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UNICEF Humanitarian Action
Current practice, key challenges and opportunities

I. Introduction

1. An estimated 535 million children – nearly one in four – live in countries affected by humanitarian crises, often without access to medical care, proper nutrition, clean water and sanitation facilities, quality education and protection.

2. Meeting the commitment embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals to “leave no one behind” requires reaching the most disadvantaged, hardest-to-reach and hardest-to-serve children – no matter what obstacles stand in the way – with the urgent assistance they need.

3. Supporting the health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education and protection of children living in humanitarian crises is central to the mandate of UNICEF. In accordance with this mandate, under the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, the focus of UNICEF will be on the delivery of faster, more effective and at-scale humanitarian response in line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs). The CCCs promote predictable, effective, accountable and timely humanitarian action, and provide a framework for steering the organization’s contextually adapted responses in acute sudden-onset and protracted humanitarian situations. The CCCs are guided by international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, in situations of armed conflict, international humanitarian law. The programme commitments of the CCCs contribute to a multisectoral response and consistently integrate gender equality into UNICEF disaster preparedness, humanitarian response and recovery programmes.

4. UNICEF humanitarian action also represents a key path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ending poverty and intergenerational disadvantage. Risk-informed development cooperation can reduce the negative impact of crises. Immediate humanitarian action in the midst of conflict or natural disaster can not only save lives but also present a unique opportunity to strengthen resilience and advance longer-term development. This

principle of working to address both humanitarian and development needs underlies the UNICEF approach to humanitarian action.

5. The present update outlines the overall approach of UNICEF to humanitarian action, and identifies the institutional challenges that must be overcome to continue serving the short- and long-term needs of children and communities whose lives are affected by conflicts and natural disasters.

II. Humanitarian action: implementation modalities

6. UNICEF humanitarian operations are implemented through several modalities. First and foremost, UNICEF responds to emergencies using its in-country capacity developed through long-standing collaboration between the UNICEF country office and key partners on the ground: government, civil society and sister United Nations agencies. Where local capacities are functioning, UNICEF promotes working synergies and helps to prevent duplication of effort, emphasizing its comparative advantages. In situations where local capacity is limited, UNICEF scales up its partnerships with sister United Nations agencies and with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UNICEF and partners also activate the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), which deploys sectoral specialists and delivers emergency supplies to previously inaccessible areas not served by other humanitarian actors, as part of the humanitarian response.

7. In all situations, UNICEF aims not only to deliver emergency life-saving assistance, but also to rebuild and revitalize systems so that the humanitarian response contributes to long-term development, thereby achieving more for those affected. This includes the ability of UNICEF to mobilize large volumes of emergency supplies in a timely and cost-effective manner and its collaboration with other actors on humanitarian response through the cluster approach.

A. System-strengthening

8. Humanitarian programming can achieve better development outcomes by contributing to building more resilient and responsive national and local systems. System-strengthening, at both the national and subnational levels, is a core strategy in UNICEF humanitarian action. By strengthening systems, UNICEF contributes to the following: the enhanced resilience of communities and societies; community capacity-building to protect and address the needs of vulnerable children in humanitarian crises; and progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

9. The UNICEF approach to strengthening systems at national and subnational levels cuts across the five goal areas of its new Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, with a specific focus on building the capacities of Governments, civil society and local actors for coordination and rapid scale-up of life-saving and protection services in humanitarian crises. This includes improving delivery systems for health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, as well as for education programming. It also includes reinforcing and expanding infrastructure for social services, working with communities to increase their capacities to protect children, and scaling up specific system capacities to mitigate and respond to child protection risks. Additionally, UNICEF invests in strengthening social protection systems to enhance emergency preparedness and the delivery of humanitarian cash-based programming where feasible and relevant.

10. An example of strengthened service-delivery systems is found in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia near the border with South Sudan, where UNICEF supported the establishment of a permanent water system, which provides clean, safe water to 150,000 South Sudanese refugees and members of the host community. Construction is currently under way to expand coverage for an additional 100,000 people. The water system not only provides immediate
access to clean water – mitigating the risks of water-borne disease outbreaks – but also will operate over the long term. This example demonstrates UNICEF humanitarian action programming that addresses both immediate needs of children and their communities and longer-term development goals.

B. Direct implementation

11. In contexts where neither government nor local actors are available to implement programmes, UNICEF, often in collaboration with partners, directly implements services and programmes. Building upon an initiative that began in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 12 years ago, UNICEF developed the RRM, through which the organization directly deploys multisectoral teams of specialists and delivers life-saving emergency supplies to previously inaccessible areas in order to implement critically needed interventions across a range of sectors. For example, in South Sudan, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) have partnered on multiple RRM deployments since 2014, reaching over 1.9 million people, including 780,000 children.

12. In addition to deploying specialized personnel, UNICEF increasingly runs cash-based programmes, which serve as a key modality to cover humanitarian needs and to catalyse longer-term national system-strengthening in social protection. Cash programmes help to preserve the dignity of populations affected by crises by empowering them to determine and prioritize their own immediate needs. Cash programmes also promote resilience by stimulating local economies and markets and strengthening national systems and partnerships for effective humanitarian response.

13. UNICEF humanitarian cash-based programming includes unconditional cash transfers to cover both immediate basic needs and longer-term approaches, such as “cash plus” programmes that combine cash with services. UNICEF uses cash in a range of contexts, including high-threat environments, where the cash modality has proven efficient. In settings with population displacement, UNICEF employs cash-based transfers, including support to newly displaced populations in camp settings and those living in host communities. By addressing both immediate and longer-term needs, cash-based programming contributes to longer-term social inclusion and cohesion. In 2016, UNICEF and partners reached more than 682,000 crisis-affected households, including 1.4 million children, with some form of cash-based support.

14. Cash transfers can also serve as a medium- and long-term response as part of integrated programming approaches. For example, humanitarian “cash plus” involves the layering of services, interventions or messaging – such as for school attendance or access to water – into cash-transfer programmes to amplify impact. The “cash plus” approach is important, as cash alone is not always sufficient to reduce the broad, interrelated social and economic risks and vulnerabilities that populations face. Additional support may be needed to facilitate basic social-service delivery and connect cash beneficiaries with the services they need. “Cash plus” thereby represents an opportunity to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development social-protection approaches, especially where there are no long-term responses in place involving social protection.

15. In collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP, UNICEF has also set up common cash programmes. For example, in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the three agencies have developed joint systems for beneficiary-targeting, database management, cash distribution and cash-delivery monitoring. The partnership has enabled the three agencies to scale up more rapidly, facilitating more efficient, streamlined and effective programming, building upon the relative strengths of each actor. UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF have reached more than 520,000 people across the three countries with these common cash programmes. In Lebanon, UNICEF supports 240,000 children through a child cash grant that is distributed through a common system – the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Agency System for E-cards – which is jointly owned and
operated by WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and the Lebanon Cash Consortium of international NGOs.

16. In addition, as part of the partnership of the World Bank Group International Development Association with United Nations agencies in Yemen, UNICEF will implement an emergency cash-transfer project totalling $200 million over the next six months, which aims to reach 1.5 million impoverished and vulnerable households across all 22 governorates of Yemen. These include women-headed households, the elderly, persons with disabilities and chronically poor families. UNICEF and the World Bank also recently signed a broader programme framework for collaborating in fragile contexts.

17. UNICEF implements humanitarian cash-transfer programmes through a variety of partnerships. Depending on the context and the objectives, UNICEF-implemented programmes can work with the national system (either fully or partially) and/or through the development of a parallel system, in partnership with United Nations agencies, international and local NGOs, and the private sector.

C. Supply and logistics

18. One clear comparative advantage of UNICEF in emergency response is its ability to mobilize supplies in a timely and cost-effective manner. UNICEF operates three emergency hubs, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in Colon, Panama, and in Shanghai, China, which can dispatch emergency supplies within 48 hours.

19. UNICEF and its partners are united in their efforts to improve efficiency and to optimize cost-effectiveness, value for money, and long-term sustainability. Procurement in collaboration with partners increases accessibility, affordability and efficiency. Working with partners pools technical knowledge and improves approaches covering the various strategic areas of procurement, including forecasting, quality assurance and product innovation. Overall, 81 per cent of UNICEF procurement is done in collaboration with United Nations agencies.

20. In 2016, UNICEF procurement for emergencies reached $379.1 million globally. This included direct support by the UNICEF Supply Division to 62 countries in emergencies. In Nigeria in 2016, UNICEF quickly distributed more than 157 million doses of oral polio vaccine to affected communities in response to outbreaks of wild polio virus in August and September. UNICEF also focused on strengthening local procurement in Nigeria by identifying potential suppliers and helping the country office to issue local tenders. For the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014–2015, UNICEF supplied 7,994 metric tons of supplies to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

21. The UNICEF Health Emergency Preparedness Initiative (HEPI) aims to strengthen the operational and technical capacity of UNICEF to respond to health emergencies and to support Governments across prevention, preparedness, response and resilience-building. Under this initiative, UNICEF product experts have worked with partners to develop new supply lists tailored to priority diseases. Overall, some 70 new supplies, including specific medicines, equipment and diagnostics, were integrated into the UNICEF Emergency Supply List and pre-positioned in the supply warehouse in Copenhagen. HEPI-related preparedness initiatives were employed in early 2017 in response to Ebola flare-ups in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. These included enhanced surveillance and re-activation of WASH and social-mobilization pillars in key districts in Sierra Leone. Additionally, essential stocks of Infection Prevention and Control supplies were pre-positioned subnationally, and Community Care Centre kits were deployed for rapid implementation.
III. Coordination and collaboration

22. Humanitarian coordination is guided by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster approach. The approach aims to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies and to provide clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of humanitarian response. This leadership is designed to improve the predictability, timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian response, while also paving the way for recovery.

23. The cluster approach mobilizes partners at the local, national, regional and international levels and is an important mechanism for achieving results for affected populations in large-scale emergencies, including children and women. Clusters are formally activated when existing coordination mechanisms are overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles. They provide a mechanism for the integration of response and preparedness into national systems, and can serve as a bridge between humanitarian and development activities.

24. UNICEF is a key member of the global emergency coordination system led by the IASC, and the country system led by the Humanitarian Country Team. UNICEF serves as cluster lead agency for the global clusters in WASH, nutrition and education (co-led with Save the Children), as well as the global child protection area of responsibility. As cluster lead agency, UNICEF provides coordination expertise to achieve various ends: align needs assessment, goals and strategies among various actors; improve prioritization and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organizations; and develop common standards, methodologies and monitoring approaches to more effectively meet the needs of affected populations. In 2016, UNICEF led or co-led clusters or sectors in 72 countries for WASH, in 68 for education, in 63 for nutrition, in 60 for child protection and in 12 for gender-based violence.

25. Along with IASC partners, UNICEF leverages local, national, regional and international partnerships with host Governments, local service providers, first responders, civil society organizations (CSOs), international and national NGOs, international financial institutions, the private sector and United Nations agencies to expand the coverage and scope of programming across sectors of humanitarian response. This includes several activities: supporting vulnerable and affected people to strengthen their resilience; strengthening the capacities of first responders and national authorities to respond effectively to crises; supporting international humanitarian actors to provide timely, appropriate, effective and coordinated support; and building and working with partnerships across humanitarian and development spheres.

26. At the local level, UNICEF strives to prioritize and give preference to the use of local knowledge, capacities and resources to respond to crises. This means working with and through local actors, first responders and national and subnational coordination mechanisms, while also increasing allocations of funding, resources, and support to local actors. By working with and developing the capacities of local partners, UNICEF further contributes to system-strengthening and building resilience among affected communities.

27. In 2016, UNICEF collaborated with 1,387 civil society partners in the field on humanitarian programming. In Somalia, UNICEF disbursed $47.2 million to CSOs, nearly three quarters of which went to local NGOs. Using these funds, local organizations helped to treat 91,000 severely malnourished children, and to vaccinate nearly 724,000 children under

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1 As co-leads of the global gender-based violence area of responsibility, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) undertook a leadership review in 2016, which led to the decision to transfer full leadership of the area of responsibility to UNFPA by early 2017. Moving forward, UNICEF will fully integrate innovative approaches for gender-based violence child survivors in emergencies within the child protection area of responsibility, focusing on direct field support, coordination and analysis of context and deliverables.
1 year of age against measles, and more than 2.4 million children under 5 years of age against polio. Local organizations also used these funds to support sustained or temporary access to water for nearly 1 million people.

28. UNICEF also works closely with Governments, United Nations sister agencies and NGOs to carry out joint needs-assessments and improve its overall capacity to respond to the needs of vulnerable people affected by crises in a timely, coordinated and predictable manner. UNICEF also works with UNHCR and other partners to respond to the increasing caseload of refugees. In 2016, UNICEF made significant inputs into the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, including a two-year road map for the elaboration and adoption of the UNHCR-led Global Compact on Refugees. UNICEF continues to work with UNHCR on defining more systematic and predictable engagement within the Compact.

IV. Results monitoring

29. UNICEF has invested in systematic results monitoring of its humanitarian response and in producing high-frequency data, with UNICEF country offices consistently reporting on humanitarian programme coverage. In large-scale humanitarian responses, country offices have established scaled-up systems for monitoring humanitarian performance – including third-party systems where necessary – to track the quality and reach of programmes on the ground. UNICEF also invests in information-management systems to further institutionalize these approaches, including the facilitation of more connected results-based management for humanitarian and development programming. These investments in results monitoring and information management have helped to streamline partner reporting among UNICEF-led clusters.

30. Following a recent internal review, UNICEF is working to further strengthen its results monitoring and management of humanitarian response. In line with the key findings, UNICEF is taking a number of steps: revising guidance, tools and support systems to reinforce the coherence and connectedness between the planning and monitoring of development and humanitarian programming; strengthening the focus on the quality of programming in field-monitoring, including reinforcing feedback from affected people and communities; and supporting adaptations in humanitarian response for different types of humanitarian crises, including protracted crises, health emergencies, and refugee and migration crises.

V. Risk management

31. When operating in humanitarian contexts and high-risk environments, UNICEF employs a range of risk-management initiatives. For example, building upon the United Nations Programme Criticality Framework, UNICEF humanitarian response includes risk-informed programme analysis, which balances the risk to staff and assets of undertaking an action against the risk of non-delivery of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, UNICEF and United Nations agencies also use the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers, which addresses financial risk-management in implementing programmes and partnerships.

32. Where access permits, UNICEF directly monitors programme implementation through field staff to oversee the quality of services and effective use of funds and supplies. In situations where UNICEF staff cannot directly supervise programmes, UNICEF employs third-party monitoring partners to provide both quality assurance and quality control to UNICEF-funded programmes.

VI. Key challenges

A. Constrained humanitarian access
33. Constrained humanitarian access is one of the largest challenges facing organizations in humanitarian action and it directly informs the risk-management that is integrated into programme design and delivery. Negotiations to allow and facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access remain a critical challenge. For example, access in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to be interrupted: only 21 inter-agency convoys were able to deliver humanitarian assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach locations from January to June 2017, as compared to 51 inter-agency missions undertaken in the same period of 2016. In Iraq, humanitarian access remains a major concern in areas of heightened security risks, and ongoing military operations have prevented access to large numbers of people in need. Compromised humanitarian access is also hindering humanitarian response in several other countries, such as Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, where the risk of famine conditions is high.

34. UNICEF is working to expand the reach of its humanitarian assistance through its efforts to develop local community dialogue and community acceptance as additional humanitarian access strategies, and by equipping staff with the tools and skills they need to increase and sustain humanitarian access. This includes several efforts: facilitating alternative implementation modalities (for example, remote implementation with third-party monitoring); conducting humanitarian negotiations; supporting humanitarian civil-military coordination; enhancing presence through partnership; and determining programme criticality.

B. Security and logistical constraints

35. Armed conflict, civil unrest, high-threat environments and targeting of humanitarian workers have made recent years the deadliest on record for the aid community. The frequent disrespect by parties to conflict of established norms and principles governing humanitarian action, and the protection of civilians during the conduct of hostilities has posed even more of a challenge. UNICEF is an active member of in-country Security Management Teams, which are chaired by the Designated Official. UNICEF has also integrated security risk-management strategies into humanitarian action, which has strengthened overall security. This allows UNICEF to stay and deliver even in high-risk contexts.

36. UNICEF is investing in its security functions through staff training and hiring of security experts and procurement of essential security equipment. Trainings cover topics such as safe and secure approaches in the field, women’s security awareness, gender considerations and road safety. To meet global strategic and operational security needs, UNICEF has increased its staffing capacity at headquarters and recruited additional security advisors and deployed security staff to crisis-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen.

C. Adequate human resources

37. The growing number and complexity of humanitarian situations, including increasingly protracted crises, is stretching the organization’s ability for timely and effective response. UNICEF uses a range of global and regional mechanisms to support the scale-up of response at the onset of an emergency. These include the Emergency Response Team (ERT), the Immediate Response Team, standby partnerships and regional emergency rosters. The Immediate Response Team comprises experts in key programme and operational sectors who are ready to deploy within 48 hours of UNICEF activating its Level 3 Corporate Emergency Procedures.

38. While the expansion of surge mechanisms – such as the ERT – has improved essential standing capacity for deployment at the onset of an emergency, the demand for ERT support has continued to increase. Similarly, the demand for Rapid Response Teams to support
UNICEF-led clusters and areas of responsibility in the field has stretched organizational capacity, and will require additional attention moving forward.

39. UNICEF is also facing challenges related to attracting and building the capacity of personnel to work in emergencies. This includes difficulty in identifying suitable and experienced candidates, limited organizational skills in some areas (for example, appropriate language skills), and concurrent emergencies requiring the same staff profiles. Attracting staff to hardship and non-family duty stations, where many emergencies are located, remains a challenge. The new compensation package for international civil servants may also reduce benefits for some categories of staff, which can in turn have a negative impact on the ability to recruit relevant staff in emergency duty stations.

40. UNICEF continues its efforts to attract candidates to emergency duty stations. A new staff selection system is enabling hiring managers to be more strategic in identifying candidates best suited to positions where they can excel. In 2016, UNICEF also began a staff rotation exercise that will help to build a stronger, more versatile international workforce that can adapt to various contexts and respond to needs more effectively. UNICEF headquarters is further expanding its outreach activities for recruitment through professional networks and active participation in career fairs and enhanced use of social media.

41. To address the increasing demand for human resources, UNICEF leverages its institutional standby arrangements to complement local emergency-response capacity. Under these arrangements, partners maintain a pool of operational resources, including technical expertise, and equipment that can be deployed to UNICEF to enhance response capacity. These partnerships can also help to strengthen the capacities of partner countries for emergency preparedness and risk reduction. Between January and July 2017, thirty standby partners were mobilized, providing UNICEF with a total of 117 personnel to support the organization’s humanitarian action.

D. Flexible Funding

42. UNICEF draws on a range of resource-mobilization options to support its humanitarian action. While regular resources remain the most critical, unrestricted contributions for UNICEF, flexible “thematic” funds are second in efficiency and effectiveness for the organization. However, UNICEF has continued to face challenges in raising thematic funding for humanitarian situations. In some cases, resources are not moving towards greater flexibility but rather towards greater conditionality, making it difficult to reach those most in need. Given the increasingly protracted nature of humanitarian crises, multi-year planning has become essential, and predictable, flexible and longer-term funding that much more crucial. UNICEF and Canada are co-leading an effort to support multi-year planning for global humanitarian funding. In addition to regular resources and flexible thematic funds, the Emergency Programme Fund is a rotating fund that disburses funds within 48 hours of a sudden-onset humanitarian crisis, allowing UNICEF to provide an immediate response to affected people.

VII. Lessons learned

43. In 2017, UNICEF commissioned a synthesis of evaluations of its humanitarian action conducted between 2010 and 2016. The body of evaluations pointed to a number of strengths in UNICEF response, confirming the achievement of important results for children in humanitarian crises. The synthesis found that the UNICEF humanitarian response is broadly aligned with humanitarian needs, and coherent with wider national and inter-agency plans and with the actions of partners. The evaluations generally praised the cluster leadership of UNICEF and its partnerships with Governments, though some evaluations noted mixed findings regarding operational coordination with partner United Nations agencies. The synthesis highlighted that a key achievement has been the successful strengthening of
national and local systems for emergency preparedness and response, while noting important constraints in terms of donor funding for longer-term investments in recovery and resilience.

44. The synthesis highlighted some challenges and recommendations that reinforce the ongoing efforts of UNICEF to strengthen humanitarian-response capacities. These include the need to continue to further strengthen risk-informed programming. Gaps were also noted in UNICEF support to community engagement, though there was evidence of improvement. UNICEF will continue to implement a full-support strategy to strengthen performance in this area. The recommendations are integrated into the milestones and targets of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

45. The evaluations showed mixed results regarding the timeliness of humanitarian response and the need for country offices to more systematically adopt simplified procedures. The evaluations noted that the timeliness of UNICEF humanitarian action has benefited from the use of simplified procedures, which enable rapid staff deployment, swift procurement and shortened administrative processes. In responses in the Sahel, the Central African Republic and Nepal, and to Typhoon Haiyan, simplified procedures for determining the UNICEF internal designation of Level 2 and Level 3 response supported swift mobilization of human resources through surge, and a fast-track recruitment process was effective in getting the right people with the right skills on the ground at the right time. UNICEF supply and logistics procedures have positively affected the timeliness of the response, with supplies properly planned, pre-positioned and mobilized in time according to response plans. UNICEF agrees with the need for a more systematic look at key procedures and the supporting measures that can reinforce their quick adoption and effective implementation.

46. The synthesis also built on recommendations from the recent evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the review of the UNICEF humanitarian performance-monitoring approach. UNICEF is reviewing the CCCs and performance-monitoring approaches to make sure that they reflect new standards as well as new strategies of UNICEF and its partners relevant to humanitarian action.

47. Finally, the synthesis noted the need for clearer triggers for evaluations of UNICEF humanitarian action. UNICEF fully acknowledges this, including the need to balance coverage of humanitarian responses that are varied in terms of scale and scope and have different demands in terms of frequency of evaluation. The organization also acknowledges the need for humanitarian evaluations to support a coherent and connected analysis of development and humanitarian programming. UNICEF is preparing a full management response to the evaluation.

VIII. Moving forward: enhancing efficiency and effectiveness

A. Investing in key preparedness actions

48. Emergency preparedness comprises the mechanisms, systems and capacities that are established in advance to enable an effective and timely emergency response to a humanitarian crisis. It is based on an analysis of the risks in a particular context and takes into account national and regional capacities and the comparative advantage of UNICEF. Key UNICEF preparedness actions include building national capacities for preparedness and response, enabling UNICEF country, regional and global office preparedness to respond, and contributing to inter-agency preparedness.

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2 The Simplified Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs) are designed to simplify, streamline and clarify UNICEF procedures related to emergencies and enable an effective response to major crises. The SSOPs for Level 3 emergencies were issued by the UNICEF Executive Director in March 2012 and updated in September 2015. The SSOPs for Level 2 emergencies were issued in January 2013. To date, the Level 3 and Level 2 SSOPs have been applied to 10 and 11 emergencies, respectively.
49. For example, in Haiti in 2016, UNICEF was able to mount an immediate response to Hurricane Matthew in part owing to preparedness measures undertaken earlier in the year, such as hurricane-preparedness planning, an emergency response simulation, and the pre-positioning of emergency supplies for beneficiaries in disaster-prone areas. In the Lake Chad Basin, UNICEF worked with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR and WFP to better prepare the region for future escalations in the crisis. This involved training emergency responders, enhancing data collection on displaced populations and strategically pre-positioning supplies. These efforts helped to dramatically increase the number of people reached with assistance, from 160,000 in October 2016 to more than 1 million in December 2016 and January 2017.

50. UNICEF has developed an emergency-preparedness procedure that is aligned with organizational and inter-agency frameworks. The procedure sets out mandatory minimum preparedness standards for UNICEF offices to analyse risks, systematically carry out preparedness planning and monitor progress towards the agreed standards. UNICEF is also developing an online Emergency Preparedness Platform – which will be rolled out by early 2018 – to support country offices to plan and monitor preparedness actions. In addition, a preparedness change-management strategy will enhance UNICEF preparedness levels globally over the next five years.

51. Working with OCHA, UNHCR and WFP, UNICEF is also developing an expanded methodology for quantifying returns on investment in humanitarian preparedness in six pilot countries – Chad, Madagascar, Myanmar, the Niger, Pakistan and Uganda. The approach measures the cost, time and carbon savings associated with agencies’ preparedness investments. Out of 34 UNICEF investments analysed, research found that on average, more than $4 was saved for every $1 spent, and operational speed improved by 12.8 days in the next emergency response. Investments in supply pre-positioning and WASH infrastructure also generated significant carbon savings.

B. Strengthening engagement with affected populations

52. UNICEF is working to enhance community engagement in its humanitarian action by facilitating the participation of affected people in humanitarian response, fostering two-way communication with affected communities, establishing feedback and complaint mechanisms, and strengthening the use of these mechanisms in programme planning and corrective action. In 2016, 83 per cent of UNICEF country offices reported that affected populations were consulted throughout one or more phases of humanitarian programming.

53. For example, in Pakistan in 2016, to improve engagement with beneficiaries and enhance transparency, UNICEF used U-Report – a social messaging tool powered by RapidPro – to generate real-time feedback on the usefulness and effectiveness of family hygiene kits. The feedback will improve the contents of future hygiene kits and has given beneficiaries, including women, a voice in projects affecting them.

54. At the inter-agency level, UNICEF, OCHA, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other partners, under the auspices of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network, have established the Communication and Community Engagement Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to help improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian and health emergency responses through harmonized, timely, systematic and predictable collective services for communication and community engagement, such as learning opportunities, knowledge management and common surge capacity. As cluster lead agency, UNICEF has also supported the integration of common approaches to community engagement at the level of UNICEF-led and co-led clusters and areas of responsibility, working with global clusters on guidance and tools that have been piloted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Jordan.
C. Fostering inclusion of children with disabilities

55. UNICEF works to systematically mainstream issues of children with disabilities in humanitarian response, with particular focus on inclusion and accessibility across policies, programmes, capacity and supplies. UNICEF was one of the first agencies to endorse the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, and co-chairs the IASC Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. In June 2017, UNICEF also released the booklet, “Guidance on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action” to country offices to strengthen this aspect of the organization’s preparedness, response, early recovery, recovery and reconstruction work.

56. At the country level, regular emergency interventions have been modified in recent years to reach children with disabilities. For example, after an earthquake struck Nepal in 2015, UNICEF supported the Government to institute a cash-transfer grant that had disability as one of the five criteria for enrolment. More than 13,000 children and adults with disabilities were able to access the grant. UNICEF has also rolled out targeted schemes for children with disabilities – for example in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2016, where a cash transfer initiative was launched specifically for children with disabilities. The initiative is currently reaching more than 4,000 children with disabilities in Aleppo.

57. UNICEF has also modified its emergency kits to promote inclusion and accessibility. In 2016, some 50,000 emergency kits sent to more than 50 countries included items designed to improve accessibility and guidance for facilitators on how to include children with disabilities. For example, changes to the contents of the school-in-a-box and recreation kits – such as including a magnifying glass and a ball with a bell – have opened the door to activities that engage children with various disabilities. The UNICEF Supply Division has also begun an innovative project to make an emergency latrine slab that is accessible for children and adults with disabilities.

D. Strengthening organizational capacity

58. As the humanitarian landscape continues to expand and become more complex, human resources remain critical to the ability of UNICEF to deliver results for children. UNICEF invests in strengthening organizational capacity, including through surge deployments, mechanisms such as the ERT, recruitment and training. In 2016, through 576 emergency deployments, UNICEF provided personnel for emergency coordination, operations, child protection, WASH, nutrition, communication, supply and logistics, health, education, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and communication for development.

59. The ERT represents a standing capacity of operational and programmatic experts based at UNICEF headquarters who are ready for deployment at the onset of an emergency. Their expertise covers emergency coordination, operations, human resources, supply and logistics, humanitarian performance-monitoring, security, nutrition, health, WASH, child protection, and education. As part of organization-wide efforts begun in 2014 to strengthen UNICEF humanitarian action, the ERT was expanded and with the addition of 6 new members in 2016, reached a total complement of 14 by the end of the year. Nine of the 14 ERT members were deployed in the field for nearly or more than 50 per cent of the time in 2016. While at headquarters, ERT members provide remote support and guidance to emergency programmes.

60. ERT missions have provided significant support to large-scale emergencies. For example, deployments by ERT emergency coordinators in 2016 to Jordan, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic helped the organization to scale up its humanitarian response and strengthened overall coordination. In countries such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, ERT security support facilitated strategic security analysis, promoted staff security awareness and enhanced preparedness and emergency response mechanisms for programme delivery. Moving forward, UNICEF will consider plans
to continue to enlarge the ERT, including expansion into new roles that represent emerging areas of support, such as community engagement, cash-based programming and emergency coordination.

61. UNICEF also invests in strengthening the organization’s core skills for humanitarian action. This includes helping staff to better prepare for and respond to the increasingly complex humanitarian landscape. Humanitarian learning tools updated in 2016 will be rolled out organization-wide in late 2017. These cover the fundamentals: UNICEF humanitarian action; humanitarian principles; coordination and the humanitarian system; key elements of emergency response; and emergency preparedness. The tools will be incorporated into emergency preparedness and response learning packages to be implemented in 2017, in line with the new procedure of UNICEF for preparedness.