United Nations Children’s Fund
Executive Board
First regular session 2014
4-7 February 2014
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

Update on progress on a costed gender action plan

Background note

1. UNICEF is developing a costed gender action plan (GAP) for 2014-2017, which will have a strong focus on gender equality. It will be aligned with the Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and cover the same four-year period.

2. In its decisions 2013/9 and 2013/20, the Executive Board reaffirmed its support for the development of the GAP, and requested UNICEF to address the challenges identified from the end-of-cycle review of the strategic priority action plan (SPAP), develop a performance management plan, provide costing and allocate adequate funds for the new GAP during 2014-2017.

3. The basic parameters for the plan were described in the report on the progress of gender equality work in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2013/12) presented to the Executive Board at its annual session in June 2013, and include a focus on results, expertise, and programmatic action in the field. Based on the roadmap presented at the annual session, UNICEF has completed the first two phases in developing the plan, taking into consideration the Executive Board’s requests and making sure that all suggested elements are meaningfully reflected as the process progresses. The third and final phase of the GAP development process will be completed by the end of April 2014.

4. The three phases are as follows:

   a) **January-June 2013.** End-of-cycle review of the SPAP 2010-2013; report on the progress of gender equality work in UNICEF.

   b) **July-December 2013.** Informal briefing around the second regular session of the Executive Board in September 2013; series of strategic and technical consultations, internally and externally, to flesh out key elements of the GAP.

   c) **January-April 2014.** Drafting, costing, review, revisions, resourcing and finalization of the GAP 2014-2017.

* E/ICEF/2014/1.
5. The present update captures the progress on the GAP during phase 2, July-December 2013, along with the anticipated steps beginning in January 2014. The main elements include: (a) sharpening of key GAP components through consultative processes with internal and external stakeholders; (b) inserting prioritized issues, indicators and guidance in the implementation process for the UNICEF strategic plan, 2014-2017; and (c) assessing resource allocation and options for tracking achievement of results on gender.

I. Sharpening key GAP elements through consultative processes

United Nations partners

6. A number of meetings with Executive Board members as well as UN-Women, UNFPA and UNDP were held between June and December 2013. The meetings with sister agencies focused largely on three areas: (a) overlap and complementarity of the gender focus in the strategic plans of the respective organizations; (b) possibilities for collaborating to operationalize the United Nations gender mandate under the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system and under Delivering as One, and to align these efforts with the UN System-Wide Action Plan on gender equality and women's empowerment; and (c) ensuring joint mobilization around key shared, measurable goals and indicators within the post-2015 development agenda.

7. A major emerging focus for shared efforts is around the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls and around initiatives to address gender-based violence. There was general agreement that the moment has come for the United Nations to jointly mobilize on these two important areas of work on gender equality and that each agency should bring a clear mandate and its own unique added value in advancing the shared agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment.

8. The meetings have allowed the agencies to discuss the approaches they are adopting for a greater focus on gender results and for providing adequate capacity and resources for gender mainstreaming. The need for articulation of fewer but more clearly definable and measurable indicators was emphasized by all agencies, even as the results frameworks for their respective strategic plans have integrated gender results in different ways; for example, UNDP is delineating a separate results area on gender while UNICEF is integrating gender results in all seven outcome areas of its strategic plan.

Member States

9. The meetings with Member States – both bilaterally and in small groups – focused on concrete ways to advance results, measures, and resources around specific gender issues that UNICEF has already prioritized for its work under its strategic plan. Collaboration and acceleration of programmatic work, resource mobilization and allocation, and definition of outcomes have already begun around the priority issues of child marriage, violence against women and girls, and education of girls. Member State input emphasized the importance of costing and resourcing the GAP and putting in place a meaningful process for tracking implementation, progress, and success.
UNICEF global technical consultation on gender

10. In November 2013, UNICEF held a global technical consultation on gender as a critical step for drawing on the rich expertise and insights that exist within the organization – especially at the country level – to inform several of the key aspects of the GAP. The three-day consultation involved the Deputy Executive Director for Programmes and approximately 55 staff. They represent all seven regions and over 20 UNICEF country offices, and encompassed a diversity of programming contexts and sectoral expertise. The Deputy Executive Director participated actively and conveyed to the participants the senior management’s commitment to integrating gender in all UNICEF activities and her vision of gender as a core priority for UNICEF.

11. The consultation identified a range of critical gender issues both within and across sectors, with significant overlap among the priorities identified across country and regional settings. The issues most often prioritized included child marriage, secondary schooling and higher-level skills for girls, violence against women and girls, and teen pregnancy. The group reviewed the best options for maximizing data, carrying out analysis and creating indicators for demonstrating gender results, and concluded that it was important to go beyond sex disaggregation and to consider gender-specific and gender-transformative indicators as well. In addition, the participants emphasized the importance of undertaking more complex analysis to identify gender disparities, such as, for example, looking more deeply at the lack of nutritional differences among girls and boys during early childhood to consider sex differences in child mortality.

12. A number of important gender bottlenecks and barriers to achieving results for children were identified. These included a lack of mobility, resources, and decision-making for women and girls, as well as societal attitudes and norms around how girls and boys should behave, the roles they should undertake, and the achievements to which they should aspire. Equally important, the group highlighted concrete and proven intervention strategies for overcoming gender barriers, such as support for training service providers to address gender-specific needs, bringing services to women and girls or gaining support for normative change from male leaders and family members.

13. Participants supported using a “modelling of success” approach to concretely implementing gender priorities in the field, where key initiatives that have been successful in addressing gender issues through cross-sectoral collaboration and effective use of resources become models for replication and adaptation across regions and issue areas. In that light, positive models include the recent efforts at leveraging the rollout of the human papilloma virus vaccine to advance adolescent girls’ health or coalescing a cross-sectoral effort across the teams for education, communication for development, child protection, adolescents and gender to address child marriage.

14. Another important area of discussion was around the issue of gender expertise, capacity, and accountability, around which long-standing challenges as well as practical and viable options for moving forward were outlined. There was agreement that mechanisms need to be set up not only for holding senior managers accountable for performance on gender results, but also for providing them strategic support on how to implement good programming on gender. Similarly, participants agreed that staff members needed to be held accountable for performance on gender programming but also required technical support and access to gender expertise in order to perform well. Two options for strengthening organizational capacity included in the review of gender expertise in the recruitment process, along with a more in-depth, hands-on gender training of those staff best positioned to advance sectoral and cross-sectoral work on gender.
II. Integrating gender priorities in the implementation of the strategic plan

15. The planning processes for implementing the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 have provided an opportunity to immediately move forward with the integration of prioritized elements of the GAP within the organization’s monitoring and guidance systems. For example, key gender issues, bottlenecks and barriers, as well as intervention approaches, are being integrated in sectoral and cross-sectoral workplans as well as programme strategy and guidance documents. Similarly, gender indicators for each result area are being identified, with specific guidance on measurement, reporting, and analysis provided. Equally important, gender benchmarks are being revised in order to provide more precise guidance to staff in the field on what defines good gender programming.

III. Assessing resource allocations and tracking options

16. As a part of the new strategic plan, UNICEF has set up the Gender Thematic Fund as a way to mobilize resources for programmatic work on gender. Currently, the organization is mapping the scope and use of those resources, as well as the results to be achieved. This has involved reviewing funding trends in programming on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and assessing the options for establishing a mutually reinforcing relationship between the Gender Thematic Fund and the other thematic funds at UNICEF in order to maximize synergies and avoid duplication. Concurrently, UNICEF is reviewing the potential opportunities the Gender Equality Marker offers for tracking resource allocation and expenditures with respect to the actual achievement of gender outputs and outcomes in addition to expected results.

IV. Next steps

17. An initial outline of the GAP is currently under development. In January 2014, the third phase will begin, with a complete draft ready for vetting by all related stakeholders by the end of February 2014, so that the plan can be finalized by the end of April 2014.