was also found to apply to UNICEF in the evaluation on UNICEF support to education in humanitarian settings.[14] Questions arise about the specific combinations and sequencing of services provided. EC/WGs made suggestions regarding better and more efficient mutual reinforcement of services, and the GEC has reflected on what should be the ideal combination and sequencing of services. In addition, EC/WGs had different levels of knowledge about GEC services available and requested better information on the services provided (according to satisfaction surveys).[15]

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[14]   *Ibid.*

[15]   Global Education Cluster, "2018 Satisfaction Survey Findings", GEC, Geneva, February 2019.

3. Efficiency of the GEC Action

EQ 3:
How / to what extent was the Action implemented efficiently?

Key Finding:

- The GEC Action was implemented in an efficient way. It managed to provide an impressive number of services in a short time and at relatively low cost, and partnership agreements allowed the GEC Action to leverage some useful additional resources.

The GEC activities were generally perceived to be cost efficient and delivered in a timely manner by highly competent people. However, perceptions of efficiency varied somewhat across the different activities, and the sequencing of activities was not consistently well-suited to EC/WG coordination cycles. The UNICEF-Save the Children PCA contributed to efficiency by leveraging additional resources from Save the Children to carry out designated activities. The evaluators did not receive the final PCA report, but views differed on the arrangement's effectiveness and also its suitability, given that it was perceived by some as positioning the GEC co-lead agency as a UNICEF sub-contractor. In addition, some stakeholders felt that accountabilities of the GEC and its co-leaders were not sufficiently defined, and requested further clarity in this area.

3.1 Efficiency

Overall, the GEC Action implemented a wide range of relevant activities using relatively few resources, and also generated essential funding for the GEC to implement its core activities. GEC activities were however efficient to different degrees.[16] Global stakeholders perceived the GEC activities to be largely efficient and staff (including RRTs) to be highly competent, with CCCT trainings and RRT deployments seen as the most effective and efficient. On the other hand, the needs assessment tool was delayed, CVA guidance was considered 'top-down',[17] and the help desk function was not used much. (Use of the GEC help desk increased considerably in 2019 thanks to more proactivity and efforts to overcome language barriers.)

GEC services were not always delivered at the ideal moment. Timing and sequencing of JENA coaching was not ideal, RRT scheduling changes impeded support to strategy development at the most opportune time, and EC/WGs needed more time to prepare for receiving support. Also, sequencing of activities was ad hoc, rather than planned. In Nigeria, where the JENA 2019 was too late to feed into the humanitarian needs overview (HNO), support could have been better sequenced with the HPC. In Bangladesh, RRT deployments were also considered too short, complicating handover to cluster coordinators.

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[16] Efficiency here is defined as "providing support through the right people in the right place at the right time".

[17] It is noted that the GEC's CVA activities involved widespread consultations, three country case studies, and establishment of a reference group. These activities remained something of an innovation in the sector and are not widely known or taken up.

4. EC/WG Coordination

EQ 4:
How and to what extent did EC/WGs have the capacity to carry out core cluster functions for needs assessment and strategy (before and/or independent of the GEC Action)?

Key Finding:

- Across the countries assisted, EC/WGs were mostly functional even without support provided under the GEC Action,[18] but capacity was often insufficient to enable development of joint plans or multi-year coordination approaches. The EC/WGs tended to have limited capacities in coordination, to conduct EiE needs assessments only to a limited extent, and to develop EiE strategies that were not comprehensive or of sufficiently high quality.

While EC/WGs had basic functional capacity for coordination before the GEC Action, a lack of coordination knowledge, skills and standardized processes impeded the ability of EC/WGs to operationalize coordination as per the IASC Reference Module for the Implementation of the HPC (2015) and in line with the GEC conceptualization of partnership. In particular, recurring challenges across country contexts included limited capacity for EC/WG coordination at subnational levels and weak coherence between national and subnational levels.

4.1 Needs assessment capacity

Prior to support from the GEC Action, EC/WGs generally conducted EiE needs assessments to a limited extent and with limited capacity. EC/WGs invariably had functional, base coordination capacity to feed into inter-agency processes to develop annual HNOs. But EC/WG teams often had limited knowledge, confidence and capacity to coordinate needs assessments as described by the IASC or JENA. These required secondary data review, ensuring that partners were collecting the right data, conducting calculations of people in need, and carrying out data analysis. Particular challenges to this capacity stemmed from a general lack of dedicated information management (IM) support within EC/WGs; multiple versions of needs assessments tools within the education sector; and from contexts in which security and government restrictions preclude needs assessments or data collection in hard-to-access zones.

4.2 Strategy development capacity

Prior to support from the GEC Action, EC/WGs often developed EiE strategies with limited capacities, resulting in final products that were not comprehensive as defined above (see 1.1). As noted above, EC/WGs were able to feed into HRP processes and coordinate with and respond to partners. But EC/WG teams and partners often lacked a strong familiarity with the HPC, as well as the coordination skills and confidence necessary to develop comprehensive strategies connecting humanitarian action with longer-term responses, particularly at subnational level.

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[18] The GEC strategic plan recognizes the need for greater alignment between humanitarian and development assistance and commits to bridging the humanitarian-development nexus, including through avoiding the use of separate coordination systems (humanitarian and development) / identifying coordination models that can incorporate both.

5. EC/WG Connectedness

EQ5:
How and to what extent did the EC/WG promote connectedness with relevant development coordination mechanisms?

Key Findings:

- Overall, the EC/WGs made efforts to consider long-term problems, but did not carry out joint needs assessments and strategic planning involving all relevant humanitarian and development actors in such a way that could provide a multi-year pathway to mainstream EiE into development plans.

- Most EC/WGs sought to promote EiE connectedness with development-oriented education actors and strategies, thereby making important progress in engaging ministries of education in cluster strategy development and needs assessments. EC/WGs frequently conducted needs assessments in collaboration with ministries of education and developed comprehensive EiE strategies explicitly aligned with ministry of education priorities, national education strategies, sector plans, and/or development coordination strategies.

- However, needs assessments were rarely conducted in collaboration with development coordination mechanisms or local education groups (LEGs), and EC/WGs faced various challenges in successfully achieving 'connectedness' to development in EiE strategies, in spite of efforts.

- In addition, while progress was made in including governments and national NGOs in strategy development and implementation, results would have been stronger with a more explicit focus on building the capacities of government partners and NGOs, especially at subnational level.

5.1 Connectedness in needs assessments

The EC/WGs frequently conducted needs assessments in collaboration with ministries of education, but less often with LEGs. In countries where the JENA coaching pilot took place, EC/WGs developed strengthened abilities to promote connectedness through harmonized needs assessments, which could strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus in line with EU policy[19] and the ECW strategy. EC/WGs operating in politicized and divided conflict environments (e.g. Ukraine,

Yemen), however, required more practical guidance and concrete examples of how to connect with government and development actors while preserving humanitarian space. More broadly, the goal of promoting stronger complementarity between EC/WGs and other relevant education coordination mechanisms has not yet been fully realized.

5.2 Connectedness in cluster strategies

The EC/WGs that were able to develop comprehensive strategies explicitly aligned these with national education strategies or

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[19]   European Commission, Communication from the Commission, 2018.

sector plans. They involved ministries of education and, in some cases, other development coordination actors. EiE strategies developed with support of the GEC Action (Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, Ukraine) and others in progress (Libya, Nigeria, State of Palestine) explicitly focused on alignment and continuity across the humanitarian-development nexus. CCCT training, strategy development and strategy implementation were mutually reinforcing processes that helped to ensure a longer-term, strategic approach across the nexus, increasing broad participation and supporting localization.

Through the inclusive processes supporting strategy development, progress was also made in terms of including national governments and national NGOs in strategy development and implementation. However, results would have been stronger with an even more explicit focus on building the capacities of government partners and NGOs, especially at subnational level.

While capacities for joint multi-year education planning increased in some EC/WGs, this was not the case for many others, and at the time of this evaluation there were no examples of joint plans or coordination approaches linked to longer-term development plans in a way that would promote continuous, uninterrupted and sustainable education for children and young people in crisis.

The EC/WGs faced several important challenges in successfully promoting connectedness in EiE strategies. First, there was often a need for advanced guidance and practical support on transition and recovery issues, connectedness in a politicized and divided conflict context, and accountability to affected populations (AAP). Second, it was not always possible to secure funding support for such initiatives. While the ECW Multi-Year Resilience Programme is designed to promote connectedness and complementarity between humanitarian and development programmes, practical challenges were encountered in trying to tap into this funding source due to perceived shortcomings in EC/WG strategies (e.g. missing elements related to gender, risk analysis, contingency planning, learning, child safeguarding, etc). Third, state ownership did not always translate into 'connectedness' with development. In NE Nigeria, for example, the EiE strategy was formally overseen and owned by the State Universal Basic Education Board but did not necessarily link up with other state education plans or include an exit strategy from emergency to development.

4

CONCLUSIONS

Overall question:

What worked where, how and to what extent in the GEC programme to develop EiE coordination capacities?

This section offers 'lessons learned' from the evaluation to inform the design and implementation of future GEC activities. Building on the findings above, it uses evidence collected to interrogate the programme theory and describe 'what really happened'. It describes the EiE outcomes generated and how the GEC Action and EC/WGs contributed to those outcomes.

1. EiE Outcomes

The GEC Action strengthened EC/WG strategy-development processes in the nine countries most assisted. GEC support strengthened the capacities of EC/WGs for strategy development, resulting in the publication of standalone EiE strategies, going beyond what was required to contribute to the HRP. These strategies are expected to "[guide] partners in their implementation of an effective, timely, and quality emergency response", to establish coordinated strategy development processes (involving six steps recommended in the guide) and to promote the active participation of relevant partners in these processes.

The GEC Action strengthened the capacities of EC/WGs for needs assessment, resulting in evolving competencies for secondary data review, increased awareness of skill gaps (notably in data analysis and information management), and advanced skills in joint needs assessments where the JENA coaching was piloted in late 2019.

The GEC Action may have contributed to more effective responses in the countries assisted. The evaluation team argues that the strengthened EC/WG strategy development processes made possible through GEC support have likely also helped the delivery of more "predictable, timely, effective and appropriate education responses", despite the constraints involved in capturing and measuring the scope of this contribution and the causal links between these levels of outcomes. In several countries, the GEC Action was credited with strengthening EiE coordination process, building confidence among partners and dynamizing the EiE response. In Bangladesh, for example, the GEC Action reportedly led to agreements with ECW for a 'new way of working'[20] to strengthen the links between relief and development efforts, and to deliver rapid and sustainable responses. It also led to the inclusion of national EiE actors and the development of education monitoring tools and minimum standards for inter-sectoral interventions. In NE Nigeria, EC/WG coordination reportedly enabled important EiE results, such as the safe schools declaration, increased donor funding, a back-to-school campaign, harmonized training materials, the EiE catch-up programme, and higher quality EiE in internally displaced person camps.

At the humanitarian system level, the GEC Action produced useful updated EiE guidance and tools. The GEC produced updated normative guidance and tools to cover EiE coordination requirements as well as opportunities and challenges arising from the World

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Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain and the Education Cannot Wait initiative. The tool-kits were recognized for their quality and effectiveness. Most notably, the GEC produced a core coordination competencies framework, a strategy guide and tools, the JENA guidance and tools, and guidance on CVA (see Annex E).

Also at the humanitarian system level, the GEC Action increased global and regional EiE coordination skills. The GEC training activities conducted at global and regional levels raised awareness of applied coordination requirements and core competencies among a growing community of EiE actors. More than 300 people were trained, among them participants from ECHO, ECW, and EiE partner organizations. To some extent, this contributed to building global and regional 'talent' pools of potential cluster coordinators. In one or two cases, there was evidence of coordinators planning and implementing improved coordination and more effective EiE responses on the strength of completing a regional training (NE Nigeria, Cameroon).

2. The GEC Action

GEC support services directly strengthened EC/WG capacities. The improvements in EC/WG capabilities were achieved by the delivery of support services that were to some extent tailored, mixed and mutually reinforcing. Most notably, capacities were strengthened by global/regional cluster coordinator (CC) training, EC/WG-specific CC training, deployed (or remote) RRT support, needs assessment training and JENA coaching. The evaluation suggests that the GEC requires a 'toolkit' of different services, and that strengthening capacity depends on applying these in a combined manner. During the period 2017-2019, these mixed services were applied proactively in 19 countries, thereby maximizing coverage in response to demand or when supply was

available. Without this mix of applied services, it is unlikely EC/WG capacities would have been enhanced by the GEC.

GEC support services were generally delivered proactively, effectively and efficiently by highly competent staff, combining online 'remote' support and in-country deployments. Country-level training and coaching were seen as particularly effective, whereas the help desk function was less often used (recent improvements have been noted, including the appointment of a dedicated coordinator) and the EC/WG online chat group (where questions are posed and addressed by a growing community of EiE coordination

practitioners) is appreciated. It also seems clear that the new JENA training was preferred to the previous JENA training, and considered more 'advanced' and empowering due to the innovative coaching and 'learning by doing' design. The effective and efficient delivery of services relied in part on PCAs signed between the co-leads (UNICEF and Save the Children) and also with global expert providers, such as REACH and the Norwegian Refugee Council (Norcap). Without such effective and efficient delivery, the EC/WGs would not have received the right combination of support services.

The quality of GEC services was reinforced by updated guidance and practical tools. GEC services were aligned with and informed by the updated guidance and tools defining expectations of EC/WGs in relation to core coordination competencies, strategy development, and joint needs assessments. These guidance documents provided transparent policy-aligned frameworks for good practices in coordination, including recommended processes and specific criteria beyond the generic HPC guidance, and the tools provided practical help to implement the guidance. This body of 'gold standard' guidance was considered useful by EC/WGs who may use it opportunistically, but it also provided a useful normative 'quality' framework to guide GEC service delivery. Without the guidance and tools, shared understanding among the GEC and partners about expectations for EC/WG coordination activities would have been less likely.

The GEC Action design enabled proactive implementation of activities. The services were designed and implemented as a 24-month project funded by DG ECHO through Enhanced Response Capacity programme funding. The project design allowed enough flexibility in implementation to include the range of GEC activities and a proactive delivery-focused approach. This

was a suitable design for a start-up phase that favoured practical, actionable plans and their implementation. It quickly and effectively channelled support to the EC/WGs, reflecting the shared interests of DG ECHO and the GEC in promoting more effective EiE responses. The project was designed to address acute emergencies, for example through rapid deployment of RRT capacity, but it was also able to adapt to the requirements of protracted emergencies. The project conducted many activities with minimal funding and benefited from additional resources leveraged through PCAs. Without a relatively flexible project design, the development of guidance and tools and the proactive delivery of mixed support services may not have been possible.

The GEC had the required resources to function from 2017-2019. The GEC Action benefited substantially from essential financial and human resources made possible through funding from DG ECHO as well as policy support from the EU. Funding from DG ECHO enabled the GEC to carry out its core functions and to leverage additional resources from partners, leading to the development of a larger project with ECW. During this time, GEC human resources and expert service providers quadrupled in number. The increased resources in part reflected growing policy interest in EiE, but the GEC strategy revision and proactive leadership during this phase was an essential element. Without the GEC having essential resources in place, the various activities above – in particular the delivery of effective and efficient services – would have been very difficult or impossible to achieve.

3. EC/WG requirements

Strengthening capacities required a basic level of EC/WG functionality and willingness. The GEC Action presupposed the existence of a functioning EC/WG, including regular meetings

of key EiE actors working together to identify gaps and avoid duplication, and an annual needs assessment and planning process linked to the wider humanitarian response. It also required EC/WG awareness of its own capacity gaps and a recognition that business as usual was not enough to move forward. It also required EC/WGs to be willing to invest time, effort and resources in capacity-building. This could not be taken for granted, as EC/WGs and coordinators were often under-resourced, overworked, and absorbed by operational demands. In some cases (e.g. Ukraine), regional CCCT sessions generated greater awareness and willingness to take up support.

Strengthening EC/WG capacities required dedicated and competent coordination actors. Most importantly, there was a need for dedicated (i.e. not 'double-hatted') CCs, with the right competencies, fixed-term contracts, and enough time and space to carry out this demanding work.[21] To be effective, the CC required a range of important leadership competencies, including experience, expertise, credibility, and the 'soft' skills for coordination and facilitation needed to convene a group of diverse actors to develop a shared plan, implement it together, and be collectively responsible for its success and failures. In the most successful examples, CCs were in place for an extended period of time (several years) to ensure processes worked well and learned from experience. In all cases, there was also a need for a dedicated IMO to manage information flows (collecting data from partners, storing and managing information, providing useful information products for EC/WG partners, and managing the growing demands and opportunities of data-driven responses, including data collection, analysis

and reporting on EiE capacities and needs). Without these dedicated and competent coordination actors, the functionality of the EC/WG could not be assured and it would have been difficult or impossible for the GEC to strengthen EC/WG capacities.

Dedicated and competent coordination actors required strategic investments by cluster lead agencies. The supply of dedicated and competent coordination actors required CLAs to make specific investments at country level. Above all, it was necessary for the UNICEF representative and the Save the Children country director to invest strategically in the EC/WG as an effective means of fulfilling their obligations to children in emergencies beyond their own programmes, and to hold themselves accountable for the effectiveness of this modality and meeting collective targets. Often, CLAs reached a shared understanding of their mutual obligations and investments, for which a GEC memorandum of understanding template was sometimes used. It was essential for CLAs to ensure key coordination actors

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[21]   It is unknown under which circumstances one, two or more CCs are needed, or what is the ideal ratio of CC to scale of response. But most often the demand for coordination actors is barely met at the response level and there is an increasing demand for coordination actors at the local level.

were recruited, managed, retained and incentivized. It was also essential for CLAs to ensure the independence of the CC function from organizational priorities. Investing strategically in CCs while defending their independence was sometimes a difficult balancing act for CLAs. Without these investments, cluster coordination actors would not have been in place and EC/WGs could not function properly.

EC/WG functionality depended on EiE partners participating and jointly owning the mechanism. A functional EC/WG required the active participation of key EiE actors in the coordination process. Participation could be indicated by the number of partners involved in needs assessment and strategy development; by the diversity of partners involved (government actors, international and national NGOs, and UN agencies); or by the quality/degree of involvement of

key EiE actors. Ultimately, participation depended on partners perceiving an interest in their participation – for example, in terms of information, opportunities, learning, advocacy, bilateral exchanges, and shared responsibilities. This seemed to depend on an implicit understanding between the EC/WG coordination actors and partners that the body should be well coordinated and managed in such a way that partner interests were upheld and investments were balanced with benefits. Strengthened capacity and GEC support was often associated with increased participation, so a circular dynamic appeared to be at work whereby increased participation led to better coordination, which in turn led to increased participation. Without the active participation and ownership of key EiE partners, the EC/WG could not be considered fully functional.

5

RECOMMENDATIONS
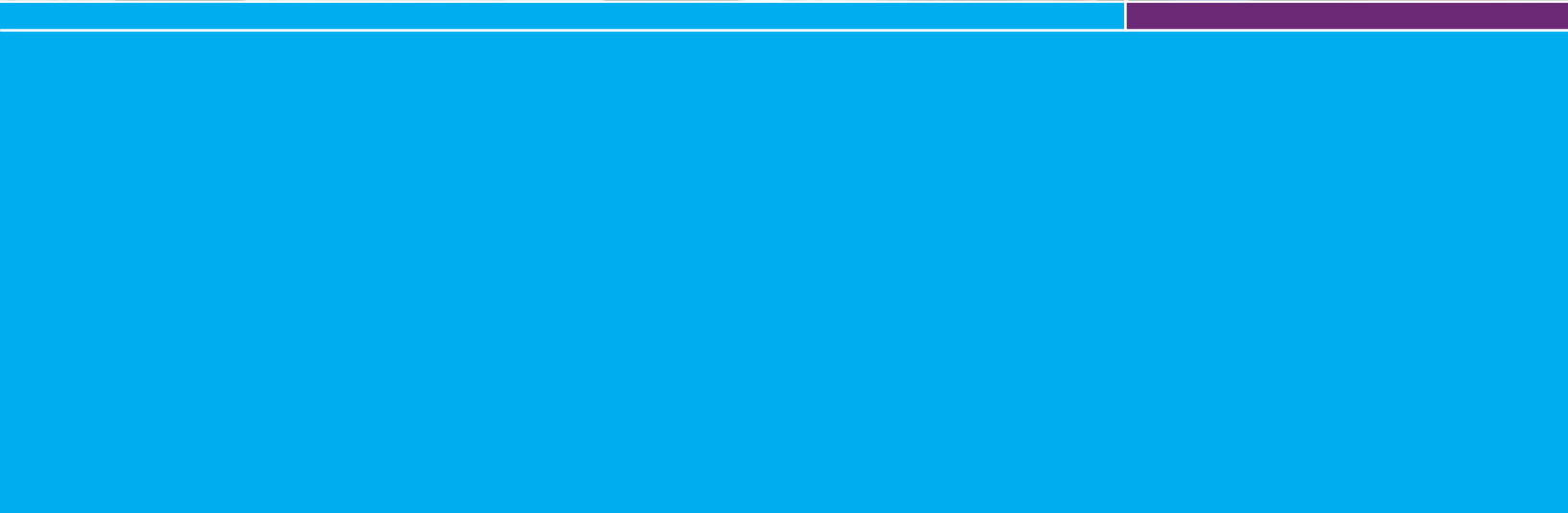
These recommendations are targeted at GEC programme designers and implementers. They were developed on the basis of evaluation findings and the outcomes of a learning workshop. At the workshop, GEC managers and key evaluation users reflected jointly on the main findings and emerging conclusions, and then each participant outlined in written form the main implications from their perspectives for future GEC capacity-building activities. These inputs were compiled and prepared as the recommendations below. As a result, these recommendations were derived directly from the lessons learned and developed by the intended users.

1. Building on results achieved during the period 2017-2019, the next GEC Action or capacity-building programme should aim more explicitly at generating outcomes, i.e. improving EiE responses. To this end, GEC programme designers should consider:

- Defining a clear intervention logic (theory of change, log frame, or programme hypothesis) to clarify how the GEC Action is expected to contribute to improved EiE responses and outcomes/impact;

- Defining short-term outcome statements (with indicators, benchmarks) in terms of EC/WG cluster coordination performance, core coordination competencies, strategy development capacities, needs assessment capacities, and/or active participation of key EiE partners;

- Defining mid-term outcome statements (with indicators, benchmarks) in terms of improved EiE responses, joint needs assessments and strategies developed across sectors and with development actors, multi-year funding and diversified/increased funding sources (potentially with DG ECHO field support);

- Managing the risk that improving EiE strategies could weaken the focus on meeting urgent needs in favour of providing basic education in protracted emergencies without an exit strategy;

- Maintaining a focus on detailed, evidence-based needs assessments, to guide targeting of people most in need of≈EiE assistance.

2. Recognizing the importance of its 'mixed support services' modality, the GEC should reinforce these with improved prioritization, packaging and sequencing. It should consider:

- Developing selection criteria to allow transparent prioritization of EC/WGs;

- Developing a 'model' package including: global/regional training of key stake-holders; remote and applied training toward developing context-specific needs assessment and/or strategy development; RRT deployment; coaching support and/or knowledge management support through the helpdesk and/or the GEC community of practice;

- Developing tailored support packages to assist specific EC/WGs, including combinations of support services that amount to a coherent whole;

- Sequencing delivery of services according to the annual HPC cycle, synchronizing assistance with EC/WG coordination processes, and limiting demands on EC/WGs.

3. **Building on the intervention logic, the GEC should develop a MEAL framework and costed MEAL plan to support accountability, learning and strategic decision-making and guide implementation.** It should consider:

- Including appropriate outcome indicators and means of informing them (e.g. evidence of change in HNO/HRPs,[22] partner numbers, CC staff grade/continuity, EiE funding levels), as well as a limited number of indicators for accountability, related to effectiveness,

efficiency and relevance. These may be linked to CLA obligations to the IASC, the UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, the GEC strategy and accountabilities to stakeholders;

- Developing an 'evidence and learning' workplan/agenda aimed at guiding decision-making and sharing of good practices. This would entail defining periodic evidence and learning opportunities to support decision-making, course-correction and risk management by the GEC and the strategic advisory group. It could include short case studies that document outcomes and real examples of improved EiE responses achieved through strengthened coordination;

- Developing a 'light touch' made-to-measure system for monitoring indicators, reflecting on progress, learning and reporting;

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22 The evaluation team in discussion with GEC experts began work on developing such indicators for the evaluation and hope these can be developed further for MEAL purposes.

- Presenting on a quarterly or biannual basis to decision-makers the progress made with regard to the MEAL plan and ensuring that the plan is adequately resourced;

- Establishing processes to update guidance and tools in line with evolving requirements (e.g. better alignment with ECW and other multi-year donors, including a more explicit gender lens, carrying out a risk analysis, and strengthening contingency planning);

- Facilitating sharing of knowledge and experience on topics of common interest or challenges raised by EC/WGs, such as AAP, engagement of local partners, working in conflict situations or with divided education authorities, localization of coordination leadership, the humanitarian-development nexus, transition/exit strategies, contingency planning.

4. Considering the importance of coordination actors and their reliance on 'strategic investments', CLAs and partners should confirm their global commitments to resourcing EC/WGs. They should consider:

- Reissuing strategic guidance for representatives and country directors to prioritize and invest in the coordinated EiE response, taking institutional responsibility for resourcing the EC/WGs, and guaranteeing the independence of the CCs and IMOs from agency pressures and programming work. There should be explicit communications designed to manage expectations around the degree to which GEC can fill all EC/WG capacity gaps, which is a responsibility of CLAs.

- Developing a joint human resources strategy to ensure the training, recruitment, retention, compensation, and development of competent coordination actors; this includes ensuring provision of IMO staff as essential to EC/WG coordination, needs assessments, partner participation.

- Managing the human resources challenges, including addressing/anticipating the rapid turnover of coordination actors and posts remaining unfilled for extended periods and developing contingency plans for sickness or absence, especially during the most important CC periods from July-December; and exploring funding opportunities to alleviate the strains that ECW engagement with EC/WGs places on coordination actors.

5. To ensure the GEC delivers efficient services and sustains achievements, the CLAs should urgently review their co-leadership responsibilities at global and country levels. They should consider:

- Providing greater clarity on roles and responsibilities, deliverables and accountabilities of UNICEF and Save the Children, including on effective implementation of GEC activities, recognizing that both UNICEF and Save the Children have IASC accountabilities as well as agency-specific commitments;

- Addressing the risk that current resourcing levels will not be sustained – and the implications on achievement of results – in view of the fact that GEC capacity-building activities remain largely funded by donors rather than CLAs.

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