

Final statement for posting
09-10-2018

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Executive Board Second Regular Session 2018
12–14 September 2018

Opening Statement by Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director

Thank you, Mr. President, for that introduction. As this marks your last Board session as President, I would like to take this moment to thank you personally for your leadership over the last year. I have greatly appreciated your guidance and advice. Your commitment to this Board — and your commitment to children and to UNICEF — will not be easily replaced. So thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge the recent departures of three of our Board Members:

- Ambassador **Mr. Tekeda Alemu**, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations.
- Ambassador **Durga Prasad Bhattarai**, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations.
- And Ambassador **Miloš Vukašinić**, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations.

We appreciated not only their leadership in gathering support among their respective regional groups — but also their personal commitment to the cause of children.

We are also bidding farewell to two of UNICEF's senior staff members, both of whom are heading into a well-earned retirement.

Shahida Afzar has been with UNICEF since 1975, and has since served our organization across a number of important roles. She stepped in to her current position — Deputy Executive Director of Partnerships — at a particularly challenging time. And since then, I have come to rely on her long institutional knowledge — and been inspired by her commitment to children.

And Fatoumata Ndiaye, our current Deputy Executive Director of Management, joined UNICEF in 2013, lending her decades of experience in the public and private sectors to our organization. You have all come to know her. Beyond her deep knowledge of financial systems, she has played an important role in helping UNICEF respond to the challenges of harassment, abuse of authority and sexual exploitation and abuse. I will miss her advice and her leadership qualities.

I am also pleased that the Secretary General has appointed a new Deputy Executive Director of Partnerships — Charlotte Petri Gornitzka of Sweden. You may know her from her previous roles with the OECD, the Swedish Government, the International Save the Children Alliance, Save the Children Sweden and the Swedish Red Cross. I look forward to benefitting from her long experience when she assumes her role in the coming weeks.

Let me also thank you, our Board members, once again, for your guidance, advice and support over the last year. UNICEF is about all of us, united in our commitment to shape a better world for children and young people. No matter where they live.

Nothing is more inspiring than seeing this global, united commitment being transformed into results in communities around the world.

We are joined online by UNICEF staff members from offices worldwide. And over the last nine months, I have seen first-hand the difference our teams are making in the lives of girls and boys around the world — all thanks to your support.

The children living through conflicts, gaining an education. Former child soldiers being reunited with family — re-integrated into their communities. Children being vaccinated against disease. Mothers living with HIV watching as their newborns are tested. Result after result, owed to your ideas, advice and support — and always, to UNICEF's committed staff members.

As we're inspired by our achievements, we're compelled to do more, to take action to make life better for children and young people as they contend with a range of challenges.

Challenges like hunger, violence, poverty and natural disasters.

Challenges like the threat of disease, as we are seeing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. While we managed to contain Ebola in one area, we are now facing new outbreaks across the country.

Challenges like the lack of access to education — in southern Bangladesh, for example, where half a million Rohingya children are struggling to have access to learning.

Challenges like the continued flow of migrants and refugees across borders — from Myanmar to Syria to Venezuela — children and families seeking a better life free from poverty and violence, and needing support and protection.

Challenges like the devastation of conflicts. In the last month alone, we have seen unconscionable attacks on children in Afghanistan and Yemen. Heartbreaking and inhumane — a call to all of us to regain our humanity.

To our global shame, each fresh attack on children sparks global anger that is, unfortunately, not being matched by sufficient action to end the violence by those with the power and influence to do so.

Children cannot wait for conflicts to end — in these countries and so many others. Global anger and grief must be matched by global action, and a re-commitment to our humanitarian principles.

We once again call on all parties to conflict to seek out new avenues of dialogue to stop the violence. As the African Union is calling to “silence the guns” in Africa, let us re-commit to silencing the guns worldwide. Now.

As we issue this call, UNICEF re-commits to staying and delivering for the millions of innocent young lives caught up in these conflicts. These children want what every child wants — and deserves. To be safe, to learn, to play and to know health and opportunity for themselves and their families.

While the challenges of poverty, conflict and violence might be outside our control, our responses to them are within our control. We can do something about it. We can support these young lives and millions of others around the world.

But as we consider the many challenges ahead, we know that we cannot keep up without a relentless focus on finding new and better ways to design, deliver and finance our programmes and services with our partners.

In other words, not without a commitment to innovation, which is what I would like to focus my remarks on today, as we look ahead to the special session today on this subject.

Today's session on innovation — the first in UNICEF's history — is not only a recognition of how innovation has influenced and shaped our programmes in recent years. It is also an opportunity to learn from a number of experts in the field, and to lend our own ideas to shape UNICEF's innovation strategy in the years ahead.

Innovation holds incredible, nearly limitless promise to reach more children in new ways. Not just through technology, but through new partnerships, new ways of working, new sources of financing, and new ways to identify and scale-up promising platforms, services and programmes that will reach more children and young people in need.

In fact, innovation has always been an important part of UNICEF's story.

Over the decades, our organization supported a number of pioneering innovations, including the scaling-up of oral rehydration salts, ready-to-use therapeutic foods like Plumpy'nut, and the India Mark II hand pump — the most widely used hand pump in the world.

We have also taken an innovative approach to programme delivery in recent years. From our adoption of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, which give us a complete picture of the many interconnected challenges that children face. To our programmes, which are now designed with the “whole child” in mind — not focusing on individual sectors like education or health, but how these different sectors all contribute to the overall well-being of every child.

But we must do more. As I said to you at our June meeting, we will not reach many of the SDGs without a significant step change in our work. Innovation provides an opportunity to make this leap, and do what generations of UNICEF staff members have always done: apply new thinking to old problems.

Today, I would like to explore three key questions with you:

One. What are some of the innovations that are changing our work and could be scaled-up to achieve even more results in different contexts?

Two. How can innovation influence and accelerate our results for children and young people across different programme areas and sectors?

And three. What kind of ecosystem of support is required to identify, apply and scale-up new innovations across our work? And what kinds of new partnerships and funding mechanisms will be required?

First, what kinds of innovations are helping us reach more children and young people in need?

Across our work, we are finding innovative ways to marry technology and the needs of children and communities.

For example, the rapid rise of mobile phone technology over the last two decades has driven the creation of U-Report, which is helping us reach children and young people in the hardest-to-reach communities in new ways — and helping them reach us. U-Report is now being used by over five million children and young people in over 50 countries around the world to report on issues affecting them, like violence, HIV prevention and reproductive health.

Advances in geographic software and technology are now helping us track unaccompanied and separated children during emergencies, through Primero. The software links them to local social welfare and protection systems, and is now managing the cases of more than 10,000 Syrian refugee children.

And advances in data-collection and analysis have led to Magic Box. Magic Box brings together private-sector partners like Google, IBM, Telefonica and Amadeus to contribute their real-time data. Using this data, we can better predict where people on the move will go, and design early-warning alarms for natural disasters like earthquakes, landslides or floods.

Guided by these inspiring examples, UNICEF is now working to answer other big challenges using innovative approaches — matching existing technology to global needs.

Blockchain is a good example — a public digital ledger that can be used to track everything from payments to production supply chains to the availability of teachers in classrooms or health supplies in clinics.

Last year in Astana, UNICEF convened our first “hackathon” to start testing blockchain technology to develop “smart contracts.” As an organization that dispenses billions of dollars each year to support children and young people, administrative tracking is essential. UNICEF must always be on the lookout for the most effective ways to track the funds that we move around the world — including to the companies with whom we work to deliver services.

I have asked that we expand these hackathons to ask other “big” questions and test new ideas. Imagine the potential of identity and facial recognition in supporting migrants and refugees. Imagine being able to use technology to help young people on the move — facing interrupted education — work towards portable certification. The possibilities are limitless.

But as I said before, innovation is about more than technology. It is also about finding innovative solutions to reach more children in need.

Our Supply Division, for example, is developing innovative furniture designs to equip schools. This furniture will be built locally with local materials, and will be easy to assemble and durable. An effective way to improve education for children and young people in disadvantaged communities.

And in Cote d’Ivoire, UNICEF is partnering with a Colombian company, Conceptos Plasticos, to transform plastic waste — everything from candy wrappers to car tires — into bricks and other construction materials that can be used to build more classrooms.

Which brings me to my second question today: how can innovation influence and even accelerate our results for children and young people across different programme areas and sectors?

Health is a good example. Technology can help us realize our vision of stronger community health systems by bringing vital services closer to hard-to-reach populations. This is an important part of our commitment to make our goal of Universal Health Coverage a reality — a reality in which every person, in every community, can access the health care they need.

For example, through RapidPro, we are using digital technology to improve the quality, reach and feedback of vital health information. From helping us monitor the immunization of millions of children in Indonesia. To training health workers in Senegal. To providing support for Palestinian children with disabilities.

We are also developing multiple product innovations to scale-up the use of pneumonia diagnostics and oxygen therapy in disadvantaged communities.

These new approaches can help us close the remaining gaps between remote, hard-to-reach communities and the health care and support they need.

Innovation will also play an important role as our Young People's Agenda moves forward. The Agenda — which young people have named themselves, Generation Unlimited — is being launched later this month.

Through it, we are working with partners to examine a number of innovative solutions to help every young person access the education, skills training and support they need by 2030.

In Argentina, for example, there is a program to connect rural students in mountainous, hard-to-reach areas with something they have rarely had: secondary school teachers. Students go to a real classroom with a community teacher, and connect to teachers from urban hub schools using digital technology. They are gaining quality education and digital skills without having to leave their communities.

And the UPSHIFT programme gives young people mentorships and resources to create local solutions in their communities. In Vietnam, a team of young people designed and built a new app to help connect people with disabilities with volunteers who can provide transportation and other assistance. A great example of innovation — and how we can empower young people to solve local problems in their own communities.

As our Director of Emergency Programmes, Manuel Fontaine, will explain in more detail later today, innovation is also playing an increasingly important role in our humanitarian action — particularly in delivering education in emergencies.

Look also at how U-Report was used to in our Ebola response, giving people vital information on how to stay safe, and where they could get help. Or how it helped us issue safety instructions to more than 25,000 people in the Caribbean during Hurricane Irma. Or how it helped spread the word about available cash transfers for families following the 2017 landslide in Sierra Leone.

We can find another example in Yemen, where cholera cases dropped from 50,000 per week last year — to about 2,500 per week this year. This is thanks — in part — to a new system supported by DFID that uses technology to predict outbreaks by monitoring rainfall, which can influence the prevalence of cholera.

This is also a good example of how we can achieve real development success in the midst of humanitarian emergencies — one of UNICEF's top priorities, which we have discussed before. Indeed, innovation can help us plant lasting seeds of development as we respond to humanitarian emergencies. All to save and improve lives in the short-term — while helping fragile communities and countries recover, re-build and avoid backsliding in the future.

But identifying, creating and scaling-up these exciting ideas requires a robust ecosystem of support — my third point today.

It requires partnerships, which are at the heart of innovation. Governments, UN agencies, businesses, philanthropists, innovators, children and young people themselves — all of us, working together.

For example, UNICEF is working with the global consulting firm Dalberg and ARM, the semiconductor supplier, on supporting children in urban areas through digital solutions.

By mid-century, over 66 per cent of the global population will live in cities — almost all of this growth will occur in low and middle-income countries. Countries already struggling with poverty and poor infrastructure.

To help prepare cities for this growth, Tech Bets for an Urban World is examining a number of areas of need.

One example is digital smart-metering for water in urban areas. The partnership examined water access in Nairobi and found that investments in smart water metering could dramatically alleviate pressure on the city's stressed water systems, while saving money over time and improving access to safe water. A solution that could be applied to cities facing similar challenges.

Our Supply Division has also issued a call to companies to help us develop and scale-up rapid e-coli detection technology to help us conquer one of the leading causes of death for children: diarrhoea.

Just as partnerships are critical to innovation's ecosystem of support, so too is financing.

UNICEF's Venture Fund is the first financial vehicle of its kind in the UN. With funding from Denmark, Finland and three private investors, it is a co-leveraged \$16-million fund to test and scale-up promising solutions from around the world.

So far, we have invested in 20 companies with promising projects. From textbooks that are accessible to children with disabilities in Kenya, to drones in Malawi, to using blockchain to improve systems for government payments to schools in South Africa.

While this is a good start, the level of investment required to identify, adapt and apply these innovations at scale and over the long-term is dramatically higher than what we have so far in the Fund. We are focusing on which investments we can scale up. We need your advice on how we can tap into not only the ideas and innovations in your countries, but new sources of public and private funding that we can apply to our work. We need your corporates and foundations, and their products, services and platforms. I look forward to discussing this with you in today's session.

Innovative financing must also play a role. It is an important opportunity mobilize additional resources for our work, while achieving both efficiencies and results.

For example, since 2015, we have pre-financed more than 150 transactions, which has led to the delivery of more than 350 million doses of vaccines, as well as therapeutic food, medicines and school kits to millions of children. Pre-financing allowed us to make these deliveries on an urgent basis — months earlier than would have otherwise been the case.

We also use risk-sharing agreements with businesses — such as advance market and purchase commitments — which have helped us save over \$2 billion since 2012.

We have secured advance market commitments and special contracts for vaccines, which have helped us save almost \$800 million since 2011.

And we continue to explore other promising opportunities. From using blended finance and loan guarantees to support water infrastructure, to working with insurance companies to help communities better prepare for emergencies and design more effective health systems.

Throughout our work to explore and apply innovations, we are working with our sister UN agencies to tap into ideas across the system.

For example, UNICEF is co-chairing the UN Innovation Network with WFP. Over the last year, the Network hosted a series of six data-innovation labs, striking new partnerships with agencies and private sector partners around key technologies, like Magic Box.

And, to help governments deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, RapidPro is being integrated into the UN's planning monitoring and reporting system, UN Info. It will be made available to all UN Country Teams for real-time monitoring at the national level — including through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

These efforts are in keeping with our commitment to the Secretary-General's work to reform and better co-ordinate the UN Development System. You will hear more about this during Friday's informal briefing, but I would like to emphasize that UNICEF is fully embracing this process.

You may know that Gunilla Olsson, our former Representative in Indonesia, has joined the Transition Team being led by Robert Piper, as his Deputy.

Experts from across our organization are also lending their expertise — from human resources, to partnerships, to field results, to experts across our country and regional teams. Managers and technical experts are also involved in every single UNDG results group. And they are deeply involved in developing the new UN Development Assistance Framework, and the new Management and Accountability Framework.

I am personally co-chairing the Results Group on Partnerships, along with Guy Ryder from ILO, focusing on how we can strengthen the development system by working more closely with the private sector.

Beyond expertise and ideas, UNICEF is providing financial support. When the General Assembly called for agencies to double their cost share for the new Resident Co-ordinator System, we quickly agreed. In fact, we are working to transfer our 2019 cost-share contribution. Another clear sign of our commitment to UN reform. We must all make our system work better.

On the one per cent levy on tightly earmarked development contributions, I have two concerns. We need your support as we work through them.

First — we believe it is essential to exempt the private sector, global program partnerships, and International Financial Institutions. After all, co-operation with the private sector offers enormous growth opportunities for the UN. However, as Administrator Steiner indicated to the UNDP Executive Board, we believe the levy would disincentivize future co-operation with these partners. Especially when many already consider the UN's overhead costs to be too high.

Second — Member States opted for the levy “at source.” It would therefore be important that the responsibility for collecting this levy be with Member States, not with UN agencies. Otherwise, we risk increasing our transaction costs and administrative burden — which is counter to the efficiencies we are trying to achieve.

A brief word on the importance of flexible funding in the context of UN reform. As you know, the Secretary-General has initiated a new funding compact that aims to increase the predictability and flexibility of funding to the UN Development System.

To borrow an excellent quote from our President, Ambassador Hattrem: “Unless donor funding changes, the effects of the reform will be less effective. The essence of the reform is to be effective at the country level. Earmarking restricts efficiency at country level.”

I could not agree more. Flexible funding is critical to all that the UN system must do at country level, as we deploy funds where and when they are most needed.

A final word on the most important ingredient of all in our pursuit of a more innovative organization: our staff members.

Throughout my travels to see UNICEF’s work in action, I have been constantly impressed by the passion and commitment our staff members demonstrate for their work — and their ability to find new and better ways to reach children in need.

As they are committed to supporting the lives of children and young people, as Executive Director, I am committed to supporting them.

This includes our ongoing work to end harassment, discrimination and abuse of power across our workplace, which we’ve discussed at previous sessions.

As you know, we have strengthened and simplified reporting mechanisms, enhanced our investigation process, and are committed to improving screening for new hires. These efforts will continue.

The ten members of the Independent Task Force established to examine this issue have convened, and eight of them will be meeting here in New York later this month.

The Task Force is consulting with experts and resources outside of UNICEF — including our sister UN agencies — and will provide recommendations. The recommendations will be presented to the Board, and a follow-up Action Plan will be swiftly developed and implemented.

This is an important next step as we build the UNICEF our staff members need and deserve — an organization at which every person feels safe, respected, empowered and able to speak up.

Similarly, as you know, UNICEF commissioned an independent review of our system for handling allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse around the world. We expect the report to be finalized in the coming weeks, and we will present it to the Board at our first Regular Session in February.

As Executive Director — and in my role as IASC Champion for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment — I am committed to advancing safe and accessible reporting mechanisms, quality survivor-centred assistance, and increased accountability for every child and adult survivor.

Children around the world face violence, abuse, and exploitation that UNICEF and partners are working to prevent, by building systems to protect children, respond to their needs, and end a culture of tolerance for violence.

Children living in humanitarian emergencies are especially at risk. That is why UNICEF's humanitarian action provides an emergency response while also investing in the systems that will protect children in the long-term — the policies, legislation, and health systems that are often overwhelmed or weakened during a crisis. Another good example of how we can plant the seeds of lasting development as we support children, young people and their communities in emergencies.

I can assure you that addressing all forms of sexual abuse, exploitation, harassment and abuse of authority will remain a high priority for me, and for everyone at UNICEF.

Thank you again to all of our Board members for your support in this effort — and in everything we do as an organization.

I look forward to a productive session today — and to working closely with you in the year ahead as we continue moving this organization into the future, and better serving the millions of children and young people who are counting on us.
