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Background Paper

Update on the targets and corresponding efforts of UNICEF to make its global operations more environmentally sustainable

This Background Paper is being presented to the Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board, June 29-July 2, in response to a request by the Bureau of the Executive Board.

I. Executive Summary

1. Recognizing the threat to children's rights posed by climate change and environmental degradation, UNICEF is working to reduce the environmental impact of its global operations and make environmental sustainability a key consideration in everything it does. The organization has aligned its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets with those of the United Nations and will continue to reduce its emissions and resource usage through 2030 and beyond, while promoting environmentally conscious staff behaviors and addressing environmental sustainability in its programming, planning, partnerships and procurement.

2. UNICEF is on track towards the overall GHG emissions reduction target set in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021, and in 2019 reduced emissions from vehicles, grid electricity and diesel generators, three out of its four main emissions sources. These reductions were achieved as a result of eco-efficiency projects implemented following regional audits that analysed excess resource consumption and identified solutions to reduce it. Audits of energy and water usage were rolled out across over 50 UNICEF offices in 2019, while eco-efficiency projects implemented over the past two years have included solarization, LED lighting, energy-efficient air conditioning, water-efficient fixtures, and improved vehicle fleet management. Meanwhile, internal communications campaigns have contributed to the reduction of environmental impact by raising staff awareness of environmental sustainability and promoting behavioural changes such as responsible energy use and elimination of single-use plastics.

3. While an increase in air travel in 2019 led to increased emissions from what has been UNICEF's largest source of emissions, the organization is exploring ways to reduce these emissions through alternatives to travel as well as greener flight options. Meanwhile, the elimination of nonessential travel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply curtailed emissions from this source in 2020. The organization has also seen reductions in emissions from office electricity, vehicle fuel, water and paper usage as a result of staff working from home during the pandemic. The impacts of these new ways of working are being monitored, and UNICEF will incorporate successful strategies in its future greening plans, seizing the opportunity to emerge from the pandemic as an ever more environmentally sustainable and efficient organization.

4. The clear links between an effective response to the pandemic and the world's ability to tackle the long-term threats of climate change and environmental degradation have reaffirmed UNICEF's focus on promoting resilience and reducing environmental impact across its main areas of programmatic focus, including WASH, health and education. The midterm review (MTR) of the current Strategic Plan has elevated climate change and environmental degradation as organizational priorities to be mainstreamed across sectors, providing a basis for embedding them across result areas of the next Strategic Plan 2022-25. UNICEF is emphasizing the reduction of emissions and pollution in its own programmes by increasing the use of solar and other sustainable energy, for instance in schools and health facilities; minimizing waste; and prepositioning supplies, among other approaches.

5. UNICEF has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote programmatic and organizational coherence in managing its environmental impact. In 2019 the organization began developing a new, comprehensive policy on environmental and social safeguards (ESS), aligned with the UN Environmental Management Group's Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for UN Programming, to systematize the implementation of environmental and social impact assessments. The new policy aims to make UNICEF programming more environmentally sustainable and resilient, and will enable the organization to secure funding from the increasing number of donors who require comprehensive ESS policies and mechanisms. The policy is currently being finalized, along with plans for organization-wide implementation. UNICEF is also incorporating environmental considerations in its procurement processes, in line with guidelines from the United Nations High-Level Committee on Management Procurement Network.

II. Section One: Operational Impact

6. This section reviews progress towards the UNICEF greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions target, provides an overview and notable examples of the process by which the organization identifies opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of its operations,[1] covers notable eco-efficiency projects and behaviour change initiatives, and discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected UNICEF's environmental impact and eco-efficiency efforts.

7. The 2018-2021 Strategic Plan reaffirmed UNICEF's commitment to reducing its environmental impact and carbon dioxide emissions from operations and facilities. UNICEF is on track towards its current overall target on GHG emissions from its operations, and aims to become more efficient and cost-effective, by 2021 and beyond, in efforts to reduce the environmental impact of its operations. For its next Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the organization is aligning its emission reduction targets with those of the United Nations, as stated by the Secretary-General in September 2019, which committed the United Nations to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent by 2025 and 45 per cent by 2030, sourcing 40 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy by 2025 and 80 per cent by 2030.

Results and progress towards 2021 Strategic Plan targets

8. UNICEF tracks its GHG emissions against an overall target set in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021. While all UNICEF offices are also required to measure water usage and waste, no targets are set in these areas. Irregularities in quantity measurements, resulting for instance from inaccessible water meters in some offices, have hampered organization-wide efforts to measure water usage, while many offices do not currently have the capability to measure waste.

9. Through the MTR process, the indicator measuring progress towards the GHG emissions reduction target (E1.b.1.) was expanded to measure percentage reduction in carbon footprint as well as volume reduction. The adjusted target aims for a 5 per cent reduction each year, setting the course for a 50 per cent reduction by 2030, in line with new UN targets set by the Secretary-General in September 2019. Under the overall GHG emissions target, UNICEF has set internal sub-targets for mobile sources (vehicles), purchased electricity, and stationary combustion (diesel generators), aiming for a 20 per cent reduction in each of these major emissions sources by 2021.

10. UNICEF uses the web-based Environmental Footprint and Accessibility Assessment Tool (EFAAT) to collect, aggregate, monitor and analyse resource consumption, carbon emissions, accessibility levels, qualitative office data, and operating costs from all 365 UNICEF Headquarters and regional, country and zone offices. The tool uses the industry standard GHG Protocol for measuring carbon footprints, and has been tailored to track other resource consumption metrics as well as office accessibility levels.[2] UNICEF was the first UN agency to deploy such a tool across every facility it operates, including zone offices.

[1] Operations are UNICEF employee and office functions and activities at HQ, Regional, Country, and zone office levels. They exclude the work conducted by UNICEF vendors, projects implemented by implementing partners and supply chains.
[2] See https://ghgprotocol.org/standards.

In 2019, emissions from three of the four primary emissions sources decreased as a result of eco-efficiency projects. The primary emissions sources, which account for over 90 per cent of UNICEF emissions, are air travel (43 per cent), stationary combustion from generators (11 per cent), purchased electricity (18 per cent), and mobile sources (19 per cent). UNICEF will continue to focus on meeting the carbon emissions reduction target by taking remedial actions described below, including improved vehicle tracking and fleet management, renewable energy and energy-efficiency projects, and finding greener flight options as well as alternatives to air travel.

11. The "air travel" carbon emissions source relates to carbon emissions resulting from any international, in-region, or in-country air travel paid for by the organization, extracting data using a calculator based on emissions factors set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). It is worthwhile noting that air travel, especially program-related and other necessary travel, will be unavoidable. However, UNICEF is always exploring ways to find 'greener' travel routes based on different types of aircrafts, and reducing GHG emission due to air travel will be the focus of future mitigation efforts. While the travel policy obligates the organization to choose the most economical route in every case, these green options may be viable in many cases. Meanwhile, the need to cancel travel and in-person meetings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the adoption of video conferencing across the organization. Drawing on this experience, UNICEF will increasingly scrutinize the need for travel to short meetings, to determine whether video conferencing may be a suitable alternative, and will establish related targets and means of tracking changes in behavior.

12. The "purchased electricity" carbon emissions source relates to carbon emissions as a result of the consumption of local grid electricity supplying UNICEF offices. Offices report the quantity of electricity units (kilowatt hours – kWh) consumed on a monthly basis per year. The GHG Protocol emissions library is used to calculate the emissions from grid electricity use (based on geographical location) through EFAAT. UNICEF achieved a 4 per cent decrease between 2018 and 2019, amounting to a 17 per cent decrease since 2016, and is on track towards the subtarget aiming for a 20 per cent reduction by 2021. The reductions achieved can be attributed to a number of initiatives, which UNICEF continues to roll out across its offices. These include LED lighting, with timer switches or vacancy/occupancy sensors; renewable energy projects, such as solar photovoltaic systems; energy-efficient and properly sized air conditioners; optimized office space, especially in new constructions; insulated building envelopes; transitioning to laptop instead of desktop computers; and staff behaviour change.

13. The "stationary combustion (diesel generators)" carbon emissions source relates to carbon emissions resulting from diesel fuel supplying backup generators across UNICEF offices. Offices report the quantity of diesel fuel (in litres) consumed on a monthly basis per year. The GHG Protocol emissions library is used to calculate the corresponding emissions through EFAAT. UNICEF achieved a 13 per cent decrease between 2018 and 2019, meeting its subtarget and amounting to a 30 per cent reduction since 2016. This reduction can be attributed primarily to the solarization of UNICEF facilities, in addition to improvements in grid reliability in some locations and improved diesel generator sizing leading to reduced fuel usage.

14. The "mobile sources" emissions source relates to carbon emissions as a result of operating UNICEF's global vehicle fleet. UNICEF offices report the quantity of vehicle fuel consumed on a monthly basis per year. The GHG Protocol emissions library is used to calculate the emissions resulting from combustion of vehicle fuel through EFAAT. UNICEF achieved a 1 per cent decrease in emissions from mobile sources between 2018 and 2019, amounting to an 18 per cent decrease since 2016, and is on track towards the targeted 20 per cent reduction by 2021.

15. Reductions in vehicle emissions can be attributed to renewing the vehicle fleet, as newer engines consume less fuel per kilometre; driver education and training; and the phased roll-out of a global Vehicle Tracking and Fuel Management System (VTFMS).[3] Currently, about 900 of 2,600 UNICEF vehicles are equipped with VTFMS. UNICEF aims to install this system in all vehicles by 2021, though the COVID-19 pandemic is slowing down the planned rollout. Meanwhile, alternative measures to reduce vehicle emissions are also being considered, alongside more accurate ways to measure emissions.

[3] A vehicle fleet management tool that allows the tracking of UNICEF vehicles via GPS, measuring idling times and driver behavior along with mileage and fuel consumption.

16. Since 2015, UNICEF has claimed carbon neutrality through the offset of all unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions. The organization purchases carbon credits from the Adaptation Fund set up under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to offset all measured and reported emissions, on a yearly basis.

Internal processes to measure and reduce environmental impact

17. In 2017 UNICEF established the Inclusive and Sustainable Operations (ISO) team in its Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM), to support its offices on both eco-efficiency and accessibility. The Division's current Office Management Plan tasks the three-member team with rolling out eco-efficiency projects and behaviour change campaigns, providing support to country teams, and ensuring that the GHG emissions reduction target is achieved.

18. The Procedure on Eco-Efficiency and Inclusive Access in UNICEF Premises and Operations, launched in 2018, serves as the backbone for eco-efficiency work across all 365 UNICEF facilities.[4] This was updated in March 2020 to include the Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies (EDGE) green building certification, developed by the World Bank and IFC, for all newly constructed or renovated UNICEF offices.

19. UNICEF uses results from EFAAT to identify the most energy-intensive offices, focusing on the major emissions sources: purchased electricity, mobile sources and stationary combustion. Regional energy audits are then conducted covering those offices, yielding recommendations of projects that can be undertaken to reduce emissions, along with their costs, expected emissions reductions, and time frames. Projects are selected for implementation based on available budget and engagement of the relevant office, with technical support, from procurement to execution, provided by the ISO team. These projects are monitored at the regional, country or zone level, with guidance and support from the ISO team. Offices are required to submit project completion reports to DFAM in video format,[5] while the projects' impact is also monitored through energy use data entered into EFAAT. A project is deemed successful if it meets the anticipated reduction in resource consumption, measured through EFAAT.

20. In 2019, audits or assessments were rolled out across more than 50 UNICEF offices. For example, in the West and Central Africa region (WCAR), assessments of energy and generator usage in seven facilities, and an assessment of water usage in nine facilities, were completed during the year.

21. The WCAR energy audit analysed energy usage, pinpointing areas of energy waste or overuse, and identified cost-effective measures to reduce usage and implement renewable energy alternatives to current electricity sources. It proposed a number of energy efficiency and solar installation measures and emphasized the need to introduce sub-metering to accurately measure energy use. The audit found that implementing all recommended projects would significantly reduce energy usage, saving over 812 tonnes of CO_2 per year as well as over $298,000, from an investment of $3 million required to implement all recommended projects. It noted that six of seven facilities had the potential to become electricity self-sufficient if adequate solar plants were installed.

22. The generator audit aimed to assess the continued need for diesel generators and identify opportunities for more energy-efficient options, such as solar energy. It found great potential to minimize diesel generator usage and concluded that implementing solar energy and other more energy-efficient options would almost entirely eliminate these offices' diesel fuel consumption, saving over 468 tonnes of CO_2 per year.

23. The water audit was undertaken to help UNICEF establish a water use efficiency improvement plan at WCAR facilities in the near future. It analysed water usage, identified areas of waste or overuse, and identified cost-effective measures to reduce usage as well as possible alternative water sources. The audit

[4] https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/portals/RF/Regulatory%20Framework%20Library/UNICEF%20Procedure%20on%20Eco-Efficiency%20and%20Inclusive%20Access.pdf

encountered data collection challenges, with water usage data not readily available in some facilities, and not disaggregated by areas of use. Still, it found significant potential to save water – including through more efficient faucets and double flush systems, reduction of water pressure, drip irrigation and behavioral approaches to water saving – and noted the potential for rainwater harvesting as an alternative source. It also emphasized measurement, including sub-metering, as a key pre-requisite to successful water conservation, and noted the need for UNICEF to make water management a formal priority. The identified measures would reduce water usage by 78 per cent across all nine facilities, with three having the potential to become self-sufficient in water if the rainwater harvesting measure were implemented with adequate storage.

Eco-efficiency projects and behaviour change initiatives

24. UNICEF has undertaken a range of eco-efficiency projects since 2018, based on findings from energy and water audits.

25. Fifty-five UNICEF offices currently use solar energy, up from 23 in 2015. UNICEF increased solar-generated power from 570,000 kWh in 2017 to 1,400,000 kWh in 2018, with 13 more solar power systems coming online. In 2019, UNICEF undertook solar energy projects for its offices in several countries, including Mali, South Sudan, Kenya, Georgia, India, and Tanzania. The organization plans on solarizing 10 facilities every year through 2030; this and other eco-efficiency objectives mentioned in this section are based on estimated capacity and available funds. UNICEF is developing a financing model for solar leasing, to support at-scale solarization of UNICEF offices and reduce carbon emissions by 50 per cent by 2030.

26. UNICEF implemented a number of other energy and water efficiency projects in 2019. Interagency projects to improve eco-efficiency included a solar photovoltaic project at the UN House in Timor-Leste, and a new UNICEF-UNFPA Annex building in Nepal, featuring solar panels as well as energy-efficient lighting and air conditioning. UNICEF has introduced LED lighting and low-flow toilets and sensors in a number of its own offices, including in Djibouti, El Salvador, India, Zambia, Mozambique and Tunisia. Energy-efficient lighting systems were in use in 185 UNICEF offices in 2018, up from 151 in 2017, with all offices slated to have energy efficient lighting systems by 2025.

27. As of 2018, 71 UNICEF offices were equipped with energy-efficient air conditioners using refrigerants with low ozone-depleting and global warming potentials, up from 61 in 2017, and all offices in hot climates are slated to have similar air conditioners by 2030. Water-efficient fixtures are in use in 63 UNICEF offices, up from 50 in 2017. By 2025, UNICEF plans to have installed water-efficient fixtures in all office bathrooms. UNICEF currently has only 14 electric vehicles, with many more needed to make an impact on carbon emissions. The organization urges Member States to further embrace electric vehicles.

28. UNICEF has been proactive in the use of technology to implement eco-efficiency projects. The organization rolled out “cyber walkthroughs” to provide live, remote technical support on eco-efficiency projects, reducing travel costs and associated emissions, improving support to country and zone offices, and building capacity among staff. In Mali, drone technology supported the design of a planned solar photovoltaic system by automatically extracting numerical data pertaining to available surfaces ready for solar photovoltaic panel installation.

29. One hundred UNICEF offices currently have Green Teams that promote environmental stewardship and responsible staff behavior, up from just 66 in 2017. Based on expected uptake of Green Teams, UNICEF plans to have them in place in all offices by 2021. In 2019, a pledge to act sustainably was added to the onboarding package for new UNICEF staff members. Campaigns were launched on the responsible use of air conditioners and heating systems, reducing single-use plastics, and debunking myths related to the environmental impact of staff actions, to improve awareness and trigger behaviour change that promotes reduced environmental impact.

Impact of COVID-19 crisis

30. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF has implemented a number of measures, including work from home and elimination of non-essential travel, that have indirectly benefited both efficiency and greening. UNICEF will be mapping and monitoring these changes, quantifying their impact, and incorporating what works into an updated greening strategy, taking the opportunity to build back better.

31. The work-from-home modality has resulted in a significant drop in printing and paper usage, as electronic documents, e-signatures and electronic approvals become the norm. Meanwhile, less populated offices, fewer people commuting and more flexible work arrangements are leading to reductions in water usage as well as emissions from electricity and vehicle usage. These changes will shape the way UNICEF does business in the future, and will contribute to reducing the organisation's environmental impact. UNICEF will continue to seize opportunities to make its offices run more efficiently, in terms of both operating costs and environmental impact.

32. Already a leader on greening initiatives within the UN family, UNICEF has an opportunity to continue to lead the way in establishing greener, smarter, bolder and more cost-effective ways of operating and managing its facilities in the post-COVID-19 period. The pandemic's impact on financial resources is prompting the organization to seek innovative ways to finance greening projects, such as solar leasing to reduce the need for upfront capital funding for solar systems. This would reduce pressure on the Greening Fund, which is funded by the travel surcharge and expected to shrink as a result of the pandemic-related reduction in travel (although these losses could be limited if 1-2 per cent of the global savings from reduced travel could be used to replenish the Fund). The Fund can then be dedicated to funding small-scale energy efficiency projects that are prerequisites to solar installations.

III. Section Two: Programmatic Integration

33. UNICEF's climate and environmental sustainability strategy stresses the need for ambitious programming to protect children from the impacts of climate change by increasing the resilience of basic services while reducing emissions and pollution, including through measures to advance the environmental sustainability of UNICEF's operations, supply chain and programmes. The strategy commits UNICEF to incorporate climate risks and low-carbon opportunity assessments into its programme planning processes, incorporate climate resilience into programme delivery, reduce its own environmental footprint and promote low-carbon approaches in its programmes. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, UNICEF recognizes that the response to this immediate threat must be linked to a comprehensive response to the long-term, overarching threats that climate change poses for children. Efforts to accelerate work on climate-resilient health and education aim to ensure that children have access to these essential services in times of crisis, while the pandemic has highlighted the importance of accelerating sustainable, universal access to safe and clean water, even as climate change and environmental degradation threaten water sources.

34. The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 was the first to explicitly incorporate climate and environment-related indicators, as part of Goal Area 4. The Midterm Review of the Strategic Plan has elevated action on climate change and environmental degradation as an organizational priority, with climate and environment considerations to be mainstreamed throughout UNICEF programmes across sectors, and efforts towards at-scale programming to be accelerated in areas including climate-resilient WASH facilities; 'climate-smart' health centres and 'green schools'; and addressing the impacts of environmental pollution upon children. These efforts over the coming two years aim to provide a basis for UNICEF to make climate and environment an ongoing consideration across result areas of the next Strategic Plan 2022-25.

35. A key element of operationalizing UNICEF's strategy is to strengthen resilience to climate impacts and environmental degradation through sectoral work. Climate resilience is already a major focus for WASH interventions, while environment and disaster risk reduction have been long-standing areas of focus for work in the education sector. UNICEF is increasingly addressing the impact of climate change and pollution on children's health and nutrition and leveraging its experience in shock-responsive social protection systems to better serve children affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

36. UNICEF recognizes that the only long-term solution to address climate change is a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. In addition to advocacy with governments and other partners, UNICEF is emphasizing the reduction of emissions and pollution in its own programmes. This includes an increase in the use of solar and other forms of sustainable energy (already in use by the WASH programme in 40 countries, for example), minimizing waste, and prepositioning supplies, all of which also contribute to building resilience to the impacts of climate change. The MTR introduced a new target in WASH to track the number of countries planning, designing and implementing climate-resilient WASH solutions through UNICEF-supported programmes.

37. UNICEF has undertaken a range of initiatives to reduce environmental impact in its programming. In South Sudan, for example, UNICEF has put in place a Dry Season Supply Plan to preposition 32,000 tonnes of lifesaving health, nutrition, education and WASH supplies during the November-April dry season, to address the logistical challenges in reaching children and families during the rainy season that renders 60 per cent of the country's roads inaccessible. Timely access to essential items has improved, and UNICEF has saved US$12 million and reduced its CO_2 emissions by 3,500 tonnes by using surface transport in the dry season instead of air transport in the rainy season.

38. As part of its continued effort on health system strengthening in Malawi, UNICEF supported a large-scale assessment of energy needs of health-care facilities in partnership with UNDP and government, laying the foundation for an investment case to expand the solarization of health-care facilities, including as a potential conduit for expanding energy access to nearby communities, while addressing equity and efficiency. In Papua New Guinea, UNICEF supported solar power in health-care facilities to provide an energy supply for both water pumping and cold chain equipment. The designs for such a dual-purpose system are being reviewed by government for adoption as a national standard.

39. After an extensive preparation and documentation process in 2019, UNICEF was confirmed as a delivery partner for readiness funding through the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in early 2020. This allows UNICEF country offices to receive GCF funding directly, for specific climate-related activities to strengthen national climate sectors.

IV. Section Three: Programmatic and Organizational Coherence

40. UNICEF in 2019 worked to embed climate and environmental considerations into existing planning processes. Emphasis on minimizing the environmental impact of humanitarian operations and prioritizing climate-resilient recovery from extreme weather events became part of UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, while climate risks were embedded in the Guidance for Risk Informed Programming. New guidance for the country programme development process strengthens the climate and environment modules of situation analyses and other parts of the country programme cycle.

41. UNICEF in 2019 began drafting a new environmental and social safeguard (ESS) policy to systematize the implementation of environmental and social impact assessments, which have proceeded on an ad hoc basis since the introduction of the UNICEF Social and Environmental Sustainability Standards and Procedures in 2015. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) and Management Plans (ESMPs) are increasingly required for programmes and projects with potential significant environmental and social impacts, notably infrastructure-heavy projects such as building water access, supply infrastructure, or schools. While some country offices in Eastern and Southern Africa (Chad, Central African Republic, and Ethiopia), East Asia and the Pacific (Bangladesh, Indonesia and Thailand) and the Middle East and North Africa (Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Yemen), have piloted ESS policies since 2016-2017 on a voluntary basis, a comprehensive, fully implemented organization-wide policy on ESS is necessary to manage risks, to make UNICEF programming more resilient, and to secure funding, as more donors (as well as Green Climate Fund accreditation and funding) require comprehensive ESS policies and mechanisms.

42. The new policy is being developed to align with the UN Environmental Management Group's Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for UN Programming, and to integrate learnings from other UN agencies. It addresses labor and working conditions; resource efficiency and pollution prevention; community health, safety and security; land acquisition and involuntary resettlement; biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of living resources; indigenous people; cultural heritage; and climate-resilient development. It is complemented by screening tools to categorize activities according to their environmental and social risk or impact; a set of procedures for review, assessment and management; and mechanisms for monitoring, stakeholder review, compliance and grievances.

43. Implementing a comprehensive ESS policy will require an organization-wide effort supported by adequate resources. UNICEF has identified the need to make substantial changes in how programmes are conceptualized, developed, implemented and monitored, to factor in time and costs to undertake assessments, identify and monitor mitigation actions, and address grievances, while integrating ESS requirements into proposals, contracts, donor and partnership agreements, and monitoring and grievance mechanisms. As a result of its midterm review, UNICEF has devoted a portion of funds allocated to the Climate, Energy and Environment thematic area to finalizing the draft policy and developing a capacity development plan and implementation guidance. In rolling out the new ESS policy, UNICEF can apply lessons learned from the recent experience with the new organization-wide policy on prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA).

44. A number of digitization initiatives have enabled UNICEF to reduce environmental impact by reducing paper use in its implementation planning processes and procedures with partners. UNICEF has digitized its end-to-end implementation partnership management processes, covering some 10,000 CSO and government partners annually and including documents such as partnership agreements, concept notes, programme documents, and calls for expression of interest. This is being done through eTools, an online platform for UNICEF country offices, and the UN Partner Portal (UNPP), an online platform for CSOs managed by UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP. The forthcoming Partner Reporting Portal, currently being tested, will digitize 20,000 paper reports pertaining to cluster reporting each year. Field monitoring and programmatic assurance has the potential to digitize over 20,000 monitoring reports annually. Meanwhile, digitization of workplans with Government is under development.

45. UNICEF incorporates environmental sustainability considerations in its procurement processes, in line with guidelines from the United Nations High-Level Committee on Management Procurement Network. In accordance with Supply Outcome Target 2, the first-ever target on sustainable procurement, newly included in the current UNICEF Supply Division workplan, all five centres involved in procurement are incorporating sustainability considerations in their strategic planning and operations across the product lifecycle, from raw manufacturing to disposal by the end user. To reduce environmental impact in procurement of items such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods, long-lasting insecticidal nets, vaccines and immunization supplies, measures include using local suppliers to reduce transportation requirements, bundling supplies to reduce transaction and shipping volumes, reducing packaging and using recycled materials, and considering suppliers' social responsibility and environmental impact as a criterion for awarding tenders.

46. In water, sanitation and education products, for example, monitoring of interventions to reduce CO_2 emissions as a result of procurement and transportation activities has shown that an average of 6 tonnes of CO_2 emissions have been avoided each year over the past 5 years. Bundled sourcing of devices for immunization activities has steadily increased, reducing the number of shipments by 24 per cent even as overall shipped quantities rose by 15 per cent; bundled awards make up 80 per cent of all awards in this area for 2020-21. Meanwhile, an environmental sustainability questionnaire has been included in tenders for vaccines since 2018, with the results providing a baseline to monitor progress towards environmental sustainability-related SDGs. Industry consultations in 2019 yielded an agreement to monitor progress through industry self-reporting and surveys, with results to be reported in UNICEF annual results.

47. CO_2 emissions resulting from international transport operations managed by Supply Division in 2019 were reported to EFAAT and will now be reported to UNFCCC through the annual arrangement for offsetting CO_2 emissions resulting from UNICEF operations. UNICEF will be the first agency to report and offset carbon emissions from international transport of supplies, with all activities related to offsetting accompanied by examples of emissions reductions through sustainable procurement. Monitoring data will also be used to analyse the main drivers of CO_2 emissions from shipments, to identify opportunities to improve supply chain planning and thereby reduce emissions and costs.

V. Conclusion

48. As climate change and environmental degradation have emerged as pressing issues of our time, threatening progress across the full range of children's rights, UNICEF has begun to incorporate environmental sustainability considerations into its operations and programming. These efforts are in many respects in early stages, with the organization only in recent years beginning to systematize the measurement of its environmental impact, to set sustainability goals and targets, and to move from ad hoc, local efforts towards systematic, organization-wide procedures and measures to reduce the environmental impact of its operations and programming.

49. As of 2019, UNICEF is still striving towards its 2021 target for overall GHG emissions and has established a robust energy audit process for identifying and analysing excessive usage and implementing eco-efficiency initiatives to reduce it. Still, these efforts have been limited by the inability to capture data accurately and systematically in some areas, notably water and waste, as well as by the lack of targets and established remediation measures for some types of emissions, notably those from air travel, the organization's largest source of GHG emissions. Additionally, while informal goals and objectives are set in some cases, quantifiable targets incorporated into established UNICEF monitoring systems do not yet exist for many aspects of operations and programming that have bearing on the organization's environmental impact – from staff behaviour to rollout of eco-efficiency projects to procurement practices.

50. More systematic, granular targets and better monitoring, including in real time, will be critical to tracking and reducing environmental impact across UNICEF's programming and operations. UNICEF has already recognized the need to implement more accurate ways to measure environmental impact, such as intensity measures of vehicle or grid electricity emissions, and water usage measures disaggregated by usage type. Finding sustainable, cost-effective solutions to reduce impact will entail more robust analysis of underlying reasons for certain trends, such as the rise in emissions from increased air travel, as well as systematic enforcement of remedial measures.

51. UNICEF has noted significant reductions in emissions, water and paper usage as an indirect result of measures undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – notably, the elimination of nonessential travel and the increase in work from home. The organization will monitor the impact of these measures with a view to incorporating successful initiatives in its greening strategies going forward, to sustain environmental impact reductions as much as possible and make its operations more eco-efficient in the post-pandemic period. As the pandemic tightens resource constraints, UNICEF continues to explore solar leasing and other innovative ways to finance eco-efficiency projects.

52. The impact of the pandemic has reaffirmed the need for UNICEF programmes, across sectors, to reinforce environmental sustainability and resilience – so that children can continue to access essential health, education, protection and WASH services in times of crisis, and can inherit a world that is better prepared for future pandemics and other types of shocks linked to climate change and environmental degradation. Continued progress in incorporating environmental sustainability considerations in programme planning, including through the development of an organization-wide policy on environmental and social safeguards, will enable UNICEF to bolster the resilience of its programming, while meeting the requirements of increasingly eco-conscious donors and aligning with UN system-wide efforts to manage environmental impact.