

Research report

Evaluation of UNICEF Social Protection Response toward Universal Child Benefits – Phase 2

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by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI)

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Executive Summary

Over the past few decades, national governments, development partners and international organisations have increased their investments in child-sensitive social protection programmes as it has shown its impact on achieving global development and humanitarian objectives. Globally, the relevance of child-sensitive social protection programmes has increased as mechanisms to tackle poverty and vulnerability while also strengthening a multi-dimensional range of development outcomes for children.

Universal Child Benefits (UCBs) offer a promising policy tool to promote the realisation of child rights, reduce poverty and inequality, bolster dignity and cohesion, and build public support for social protection policy. Given the growing momentum behind moving towards universal child benefits, there is a need for an evidence base that analyses the pathways that have enabled countries to progressively realise UCBs. For this reason, UNICEF's Evaluation Office has commissioned the Economic Policy Research Institute, a not-for-profit organisation based in Cape Town, to evaluate UNICEF's approaches to universal child benefits across 21 countries at a global level.

The overarching purpose of this evaluation is twofold: (1) to contribute to the global evidence base on the relevant and effective actions that support the progressive realisation of UCBs, and (2) to provide organisational direction to UNICEF on how to best shape interventions in this area of work. Based on secondary desk research and key stakeholder interviews, this report identifies the drivers and barriers to the progressive realisation of UCBs, and the range of actions and interventions that UNICEF Country Offices have available (i.e. the opportunities) in order to influence these structural factors. This evidence will help UNICEF to strengthen its ability to deliver children's rights and tackle child poverty through universal social protection for children.

Key message 1: Progress towards UCBs follows diverse and sometimes uncertain pathways

Governments and their development partners, including UNICEF, achieve progress towards UCBs through multidimensional, dynamic and non-linear pathways that complex factors influence. Countries follow different policy trajectories in improving child benefits, which take place over varying timeframes and through diverse funding resources and policy frameworks. Accordingly, this report identifies six dimensions that constitute the progressive realisation towards UCBs: universality, unconditionality, predictability, impact, permanence, and policy comprehensiveness.

Key Message 2: Structural and contextual factors both support and hinder progress

Diverse structural and contextual factors both drive and impede the progressive realisation of the UCB agenda. The main drivers for the improvement of child benefits include (1) public and key stakeholder (including government) demands to address developmental challenges, (2) imperatives for more shock responsive systems, (3) political incentives and competition, (4)

motivations resulting from policy leadership, (5) lending agreements with financial institutions and (6) other development partnerships. This report explores the role of inclusive digital technologies in improving programmes' governance and delivery and creating new social and policy demands for social protection's mandate to ensure access to vital services, including information and communications capabilities that will prove increasingly vital for strengthening resilience. On the other hand, the chief barriers that hinder the progressive realisation of UCBs include (1) limited fiscal space, (2) government capacity constraints, (3) misconceptions among the public and key stakeholders (including both governments and development partners) about the evidence base for UCBs and specifically the case for universalism.

Key Message 3: UNICEF can lead strategic initiatives to advance the progressive realisation of UCBs

UNICEF faces substantial opportunities to lead strategic initiatives other activities that accelerate the drivers and reduce the barriers towards advancing the UCB agenda. The most salient opportunities include (1) mobilising evidence of feasibility and impact so crucial for generating support among government actors and other stakeholders, particularly in strengthening domestic and international resource mobilisation; (2) leading capacity-building initiatives through technical assistance on programme design and implementation; and (3) improving collaboration among government and development partners towards common objectives, especially with international financial institutions.

UNICEF's UCB agenda adopts an inclusive approach that supports countries in advancing social protection for children according to their national priorities, financial capacities and policy frameworks. Governments, development partners (including UNICEF), civil society and other actors face considerable scope to contribute towards the required progress. UNICEF, with its intellectual leadership in this sector and the force of its child rights mandate, can drive multi-dimensional initiatives that accelerate the progressive realisation of UCBs.

1. Introduction

With an estimated 356 million children living in extreme poverty and more than an additional 100 million children falling into multi-dimensional poverty due to the multi-faceted impact of COVID-19, child-sensitive social protection plays a more vital role than ever before.¹ Sustainable Development Goal One (Target 1.2) calls for “reducing at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions” by 2030.

Over the past few decades, national governments, development partners and international organisations have focused on increasing investment in child-sensitive social protection programmes and demonstrated substantial progress in employing social protection systems (particularly cash-based programming) in achieving global development and humanitarian objectives. Around the world, child-sensitive social protection programmes (including cash transfers) have grown in importance as tools to not only tackle poverty and vulnerability but also to strengthen a multi-dimensional range of developmental outcomes for children. These initiatives have documented substantial impact in helping achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other social and human development impacts.

UNICEF plays an instrumental role in ending child poverty. Its rights-based approach to social protection has supported the mobilisation of multiple actors at local, national, regional, and global levels to expand child-sensitive social protection, including universal child benefits. Child benefits play a vital role in reducing child poverty and contribute to cognitive and human capital development. Universalism is at the forefront of the international policy consensus, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the call to ‘leave no one behind’. Universal Child Benefits (UCBs) offer a promising policy tool to promote the realisation of child rights, reduce poverty and inequality, bolster dignity and cohesion, and build public support for social protection policy.² Despite this, not all governments make the establishment of UCBs a priority and those that do face challenges in institutionalising universal child benefits due to various barriers, including capacity constraints and fiscal space allocation for child-sensitive social protection programming. Given the growing momentum towards universal child benefits, policy-makers and their development partners require an evidence base that analyses the pathways that have enabled countries to progressively realise UCBs, whether this is through establishing or expanding an existing child-focused benefit, increasing the child-sensitivity or coverage of other benefit programs that support children indirectly, strengthening legislative frameworks and policy regulation, government capacity for administrative and financing, or building political will and public support for a universal policy. This evidence will strengthen UNICEF’s ability to deliver children’s rights and tackle child poverty by supporting national governments to make progress towards delivering more expansive

benefits. Evidence of what works can strengthen UNICEF’s global position in this area of work and enhance the capacity within UNICEF to design, deliver and coordinate its interventions towards this aim.

In light of the prevailing need for evidence on what works and to provide organisational direction for the progressive realisation of universal child benefits, UNICEF’s Evaluation Office has commissioned the Economic Policy Research Institute, a global not-for-profit research and evaluation organisation based in Cape Town, to evaluate UNICEF’s approaches to universal child benefits in 21 countries around the world. This document provides the project’s research report. After a brief introduction to the progressive realisation of universal child benefits, the document outlines the evaluation’s purpose, objectives, subject and scope, together with the evaluation criteria and questions. The report then presents the research findings based on initial key informant interviews with UNICEF country offices and secondary desk research. Illuminating a conceptual framework of progressive realisation towards UCBs, the report answers the three research questions framing the evaluation. The first interrogates for those countries in the sample which have achieved UCBs or progress in expansion towards universality, the steps and processes that led to their establishment. Questions 2 and 3 will draw from these country examples and desk research to identify the key structural drivers and barriers to the progressive realisation of UCBs. The answers to questions 2 and 3 provide a framework for the evaluation component and articulate research propositions, supporting a systematic evaluation of the extent to which UNICEF’s activities contributed to the structural drivers of expansion towards UCBs.

2. Purpose, objectives, subjects and scope

2.1 Purpose

This evaluation focuses on two complementary components. This report focuses on the first—the research component, which in turn provides the conceptual basis for the second component—the evaluation component. The research component provides a framework to understand the drivers and barriers to the progressive realisation of UCB’s and the range of actions and activities undertaken by UNICEF Country Offices to support the drivers and tackle the barriers. This research frames a set of drivers and barriers that support and hinder the progressive realisation of UCBs within the sampled countries, positing hypotheses that the evaluation phase tests.

This research report consolidates the conceptual framework around the progressive realisation towards UCBs. The three questions outlined in the research phase will interrogate the key steps and processes that led to establishment of child benefits in the sampled countries, key structural drivers and barriers through KII and complementing desk research. Based on country case studies, the research phase generates propositions of the factors that promote or constrain progress (drivers and barriers) and articulates an ex-post theory of change, and presents the pathways of

impact that will guide the evaluation phase. According to research findings and propositions, the evaluation questions and hypotheses framework will be revisited and refined.

2.2 Objectives

Based on the purpose, the research phase aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the policy and programme steps and processes (pathways or models) that have led to the establishment or progressive realisation of UCB, including factors that enhance or impede progressive expansion (drivers and barriers).
2. To preliminarily identify actions undertaken by UNICEF in supporting their government partners in making progress towards UCBs, and what are the opportunities for leading further strategic action.
3. To inform the evaluation framework that will guide the evaluation phase. The evaluation phase will assess to what extent UNICEF country offices' interventions have been relevant and effective in supporting their government partners in making progress towards UCBs.
 - a. To assess the extent to which UNICEF has been effective in mobilising government resources or enabling governments to mobilise resources to support progress towards UCBs;
 - b. To assess the extent to which UNICEF has been effective in strengthening the capacity of governments and their partners at individual and organisational levels to support progress towards UCBs; and
 - c. To assess the extent to which UNICEF has effectively developed, sustained or leveraged country-level partnerships to support the progressive realisation of UCBs.

2.3 Subject

The subject of the research component is UNICEF's activities towards the progressive realisation of Universal Child Benefits. The definition of progressive realisation of Universal Child Benefits employed in this evaluation is the establishment or improvement of UCB-relevant social protection programmes or policies, as further elaborated in section 4.1.

2.4 Scope

This evaluation aims to assess UNICEF's role in the progressive realisation of universal child benefits, focusing specifically on programmes that provide cash transfers either directly or indirectly to children or households with children. This focus reflects (i) the wide use of child benefits as a core social protection interventions proven to reduce child poverty and vulnerability, and (ii) UNICEF's commitment to the progressive realisation of universal child benefits.

Child benefits can take a variety of forms, with considerable variation in the design and implementation of these programmes around the world. Progressive realisation of UCBs takes different pathways in various countries, depending on the country's social protection system and the government's commitment to providing rights-based social protection. This evaluation identified two key objectives, which include the pathways to universalism and how UNICEF has leveraged the opportunities to support the progressive realisation of UCBs, including effective interim resourcing and supporting governments in mobilising long-term domestic fiscal resources.

Geographic scope: While the evaluation has a global outlook and is not limited to a specific region, primary data collection activities and integrated analysis of secondary data focus on a set of twenty-one countries.

The following list of countries reflect consultations and analysis during the inception phase and results from the initial baseline in 2020:

EAP: Cambodia, Mongolia, and Thailand

ECA: Montenegro

ESA: Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia

MENA: Lebanon, Sudan and Tunisia

LAC: Argentina and Bolivia

SA: India and Nepal

WCA: Nigeria and Senegal

OECD: Canada

Four in-depth country case studies will be carried out during the evaluation phase. Each in-depth country case study will review the relevant literature on key areas of inquiry as well as primary data collected from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions from the initial review. The four following countries have been selected for in-depth review, based on consultation with UNICEF during the inception and research phase: (i) Argentina, (ii) Nepal, (3) South Africa, and (iv) Thailand.

The **temporal scope** of the evaluation reflects each country’s relevant timeline for the evolution and progressive realisation of its main child-focused cash transfer programmes. The case study documentation will detail the framing of the temporal scope.

3. Conceptual Framework and Definitions

As established in the Global Social Protection Framework (2019), UNICEF has adopted a rights-based approach to social protection that promotes universal social protection for all and prioritises the poorest and most vulnerable children in working towards progressive realisation of universal coverage. For the purpose of this evaluation, the desired change is more specific, focusing on the progressive realisation of one particular policy tool: Universal Child Benefits. This desired change is interpreted to be a specific aim that is a part of, but not the complete realisation of, UNICEF’s broader universal coverage goal. The articulation of the desired change, and the definition of what constitutes the progressive realisation of UCBs, were developed in consultation with UNICEF stakeholders and through documentary review. This section provides a consolidated framework for how to conceptualise the desired change.

Universal Child Benefits are understood as child and family cash benefit programmes anchored in national legislation consisting of unconditional cash transfers paid regularly to every child in a country irrespective of household income or poverty levels (See Box 1 for the definition of UCBs)

Box 1: Definition of UCBs

Definition of a Universal Child Benefit

Universal Child Benefits (UCB): Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children under 18 years of age (or 18 and above), independently of their socioeconomic or other characteristics, paid for a minimum of 10 years.

Source: ODI/UNICEF (2020) *Universal child benefits: policy issues and options*. London: Overseas Development Institute and New York: UNICEF.

3.1 Definition: What is the “progressive realisation of UCBs”?

While UNICEF holds the overarching aim that efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable social protection covers all children, this evaluation defines impact to be *progressive realisation* towards relevant and appropriate instruments for delivering child benefits, including UCBs. Progressive realisation towards UCBs involves establishing, expanding or improving social protection programmes or policies that reach children. ‘Progress’ can be complex, non-linear and multi-dimensional, evolving in multiple ways (dimensions). One dimension may progress while another recedes, and these dimensions may interact with each other and generate compounding effects. No single indicator or index of success captures the complexity of these dynamics.

Progress results along six dimensions, organised under two main categories of improvements in programmes (universality, unconditionality, predictability and impact) and improvements in policy (permanence and comprehensiveness).

Box 2: The Progressive Realisation of Universal Child Benefits

The Progressive Realisation of Universal Child Benefits

Progressive Realisation of UCBs: Multi-dimensional and dynamic improvement of social protection programmes or policies that reach children, according to criteria of universality, unconditionality, predictability, impact, permanence and policy comprehensiveness.

Source: Based on ODI/UNICEF (2020) and key stakeholder consultations

Improvements in programmes

Three principles underpin a universal child benefit (UCB): predictability, unconditionality and universality.³ Each principle is taken to be a dimension for progress. Added to this is a fourth dimension: programme impact. While it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess the impact of social protection programmes, adjustments in design or implementation that improve the multidimensional impacts⁴ and realisation of rights and gender equality for target populations and rights holders are considered to contribute to the progressive realisation of UCBs.

1. **Universality.** The establishment or horizontal expansion of a child benefit reaches a relevant number of children regardless of income status or other characteristics. Examples of progress in this dimension are the expansion through increasing geographic inclusion, widening age restrictions and increasing the income threshold of means-testing.
2. **Unconditionality.** The removal of conditionalities set in terms of individual punitive responsibility (e.g. lead to suspension from programme participation in the event of non-compliance) represents progress towards UCBs since it increases inclusion. Such conditionalities risk screening out or penalising the most vulnerable groups, who face the highest barriers or opportunity costs in complying with such conditions.
3. **Predictability.** A scheme is not considered a UCB unless payments are made on a regular basis. Changes that increase the predictability of payments (encompassing the frequency and timing, regularity and expected duration) are considered progress in this dimension towards the realisation of UCBs.
4. **Programme Impact.** Improvements in multidimensional impact, greater realisation of rights and gender equality are considered progress in the impact dimension. This may encompass a variety of improvements, including increasing the benefit amount, the integration of

complementary services such as nutrition, health and education,⁵ improved sensitivity to gender or tackling adverse social norms, disability, or other vulnerabilities; “shame-proofing” cash transfers and the adoption of a lifecycle approach.

Improvements in Policy

Statutory status is a necessary component of the full realisation of a UCB, since the legal establishment of the entitlement for children below the age of 18 to receive a regular transfer ensures universal statutory coverage and sustainability.⁶ It is noteworthy that statutory status is not a sufficient component of a UCB since it does not guarantee that all eligible children receive a transfer in practice. The government's recognition of transfers as citizens' ‘right’ may enable the empowerment of beneficiaries and promote government accountability, as citizens are made aware of their entitlements and demand them.⁷ A further policy dimension of the progressive realisation towards UCBs is the comprehensiveness of the government's approach, based on the fundamental realisation of rights.

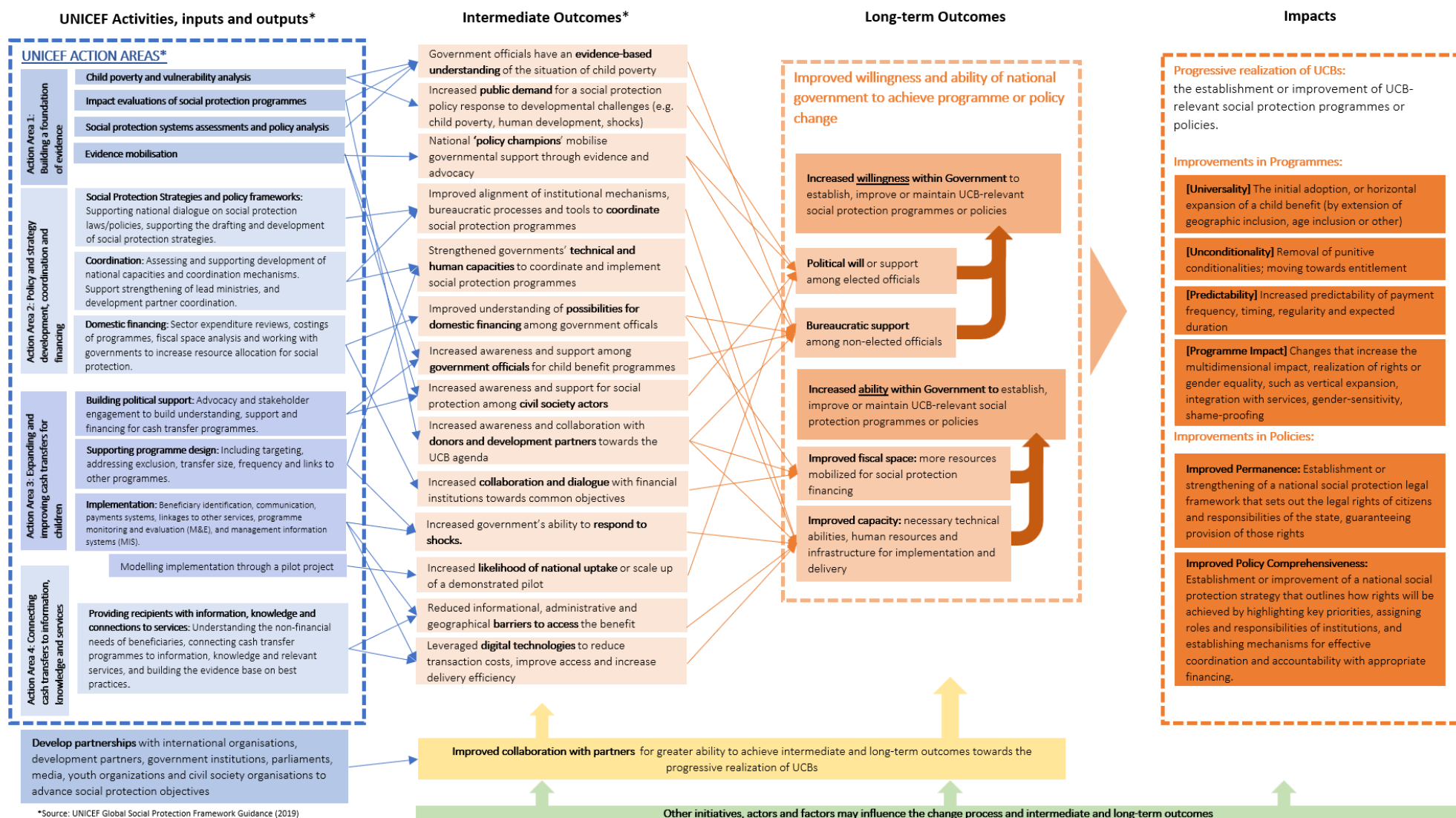
5. **Permanence.** The establishment or strengthening of a national social protection legal framework that sets out the legal rights of citizens and responsibilities of the state, guaranteeing the provision of those rights.
6. **Policy Comprehensiveness.** Establishment or improvement of a national social protection strategy that outlines how rights will be achieved by highlighting key priorities, assigning roles and responsibilities of institutions, and establishing mechanisms for effective coordination and accountability with appropriate financing.

3.2 Ex-Post Theory of Change

This report presents an ex-post Theory of Change to reconstruct the causal thinking and assumptions that link the Action Areas developed by UNICEF with the desired change: the progressive realisation of UCBs. The ToC in this report builds on findings and propositions identified during the research phase and provides the framework for the evaluation phase.

The ToC illustrated in figure 1 presents the main change mechanisms and strategies adopted by UNICEF to advance the UCB agenda. It incorporates propositions pertaining to drivers and barriers identified during the research phase and articulates the pathways of impact towards the progressive realisation of UCBs. At this stage, the ToC validates intermediate and long-term outcomes based on country case studies and consolidates the dimensions of impact discussed above. During the evaluation phase, the analysis of UNICEF actions towards drivers and barriers will inform a revised version of the ToC.

Figure 1: Ex-post theory of change



SOURCE: Authors, based on UNICEF (2019) and further consultations and analysis

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The **inputs** of the ToC consist of UNICEF actions and activities towards the progressive realisation of UCBs. The listed actions presented in the first column in figure 1 is based on available data, taken largely from UNICEF’s Global Social Protection Programme Framework (2019) and the associated Companion Guidance, as well as the initial round of KIIs. The arrows linking UNICEF actions to intermediate outcomes as presented here will be further developed during the evaluation phase.

The **intermediate outcomes** in second column are informed by additional propositions on the drivers and barriers that are within UNICEF’s sphere of influence, based on this report’s findings. Relevant intermediate outcomes associated with the main drivers include evidence and partnerships to mobilise support among government officials; the role of policy champions to generate support within government departments and ministries through evidence and advocacy; increased awareness and the ability of governments to introduce shock-responsive policies; and the collaboration with financial institution towards common objectives on social protection for children. Intermediate outcomes related to overcoming the primary barriers include employing evidence to analyse the fiscal feasibility of child benefits; mobilising results of impact evaluations to generate support among government officials to finance or increase programmes’ budget; strengthening governments’ technical abilities and capacities, and the adoption of more inclusive and comprehensive policy design features.

Longer-term outcomes consist of improved willingness and abilities of national governments to achieve programme or policy changes and improvements in programme design towards the dimensions of impact. Improved government will translate into political will and bureaucratic support. Political will refers to support among elected officials, generally driven by political incentives. Bureaucratic support consists of support among non-elected government officials such as ministers and relevant decision-makers. Improved government ability includes increased fiscal space and improved government capacity. Increased fiscal space refers to more resources being mobilised to finance child benefits, whilst improved capacity refers to governments technical, human, coordination and infrastructure resources to implement and deliver programmes.

Partnerships are taken to have a transversal role, involved in various of UNICEFs actions and contributing to both intermediate and longer-term outcomes. The yellow section at the lower part of the diagram depicts this cross-cutting character. Partnerships include various actors, notably governments, international development agencies, financial institutions, and civil society organisations. Question 1 (g) and question 2 (a) discuss the role of strategic partnerships in the progressive realisation of UCBs.

Impact in this ToC consists of improvements in the six dimensions of progress towards the realisation of UCBs outlined in previous sections. Programmatic improvements include

universality, unconditionality, predictability and programme impact. Policy improvements include permanence and comprehensiveness.

This ToC will be used to refine the evaluation framework, enabling the evaluation team to better assess whether UNICEF's interventions were (a) **relevant** for making progress towards the desired change through the pathways identified (for example, are there pathways that UNICEF did not explore? Were the correct actions/pathways for the situation identified and prioritised?), and (b) **effective** in activating the pathways identified (e.g., Were the necessary conditions met for the actions to result in desired outcomes?). The ToC will be revised and revisited throughout the evaluation to incorporate new information and findings.

4. Research Questions

The research component consists of three questions. The first interrogates, for those countries in the sample which have achieved UCBs (or progress towards UCBs), the steps and processes that led to their establishment. Questions 2 and 3 will draw from these country examples, and desk research, the key structural drivers and barriers to the progressive realisation of UCBs. The answers to questions 2 and 3 will provide a framework for the evaluation component and the articulation of initial propositions, enabling a systematic evaluation of the extent to which UNICEF's activities contributed to the structural drivers of expansion towards UCBs. Four factors of interest have been identified as drivers and barriers for progressive realisation of UCBs: partnerships and inclusive digital technologies (as drivers) and government capacity and fiscal space (as barriers). These will be explored in further detail in both the research and evaluation components.

1. For the countries in the sample in which Universal Child Benefits (UCBs) are in place or progressively being realised: What are the policy and programme steps and processes (pathways or models) that have led to the establishment or progressive realisation of UCBs?
2. For these relevant countries, what are the key structural drivers of UCB expansion?
3. Considering all the countries in the sample, what are the key barriers to overcome in achieving progressive realisation of UCBs?

4.1 Research Methodology

Secondary data collection

The research phase commenced in parallel to the inception phase. The decided protocol of complementing qualitative data and information retrieved from primary data collection activities with secondary sources was followed. The research team performed comprehensive desk review of documents pertaining to the child benefit programmes selected for evaluation, together with the wider social protection landscape and its key actors. The desk review comprised existing reports, assessments and evaluations of the social protection system, and documents specific to the child benefits, such as policy briefs, government reports, internal monitoring and evaluation documents, and financial reports, depending on availability of documents. The project's research phase was critical in conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature and guidance documents on social protection, particularly child benefit and cash transfers targeting children across the country sample. Findings at this stage provide adequate background to the evaluation's setting and context. The review resulted in the development of country profiles and based on these a set of preliminary context variables, drivers and barriers were identified, as well as relevant UNICEF actions. Key events highlighting the progressive realisation of UCBs were situated in time, and initial propositions were defined. This initial analysis informed the consequent primary data collection.

Primary data collection

Following the initial research, the research team undertook primary data collection through in-person and virtual key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders. UNICEF HQ facilitated communication with country offices, and at least one member of UNICEF HQ was present during the interview process. An expert sampling technique was employed for the KIIs, which is a type of purposive sampling that selects individuals with particular expertise on the subject matter. For KIIs with UNICEF staff at the headquarters, regional offices and country offices, the chief of social policy and other relevant staff involved in the design and implementation of UCB-relevant programmes were selected. The technique of expert sampling was used for key initial round of informant interviews with stakeholders in government and non-governmental organisations at national level and implementers at sub-national level. In each sampled country, in consultation with the UNICEF Country Offices, a sample of experts and key informants involved in the design and implementation of the evaluated UCB programme, and the wider social protection landscape and humanitarian response was selected for interviews. This method will be further adopted for the informant interviews in the evaluation phase. In addition to the expert sampling technique, a chain referral approach will also be adopted, wherein identified stakeholders are encouraged to refer other individuals that should also be consulted.

All key informant interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed and subsequently coded to facilitate integrated data analysis. Thematic coding supported the identification of pre-established codes and data-driven, emergent codes. As a result of coding analysis, the relevant variables were updated, and each country's case acquired further nuance.

5. Research Findings

The following section presents the research findings. It first explains the conceptual framework that informs the idea of progressive realisation of UCBs, its dimensions, typology and corresponding classification of the country sample. Subsequently, the report addresses the research questions based on the developed framework.

Research Questions

RQ1

For the countries in the sample in which Universal Child Benefits (UCBs) are in place or progressively being realised: What are the policy and programme steps and processes (pathways or models) that have led to the establishment or progressive realisation of UCBs?

- a) In which countries have the progressive realisation of UCBs happened?

This section discusses the evolution of progress towards UCBs in the sample countries. The analysis builds on the typology of the “progressive realisation of UCBs” introduced by UNICEF and ODI to frame the broader relevance beyond country-specific descriptions.⁸ The typology was formulated in iteration both inductively and deductively, and case studies informed the stages and definitory variables; subsequently, the resulting types served to situate the cases. The table below presents an overview of the programmatic progress of child benefits in each country, according to design features such as conditionalities, eligibility criteria, means-testing, child-sensitivity and geographical scope, reflecting their status of progressive realisation towards UCBs.

Table 1: Country-wise child benefit programmes

Country	Programme Name and Acronym	Progress status towards the realisation of UCBs and typology classification
Argentina	Universal Child Allowance (AUH), Family Allowance (FA) and tax deductions	Combined contributory and non-contributory schemes with high coverage
Bihar, India	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY)	Girl-targeted conditional programme with developmental aims (eliminate child marriage)
Bolivia	Bono Juancito Pinto (Juancito Pinto Grant) (BJP)	Conditional cash transfer programme with developmental aims (decrease drop-out rates)
Burundi	Merankabandi	Household-level multiple-categorical targeted programme
Cambodia	CARD-UNICEF cash transfer pilot project	Cash-plus programme targeting pregnant women and children under-5 living in poverty
Canada	Canada Child Benefit	Tax-financed scheme with high coverage and gradually phased out for households with an adjusted income above CAD 30,000
Kenya	Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC)	Means-tested cash transfer with limited population coverage and targeted to households that include children living with HIV
Lebanon	Haddi Programme	Cash-plus programme targeting households with vulnerable children
Lesotho	Child Grants Programme (CGP)	Means-tested cash transfer with limited population coverage and targeted to households that include OVC
Mongolia	Child Money Programme (CMP)	Unconditional categorically targeted child transfer with pressures/history for poverty targeting using a PMT
Montenegro	First Child Allowance (FCA)	Unconditional cash transfer programme currently targeting children under 6 years (potentially expanding)
Mozambique	Child Grant Programme	Unconditional means-tested transfer for specific age-groups
Nepal	Child Grant Programme	Multiple categorical targeted cash transfer (children, geography) with low population coverage
Senegal	Programme National de Bourses Sociales Familiales (PNBSF)	Conditional cash transfer programme with developmental aims (decrease drop-out and increase vaccination rate)
Sokoto State, Nigeria	Girls Education Project Phase 3	Girl-targeted conditional programme with developmental aims (improving school access, ensuring learning outcomes)
South Africa	Child Support Grant (CSG)	Unconditional means-tested transfer with high population coverage (B), progressively expanded to age 18
Sudan	Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus (MCCT+)	Cash-plus donor-funded government programme targeting pregnant women and children under age of two
Thailand	Child Support Grant	Near-Universal Child Benefit for specific age groups (potentially expanding) €
Tunisia	AMEN Social Programme	Means-tested cash transfer programme targeting households
Uganda	Girls Empowering Girls	Multiple Categorical and Means Tested programme with developmental objectives
Zambia	Social Cash Transfer	Cash transfer programme that includes children (directly and indirectly), but with low population coverage

The analysis of child benefit programmes in the 21 countries of the sample demonstrates that the progressive realisation towards child benefits is a multidimensional dynamic leading to various outcomes, meaning that there is not a single and linear pathway to the desired change. Table 1 presents the classification of programmes according to their progress status towards UCBs as they develop.

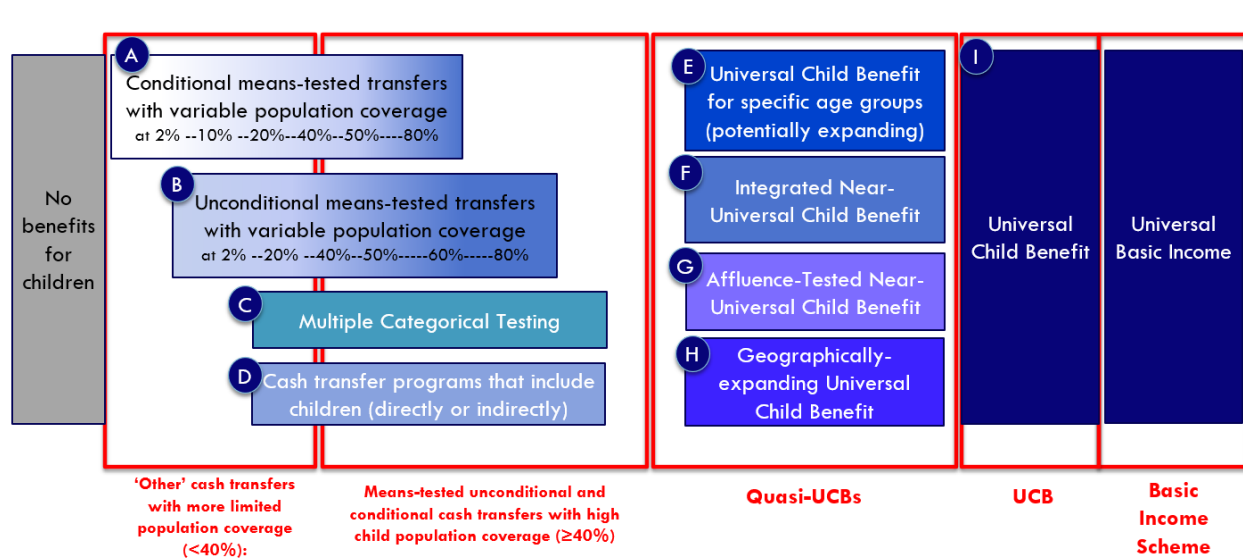
Increasing coverage rates or reaching a relevant share of the children population is considered a progress dimension. In Mongolia, the CMP is a near-universal UCB covering about 99% of the children population, which evolved from a targeted means-testing design to affluence-testing.⁹ In this case, the dimension of progress corresponds to the high number of children receiving the benefit and the progressive improvement from poverty-targeting to affluence-targeting. Similarly, in Argentina, the combination of two contributory programmes and the non-contributory AUH covers 87.4% of children, the AUH accounting for 30%.¹⁰ While involving conditionalities and means-testing, the AUH is complemented by contributory schemes to cover a high number of children. The case studies also reveal that progress in one dimension is not always associated with improvements in other dimensions. For instance, in Bolivia, the BJP has made progress by reaching 90% of school-age children in public schools,¹¹ even when the transfer amount has not increased substantially.

Geographically expanding coverage across districts is considered another dimension of progress. The CGP in Nepal has experienced progress by expanding coverage from all under-five children in the Karnali Zone as well as poor Dalit children in the rest of the country, with geographic expansions and subsequently to all children under five years of age. Another dimension of progress, in this case, consists of the coverage increase from 16% to 80% of the intended beneficiaries.¹²

Adopting multiple categorical targeting criteria that include socio-demographic characteristics or living standards and (or instead of) monetary poverty is also considered a dimension of progress for better capturing the multidimensional character of poverty and vulnerability. Examples of progress in this dimension are two programmes- MKUY in Bihar, India, which aims to prevent child marriage, and the GEP3-CTP in the Sokoto state, Nigeria, which aims to increase girls' school attendance; it follows that both programmes target girls and adolescents. In the case of the GEP3-CTP, targeting also included geographical areas of higher school drop-out rates.¹³ While most child benefits have progressed in the dimension of unconditionality, universality remains constrained by targeted approaches. For instance, programmes in Bolivia, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa, Thailand and Zambia are means-tested unconditional cash transfers that have nonetheless experienced different improvements in coverage and transfer amount.

Case studies illustrate that progress towards the realisation of UCBs is multidimensional, and the conceptual framework proposed here captures a diverse set of improvements. The typology presented in this section depicts the various ways a country can progress towards the realisation of UCBs. This categorisation is informed by the countries' case studies, reflecting their progress in the above-mentioned domains. Building on the classification of non-contributory child and family benefits set out in ODI/UNICEF's Report 'Universal child benefits: policy issues and options' (2020)¹⁷, Figure 2 shows that as well as progress across each category (represented in the figure by moving from left to right; such as increasing the coverage of a programme with <40% to 80% child coverage), progress can also occur within each category (represented by moving from A to I; such as increasing the universality of a qUCB by expanding coverage, or increasing the programme's impact by integrating cash-plus, etc). This reflects the multidimensional and dynamic character of the progressive realisation of UCBs and the diverse means of making progress. The defining components of each category are presented as follows.

Figure 2: Progressive realisation towards UCBs can occur in multiple dimensions, as represented by a move from left to right or from A to I



(A) **Conditional means-tested transfers with low or high population coverage:** Cash transfers delivered to beneficiaries upon the fulfilment of conditionalities, generally consisting of health and education activities or labour. Eligibility is determined by low incomes, generally an income poverty threshold. Coverage is considered low when less than 40% of the population have access to the programme, and high when more than 40% of the population have access to the programme.

- (B) **Unconditional means-tested transfers with low or high population coverage:** Cash transfers delivered to beneficiaries without the need to fulfil conditionalities. Eligibility is determined by low incomes, generally an income poverty threshold.
- (C) **Multiple Categorical Testing with low or high population coverage:** Unconditional cash transfers with eligibility criteria that include socio-demographic characteristics or multidimensional poverty measures, in addition to (or instead of) income poverty. Age, gender, living standards, multidimensional poverty or human development indices are examples of these criteria.
- (D) **Cash transfers that include children (directly or indirectly) with low or high population coverage:** Child-sensitive conditional or unconditional cash transfers aimed at improving development outcomes for children in a direct or indirect manner, by either targeting children, their caregivers or households with children.
- (E) **Near-Universal Child Benefit for specific age groups (potentially expanding):** Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children, with no eligibility criteria other than age, generally determined by a threshold. “Potentially expanding” indicates the expansion of the age threshold is currently under development.
- (F) **Integrated Near-Universal Child Benefit:** Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children under 18 years of age (or 18 and above), that include components in addition to the cash benefit, generally related to access to basic services, informational workshops, financial literacy, or other behavioural interventions. These components are often referred to as “cash plus”.
- (G) **Affluence-Tested Near-Universal Child Benefit:** Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children under 18 years of age (or 18 and above), below an income threshold, generally excluding upper-medium and higher income households.
- (H) **Geographically expanding Universal Child Benefit:** Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children under 18 years of age (or 18 and above). Coverage is limited to some geographical areas or political units, often determined by levels of poverty or marginalisation, for instance, specific provinces or rural areas. “Potentially expanding” indicates the expansion of the geographical scope is currently under development.
- (I) **Universal Child Benefit:** Defined by UNICEF and ODI as Child or family allowances, paid on a regular basis as a cash or tax transfer, to the primary caregiver for all dependent children

under 18 years of age (or 18 and above), independently of their socioeconomic or other characteristics, paid for a minimum of 10 years.

Universal Basic Income: Unconditional cash transfer for all the population of a country aiming at providing a floor of basic income.¹⁴

The conceptual framework proposed above and in sections 4.1 and 4.2 points at different pathways through which UCBs are progressively realised. Policy pathways are understood as the programmatic trajectories of progress towards the desired change. The typology in Figure 2 above is a non-exhaustive tool to identify the policy pathways that child benefits follow to make progress towards UCBs. For instance, a policy pathway can consist of going from an unconditional poverty-targeted design to an unconditional affluence-tested design, such as the case of Mongolia; a programme that is implemented first in one district followed by expansions to other districts follows a geographically expanding programme pathway, such as the case of Nepal; or a programme that has increased coverage by widening the age-threshold, that is an age expanding pathway, as the cases of South Africa and Thailand. The typology (figure 2) serves to map the policy pathways, which can go from points A to I or from A to D. The key drivers and barriers examined in research questions 2 and 3 influence these trajectories, in addition to multiple contextual factors.

b) What was the **timeframe** of the UCB development?

The progressive realisation of UCBs along the six dimensions is a dynamic and non-linear process. Progress does not occur in a single moment in time, and the timeframe varies highly across the country sample. Multiple factors influence the timeframe of developments and sequencing of reforms and expansions. These factors involve actors behind the planning process, national priorities, target audience, implementation methods, as well as monitoring and evaluation, and, more importantly, structural factors that drive or hinder the progressive realisation of UCBs (drivers and barriers). The table below presents an overview of the trajectories of child benefits over time regarding their development along the dimensions of progress discussed in previous sections.

Table 2: Timeframe for expansion of child benefit

Country	Programme	Start	Development dynamics
Argentina	AUH, FA, and tax deductions	2009	AUH expanded in 2011 to cover pregnant women. FA reformed in 2016 to cover self-employed.
Bihar, India	MKUY	2018	Pilot project expanded universally, targeting girls under 21 years
Bolivia	BJP	2006	Expanded school grade eligibility threshold expansions in 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2014
Burundi	Merankabandi	2017	Launched for a period of five years. Estimated completion for 2022
Cambodia	CARD	2013	Pilot project expanded in 2019 and through 2020
Canada	Child Benefit	2016	Increased benefit size for the period of 2022-23
Kenya	CT-OVC	2004	Pilot project expanded in 2009, with vertical expansion in 2011
Lebanon	Haddi Programme	2021	Increased coverage between the period 2021-22
Lesotho	CGP	2009	Geographical expansion in 2013. Top-ups during El Niño Shock in 2016. Donor-led horizontal expansion in 2021
Mongolia	CMP	2005	Universalised in 2006, discontinued in 2010, reintroduced in 2012 and made affluence-tested in 2018
Montenegro	FCA	2021	Coverage increase in 2021 and universal roll-out in 2022
Mozambique	CGP	2016	Based on pilot phase of this programme, GoM is preparing for its horizontal expansion
Nepal	CPG	2009-10	Vertical and temporary horizontal expansion targeting all children under the age of five and proposed universalisation
Senegal	PNBSF	2013	Horizontal expansion In 2014 and 2015
Sokoto State, Nigeria	Girls Education Project Phase 3	2014	Commenced in six districts and by 2020 has expanded to reach an additional one million girls
South Africa	CSG	1998	Incremental vertical expansion. Increased age threshold in 2003-2005, 2010, 2012
Sudan	MCCT+	2021	Geographical expansion of MCCT+ in 7 additional states in 2021
Thailand	CSG	2015	Expanded vertically and horizontally in 2016 to cover eligible children under 3 and in 2020 to cover children under 6
Tunisia	AMEN	2020	Started as a COVID-19 response, currently covering children under 5
Uganda	GEG	2019	Horizontal expansion in 2021
Zambia	SCT	2003	Geographically expanded to all 116 districts in Zambia

Progress towards UCBs does not follow a linear trajectory, as policies experience a series of setbacks and improvements in different stages of their development. In the case of Mongolia, the CMP was introduced by the GoM as a conditional means-tested transfer, which became universal in 2006 after evidence revealed high exclusion errors associated with conditionalities and targeting criteria. The GoM discontinued the programme in 2010 and reintroduced it again as a universal scheme in 2012. In 2018 the government reintroduced targeting, this time through affluence-testing intended to cover 80% of children under 18.¹⁵ This case demonstrates the dynamic trajectory of a child benefit, highlighting that even major setbacks such as discontinuation are not determinants for progressing in subsequent periods.

Improvements can also be incremental across more prolonged periods. For example, the CSG in South Africa experienced incremental expansions since its implementation in 1998 through cautious increases in the programme budget, benefit size and age threshold.¹⁶ Similarly, the BJP in Bolivia experienced the gradual expansion of the age threshold by expanding coverage of children up to fifth until 12th grade between 2006 and 2014.¹⁷ Reforms leading to horizontal and vertical expansions or changes to programme design can also be episodic, taking place between longer periods, not necessarily preceded or followed by incremental change. In Argentina, the AUH expanded to include pregnant women in 2011, and the contributory FA reformed in 2016 to include small taxpayers and self-employed.¹⁸ Improvements can occur in short periods; for instance, the full ownership of the CGP by the Government of Lesotho in 2013 after its introduction in 2009 by the European Union.¹⁹

The development trajectories of the child benefits reveal that progressive realisation is not achieved in one single step; on the contrary, the process occurs in different stages throughout variable periods of time. The development process of these programmes can be accelerated, slowed or interrupted by factors that enable or hinder this dynamic.

- c) Was the expansion rooted in any **policies/laws**? More generally—what was the institutional basis for the expansion? Donor programme? Ministry policy? National legislation? Other?

In the context of COVID-19, governments and policymakers have increased enthusiasm to invest in the expansion of child benefits. Countries have managed to achieve the progressive realisation of UCBs through various pathways. In many countries, the progressive realisation of UCBs has happened through an “iterative process which involves the establishment and strengthening of legislation and policy regulation, administrative and financing capacity and political and public support for policy”.²⁰

A rights-based approach to social protection is essential to ensure the fulfilment and protection of basic needs. With countries being part of international human rights treaties, governments are committed to ensuring equality for all and supporting the most vulnerable. The progress towards universal child benefits shows a higher commitment to fulfilling that promise and is closely integrated with the discussion about basic incomes and redistribution of resources.²¹ Child benefits require political will and anchoring such programmes within national legislation helps guarantee coverage as a matter of right, providing sustainability in funding and legal entitlements to eligible individuals and households. According to the World Social Protection Report 2020-22, around 67 of the 181 sampled countries do not have any child or family benefit anchored within national legislation.²²

Table 3: Institutional basis for child benefits within the sampled countries

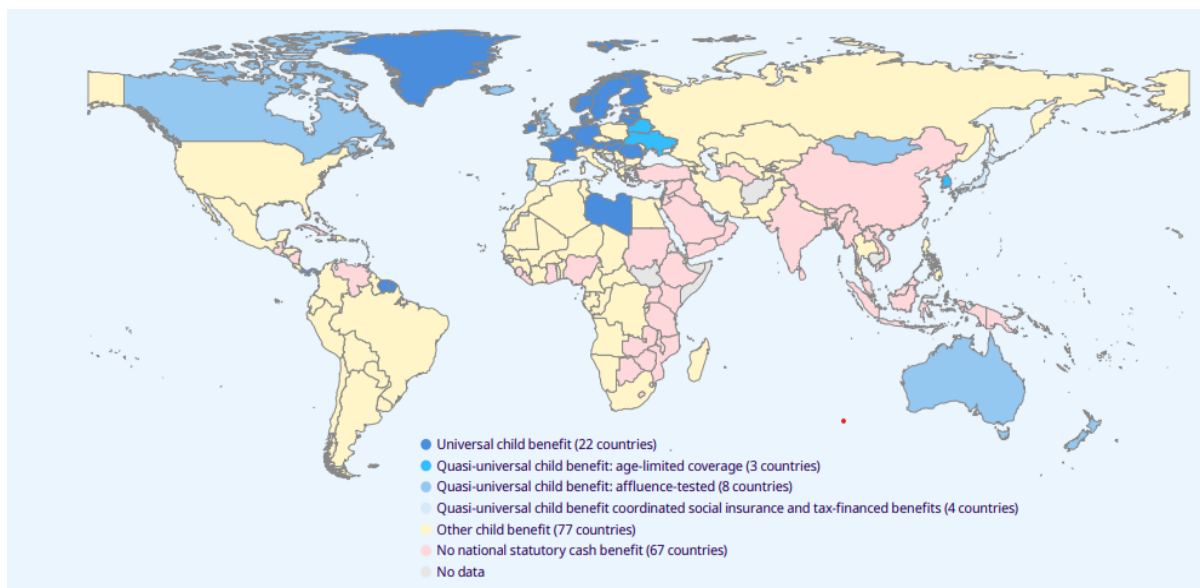
Country	Year of legislation	Institutional basis, policy or law
Argentina	2009, 2011, 2016	Act 24.714, AUH: Executive Order 1602/ 2009 and Executive Order 446/2011; FA: Executive Order 593/2016. ²³
Bihar, India	2018	Government policy with budget allocation
Bolivia	2006	Executive Decree
Burundi	2018	Vision 2025, Burundi National Development Plan 2018-2027
Cambodia	2017	National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-25
Canada	2016	Constitutional Act
Kenya	2013	Kenya National Social Protection Policy (2011) National Social Assistance act (2013)
Lebanon	2021	Donor-funded programme
Lesotho	2014	National Social Policy Strategy
Mongolia	1995	Law on Social Welfare
Montenegro	2020	Law on Social and Child Protection Reform
Mozambique	2016	Mozambique National Basic Social Security Strategy 2016-2024
Nepal	2009	Government policy with budget allocation
Senegal	2017	National Social Protection Strategy (2016-2035)
Sokoto State, Nigeria	-	Donor-funded programme implemented by UNICEF. (No legislation or policy)
South Africa	1998, 2004	South African Constitution. Section 27(1)(c) and 27(2) of the Bill of Rights, ²⁴ Social Assistance Act, (No. 13 of 2004) ²⁵
Sudan	2021	Sudan Social Protection Strategy
Thailand	2015	Cabinet-approved resolution
Tunisia	2019	Cabinet-approved resolution
Uganda	-	Donor-funded municipality-implemented pilot (no legislation or policy)
Zambia	PWAS - 1950 NSPA - 2014	Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS) in 1950 National Social Protection Policy (NSPA) in 2014

UCBs anchored within national legislation mainly emerge in upper-middle-income or high-income countries.²⁶ Many low-income and lower-middle income countries develop a variety of child/family benefit programmes targeted towards vulnerable children but without an anchor in national legislation. Child/family benefits not anchored in national legislation tend to be delivered by various stakeholders, including governments, development partners, NGOs and other agencies, and are less stable in terms of funding and long-term sustainability. With no legal framework backing such policies, there is a higher risk of curtailment of these programmes due to political changes, reduction in fiscal space and shocks to often-weak institutional foundations. Anchoring child benefits and social security measures within the Constitution and legal framework ensures that the State or the government is obliged to progressively provide the right to social protection for all individuals using the maximum available resources.²⁷

Within the sampled countries for the evaluation, key informants and desk research identified only three countries that have a constitutional obligation to provide child benefits or social security to children. Introduced in 2005, the Government of Mongolia anchored the Child Money Programme in national legislation through the Law on Social Welfare in 2017 and extended the coverage to near-universal, covering more than 99% of children in the country.²⁸ This integration was followed right after the implementation of the Law on Child Protection (LCP), passed in 2016 and established a legal framework for Mongolian Child Protection System at the national, provincial and community levels.

In South Africa, the right to social security as a human right and the right of every child 'to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health services and social services is recognised within the Constitution within section 27(1)(c). The government is obliged under the constitution to provide the Child Support Grant (CSG) to every child living in poverty under section 6 of the Social Assistance Act. The constitutional embedding of CSG and the political commitments has ensured the adjustment and increase of benefit levels above the country's Consumer Price Index, even during financial crises.²⁹ Similarly, in Canada, the Universal Child Care Benefit Act, ensures financial support to families with children under the age of 18 and was enacted in response to the commitment made by the government to eradicate child poverty in 2006.³⁰

Figure 3: Child and family protection (cash benefits) anchored in national legislations



Source: ILO. (2020). World Social Protection Report.

Governments have designed, implemented and expanded child benefits through various measures, including presidential orders, cabinet-approved policies and budget allocations, as well as independent projects by development partners. Path dependency of a programme, which means that ‘once a country or region has started down a track, the cost of reversals is very high’, ensures that once a programme is adopted through policy change, it is generally difficult to alter the structure of the programme.³¹ Hence when child benefit programmes are implemented through policy instruments, it is difficult to reverse or curtail the programme because it has become institutionalised; consequently, it takes great efforts and costs by actors to alter or discontinue the programme.³² President Cristina Fernandez created Argentina’s Universal Child Allowance through Necessity and Urgency Decree in 2009. This kind of decree is passed by the President only in exceptional circumstances and has the same effect as a statute passed by Congress.³³ In Argentina, the child benefit is seen as a right and the progressive universalisation of the programme highlights governments commitment to the programme. A key informant quoted *"The fact that it emerges from the logic of universalising the right to social protection for children in the contributory system, [...] that provided the policy with a logic of rights, which was rapidly accepted, institutionalised and legitimised in society as a right; that is why it is not called a ‘benefit’ nor a ‘subsidy’, the AUH is a right."* (ARGU1) The Royal Government of Thailand introduced the Child Support Grant through a cabinet resolution in 2015, which later expanded in 2019, both vertically and horizontally, mainly due to the political commitment of the PM and cabinet (THU1).

Many governments within the sampled countries introduced and expanded child benefits as part of their alignment and commitment towards national social protection strategies. Social protection frameworks and strategies play an important role in formalising political commitment and consolidating fragmented programmes to reach the vulnerable population effectively. In Nepal, Lesotho, Mozambique, Sudan and Zambia, governments have shown increased commitments towards introducing and expanding child benefits by including them within national social protection strategies and frameworks. In Lesotho, the government took over the implementation and financing of the child grant programme from development partners with the implementation of National Information Systems for Social Assistance, a central mechanism to the National Social Protection Strategy.³⁴ In Sudan, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Social Development in developing the country's first National Social Protection Strategy.³⁵ With an increased commitment to social protection, UNICEF Sudan was able to provide technical and financial assistance to the Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus (MCCT+) programme.³⁶ In Malawi, the National Social Support Policy, operated through the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) II has ensured the implementation and expansion of the Social Cash Transfer Programme, one of the largest cash transfers in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁷ Even though social protection strategies are not legally binding, it provides a much-needed impetus for governments and policymakers to invest in child benefits and work towards progressive universalisation.

d) What were the **sources of revenues** explored and then mobilised to finance UCBs?

Governments' spending on child benefits varies across countries, mainly depending on the country's income level and benefit coverage. Spending on child benefits averages around 1.1% of the GDPs globally, about 1.7% in high-income countries and about 0.4% in low- and middle-income countries.³⁸ Regionally, South Asia spends the lowest on child benefits, while Europe and Central Asia spend the most.³⁹

Progressive expansion and universalisation of child benefits highly depend on a country's fiscal space and the government's opportunities to mobilise additional revenue and reallocate existing revenue.⁴⁰ Across the sampled countries for the evaluation, the revenue for child benefits has been mobilised through various sources, including domestic revenue, household out-of-pocket expenditure and aid from international donors and development finance institutions.⁴¹

Table 4: Programme funding source and latest estimate

Country	Programme	Source of funding (Govt / Donors / Combination)	Latest estimate on financing the programme (% of GDP)	Year of estimate
Argentina	AUH, FA, and tax deductions	Government funding	0.60%	2017
Bihar, India	MKUY	Government funding	1% of State Budget	2021
Bolivia	BJP	Government funding	0.18%	2017
Burundi	Merankabandi	Donor-Funding	0.01%	2016
Cambodia	CARD	Government funding	Not available	Not available
Canada	Child Benefit	Government funding	2.1%	2019
Kenya	CT-OVC	Combined funding	0.13%	2018
Lebanon	Haddi Programme	Donor funding	0.29%	2022
Lesotho	CGP	Government funding	0.003%	2021
Mongolia	CMP	Government funding	1.00%	2017
Montenegro	FCA	Government funding	0.003%	2021
Mozambique	CGP	Combined funding	0.03%	2018
Nepal	CGP	Government funding	0.10%	2019
Senegal	PNBSF	Combined funding	0.17%	2015
South Africa	CSG	Government funding	1.30%	2019
Sudan	MCCT+	Donor funding	0.11%	2021
Thailand	CSG	Government funding	0.10%	2022
Uganda	GEG	Donor funding	0.01%	2022
Zambia	SCT	Combined funding	0.61%	2021

With restricted fiscal space, governments often rely on development partners and international funding institutions to introduce and expand child benefits. Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, we see a strong role played by donors in building social protection infrastructure and supporting cash transfer programmes.⁴² International partners and donors tend to push towards pilot programmes as aid is results-driven, and the initial costs of setting up the programme can be high for governments facing financial constraints.⁴³ UNICEF and other development partners have supported governments by directly funding pilot programmes that have later been expanded into national flagship cash transfer programmes. The CT-OVC programme in Kenya began as a pre-pilot programme funded and supported by UNICEF in 2004, and later expanded to be a government's flagship programme in 2007.⁴⁴ In Uganda, the Girls Empowering Girls pilot programme was initially funded by UNICEF and has now further expanded with the support of Government of Belgium who contributed around USD 4.1 million.⁴⁵ In Lesotho, the Child Grant Programme was initially a fully-donor driven programme by European Commission when implemented in 2007.⁴⁶ But the expansion of the programme in 2011 led to the transition in ownership and funding from donor-driven to government-owned.⁴⁷ In Argentina, the World Bank largely funded the Family allowance during its inception in 2009 through World Bank Basic Protection Programme which was approved to provide support to the poor during the global financial crisis.⁴⁸ World Bank has continuously supported the Government of Argentina with additional financing option for the expansion of the programme and this includes a USD 480 million additional financing in 2011.⁴⁹ Similarly, in Lebanon, the European Union provided a grant of USD 26 million to establish social grants, and UNICEF also implemented the cash transfer programme for children, "Haddi", in 2021.⁵⁰ The Government of Mozambique is funding the Child Grant Programme Grant, which is part of the National Strategy for Basic Social Security 2016-24 and also has financial support from the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.⁵¹

Domestic resource mobilisation, such as tax policy reform and increased domestic revenue, has led governments to invest in social assistance programmes, including child benefits. In Africa, domestic resource mobilisation through taxation policy makes up the majority of funding for national budgets.⁵² Government budgets offer the biggest source of finance available for any country to invest in children.⁵³ Some countries also earmark revenues from taxes on natural resources to fund child benefits. In Mongolia, the funding for the Child Money Programme was initially funded through the increased revenues from the mining boom in the early 2000s. The increased revenue from copper mining and coal led to the introduction of the CMP programme, as a conditional, poverty-targeted cash transfer, in 2005. But over the years, the funding for the programme has changed with development funding institutions like IMF and ADB providing loans to the government to sustain the coverage of the programme.⁵⁴ Similarly to Mongolia, Bolivia's Bono Juancito Pinto, established in 2006, was funded by the revenue generated from the

nationalisation of its hydrocarbon industries. The programme, which aimed at reducing school dropouts in the country, had 47% funding from Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB), a government-owned company responsible for the commercialisation of natural gas, and the rest of the funding from the national treasury in 2007.⁵⁵

Governments that have enough fiscal space fund child benefit programmes through budget allocations. Government solely finances the Nepal's Child Grant programme, South Africa's Child Support Programme and Thailand's Child Support Grant and are non-contributory. In Bihar, India, the Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY) introduced in 2018 has seen a budget allocation by the government amounting to around USD 320 million, about 1% of the state budget in 2021.⁵⁶

e) How were **resources** mobilised to enable UCBs?

Expansion of child benefits and progressive realisation of universal child benefits requires political commitment and stable funding sources. Governments undertake various options to finance child benefits which include domestic resource mobilisation through increased tax revenues, expanding contributory revenues, lobbying for increased aid and reallocating public expenditures. Today, with the increased need for social protection to facilitate human and economic development, there is an urgency to create fiscal space for the expansion of child benefits. Policymakers often grapple with resource trade-offs and fiscal sustainability involving social protection programmes, including child benefits. Higher commitment and political will by the governments towards UCBs translates into increased government funding for the programme and less dependency on donor funding. Scaling child benefits requires a structured approach and rigorous decision-making process depending on the country's fiscal context. Financial support from donors and funding institutions has been crucial in the piloting and subsequent scaling up of child benefits.⁵⁷ When incorporated within comprehensive social protection systems, child benefits enable intersectoral synergies that support a broad set of developmental outcomes, including building human and cognitive capital. Delivering child benefits integrated within a lifecycle approach has a multi-dimensional impact that translates into inclusive development and economic growth.⁵⁸

Increasing government commitment to invest in child benefits heavily depends on evidence generation on the multi-dimensional impact of child benefits. Translating this evidence of multi-dimensional impacts of child benefits has been instrumental in mobilising resources for the expansion of child benefits in various countries and creating government will for ownership of the programme. Multiple evaluations of child benefit programmes across sampled countries have been helpful in creating an evidence base regarding the effectiveness of cash transfers and their impact on achieving social developmental outcomes. According to a key informant in

Mozambique, the impact and effectiveness of the child grant led to increased funding for the programme. They quoted *“the very compelling evidence for the effectiveness of child grant on improvement of human capital, which is so important in Mozambique, swung the funding opportunities for the programme”*.⁵⁹ In Kenya, a rigorous impact evaluation was instrumental in the World Bank financing the expansion of the OVC cash transfer programme in 2009 with a USD 50 million credit to the government.⁶⁰ In Thailand, evidence of the role of the Child Support Grant in improving the nutritional status of children and expanded access to vital services led the government to vertically expand the programme to cover all children under the age of six.⁶¹ Similar cases of the impact of evidence generation and programme expansion occurred in South Africa, Nigeria and Zambia. The impact evaluation in South Africa improved the understanding of the impact of the programme and considered issues such as accessibility to the child grant and provided evidence to advocate for the expansion of the programme. In Zambia, the impact evaluation was helpful in building the case for categorical targeting approach of the cash transfer and gathering support for the scale-up of the programme.⁶²

In Lesotho, the development partners were able to successfully achieve increased political commitment to the Child Grant Programme (CGP) and government financing through a multi-tiered influencing strategy that included partnership building among institutions and key players.⁶³ The initial pilot of CGP was mainly successful due to the commitment of EU as a donor, UNICEF to provide technical support and the government to find an innovative solution to address poverty and vulnerability. Regular policy dialogue and generating rigorous evidence showcasing the impact of child grants have been influential in the government's uptake of the programme. This has reduced dependency on donor funding and government financing of 100% of the programme cost.⁶⁴ Similarly, in Mozambique, UNICEF has demonstrated a strong commitment to and application of partnership. For example, UNICEF and the ILO have jointly developed advocacy activities that include relevant research, roundtables with Parliamentarians, the annual “Social Protection Week” activities, and most recently, the rigorous evaluation report on the Nampula child benefit programme, which is proving powerful support for advocating for the extension of the program in the next phase.⁶⁵

Enhancing the capacity of policymakers and government officials also has led to increased resource mobilisation for child benefits and its progressive realisation. In Kenya, the OVC cash transfer programme relied heavily on external financing during its pilot phase, with development partners covering around 57% of the costs. But the pilot phase also saw a Capacity Building Strategy that strengthened the capacity of the government to ensure the government capacity is strengthened to manage the expansion of the programme and allocation of necessary financial resources.⁶⁶ Across countries, various activities to build capacities have been undertaken, which

thereby supported resource mobilisation for UCB, including training and study tours. Study tours and capacity-building training on cash transfers contribute to knowledge on designing and implementing such programmes, an enhanced understanding of its potential impacts and creating political champions for child benefits. In Thailand, UNICEF organised an international study tour for key policymakers to South Africa to understand how the Child Support Grant has been working in South Africa and the key impacts of the programme. It was a key milestone to win support from the Royal Government of Thailand for the child benefit.⁶⁷

f) How was **government capacity** strengthened?

Building national and local capacity for social protection systems enables the efficient and sustainable expansion of child benefits towards universalism. Three key elements of strengthening the capacity of governments at different levels include:⁶⁸

- a) Building capacity for evidence-based policymaking,
- b) National-level design and implementation capacity
- c) Local-level delivery capacity.

UNICEF has continuously worked on strengthening the capacity of governments at these different levels through its actions and activities.

Building capacity for evidence-based policymaking

A better understanding of UCB programmes will enable policymakers to advocate for them and build the capacity for evidence-based policymaking. UNICEF has enabled this through knowledge-sharing on global experiences, providing technical assistance, conducting pilot studies, and strengthening inter-ministerial linkages within the countries. For example, leveraging its global experience, UNICEF has been advocating for introducing UCBs in Kenya through policy proposals and feasibility studies.⁶⁹ UNICEF's technical assistance in Nepal greatly impacted the policymaking of the child grant programme by establishing a long-term expansion plan in line with the draft National Framework for Social Protection.⁷⁰ UNICEF's pilot implementation of the child grant programme in Mozambique has built the necessary evidence and capacity to deliver and scale up the programme throughout the country.⁷¹ Lesotho is an example of how UNICEF built bridges across ministerial silos and improved governance structures, which resulted in the creation of the National Information System for Social Assistance (NISSA) and eventually led to the establishment of a Ministry of Social Development in 2012 with UNICEF's and the European Union's financial and technical assistance.⁷²

National-level design and implementation capacity

UNICEF has built government capacity at the national level by strengthening targeting, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation systems. For sustainable development goals to be achieved, high-quality child-relevant data, research, monitoring, and evaluation must be collected, analysed, communicated, and used across all sectors.⁷³ Towards this, UNICEF has engaged with the governments in several countries like Uganda and Syria to incorporate their National Social Registries in the programme implementation and is also supporting them with the development of integrated Management Information Systems (MIS). Through the MIS, governments can integrate beneficiaries' data from different social protection programmes, consolidate beneficiaries' feedback in decision-making processes, and improve program data flow from subnational to national levels.⁷⁴ In Bihar (India), UNICEF supported in developing a MIS for the Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY) programme, along with a targeting system, a phone-based payment platform, monitoring and evaluation system and a grievance redress mechanism. These helped in improving the programme's operational capacity to integrate multiple conditionalities and targeting criteria. Furthermore, the harmonised collection of socioeconomic data from poor households contributed to the improvement of the country's social registry.⁷⁵

Local-level delivery capacity

Subnational governments are crucial in delivering public services and ensuring sustainable development. According to the OECD estimates, at least 105 out of the 169 targets underlying the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will not be reached without local government action.⁷⁶ Building local-level delivery capacity includes strengthening the delivery infrastructure through cross-cutting networks and improving the human resources capacity through effective training. UNICEF has been enabling this by working with governments at the local levels. The collaborations of UNICEF with Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) for piloting the Girls Empowering Girls programme and providing technical assistance to state governments in Nigeria to implement Girls Implementation Project Phase-Three⁷⁷ highlights the contributions of UNICEF for strengthening local level delivery capacity.

g) Were there any partnerships that were key parts of process influencing UCB expansion?

Partnerships UNICEF established with the private sector, local governments, civil society, development partners, and other UN organisations through its initiatives globally and in different countries have instrumentally supported the progressive realisation towards UCBs. Such partnerships helped governments build inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems in over 115 countries in response to COVID-19.⁷⁸ With the idea of universalism at the forefront of the international policy agenda, UNICEF's partnerships at the global level with the Social

Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), the Global Accelerator for Social Protection, Jobs and Just Transition as part of the Common Agenda, the SDG Fund, Global Coalition to end Child Poverty, and International Budget Partnership contributed to the expansion of UCBs.⁷⁹

Table 5: Summary of UNICEF's Partnerships in the sampled programmes and the year in which they started

Country	State agencies	Civil society/ Thinktanks/ Academia	Other International Development agencies
Argentina	ANSES (2009)	University of Buenos Aires	World Bank (2009)
Bihar, India	DoSW, DoE, State Health Committee	Art of Living	ActionAid
Bolivia	Ministry of Education	-	
Burundi	MNSHRG	-	World Bank
Cambodia	MEF, MoH, MoP, CARD	AMK	-
Canada	Canada Revenue Agency	-	-
Kenya	Min of Home Affairs - GoK (2004)	-	FCDO (2004), Sida, World Bank (2009)
Lebanon	Ministry of Social Affairs	Lebanon Centre for Policy Studies, Institute of Finance and Beyond Group, The Policy Initiative	ILO
Lesotho	MSD (2012)	-	European Union (2007)
Mongolia	MPDSP, MLSP	-	IMF (2016), ADB
Montenegro	MLSW	-	
Mozambique	MGCAS, DPGCAS and SDSMAS (2018), INAS	ICDP Mozambique	Sida (2018), FCDO (2018), Netherlands (2018), ILO, World
Nepal	MoFALD	-	
Senegal	DGPSN (2012)	-	World Bank
Sokoto State,	Sokoto State government (2017)	EPRI	FCDO
South Africa	SASSA (2006)	Black Sash, UCT, Alliance for Children's Entitlement to	-
Sudan	MoSD, MOFEP	-	BMZ-KfW Development Bank, Sida
Thailand	MOI, MOPH, MOF	TDRI, ThaiHealth	-
Tunisia	Ministry of Social Affairs	-	World Bank (2021)
Uganda	KCCA (2019), MGLSD (2019)	EPRI (2019), TMF (2019), UYDL (2019), GiveDirectly (2019)	Belgium govt (2022)
Zambia	MCDSS - GRZ (2003)	-	FCDO, IrishAid, Sida, CARE International (2007), GIZ (2003), Helpage International (2007), World Bank

Contributions of partnerships to expand toward UCBs

At the country level, UNICEF country offices are building partnerships to expand UCBs from the stage of pilot studies to the stage of institutionalisation of policies and beyond. For example, in Tunisia, UNICEF supported a feasibility study on universal child benefits (UCB) in 2018-19, demonstrating the benefits and cost-effectiveness of the UCB over existing subsidies. Through this work, UNICEF established new strategic partnerships, including with the World Bank and the IMF. Following further advocacy efforts by UNICEF, a short-term response funded by the German government enabled children's coverage to be increased in 2021. Government made changes to the legal framework to remove a limit on the number of children eligible per family and the age threshold. Most families outside the contributory system received a monthly grant for their children under five years of age for the first time. In March 2021, the government further expanded the programme with funding support from the World Bank as part of its COVID-19 Social Protection Emergency Response Support Project. Tunisia recently passed a law in January 2022 that institutionalised the monthly benefit for all under-five children enrolled in social assistance programs.⁸⁰

Contributions of partnerships to support national governments with comprehensive social protection programming

Comprehensive social protection interventions that combine cash transfers with complementary supporting components have grown increasingly popular in recent years. A widening evidence base attests to its wide-ranging positive impacts, including reduced hunger, greater uptake of education and health services, and improved psychosocial wellbeing. The 'plus' components that complement cash transfers often seek to incentivise behaviour change or address supply-side constraints. They can be provided as inherent components of the scheme (e.g. information provision, psychosocial support, additional in-kind transfers) or by establishing cross-sectoral linkages (e.g. referrals to health services, health insurance, or tuition fee waivers).⁸¹

For example, UNICEF collaborated with the Government of Sudan, Sida, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and KfW Development Bank to implement the Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus (MCCT+) Programme aiming to mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 socio-economic crisis on pregnant women and young children. The MCCT+ combines cash transfers with the transfer of knowledge, skills and services on dietary intake and diversity/nutrition, health, WASH, child care, child protection and livelihood programmes, along with building the capacity of national social protection systems.⁸² In Uganda, where UNICEF is collaborating with KCCA, EPRI, Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation and Uganda Youth Development Link, along with funding from the Belgium government, the beneficiaries of

Girls Empowering Girls receive mentoring support for education and career development along with cash transfers.⁸³

Challenges to long-term collaboration

While the global emphasis on social protection has been growing rapidly in recent years, there remain challenges to long-term collaborations for the expansion of UCBs. Firstly, conflicts and political shocks that remain in contexts of fragility can constraint partnerships where collaborations are needed the most. For example, in Sudan, despite UNICEF's initiatives in the country, the decline in domestic and international development financing supporting the Government of Sudan after the military coup, is posing limitations to partners' collaborations in the country.⁸⁴ Political ideologies can also challenge cooperation with international partners or donors. In Bolivia, UNICEF has faced resistance from the government to engage in technical advisory or evidence generation around child benefits.⁸⁵ The political orientation of the ruling coalition is considered a factor constraining UNICEF's and other development partners' ability to collaborate with the government; as a key informant mentioned, *"due to the government's leftist orientation, they have a reluctance to social policies implemented from international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF, "* and *"UNICEF did not have any technical influence in the design of the programme, technical support was very limited due to this reticence to foreign assistance."* (BOLU1) Fragmentation within the government also limits the development of partnerships due to coordination barriers, dispersed policy frameworks, and different ideological orientations. In Lebanon, characterised by a context of political instability due to a fragile government divided along sectarian lines, UNICEF's engagement has been limited yet nascent. UNICEF, along with ILO, supported the government in the establishment of the National Social Protection Strategy, despite facing several challenges at the policy level: *"A major barrier, if you're working in a country that has 50 different working groups across four different frameworks, I don't even understand how these different frameworks are interrelated, some in emergency, some in development, some under the UN, some are led by the government, some are not led by the government, some are covering the same issues. Even on social protection or social assistance, in cash alone, I think we have eight different groups that we work in and coordinate through."* (LBNU1)

Secondly, the lack of institutionalisation for most programmes poses another challenge for long-term collaboration. When the programme is not anchored in any legislation, it is prone to the risk of ad hoc political and administrative changes and is vulnerable to funding discontinuities. For example, following the ministerial reshuffle of May 2019 in Senegal, DGPSN started reporting to a new ministry instead of the Presidency earlier. This transition posed challenges to the leadership of DGPSN implementation of the programme.⁸⁶

Lastly, the fragmented funding by different donors, either due to diverging preferences or lack of coordination between multiple funding actors, hinders the growth of long-term collaborations.⁸⁷ In Mozambique, the involvement of numerous donors and development partners in the UN Joint Programme carried coordination and accountability difficulties, as mentioned by a stakeholder: *“At an earlier stage, you could read a report and you see, this is the UNICEF part, and this is the ILO part, this is the WFP part was, not like all coming together as one program and you still see that, so the way they present... that is still challenging, when it comes to deliver as one programme.”* (MOZD3) Similarly, four donors directly fund the transfers in Malawi, and each has a different approach and priorities rooted in their established history with Malawi’s institutions. A fragmented funding landscape results in multiple audits and complex communication and accountability channels. As most of the cash transfers in Malawi are funded by donors, the government has little ability to impose its preferences for a harmonised funding pool and build a long-term sustainable collaboration.⁸⁸ Diverging policy preferences among donors and funding agencies can also hinder collaborations and pose barriers to programmatic improvements, such as introducing targeting criteria to the CMP in Mongolia following IMF’s and ADB’s loan conditionalities (Box 2).⁸⁹

- h) What are good practice examples for collaboration with other international organisations, development partners, government institutions, parliaments, media, youth organisations and civil society organisations?

Good practice 1: Partnering with other international organisations with complementary strengths

Tackling the triple challenge of Climate change, Conflicts and COVID-19 and making progress towards sustainable development goals requires UNICEF to collaborate with other international organisations. At a multi-lateral level, Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board, Global Coalition on Social Protection Floors, and Universal Social Protection Partnership are some successful examples of UNICEF's collaborations. At country level, UNICEF and WFP are partnering in Uganda to jointly implement the Sida-funded Child-Sensitive Social Protection in refugee hosting districts in West Nile.⁹⁰ According to a stakeholder, *“the design of this programme is such that the health system strengthening component is run by UNICEF and the component of Social Protection is run by WFP”* (UGU1). The integrated approach that combines the efforts of both UNICEF and the WFP is expected to enhance efficiency, quality and long-term sustainability.⁹¹

Good practice 2: Collaborating with development partners to initiate pilot studies for UCBs

Governments face challenges introducing child benefits due to huge initial costs, absence/lack of evidence to convince the electorate and lack of institutional capacity. Development partners are

addressing these challenges through financing and supporting pilot programmes. Through such pilots, the initial financing is often covered by development partners, and the ownership of the programme is gradually transferred to the government after the successful implementation of the pilot, and there is enough evidence of the impact of the programme. Along this process, development partners provide their technical assistance and support in building the capacity of the institutions to help build the scale of the programmes.

UNICEF Kenya is working with development partners like Sida and Save The Children and other international organisations like World Food Programme to roll out a pilot for the Universal Child Benefits. While the pilot will initially cover only 0-2 years of children in three counties, the goal is to gradually scale up the pilot to achieve the UCBs by 2038.⁹² The pilot programmes in Mozambique (Child Grant Programme) and Uganda (Girls Empowering Girls) have also demonstrated success and are being scaled up further. Similarly, the pilot in Zambia, which started in 2010, was mostly funded by donors (DFID, GTZ and CARE), but the government took major ownership by expanding its share in the programme.⁹³

Good practice 3: Developing social protection information systems

The development of a social protection information system, which facilitates the flow and management of information within and outside the social protection sector, is a strong measure to ensure equity, responsiveness and inclusive distribution of resources in programme implementation. It also helps in the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to citizens.⁹⁴

In Tunisia, UNICEF supported the modernisation of the registration system by launching a digital platform that allowed households to request support and update their information. This helped update the databases of eligible households, which will be merged from all existing social protection programmes into one database with the Amen Social law in 2019. In addition, UNICEF's support helped accelerate the registration of children under the age of 5.⁹⁵

Good practice 4: Institutionalising budget transparency and accountability

Transparency in social sector budgets and citizen participation in budgetary processes contribute to improved public oversight, allocation and spending of public funds, and social spending on important child rights programs.⁹⁶ To promote transparency in public spending for children, UNICEF has launched a major capacity-building programme in 2021 that will prepare more than 200 ministers, parliamentarians, local elected officials, and civil society members to assess how the state finances social sectors.⁹⁷ Furthermore, UNICEF is collaborating with a broad spectrum of national and international partners to improve budget transparency and accountability, including the International Budget Partnership.⁹⁸

In Argentina, UNICEF analysed budgetary allocations for children and adolescents in 2021 at national and provincial levels and discussed the 2022 national budget proposal in congress with the Bicameral Commission of Children and Adolescents Rights, the National Secretariat for Children, Youth, and Family, and other actors of government and civil society. Focusing on children and adolescents has improved the availability of budgetary data and provided an enabling environment for the generation of evidence, especially about the distributive impact of public health spending.⁹⁹ In Zimbabwe and Egypt, UNICEF collaborated with the parliaments and governments to institutionalise budget transparency and accountability through promoting citizen participation, spreading financial awareness and establishing frameworks like Budget Transparency Reform Matrix. These initiatives helped both countries to improve their Open Budget Index scores.¹⁰⁰

Good practice 5: Leveraging media for public awareness and advocacy

Media, including social media, is an important driver of public opinion and holds significant weight in the country's politics. Especially when governments imposed lockdowns during COVID-19, the media kept the communication channels with the masses open. UNICEF's Initiatives like the "Digital Rap Contest" in Argentina and the "@KitaConnect" channel in Malaysia demonstrate the potential of media in creating public discussions on UCBs.¹⁰¹

In Argentina, the studies conducted by UNICEF on child poverty were widely publicised and discussed in the media – including the policy recommendations for child-focused social and income protection measures. The advocacy and communication strategies enabled UNICEF to reach the highest level of decision-makers to influence the policies. This has resulted in the government's decision to expand the Universal Child Allowance for Social Protection to reach one million children without coverage.¹⁰²

Good practice 6: Institutionalising partnerships with youth organisations

Institutionalising partnerships with youth organisations helps foster sustainable mechanisms and platforms for volunteering and civic engagement among youth. UNICEF's strategic partnerships with Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action (consisting of more than 60 organisations, including United Nations agencies, civil society, youth-led organisations and donors) and PROSPECTS (in collaboration with the Netherlands, UNHCR, ILO, International Finance Corporation and the World Bank) are good examples of engaging with youth organisations at the global level.¹⁰³

At the country level, Uganda's Girls Empowering Girls programme is a good example of leveraging youth organisations to implement a "mentoring plus cash" programme to ensure that girls transition safely into adulthood, receive education and training, and are empowered to achieve their aspirations. The mentorship support is provided by a network of lead mentors and peer-

mentors associated with Uganda Youth Development Link and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation.¹⁰⁴

Good practice 7: Engaging Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for inclusive targeting and registration of beneficiaries

Engaging with CSOs helps monitor vulnerable populations' needs and report who is being left out and what areas are not covered by existing policy. CSOs also facilitate outreach, communication with and identification of vulnerable groups and individuals, including through information campaigns, to ensure they are aware of their right to access measures they are entitled to.¹⁰⁵ In Kenya, the collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities at the local level facilitated the identification of persons with disabilities eligible for the emergency cash transfer programme.¹⁰⁶ In Argentina, UNICEF collaborated with ANSES and CSOs to expand coverage in rural areas through facilitating field operations, conducting censuses and promoting database integration.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in Sudan, UNICEF is establishing partnerships with civil society organisations to better reach beneficiary population: “because of the challenges that we face in reaching people we have to rely more than ever on organisations that are present in the communities that we work in order for us to sort of sustain the services, so we are now trying to stress on our part, our partnership with NGOs, civil society, organisations that are in the communities that we target”. (SUDU1)

RQ2

For these relevant countries, what are the key structural drivers of UCB expansion?

This question seeks to identify the main drivers that enabled, influenced or contributed to the expansion of cash transfers towards Universal Child Benefits. Drivers may include political or economic factors, as well as other factors and circumstances, and may present opportunities for engagement which may include, but are not limited to:

- Demand for more broadly developed social protection systems, including those that change adverse social norms
- Need to improve shock-responsiveness of social protection systems
- Elections and other manifestations of political competition
- Crisis (economic/social/natural/other)
- Fiscal factors including tax/benefit integration

- Political-economy reform (for example, fuel subsidy reform)
- Pressure from donors/peer pressure from other countries/transnational pressures

Table 6 below presents an overview of the main structural drivers in each country, followed by a discussion of the drivers that had relevant roles: i) public demands for policy responses to poverty and vulnerability, ii) shock-responsiveness, iii) political incentives, iv) financial agreements with funding partners, v) evidence, and vi) partnerships. Partnerships are considered to have a transversal role in enhancing government support, increasing fiscal space, improving programme comprehensiveness and supporting technical capacity. Additionally, this section examines digital technologies' role in improving programme delivery and governance.

Table 6: Country-wise structural drivers to expansion of UCBs

Country	Overview of structural drivers
Argentina	Technical assistance delivered by partners, electoral competition, parallel measure to adjustment policies, institutional framework, loan agreement clauses
Bihar, India	Public demands for policies to address child marriage, political and bureaucratic support, UNICEF evidence and advocacy
Bolivia	Political incentives, fiscal space created by export-oriented strategy
Burundi	Institutional framework, partnerships, digital technologies
Cambodia	Government support, institutional framework
Canada	Increased vulnerability during 2008 financial crisis
Kenya	Response to high number of OVC due to HIV/AIDS prevalence, political incentives, partnerships, policy champion, response to distributive crises
Lebanon	Emergency programme response to Beirut blast in 2020, partnerships with civil society and ILO, response to HIV/AIDS prevalence
Lesotho	Electoral incentives, funding agreement clauses, impact evaluations, partnership UNICEF, EU and GoL
Mongolia	Electoral incentives, policy champion, evidence revealing exclusion errors
Montenegro	Political support, the COVID-19 crisis, evidence generated by UNICEF
Mozambique	Policy championship, partnerships
Nepal	Technical assistance provided by partners, electoral incentives, shock response
Senegal	Government support, evidence, partners enhancing fiscal space
Sokoto State, Nigeria	Bureaucratic support, response to developmental challenges (girl's school dropout), partners providing technical assistance
South Africa	Public demands, political incentives, policy champion, evidence, civil society advocacy, institutional framework
Sudan	Social demand for universal social protection, inter-ministerial support, partnerships
Thailand	Public pressure to expand, bureaucratic support, partnerships with civil society, evidence on exclusion errors
Tunisia	COVID-19 shock, evidence on feasibility, funding partnerships, study tour to Argentina
Uganda	Partnerships, international evidence on integrated programmes
Zambia	Bureaucratic support driven by partner's advocacy efforts, impact evaluations, funding partnerships, political incentives, response to HIV/AIDS prevalence

Public demand for policy responses to poverty and vulnerability

Widespread popular pressure to address developmental challenges can create the political will to implement and expand child benefits. Public demands can lead elected government officials to introduce and broaden social policies to avoid losing support and consolidate their voter base, as “social mobilisation around redistributive demands in unequal societies can gain public support and undermine the government’s electoral prospects unless policy responses satisfy those demands”.¹⁰⁸ When developmental problems become highly visible, citizen pressure with high coordination capacity – involving civil society organisations and social mobilisation- can contribute to creating political will for establishing or expanding child benefits. In South Africa, the establishment and expansions of the Child Support Grant were partly explained by public demands that increased incentives for the ruling party to respond to the rising levels of poverty. Popular pressure, amplified by the demands of a well-organised civil society¹⁰⁹ and mobilisation for Basic Income Support¹¹⁰ encouraged incremental expansions of the programme between 2003 and 2012:¹¹¹ *“It was it was much more political, in the sense that the Child Support Grant was expanded as an alternative to actually doing anything more radical like a basic income grant, so, in a sense, it was the success of the basic income grant advocates and putting a basic income ground on the agenda which actually pushed the ANC to show they were doing something.”* (SAD1) In addition, inter-governmental support for a policy response that addressed high levels of poverty and inequality was a driving force for the establishment of the CSG.¹¹² Similarly, in Bihar, India, citizens demanded actions from the government to prevent child marriage, through social mobilisation which led elected officials to support this agenda and subsequently introduce the MKUY programme.¹¹³

Shock-responsiveness

The need to introduce policy responses to shocks can contribute to the progressive realisation of UCBs. Humanitarian crises can create support among government officials or donors to introduce or expand child benefits. The 2015 earthquake in Nepal contributed to the horizontal expansion of the Child Grant during the fiscal year 2016-17.¹¹⁴ Similarly, as a response to the 2020 blast in Beirut, Lebanon, UNICEF introduced an emergency cash transfer¹¹⁵ which set a precedent for the subsequent introduction of Haddi in 2021: *“For the child grant, we started off with something more as an emergency response that was led very much by UNICEF.”* (LBNU1)

Health crises such as the spread of HIV/AIDS and the 2014 Ebola in West Africa have triggered the expansion of social safety nets.¹¹⁶ For instance, the CGP, the SCT and the CT-OVC were a response to the high number of orphans and vulnerable children given the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho, Zambia and Kenya respectively.¹¹⁷ On a similar note, the COVID-19 pandemic also generated a public demand for social protection policies, leading to comprehensive responses from national governments. The need to mitigate the socio-economic shock generated by the

pandemic led to the establishment or upscale of child benefits which has the potential to build delivery systems and institutional frameworks to progressively realise UCBs. With the support of the German Government and a World Bank loan, the government of Tunisia introduced a child allowance to reduce children's vulnerability to the shock,¹¹⁸ which supported the subsequent establishment of the Amen Social programme: *"COVID-19 revealed the gaps in the national social protection system. The pandemic helped us to move forward and advance the agenda more quickly. [...] COVID-19 caused a lot of destruction, but in terms of shifting the minds of the policymakers, it was a good opportunity."* (TUNU1) By exacerbating vulnerabilities, the pandemic increased the number of households that meet the means-testing requirements to receive existing programmes, leading to increased coverage. For instance, in Cambodia, the number of people in poverty status grew during the pandemic, resulting in the coverage expansion of the Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Pregnant Women and Children (0-2 years old).¹¹⁹

Financial crises with perceived distributional implications can also drive the establishment of social protection policies.¹²⁰ In Senegal, the rise in fuel and food prices in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis motivated the government to prioritise social safety nets in the public agenda¹²¹ and promoting the establishment of the PNBSF in 2013. On a similar note, social protection expansions can occur as a parallel measure to austerity policies introduced in the face of financial crises. For instance, in Argentina, the objective of mitigating increasing poverty and social discontent resulting from adjustment policies during a period of high inflation, contributed to the expansion of the family allowances in 2016.¹²²

Political incentives: competitive elections and systems of redistribution

Political incentives can contribute to creating the political will required to introduce and expand child benefits. Political factors contributing to the progressive realisation of UCBs are competitive elections and the widespread acceptance of the programme as part of the state system of redistribution. Child benefit programmes have often become a field of contestation between parties in politically competitive environments, leading to programme proposals during campaigns and their consequent establishment by winning coalitions. This is consistent with literature that identifies competitive elections as a major driver of the expansion of social policies.¹²³ In Mongolia, the Child Money Programme became a field of contestation between the two major parties in the 2004 highly competitive parliamentary elections. As a result, the programme was established in 2005:¹²⁴ *"A key component for the sustainability of the program is political will. As you know, the political situation in Mongolia is quite fluid. It's a big driver."* (MONU1) In Bolivia, the Bono Juancito Pinto and Bono Juana Azurduy instituted by President Evo Morales were introduced after competitive elections, whereby cash transfers were among the opposition's campaign promises.¹²⁵

Incremental expansions can be explained by the concept of policy drifts, whereby cautious increases are a means of avoiding more generous expansions or progressive reforms.¹²⁶ In Argentina, this is characterised by the benefit's insufficient adjustment to inflation rates upon expansion which constrained its real value;¹²⁷ in South Africa, the CSG was likely introduced as a moderate alternative to the BIS¹²⁸ and did not correspond to parametric criteria of fiscal affordability.¹²⁹ In both cases, the child benefit is embedded in the national legislation and fully owned by the government, strengthening the effect of policy legacies, and deeming significant reductions politically infeasible.¹³⁰

Donor-introduced child benefits can become a political asset if recognised as part of the state's redistribution system. When donor-led initiatives gain widespread acceptance and become part of the political settlement, the political costs of withdrawing it increase.¹³¹ By becoming a legitimate component of the state's regime of redistribution, a cash transfer can replace clientelist for programmatic political settlements that promote expansion.¹³² In Kenya, once externally financed cash transfers, such as the CT-OVC became part of the distribution system, withdrawing the programme would have political costs for the government and thus, securing it became a means of maintaining support.¹³³ In Zambia, the budget expansion to SCTs in 2013, including the Child Grants, was influenced by a public scandal related to overspending and clientelist allocation of agricultural subsidies. Hence, increased funding for cash transfers was an alternative means of securing rural support, as it became accepted as part of the state's regime of redistribution among lower-income households.¹³⁴

Policy champions

Policy champions, often the ministers of social development, have contributed to the progressive realisation of UCBs in some countries of the sample. These cases suggest that the main pathway through which policy champions advance child benefits is by harnessing evidence and inter-ministerial advocacy to generate bureaucratic support,¹³⁵ and are particularly effective for overcoming opposition from ministries of finance. In South Africa, Zola Skweyiya, who was the Minister of Social Development from 1999 to 2009, had a relevant role in gathering inter-ministerial support for the expansions of the CSG.¹³⁶ *"The other thing that was very crucial is our champion [...] our Minister was a champion who was able to find officials who will give him all the material that he needed to use when he goes to Parliament. That is how we were able to expand, it was not easy, because when you have to fight for resources with other competing priorities, it is not easy."* (SAG6) Similarly, in Kenya, the vice-president had a relevant role in gathering bureaucratic support to increase the budget of the CT-OVC during the pilot stage;¹³⁷ and in Zambia, the Ministry of Community Development led inter-ministerial consultations that influenced the budget increase for the SCTs in the period 2012-13. Also, in Mozambique, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare had a critical commitment to the scale-up of the

Child Grant Programme: *“The previous Minister, she had a strong commitment towards the Child Grant, she will see, even in [...] one of the pilot districts, which we all from the development side were ‘oh it’s very far, the accessibility...’ and you know all the conditions were a bit tougher than on the other districts, and she was like ‘no, we also need to know how is the situation, what would be the output if we implement in a place with no conditions’, so she insisted in one district [...] which, like we were quite exit out at the beginning, so there was at the moment, with the previous leadership of the Ministry, a strong commitment to implement the Child Grant.”* (MOZD3)

Financial agreements with funding partners

Partners can improve the financing of child benefits and encourage government ownership through funding agreements. Lending agreements with clauses for resource allocation to social protection can secure the fiscal space for introducing or expanding child benefits. Funding agreements, if accompanied by technical capacity development, can support government ownership. For instance, in Argentina, the World Bank loan of USD450 million was conditional upon expanding of the existing child protection programmes,¹³⁸ leading to the establishment of the AUH. Similarly, during the economic crisis in 2018, the government resorted to an IMF loan, which included a clause for the allocation of funds to social inclusion. This led to a 46% increase in the transfer amount of the AUH, paid upfront in March 2019.¹³⁹ In Lesotho, the government came to an Extended Credit Facility agreement with the IMF in 2010, conditional on a M300 million benchmark on social expenditure, which contributed to the government’s commitment to fund the CGP. In addition, financing support negotiations with the EU reached an agreement whereby the GoL committed to fund the programme and eventually cover its full cost.¹⁴⁰

Evidence

Evidence has been influential in advancing the progressive realisation of UCBs in three distinct manners. First, evidence of the prevalence of poverty can increase visibility and generate public demands for developmental responses. This was the case of South Africa, as mentioned above, that of Kenya regarding the number of OVC due to the HIV-AIDS crisis, and the prevalence of child marriage in Bihar, which contributed to the introduction of the CSG, the CT-OVC and the MKUY respectively. Second, impact evaluations can generate support among government officials, being particularly instrumental in overcoming ideological opposition. When the evidence has been utilised as a part of advocacy strategies, often led by development partners and civil society, progress in multiple dimensions has been achieved, particularly during the initial stages. *“When you have evidence and then you place it before Parliament [...] when you have you do evaluation studies and they’re able to see the impact, a positive impact of your programs, it becomes difficult for any political party to be against a program that is viewed as addressing and poverty”.* (SAG6) As mentioned above, policy champions are capable of mobilising evidence to gather intergovernmental support. Impact evaluations, as well as evidence on the effectiveness and

sustainability of foreign programmes have been influential in advancing child benefits in Zambia¹⁴¹, Kenya¹⁴² and Lesotho.¹⁴³ Third, evaluations assessing coverage, exclusion rates and barriers to access can contribute to expansions or transitions towards more universal programme design features. For example, in Mongolia, evidence revealing high exclusion errors was an important driver for replacing the initially means-testing of the CMP with a universal approach.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, in Thailand, an evaluation of the CSGs found exclusion errors of around 30%, which influenced the horizontal expansion in 2019.¹⁴⁵

The following additional sub-questions will be explored:

(a) How do **partnerships** contribute to the progressive realisation of UCBs?

UNICEF has helped to scale-up responses towards universal child benefits in multiple countries through leveraging key partnerships with development partners, donors and civil society groups to influence governments to expand these interventions.

Partnerships can contribute to government support

By mobilising strategic partnerships across civil society, local governments and even private sector entities, UNICEF can help build government support and buy-in towards universal child grants. These partnerships can help develop strong evidence on the feasibility of child grants, the impact of existing interventions and scope for expansion.

UNICEF in Bihar supported the first child marriage prevention pilots between 2009 and 2011 through a partnership with local government institutions and civil society groups to generate awareness and build capacities of stakeholders on the prevention of child marriage. This helped build an enabling environment for not only building the foundation of MKUY, but also supporting broader initiatives addressing harmful social practices and promoting women's empowerment.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in 2015, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister reiterated robust evidence's crucial role in supporting the CSG's link and its impacts on poverty, child health and access to social services. The evaluation effort facilitated collaboration between UNICEF Thailand, Thailand's Department of Children and Youth, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, EPRI and TDRI. This partnership of public and private sector entities generated useful insights on the inclusion and exclusion errors, how the beneficiaries were using the grant and the factors that might impede the programme. Findings and recommendations made in the report directly influenced the Government's decision to expand the reach of the programme in 2019.¹⁴⁷

Partnerships with development partners is critical in developing evidence that leads to government ownership and expansion of the programme. A rigorous impact evaluation of the CT-OVC in Kenya was originally developed by Oxford Policy Management, with the involvement of DFID, UNICEF and the World Bank and was extended to four years under the Transfer Project. In addition to providing insights on the policy and implementation debates for cash transfers, the

project helped influence the development of several other cash transfer interventions, expand programme coverage and garner political support. Evidence from the evaluation, especially the finding on 13% poverty reduction has influenced the programme's expansion, particularly in persuading Treasury officials to increase public investment in cash transfers under the NSNP and in achieving support from parliamentary committees and the Senate.¹⁴⁸ Another example is seen through the technical assistance partnership between EPRI and UNICEF in Nigeria which was a driving force in facilitating government ownership of the programme.¹⁴⁹

Partnerships to motivate fiscal space

The argument that spending on social protection is unaffordable is gradually becoming less common, especially with the help of partnerships that can advocate for financial aid, reallocating public expenditures or expanding social protection coverage and contributory revenues.¹⁵⁰ However, in the process of partnering with IFIs to help fund social protection programmes and increase affordability and fiscal sustainability, there could be significant trade-offs to programme design which might undermine universal social protection provision.

Lesotho's child grant was initially designed and funded with support from the European Union and UNICEF, at present it is nationally owned and funded by the Government. A partnership between UNICEF, the EU and the Government helped ensure that the programme was implemented according to plan and to build the capacity of the Government to assume full financial ownership of the programme in 2013. The funds provided were contingent on achieving the CGP-linked indicators which was a crucial step to integrate the grant into the national budget, to ensure its sustainability should the EU withdraw funding.¹⁵¹

Following the results of a feasibility study in Tunisia in 2019 that suggested that UCBs would be fiscally feasible if implemented gradually to accompany phase-out subsidies, the Ministry of Finance, along with IMF and World Bank engaged in a dialogue on how the child benefit can be used as a mitigation strategy for the reduction of subsidies and how this could benefit the poorest households. UNICEF and the World Bank organised a study tour to Argentina to engage in South-South policy dialogue on social protection reform and discuss the gaps in the existing social protection system. According to a key informant, *"(this visit) helped reduce resistance towards UCBs and demonstrated to the government that this is a credible global option that they can have confidence in."* (TUNU1)

Mongolia's Child Money Programme (Box 2) presents a key example of how the constraints imposed by IFIs can conflict with government motivation towards UCBs, leaving governments to make difficult decisions.

Civil society partnerships for more comprehensive programmes

Civil society groups play a key role as intermediaries between the government and the beneficiaries to ensure that the transfer reaches households on time and to prevent exclusion. These groups can help increase access to social protection and ensure that underrepresented populations are covered, thus improving programme inclusivity.

A number of countries have demonstrated the crucial role of civil society groups in increasing access to social protection, strengthening accountability and promoting participation and outreach of the programme.¹⁵² In South Africa, civil society groups were involved in extensive campaigning, advocacy and legal action to expand the Child Support Grant. Organisations like Black Sash, the Institute for Democracy in Africa (IDASA), the Alliance for Children’s Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS) and the Children’s Institute helped push reform considerably. Evidence-based research undertaken by these groups helped influence changes in the CSG especially related to budget analysis, issues in service delivery and on the value of the grant as an effective means to address poverty. The Government expanded the CSG to the age of 18 after eight years of civil society campaigning, which was set to benefit an additional two million children over three years of phased expansion.¹⁵³ Notably, civil society groups have effectively engaged with government actors in the Parliament, leading to increases to the programme budget.¹⁵⁴ The Department of Social Development’s budget for 2022-23 included a provision for a top-up of more than 50% on the Extended CSG.¹⁵⁵

Building on the role of civil society in facilitating greater inclusion, social workers in Tunisia played a significant role in mass communication campaigns for the registration of children under five years. They were involved in communicating to households about the transfers and ensuring that they were receiving the payments at the specified time. According to an informant, *“It was really useful and critical to have the social worker being in contact with the beneficiaries and making sure that the grievances, complaints and communications were handled.”* (TUNU1) Having social workers operate at the grassroots level helped facilitate the programme’s launch during COVID-19 and will contribute to the programme’s sustainability in the aftermath of the pandemic. (TUNU1) Senegal is another example where the government partnered with “social operators” (NGOs) to host awareness sessions and engage in grievance redressal using decentralised relays in the implementation of the PNBSF.¹⁵⁶

Partnerships can help to create a policy dialogue on priority issues, as was seen in Lebanon, where a collaboration with civil society and think-tank actors helped establish a platform for organisations representing people with disabilities.¹⁵⁷

Partnerships to support technical capacity

In Lesotho, the implementation of the CGP helped steer the government towards an approach that builds harmonisation and integration of social protection programmes within a clear national vision. With the support of the EU, UNICEF and the World Bank in 2014, the Government of Lesotho developed the National Social Protection Strategy which uses the life-cycle approach to ensure more comprehensive and coordinated service provision which was better adapted to the different types of vulnerability and linked to other social and economic services. This had the purpose of addressing the difficulty of coordinating among different ministries and to improve monitoring and evaluation of these programmes. The approval of this strategy was key to expanding the Government's efforts to diversify social protection by introducing new interventions like the Infant Grant Programme, a Disability Grant and a Productive Safety Net and the expansion of existing programmes like the CGP.¹⁵⁸

In Argentina, the World Bank and the Ministry of Labour and ANSES together played a critical role in the establishment of the AUH through the provision of technical assistance for capacity building. Nearly 16 million of the 2009 loan was provided for building capacity of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.¹⁵⁹

b) How do **inclusive digital technologies** create synergies with UCB expansion?

Recent years have seen significant growth in the use of digital technology in social protection systems across low-, middle and high-income countries.¹⁶⁰ This is generally manifested in online or mobile-based channels for programme registration, bank transfers, e-payments and the use of technology to facilitate grievance redressal and feedback. Governments are investing more in integrated Management Information Systems (MIS) that can enable more effective programme response and facilitate interoperability with other programmes or databases.¹⁶¹ These mechanisms enable rapid programme scale-up, but there is a need for these interventions to be more inclusive to ensure no one is left behind.

Payment disbursement

Government-to-person payments are increasingly leveraged to build a consolidated system that identifies, enrolls and delivers social protection at scale to individuals, especially to deal with the impacts of shocks. The Merankabandi programme in Burundi provides mobile phones and sim cards to women beneficiaries and delivers monthly CVA disbursements via Cassava Fintech Burundi's mobile money platform EcoCash.¹⁶² The registered households receive BIF 40,000 (USD 24) every two months. The beneficiaries' phone number corresponds to the account number used for the cash transfer.¹⁶³ This example highlights the potential of digital payments to facilitate seamless end-to-end delivery of social protection payments. In Burundi, the technology gap between men and women is significant, with 24% of women owning a mobile phone, compared

to 48% of men¹⁶⁴; this programme has the capacity to address these gaps and pave the way for more inclusive interventions.

Lesotho is a country where cash-based transfers can be an expensive undertaking due to hard-to-reach areas and limited penetration of rural banking. The Child Grant Programme (CGP) piloted mobile payments through Vodacom, M-Pesa and EcoCash in several districts revealing promising results. Evaluations indicated that the costs of cash in transit are 1.5 to 7 times higher than the costs of mobile payment deliveries. For CGP, current costs of cash payments are 4.5% of the transfer amount, while costs of e-payment delivery are only 1.4% of the transfer amount.¹⁶⁵ These findings indicate that shifting to digital modes of payment delivery can save resources from the programme budget, which the government can allocate towards programme expansion.

Programme Governance

Management Information Systems (MIS) can facilitate social protection delivery by identifying beneficiaries through registration and targeting processes, compliance with conditions in some instances, grievance and feedback management, generation of payment lists and data verification.¹⁶⁶ Integrated MISs helps scale digital payments that harmonise beneficiary databases across programmes to respond rapidly, particularly during shocks. In Bihar, UNICEF is working with the Directorate of Social Welfare to develop an integrated MIS to track the cash payments, to integrating across health, child protection and education to measure the impact of the cash transfer on girls over the years. This data will also help to understand the programme's reach and assess which beneficiaries might be excluded. Efforts towards digitising data to facilitate this process are currently ongoing.¹⁶⁷

- c) Of the drivers identified, which are opportunities for UNICEF intervention (i.e., which are in the sphere of control or influence of UNICEF?)

The previous section outlined the main drivers influencing the progressive realisation of UCBs for the country sample analysed in this report. Drivers are enacted in multiple manners and lead to varied outcomes, as has been discussed in question 1. Some of the identified drivers such as electoral incentives, clauses in funding agreements and exogenous shocks are out of the sphere of influence of UNICEF; nevertheless, generating evidence and strengthening partnerships are potential pathways through which UNICEF can influence the necessary political and bureaucratic support to advance the realisation of UCBs in their multiple dimensions. This section examines how these drivers offer opportunities for UNICEF to support countries towards the child benefits agenda.

Evidence generation and outreach are relevant domains of influence for UNICEF. In the first instance, UNICEF can help generate support among government officials by producing and

mobilising impact evaluations demonstrating the financial sustainability and effectiveness of child benefits in improving outcomes for children. Stakeholder consultations revealed the relevance of not only producing evidence but also mobilising and communicating it effectively: *“when communicating systemic benefits that you can have, that is a bit harder to grasp, for the public and maybe even for decision makers. The information is there, somewhere in the system and there is a system in the Ministry of Interior. It's not an issue of where you could extract the information, it's that nobody is really using information appropriately.”* (MNGU1) UNICEF can also support potential policy champions by introducing relevant evidence to government officials, especially within the Ministry of Social Development or equivalent departments. In a second instance, research findings can also be mobilised among members of the civil society to both create public awareness of a developmental problem such as child poverty and strengthen the empirical foundations of citizen demands and hence improve their advocacy strategies: *“You can't just dismiss what you don't agree with and that's what some of these campaigning NGOs tend to do, they just dismiss it [government's statements on affordability]. And that is not strategic.”* (SAD6) In addition, joint research initiatives with academic institutions are another entry point for collaboration with civil society. The case studies in this report reveal the critical role of evidence as a driver is only realised when it is effectively mobilised among the right actors at the right time. In this sense, evidence is a transversal component of advocacy efforts.

Through advocacy initiatives, UNICEF can contribute to creating bureaucratic and political support for the UCB agenda. Facilitating learning experiences such as workshops and field trips can drive support among government departments. In addition, UNICEF can influence inter-ministerial advocacy by supporting key actors through evidence and advisory. Targeting advocacy initiatives to elected officials, for instance, at the parliament's interior, is another opportunity to advance child benefits: *“Openness with the political parties is important, to capitalise and establish those relationships and connect with the top leadership as well, but also engage with the technical teams.”* (KENU1) Emphasising citizens' concerns about child poverty and human development status can harness the political support required among elected officials by indirectly appealing to political incentives.

By building partnerships with civil society organisations, academics, and grassroots initiatives, UNICEF can contribute to increasing public awareness of the UCB agenda and hence promote citizens' demand for child-focused policies, as the following quote suggests: *“One of the main challenges in civil society engagement is that the dialogue on child grants is still very restricted to the government. UNICEF can play a key role in catalysing this dialogue among civil society groups.”* (MOZD5) Moreover, UNICEF can have a mediating role between civil society and the government and contribute to articulating demands and setting the agenda, as a stakeholder indicates: *“Civil*

society said to us: look we have these conversations among ourselves about the realisation of people's social economic rights, including children's social economic rights, but would it be possible for UNICEF to facilitate getting the national treasury to the table?" (SAU1) Strengthening collaborations and sharing lessons with civil society can be particularly beneficial in complex political environments and weak state capacity. Establishing and consolidating partnerships with development agencies is another critical opportunity for UNICEF to undertake concerted efforts and achieve progress in multiple dimensions.

Establishing partnerships with funding institutions and positioning child-sensitive social protection as a critical component of the development agenda can leverage the role of clauses in funding agreements and thus increase fiscal space for child benefits. Additionally, initiatives to reach consensus over programme design features, particularly conditionalities and targeting approaches, are critical for UNICEF's action. For this purpose, evidence on the longer-term developmental impacts of human capital formation and fiscal sustainability can be mobilised and balanced with rights-based approaches to social protection.

UNICEF can lead shock-responsive initiatives by influencing awareness among governments on the socio-economic effects of shocks on children, providing technical capacity to implement shock-responsive cash transfers or directly implementing initiatives.

Digital technologies offer another set of opportunities for UNICEF to support the progressive realisation of UCBs. UNICEF can take further advantage of delivering transfers through digital payments, reaching sectors of the populations that experience administrative or geographical barriers to access. In a similar way, further case-specific estimations on the cost-effectiveness of digital payments can support the adoption of digital initiatives. UNICEF can also contribute to strengthening national MISs and encourage the adoption of digital technologies to improve efficiency in targeting processes. Digital technologies can also contribute to overcoming administrative barriers to access by simplifying bureaucratic procedures such as requesting and submitting official documentation. Hence, advocating for utilising digital technologies to improve efficiency is a relevant entry point for UNICEF actions.

d) What actions and activities towards UCBs have country offices supported?

This section provides an overview of UNICEF's actions to take advantage of the opportunities discussed in the previous section, based on desk reviews and initial consultations. It provides an initial mapping of activities which the team will further develop during the evaluation stage of this project.

UNICEF has had a pivotal role in leading evidence-generation initiatives. It has conducted impact evaluations in most countries in the sample, being particularly instrumental in mobilising support in Zambia¹⁶⁸, Kenya¹⁶⁹ and Lesotho¹⁷⁰ during the initial stages of implementation. Similarly, in Mongolia, UNICEF led the assessment of the CMP impact on poverty reduction, whereby findings on exclusion errors as a result of proxy-means testing led to adopting a universal programme design. UNICEF has also commissioned feasibility studies, for example, an analysis suggesting the sustainability of a cash transfer for children under five was the precursor of the child benefit in Senegal.¹⁷¹ Notably, in Argentina, UNICEF has generated evidence on the effects of conditionalities and effectively collaborated with the implementing agency of the AUH while advocating for a rights-based approach: *"We generate evidence and advocacy around the inequities generated by conditionalities, in terms of what they demand women in charge of complying with conditionalities [...] and the fact that those whose parents are formal workers are not required to fulfil conditionalities, while those whose parents are informal need to comply. There is this tension in terms of equity, and we still collaborate with ANSES supporting the expansion of the AUH – being a conditional programme-, but our north and our advocacy is towards universal non-conditional programmes."* (ARGU1)

UNICEF has led partnership development efforts with multiple actors. It has engaged with relevant governmental departments and led advocacy initiatives among policymakers in some of the analysed cases. Specific activities have involved sharing learning experiences through high-level consultations and events such as the Intergovernmental Regional Conference on Social Protection held in Livingstone, Zambia, in 2006.¹⁷² While partnerships with development agencies and donors have been established in most cases, collaborations with financial institutions have occurred to a lesser extent, being the World Bank, the most relevant actor. Some developments include a policy note prepared by UNICEF jointly with the World Bank that informed debates to increase the transfer amount of the CT-OVC in Kenya;¹⁷³ and in Argentina, UNICEF has collaborated with the World Bank towards reducing exclusion errors, and engaging in dialogues on the role of conditionalities.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, UNICEF has engaged in dialogues with the IMF in Kenya, as confirmed by a stakeholder: *"we have extremely good relationships with the IMF. The representative here wants to learn and is open to things. So, it is a lot about establishing those relationships with the partners."* (KENU1) UNICEF has partnered with the civil society by mobilising evidence and collaborating with grassroots organisations, notably in Bihar and South Africa. Engagement with the civil society groups in Lebanon was also crucial, given the fragmented political environment and nascent collaboration with the government.¹⁷⁵ Relevant joint evidence initiatives with academic institutions have occurred in South Africa with the Children's Institute from the University of Cape Town, and in Argentina with the University of Buenos Aires.

RQ3

Considering all the countries in the sample, what are the key barriers to overcome in achieving progressive realisation of UCBs?

This question seeks to identify the main obstacles that impede the expansion of cash transfers towards Universal Child Benefits. Particular attention will be paid to **fiscal space** and **government capacity** as barriers. Other barriers include design and implementation and political, economic, or other factors.

Table 7: Country-wise structural barriers to expansion of UCBs

Country	Overview of structural barriers
Argentina	Capacity constraints to deliver benefit, lack of coordination among stakeholders, opposition by policymakers based on dependency myth belief, misalignment of incentives between central and local government
Bihar, India	Limited budgetary allocation, capacity constraints to deliver benefits, lack of coordination among stakeholders, lack of evidence on the impact of the programme
Bolivia	Lack of legal institutionalisation of the programme, fiscal space constraint
Burundi	Lack of legal institutionalisation of the programme, donor-dependent
Cambodia	Financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation, capacity constraints to deliver benefits
Canada	Fiscal space constraints during shocks such as 2008 financial crisis
Kenya	Opposition by policymakers based on dependency myth belief, lack of coordination among stakeholders, clientelism
Lebanon	Lack of legal institutionalisation of the programme, donor-dependent
Lesotho	Financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation
Mongolia	Financial constraint and reliance on commodity pricing, funding partners' preferences
Montenegro	Low benefit-value
Mozambique	Capacity constraints to deliver benefits
Nepal	Financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation, low benefit value
Senegal	Lack of legal institutionalisation of the programme, capacity constraints to deliver benefits
Sokoto State, Nigeria	Political instability, financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation, capacity constraints to deliver benefits
South Africa	Opposition by Ministry of Finance and bureaucrats based on dependency myth belief, financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation, lack of political support
Sudan	Capacity constraints to deliver benefits, donor-dependent, political instability, financial constraint
Thailand	Technical capacity gaps to design and deliver child benefit, lack of coordination among stakeholders, low benefit value
Tunisia	Insufficient coverage for vulnerable households and informal workers above the poverty line, poor harmonisation of existing programmes, limited implementation capacity
Uganda	Inadequate coverage due to low fiscal spending, integrated approach requires a complex funds mobilisation process
Zambia	Financial constraint and limited budgetary allocation, opposition by Ministry of Finance and bureaucrats based on dependency myth belief

The following additional sub-questions will be explored:

- (a) How do **fiscal space limits** (inadequate fiscal resources) represent a barrier to the expansion of cash transfers towards UCBs?

On average, countries spend a meagre 1.1% of GDP on social protection for children, excluding health expenditure, with wide disparities across countries.¹⁷⁶ An increasing number of children still do not have access to social protection benefits, and data shows that globally, 35% of children have social protection coverage, with only 28% of children in Asia and the Pacific and 16% in Africa.¹⁷⁷

While some countries, like Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mongolia, have made remarkable progress in expanding social protection coverage, many other countries struggle to do the same. As governments experience fiscal constraints, many countries are reducing child and family benefits and adopting narrow targeting strategies excluding a high proportion of vulnerable children.¹⁷⁸

Benefits targeted at children do not operate in a policy vacuum. The expansion of programs depends on several factors such as political will, fiscal capacity and the evidence of program impact. In turn, a country's fiscal space is governed by the political climate and economic factors like mobilising and managing domestic revenue, progressive taxation etc. There are various fiscal barriers that hinder the expansion of cash transfers towards UCBs, which have been identified as the following:

The affordability of a UCB is often cited as a reason for the non-expansion of child benefit programmes

The fiscal capacity of the governments significantly impacts the evolution of schemes. A broader fiscal space is considered important for horizontal or vertical expansion while shrinking government budgets and economic downturns lead to the withdrawal of social protection programmes. In Mongolia, financial crises due to the drop in global copper and mineral prices resulted in programme retrenchment, with international donor bodies putting restrictions on the expansion of the Child Money Programme and conditioning the loan payment on proxy means targeting, as further discussed in Box 2.¹⁷⁹ In South Africa, for example, the budget for child grants for the year 2016-17 was ZAR 60 billion (around 1.3% of GDP), and the estimated cost of a UCB was ZAR 87 billion, representing a 45% increase of the budget at the time.¹⁸⁰ Proponents in support of UCBs argue that all countries can or have the capacity to implement a basic social protection floor, including a UCB.¹⁸¹ However, countries often cite non-affordability or lack of fiscal space as a reason towards not expanding child programmes. In Lesotho, a key informant highlighted the fiscal challenges the Government faces, which restricts the space for expansion of

the child benefit: *“Certainly, we can make a case from the human rights perspective, but the fiscal space will not allow that. Two years ago, the country started to pull resources from the national reserves. This is just to tell you about the magnitude of the constraint and these fiscal space challenges are heavy.”* (LESU1)

Resource-driven economies are more vulnerable to external forces

Economies that depend on natural resources are more vulnerable to external factors and crises. A global shock can lead to severe economic contractions if the country has limited economic diversification. This leads to major changes in commodity prices and balance of payment shocks, accentuating the financial sector risks. Countries around the globe are facing slow growth and austerity measures while going through a period of fragile recovery post COVID-19. While some countries succeed in mobilising resources for social protection during fragile periods, leading them to a cycle of sustained growth, others get trapped in the vicious cycle of limited fiscal space, low social spending and poor economic growth. Zambia and Mongolia are examples of resource-driven economies.

Zambia’s economy depends on its natural resources. Since 2014, the world copper demand and prices have declined and coupled with other factors like high fiscal deficits, exchange-rate depreciation and inflation, facing an urgent need for fiscal adjustment. All this has not only impacted Zambia’s fiscal accounts but also affected the business confidence within and outside the country. The fiscal deficit increased from 2.6% to an estimated 7.6% of GDP between 2011-2015.¹⁸² The country’s fiscal balances are thus under intensifying pressure as debt levels continue to mount, implying an additional challenge to creating fiscal space.¹⁸³

Reliance on donor partners for funds because of low fiscal capacity

In addition to levels of financing, the sources of funding and “financing mix” matter as it has an important implication on the design and sustainability of the programme.¹⁸⁴ Donor support from international organisations like UNICEF, DFID, World Bank and the EU is seen to be critical in expanding and piloting child benefit programmes.¹⁸⁵ But complete reliance on external funding have implications on programme sustainability, especially since donor-drive reform agenda favour short term horizons and targeted programmes, leading to tensions with the time that social protection initiatives require to be effective.¹⁸⁶ The proportion of funds allocated for child grants by the government and development partners can change over time. For example, in Kenya, donor funding for the CT-OVC declined from 57% to 16% between 2008 and 2016, further constricting the space for expansion.¹⁸⁷ Sometimes, the government is also seen to be less enthusiastic about mobilising resources locally and depends more on funding from external partners.¹⁸⁸ In Mongolia, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like the IMF and the World

Bank were instrumental in shaping the design of the child program. They pushed the Government to introduce targeting in its universal child grants considering the debt sustainability of the country.¹⁸⁹

The impact of shocks on fiscal space

There is also growing evidence that financial crises and other shocks, like COVID-19 affect policy decisions impacting the expansion of child protection programmes. External shocks create unprecedented challenges for domestic resource mobilisation due to increased spending and decreased tax revenue collection. During COVID-19, countries faced unprecedented levels of uncertainty and increasing fiscal pressures, but amidst the crisis, there was a growing rise in social protection programs to protect vulnerable households and reduce rising poverty rates. Following the 2008 global crisis, the Government of Canada was forced to introduce targeting to previously universal programmes. But after the economy's upturn, Canada introduced a single Canada Child Benefit in 2015, a tax-free and income-related scheme wherein governments combined various benefits, and the coverage did not extend to higher-income earners. This was envisioned to alleviate child poverty by increasing benefits to lower- and middle-income households instead.¹⁹⁰

Many countries introduced new social protection programmes or increased the coverage or benefit value in the already existing ones to mitigate the COVID-19 shock thereby increasing government spending.¹⁹¹ With increased pressure on fiscal space, governments face constraints in expanding existing policies, including child benefits. In Nepal, while the government did not announce any budget cuts for funding the child benefit, the programme faced a delay in the planned expansion from 2020 to 2021 as fiscal pressures rose. The delays in the expansion of the Child Grants highlight the uncertainty about the government's commitment to the Child Grant program. Similarly, Bihar, which is one of the most indebted states in India, a key informant highlighted the challenges government faced due to the COVID-19 shock and lack of fiscal capacity: *"The grants were not given out during the COVID-19 pandemic largely due to the government not having enough money and because it was difficult to meet the conditionalities with schools that were shut. UNICEF advocated to repurpose these grants to account for COVID-19-sensitive realities by encouraging access to digital platforms, providing money for bicycles or uniforms."* (INDU1)

Box 3: Impact of shocks on resource-driven economies: The case of Mongolia

Mongolia is an example of a country that embarked on the process of universalising the coverage of its child grants but faced several challenges in reaching this goal, partly due to its fiscal capacity and debt sustainability model and partly due to outside influence. The Child Money Program in Mongolia relied on natural resource extraction for its funding or implementation during its inception. Mongolia's vulnerability and dependency on minerals and other resources came to the fore during the global financial crisis in 2008. The global financial crisis triggered a domestic economic emergency, and government revenues plunged. Parliament approved official loans of US\$200 million, and the IMF contributed US\$187 million in an emergency loan, conditional on an agreement to rescind untargeted social transfers.¹⁹²

The evolution Child Money Program in Mongolia resulted from multilateral and regional organisations providing funding options to the government. As Mongolia faced the global financial crisis of 2008, which resulted in the decline of global prices of mineral resources, the government confided in the IMF for a loan. The IMF agreed, conditioned on a provision to repeal the universality of the CMP.¹⁹³ The CMP underwent several transitions, from adopting a targeted design to universal and back again. Domestic policy preferences that supported the universality of the scheme were contested by IFIs with a preference for targeted approaches.

The scheme had various macroeconomic costs. Public external debt rose from 30.8% of GDP in 2010 to 48.3% of GDP in 2012.¹⁹⁴ The government spent a considerable portion of HDF expenditure on paying the loans. In 2014, cash payments accounted for approximately half of the HDF expenditure; the bulk of the remaining spending has gone towards servicing debts. Current debt concerning the HDF stands at around MNT 1 trillion or 6% of the GDP. It is also widely believed that cash transfers contributed to higher inflation.¹⁹⁵

(b) How do **government capacity constraints** represent a barrier for the progressive realisation of UCBs?

Government capacity constraints represent an important barrier for the progressive realisation of UCBs. This term can include a variety of actions implemented by the government as well as the interactions within the state. Social transfers depend on a number of factors pertaining to the state's technical capacity and resources. One example is how states should be capable of acquiring the information required for targeting programme beneficiaries.

State capacity varies according to the country and its history of state formation. Historical events like war, revolution and colonialism have influenced the different processes of state building within countries and impacted the current capacity of the state to provide basic services and social protection systems. However, there is also literature that alludes to more recent events such as electoral incentives and change in the regime as factors that affect development and social policies.¹⁹⁶

The distribution of social transfers is also a political dynamic that requires various aspects of state capacity to effectively identify participants, provide the transfers and track the programme's performance. State capacity has to be able to cope depending on the programme's particular characteristics in targeting and conditionalities.¹⁹⁷

According to Lavers, it is usually in the poorest parts of the countries with the greatest need for social transfers where state capacity is most deficient.¹⁹⁸ Lack of administrative capacity can reflect in delays in processes like retargeting, depriving families of receiving the benefits that they are entitled to.¹⁹⁹

Lavers argues that while central coordination, budgeting and planning are central elements in state capacity, the issue remains the capability to collaborate with marginalised communities and achieve the programme's goals.²⁰⁰ Also, sometimes, even when policies and budgets are established, the absence of public infrastructure can be a major government capacity constraint to implement such programmes.

Bureaucratic capacity with skilled officials remains a challenge, which is something that requires training and resources destined to efficient recruitment that can have the potential to achieve the collective goals of the programmes.²⁰¹

While all the above points are essential for state capacity, there is also the issue of intra-state relations. The dynamics between the different actors within the state, ranging from national agencies to frontline officials, and the interactions of divergent ideological perspectives plays important factors in the implementation of social policies.²⁰²

Another factor is the collaboration with non-state actors like the private sector and non-governmental organisations as sometimes they influence the delivery of social transfers. Lavers mentions the potential of powerful local elites in guiding programmatic priorities and resource allocation as an implementation capacity enabler or barrier.²⁰³

System fragmentation and design affect implementation. One example is Lesotho, in this case being that “the CGP program only covers 50,000 households and the PA only around 12,000 leaves out a large number of poor households”.²⁰⁴ “Within the MoSD, the three core programmes (PA, CGP and OVC-B) are managed at different levels of government. Moreover, there are no unified communication and reporting lines in place between the central and decentral government levels. This results in a duplication of staff positions for the different programmes, squandering valuable human resources, which could have otherwise been used to fill gaps in human resources required for effective coordination, case management, grievance response, monitoring and evaluation and the roll out of MIS and NISSA”.²⁰⁵

Another example is the case of Argentina where there are constraints that hinder access to the AUH related to the government’s capacity to overcome bottlenecks to reach all the eligible population. These include administrative barriers, geographical distance, and information gaps, which directly prevent eligible households from accessing the programme or pose difficulties to fulfil conditionalities and consequent drop-out.²⁰⁶ For instance, delays in birth certificates account for low coverage rates (53%) among children under 1-year-old.²⁰⁷

In the case of Bolivia, UNICEF has identified the lack of coordination among social programs (programs run by different ministries) and tried to advance a systems approach. For example, it has made efforts to integrate databases. These efforts have failed due to limited cooperation with the Bolivian government as they are reluctant to any foreign organisation's assistance based on a nationalist ideology. Overall, the government is not open to receiving technical advisory or capacity support, as mentioned previously. Moreover, there is an evidence gap. During the first five years of the program, UNICEF attempted to conduct impact evaluations, but initiatives have been discouraged by the government and in some cases, even censored. Even more so, the government has been non-cooperative towards civil society demands. Civil society and CO were concerned about the inclusion errors that these universal programs may have. Ex. About 20 % of the old pension (*Renta Dignidad*) grantees do not need these transfers. Also, in the case of *Bono Juancito Pinto*, it excludes children from private institutions (BOLU1).

- (c) Of the barriers identified, what are the key **opportunities** for UNICEF intervention (i.e., which barriers are in the sphere of control or influence of UNICEF?)

The barriers to the expansion of UCB as outlined in the previous section, varies depending on the country and the maturity of its social protection system. In the sample of countries selected for

evaluation, UNICEF has many opportunities for interventions to influence the various barriers that countries face in the expansion of UCB. The main areas where UNICEF has the highest opportunity to influence for expansion of child benefits are

- Technical assistance in the design and implementation of programmes
- Capacity building
- Building partnerships and institutionalising social protection
- Evidence generation thereby creating governmental support for social protection and child benefits

Accessibility, affordability, adaptability and acceptability of a programme enormously depend on its design and implementation. Targeting mechanisms within the design of a cash benefit is to identify the most vulnerable household and individuals eligible for the cash benefit. But implementing a targeted cash transfer programme has many challenges, including targeting costs and accuracy which can lead to the exclusion of the vulnerable. Governments and policymakers tend to prefer targeted programmes mainly to reduce the cost of the programme, which acts as a barrier to the expansion of child benefits. In Argentina, the main barrier to extending and expanding the coverage of Universal Child Allowance (AUH) is heavily related to the eligibility and targeting criteria and failure to comply with the conditions of the programme.²⁰⁸ As seen in the case of Mongolia, the financial crisis led to the curtailment of the Child Money Programme and the government was forced to introduce targeting criteria, as a condition for IMF and World Bank loan. According to a key informant in India, the MKUY programme, which is universal conditional cash transfer require operational support, thereby increasing the cost and negatively affecting coverage. The informant quoted *“There are a lot of conditionalities in the cash transfer and although the overall targeting is universal, it still requires a lot of operational support to track the conditions and see if the benefits are going to the targeted groups and that they are actually making a difference. That has been a lesson on how we can review the conditionalities to avoid putting a burden on the girl beneficiaries and the parents for their girl children, as well as reduce the operational hurdles.”* (INDU1) Progressive realisation of universal child benefits require the programme to move away from targeting criteria and conditionalities many of them currently impose. UNICEF can support governments in designing and implementing universal child benefits programmes and encouraging the relaxing of targeting criteria. Implementation and ensuring access to child benefits are critical in ensuring the success of the programme. UNICEF’s technical expertise in establishing and expanding cash transfer programmes through core diagnostics, implementing social registries, and monitoring and evaluation systems is imperative in addressing the design barriers of cash benefits and progressive realisation of universal child benefits.

Strengthening the capacity of policymakers and government officials is imperative for the successful design and implementation of universal child benefits. Lack of public infrastructure, technical and functional skills to implement the conditionality of the programme and low knowledge level on the importance and impact of universal child benefits are some of the capacity barriers to progressive realisation of universal child benefits. UNICEF has experience in operating in complex and challenging environments with various partners and has engaged in activities that strengthen the skills and capacities of policymakers, government officials and implementors. By engaging in capacity-building activities, which include organising and conducting trainings, study tours, workshops and round tables, UNICEF can strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to facilitate the design and implementation of universal child benefits.

Fragmented social protection systems and governance hinder the progressive realisation of universal child benefits. There is a need to build institutional social protection frameworks toward achieving the goal of universal child benefits. During COVID-19 and other shocks, UNICEF has worked with other UN agencies and global development partners to develop a larger and more comprehensive socio-economic response, within which social protection interventions are carefully integrated and systems are institutionalised. As a global organisation with an exemplary reputation for working towards children's rights UNICEF has a comparative advantage in building the various blocks to connect many institutions and formalising collaboration and coordination.

Institutionalising and formalising child benefits within a country's social protection system through evidence generation has been a key activity UNICEF has engaged in various countries. Evidence generation can tackle the lack of government support towards universal child benefits that stems from historical reluctance to invest in social protection and the dependency myth. By engaging with various partners in undertaking impact evaluations of the child benefit programme and highlighting the key achievements of the programme in developing human and cognitive capital, UNICEF can play a key role in supporting policy champions to advance the progressive realisation of UCBs.

One of the main barriers to expanding child benefits is the fiscal constraints governments face and the resulting trade-offs. By engaging in evidence-generation activities, UNICEF is in a position to advocate for greater public investments in child benefits and their progressive universal realisation. UNICEF can engage with governments and policymakers to better reflect child benefit programmes within the budget processes and also identify cost-effective and equitable mechanisms to deliver the benefit. By raising the capacity of policymakers at the state and national level on child-focused budgeting, UNICEF can support in managing allocated financial resources that help achieve the project's intended outcomes.

- (d) What **actions and activities** towards tackling the barriers to UCBs have country offices supported?

With a growing number of countries investing in child benefits, UNICEF as a global advocate for universal child benefits can support governments and policymakers in overcoming various barriers and challenges to the expansion of the benefit. UNICEF frequently works with governments and development partners across three main areas of work:

- a) Understanding the existing social protection systems and status,
- b) Designing and implementing the programme,
- c) Engaging in policy advocacy and building capacities of governments to ensure the programme is sustainable.

Depending on the country's context, UNICEF has worked across the three areas of work, and in many cases, a combination of various activities has led to the expansion of child benefits. Within the countries selected for evaluation, UNICEF has provided technical assistance in designing and implementing cash transfer programmes in Cambodia, India (Bihar), Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tunisia, and Uganda. In Kenya, UNICEF provided technical assistance through technical groups on payments, targeting, M&E, and grievance mechanism, which led to the scaling up of CT-OVC cash transfer programmes.²⁰⁹ In Cambodia and Mozambique, UNICEF played a key role in designing and implementing pilot projects which later enabled governments to take complete ownership of the programme and expand it. In Mozambique, UNICEF has been instrumental in improving the implementation capacity of the government by developing new standard operating procedures related to targeting, payments and case management.²¹⁰ In Bihar, India, for the implementation of the MKUY programme, UNICEF is working with the Directorate of Social Welfare to develop an integrated MIS system and quarterly monitoring surveys.²¹¹

Building partnerships and supporting the institutionalisation of social protection is an important mandate of UNICEF and has successfully positioned itself as a key partner to the government in various countries, including India, Mozambique, Thailand, Sudan, and Zambia. UNICEF was instrumental in drafting Sudan's first National Social Protection Strategy and deepening the commitment of the government towards investing in social protection.²¹² In Thailand, UNICEF partnered with local institutions like Thailand Development Research Institution to advocate and generate evidence for the expansion of Thailand Child Support Grant.²¹³ According to a key informant in Thailand the main driving factor for the expansion of child grant was a combination of good evidence and advocacy measures. The informant quoted *"The key to success of what UNICEF has been doing is actually a combination between, good quality evidence that basically responds to politicians, donor and government agencies and combining public and policy advocacy"*. (THU1)

In the area of domestic financing solutions, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Finance and Economic planning in Sudan in undertaking and expanding the child-focused public expenditure review, which provided a detailed analysis of the budgeting process for the social sector.²¹⁴ In

Bihar, India, UNICEF is planning to conduct a public expenditure review to generate new evidence related to the outcome of MKUY which will thereby motivate increased government spending on MKUY.²¹⁵ UNICEF has been engaging in advocacy for increasing budget allocation to the social cash transfer programme in Zambia and this included development of budget projects and social sector budget brief advocating for more efficient social protection spending.²¹⁶ In South Africa, UNICEF has been working on advocacy measures with civil society to increase the budget spending on the child grant and a key informant quoted *“And I think a lot of what you see in the budget amendment both today has to do with the efforts of civil society, actually going underground with particular agency people in Parliament.”* (SAU1)

6. Summary of key findings: “How” are UCBs progressively realised?

Universal child benefits serve as a vital social protection instrument supporting governments’ poverty reduction and sustainable development agenda. Children represent one of the most vulnerable groups with the highest risk of exclusion from social protection measures. The progressive realisation of UCBs tackles high rates of child poverty and improves children’s overall well-being, and further enhances their future ability to contribute to the social and economic life of their families, communities and nations.

Governments mostly achieve universal child benefits through a rights-based and inclusive social protection system by addressing fiscal constraints and improving policy and legislative framework. Securing adequate benefit size also remains a challenge in the path to progressive realisation of universal child benefits. From the research phase of the evaluation, it is clear that there is not one single pathway countries take to advance towards UCBs. Countries, depending on the maturity of the social protection system and other factors, tend to follow different trajectories and pathways in achieving universal child benefit. It often involves an iterative process through multiple partnerships and the strengthening of national legislation. As identified in the previous sections, various drivers help governments and policymakers support the progressive realisation of UCBs. It includes increased demand for a rights-based social protection system, political incentives, improved evidence on the impact of child benefits and policy champions that drive the agenda.

Key Message 1: Progress towards UCBs follows diverse and sometimes uncertain pathways

This report defines the **progressive realisation of UCBs** as the multi-dimensional and dynamic improvement of social protection programmes or policies that reach children according to criteria of universality, unconditionality, predictability, impact, permanence, and policy comprehensiveness. Based on the study of 21 country cases where child benefits are under development, the report demonstrates that progress is multi-dimensional, dynamic and non-linear and is influenced by various factors. The conceptual framework of the progressive realisation developed in section 4 captures these characteristics.

The main implication of the conceptual framework developed here is that there are multiple ways of making progress in advancing the agenda of child social protection. The answer to Question 1 reinforces this key message based on the country studies, leading to the proposition of multiple pathways of approaching impact. Policy pathways are understood as the possible programmatic trajectories of progress towards the UCB agenda and are illustrated by the typology in figure 2. The case studies demonstrate that child benefits follow multiple programmatic pathways to make improvements along the six dimensions that conform *progress*; this occurs through iterations in policy frameworks over variable periods and the mobilisation of different financial resources. In

addition, country studies reveal the cross-cutting character of partnerships as a driving force for advancing UCBs, involving a diversity of actors with various policy preferences.

Key Message 2: Structural and contextual factors both support and hinder progress

Different actors, incentives and contextual factors that interact to drive or hinder the desired change determine the multiplicity of outcomes and pathways for making progress. Answers to questions 2 and 3 examined how multiple factors can serve as drivers or barriers to advancing child benefits.

The answer to Question 2 identified the **key structural drivers** contributing to the progress of domains discussed above. **Public demands** for government responses to poverty and human development challenges have created the political will to establish or expand child benefits. **Political incentives**, mainly generated by competitive elections and the integration of child benefits programmes into the state's broader redistribution system, have created political support for advancing UCBs. **Policy champions** have played an essential role in generating governmental and bureaucratic support for extending child benefits by mobilising evidence and creating inter-departmental coalitions through advocacy efforts. Policy champions have been able to overcome inter-governmental opposition to child benefits. **Funding agreements** with financial institutions that include clauses for social protection spending have been influential in generating fiscal space for child benefits and have often driven the establishment or expansion of programmes. **Evidence** on impact evaluations, feasibility studies and process assessments have contributed to generating bureaucratic support for child benefits; it has motivated changes in programme design for more universal approaches and has helped to overcome barriers to access. **Partnerships** with development agencies have generated substantial support among government and state officials through advocacy efforts and evidence mobilisation. The engagement of development partners with civil society members has strengthened public demands by supporting coordination capacities and improving the evidence foundation of citizens' demands. **Digital technologies** can contribute to reducing the transaction costs of delivering payments, eliminating access barriers and strengthening capacities; nevertheless, the opportunities offered by digital technologies are yet to be taken full advantage of.

The answer to Question 3 identified the **key structural barriers** that have hindered the progress toward the child benefits agenda. **Insufficient fiscal space** is a significant constraint for financing the progressive realisation of UCBs. Financial constraints are influenced by various macroeconomic factors such as financial crises, commodity prices and external debt; microeconomic factors such as tax revenue; and domestic political and bureaucratic forces such as austerity measures and lack of political incentives. **Limited government capacity** hinders institutionalisation, implementation, coordination, and effective delivery of cash transfers for children. Insufficient capacities consist of a lack of technical abilities, weak human resources, and

insufficient physical and information infrastructures required for programme operations. Capacity constraints also hinder progress through weak policy frameworks and administrative barriers for rightsholders to access the transfer.

Key Message 3: UNICEF can lead strategic initiatives to advance the progressive realisation of UCBs

The key structural drivers and barriers present opportunities for UNICEF to lead strategic actions and activities that accelerate drivers of UCBs and diminish the associated barriers. High-level advocacy activities contribute to creating bureaucratic support among government officials, particularly by strengthening national leaders who work as ‘policy champions’ to drive inter-ministerial support. UNICEF can reinforce shock-responsive initiatives through technical assistance or direct implementation. Engaging with civil society organisations and grassroots initiatives can create public awareness and subsequent demand for child protection policies. UNICEF can collaborate with financial institutions to work towards common objectives and create dialogue around programmatic design features. Generating and mobilising evidence such as impact evaluations and feasibility studies can contribute to increasing governmental support, particularly among bureaucratic officials and ministerial actors, for mobilising resources to fund child benefits. Through technical assistance, UNICEF can influence programme design to overcome programmatic barriers that hinder coverage. Through capacity-building activities, UNICEF can also strengthen the governments’ capacities and knowledge on designing and implementing cash transfers for children.

This report’s main findings and propositions support the key message that the progressive realisation of UCBs is a multidimensional, non-linear and dynamic process that allows diverse outcomes. The child benefit agenda proposed by UNICEF has an inclusive approach that enables countries to make programmatic improvements to advance social protection for children according to their national priorities, financial capacities and policy preferences. Given the multiplicity of factors influencing the child benefit agenda in the country sample, there is considerable scope for development partners, governments, civil society and other actors to contribute towards the desired change. Particularly, UNICEF can build on its Global Social Protection Action Areas to undertake strategic actions to support the drivers and overcome the barriers to accelerate the progressive realisation towards UCBs.

The conceptual framework discussed in section 3, along with the answers to the research questions related to the main drivers and barriers in section 5, will provide the foundation for articulating the evaluation framework during the evaluation phase; in this regard, the following section re-assesses the evaluation questions in light of these findings.

7. Evaluation component

This section revisits and refines the evaluation questions developed during the inception phase, building on the findings and key messages of the research phase presented in this report. The evaluation questions below integrate the conceptual framework and critical insights on the structural drivers and barriers towards the realisation of UCBs, as well as the opportunities identified for UNICEF’s intervention. The evaluation questions seek to explore the extent to which UNICEF has effectively identified opportunities and carried out activities that influence the drivers and barriers that promote or hinder the desired impact, which is the overarching purpose of the evaluation phase.

The revised evaluation questions based on the key findings and conceptual propositions developed in the previous sections are presented as follows:

Question 4: [OVERARCHING] How relevant and effective have UNICEF country offices interventions been in supporting their government partners in making progress towards Universal Child Benefits (UCBs)?

This question seeks to explore overall what actions UNICEF country offices took towards the progressive realisation of UCBs, and how effective these activities were. Relevance is addressed in the part (a) below. Effectiveness is answered in part (b). The findings of key informant interviews suggest that the evaluation should consider the premise that UCBs are the endpoint for UNICEF’s child-sensitive social protection agenda. This premise underlies the first evaluation question, but key informants have raised important issues that further evaluation can address.

Table 8: Question 4 sub-questions proposed revision

Original Question	Revised Question
<p>(a) How relevant are UNICEF supporting activities for the progressive realisation of UCBs?</p> <p>These may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence generation (impact evaluation, costing, systems diagnostics, simulations) • Advocacy (with the government, parliament, media, civil society, other sectors) • Funding and implementing pilot projects to be scaled-up later by the government • Building internal cross-sectoral collaboration at UNICEF, including UNICEF global and regional guidance • Engaging national governments and civil society (for example, mapping out milestones for engaging with policy officials to make progress towards expanding benefits for children within a progressive realisation framework) <p>(b) How effective were UNICEF-supported actions and activities at country level?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively did the country offices address the barriers, and support the drivers? • How effectively did country offices support the leadership of national governments and engage civil society? 	<p>(a) To what extent have UNICEF COs used the learning, evidence and insight generated by the progressive realisation of UCBs around the world to shape their approaches to programming?</p> <p>(b) How effectively has UNICEF supported governments in institutionalising child benefit policies within the respective legal frameworks?</p> <p>(c) How effectively has UNICEF been able to maximise opportunities to advance the progressive realisation of child benefits? (Including but not limited to identifying and supporting policy and programme champions, opening policy windows, and responding to public demands and social priorities).</p> <p>(d) What more can UNICEF do to support the drivers and overcome the barriers to the progressive realisation of [universal] child benefits?</p>

Question 5: [FISCAL SPACE] How effectively has UNICEF been able to mobilise government resources or to enable governments to mobilise resources to support progress towards UCBs?

This question seeks to explore the extent to which UNICEF mobilised and enabled governments to mobilise the fiscal resources for expansions of cash transfers. It will further explore what more can be done, for the three levels of UNICEF governance framework: global, regional and country level.

The evaluation will explore this question in three parts:

Table 9: Question 5 sub-questions proposed revision

Original Questions	Revised Questions
<p>(a) Have UNICEF country offices effectively employed strategies, evidence and advocacy approaches to mobilise resources and to support governments to mobilise resources?</p> <p>(b) How effectively has UNICEF (ROs-COs) explored alternative and innovative sources of revenue to finance UCBs?</p> <p>(c) What more can be done: What support or approaches would enable HQ, regional offices and country offices to better mobilise resources and/or to better enable governments to mobilise resources?</p>	<p>(a) Have UNICEF country offices effectively employed evidence and advocacy approaches to mobilise resources and to support governments to mobilise domestic and international resources?</p> <p>(b) How effectively has UNICEF (ROs-COs) explored alternative domestic and international sources of revenue to finance UCBs? (Include a focus on funding agreement clauses of IFIs and other development partner agreements as well as innovative links to climate finance)</p> <p>(c) What more can be done: What support or approaches would enable HQ, regional offices and country offices to better mobilise resources and/or to better enable governments to mobilise resources?</p>

Question 6: [GOVERNMENT CAPACITY] How effectively has UNICEF strengthened the capacity of governments and their partners at individual and organisational levels to support UCBs (with a view to long-term sustainability)?

This question seeks to explore the extent to which UNICEF’s activities strengthened government capacities (at individual and organisational levels) toward the implementation of UCBs. It will further explore the extent to which any such activities supported the capacities for the sustainable, country-led implementation of UCBs over the long term.

Table 10: Question 6 sub-questions proposed revision

Original Questions	Revised Questions
<p>a) How effective was UNICEF in supporting capacity-building activities (training, institutional support, human resources, evidence) to strengthen governments and partners in designing, delivering and sustaining child benefits (including universal ones)?</p> <p>b) What more can be done? How can UNICEF (at global, regional and country levels) more effectively support and strengthen capacities of governments and their partners towards UCBs?</p>	<p>(a) Have UNICEF’s capacity-building activities (particularly training but also potentially including capacity-strengthening institutional support, support for government human resources, and capacity-building for evidence generation) been effective to strengthen governments in designing, delivering and sustaining child benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In particular, have these activities been effective in reducing administrative, geographical or other barriers to access? • In addition, has UNICEF effectively leveraged inclusive digital technologies to support the efficiency, coverage and inclusivity of child benefits? <p>(b) What more can be done? How can UNICEF (at global, regional and country levels) more effectively support and strengthen capacities of governments and their partners towards progressive realisation of UCBs?</p>

Question 7: [PARTNERSHIPS] How effectively has UNICEF developed, sustained or leveraged partnerships (at country level) to support the progressive realisation of UCBs?

This question explores UNICEF’s activities with regard to collaboration and partnership directed at progressive realisation of UCBs. It evaluates the extent to which UNICEF effectively leveraged partnerships. The following table compares the original sub-questions to the proposed revised sub-questions.

Table 11: Question 7 sub-questions proposed revision

Original sub-questions	Revised sub-questions
<p>(a) To what extent did UNICEF effectively engage in partnerships and support governments to build partnerships to advocate for, initiate, design, deliver, monitor and evaluate UCBs?</p> <p>(b) How proactively and effectively has UNICEF supported the realisation of the inter-sectoral and collaborative synergies that partnerships can deliver, including complex developmental outcomes such as nutrition, health, education, gender equality, and others?</p> <p>(c) What more can be done: What are the potential areas for collaboration with other UN organisations, IFIs and other potential partners, including government and civil society? What is the potential of joint programming approaches?</p>	<p>(a) How did UNICEF’s partnerships with civil society effectively contribute to government support, fiscal space and/or government capacity? (Including strengthening/articulating public demands, improving programme inclusivity and overcoming barriers to access)</p> <p>(b) To what extent and how did UNICEF’s partnerships with government actors and agencies, development partners, IFIs and NGOs effectively drive government support, fiscal space and/or government capacity? (Including increasing evidence-based understanding, supporting and leveraging policy championship, improving collaboration with IFIs and donors)</p> <p>(c) How proactively and effectively has UNICEF supported the realisation of the inter-sectoral and collaborative synergies that partnerships can deliver to tackle multi-dimensional poverty, including by supporting complex developmental outcomes including nutrition, health, education, gender equality, livelihoods, and others?</p> <p>(d) What more can be done: What are the potential areas for collaboration with other UN organisations, IFIs and other potential partners, including government and civil society? What are the most promising joint programming approaches?</p>

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