



Partnerships with Development Partners, Civil Society, NGO's, Academia, and Think Tanks

Good Practice Note

Evaluation of UNICEF's Social Protection Responses towards Universal Child Benefits



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Introduction

Action Area 2 of UNICEF’s Global Social Protection Framework seeks to expand social protection programmes, including child benefits, through partnerships with governments, civil society groups, development partners, and academia.¹ Through partnerships, UNICEF has successfully supported governments in designing child benefits, supported the building of social protection delivery systems and built an evidence base for social protection advocacy. Partnerships have allowed UNICEF to advance a multi-pronged approach to support governments in expanding child benefits worldwide, backed by evidence generation and advocacy.

By continuously leveraging its convening power on child-sensitive social protection issues, the UNICEF Country Offices (COs) have organised multistakeholder policy dialogues to disseminate evidence and engage policymakers, development partners, and scholars worldwide in a global dialogue on current evidence for child benefits. In 2019, UNICEF collaborated with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to convene an International Conference on Universal Child Grants to disseminate evidence emerging from cash transfer schemes and the implications for Universal Child Grants (UCGs).² The UCG Conference brought together a wide array of social protection stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, researchers, and members of the international community, to discuss, debate,

and engage with current evidence on universal child benefits.

Through partnerships with national and local actors, including academia and civil society organisations (CSOs), the credibility of UNICEF’s evidence-building efforts is continuously strengthened. In Thailand, CSOs were pivotal in driving public demand to expand child benefits. Simultaneously, UNICEF’s partnerships with academia in Argentina enhanced the credibility and ownership of jointly produced evidence. UNICEF COs in Thailand and Argentina prioritised partnerships with government agencies, civil society, academia, and think tanks to support building integrated and child-sensitive social protection systems, reinforced by each partner’s expertise and comparative advantages. These partnerships led to the establishment of integrated and rights-based social protection systems, harmonising various social protection programmes, integrating administrative systems and developing a global evidence base. In Thailand and Argentina, the partnerships were key in developing joint-evidence initiatives and supporting the expansion of child benefits by engaging with policymakers to garner political support for the programme. This document highlights good practices on partnerships developed and sustained by UNICEF country offices that can provide valuable insights and serve as a guide for other COs to adopt and implement.



Highlighted Good Practices

Empowering Communities for Children’s Rights: UNICEF Thailand CO’s Successful Partnership with Civil Society Coalition to Strengthen Child Benefit Programmes

Summary of the Approach

In 2015, after years of advocacy and evidence mobilisation efforts, the UNICEF Thailand CO successfully supported the Royal Government of Thailand’s introduction of the Child Support Grant (CSG). The UNICEF Thailand CO’s approach to increasing demand and strengthening child benefit programmes involved adopting a multi-pronged approach through building partnerships with powerful CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). UNICEF pursued multisectoral partnerships with NGOs, including the Foundation for Children Development, Foundation for Slum Babies, Doungprateep Foundation, Mercy Foundation, Sahathai Foundation, and the Chulalongkorn University, to advance concerted and sustained advocacy initiatives.

In 2018, the UNICEF Thailand CO partnered with the Coalition on Universal Child Support Grant, comprising over 100 NGOs working on children’s issues.³ The partnership successfully advocated with different stakeholders, including policymakers, for the progressive expansion of the CSG. CSOs and NGOs’ partnership with UNICEF provided a platform for civil society to represent the interest of children in official government committees such as the National Committee on Child Development and the National Law Reform Commission. Simultaneously, on these platforms, CSOs and NGOs were able to support UNICEF’s proposal for child benefits and its subsequent expansion. Overall, in Thailand, the partnerships between UNICEF and civil society have been instrumental in supporting the government to establish an integrated and rights-based social protection system in Thailand.

<p>Key Results Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The UNICEF Thailand CO’s partnerships with CSOs and NGOs provided a platform for civil society to engage in policymaking and enabled the representation of different interest groups during the policymaking process. ▶ In January 2015, a National Seminar on the Child Support Grant was held in Parliament, where the joint advocacy coalition of NGOs and CSOs showcased its strength by bringing together diverse stakeholders. The seminar amplified the voices of various interest groups, leading to overall political support for the programme. ▶ UNICEF leveraged the expertise of CSOs and NGOs to conduct public awareness campaigns among local communities at grassroots levels. The public engagement initiatives helped empower local communities to demand continuous CSG expansion.
<p>Lessons Learnt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establishing partnerships with stakeholders who advocate for common causes is vital in conveying a unified and strengthened message for programmatic improvements. ▶ Partnerships with coalitions of CSOs and NGOs strengthen advocacy and leverage evidence produced by development partners by adding credibility and legitimacy to advocacy initiatives, reaching and impacting greater numbers of the target audience. ▶ Involving CSOs in policymaking processes can be beneficial in ensuring the representation of various interest groups and provides a platform for civil society in policymaking, ensuring policies are grounded in the needs and aspirations of the communities. ▶ Maximising the abilities of CSOs and NGOs to conduct public awareness campaigns among local communities at the grassroots level generates public demand for social protection programmes, thereby encouraging continuous expansion. Public demand and support for child benefit programmes are instrumental in ensuring long-term sustainability and increasing political will for the programme.



Strengthening Child Benefits Programmes through Evidence-Based Policy: UNICEF Argentina's Successful Partnership with Academic Institutions and Think Tanks

<p>Summary of the Approach</p>	<p>The UNICEF Argentina CO developed valuable partnerships with prominent national academic institutions and think tanks. These partnerships have been vital in producing evidence supporting policy reform and strengthening the Universal Child Allowance for Social Protection (AUH) programme. The UNICEF Argentina CO collaborated with several academic institutions, including the University of Buenos Aires and the Center of Distributive, Labor and Social Studies (CEDLAS) at the University of La Plata. The collaborative partnerships produced joint evidence products that advocated for programmatic improvement, including the size and horizontal expansion of the benefit.</p> <p>UNICEF launched multidisciplinary research initiatives to support the government in addressing exclusion errors and increasing programme coverage by working closely with the University of Buenos Aires and think tanks, such as the Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC). In 2017, the CO jointly developed the report "Analysis and Proposals for Improvements to Expand the Universal Child Allowance" with the National Social Security Agency (ANSES) and the University of Buenos Aires, highlighting the grant's inadequacy in overcoming poverty while shedding light on the causes of exclusion.⁴</p> <p>Aside from the partnerships with academia, the UNICEF CO also collaborated with national think tanks to organise stakeholder engagement forums. As part of its advocacy efforts, the UNICEF CO partnered with CIPPEC to produce evidence on the implication of conditionality of child benefit programmes, leading to the exclusion of vulnerable populations. The UNICEF Argentina CO partnered with think tanks to hold policy dialogues with government stakeholders. The policy dialogue forums were instrumental in disseminating evidence on the impact of AUH with policymakers and further strengthening the agenda of expansion of the programme.⁵</p>
<p>Key Results Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The UNICEF Argentina CO, ANSES, and the University of Buenos Aires conducted research that highlighted the inadequacy of AUH to address child poverty due to its low benefit size and exclusion of eligible beneficiaries. By working together, UNICEF and its partners were able to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the programme and address the underlying factors contributing to exclusion errors. ▶ The collaboration between UNICEF, academic institutions, and the government agencies ANSES and the Ministry of Social Development⁶ emphasised the legitimacy and academic credibility of the evidence and findings in the joint research report. The partnership played a significant role in decision-making and policy reform, leading to improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families.
<p>Lessons Learnt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Partnerships with think tanks and national institutions support mobilising expertise and ideas, including diverse perspectives on child benefits and its expansion, to influence the policymaking process. ▶ By involving government agencies and academic institutions in joint evidence generation, UNICEF can increase its initiatives' academic credence, objectivity, and credibility and establish legitimacy for research findings and recommendations.

Leveraging Evidence from Cash Transfer Schemes to Advance Child Well-being – UNICEF, ILO, and ODI’s Joint Efforts through an International Conference on Child Grants

<p>Summary of the Approach</p>	<p>In February 2019, UNICEF convened an International Conference on Child Grants in collaboration with the ILO and the ODI. The conference aimed to disseminate evidence on cash transfer schemes and their relevance to the UCGs. Government officials, policymakers, researchers, and members of the international community working in social protection attended the conference. The conference was part of a larger project on UCGs led by UNICEF, ILO and ODI, and its goal was to increase political will and support governments to implement UCGs. Panel discussions during the conference presented strong evidence demonstrating the positive impact of UCGs and quasi-universal child grants and their role in addressing child poverty and other socio-economic vulnerabilities.⁷ These discussions also provided options for governments to progress toward expanding child benefits to implement UCGs in a fiscally sustainable manner. The conference served as a platform for policymakers, researchers, and international communities to discuss and exchange information on child benefits. It encouraged multidisciplinary and multisectoral conversations on the topic of universal social protection.</p> <p>ILO and UNICEF launched the jointly co-authored report “Towards Universal Social Protection for Children: Achieving SDG 1.3” during the conference. The report’s launch was a key aspect of the conference because it provided evidence supporting universal social protection for children, especially through child benefits. The report highlighted the urgent need to expand child-sensitive social protection programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>
<p>Key Results Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The conference allowed governments and development partners to engage in a global dialogue with policymakers, scholars, and other stakeholders from around the world to discuss current evidence on child benefits. ▶ The event created a learning platform for sharing and exchanging information, ideas, knowledge, and relevant experiences among participants working in the social protection sector. ▶ The conference led to government commitment towards Universal Child Benefits in Thailand and Nepal. The evidence and deliberations presented during the conference played a critical role in supporting the government to commit to universal child benefits and strengthening child-sensitive social protection in the country.
<p>Lessons Learnt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Stakeholder engagement platforms are highly effective in sharing evidence on child benefits widely. By bringing together multiple partners working in the field of social protection, multidisciplinary and multisectoral conversations can be facilitated, allowing actors to discuss, debate, and critique policy positions constructively. ▶ Partnerships between organisations that have common interests can achieve mutually beneficial results. UNICEF’s partnership with the ILO harnessed shared interests and priorities between both organisations to deliver adequate social protection for children.

Abbreviations

ANSES	The National Social Security Agency
AUH	Child Allowance for Social Protection
CEDLAS	The Center of Distributive, Labor and Social Studies
CIPPEC	Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth
COs	Country Offices
CSG	Child Support Grant
CSOs	Civil society Organisations
ILO	International Labour Organisation
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
UCGs	Universal Child Grants

Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF. (2019). UNICEF's Global Social Protection Framework. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/64601/file/Global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019.pdf>
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- 4 UNICEF. (2020). *Análisis de la cobertura de ingresos monetarios para la niñez en la Argentina a través de los diferentes sistemas existentes*. UNICEF Argentina.
- 5 CIPPEC. (2021). Diálogos por la niñez y la adolescencia. Intercambios, lecciones y desafíos. CIPPEC. <https://dialogosnnya.cippec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Dialogos-version-final.pdf>
- 6 ARGU2; ARGD1
- 7 ILO, UNICEF. (2019). Towards universal social protection for children: Achieving SDG 1.3. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/49401/file/Towards%20universal%20social%20protection%20for%20children.pdf>



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August 2023