

# EVALUATION REPORT

October 2020



## Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021



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Three United Nations Plaza

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# PREFACE

The 2018-2021 UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 was developed to guide the organization in implementing its mission, advocating for the protection of children's rights, their basic needs, and to help them find opportunities to reach their full potential. Global geopolitical changes and emerging threats facing children have changed the landscape and challenged the relevance of the United Nations system. The current evaluation presents an assessment of the Strategic Plan as a guiding tool, offering actionable recommendations that will inform the new Strategic Plan cycle.

This exercise was managed by the UNICEF Evaluation Office, with the support of six external senior level consultants. The evaluation followed a mixed-method approach, based on a highly consultative comprehensive data collection and analyses process at all levels of the organization, with over 100 internal and external stakeholders being interviewed and more than 200 documents being revised.

The evaluation findings show that the Strategic Plan is well regarded and used as a framework, rather than a plan. The holistic structure of the Strategic Plan gives COs the flexibility to adjust their context and national priority needs, however more needs to be done to include and represent the voices of children against any violation of child rights, and for their meaningful participation in UNICEF programming. The evaluation also presents challenges associated with the short timeframe, calling for a longer-term, phased strategic framework, with a deliberate orientation to provide strategic policy advice and vertical logic between high-level outcome indicators and CO level indicators.

Additionally, evaluation findings indicate that more emphasis on change strategies is needed, and, given the diversity of country office contexts, greater understanding of the country-specific evolution and contribution of change strategies is required. Likewise, building from the improvement of the current Strategic Plan structure, the organization should continue supporting the multisectoral approach, including the strengthening of the humanitarian and development nexus, which are critical to achieve the SDGs. These efforts need to be accompanied by funding support, particularly the type that could allow flexibility to adjust and respond to emerging threats or new national priorities.

On behalf of the Evaluation Office, I extend my appreciation to the evaluation team consisting of Jean Serge Quesnel (team leader), and senior team members Marie-Hélène Adrien; Ted Freeman; Gonzalo Hernandez Licon; Hubert Paulmer; Faith Tempest; as well as Paola Vela de la Garza Evia (research assistant). I would like to thank Tami Aritomi for managing the evaluation. Special acknowledgement goes to Kamilla Nabiyeva for providing excellent research support and to Geeta Dey for invaluable administrative support.



Particular appreciation is due to the Evaluation Reference Group and the member of the UNICEF Global Evaluation Committee, for their comments and support throughout the different phases of the evaluation process. Our gratitude also goes to all HQ, Regional Offices, and to the ten country office (Afghanistan, Argentina, India, Kazakhstan, Mali, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Africa, Syria, and Viet Nam) colleagues who participated in interviews, for their time and support coordinating interviews with external partners.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>B4R</b>	Business for Results	<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>C4D</b>	Communications for Development	<b>PD</b>	Programme Division
<b>CCCs</b>	Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies	<b>PMR</b>	Planning, Monitoring and Reporting
<b>COAR</b>	Country Office Annual Report	<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>CO</b>	Country Office	<b>RBM</b>	Results-Based Management
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document	<b>ROSA</b>	Regional Office for South Asia
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>RO</b>	Regional Office
<b>DAPM</b>	Division of Analytics, Planning and Monitoring	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>DER</b>	Development Effectiveness Review	<b>SP</b>	Strategic Plan
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director	<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>EMOPS</b>	Office of Emergency Programmes	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>EO</b>	Evaluation Office	<b>UNDS</b>	United Nations Development System
<b>EQ</b>	Evaluation Question	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>ERG</b>	Evaluation Reference Group	<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion	<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework
<b>GAP</b>	Gender Action Plan	<b>UNSDG</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
<b>GPP</b>	Global Partnership Programme	<b>UN-Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>HAC</b>	Humanitarian Action for Children	<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>HSS</b>	Health Systems Strengthening	<b>WCAR(O)</b>	West and Central Africa (Regional Office)
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview		
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation		
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa		
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review		
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization		
<b>OECD/DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee		



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background, purpose and scope

As mandated by the United Nations General Assembly, UNICEF advocates for the protection of children's rights, helps meet their basic needs and works to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. To guide the organization in implementing its mission, UNICEF has developed a Strategic Plan, 2018-2021,<sup>1</sup> which builds on lessons learned from the implementation of its previous Strategic Plans (2006-2013 and 2014-2017).

The present evaluation of the SP is the first of its kind, and was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the UNICEF [evaluation policy](#) and the [norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluations Group](#). The primary purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Assess the use of the SP as a tool for guiding UNICEF and for managing its activities;
- Facilitate learning from UNICEF experience during the SP implementation period (2018-2021); and
- Provide actionable recommendations with respect to the organization's overall strategy and strategic planning process for the upcoming strategic planning cycle.

The present evaluation of the SP should not be read as an evaluation of UNICEF performance during the period 2018-2021. It does not attempt to link the SP to specific results and, instead, attempts to assess the utility of the SP in guiding the organization over the four years of its duration. To the extent that evidence was available

on the performance of UNICEF programmes and the achievement of results in the context of the SP, this is presented in Annex 1.

The **process** was guided by an evaluation matrix using a set of five key evaluation questions, namely:

1. To what extent is the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 aligned with the UNICEF mission and the United Nations reform agenda, and to what extent does it contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?
2. To what extent is the SP fit-for-purpose in a rapidly changing world?
3. What are the lessons from the operationalization of the SP?
4. To what extent has the SP contributed to fostering partnerships and new ways of working?
5. To what extent has the SP enabled UNICEF country offices to support national priorities to achieve child-focused Sustainable Development Goals?

## Methodology

The evaluation was conducted between July 2020 and October 2020 with the support of a team of six senior external evaluation consultants. A mixed-methods approach was used, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses. This included a systematic and comprehensive review of more than

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021', E/ICEF/2017/17/Rev.1, UNICEF, New York, 2017.



210 internal and external documents and over 100 interviews with internal stakeholders and external partners.

A set of 62 country programme documents (CPDs), from 2018 onwards, were selected for deeper analyses. Additionally, ten country offices were selected for more in-depth analyses.

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at country, regional and headquarters (HQ) levels and with external partners. The evaluation was also supported by an evaluation reference group (ERG) composed of members from key HQ divisions and selected regional offices. Consultations with the global evaluation committee were held in September 2020 to validate emerging findings and refine the evidence.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This first evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan describes and acknowledges the complexities that the design of such a strategy entails for a highly complex organization such as UNICEF, in view of its dual humanitarian and development mandate and the multiple roles involved in being the United Nations agency for children.

Analysis of the SP presented the following **conclusions**:

1. Evidence indicates that the SP is well regarded and utilized as a framework, as reflected in direct feedback from CO senior management and the systematic analysis of country programming documentation. At the CO level, the SP is considered an important guiding document and a framework that defines a common narrative to rally support for accountability purposes with donors and to show concrete global results. The holistic structure of the SP gives COs the flexibility to adapt to the organization's multiple and complex roles, mandates, diverse contexts, and especially to support national priorities in coordination with other United Nations agencies under the guidance of the RC. Nevertheless, the need for balance between flexibility and organizational focus is critical to provide a collective vision in support of children.
2. The evaluation observed that more could be done to systematically (a) incorporate the voices of children and (b) represent their voices and speak out against any violation of child rights, particularly of those further left behind. The current SP did not provide the required provisions for UNICEF to act as the voice of children in all contexts, including in the operationalization of UNDS reform at the CO level. Despite being guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and covering the child-focused SDGs, the current SP fails to give enough attention to including the voices of children in the planning and operationalization processes in different contexts. This represents an important gap, especially when compared to the much clearer approach to partnering with various actors including Government, civil society organizations, private sector, and other United Nations agencies, which are clearly articulated in the change strategies of the SP.
3. The short timeframe of the SP represents a challenge for CO planning to address system changes and emerging threats to children. Evidence also indicates that the short-term period of the SP has constrained the organization's ability to have a long-term vision, which is needed to develop the resilience, development and peacebuilding components of the humanitarian-development nexus.



Interviews with CO senior management described the transaction costs of learning and using new monitoring and reporting systems with each new SP.

4. In order for a long-term strategic plan for children to be viable, a deliberate orientation to provide strategic policy advice to Governments, global and regional partners to address structural barriers, revise priorities, and better coordinate and collaborate with other United Nations agencies is clearly needed. The lack of vertical logic between higher-level outcome indicators and CO-level indicators was seen as a general weakness of the SP, supported by documentation, as well a review of indicators. In addition to the delivery of essential supplies and capacity development, UNICEF needs to enhance and prioritize the provisions of strategic policy advice to address the structural barriers to improving the well-being of children and young people.
5. An important point generally presented by COs was that the heavy burden of SP reporting requirements was not balanced by practical benefits for direct decision-making. Additionally, there is a widespread perception that the SP was largely designed to fulfil HQ needs. Although there is a general acknowledgement that the design of central planning documents such as the SP represents a challenge given the diversity of countries and regions in which UNICEF operates, incentives and systems to share lessons learned is critical. Examples from regional and sub-regional groups and inter-agency networks on evidence-sharing, technical capacity collaboration, and advocacy support should be used to guide this process. This sharing of lessons learned becomes even more relevant in the context

of UNDS reform to ensure good coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies.

6. Given the organization's good understanding of programme approaches to deal with specific issues affecting children, a strategic plan that gives more emphasis to change strategies, along with accompanying efforts to ensure the right capacities to implement them, sets the basis for the organization to be more agile, to respond to new threats to children and to understand how to collaborate better with other United Nations agencies. Even prior to the introduction of change strategies in the current SP, various examples from COs indicate growing recognition of the importance of change strategies in understanding 'how' COs successfully achieve results.
7. The diverse country contexts where UNICEF works requires not only an understanding of the different needs and corresponding national priorities, but also demand greater understanding of how to achieve priority targets, since the use and contribution of these change strategies is likely to be highly country context-specific. Relevant and country-specific monitoring and evaluation data are critical to understanding how these country-specific change strategies could improve the agility of programmatic work at country office level. This information should provide the necessary evidence to understand how to better collaborate with other United Nations agencies within the framework of the UNCT.
8. The general recognition that the attainment of the SDGs requires a holistic and multisectoral approach has been closely mirrored by an acknowledgement of the



many challenges that still exist. Despite the significant structural improvements of the current SP through its Goal Area clusters and the growing guidance on collaboration and coordination given by UNDS reform, there are still many challenges to using a multisectoral approach. These include challenges with reporting multisectoral efforts, siloed Government partnership structures, and restrictions imposed by targeted or earmarked funding. UNICEF must be aware of pressures that might move strategic planning back to more siloed approaches, both in support of country office and joint United Nations-system programming.

9. The multisectoral structure of the SP has given country offices the bases to understand and effectively design multisectoral strategies. This learning process, nevertheless, requires time and resources to achieve the proper integration into country office structures and to account for the requirement of the UNCT. Important lessons can be drawn from a variety of country contexts and Government structures, learning from country offices embracing multisectoral approaches. These lessons include significant CO structural changes in support of multisectoral approaches; strengthening CO designs of programmes across specific sectors; and the fully embracing such approaches in CPDs. These lessons should inform broader organizational efforts. Additionally, in order to achieve a organization-wide transformative multi-dimensional approach, it is critical to understand the specific structures, political will, and incentives of Government partners to embrace a multisectoral approach, as well as the complexities linked to the coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies in line with UNCT planning requirements.
10. Significant advances on gender equity have been observed across various programme areas, particularly those related to the GAP target priorities, as well as in operationalizing gender equality efforts, enabling the organization to allocate resources to these targeted priorities. As noted in the GAP evaluation, however, despite these improvements, there is still a need to improve gender equality mainstreaming in both programmes and institutional capacity and systems, and more needs to be done to align organizational efforts with current gender realities on the ground. UNICEF has the capacity to support UNCTs and regional partners with gender equality issues, taking a proactive approach, particularly in countries where UNICEF has strong capacity.
11. The SP made a positive contribution to humanitarian action by placing it as a cross-cutting priority. Simultaneously, the wider United Nations system has provided a clear division of labour in the humanitarian and emergency world. However, acknowledging that some aspects are beyond the organization's control, UNICEF faces a disconnect between its humanitarian and development work. Bottlenecks related to the separate overarching systems for humanitarian and for development programming, siloed resourcing and capacity, as well as separate monitoring and reporting systems, prevent UNICEF from achieving more effective nexus programming, particularly in countries with protracted crises.
12. The introduction of a procedure on risk-informed programming is a useful step in enhancing the UNICEF approach strengthening the humanitarian and development nexus. Political and socio-economic contextual elements have,



however, not been systematically included when developing risk-informed programming analyses, particularly for country offices working in protracted humanitarian crisis contexts. This programming analysis must be done to inform country office programming in the wider context of United Nations system coordination and collaboration. By not factoring in the economic and political context, humanitarian response may be delayed, as the risk analysis may not effectively account for some of the more severe risks for children.

13. With regard to distribution of resources, evidence reveals an allocation pattern that is highly concentrated in a small number of countries, driven in large part by humanitarian-targeted allocations. The skewness in the expense distribution has been accompanied by a smaller (than the originally planned for 2019) percentage of regular resources as a share of total resources, which has had important implications for the operationalization of the SP. It is critical for the organization to use different tools to address changes in funding needs with Member States, NatComs, individual large donors, regional and global funding networks, etc. In this connection, it is important to tailor advocacy narratives supported by evidence-based reports to answer each donor's specific requirements and those of their constituencies. Existing funding tools could be utilized to jointly advocate, requiring significant coordination with other United Nations agencies, for greater funding directed to regular resources. In addition to individual contributors, the structured funding dialogue, informed by the Funding Compact, and the the Grand Bargain agreement provide such avenues to encourage Member States to continue

their support to bring core resources for multisectoral and multiagency joint work and coordination in humanitarian action.

14. The evaluation acknowledges that the new SP is being developed in a geopolitical context in which the United Nations system in general is more vulnerable, and where the relevance of the United Nations is being challenged. This reinforces the need for United Nations agencies to partner for increased synergy. The organization's efforts and resources in supporting UNDS reform, through a flexible strategic framework that could support various country-specific national priorities in coordination with the RC, were found to be insufficient. This is much needed to enable a long-term vision that would allow for long-term planning and better coordination with other United Nations agencies, providing evidence to countries on how change strategies could better help the organization's agile response, including those related to the ongoing UNDS reform process.
15. Strengthening reporting and linking funding to multisectoral work is critical to achieving the child-focused SDGs, to overcome bottlenecks inhibiting efforts to link humanitarian and development programming, and for coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies. It is clear that trade-offs between functional and effective coordination across agencies, as well as the related management and coordination costs, must be considered while partnering for results to support UNDS reform. UNICEF could have put to greater use its comparative advantages in support of UNDS reform and promoting the organization's core mission to be the voice for the rights of all children, leaving no one behind.



This report's **recommendations** are derived from the findings and conclusions presented above. They are the result of consultations with senior management and informed by comments received during a workshop on November 2020.

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#### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Conceptualize the strategic plan as a holistic framework, reflecting the voices of children, with a limited number of priorities pitched at the outcome level along with clear paths for collaboration with other United Nations agencies.**

- UNICEF should ensure that the next plan builds on the holistic approach and flexibility gains from the current Strategic Plan. The new Plan should therefore be clearly designed as a framework that provides direction to country offices while allowing them to adapt in support of national priorities and the United Nations cooperation framework. In addition, the next strategic framework should spell out key areas of work and related results that will require a whole-of-organization approach for implementation. Consideration must be given to support collaborative mechanisms between headquarters, regional offices and country offices, as well as with other United Nations agencies, to ensure that the voices of children are included in internal and joint programming and planning, and that no child is left behind.
- Moving forward, the relevant divisions must ensure that the new strategic framework clearly identifies and promotes new change strategies on:
  - » The systematic involvement of children in programming
  - » The role of UNICEF as the voice of children and for children, in all contexts

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#### RECOMMENDATION 2:

**Develop a longer-term 2022–2030 strategy for children, with a strong focus on outcomes, allowing for flexibility to address emerging threats to children, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies.**

- The new strategic framework should adopt a long-term 2022–2030 timeframe with a phased implementation approach, aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Anchored in accelerating child-focused Sustainable Development Goals, the new strategic framework should have an outcome-level focus and logical links with country-level results, allowing for flexibility to adapt to emerging threats to children (including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic) and facilitating growing collaboration with other United Nations agencies.
- Prioritize, in the results framework and change strategies, UNICEF comparative advantages in providing critical policy advice to influence change for children and to address emerging threats that constrain the rights of children. Country programming and operations documents, including common country assessments, UNSDCFs, programme strategy notes, CPDs and related theories of change, and country programme management plans, should more explicitly include the provision of strategic policy advice to fully utilize UNICEF comparative and collaborative advantages in support of the 2030 Agenda and the overall United Nations development system reform process.
- Across all levels of the organization, reporting systems should continue to move away from incentives that lead to heavy reporting and towards a learning and exchange of evidence, both within UNICEF and with other United Nations agencies, that could inform the continued adaptation of programmes, based on:



- » Timely monitoring, strategic programme and operational reviews and real-time evaluations, with supporting technical capacity from regional offices and in coordination with the United Nations country team.
- » Sharing lessons learned and experiences within the organization, with government partners, sister United Nations agencies and other development actors, as well as with donors.

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### RECOMMENDATION 3:

#### Place equal emphasis on measuring change strategies and enablers alongside programme results.

- In operationalizing the new strategic framework, UNICEF must place equal attention on progress in programme results, change strategies and enablers. For purposes of monitoring and learning, this must be done in a manner that feeds back into the organization to strengthen its agility to respond to emerging threats to children, in coordination with other United Nations agencies.
- Change strategies and enablers must be more systematically monitored, evaluated and presented in key management documents such as the Executive Director's annual report to the Executive Board, country-level evaluations, multi-agency joint evaluations and reports, and donor and National Committee reports. This information will be critical in order to determine country-specific change strategies and enablers in support of more agile and sustainable country-level programming and better programming and planning collaboration with other United Nations agencies. To this end, responsible divisions and offices must ensure that there is adequate capacity in all contexts for better reporting, monitoring, and evidence-generation of country-specific change strategies to

improve country office agility to better support national priorities and child-focused Sustainable Development Goals in coordination with United Nations sister agencies.

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### RECOMMENDATION 4:

#### Strengthen outcome-level reporting and appropriate funding sources for a multisectoral approach.

- Building on the multisectoral approach of the current Strategic Plan Goal Area clusters, the next strategic framework must advance such multisectoral arrangements and establish relevant outcome-level indicators. These improvements should include and address the greater multisectoral complexities of joint programming, in line with United Nations country team planning requirements. UNICEF must continue to negotiate with donors to appropriately link funding sources to multisectoral programming, to encourage the organization to overcome constraining siloed approaches. Moving away from siloed approaches will contribute to the understanding of how to better enhance collaborations with relevant sister United Nations agencies.

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### RECOMMENDATION 5:

#### Reflect the organization's dual development and humanitarian mandate in the long-term strategy, overcome bottlenecks of duality in programming, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity and integrate peacebuilding processes.

- Moving forward, several steps are necessary to address the existing bottlenecks preventing more effective programming to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus:
  - » The strategic framework must ensure provisions to avoid the duality in programming, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity in support of the



achievement of the organization's dual humanitarian and development mandate in support of children.

- » Ensure resources to support flexible staff mobilization to gain the necessary work experience in humanitarian and development contexts.
- » Secure resources to finance advocacy work with donors to secure flexible and long-term funding, to ensure longer-term activities that will address the humanitarian and development nexus, with the aim of building a clear path to integrate peacebuilding into the organization's strategy.
- UNICEF must continue to support the integration of risk-informed programming linking humanitarian and development programming into country office programming and planning documents, with a focus on informing United Nations system-wide documents. Moving forward, the new strategic framework must ensure that there is adequate attention in country offices to building staff capacity, resources, and operational management support to incorporate political and economic context into the assessment of risks and opportunities to more comprehensively inform humanitarian and development nexus programming for children.

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#### RECOMMENDATION 6:

**Address the skewed distribution of resources, particularly in non-humanitarian contexts, to ensure that no one is left behind.**

- In funding negotiations and agreements with donors, responsible UNICEF divisions must prioritize addressing the skewed distribution of resources, particularly as it affects country offices in non-humanitarian contexts. UNICEF must encourage joint

advocacy efforts, with a United Nations system-wide focus aimed at allocating resources to support fundraising advocacy efforts with specific tailored narratives for different donors, with the support of National Committees and regional funding networks. Efforts should include utilizing all existing channels of negotiations, including annual donor consultations, proposal submission processes and structured funding dialogue, in coordination with other United Nations agencies.

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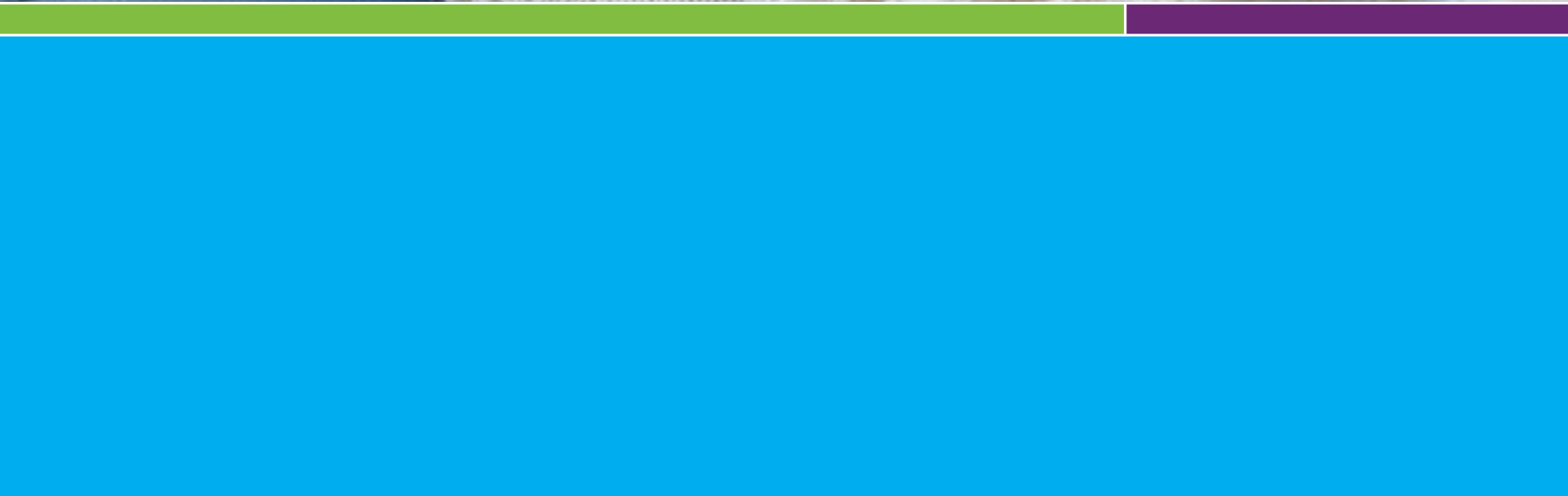
#### RECOMMENDATION 7:

**Ensure provisions to support the United Nations development system agenda while strengthening the UNICEF mission, comparative and collaborative advantages.**

- In operationalizing the next strategic framework, responsible divisions must ensure that resources are provided to continue working together with all sister United Nations agencies in the context of the United Nations development system reform. A multisectoral approach must be used in support of existing joint priorities, including data and evidence generation, climate change, gender equality, poverty eradication, and improving adolescent and maternal health, as well as other relevant areas of work that will emerge during the preparation of the next strategic framework. The new strategic framework must ensure that UNICEF collaborative advantages – including being a highly decentralized organization with a universal field presence, strong promotion of community-based mobilization and capacity-building efforts to support national partners to achieve child-focused Sustainable Development Goals – are adequately resourced and used in support of the Goals and for UNICEF to become a stronger voice for all children.



# 1 INTRODUCTION





## 1.1. Background of the evaluation

As mandated by the United Nations General Assembly, UNICEF advocates for the protection of children's rights, helps meet their basic needs and works to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. To guide the organization in implementing its mission, UNICEF has developed a Strategic Plan, 2018-2021,<sup>2</sup> which builds on lessons learned from the implementation of its previous Strategic Plans (2006-2013 and 2014-2017). The evaluation of the Strategic Plan is part of the UNICEF plan for global evaluations<sup>3</sup> endorsed by the UNICEF Executive Board in February 2018.

## 1.2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation of the SP is the first of its kind, and was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the UNICEF [evaluation policy](#) and the [norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluations Group](#). The primary purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Assess the use of the Strategic Plan as a tool for guiding UNICEF and for managing its activities;
- Facilitate learning from UNICEF experience during the SP implementation period (2018-2021); and
- Provide actionable recommendations with respect to the organization's overall strategy and strategic planning process for the upcoming strategic planning cycle.

The present evaluation of the Strategic Plan should not be read as an evaluation of UNICEF performance during the period 2018-2021. It does not attempt to link the SP to specific results and, instead, attempts to assess the utility of the SP in guiding the organization over the four years of its duration. To the extent that evidence was available on the performance of UNICEF programmes and the achievement of results in the context of the SP, this is presented in Annex 1.

The **process** was guided by an evaluation matrix using a set of five key evaluation questions, namely:

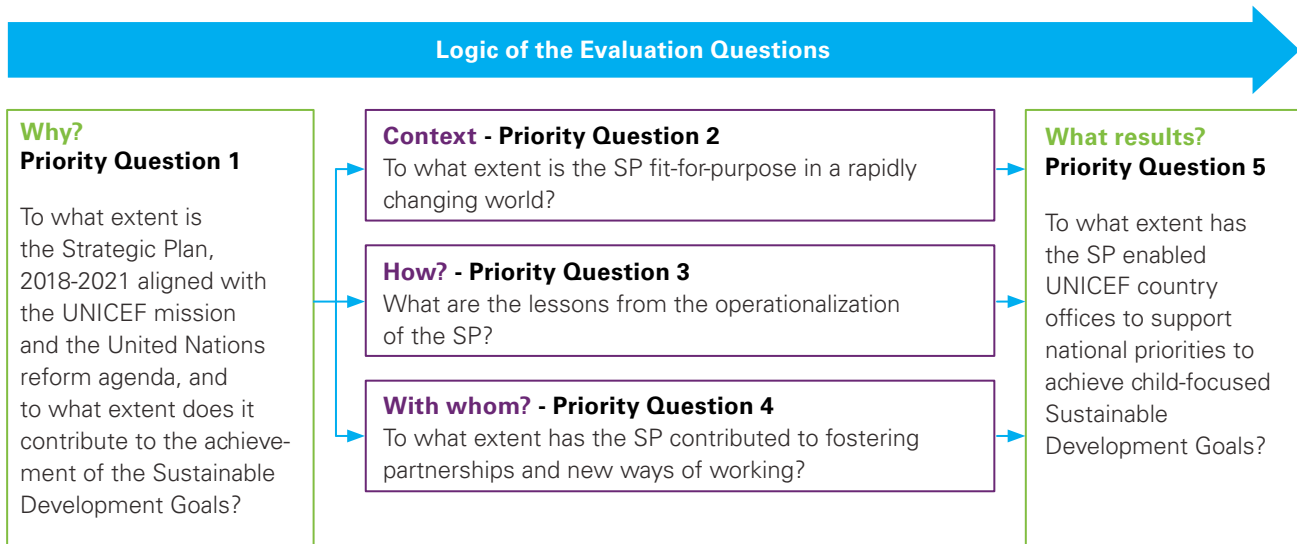
1. To what extent is the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 aligned with the UNICEF mission and the United Nations reform agenda, and to what extent does it contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?
2. To what extent is the Strategic Plan fit-for-purpose in a rapidly changing world?
3. What are the lessons from the operationalization of the Strategic Plan?
4. To what extent has the Strategic Plan contributed to fostering partnerships and new ways of working?
5. To what extent has the Strategic Plan enabled UNICEF country offices to support national priorities to achieve child-focused Sustainable Development Goals?

Figure 1 presents a schematic representation of the logic of the evaluation questions. The full set of evaluation questions are presented in Annex 2.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021', E/ICEF/2017/17/Rev.1, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Plan for Global Evaluations 2018-2021', UNICEF, New York, 2018.

**Figure 1: Logic of the evaluation questions**



The evaluation was conducted between July 2020 and October 2020 with the support of a team of six senior external evaluation consultants (see Annex 3 for the team’s bios).

A mixed-methods approach was used for the evaluation, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses. This included a systematic and comprehensive review of more than 210 internal and external documents and over 100 interviews with internal stakeholders and external partners (see Annex 4 for the full list of informants).

In addition to published estimates from the 2020 Development Effectiveness Review (DER)<sup>4</sup> and the 2020 mid-term review (MTR) of the Strategic Plan,<sup>5</sup> the evaluation utilized data on resources and expenses (updated as of July 2020) as well as external data from various sources, including UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

A set of 62 country programme documents (CPDs), from 2018 onwards, were selected for deeper analyses according to a set of criteria including regional location, country income level, progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), humanitarian context, resources spent, and the programme areas of focus (see Annex 5 for more detail on the selection criteria). Additionally, ten country offices (Afghanistan, Argentina, India, Kazakhstan, Mali, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Africa, Syria, and Viet Nam) were selected for more in-depth analyses through documentation review.

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at country, regional and headquarters (HQ) levels. In-depth interviews with country office (CO) representatives and senior level staff were conducted in the ten selected COs. External partners from United Nations agencies, resident

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘2020 Development Effectiveness Review’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Report on the Review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and Annual Report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.



coordinators (RCs), Government partners, and representatives from other development agencies were also interviewed. Directors of UNICEF National Committees were also included in the interview sample. All seven regional directors participated in the interviews, and key stakeholders at HQ level, including all Deputy Executive Directors and the Chief of Staff, from most areas of the organization were also consulted during the data-collection process. Staff from all areas of work within UNICEF Programme Division were invited to participate in four separate focus group discussions.

The evaluation design addressed four main potential limitations. The chief limitation was a highly contracted time frame, which forced the evaluation to have significant overlaps between phases so as not to lose momentum from one phase to the next (see Annex 6 for the timeline). A second limitation was the burden of documentation, challenging the team to identify the most important documents early in the process and employing a common data-extraction tool that allowed the evaluation team to examine many documents. A third challenge was the availability and early identification of key stakeholders and respondents with the most direct knowledge of the Strategic Plan. The evaluation team used a core interview guide to ensure the burden on respondents was as limited as possible. The final significant limitation was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite limited physical access to interviewees, the evaluation team was able to converse with respondents electronically.

A participatory approach was used during the evaluation process. In addition to consultation across all levels of the organization, the evaluation was supported by an evaluation reference group (ERG) composed of members from key HQ divisions and selected regional offices

(see Annex 7 for a full list of ERG members). Additionally, consultations with the global evaluation committee were held in September 2020, mid-point through the evaluation process. These consultations helped the evaluation team validate emerging findings and refine the evidence supporting the conclusions and recommendations.

### 1.3. The Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

The purpose of the strategic plan, 2018-2021, is to align the organization's resources around common goals and strategies, support its ability to make strategic choices, create more effective communication about UNICEF work for every child and strengthen the organization's accountability framework. The Strategic Plan is guided by an overarching set of conventions and principles, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Leave No One Behind principle, gender equality, coherence between humanitarian and development programming, and partnerships with Governments, private sector, civil society and within the United Nations system.

The Executive Board of UNICEF endorsed the organization's Strategic Plan at its Second Regular Session of 2017. The results framework<sup>6</sup> of the Strategic Plan sets out measurable targets and indicators, defining results for children as well as change strategies and enablers that support the achievement of results. A set of global and goal area-specific theories of change was also produced to accompany the plan (see Annex 8). In line with General Assembly resolution A/71/243 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System (QCPR), the Strategic Plan includes

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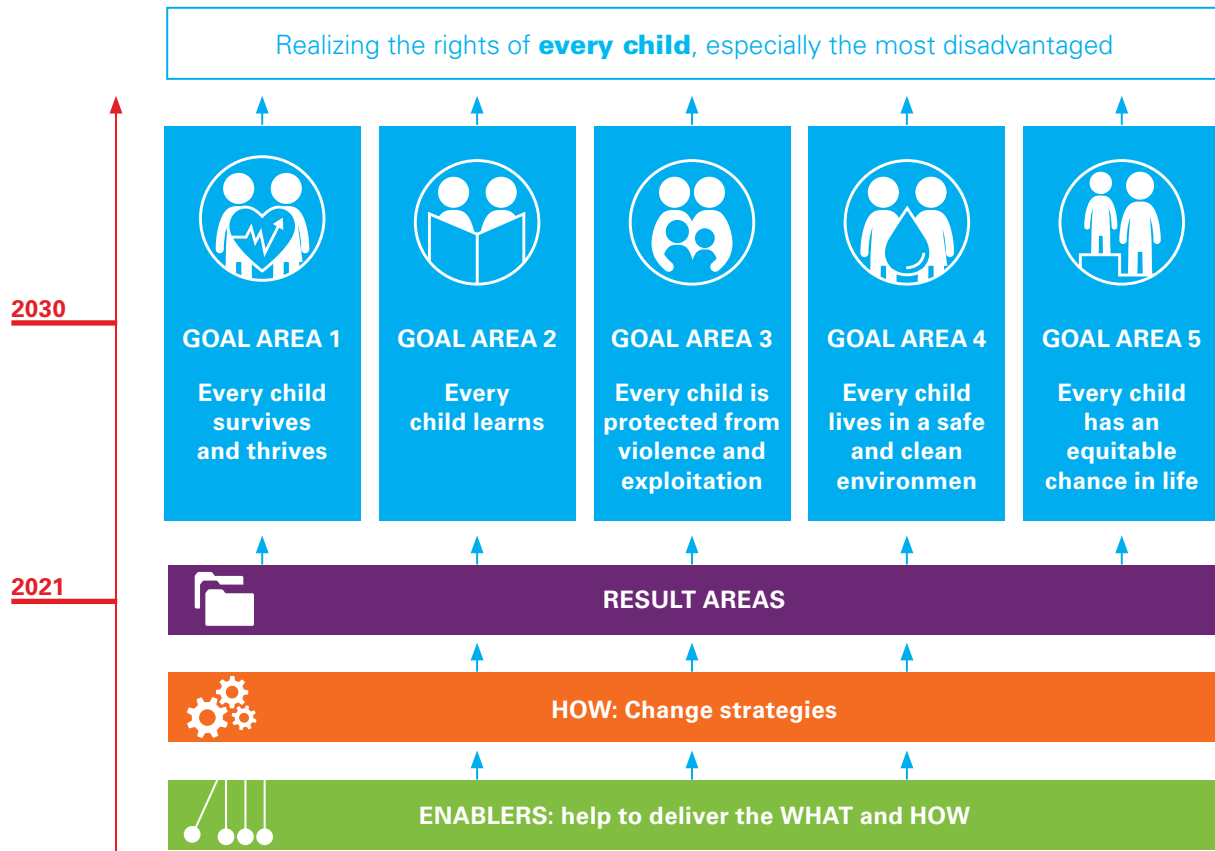
<sup>6</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Final Results Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021', E/ICEF/2017/18, UNICEF, New York, 2017.



a common chapter describing how UNICEF will work together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and emphasizing their joint commitment to support countries to achieve sustainable development.

Figure 2: Key components of the UNICEF Strategic Plan





# 2

## EVALUATION FINDINGS





This section explores the key findings of the evaluation. Findings are organized according to the original evaluation questions.

## 2.1. To what extent is the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 aligned with the UNICEF mission and the United Nations reform agenda, and to what extent does it contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?

### 2.1.1. Purpose and alignment with existing frameworks

The Strategic Plan was intended to be implemented as an overarching and strategic framework under which programme countries determine the direction and details of implementation. Decisions on programme priorities are based on national priorities, each country's situation analysis and the role of UNICEF within the United Nation Sustainable Development Country Framework (UNSDCF). In both the Strategic Plan and the theory of change document, UNICEF recognized the need for balance between, on the one hand, the rigour and specificity required to provide global strategic guidance, and on the other, the flexibility to make decisions based on context and guided by the priorities of national Governments.

The evaluation found that key stakeholders support the intention of the Strategic Plan to serve as a framework rather than a plan. Interviews included references to the Strategic Plan as a *vision*, *guiding principles*, *priorities*, the *driving focus*, the *glue* that holds the organization together, an *umbrella* under which

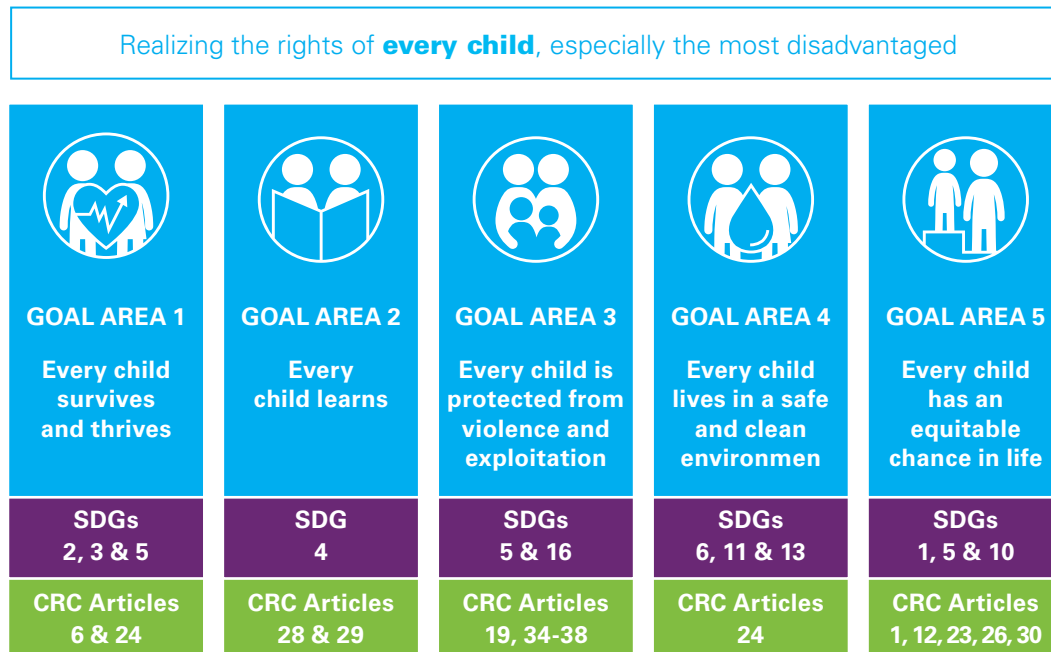
activities are undertaken, a *menu* used to choose the activities to be accomplished, among other analogies. These largely describe a Strategic Plan that has been perceived and utilized more as a framework than a plan, per se.

A framework is commonly defined as a basic structure that is less prescriptive than a plan and more open to changes, allowing for greater autonomy. Frameworks are typically more advantageous for fast-moving contexts with rapidly-changing political, economic, social and technological circumstances. In contrast, a plan is a more detailed and prescriptive proposal that sets out clear goals and specific targets. Plans are commonly shorter-term, more prescriptive, and offer a clear sense of direction. They commonly require more detailed theories of change and blueprints.

There is no doubt that in principle, the Strategic Plan is in full alignment and compliance with the UNICEF mission (see Annex 9), as well as with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Annex 10 shows a very detailed description of the linkages between the Strategic Plan and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As assessed against the UNICEF mandate, other foundational documents and international agreements and accords, the Strategic Plan was found to be highly relevant. There is a high degree of correspondence between the Strategic Plan's core and forward-looking components and the SDGs, both at the level of goals and sub-goals. Figure 3 shows the relationships between the Strategic Plan, the Convention, and the SDGs.



Figure 3: The Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, CRC and Agenda 2030



Due to its timeframe, the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 is the first UNICEF Strategic Plan to refer to Agenda 2030, emphasizing the organization’s role within the common chapter and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (now UNSDCF). Considering that the Strategic Plan is designed to drive progress made towards the achievement of the SDGs, country offices programme their plans and activities to accelerate the achievement of child-focused SDGs, aligned with national priorities, while maintaining a strong anchor in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Additionally, as noted above, in an effort to align the current Strategic Plan with the QCPR and to ensure more coherence between UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, the Strategic Plans of all four organizations included a common chapter. A recent joint evaluability assessment of the common chapter concluded that, despite the increase in joint programming being

observed across the four agencies implementing the common chapter, there is insufficient evidence that can be directly attributed to the common chapter with a high degree of certainty. The present evaluation does not address the common chapter, since such an exercise would require a joint endeavour.

As the reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS) was rolled out concurrently with the implementation of UNICEF strategic plan, no formal linkages are expected between these two documents. Nevertheless, alongside other United Nations agencies, UNICEF supports the vision and objectives of UNDS reform – that is, strengthening the collective support of the United Nations to the SDGs in order to drive better results at country and regional levels, while also improving system-wide transparency and accountability and increasing efficiencies.



## 2.2. To what extent is the Strategic Plan fit-for-purpose in a rapidly changing world?

### 2.2.1. Strategic Plan Goal Areas

The Strategic Plan Goal Areas were designed to be aligned with one or more of the child-focused SDGs. All Goal Areas were conceived to be interlinked, reflecting the integrated and cross-sectoral nature of the 2030 Agenda.

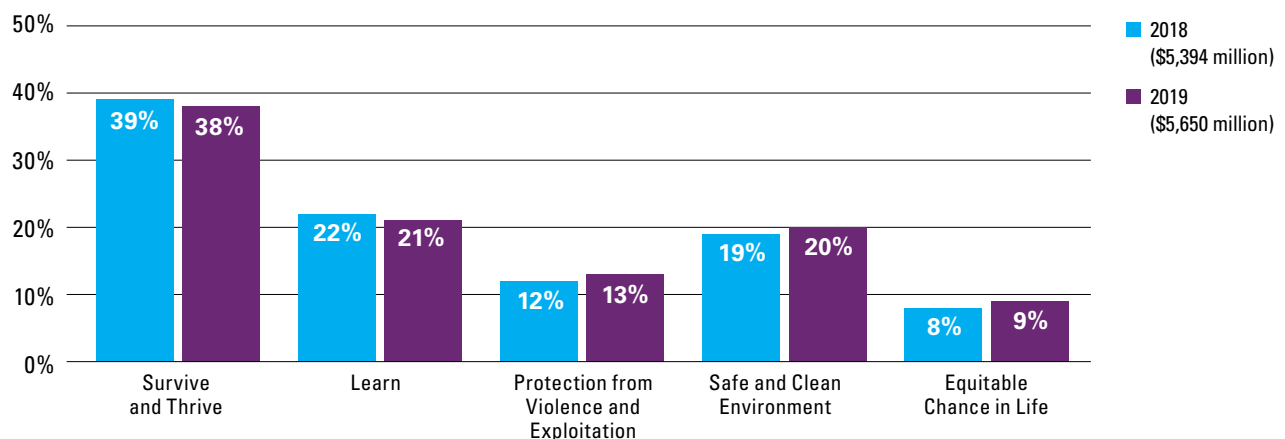
Information from systematic documentation review, as well as interviews with country offices, support the evidence that the Strategic Plan is used as a powerful organizational narrative and a broad overarching framework, fostering a common language within the organization and when engaging with external stakeholders.

The Goal Area structure of the Strategic Plan has allowed COs the flexibility to align with national priorities supporting acceleration of the SDGs, particularly focusing on the most ‘traditional’ UNICEF sectors such as health, education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The structure of the Strategic Plan was not considered by COs to present constraints to planning in support of different national priorities.

Evidence shows progress across all Goal Areas, with some showing more progress in specific result areas than others. According to the midterm review of the Strategic Plan (MTR), Goal Area 1 show progress rates of over 90 per cent across all results areas at the output level and had met or was on track to meet 79 per cent of its targets. Goal Area 2 had 73 per cent of its output targets met or close to being met and showed more than 90 per cent progress rates across all three result areas. Also, at the outcome level, Goal Area 3 had progress rates of over 90 per cent in two of the three result areas, and Goal Area 4 showed similar progress rates in four out of the five result areas. Goal Area 5 showed a progress rate of over 90 per at the output level in three of the five result areas.

In operationalizing the Strategic Plan, the distribution of expenses across Goal Areas has remained constant over time, as described in Figure 4. Goal Area 1 is the largest area of expenses, followed by Goal Area 2 and Goal Area 4. These distributions are consistent with the progress against targets described above, and are areas where UNICEF has a long tradition of programming.

**Figure 4: Distribution of expenses by Goal Area**



Source: UNICEF InSight



Despite the organization's strength in these areas and their relevance to the Goal Areas and child-focused SDGs, the attainment of the SDG requires holistic and multisectoral approaches. In recognition of this fact, the current Strategic Plan made significant improvements over its predecessors by integrating multiple sectors into each Goal Areas. However, challenges to this approach are still being reported, particularly when advancing on some goals may come at the cost of setbacks on others, creating disincentives to move away from 'silo' approaches. The interaction between economic growth and climate change is an example of this phenomenon.

### **Goal Areas and the multisectoral approach**

The current Strategic Plan represents a significant improvement in advancing multisectoral planning through its Goal Area clusters. This improvement allowed for the Strategic Plan Goal Areas to be aligned with the different programmes, country objectives and development strategies, allowing for the first step toward the achievement of the SDGs. At the country level, most Voluntary National Reviews present some type of alignment between SDGs and country priorities. However, alignment is not enough.

The 2030 Agenda goes beyond individual SDGs; development is about interactions between goals and targets. The SDGs present complex synergies and trade-offs. All goals are important, and therefore cross-sectoral strategies are crucial for accelerating the 2030 Agenda. In recognition of this, the Strategic Plan underlines the importance of the interactions between goals, targets and sectors in its first change strategy, which aims to foster "cross-sectoral and multisectoral programming that responds holistically to children's needs and to the environments in which they grow up"<sup>7</sup>

Almost all CPDs developed during the current Strategic Plan cycle refer to multisectoral strategies for achieving results, describing multisectoral programming while acknowledging the complexities of each country's siloed Government structures. The Strategic Plan Goal Area clustering has guided COs to increase multisectoral programming (consistent with findings from the MTR) and has contributed to positive cultural change when talking about convergence. Although there is not enough evidence to conclusively attribute this trend to the Strategic Plan, the organization seems to be making progress at the strategic and operational levels, both in principle and in practice. This multisectoral approach is necessary both to achieve the SDGs and to continue supporting the UNDS reform process.

Several barriers were shared during interviews, referencing issues such as how to properly monitor and report on multisectoral work (for accountability purposes), the need to better link funding to specific multisectoral initiatives, and the lack of evidence to fully understand and effectively design multisectoral strategies, both for country offices and HQ.

For many COs, this has been an ongoing learning process requiring time and resource investments to properly introduce multisectoral approaches. Country office teams that have successfully integrated multisectoral practices into their work are particularly proud of this convergence. Examples of country offices offering good practices on multisectoral approaches to WASH include Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Syria and India. Kazakhstan has adopted innovative multisectoral approaches to mental health, and Mali has fully embraced a cross-sectoral CPD.

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021.



Another good and innovative example of cross-sectoral work is seen in Peru CO. Three years ago, UNICEF in Peru restructured the CO away from a traditional model assigning area-specific responsibilities to a management matrix-model in which three new national officials working in specific territories would hold multisectoral responsibilities. This enabled the CO to address cross-sectoral strategies from within, addressing work on adolescence and early child development under this approach. However, recent leadership changes disrupted the cross-sectoral momentum, underlining the importance of management attitudes and Government capacities in successfully implementing multisectoral approaches.

### Leave no one behind

Although progress has been made toward SDG targets, millions of children live in countries where the full realization of their basic rights remains out of reach. The 2030 Agenda has placed equity at its centre by promising to “leave no one behind”, and this commitment is reflected in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, particularly through its approach to gender-responsive programming, humanitarian action and results for children with disabilities, among other areas. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving no child behind has become an even bigger challenge. Household income, educational attainment, health services and security for children have all been compromised by the pandemic.

There has been progress in a number of countries toward gathering the data required for effective programming to ensure no child is left behind. In countries with relatively good disaggregated data, COs jointly with Government partners and donors are able to identify and respond to the needs of children living in extremely poor households, children belonging to vulnerable groups, and children at a disadvantage.

In countries with data limitations, this challenge is more acute. Some Governments, particularly those facing humanitarian crises, are not able to collect disaggregated data. Evidence from a number of recent evaluations in humanitarian contexts consistently report a lack of disaggregated data. This makes the targeting the most vulnerable children and meeting their needs a challenge.

However, perhaps the biggest challenge for COs in their efforts to ensure no child is left behind relates to the trade-offs and tensions between reaching the most vulnerable and achieving results at scale – a finding consistent with the MTR. Being efficient with donor money implies reaching the greatest possible number of children. Reaching the most vulnerable is, however, often more resource-intensive. These objectives are inherently in tension with one another, and achieving the right balance between them is challenging, particularly in the light of resource constraints at CO level. The dilemma is often particularly acute in humanitarian contexts.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Annual Report on UNICEF Humanitarian Action’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.



## 2.2.2. Cross-cutting priorities

In addition to the five Goal Areas, the Strategic Plan includes two “cross-cutting priorities” that are integrated into everything UNICEF does, namely humanitarian action and gender equality. This was a key innovation of the Strategic Plan and was designed to encourage the organization to view humanitarian action and gender equality not as standalone areas, but as integral to UNICEF work across all sectors and in all contexts. Recent evaluations have shown evidence of significant improvements in both cross-cutting priorities.

### Humanitarian action

Humanitarian action has always been a significant aspect of organization’s work, but the current Strategic Plan is the first to identify humanitarian action as a cross-cutting priority. Recent evidence from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) shows a growth in the number of humanitarian crises, making this inclusion particularly relevant.<sup>9</sup> The Strategic Plan notes three priorities for UNICEF humanitarian action, namely: enhancing risk-informed programming, supporting national preparedness and risk assessment, and advocacy for risk reduction in development and [national] sector plans. Additionally, as part of UNDS reform, UNICEF commits to supporting more agile data-collection in fragile and humanitarian situations.

Within the overall framework of the Strategic Plan, the organization’s strategic and operational approach to humanitarian action is set out in the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs). The CCCs were

revised in 2020 to reflect the significant changes in the humanitarian landscape over the last ten years. The CCCs establish benchmarks against which UNICEF “holds itself accountable for the coverage, quality and equity of its humanitarian action and advocacy.”<sup>10</sup> The CCCs include both the principles to be applied in UNICEF humanitarian action, as well as specific operational considerations to be taken into account when undertaking humanitarian action at country level. They contain specific programme commitments and benchmarks in the sectors in which UNICEF works (health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, child protection, education, WASH, social protection), as well as cross-sectoral commitments regarding gender equality, disability, early childhood development, and adolescent development and participation.

Given the nature of humanitarian crises and the varying needs from year to year, it is difficult to make a comparison of reported results from one year to the next, or from the previous Strategic Plan to the current one. The organization’s annual results reports for humanitarian action provide and account of progress against the commitments in the CCCs. The data companion and scorecard to the MTR<sup>11</sup> show absolute numbers of children reached in many of the results for humanitarian action.

Several reviews and evaluations have noted the problems that this type of reporting brings. On the one hand, the figures themselves may be inaccurate. More fundamentally, the use of coverage data tends to push UNICEF offices to value coverage over quality. In the context of humanitarian situations, a key aspect of quality is reaching those in greatest need, who may also be the hardest to reach. The MTR notes the difficulties UNICEF still faces

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Global Humanitarian Overview’, OCHA, New York, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action’, UNICEF, New York, 2020, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Data Companion and Scorecard to the Report on the Midterm Review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and Annual Report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.



in finding the balance between reaching the greatest number and reaching those in greatest need. Other reviews have noted the tensions between principled access and UNICEF work with Governments when principled access may mean working in areas controlled by non-state actors. This calls for UNICEF to be clearer on its stance in such circumstances.

In all facets of programming in UNICEF, there are separate processes for development programming and humanitarian action – including in areas such as the programming process, funding and resource mobilization, as well as monitoring and reporting. Those structural issues are not all within the organization’s control; much of it is based on the need for consistency with and contributions to inter-agency processes. However, such distinctions limit the influence of the Strategic Plan in UNICEF humanitarian action.

In conducting interviews at the country level, the evaluation found some evidence to suggest that incorporating humanitarian action as a cross-cutting priority has been beneficial to some COs by ensuring it is integrated across the country programme, rather than being ‘squeezed’ between other aspects of the programme. It is perhaps telling that these reports were most likely to be observed in country and regional offices dealing with protracted crises. The UNICEF Humanitarian Review noted that the mainstreaming of humanitarian action in the Strategic Plan is difficult to apply at the country level because it requires context-specific adaptations and flexibility.<sup>12</sup>

## Gender equality

Enhancing gender equality has been a core part of UNICEF work for many years and a feature of the organization’s strategic planning documents since at least 1998, and over time, there has been more effort to integrate gender equality into all of the organization’s work. The current Strategic Plan articulates these normative and programmatic commitments in several ways:

- Gender equality is a cross-cutting priority, with gender-related results integrated into each of the Goal Areas;
- Goal Area 5 identifies specific actions to address discriminatory policies as well as socialization processes that define gender roles and practices (although many of these are addressed through sector-specific programmes such as early childhood education);
- Gender-responsive programming is a change strategy in the Strategic Plan.

In the common chapter, UNICEF commits to working in collaboration with others to make progress on common indicators on gender equality and women’s empowerment. One of these modalities is the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which sets out common measures of progress in gender-related work and mainstreaming of gender.

In 2014, UNICEF developed its Gender Action Plan, 2014-2017, which focused on improving UNICEF capacity to mainstream gender equality and enhance gender equality programming. Its successor, the Gender Action Plan, 2018-2021 (GAP) was developed concurrently with the

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, Humanitarian review - findings and recommendations: Strengthening UNICEF’s humanitarian action (forthcoming).. The forthcoming evaluation of the humanitarian and development nexus will shed more light on how humanitarian action as cross cutting priority has contributed to improvements in humanitarian results.



present Strategic Plan.<sup>13</sup> The Gender Action Plan continues to follow the twin-track approach of improving UNICEF institutional capacity and integrating gender results in programmes, with specific efforts to empower adolescent girls. The Strategic Plan notes that the GAP articulates the main strategies through which Strategic Plan results related to gender will be achieved.

The recently-completed evaluation of the GAP shows important advances in UNICEF work on gender equality. In particular, significant advances relating to gender have been observed across various programme areas, particularly in GAP-targeted priorities, and in operationalizing gender equality efforts.

Evidence from the DER supports these findings, describing important contributions to gender equality across Goal Areas 2, 3, 4 and 5. Evidence also shows a significant improvement in the percentage of evaluations reporting improvements towards gender equality, from 48 per cent in the 2016 report to 58 per cent in the most recent 2020 report.

Nevertheless, the GAP evaluation also indicates that challenges to gender mainstreaming remain, including limited comprehensive integration of gender equality within programmes, institutional capacity and systems. Additionally, the evaluation concluded that although UNICEF had the capacity to support United Nations Country Team (UNCT) or regional partners with gender equality issues, the organization has not taken a proactive approach, particularly in countries where UNICEF has a stronger presence and greater capacity compared to other United Nations or development agencies.

### 2.2.3. Change strategies

Another key innovation of the Strategic Plan was the definition of “change strategies” addressing the ways in which (the “how”) UNICEF will achieve results for children. Whereas the previous Strategic Plan outlined seven “implementation strategies”, the current Strategic Plan identifies eight change strategies and four “organizational enablers”.<sup>14</sup> See box 1 for a clear description of each change strategies.

Overall, evidence indicates that, particularly at the field level, the eight change strategies have provided useful guidance to COs on how to support national priorities. Country offices have reinforced strategies for building national capacity, strengthening systems, promoting community engagement, generating evidence for policy advocacy, and monitoring and reporting, among many others. Annex 11 presents a set of lessons learned from WASH initiatives from various country offices and the COVID 19 pandemic response. In addition, box 2 presents several examples of countries using the change strategies to support organizational agility in pursuit of the SDGs.

Although it is difficult to directly attribute these achievements solely to the Strategic Plan, it is important to acknowledge that, even when faced with challenges, COs have been actively using the Strategic Plan change strategies (even prior to their clear introduction in the current Strategic Plan, as described in the 2020 DER analyses) to quickly adapt to changes in support of the realization of all children’s rights. These examples provide some understanding of how COs relate to the current Strategic Plan through the use of its change strategies.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018-2021’, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> The fifth organizational enabler was not included in the full analysis as it was not part of the original set of enablers.



### Box 1: Elements included in the change strategies of the Strategic Plan

Change Strategy	Elements
Programming for at-scale results for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster cross-sectoral and multisectoral programming</li> <li>• Support policy, capacity development and systems strengthening at both national and subnational levels</li> <li>• Human-rights based approach</li> <li>• Enhance coherence and connectedness between humanitarian action and longer-term programming and build responsive programming with partners to support preparedness, increase recovery and build resilience against future shocks</li> <li>• Engage with communities to promote behaviour change, increase demand for quality services and support social norms that contribute to the realization of child rights</li> <li>• Promote cooperation, share lessons learned and best practices and foster innovation among countries and across regions</li> </ul>
Gender-responsive programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen gender-responsive programming in all areas of UNICEF work</li> <li>• Deepen focus on empowering disadvantaged adolescent girls</li> <li>• Improve the capacity of country offices</li> </ul>
Winning support for the cause of children from decision makers and the wider public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become an even stronger advocacy, campaigning, fundraising and communications force for children</li> <li>• Increase base of supporters to 115 million people willing to volunteer, advocate and donate resources</li> <li>• Support children and young people as agents of change</li> </ul>
Develop and leverage resources and partnerships for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage resources and partnerships for children</li> <li>• Mobilize resources and fundraising for UNICEF from Governments and the private sector</li> <li>• Explore new areas for growth</li> </ul>
Harnessing the power of business and markets for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepen partnerships in the private sector</li> <li>• Influence global and local markets for children</li> </ul>
United Nations working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively with United Nations partners globally and nationally</li> <li>• Increase alignment with national Government priorities and plans</li> <li>• Work with other United Nations agencies on six priorities: eradicating poverty; addressing climate change; improving adolescent and maternal health; achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; ensuring greater availability and use of disaggregated data to address inequity; and emphasizing the contribution development makes to peacebuilding, sustaining peace and building resilience</li> </ul>
Fostering innovations for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the use of new technologies</li> <li>• Identify and scale up the most promising programme innovations</li> </ul>
Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate, synthesize and promote the use of evaluations, research and data about child well-being to catalyse change for the most vulnerable children</li> <li>• Leverage new and existing partnerships to generate more robust research, disaggregated data and analysis</li> <li>• Increase the availability of disaggregated data on child-focused SDG indicators</li> </ul>



## Box 2: Examples of the use of change strategies to improve organizational agility

### Nicaragua

The Government of Nicaragua designed and implemented *Programa Amor* to benefit children with special needs. The programme's evaluation described the limited existing disaggregated data. Empowered by the “harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children” change strategy, the Nicaraguan CO responded by supporting data collection efforts that will improve the programme design to reach the most left behind children in the country.

The Nicaragua CO has also been working with the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit on estimating public investment for the SDGs, guided by the “developing and leveraging resources and partnerships” change strategy. The joint planning process will allow the Government of Nicaragua and UNICEF to know the total resources the Government is allocating to achieve the SDGs by 2021. This type of exercise not only accelerates progress made towards the SDGs and national goals, but also contributes to Government partners ‘owning’ the 2030 Agenda.

### Mali

Following the change strategy to “foster innovation for children”, Mali CO used an innovative approach to plan its CPD. Adopting a totally cross-sectoral life cycle approach aimed at accelerating progress made towards the SDGs, Mali CO addressed children's needs through an integrated package of services and interventions.

### Argentina

The use of change strategies “developing and leveraging resources and partnerships” and “fostering innovation for children” has been successful in Argentina CO. Using a successful fundraising strategy, Argentina CO was able to scale up programme work on innovative areas such as adolescent health and malnutrition, especially referring to obesity. The UNICEF Argentina CPD introduced an innovative approach to adolescent health, including pregnancy and suicide prevention. Under its child and adolescent health and well-being component, the programme focuses on “improving adolescents’ school attendance and learning achievement, preventing early pregnancy, promoting an environment free from violence, supporting health and well-being and facilitating participation and empowerment”. The programme contributes to the reduction of adolescent pregnancy and suicide and infant and maternal mortality in the most disadvantaged populations, as well as the prevalence of child and adolescent obesity and other risk factors linked to non-communicable diseases.

More evidence is certainly needed to understand how specific change strategies directly improve the organization's agility in responding to new or emerging threats to children, given the diversity of contexts in which UNICEF works. There was, particularly from country offices and HQ, a call for guidance on how to effectively implement the change strategies to programme around certain emerging development areas such as climate change and mental health.

Also noted was the imbalance in emphasis in the Strategic Plan between the Goal Areas (the ‘what’) and the change strategies and enablers (the ‘how’). Given the relatively good understanding of programme approaches to deal with specific issues facing children, it may be the case that an Strategic Plan which gives more emphasis to the utility of change strategies and on efforts to ensure the organization has the right capacities will be more likely to lead to the agility that the organization seeks.



## 2.3. What are the lessons from the operationalization of the Strategic Plan?

### 2.3.1. Country programme document: Operationalization plan

While the Strategic Plan provides overall strategic guidance, it is not a plan as such. In a decentralized organization such as UNICEF, the key planning framework at country level is the country programme, which is developed in collaboration with the national Government and in coordination with the UNCT, but timed to a cycle that does not necessarily correspond with the Strategic Plan timeframe. As a result, the Strategic Plan does not 'hierarchically dictate' what the country programme will contain.

Senior management at the CO level consistently indicated that the Strategic Plan was a good framework for preparing their CPDs, which allowed the organization to identify priorities globally while giving sufficient space for COs to work, in coordination with UNCTs, to align national priorities to the country-relevant SDGs. These views were also reflected in the analysis of CPDs, where different COs focused their planning to specific Goal Areas and their respective child-focused SDGs.

Country offices operationalize the Strategic Plan and the country programme through their CPDs. Focusing on a sub-set of 62 CPDs approved during the current Strategic Plan timeframe, relevant Strategic Plan aspects were analysed through explicit mentions of the strategic plan, the SDGs, holistic and cross-sectoral programming, gender, children's rights, risk-informed programming, and their response to national priorities (see Annex 12 for a more detailed description). This information was triangulated with information from interviews with country

office stakeholders and external partners who support UNICEF operations at country level. The analysis was further enriched by an extensive documentation review, which included the review of CPDs, country office annual reports, program strategy notes, situation analyses and country programme management plans.

The evaluation found that country offices vary in their use of the Strategic Plan to guide their programming, partly due to differing timing cycles. Under current UNICEF procedures, COs commonly design a five-year CPD in collaboration with national Government counterparts and in direct coordination with the UNCT. As such, these programmes have a longer duration than the Strategic Plan, which lasts for four years. Country offices with 'off-cycle' CPDs – meaning those that were approved during the last year of the currently ongoing Strategic Plan – find themselves aligning their existing and ongoing programme and indicator reporting strategy with the current Strategic Plan, or, alternatively, 'in the spirit of' the upcoming Strategic Plan, rather than using the Strategic Plan as a guide to design their programme. This has implications for the relevance of the Strategic Plan in informing the content of such CPDs.

As to the overarching goal in the Strategic Plan, when it comes to accelerating results toward the SDGs, only half of the countries in the sample explicitly detail at least some of the SDGs their programme will address. The other half of the sample mention an overall alignment of the CPD with the SDGs. Based on this evidence, it is clear that CPDs whose development coincides with the Strategic Plan are more likely to make reference to the Strategic Plan, implying a stronger influence of the strategy.



### 2.3.2. Cross-cutting priorities: Humanitarian action and gender equality

#### Humanitarian action

At the start of each year, the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal estimates funding needs based on ongoing and past crises. Table 1 below gives an overview of HAC appeals over the last five years.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, there are many factors influencing humanitarian fundraising. While in absolute terms funding of humanitarian action globally increased between 2009 and 2018, it continues to fall short of global needs, with humanitarian response plans experiencing a consistent shortfall of between 35 and 40 per cent.<sup>16</sup> Table 1 above shows that UNICEF funding of humanitarian action is no exception, with funding increasing year on year but with a shortfall of around 50 per cent each year. This shortfall has not changed significantly since the launch of the current Strategic Plan. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the Strategic Plan had either a positive or negative effect on humanitarian fundraising.

The relatively effective fundraising for the COVID-19 pandemic HAC appeal may be the result of a coherent and effective advocacy strategy. A recent landscape analysis to support the review of UNICEF humanitarian action,<sup>17</sup> acknowledging previous assessments and Executive Board reports, notes that the quality of humanitarian funding continues to be problematic, with conditional and short-term funding constraining UNICEF humanitarian action. The review also notes that emergency preparedness is hampered by limited funding, with implications for achievement of Strategic Plan results in this area.

While the Strategic Plan notes the need for UNICEF to have appropriate capacity, including to respond to humanitarian situations, much of the focus of reporting is on surge capacity. As with the indicators of coverage of humanitarian action, reports on the number of staff deployed through surge arrangements provide a limited picture, and do not convey whether the capacity was enough to address the need.

**Table 1: UNICEF appeals for humanitarian action for children**

Year	HAC initial appeal (\$ billion)	HAC appeal by end of year (\$ billion)	HAC contributions (\$ billion)	Funding gap
2016	2.8	3.2	1.6	50%
2017	3.3	3.8	2.7	28%**
2018	3.6	3.8	2.0	46%
2019	3.9	4.1	2.0	50%
2020	4.2	6.3*	n/a	

Source: Annual reports on UNICEF humanitarian action 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

NOTES: \*as of October 2020; the main increase is the HAC appeal for COVID-19 pandemic, at \$1.9 billion. As of October 2020, that appeal had a 27% funding gap.

\*\*due to a different approach to reporting (carrying over resources received in the previous year) this figure may be artificially low.

<sup>15</sup> Sources: Annual reports on UNICEF humanitarian action 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Schenkenberg, E. and Velina Stoianova, 'Light Landscape Analysis to Support UNICEF Humanitarian Action Review', UNICEF, New York, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, Humanitarian review - findings and recommendations: Strengthening UNICEF's humanitarian action (forthcoming).



An important dimension of humanitarian capacity is leadership, and this was identified by the humanitarian review<sup>18</sup> as an important limitation to the organization's humanitarian response. The review notes that there are insufficient leaders with the right skills, qualities and expertise. This in turn gives rise to variability in the organization's response to humanitarian situations. In addition, earlier evaluation evidence<sup>19</sup> suggests that limited understanding by UNICEF staff of humanitarian principles had led to examples of compromises on some of those principles. Clearly, if UNICEF is to fulfil the objectives for humanitarian action set out in the Strategic Plan, it will need to support greater internal capacity.

The revised CCCs do have a roll-out plan, including significant efforts to ensure organization-wide awareness of the CCC obligations, with a mandatory policy for staff with organizational and managerial commitments and for partnerships as a tool to discuss mutual accountabilities with external partners.

The Strategic Plan emphasizes the use of risk-informed programming as a key approach to enhancing the link between humanitarian and development programming. Guidance on risk-informed programming was launched in early 2018, initially as an addition to existing country programme guidance, but in 2019 an official procedure was issued by Programme Division on 'Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming', which included, *inter alia*, the requirement for all COs to adopt risk-informed programming over the next two years.

The 2020 data companion and scorecard to the Executive Director's annual report notes that 37 per cent of COs met organizational

benchmarks on implementing risk-informed programming in 2018, and 41 per cent in 2019. A review of CPDs for the period 2018-2020 undertaken for the present evaluation shows comparable figures for 2020 (33 per cent), but also noted that in some cases there is a conflation between enterprise risk management (i.e. the risk to UNICEF and its programme implementation) and risk-informed programming (the likelihood of shocks or stresses impacting children's rights in the country).

Despite important advances on risk-informed programming, a more comprehensive contextual view is critical to improve the risk analyses. A recent review of the UNICEF response in Venezuela noted the need to include analysis related to the political and economic context in the risk analysis for decision-making. The review indicated that the humanitarian response in Venezuela was partially delayed because of this omission. Views from the field reinforced this conclusion, arguing that that by not incorporating a more comprehensive approach, factoring in the economic and political contexts, humanitarian responses could be delayed, as the risk analysis would not effectively anticipate the deteriorating conditions for children. Given the complexity of these situations, a broader 'whole-of-organization' approach is needed which includes the necessary technical capacity to comprehend the complexity and scale of these contexts.<sup>20</sup>

## Gender equality

The inclusion of gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in the Strategic Plan was in line with the organization's prior efforts to integrate gender into programming, as per the introduction of the first and second GAPs.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Evaluation of the Coverage and Quality of the UNICEF Humanitarian Response in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies', UNICEF, New York, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Review of the UNICEF L2 Response in Venezuela', UNICEF, New York, 2020.



Gender equality was explicitly included across all Goal Areas clusters, along the line of the GAP targeted priority areas.

The trend analysis included in the DER report presents the progress made towards including gender in programming, with 107 countries including one or more gender result in their programming by 2019, an increase of six since 2018 and 15 since 2017. According to a composite measure of gender integration, 83 COs out of 128 met the organizational standard in 2019.<sup>21</sup> More recent evidence, from the data companion and scorecard to the Executive Director's annual report for both 2018 and 2019, reports good progress (more than 90 per cent of all output indicators in each specific result area) in all programme results that have integrated gender.

The GAP evaluation also found that at country level, programmatic approaches in the priority areas and the integrated programming areas of the GAP had generally improved.<sup>22</sup> Additional progress was reported in the percentage of COs undertaking gender programmatic reviews from, 11 per cent in 2016 to 43 per cent in 2018. There was, however, less progress in integrating gender equality into CPDs and programme strategy notes, with only 37 per cent of COs complying, and gender integration in humanitarian situations, where the evaluation found that humanitarian action lacked a focus on gender equality beyond "equal participation of women and men in programming".

### 2.3.3. Resource mobilization and expenses

The current Strategic Plan did not set out to radically alter the means by which UNICEF mobilizes and allocates financial resources (through

budgeting and programme planning at global, regional and country levels). At the same time, it is important to understand how resources are mobilized and allocated in UNICEF in order to understand the financial foundation of UNICEF programming and the means of turning the Strategic Plan into action.

Unlike some other United Nations bodies, UNICEF is responsible for mobilizing most of its financial resources from voluntary contributions from Governments, inter-organizational arrangements, global programme partnerships, private organizations and individuals. In 2019, these sources provided 97 per cent of the \$6.4 billion available to UNICEF. The remaining three per cent was generated by interest income (\$117 million), procurement services for partners (\$50 million), warehouse goods transfers (\$7 million), miscellaneous activities (\$23 million) and royalties and sales of greeting cards and other products (\$5 million).<sup>23</sup>

#### Resources at the global level

Resources provided to UNICEF are categorized for budgeting and allocation purposes into three basic categories. "Regular resources" represent non-earmarked or 'core funds'. "Other resources, regular" are earmarked to a greater or lesser extent and largely used in development programming, while "other resources, emergency" are earmarked for humanitarian responses. The first two years of the Strategic Plan were characterized by steady growth in the overall level of financial resources available to UNICEF but a decline in regular resources.

While total income for UNICEF rose by six per cent in 2019 when compared to the first year of the Strategic Plan, regular income fell by almost four per cent.

<sup>21</sup> The composite measure includes institutional accountability benchmarks that track gender analysis, the integration of gender priority results, monitoring, resourcing, capacity, and accountability.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan', UNICEF, New York, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Strategic Plan: Updated financial estimates 2020-2023', UNICEF, New York, 2020.



**Table 2: UNICEF income by category, 2018 and 2019 in millions**

Income Category	2018	2019	Change	% Change
Regular resources	1,422	1,371	-51	-4%
Other resources (regular)	2,591	2,995	404	16%
Other resources (emergency)	2,046	2,034	-12	-0.6%
Total income	6,059	6,400	341	6%

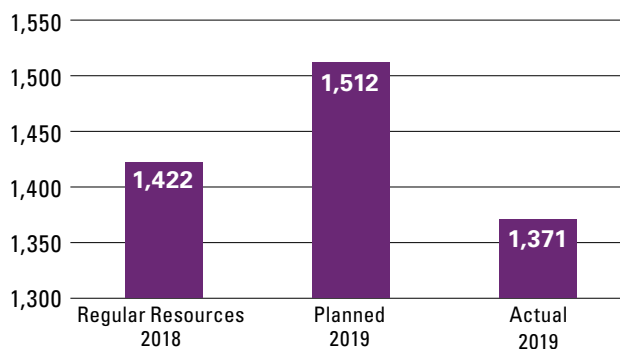
Source: UNICEF, UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates, 2020-2023, 2020.

This has important implications for UNICEF and the operationalization of the Strategic Plan because regular resources are the only category that is not earmarked and thus able to be allocated internally (although with important restrictions as noted below).

The decline in regular resources is even more noteworthy when compared to planned levels of income. The original financial framework for the Strategic Plan assumed a six per cent increase in regular resources, from \$1,422 million dollars in 2018 to a planned \$1,512 million in 2019. Nevertheless, the observed 2019 actual regular resources were \$141 million less than what was originally planned (\$1,371 million).

There are two general categories of contributors to UNICEF regular resources, namely Governments and the private sector. The latter includes, among other sources, contributions from individuals raised through the work of UNICEF national committees, individual pledges, and key influencers and high net-worth individuals. Regular resources provided by Governments fell just \$3 million short of projections for 2019 (\$519 million versus a planned \$522 million). In contrast, contributions of regular resources from private sector sources fell short of the planned amount by \$168 million. The total shortfall in planned regular resources was only \$141 million because of actual other income in 2019 exceeding the estimated amount by \$27 million.

**Figure 5: Actual regular resources available in 2019 compared to planned (in millions)**



Source: UNICEF, UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates, 2020-2023, 2020.

Evidence suggests that the shortfall in regular resources derived from private sector sources reflects under-investment in fundraising and the difficult environment for raising funds from businesses, foundations and individuals.<sup>24</sup> In addition, unfavourable exchange rates in most markets, a rise in nationalism (with Governments focusing on domestic rather than international issues), and some NatComs being affected by reputation crises, were also presented in the recently-published private sector situation analysis.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Report on the Mid-term Review of the Integrated Budget, 2018-2021’, UNICEF, New York, 2020, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Situation Analysis of UNICEF’s Work with the Private Sector’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.



The significant shortfall in actual versus planned regular resources available to UNICEF represents a real challenge to operationalizing the Strategic Plan. These reductions become even more troubling in the context of United Nations system-wide funding restrictions and their impact on the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Nevertheless, existing funding tools are in place, involving significant coordination with other United Nations agencies, which could be utilized to advocate for greater funding directed to regular resources. In addition to individual contributors, the structured funding dialogue, informed by the Funding Compact, provides one such avenue to encourage Member States to continue their support to bring core resources for multisectoral and multiagency joint work to the originally-committed to 30 per cent by 2023. Similarly, important commitments to provide humanitarian funding to national responders, more un-earmarked money, an increase in multi-year funding, and support to the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General for greater coordination in humanitarian action, among others, are also reflected in the Grand Bargain agreement.<sup>26</sup>

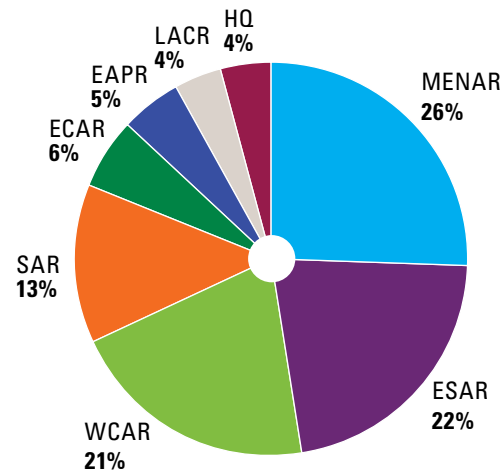
These different funding opportunities reflect different areas of interest of diverse Member States, NatComs, individual large donors, regional and global funding networks, etc. Well-tailored advocacy narratives supported by evidence-based reports to answer each donor's specific requirements and those of their constituencies are necessary to inform, engage, and gain the support of this diverse set of donors.

### Expenses at the global level

Overall, the distribution of expenses by category of resources has remained relatively constant over the past three years. Regular resources

(flexible core resources) account for around 18 per cent (constant throughout the 2018-2020 period); other resources, regular (resources earmarked but flexible to some degree) range from 46 per cent in 2018 to 44 per cent in 2020, and other resources, emergency (resources earmarked specifically humanitarian situations) between 37 per cent in 2018 to 38 per cent in 2020 of the total expenses. The distribution across regional offices has also remained relatively constant over the same period of time, as shown in figure 6.

**Figure 6: UNICEF expenses, by regional office 2018-2020**



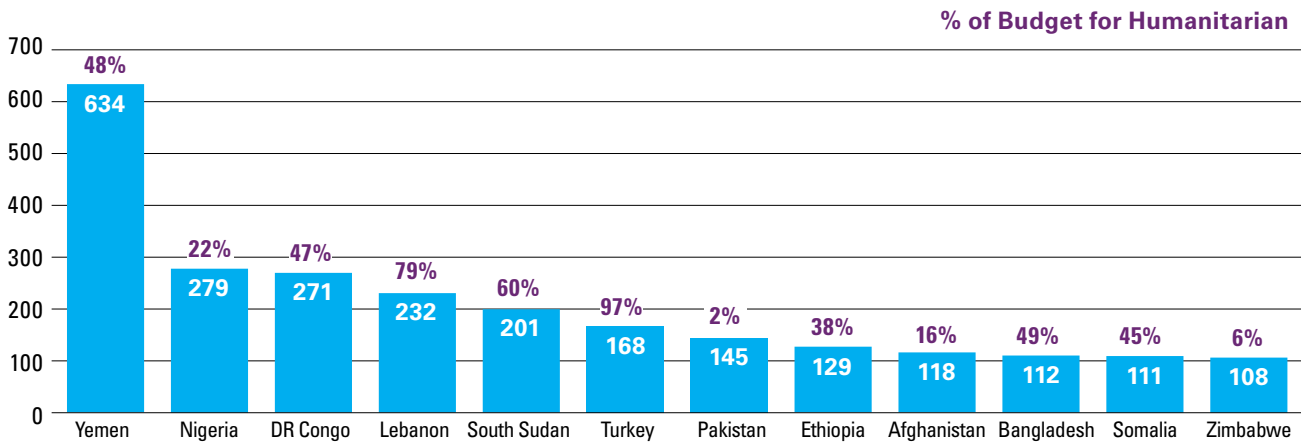
Source: UNICEF InSight

The allocation of resources across COs, meanwhile, has been consistently concentrated on a small number of countries with either very large programmes and/or very significant emergency operations. In 2019, for example, a small number of country offices spent over \$100 million (per country office). Of those, five (Yemen, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon and South Sudan) accounted for a total of \$1.6 billion in expenses (see figure 7).

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Implementation of UNICEF's Procedure on Linking Humanitarian Action and Development Programming', New York, 2020.



Figure 7: UNICEF expenses in countries in excess of \$100 million, 2019



Source: UNICEF InSight

A major driver of how UNICEF resources are allocated in large-scale humanitarian responses is the very high degree of earmarking of other resources (emergency). Evidence indicates that, despite the recent increase in innovative funding approaches and greater engagement from other development actors, some disconnect at the field level on practical implementations and bottlenecks is also acknowledged.<sup>27</sup>

These findings are also reflected in the fact that, despite the significantly larger allocation of resources and expenses observed in these country offices, expenses across the different Goal Areas do not seem to mirror the potential existing needs of children in these countries. Indeed, figure 7 shows that Yemen and Nigeria are the only two countries that have resources allocated across all five Goal Areas. With the exceptions of Yemen, Lebanon, Turkey and Bangladesh, country offices appear to allocate the largest proportions of expenses toward Goal Area 1, 'survive and thrive', leaving fewer resources to support activities in the other Goal Areas. This evidence is consistent with findings from the evaluation of UNICEF work on

the humanitarian-development nexus, which expresses concerns about silos in result progress reporting and funding allocation that prevent a full implementation of the HD nexus.

Further analyses of the five top-spending countries and five other randomly-selected countries examined the relationship between expenses at country level and development needs. A set of various indicators (including on multidimensional poverty, gender disparity, access to basic water and sanitation, violence, child marriage, and primary and secondary education) was used as a proxy for need for development support within each goal area, and evidence indicates that expenses were not well correlated with country needs. That finding is consistent with information from country offices suggesting that expenses on specific programme areas were largely dependent upon resources mobilized at the country office level through specific agreements with donors; in other words, expenses were more opportunistic than strategic. More detailed information on these analyses is presented in Annex 13.

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF, Linking Humanitarian Action and Development Programming.



### 2.3.4. Change strategies

#### Programming at scale

##### *Cross-sector and multisector programming*

Estimates from the MTR suggest that 77 per cent of COs monitor the implementation of cross-sectoral strategies, exceeding the milestone set for 2019 (74 per cent).<sup>28</sup> This represents an important improvement, as the absence of a multisectoral approach to programme design was highlighted in the DER report as an issue. A number of evaluations have highlighted the need to support multisectoral work and involve more partners in programming, particularly now in the context of the current UNDS reform process and the global economic and public health crises.

Interviews support these findings, showing that COs embrace the idea of multisectoral programming in principle. Importantly, they recognize that addressing emerging issues such as early childhood development, climate change, adolescents, urbanization, and the environment requires a multisectoral approach and cannot be addressed by a single sector or even a single United Nations agency. In practice, however, the success of multisectoral programming is currently dependent on a number of factors, including individual personalities and mindsets on the ground.

Country offices feel that UNICEF still functions in silos, and a paradigm shift is required in order for resources to be allocated in a multisectoral manner. Despite improvements compared to its predecessor, the Strategic Plan is still perceived as not fully multisectoral, particularly at the RO and HQ levels. These issues are an even larger challenge when it comes to applying a multisectoral approach to joint work with other United Nations agencies.

Additionally, the vertical structure of Programme Division affects efforts to promote multisectoral work. There is no clarity on accountability for multisectoral programming results. Also, the vertical allocation of resources through the Strategic Plan provides certain sectors with targeted funding, leading many country representatives to focus on and leverage those sectors.

Interviews highlighted that this siloed approach hampers the organization's ability, both individually and in coordination with other United Nations agencies, to support national priorities and the achievement of the SDGs. For example, in nutrition, strong results are seen at country level, with Strategic Plan overall results achieving targets. However, SDG achievement remains off track because of the high dependence on many other factors outside the realm of nutrition programming and beyond the control of the organization itself.

Member States have recognized the multisectoral nature of the SDGs and are pushing for a more intersectoral and interagency approach to achieving children's rights. However, greater support to appropriately link funding sources to multisectoral programming is critical to encourage the organization to overcome these constraining siloed approaches. Government support is also critical to achieving a multisectoral approach in support of national priorities and the SDGs.

In humanitarian action, in particular, there is continued donor hesitation to translate their commitment to support multisectoral efforts into the kind of funding that would enable such linkages. Humanitarian donors and other development agencies, particularly the World Bank, are increasingly willing to engage in multisectoral programming and provide flexible funding to services such as health services and

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF, MTR Data Companion and Scorecard.



schools. However, further progress is required. The Structured Funding Dialogue, informed by the Funding Compact, provides one such avenue to encourage Member States to continue their support to bring core resources to the originally committed 30 per cent by 2023.

Another constraint is the tendency for Government partners to operate in silos of their own. This makes it much more challenging to work in a cross-sectoral manner, since the Government partners with which UNICEF works hand-in-glove are themselves operating in individual sectors and allocating their budgets accordingly.

### *Policy, capacity development and systems strengthening*

Evidence on system strengthening and service delivery indicates that 77 per cent of COs have an evidence-based system-strengthening strategy, significantly higher than the milestone set for 2019 (55 per cent) and 2021 (65 per cent).<sup>29</sup>

A clear example is the UNICEF approach to health system strengthening (HSS).<sup>30</sup> The formative evaluation of HSS in 2018 highlighted that the organization's transition to HSS would be complex and challenging to achieve.<sup>31</sup> Funding streams, strong Government positions, and UNICEF emergency response accountabilities can push the organization to offer direct support rather than adopt a system-strengthening approach. The HSS evaluation found a few examples that show UNICEF effectively using the HSS approach for development results. Results, nevertheless, are mixed, particularly on questions of sustainability, scalability and replication. In addition, evidence suggests that the lack of

available data and evidence limited CO capacity to make evidence-based decisions; rather, such decisions were driven by political priorities. At the country level, progress is being made with integration of HSS in CPDs, and several training courses have taken place in Melbourne to increase the number of HSS-trained health section chiefs.

Overall, establishing programming differentiation based on country typology will allow for better programme footprints, planning and results reporting. For example, in upper-middle-income countries, health programmes are about policy advocacy and addressing strategic gaps rather than delivery and capacity development in humanitarian and low-income country contexts. However, more up-to date contextual understanding is needed, as many countries' needs (developmental, economic and basic needs) have changed as a result of the COVID 19 crisis.

### *Coherence and connectedness between humanitarian action and longer-term programming*

Despite efforts to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus in recent years, there is still room for UNICEF to develop a more coherent and systematic programming approach in the field. Despite evidence from the Strategic Plan MTR indicating that UNICEF has exceeded its 2019 milestones in four of the six indicators under this change strategy, the report concluded that COs in fragile situations are still at significant risk of not meeting their SDG targets and Strategic Plan targets across all goal areas.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, MTR Data Companion and Scorecard.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'The UNICEF Health Systems Strengthening Approach', UNICEF, New York, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Programming in Health Systems Strengthening: A formative evaluation', UNICEF, New York, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Report on the Midterm Review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 and Annual Report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF', UNICEF, New York, 2020.



Evidence from the recent humanitarian review<sup>33</sup> highlighted that the organization plans humanitarian and development programming separately, using different processes and schedules. Staff are separated into development and humanitarian professionals in programmatic siloes, and there are limited links. Not enough is invested in using pre-disaster development to enhance emergency responses or make development gains from humanitarian action. These are clear factors creating bottleneck to the operationalization of the humanitarian-development nexus.

Despite the organization's new procedure on "linking humanitarian and development," there is a lack of clarity on implementing it in practice. There is considerable variation in the interpretation of the procedures at CO level, and it primarily relies on individual understanding and personalities of those on the ground. As well, UNICEF still lacks integrated humanitarian and development planning, monitoring and reporting. At the same time, linking humanitarian and development programming requires flexibility and context-specific adaptation. In some cases, it may be inappropriate or not feasible. In other cases, the two components may have competing demands.

Interviews supported these findings, highlighting that having humanitarian action as a cross-cutting area was a positive step toward linking humanitarian and development programming, permitting flexibility in shifting resources and for emergency preparedness. Nevertheless, despite its cross-cutting nature and the efforts to integrate humanitarian action through a multi-sectoral approach, there were some cases where no specific staff or capacity was allocated to emergency response, which was problematic when emergencies actually struck. Evidence also indicates that much of humanitarian response

is still focused on service delivery, which could impede longer-term development and resilience. These two observed scenarios show that moving away from silos is critical if the existing humanitarian action and development programming linkages are to be strengthened.

There are also obvious external constraints. The instability inherent in humanitarian crises makes long-term planning and programming difficult. Lack of Government control over some areas presents practical challenges to linking humanitarian programming to broader national strategies. Additionally, development donors may hesitate to fund longer-term approaches in highly politicized environments, especially where this involves working with partners that are deemed to be party to a conflict.

#### *Engagement with communities*

According to the 2020 MTR of the Strategic Plan, despite a significant increase from the baseline of 16 per cent in 2017, only 31 per cent of COs routinely engage children in their planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. While this means the 2019 target of 30 per cent has been achieved, this modest figure is cause for concern, given the organization's target of 60 per cent by 2021. As the primary global advocate for children's rights, UNICEF should be at the forefront of promoting child participation and ensuring that the voices of all children are heard.

Strategically, community engagement sits at the nexus of community systems strengthening, accountability to affected populations and communications for development (C4D). As of 2019, UNICEF had only one indicator measuring C4D, and performance has fallen short of the milestone for 2019 and is only at 50 per cent of the 2021 target.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> UNICEF, Humanitarian review - findings and recommendations: Strengthening UNICEF's humanitarian action (forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> UNICEF MTR.



The DER highlighted that strong convergence between UNICEF-supported programmes and activities and the needs of target group members is often grounded in strong dialogue with communities. Examples include consultations with community leaders before establishing family centres in Palestine, direct consultations with parents in Benin, and joint planning with Mali community members. A few evaluations also pointed to the use of community-level data (sometimes from baseline studies) to effectively target poor and vulnerable households and individuals (e.g. Indonesia, Eswatini and Haiti).

UNICEF has also increased its systematic engagement with religious leaders and faith-based communities as central influencers at the community level, and C4D has played a key role in identifying and promoting positive social norms (such as the engagement of fathers in childcare) and discouraging harmful practices (such as open defecation or child marriage).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the recently-published “Minimum quality standards and indicators in community engagement” document aims at providing global guidance on the contribution of community engagement in both development and humanitarian action.<sup>36</sup>

### Gender-responsive programming

Even prior to the introduction of gender-responsive programming as a change strategy in the Strategic Plan, the trend analysis presented in the DER report shows a significant improvement in promoting gender equality from a low baseline in 2012, which could be largely attributed to the Strategic Plan and the GAP.

The analysis indicates that coverage of gender equity was only moderate in 2012, with 47 per cent of evaluations reporting positive findings. The 2020 DER report, meanwhile, indicates that 58 per cent of evaluations reported positive findings on UNICEF gender equity performance. Similarly, more recent evidence from the MTR data companion and scorecard shows progress in gender-responsive UNICEF programming at country level. The percentage of country offices that conducted gender analyses as part of their CPD development process increased from a baseline of 39 per cent to 55 per cent in 2019, moving closer to the target of 77 per cent by 2021. A similar pattern is observed for the percentage of country offices that meet organizational standards on gender mainstreaming in programme implementation, from a baseline of 53 per cent in 2017 to 62 per cent in 2019.<sup>37</sup>



<sup>35</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Communication for Development (C4D): Advancing positive social and behaviour change - global annual results reports, 2019’, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators in Community Engagement’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, MTR Data Companion and Scorecard.



The evaluation of the GAP supports these findings, reporting strong to moderate progress in strengthening the organization's enabling environment to generate result for gender equality. These improvements can be directly attributed to the Strategic Plan and the supporting programmatic guidance from the GAP, particularly in the five targeted priorities. There is, however, strong acknowledgement that efforts to stimulate gender equality-related activities that support gender mainstreaming across the organization remain limited. Additionally, despite the significant efforts to increase programme and institutional capacity and systems, more needs to be done to align organizational priorities with current gender realities on the ground.

Considerable progress was noted in building internal capacity through architecture, systems and staffing focusing on gender equality at the country and regional levels. Particular highlights included the establishment of a dedicated gender unit at headquarters and recruitment of gender specialists at country level with the specific role of mainstreaming gender.

Furthermore, UNICEF reporting on implementation of the QCPR for 2019 notes that "the UNICEF base gender architecture at headquarters and in the regional offices is fully resourced and functional", with 166 gender focal points in 119 COs, compared with 117 offices in 2018. Additionally, there were 18 gender specialists at the regional and headquarters levels and 30 at the country level.

However, the GAP evaluation also noted structural and financial limitations that potentially hamper the impact of this additional capacity. At country level, gender staff have limited resources to support mainstreaming, and their influence draws from the willingness of other programme staff to engage, rather than mandatory gender-related

processes such as gender reviews of key programme implementation documents. These constraints are more challenging in smaller offices where there is a gender focal point rather than a dedicated staff member.

In country offices with gender specialists, the evaluation noted a risk of the gender specialist being assumed to be responsible for gender equality. At HQ, the evaluation notes that locating the gender unit within Programme Division has reduced the scope for influence on corporate-level processes including strategic planning and decision-making, leading to the acceptance of the recommendation to have a matrix management arrangement for gender oversight to programme and management functions. The evaluation also noted that although there have been improvements in monitoring of institutional performance on the GAP, there are still technical challenges.

### **Winning support for the cause of children and the wider public**

As noted in the Strategic Plan, winning support for children's rights has remained a key priority for UNICEF. The organization increased its base of supporters to 96 million in 2019 (target of 67.2 million).<sup>38</sup> The data companion of the MTR reports that the percentage of countries that have changed child-focused policies are a result of UNICEF-led advocacy campaign and related programme strategies increased from a baseline of 77 per cent in 2017 to 92 per cent in 2018, but later fell to 87 per cent in 2019. Additional efforts are needed to achieve the revised 90 per cent target by 2021.

Evidence on staff capacities indicates the increased importance of engaging with children and adolescents as change agents. Ongoing efforts to strengthen staff capacity to engage young people and their communities

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



in ways that are respectful of local cultures, while ensuring the meaningful and safe participation of vulnerable groups, are key.<sup>39</sup> In addition, lessons can be learned from implementing partners on how to interactions with young beneficiaries in a safe way, in accordance with global protocols. UNICEF will also need to develop new ways of measuring its interactions with young people, who are now reachable by digital means.

Although the Strategic Plan confirms the importance of engaging with civil society organizations (CSOs), this commitment does not fully reflect the growing importance of civil society movements (as opposed to more structured civil society organizations) in the advocacy space. Engaging effectively with such movements will require different ways of partnering, something the organization is perhaps less familiar with. Interviewees also noted the growing importance of social media and their role in mobilizing supporters for advocacy and protests in rapidly-forming and rapidly-evolving social movements. These social movements are often led by youth and involve issues that are closely aligned with UNICEF Goal Areas. Indeed, the potential to accelerate results through advocacy is particularly high around issues such as climate change, education and humanitarian action.

### **Developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children**

As noted in the MTR,<sup>40</sup> UNICEF has been quite successful in the implementation of this change strategy. Since 2018, UNICEF partnerships with regional and multilateral organizations and international financial institutions yielded \$401 million in funding, a 300 per cent increase from 2018. Contributions from the global partnerships programme (GPP) recorded 19 per cent annualized growth, while 83 per cent of COs

implemented advocacy plans to leverage domestic resources, vastly exceeding the 56 per cent milestone for 2019. Contributions from corporate partners increased from \$134 million in 2018 to \$155 million in 2019.

Considering these achievements, evidence suggest that the Strategic Plan was, overall, a helpful framework guiding UNICEF in leveraging resources for the Plan's five Goal Areas. However, the Strategic Plan was not as helpful in enabling resource mobilization for newer global initiatives (such as climate change or adolescent mental health). Exceptions were observed, such as the case of Argentina CO, which used innovative funding methods to successfully finance adolescent mental health, a new area of work.

Some concerns were voiced that senior leadership was focusing support and greater resources on reaching out to corporate partners, at the expense outreach efforts to individual UNICEF donors, who represent a significant source of regular resources.

A consensus emerged from interviews that leveraging resources will continue to be more challenging in the current geopolitical context and even more crucial for UNICEF in the 2020-2030 Decade of Action, which will require acceleration and scaling for results. Additional concerns were raised regarding various ways to better recognize and support the work of National Committees in support of the Goal Areas and change strategies, including outside the field of resource mobilization.

### **Harnessing the power of business and markets for children**

As per the MTR lessons learned document, UNICEF partnerships with the private sector have expanded, allowing UNICEF to leverage resources and broaden and deepen its reach,

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<sup>39</sup> MTR, paragraph 17.

<sup>40</sup> MTR, paragraph 96.



influence, knowledge and effectiveness, to increase the relevance of shared-value approach for businesses engagement, and to strengthen private sector commitments to uphold children's rights.<sup>41</sup>

Globally, UNICEF has harnessed business in several ways:

- Resource mobilization: Income from businesses increased from \$134 million in 2018 to \$155 million in 2019.
- Procurement of goods and services: UNICEF procured \$3.826 billion in supplies and services from over 11,000 businesses across 172 countries, achieving a savings of \$363.3 million through strategic procurement approaches, \$93.3 million more than the 2019 milestone of \$270 million.
- Fundraising, advocacy, good business practices: UNICEF maximized the power of business and markets for children in 2019, as 136 country offices and National Committees, compared with 73 in 2018, engaged with over 18,000 businesses worldwide on fundraising, advocacy, good business practices and support through core assets, reaching an estimated 15 million children worldwide in 2019.
- Guidance and tools: To address uneven capacities that have limited the effectiveness of private sector partnerships and to avoid reputational risks, UNICEF has taken steps to support COs with guidance and tools, in line with child rights and business principles, on building partnerships with different entities.

Evidence shows that the Strategic Plan and its results framework have been robust platforms for partnering with the private sector and for being accountable for doing so. Additionally,

the guidance and directions provided by the Strategic Plan to partner with the private sector were amplified under the leadership of the new Executive Director (ED), who provided a renewed impetus for UNICEF to engage with businesses. From the onset of her tenure, the ED gave increased importance to working with the private sector, with a special focus on partnering with the full ecosystem of businesses and the full supply chain (e.g. business sustainability initiatives or organizations, investors, shareholders, workers), aiming at a "whole-of-UNICEF approach to business", to make UNICEF more aware, agile and ready to maximize results for children.

In this context, there was wide consensus<sup>42</sup> recognizing that the recently-launched 'Business for Results' (B4R) initiative is showing encouraging results and contributing to all Strategic Plan change strategies, most specifically to Change Strategy 4 (develop and leverage resources and partnerships for children) and Change Strategy 5 (harness the power of business and markets for children). By repositioning businesses as key stakeholders in the UNICEF agenda for children (as elaborated in the Strategic Plan), B4R aims to mainstream business engagements in all operations toward achieving the Strategic Plan goals and objectives. Building on the generic Strategic Plan definition of "private sector", B4R is now promoting different ways through which UNICEF can engage with business.

Rollout of B4R is unfolding and respondents as well as countries are encouraged by the uptake at the country level. There was wide consensus among respondents that the next Strategic Plan should maintain the path established by B4R and not change direction, as they feel there is strong momentum and that changing strategy or focus would affect that momentum.

<sup>41</sup> MTR, paragraph 16.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews suggest that Business for Results workshops have been well received.



However, some considerations that emerged from evidence collected during the evaluation indicate a need to align expectations and results to the ambition of B4R. Although it will take time to see results, implementing B4R is an important organizational transformation that will require a cultural shift, the creation of systems, and staff capacities building – all three of which are time-intensive. Expected results, targets and indicators in the results framework of the next Strategic Plan must reflect that. A significant strategic shift is required to advance UNICEF engagement with the business sector.

Evidence also indicated that COs will need guidance on creating shared value, and that it will be challenging. Business for results goes beyond engaging with businesses for financial support and for corporate social responsibility purposes. Rather, it entails partnering with the aim of creating shared value partnerships,<sup>43</sup> and seeking engagement on the values, culture and policies of businesses (for example, on child labour). As confirmed by interview data, forming shared value partnerships with businesses may prove challenging for UNICEF in terms of getting results quickly, and is an area where the next Strategic Plan will need to provide more guidance.

Additionally, although it may prove challenging, there is need to hold businesses accountable. As such, there will be merit in reflecting on the type of indicators required to hold businesses accountable for respecting the various principles that underpin the UNICEF rights-based approach to programming.

Finally, sustained investment is required to continue mainstreaming partnerships with businesses; continuing to increase staff awareness

and capacities in managing the potential risks inherent in partnering with businesses (reputational risk, institutional risk, conflict of interest, inconsistency with UNICEF programmatic and advocacy efforts; risks associated with industry sector; managing business expectations on quick results; increased public scrutiny; financial risk).<sup>44</sup>



### United Nations working together

Overall, as evidenced by multiple reports, UNICEF has engaged significantly with other United Nations agencies under the current Strategic Plan. The 2020 report on the implementation of the QCPR indicates that UNICEF remains fully committed to the reform of the United Nations development system and has demonstrated a strong capacity to engage in and support partnerships within the United Nations.<sup>45</sup> The report further stresses that, during the Strategic Plan period, UNICEF has carried out numerous critical adjustments to processes, policies and structures in line with the reform and has strengthened its partnerships with other

<sup>43</sup> Creating shared value (CSV) involves working with businesses to create a win-win partnership that is of value to both society and business. United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Advocacy with Business Toolkit’, UNICEF, New York, 2020, p.5.

<sup>44</sup> Advocacy with Business Toolkit.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Report on the Implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations Development System: Executive Board Annual Session 2020’, UNICEF, New York, 2020.



United Nations entities at the global and field levels.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the MTR report summarizes many of the results achieved by UNICEF through its partnerships with other United Nations agencies under the Strategic Plan.



The new Strategic Plan is being developed in a geopolitical context in which the relevance of the United Nations system is being challenged, thus reinforcing the need for United Nations agencies to partner for increased synergy. At a broad level, evidence from interviews suggest that, given the central and synergistic roles of the UNDS reform and the QCPR, the new UNICEF Strategic Plan will need to be anchored in these two initiatives and their implications for delivering programme and services toward the SDGs.

As the current UNICEF Strategic Plan was implemented prior to the initiation of UNDS reform, the evaluation did not expect to find indicators explicitly measuring the contribution of the Strategic Plan to the progress of UNDS reform. In line with the QCPR, the Strategic Plan did however introduce output-level indicators that capture joint programming and coordination.

These include the number of country team results groups co-led or led by UNICEF, the percentage of country offices that are engaged in joint programming, and contributions in cash and in-kind provided to the resident coordinator system.<sup>47</sup>

Important progress has been made in several areas of relevant to UNDS reform, including the UNSDCF, the Management Accountability Framework, Funding Compact progress and joint SDG fund engagement. The 2020 UNICEF Information note on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system presents description of the observed growth and progress in joint programming and joint evaluations, reporting and monitoring systems (such as mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support and country-focused data and reporting in support to RC offices), and shared business operations and premises, among others (largely accelerated by the COVID 19 pandemic). The same information note indicates, however, that the engagement on normative issues (i.e. the child rights agenda) with other UNCT members is an area that UNICEF needs to further explore. A similar concern was reflected from stakeholder interviews, particularly from field offices, regarding the need to protect and promote the UNICEF mission as the children's organization.

Additionally, country offices highlighted the need to better use UNICEF collaborative advantages in support of the UNDS reform process. In particular, COs noted the organization's decentralized nature and almost universal field presence at the country level, as well as its prominent role with Government and private sector partners.

<sup>46</sup> MTR, paragraphs 82-92, pp.19-20, 29.

<sup>47</sup> SP final results framework.



Evidence also reveals some of the trade-offs to consider in aiming to achieve results efficiently while partnering for results in support of United Nations reform. While functional and effective coordination between agencies can increase effectiveness, it may also increase management and coordination costs. The MTR lessons learned<sup>48</sup> noted that the most effective and efficient efforts are those that recognize and integrate the strengths and mandates of each agency. Also noted are management reporting structure costs, with CO representatives presently having a dual accountability to the UNICEF Regional Director and to the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations.

There is an indisputable need to jointly monitor, report on and assess the contribution of joint engagements to higher-level results, and progress has been made in this regard, particularly during the COVID 19 pandemic response. However, there is still an urgent need for more coordinated work. The evaluability assessment of the common chapter shows the need for a logic results framework that captures the contribution of such joint programme initiatives. UNICEF, jointly with the other UN agencies committed to the common chapter, have been working on mapping a tracking framework to be utilized for the remaining period of the Strategic Plan.

In addition, evidence from country offices indicates that specific-sector guidance in joint programme delivery is needed, notably in the refugee context, to understand how UNICEF work complements UNHCR when it comes to education, sanitation and nutrition for children. Equally, guidance is sought on how UNICEF defines its role with children on the move, in partnerships on programmes on sexual and reproductive health, and in

education for young people, to better define the respective roles of each agency participating in these joint programmes.

For example, the following hurdles were noted in the 2019 global synthesis report of the OCHA evaluation of country-based pooled funds:<sup>49</sup>

- Unmatched agency capacity: Assigning agencies with no field presence and limited capacity to manage joint programmes can overburden partner agencies;
- Absence of consultative approach: In some cases when proposal development is rushed, there is limited consultation among partner agencies and quality assurance is often left to one agency;
- Deviations from the standards of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG): Although few United Nations agencies and donors deviate from UNSDG standards, when such deviations have occurred it led to delays due to time required for negotiations;
- Potential competition for resources: Despite the need for the UNDS to work together to respond to the inter-disciplinary nature of the SDGs, partnerships are often challenged with competition among agencies;
- Siloed programme implementation by each agency without consulting partner agencies.

### **Fostering innovation for children**

Since 2014, UNICEF has embraced innovation as one of its key strategies to achieve results for children.

<sup>48</sup> MTR, paragraph 22.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'OCHA Evaluation of Country-Based Pooled Funds Global Synthesis Report', OCHA, New York, 2019.



The 2020 DER confirmed that UNICEF evaluations published from 2016 to 2019 often referred to significant innovations in programming approaches and methods and in new technologies for development. For the 2020 review, 50 per cent of evaluation reports referred to some form of innovation supported by UNICEF.<sup>50</sup>

In the context of the SDGs, innovation for development is seen as increasingly important to meeting the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Innovation is included in the current Strategic Plan as a change strategy and ranks high in the agenda of the UNICEF Executive Director.

The 2018 evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work<sup>51</sup> confirmed the organization's strategic intent to utilize innovation as an important means to achieve results for children during the

period 2014-2021. It also signalled that the organization's ability to innovate was hampered by aspects of its culture, organizational structure and aspects of its organizational system.

In response to the evaluation, UNICEF acted quickly. As per the recommendations, UNICEF developed an innovation strategy<sup>52</sup> proposing four focus areas: digital innovations, physical product innovations, innovative financing and programme innovations. The strategy also identified several areas that could benefit from innovative work, including data gaps, humanitarian financing, data protection, energy in emergencies, political and conflict risk analysis, predictive epidemiology and social science for health in emergencies. As per the recommendations of the evaluation, UNICEF also initiated structural changes and introduced a portfolio-management approach.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Programme Effectiveness Review, 2016-2019', draft final report, June 2020, UNICEF, New York.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Evaluation of Innovation in UNICEF Work: Synthesis report', UNICEF, New York, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Global Innovation Strategy and Framework 2.0: The ABC of innovation', UNICEF, New York, 2019.



The MTR provided a positive update on how UNICEF is implementing this change strategy, highlighting achievements in innovative products, innovations in the area of information and communications technology and in implementing new behaviours and approaches to programming. However, there were mixed views as to how effective the Strategic Plan had been in supporting innovation. Some were not sure if embracing innovation was inevitable (deriving from the global context where innovation is increasingly important) or if was purposeful and in response to the Strategic Plan. Others argued that the current Strategic Plan has supported innovation. A few considerations were highlighted regarding UNICEF innovation strategies, touching on, *inter alia*, how to prioritize innovation and the need for guidance to COs on how to innovate within the UNDS and the QCPR frameworks.

Additional considerations noted by respondents are listed below:

- Issues that were raised in the evaluation of innovation have yet to be fully addressed as UNICEF strives to embrace a culture where innovative behaviour and ideas are encouraged. While respondents recognized that a culture for innovation is not yet fully developed at UNICEF, they also noted that it is not easy to embrace such behaviour in an organization that often operates in humanitarian contexts that require fairly strict rules and guidelines to maintain safety on the ground. So, while one needs to innovate to find solutions to alleviate humanitarian crises, organizations with a humanitarian mandate are often risk-averse.
- Give priority to innovations for public health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic makes it imperative that UNICEF deepen

its understanding of health behaviours and their impact on public health, as well as predictive epidemiology to try to anticipate where disease will occur and spread. As noted in a 2020 report on UNICEF humanitarian action,<sup>53</sup> the humanitarian review, public health emergencies are an area in which innovation and technology can play a key part in advancing the UNICEF approach and in improving the quality and equity of its humanitarian programming.

- Continue to develop and engage in innovative partnerships. UNICEF has different sorts of partnerships. For example, it has partnered more consistently with Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) and engaged in larger conversations with them on humanitarian action to ensure it remains focused on challenges on the ground. It has engaged through the joint investment mechanism with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate national systems changes. It is increasingly partnering with businesses beyond fundraising. UNICEF must address the cultural challenges that prevent the organization from taking calculated risks to accelerate the achievements of the SDGs.
- Further streamline innovation into programme design rather than considering innovations as an add-on. Of concern to respondents is that innovation is not fully integrated into programme design but, rather, considered afterwards and for which, often CO must seek funding for. It was suggested instead to include innovation at the onset of programme design to engage and encourage partners to think creatively during the programme cycle.

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, Humanitarian review - findings and recommendations: Strengthening UNICEF's humanitarian action (forthcoming).



## Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children

Effective use of data can help not only to plan, track and report results for children, but also shape those results with better insights about what is working, what is not, which children are thriving, and which are being left behind. The Strategic Plan confirmed the importance of data through the articulation of Change Strategy 8 and through its comprehensive results framework, which includes results, targets and indicators for evidence from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and research.

With respect to the use of monitoring data, evidence from review of the relevant documents suggests that the effectiveness of monitoring and results-based management (RBM) systems at country level has been an ongoing challenge for UNICEF. This was signalled in the 2020 DER (for UNICEF programming delivered largely before the current Strategic Plan), which attributed this challenge to the absence of credible baselines and valid change indicators reported against time-bound targets. A similar challenge was also reported in the lessons learned report of the MTR, emphasizing that the disparate data collection and monitoring systems are limiting the generation of information for effective decision-making and evidence-based programming, advocacy, innovation and resource mobilization, particularly in humanitarian settings.

The MTR<sup>54</sup> noted that UNICEF is increasingly data-driven in its programming approaches, an assertion confirmed by a review of current CPDs, which demonstrated that all current CPDs include an M&E section and often emphasize the intent of the CO to work with Government partners to improve data quality and M&E

mechanisms (e.g. Syria and Kazakhstan). However, these sections tend to vary in their degree of rigour and completeness, suggesting ongoing concerns about CO production and use of monitoring data. Country offices feel burdened by the amount of reporting requests coming from HQ and frustrated by the seeming lack of analytical evidence for decision-making shared back to COs from data that they collect.

Under the current Strategic Plan, there have been some efforts to address these issues, particularly within the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM), where significant improvements have been made or are in progress with a view to accelerating programme effectiveness. These improvements include the introduction of a dashboard with a summary of indicators and limiting CO reporting to indicators directly linked to CPD requirements.

With respect to research, the current Strategic Plan reinforces the strong need across UNICEF for increased access to research databases and peer-reviewed journals. The MTR reaffirmed efforts to strengthen UNICEF research, including by strengthening governance mechanisms for research within UNICEF, research infrastructure and funding. However, interview respondents reported that the current Strategic Plan had no significant influence on advancing the use of research to inform programming or on facilitating partnerships with academia and other research institutes.

### 2.3.5. Organizational enablers

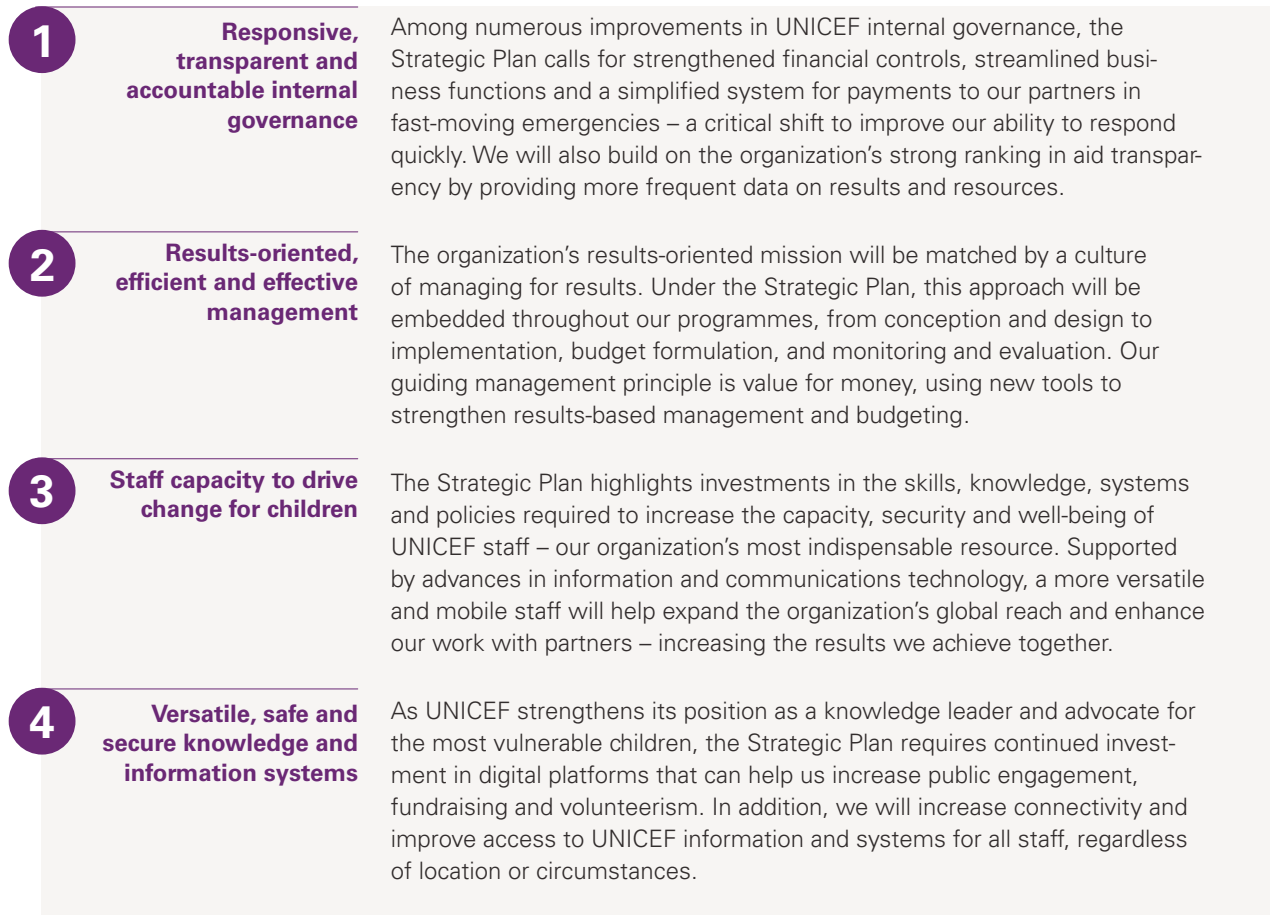
In addition to the eight change strategies, the Strategic Plan identified four organizational enablers to drive results.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> MTR, paragraph 101.

<sup>55</sup> The fifth enabler “A stronger, values-based organizational culture” was not assessed in full detail, as it was only recently included in 2020.



**Figure 8: Organizational enablers in the UNICEF Strategic Plan**



The data companion to the MTR includes a scorecard for progress on all four organizational enablers, namely: responsive, transparent and accountable governance (reaching 122 per cent of target); results-oriented efficient and effective management (107 per cent of target); staff capacity and drive change for children (90 per cent of target); and versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems targets (111 per cent of target achieved).<sup>56</sup> Without disputing the findings of the MTR and the data companion, the evaluation examined each of the organizational enablers based on

documentary evidence and interviews with informants both inside and outside of UNICEF. The results of this analysis are presented below.

### **Responsive, transparent and accountable governance**

This organizational enabler encompasses all efforts to improve the internal governance of UNICEF by strengthening financial controls, streamlining business functions and simplifying payment systems to respond to the need for action in fast-moving emergencies. It also encompasses UNICEF efforts to improve aid transparency by providing more frequent data

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF, MTR Data Companion and Scorecard, p.19.



on results and resources. The MTR addressed progress in realizing Enabler 1 through four results encompassing the internal regulatory framework (policies, procedures, standards and guidance), efficient energy and resource use, improved access for persons with disabilities and exceeding global transparency standards.<sup>57</sup>

In six of the seven sub-indicators, UNICEF had met or exceeded the 2019 milestone established in the Strategic Plan and data were pending on the seventh indicator at the time of the MTR. Despite these positive results, there is a continuing need for improvement. This can be seen in the current mandate of the change management core group to re-imagine UNICEF business models and make them fit for accelerated action for children. The concept note for this work identified seven needed improvements in UNICEF business models, including:

- Empower UNICEF offices to deliver results for children through further decentralization and simplification of processes;
- Better balance accountabilities and complementarities with the UNICEF family (HQ, ROs, COs, sub-offices, National Committees), following the principle of subsidiarity (making decisions closest to where they need to be made);
- Increase efficiencies (time and resources) and ensure resources are used in the best way possible to support the achievement of results;
- Enhance organizational agility in terms of systems, processes and organizational design as well as in terms of ways of working (e.g. fluid, networked multi-faceted and cross functional teams with broad skill sets);

- Improve the flow of ideas and learning across and between divisions, regions and countries and encourage a more interactive, collaborative and networked way of working;
- Build mindsets, behaviours and a culture of agility, innovation, and creativity;
- Build on opportunities created by United Nations reform (in terms of common and complementary structures, processes and ways of working with other agencies at all levels).<sup>58</sup>

In addition, interviews with UNICEF staff and external partners have pointed out some key areas for attention in addressing internal systems and procedures: including those for allocating resources and approving new programmes. These include the need to:

- Re-examine the allocation formula for allocating regular resources to programme countries to allow for a higher minimum level of RR funding and to allow innovative programming in countries that do not receive large allocations of regular earmarked funding for either development or humanitarian programming;
- Better support the work of National Committees by allowing for some UNICEF programming in high-income countries to reach vulnerable children and adolescents (currently being pilot tested); and
- Better align results reporting with new priority areas, such as climate change, in order to strengthen the UNICEF contribution story and better support resource mobilization.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.112

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Reimagining UNICEF Business Models: Making them fit for accelerated action for children', concept note, UNICEF, New York, July 2020, p.1.



## Results-oriented effective and efficient management

There are two major components to Enabler 2: Reinforcing a *culture of managing for results* to be embedded throughout programmes, from conception and design to implementation; and a commitment to *value for money* as a guiding principle to management at UNICEF.

The MTR assessed progress made towards the realization of this enabler through seven defined results and ten indicators. The MTR reported that UNICEF met or exceeded the 2019 milestones for eight of the nine indicators where data were available. For the one sub-indicator which did not meet the established milestone (percentage of new CPDs meeting organizational standards for results-based management), the 2019 value was only five per cent lower than the targeted milestone of 85 per cent.

On the other hand, evidence from the recently-completed DER suggests that there was a strong imperative to improve both management for results and programming efficiency at UNICEF at the beginning of the Strategic Plan period. It is important to emphasize that evaluation reports reviewed for the 2020 DER are mainly focused on programmes designed and implemented before January 2018. As a result, the findings of the review provide an overview of UNICEF programming systems at the beginning of the Strategic Plan rather than an assessment of improvement over time. The review examined findings reported in 62 evaluation reports published by UNICEF from 2016 to 2018 across six main criteria and 20 sub-criteria.<sup>59</sup> The reported findings for each sub-criterion were classified as highly satisfactory, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or highly unsatisfactory using a detailed set of classification guidelines.

## Managing for results

The DER examined two criteria relating to managing for results: The effectiveness of systems for monitoring and reporting on results and the effectiveness of results-based management systems.<sup>60</sup> For programmes designed and largely implemented in the period before the beginning of the current Strategic Plan, evaluation reports published by UNICEF more often reported negative findings regarding both the effectiveness of results monitoring and the effectiveness of RBM systems. Most importantly, as reported in evaluations published by UNICEF to the end of 2019, the promise of RBM remained largely unfulfilled. In the 2020 review, only 33 per cent of cases reported effective systems for RBM, with no noticeable improvement over 2016.

Considering the findings of many preceding UNICEF evaluation reports, it is extremely significant that the current Strategic Plan was the first to roll out a comprehensive results framework with detailed results definitions, indicators, baselines and targets at the goal, outcome and output levels. This should contribute to improved findings in evaluations commissioned from 2019 onward.

Interviews with UNICEF staff at headquarters and in ROs and COs (and with external partners) indicate that the original (2018) and updated (2020) results framework for the Strategic Plan represents a major investment and should improve the strength of results reporting and of RBM systems over time. Future reviews of UNICEF evaluation reports should reflect this improvement.

In addition, in 2018 UNICEF conducted a repositioning and realignment review of the planning, monitoring and reporting (PMR) functions of the

<sup>59</sup> For an explanation of the approach and methods used in the Development Effectiveness Review see, UNICEF 2020 Development Effectiveness Review, p.4-7.

<sup>60</sup> UNICEF, Development Effectiveness Review, p.39



organization, which pointed to “misalignments in planning, monitoring and reporting, with fragmentation of PMR across three deputy executive directors, reducing efficiency and effectiveness.”<sup>61</sup> In early 2019, the Executive Director responded to the realignment review with a decision memo, which created one Programme Group under the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, with responsibility for the PMR function at UNICEF. The new Programme Group has just three divisions: EMOPS, DP, and DAPM.

The formation of the Programme Group was intended to:

- Address the fragmentation and create unity of purpose within the group;
- Ensure a common vision, direction and oversight of the PMR functions;
- Strengthen accountability and speed up decision-making on PMR;
- Increase the potential for synergies among different functions;
- Establish a clear line of sight between planning and reporting; and,
- Improve the management of global results and formulation of global commitments.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, three other important dimensions of the Strategic Plan results framework should be also be emphasized. Since the first Strategic Plan results framework explicitly linked to the SDGs, the current framework should allow a realignment of CPD results frameworks towards compliance with the SDGs over time as new country programmes are developed. Stability in the overall results framework is a critical factor because the duration of country programmes is often not synchronised with the Strategic Plan.

Second, there is a continuing need to better link results reported at the output level to higher level data on achieving targets for outcomes and Goal Areas, as evidenced by the target achievement data reported in the 2019 MTR. Third, strengthened results reporting and the continuing trend to improved evaluation systems and processes at programme level could allow UNICEF to strengthen the ‘contribution story’ required to support resource mobilization. It is also worth noting that the DER exercise points to continuing and sustained improvements in UNICEF systems for programme evaluation and for acting on the results of published evaluation reports – another sign of an improving culture for managing for results.

In 2018, UNICEF faced a challenging environment for identifying and monitoring programme results and for realizing the promise of a culture of managing for results. The Strategic Plan represents an important effort to address these challenges by defining results and targets at all levels of the chain-of-effects (goal area, outcome and output) and across global, regional and country levels. It also better aligns target definitions and results indicators with the child-specific SDGs and their targets. In addition, UNICEF has taken important steps to align its internal organizational structure to support a more coherent approach to results monitoring and reporting during the first years of the Strategic Plan.

Interviews with UNICEF staff at headquarters, RO and CO level also strongly suggest that going forward it is critically important to maintain as much stability as possible in the results framework and its constituent indicators and targets. Operationalizing the results framework, particularly at CO level, was a major challenge given the many changes

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Office Management Plan, July 2019-2021, Division of Analysis, Planning and Monitoring’, UNICEF, New York, 2019, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.6.



and the new indicators identified in 2018. As CO staff are just now becoming reasonably familiar with the data-gathering and reporting requirements of the framework, it would be highly disruptive to make major changes in the transition to the new Strategic Plan.

### *Efficiency and value for money*

Overall results from the DER report on programme efficiency indicate that for all three efficiency criteria, results were more often negative than positive. However, the reviewed evaluations did point out areas where UNICEF staff at all levels were working to improve the efficiency of programmes. These included adapting a value-for-money perspective when designing programmes, use of cost-benefit analysis in programme approval, relying on established networks for programme implementation, and on strong, UNICEF-led coordination mechanisms.<sup>63</sup>

What the DER report establishes is the need for UNICEF (as of 2018) to direct attention to strengthening and simplifying internal programme management systems and business practices. As already noted, this is an important element in the work of the change management group working on reimagining UNICEF business models.

### **Staff capacity to drive change for children**

The MTR and annual report of the Executive Director, 2019, addressed Enabler 3 through four defined results and 32 separate indicators. UNICEF has been able to slightly increase the percentage of international professional staff who are nationals of programme countries from a 2017 baseline of 52 per cent to 54 per cent in 2019, with an overall target of maintaining this indicator at 50 per cent.

The most difficult dimension of the plan to increase the versatility of staff at UNICEF has been geographic mobility. The results framework of the Strategic Plan established a milestone of 78 per cent for the percentage of international professional staff moving to another duty station classification after completing their tour of duty. By 2019, this indicator had reached just 28 per cent from the 2017 baseline of 20 per cent. There are obviously continuing barriers to mobility across duty station classifications at UNICEF.



Similarly, while UNICEF has made some progress in achieving simpler, faster or more targeted recruitment, it has fallen short of its targets. There was an improvement in the proportion of requests for emergency team support met within three days from 78 in 2017 to 81 per cent in 2019, but this falls well short of the 100 per cent target for 2019. The percentage of regular recruitment actions for established international professional posts completed within 90 days improved over the same period from 56 to 73 per cent, almost achieving the targeted 75 per cent. In contrast, the percentage of emergency recruitment

<sup>63</sup> DER, pp.36-38.



actions completed within 30 days for established international professional posts fell from 35 per cent at baseline to 27 per cent in 2019, against a milestone of 70 per cent.

### **Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems**

The MTR and annual report of the Executive Director, 2019 reported an overall value of 111 per cent for the achievement of 2019 milestones for Enabler 4. This score was based on results reported for three defined results and five indicators.<sup>64</sup>

Results for this enabler were not examined directly in the DER. It is worth noting, however, that the present evaluation undertook extensive interviews with UNICEF staff at all levels of the organization, and at no point did staff identify shortcomings or weaknesses in UNICEF knowledge management and information systems. Given the positive findings of the MTR and the annual report of the Executive Director, there is no evidence to suggest that UNICEF has not been able to achieve expected results under Enabler 4.

## **2.4. To what extent has the strategic plan contributed to fostering partnerships and new ways of working?**

The introduction of Change Strategy 'United Nations working together' represents an improvement compared with the previous Strategic Plan. Evidence from the DER indicated that, even prior to the introduction of these change strategies, the organization had strong capacity to engage with partners including Government agencies, national and international NGOs, CSOs and development partners.

Nevertheless, the review also indicated that partnerships with the private and business sectors (other than for fundraising purposes) were less common and in general less successful. Similarly, prior to recent efforts including the introduction of the common chapter, this change strategy, and UNDS reform, joint work with other United Nations agencies was observed, but in a less systematic and coordinated way (see DER; evaluability assessment of the common chapter, 2020).

Overall, as noted in Section 2.3.4 above, evidence suggests that, although the Strategic Plan confirms the importance of engaging with CSOs, this commitment does not fully reflect the growing importance of civil society movements (as opposed to more structured civil society organizations) in the advocacy space. Innovative partnerships with CSOs, particularly those led by youth, have the potential to accelerate results through innovative advocacy channels such as social media, moving beyond the traditional service delivery role that CSOs have played in the implementation of UNICEF programmes and services.

The introduction of Change Strategy 5 and the recent support from leadership represented robust platforms for partnering with the private sector beyond traditional fundraising relationships. Evidence suggests there are encouraging efforts to support staff capacities, cultural shifts and reporting systems, with field offices acknowledging and appreciating these changes. However, forming shared value partnerships with businesses may prove challenging, and greater guidance needs to be provided.

In 2009, UNICEF adopted an Executive Board-approved definition of global programme partnerships (GPPs) as voluntary and collaborative relationships that:

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<sup>64</sup> EDAR Data Companion and Scorecard, 2020, p.118.



- Reach an explicit agreement at the global level on programmatic objectives that are relevant to the promotion and protection of children’s rights and to the achievement of internationally-agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals;
- Have a programmatic focus that extends across more than one region of the world;
- Involve multiple public and non-public stakeholders, who are actively engaged in the partnerships and programmatic decision making at the global level; and
- Establish formal or informal modalities of cooperation to meet these objectives in a medium- or long-term framework.<sup>65</sup>

By 2018, GPPs took on an important role in leveraging UNICEF organizational and financial resources into action for children at global, regional and country levels. In 2019, GPPs were the source of \$240 million in programme funding (other resources, regular) with an estimated rise to \$370 million by 2021.<sup>66</sup>

For the present evaluation, the team reviewed information on 14 important GPPs where UNICEF is engaged either as the secretariat, with representation in the governing body, and/or accessing or providing funds for programming at a global, regional or country level. A description of UNICEF engagement in GPPs can be found in Annex 14.

Global programme partnerships are both a critically important source of resources (see GAVI and UNAIDS) and a means of leveraging the advocacy, technical strength and convening power of UNICEF to advance progress in all five Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan. Given their

importance both for mobilizing resources and for achieving results at global, regional and country levels, there is a need and an opportunity to revisit UNICEF engagement with GPPs, perhaps through a major thematic evaluation.

## 2.5. To what extent has the Strategic Plan enabled UNICEF country offices to support national priorities to achieve child-focused Sustainable Development Goals?

It is important to recall that the 2030 Agenda is by nature a political agreement, and as such, it did not fully consider the technical implementation challenges. This has slowed progress made towards the fulfilment of the SDGs over the past years, as underlined by the Global Sustainable Development Report, 2019.<sup>67</sup>

Children’s rights are mentioned in almost every UNICEF document, and the concept is ingrained in the narrative of the Strategic Plan and country programmes. All CPDs refer to children’s rights. However, feedback from country office informants indicates that the concept of rights tends to be perceived as aspirational. The main challenge is to adequately measure progress towards realizing the rights of every child in every country. A clearer bridge is needed between realizing children’s rights and the day-to-day operations in countries. UNICEF could give practical guidance on what precisely is meant by the realization of children’s rights, with concrete examples.

During each planning cycle, with limited resources, COs ask themselves *what* to prioritize. For all UNICEF COs, primacy is placed on

<sup>65</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Strategic Framework on Partnerships and Collaborative Relationships’, UNICEF, New York, 2009. E/ICEF/2009/10.

<sup>66</sup> UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates, 2020-2023, p.12.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Progress for Every Child in the SDG Era’, UNICEF, New York, 2019.



contributing to national efforts geared toward the progressive fulfilment of all children's rights. Country offices focus their CPDs on addressing national development priorities, all while relating to UNICEF goals as established in the Strategic Plan and aligning with the larger national development agenda as stated in the UNSDCF. A quick-glance analysis to 62 CPDs revealed almost all of them (60) explicitly incorporate national priorities.

For CO efforts to contribute to UNICEF global goals and key result areas, the UNICEF Strategic Plan must be holistic enough to accommodate the vast array of national priorities and needs of children in all different contexts. Respondents concur that the current Strategic Plan allows for flexibility, being holistic enough to enable the alignment of country programme components. Some COs voiced their satisfaction with the Strategic Plan being holistic and innovative enough to respond to new and emerging national priorities such as mental health, digitalization and climate change. Others, especially those in humanitarian contexts whose programmes are mainly focused on humanitarian response, perceived a lack of synergy between their country contexts and the current Strategic Plan. Countries in fragile and humanitarian contexts recognize that there is still plenty to be done on linking humanitarian action with development programming in support of basic goals such as malaria, clean water, nutrition, immunization and basic education.

Additionally, a subset of COs face limitations in their engagements with Government, mostly imposed by donor Governments. This additional burden limits their ability to respond to national priorities, especially when requiring engagement with the Government as a key partner to achieve results at scale.

A key challenge when drafting the new Strategic Plan will be to accommodate such a variety of country contexts. The Strategic Plan should

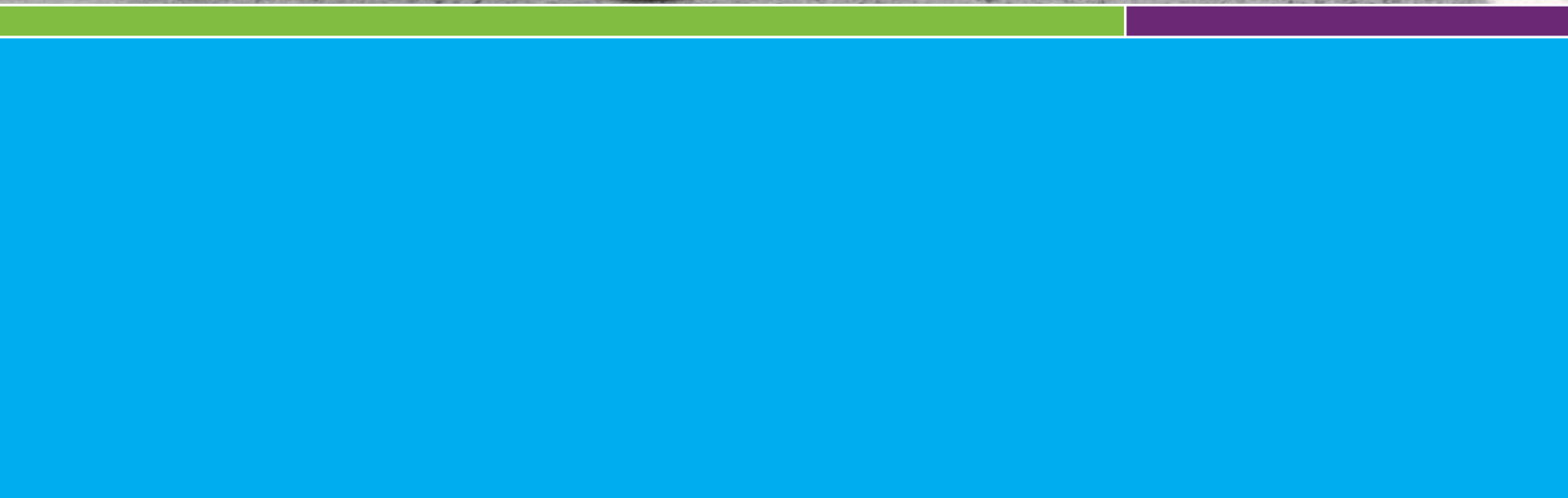
be kept flexible enough to accommodate all country contexts, resonating with staff working in a low-income country as much as those in a high-income country. There is a call for a stronger balance between "basic" needs and "emerging" challenges, particularly in the context of potential regressions due to COVID-19 pandemic. Striking such a balance could be a huge challenge, especially considering CO sentiments regarding the accumulation of new priority areas without allocating enough funding or dropping previous priorities.

Three main blocks of national priorities were systematically observed at country level: (i) emphasis on basic needs, from a cluster of COs with humanitarian and fragile contexts, and greater emphasis on those not significantly affected by the COVID 19 pandemic; (ii) emphasis on innovative areas of work, emerging threats to children and advocacy, largely from COs working in HICs and UMICs, with an important focus on leaving no child behind; and (iii) existing national priorities more closely aligned to the current Strategic Plan, from the remaining cluster of COs, with an important focus on acceleration of goal area targets and the SDGs.

With regard to supporting national priorities, COs find guidance in the eight change strategies specified in the Strategic Plan. Nevertheless, COs have called for more context-specific evidence and guidance from HQ and ROs on how to effectively implement the change strategies in relation to certain new key development areas, including climate change and mental health. Operating under a vast framework such as the Strategic Plan, COs feel constrained in their response to national priorities by their capacities (lack of guidance in new areas), limited resources (challenges in accessing donors), and lack of structures to adapt to change (bureaucratic processes).



# 3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS





This first evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan describes and acknowledges the complexities that the design of such a strategy entails for a highly complex organization such as UNICEF, in view of its dual humanitarian and development mandate and the multiple roles involved in being the United Nations agency for children.

Analysis of the Strategic Plan presented the following **conclusions**:

1. Evidence indicates that the Strategic Plan is well regarded and utilized as a framework, as reflected in direct feedback from CO senior management and the systematic analysis of country programming documentation. At the CO level, the Strategic Plan is considered an important guiding document and a framework that defines a common narrative to rally support for accountability purposes with donors and to show concrete global results. The holistic structure of the Strategic Plan gives COs the flexibility to adapt to the organization's multiple and complex roles, mandates, diverse contexts, and especially to support national priorities in coordination with other United Nations agencies under the guidance of the RC. Nevertheless, the need for balance between a holistic framework and organizational focus is critical to provide a collective vision in support of children.
2. The evaluation observed that more could be done to systematically (a) incorporate the voices of children and (b) represent their voices and speak out against any violation of child rights, particularly of those further left behind. The current Strategic Plan did not contain the required provisions for UNICEF to act as the voice of children in all contexts, including in the operationalization of UNDS reform at the CO level. Despite being guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and covering the child-focused SDGs, the current Strategic Plan fails to give enough attention to including the voices of children in the planning and operationalization processes in different contexts. This omission represents an important gap, especially when compared to the much clearer approach to partnering with various actors including Government, civil society organizations, private sector, and other United Nations agencies, which are clearly articulated in the change strategies of the Strategic Plan.
3. The short timeframe of the Strategic Plan represents a challenge for CO planning to address system changes and emerging threats to children. Evidence also indicates that the short-term period of the Strategic Plan has constrained the organization's ability to have a long-term vision, which is needed to develop the resilience, development and peacebuilding components of the humanitarian-development nexus. Interviews with CO senior management described the transaction costs of learning and using new monitoring and reporting systems with each new Strategic Plan.
4. For a long-term strategic plan for children to be viable, a deliberate orientation is needed to provide strategic policy advice to Governments, global and regional partners on how to address structural barriers and to revise priorities, and better coordinate. This long-term strategy needs to be developed in the context of the United Nations development system reform, through better coordination and collaboration with other United Nations



agencies. The lack of vertical logic between higher-level outcome indicators and country office-level indicators was seen as a general weakness of the Strategic Plan. Several key stakeholders shared this concern, which was validated by a review of relevant documentation as well as an analysis of key indicators.

5. An important point generally presented by COs was that the heavy burden of Strategic Plan reporting requirements was not balanced by practical benefits for direct decision-making. Additionally, there is a widespread perception that the Strategic Plan was largely designed to fulfil HQ needs. Although there is a general acknowledgement that the design of central planning documents such as the Strategic Plan represents a challenge given the diversity of countries and regions in which UNICEF operates, incentives and systems to share lessons learned is critical. Examples from regional and sub-regional groups and inter-agency networks on evidence-sharing, technical capacity collaboration, and advocacy support should be used to guide this process. This sharing of lessons learned becomes even more relevant in the context of UNDS reform to ensure good coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies.
6. Given the organization's good understanding of programme approaches to deal with specific issues affecting children, a strategic plan that gives more emphasis to change strategies, along with accompanying efforts to ensure the right capacities to implement them, sets the basis for the organization to be more agile, to respond to new threats to children and to understand how to collaborate better with other United Nations agencies under the guidance of the RC. Even prior to the

introduction of change strategies in the current Strategic Plan, various examples from COs indicate growing recognition of the importance of change strategies in understanding 'how' COs successfully achieve results.

7. The diverse country contexts where UNICEF works requires not only an understanding of the different needs and corresponding national priorities, but also demand greater understanding of how to achieve priority targets, since the use and contribution of these change strategies is likely to be highly country context-specific. Relevant and country-specific monitoring and evaluation data are critical to understanding how these country-specific change strategies could improve the agility of programmatic work at country office level. This information should provide the necessary evidence to understand how to better collaborate with other United Nations agencies within the framework of the UNCT.
8. The general recognition that the attainment of the SDGs requires a holistic and multisectoral approach has been closely mirrored by an acknowledgement of the many challenges that still exist. Despite the significant structural improvements of the current Strategic Plan through its Goal Area clusters and the growing guidance on collaboration and coordination given by UNDS reform, there are still many challenges to using a multisectoral approach. These include challenges with reporting multisectoral efforts, siloed Government partnership structures, and restrictions imposed by targeted or earmarked funding. UNICEF must be aware of pressures that might move strategic planning



back to more siloed approaches, both in support of country office and joint United Nations-system programming.

9. The multisectoral structure of the Strategic Plan has given country offices the bases to understand and effectively design multisectoral strategies. This learning process, nevertheless, requires time and resources to achieve the proper integration into country office structures and to account for the requirement of the UNCT. Important lessons can be drawn from a variety of country contexts and Government structures, learning from country offices embracing multisectoral approaches. These include significant CO structural changes in support of multi-sectoral approaches; strengthening CO designs of programmes across specific sectors; and the fully embracing such approaches in CPDs. These lessons should inform broader organizational efforts. Additionally, in order to achieve an organization-wide transformative multi-dimensional approach, it is critical to understand the specific structures, political will, and incentives of Government partners to embrace a multisectoral approach, as well as the complexities linked to the coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies in line with UNCT planning requirements.
10. Significant advances on gender equity have been observed across various programme areas, particularly those related to the GAP target priorities, as well as in operationalizing gender equality efforts, enabling the organization to allocate resources to these targeted priorities. As noted in the GAP evaluation, however, despite these improvements, there is still a need to improve gender equality mainstreaming in both programmes and institutional capacity and systems, and more needs to be done to align organizational efforts with current gender realities on the ground. UNICEF has the capacity to support UNCTs and regional partners with gender equality issues, taking a proactive approach, particularly in countries where UNICEF has strong capacity.
11. The Strategic Plan made a positive contribution to humanitarian action by placing it as a cross-cutting priority. Simultaneously, the wider United Nations system has provided a clear division of labour in the humanitarian and emergency world. However, acknowledging that some aspects are beyond the organization's control, UNICEF faces a disconnect between its humanitarian and development work. Bottlenecks related to the separate overarching systems for humanitarian and for development programming, siloed resourcing and capacity, as well as separate monitoring and reporting systems, prevent UNICEF from achieving more effective nexus programming, particularly in countries with protracted crises.
12. The introduction of a procedure on risk-informed programming is a useful step towards enhancing the UNICEF approach strengthening the humanitarian and development nexus. Political and socio-economic contextual elements have however not been systematically included when developing risk-informed programming analyses, particularly for country offices working in protracted humanitarian crisis contexts. This programming analysis must be done to inform country office programming in the wider context of United Nations system coordination and collaboration. By not factoring in the



economic and political context, humanitarian response may be delayed, as the risk analysis may not effectively account for some of the more severe risks for children.

13. With regard to distribution of resources, evidence reveals an allocation pattern that is highly concentrated in a small number of countries, driven in large part by humanitarian-targeted allocations. The skewed expense distribution has been accompanied by a smaller (than that originally planned for 2019) percentage of regular resources as a share of total resources, which has had important implications for the operationalization of the Strategic Plan. It is critical for the organization to use different tools to address changes in funding needs with Member States, NatComs, individual large donors, regional and global funding networks, etc. In this connection, it is important to tailor advocacy narratives supported by evidence-based reports to answer each donor's specific requirements and those of their constituencies. Existing funding tools could be utilized to jointly advocate, requiring significant coordination with other United Nations agencies, for greater funding directed to regular resources. In addition to individual contributors, the structured funding dialogue, informed by the Funding Compact, and the the Grand Bargain agreement provide such avenues to encourage Member States to continue their support to bring core resources for multisectoral and multiagency joint work and coordination in humanitarian action. The evaluation acknowledges that the new Strategic Plan is being developed in a geopolitical context in which the United Nations system in general is more vulnerable, and where the relevance of the

United Nations is being challenged. This reinforces the need for United Nations agencies to partner for increased synergy. The organization's efforts and resources in supporting UNDS reform, through a flexible strategic framework that could support various country-specific national priorities in coordination with the RC, were found to be insufficient. A flexible strategic framework is much needed to enable a long-term vision that would allow for long-term planning and better coordination with other United Nations agencies, providing evidence to countries on how change strategies could better help the organization's agile response, including those related to the ongoing UNDS reform process.

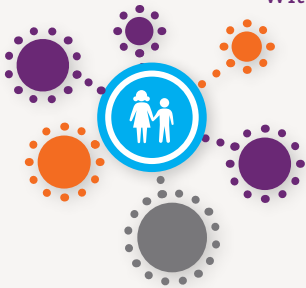
14. Strengthening reporting and linking funding to multisectoral work is critical to achieving the child-focused SDGs, to overcome bottlenecks inhibiting efforts to link humanitarian and development programming, and for coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies. It is clear that trade-offs between functional and effective coordination across agencies, as well as the related management and coordination costs, must be considered while partnering for results to support UNDS reform. UNICEF could have put to greater use its comparative advantages in support of UNDS reform and promoting the organization's core mission to be the voice for the rights of all children, leaving no one behind.



This report's **recommendations** are derived from the findings and conclusions presented above. They are the result of consultations with senior management and informed by comments received during a workshop held in November 2020.

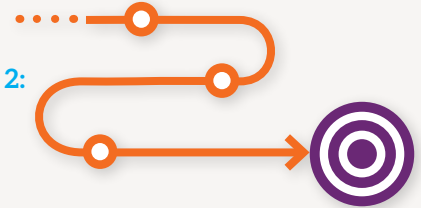
**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

Conceptualize the strategic plan as a holistic framework, reflecting the voices of children, with a limited number of priorities pitched at the outcome level along with clear paths for collaboration with other United Nations agencies.



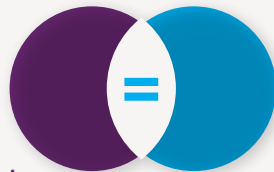
**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

Develop a longer-term 2022–2030 strategy for children, with a strong focus on outcomes, allowing for flexibility to address emerging threats to children, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies.



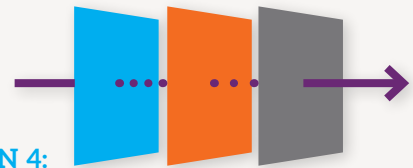
**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

Place equal emphasis on measuring change strategies and enablers alongside programme results.



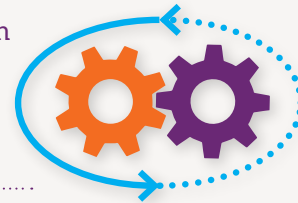
**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

Strengthen outcome-level reporting and appropriate funding sources for a multisectoral approach.



**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

Reflect the organization's dual development and humanitarian mandate in the long-term strategy, overcome bottlenecks of duality in programming, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity and integrate peacebuilding processes.

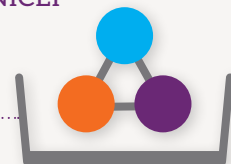


**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

Address the skewed distribution of resources, particularly in non-humanitarian contexts, to ensure that no one is left behind.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

Ensure provisions to support the United Nations development system agenda while strengthening the UNICEF mission, comparative and collaborative advantages.

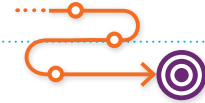




### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Conceptualize the strategic plan as a holistic framework, reflecting the voices of children, with a limited number of priorities pitched at the outcome level along with clear paths for collaboration with other United Nations agencies.**

- UNICEF should ensure that the next plan builds on the holistic approach and flexibility gains from the current Strategic Plan. The new Plan should therefore be clearly designed as a framework that provides direction to country offices while allowing them to adapt in support of national priorities and the United Nations cooperation framework. In addition, the next strategic framework should spell out key areas of work and related results that will require a whole-of-organization approach for implementation. Consideration must be given to support collaborative mechanisms between headquarters, regional offices and country offices, as well as with other United Nations agencies, to ensure that the voices of children are included in internal and joint programming and planning, and that no child is left behind.
- Moving forward, the relevant divisions must ensure that the new strategic framework clearly identifies and promotes new change strategies on:
  - » The systematic involvement of children in programming
  - » The role of UNICEF as the voice of children and for children, in all contexts



### RECOMMENDATION 2:


**Develop a longer-term 2022–2030 strategy for children, with a strong focus on outcomes, allowing for flexibility to address emerging threats to children, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies.**

- The new strategic framework should adopt a long-term 2022–2030 timeframe with a phased implementation approach, aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Anchored in accelerating child-focused Sustainable Development Goals, the new strategic framework should have an outcome-level focus and logical links with country-level results, allowing for flexibility to adapt to emerging threats to children (including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic) and facilitating growing collaboration with other United Nations agencies.
- Prioritize, in the results framework and change strategies, UNICEF comparative advantages in providing critical policy advice to influence change for children and to address emerging threats that constrain the rights of children. Country programming and operations documents, including common country assessments, UNSDCFs, programme strategy notes, CPDs and related theories of change, and country programme management plans, should more explicitly include the provision of strategic policy advice to fully utilize UNICEF comparative and collaborative advantages in support of the 2030 Agenda and the overall United Nations development system reform process.




- Across all levels of the organization, reporting systems should continue to move away from incentives that lead to heavy reporting and towards a learning and exchange of evidence, both within UNICEF and with other United Nations agencies, that could inform the continued adaptation of programmes, based on:
  - » Timely monitoring, strategic programme and operational reviews and real-time evaluations, with supporting technical capacity from regional offices and in coordination with the United Nations country team.
  - » Sharing lessons learned and experiences within the organization, with government partners, sister United Nations agencies and other development actors, as well as with donors.

joint evaluations and reports, and donor and National Committee reports. This information will be critical in order to determine country-specific change strategies and enablers in support of more agile and sustainable country-level programming and better programming and planning collaboration with other United Nations agencies. To this end, responsible divisions and offices must ensure that there is adequate capacity in all contexts for better reporting, monitoring, and evidence-generation of country-specific change strategies to improve country office agility to better support national priorities and child-focused Sustainable Development Goals in coordination with United Nations sister agencies.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** 

**Place equal emphasis on measuring change strategies and enablers alongside programme results.**

- In operationalizing the new strategic framework, UNICEF must place equal attention on progress in programme results, change strategies and enablers. For purposes of monitoring and learning, this must be done in a manner that feeds back into the organization to strengthen its agility to respond to emerging threats to children, in coordination with other United Nations agencies.
- Change strategies and enablers must be more systematically monitored, evaluated and presented in key management documents such as the Executive Director's annual report to the Executive Board, country-level evaluations, multi-agency

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** 

**Strengthen outcome-level reporting and appropriate funding sources for a multisectoral approach.**

- Building on the multisectoral approach of the current Strategic Plan Goal Area clusters, the next strategic framework must advance such multisectoral arrangements and establish relevant outcome-level indicators. These improvements should include and address the greater multisectoral complexities of joint programming, in line with United Nations country team planning requirements. UNICEF must continue to negotiate with donors to appropriately link funding sources to multisectoral programming, to encourage the organization to overcome constraining siloed approaches. Moving away from siloed approaches will contribute to the understanding of how to better enhance collaborations with relevant sister United Nations agencies.



#### RECOMMENDATION 5:

**Reflect the organization's dual development and humanitarian mandate in the long-term strategy, overcome bottlenecks of duality in programming, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity and integrate peacebuilding processes.**

- Moving forward, several steps are necessary to address the existing bottlenecks preventing more effective programming to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus:
  - » The strategic framework must ensure provisions to avoid the duality in programming, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity in support of the achievement of the organization's dual humanitarian and development mandate in support of children.
  - » Ensure resources to support flexible staff mobilization to gain the necessary work experience in humanitarian and development contexts.
  - » Secure resources to finance advocacy work with donors to secure flexible and long-term funding, to ensure longer-term activities that will address the humanitarian and development nexus, with the aim of building a clear path to integrate peacebuilding into the organization's strategy.
- UNICEF must continue to support the integration of risk-informed programming linking humanitarian and development programming into country office programming and planning documents, with a focus on informing United Nations system-wide documents. Moving forward, the new strategic framework must ensure that there is adequate attention in country offices to building staff capacity, resources,

and operational management support to incorporate political and economic context into the assessment of risks and opportunities to more comprehensively inform humanitarian and development nexus programming for children.



#### RECOMMENDATION 6:

**Address the skewed distribution of resources, particularly in non-humanitarian contexts, to ensure that no one is left behind.**

- In funding negotiations and agreements with donors, responsible UNICEF divisions must prioritize addressing the skewed distribution of resources, particularly as it affects country offices in non-humanitarian contexts. UNICEF must encourage joint advocacy efforts, with a United Nations system-wide focus aimed at allocating resources to support fundraising advocacy efforts with specific tailored narratives for different donors, with the support of National Committees and regional funding networks. Efforts should include utilizing all existing channels of negotiations, including annual donor consultations, proposal submission processes and structured funding dialogue, in coordination with other United Nations agencies.



## RECOMMENDATION 7:

**Ensure provisions to support the United Nations development system agenda while strengthening the UNICEF mission, comparative and collaborative advantages.**

- In operationalizing the next strategic framework, responsible divisions must ensure that resources are provided to continue working together with all sister United Nations agencies in the context of the United Nations development system reform. A multisectoral approach must be used in support of existing joint priorities, including data and evidence generation, climate change, gender equality, poverty eradication, and improving adolescent and maternal health, as well as other relevant areas of work that will emerge during the preparation of the next strategic framework. The new strategic framework must ensure that UNICEF collaborative advantages – including being a highly decentralized organization with a universal field presence, strong promotion of community-based mobilization and capacity-building efforts to support national partners to achieve child-focused Sustainable Development Goals – are adequately resourced and used in support of the Goals and for UNICEF to become a stronger voice for all children.

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