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Evaluation of Innovation in UNICEF Work
Informal Briefing of the UNICEF Executive Board

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Background and Purpose

UNICEF has made innovation a corporate priority integrating it into strategy, programming and institutional architecture

To date, no examination of whether/how innovation translates into meaningful outcomes for children or whether UNICEF is set-up to deliver on this change strategy

Evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work

Overall purpose: generate important information for organizational learning and accountability

Objectives:
- Assess UNICEF's 'fitness for purpose' to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve outcomes and goals of strategic plans for the period 2014 - 2021
- Provide insights on how innovation contributes to UNICEF's goals, objectives, and responses

Evaluation Scope

Approach: mixed methods with a summative emphasis

Scope:
- Period covered: 2014 – 2018
- Various units at headquarters (HQs) with emphasis on units with innovation remit*
- Regional offices: interviews with six Regional Directors and Deputy Directors
- Country Offices: 25 COs participated (staff interviews include 19 Representatives and Deputy Reps.

Types of innovations:
- 'Hard' technologies
- Information and communications technology (ICT)
- 'Soft' technologies: innovative methodologies, approaches, and processes

* *Units with innovation remit* refer to the Office of Innovation (OoI), the innovation unit of UNICEF's Supply Division (SD IU) and the Information and Communication Technologies Division (ICTD).

Evaluation Design and Methods

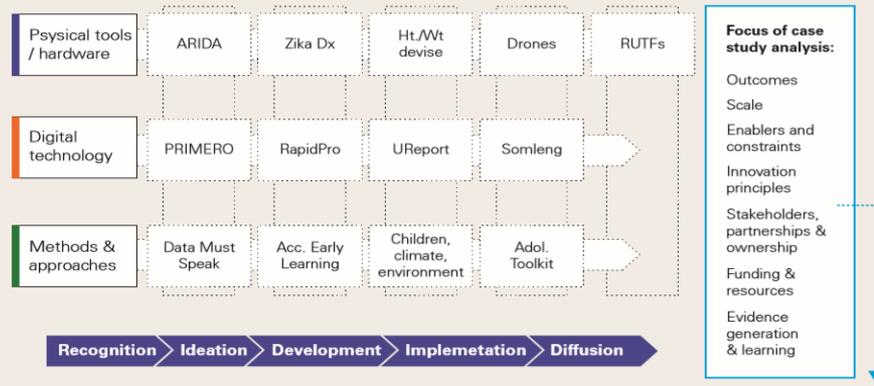**Conducted through separate yet interrelated projects:**

- Organizational assessment provides evidence on UNICEF 'fitness for purpose' to innovate as a key strategy to achieve its goals through its values, structures, and systems

- 13 innovation case studies (9 field visits) provide evidence of how specific innovations progress from ideation to scale

- Synthesis to integrate learning and generate conclusions and recommendations

Analysis primarily qualitative:

- Based on key informant interviews (400+) and online surveys
- Based on existing in-house sources of information (e.g. Global Staff Survey)
- Triangulation between sources and methods, when possible

Evaluation Design

ELEMENT 1   Case studies: Exploring the spectrum of innovation in UNICEF

						Focus of case study analysis:
Psysical tools / hardware	ARIDA	Zika Dx	Ht./Wt devise	Drones	RUTFs	Outcomes
						Scale
Digital technology	PRIMERO	RapidPro	UReport	Somleng		Enablers and constraints
						Innovation principles
Methods & approaches	Data Must Speak	Acc. Early Learning	Children, climate, environment	Adol. Toolkit		Stakeholders, partnerships & ownership
						Funding & resources
						Evidence generation & learning

Recognition > Ideation > Development > Implemetation > Diffusion

ELEMENT 3
Capstone / Synthesis

Based on findings from each element and additional data collection as needed

ELEMENT 2   Organizational assessment: Is UNICEF fit for purpose?

Areas of inquiry

- Institutional arrangements, roles and responsibilities
- Provision and utilization of resources
- Partnerships and UNICEF's role in the larger landscape
- Monitoring, evaluation, learning and knowledge managment
- Scaling and mainstreaming of innovation solutions

Work – **UNICEF** | for every child

Intended Users

- Internal audience of UNICEF decision-makers, across levels

- The **synthesis report** serves as a tool for UNICEF to assess its progress in innovation and make decisions regarding future directions

- The **13 innovation case studies** are to be used as knowledge-sharing tools by UNICEF staff and a range of stakeholders including government partners, other United Nations agencies and initiatives, development partners, and implementers

Conclusions

Organizational values: - collective ways of thinking that shape the way UNICEF works

- Innovation has been placed as clear corporate priority over the period 2014 – 2021

- UNICEF is falling short on implementation:
  - 55% COs use innovation as implementing strategy
  - 55% staff say that '*new ideas and innovations are supported in my office*'

- Aspects of organizational culture are barriers to innovation: risk-taking and acceptance of failure are largely absent

- Lack of management support for innovation

- Innovative work is seen as 'something extra' running parallel to routine programming

- Bootstrap innovation resulting in piecemeal approaches (staff, funds, etc…)

- Lack of common, agreed understandings of innovation and its ecosystem

- Lack of attention to issues of ownership and planning: steps, resources, and time

Organizational structures:

-UNICEF's institutional architecture, governance, staff & unit configuration

- Much innovation occurs in a diffused manner outside the formally recognized innovative structures

- Lack of awareness of structures and their ability to support innovative ideas

- Importance of clarifying and communicating new roles and how they relate across units when changes occur

- Benefits of a decentralized structure include strong partnerships with country actors, knowledge of in-country situations, and understanding of stakeholders' needs

- Difficulty of moving ideas through the hierarchy

- 'One-size-fits-all' model does not work: different solutions are necessary based on needs assessment

- From the case studies, success factors in mainstreaming include having: a national-level policy, framework or priority in place, capacities of individuals and systems, and a funder with the intent to bring to scale

- Importance of building new forms of partnerships with the private sector

Organizational systems:
-UNICEF processes to support flow of information, knowledge and resources

- Unclear staffing model re: innovation capacity: issues of 'in-sourcing' versus 'out-sourcing' of skills have to be addressed

- Limited guidance on innovation treatment in management systems (planning, reporting, expenditure tracking)

- Very hierarchical management style influencing the approach to innovation: lack of clarity regarding staff' roles for innovation

- Lack of consideration to the relative balance of effort for innovation activities (e.g. search vis-à-vis scale).

- Some agencies use a portfolio management approach which could help UNICEF ensure that resources are well aligned with priorities, comparative advantages, and unique positioning

- Better information sharing and dissemination are needed

- Insufficient resources for innovation and a lack of clarity in processes to access funds for that purpose

Recommendation 1

Develop a shared strategic vision and approach that directly addresses fundamental constraints in the current approach and drives decision-making across the organization

1) Build on a shared understanding of priority challenges and informs decision-making, including considerations and principles on innovation in humanitarian settings

2) Develop UNICEF wide positions on addressing some key barriers such as :

- Recognize risk-taking as necessary component of innovation

- Clarify how different parts of the organization contribute to innovation

- Increased transparency, governance and decision-making within dedicated innovation units

- Clarify medium- and long-term staff requirements to better innovate as a core strategy

- Pay greater attention to and investment in learning and uptake
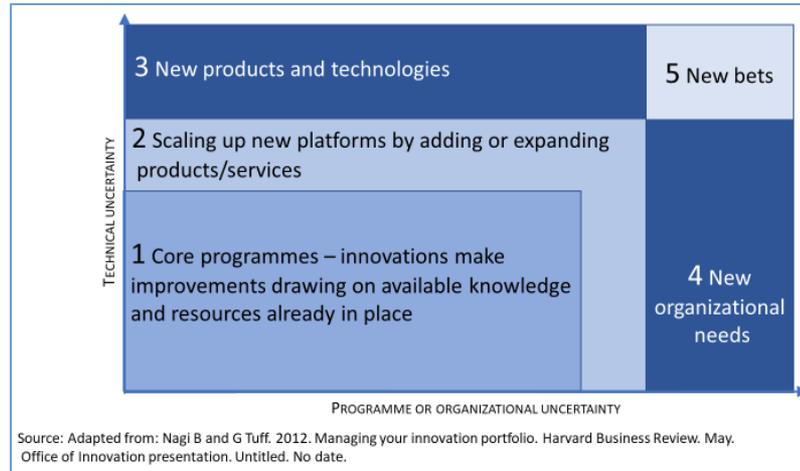
Recommendation 2

Act on needed structural change to advance innovation as a means of achieving results for children

1) Balance structures, and their strengths and roles

2) Senior management role at Deputy Executive Director level to oversee organization's innovation agenda

3) Create Innovation Enabling Services teams responsible for portfolio management and support to COs

4) House leadership for digital innovation under the ICT Division, bringing together parts of HQs currently engaged

5) Open posts for dedicated innovation staff at RO and CO level:
   - Regional T4D specialists can serve as a model
   - Best placed under the supervision of the deputy representative
   - No 'one-size-fits-all' model: efforts should be tailored to country needs
   - Increase understanding of innovation ecosystems, ownership, requirements for scale, hand-over, and exit

Recommendation 3

Utilize a portfolio management approach for innovation

1) Clarify how structures and resources are positioned to innovation and scale

2) Use a portfolio management approach as a tool to align resources with strategic priorities, comparative advantages, and acceptable levels of risk. Could help to mitigate a 'projectized' or piecemeal approach with small sums, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer common.

Source: Adapted from: Nagi B and G Tuff. 2012. Managing your innovation portfolio. Harvard Business Review. May. Office of Innovation presentation. Untitled. No date.

Our Products

- Website: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103533.html

- Synthesis Report: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF_Innovation_evaluation_report_Digital.pdf

- Blog: https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/evaluating-innovation-unicef/

- Vlog: forthcoming

- Infogram: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103533.html

Thank You