



# 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:**

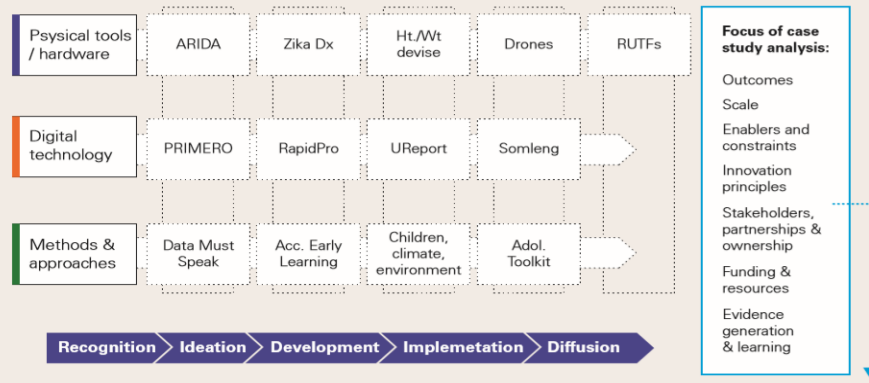
- Organizational assessment provides evidence on UNICEF ‘fitness for purpose’ to innovate as a key strategy to achieve its goals through its values, structures, and systems
- 13 innovation case studies (9 field visits) provide evidence of how specific innovations progress from ideation to scale
- Synthesis 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



## ELEMENT 2 Organizational assessment: Is UNICEF fit for purpose?



## ELEMENT 3 Capstone / Synthesis

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

# 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

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

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- 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

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## Organizational structures:

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

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- 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



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## Organizational systems:

### -UNICEF processes to support flow of information, knowledge and resources

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- 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

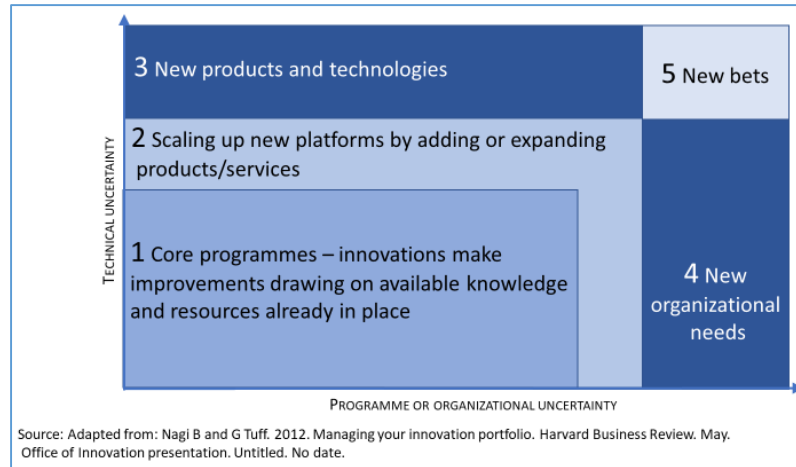
## Act on needed structural change to advance innovation as a means of achieving results for children

- 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.



# Our Products

- Website: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_103533.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103533.html)
- Synthesis Report: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF\\_Innovation\\_evaluation\\_report\\_Digital.pdf](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](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103533.html)

Thank You