INFLUENTIAL EVALUATIONS: A SELECTION OF UNICEF EVALUATIONS THAT LED TO LEARNING AND CHANGE
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Influential Evaluations: A Selection of UNICEF Evaluations that Led to Learning and Change

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To what extent evaluations at UNICEF have been influential? And what factors contribute to or constrain evaluation influence? To begin answering these questions, UNICEF’s Evaluation Office commissioned this study with a view to obtaining an initial picture of evaluation influence in the organization. Through a series of case studies, the study explores pathways to influence in eight different UNICEF offices and programmes. In addition, drawing on a broader sample of thirty influential evaluations and evaluative studies, the report describes the ways in which these evaluations have contributed to learning and change, and provides an initial analysis of contributing factors.¹

The findings, based on the initial sample, show a wide-ranging and surprising degree of influence. The evaluations in the sample have reshaped the organization’s global strategies, contributing to a paradigm shift in how UNICEF understands and addresses child rights. In other cases, evaluations have led to the complete redesign of national policy frameworks. In a number of countries, evaluations have contributed to raising the prominence of children’s issues in national development agendas. The influence achieved suggests there is room to raise the bar, and expect even more from evaluations in UNICEF.

Most commonly, influence was instrumental— that is, focused on the ‘how’ rather than rationale or overall strategic approach (the ‘why’ and the ‘what’) – supporting the improved design and implementation of policies and programmes. Many of the evaluations were of pilot projects, highlighting the value of intentional and well-designed approaches to programme innovations. In other cases, the evaluations were more far-reaching, prompting the re-conceptualization of long-standing programmes. What distinguished influential evaluations from those that were less effectual, was the scale and scope of change achieved. Among the most salient outcomes was the increase in government funding and ownership, showing that evaluations can contribute to sustainability - an area that has been flagged for improvement in UNICEF.

By providing independent confirmation of programme effectiveness, the evaluations enabled UNICEF offices to advocate with greater confidence for specific policy and approaches. The involvement of national partners in the evaluation process kick-started advocacy efforts – and ultimately the level of influence achieved. At other times, the evaluation process fostered learning that challenged the common wisdom or helped UNICEF and partners to re-conceptualize the way programmes work. Less frequently evaluations contributed to change in partnerships and positioning. Given the organization’s stated strategy of leveraging partnerships for results, the relational aspect of evaluation influence would benefit from greater attention.

Among the most exciting findings were the multiple examples of social change; paradigm shifts in how social problems are understood and addressed. This type of influence is rare and difficult to achieve; the number of cases cited is a tribute to UNICEF’s

¹ This study is expected to serve as basis for a more comprehensive review of influential evaluations, to be undertaken at a later stage.
programmes and advocacy for children, as well as the investment in credible and relevant evaluations. However, there were fewer examples of diffusion, that is, the replication of programmes and policies to new contexts. This finding indicates that UNICEF still has room to improve when it comes to sharing evaluation evidence and lessons learned across countries.

In analyzing the reasons behind evaluation influence, a picture emerges of inter-connected and mutually reinforcing factors. **Evaluations that were strategic and designed for utilization, well-resourced, and had strong ownership by staff and partners tended to be the most influential. Underlying these factors was championing and support from senior management.** The findings from this study concur with previous assessments in highlighting the need for more programme or policy oriented i.e. strategic evaluations. To a large extent, the shift towards strategic evaluations is already underway in regions and countries with less focus on service-delivery and greater reliance on Regular Resources as a funding mechanism. However, as demonstrated by some Country Offices, even with donor-driven and project evaluations, UNICEF can create the space for influential evaluations. Most important is support from senior management in creating an evaluation and learning culture.

When it comes to knowledge exchange and communication, this study highlighted the same weaknesses as previous assessments namely, limited learning outside of the context in which the evaluation was conducted. In other words, for the most part, learning mainly occurs with primary users as part of the evaluation process. **In order to accelerate progress for children in line with Agenda 2030, UNICEF will need to make a greater investment in sharing evaluation evidence and knowledge at the global, regional and national levels.** Similarly, more effort is needed to make evaluation findings accessible to the wider public. Given the organization’s strength in communication, this should be relatively easy to implement. However, accessible knowledge products on their own are not enough to stimulate learning; UNICEF staff also need the time to engage with external knowledge networks – and to work with governments and partners in creating platforms to promote policy solutions for children.

Finally, **evaluation influence can be expanded by integrating a stronger focus on external uses and opportunities from the start.** To do so requires a shift away from viewing evaluation only as an accountability exercise, but also as an opportunity to leverage credible evidence for children.

**Table 1: Summary of Case Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Ma’An Together towards a Safe School Environment Programme</td>
<td>• Generated political momentum for a cross-sectoral approach to violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Nepal Emergency Cash Transfer Programme through Social Assistance</td>
<td>• Confirmed the value of a new approach to emergency cash transfers, cementing government support and partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Child Protection Systems Building Approach</td>
<td>• Comprehensive influence on national policy framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Exponential increase in government funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Malawi  | Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM)  | • Multiple layers of programme and policy influence  
| | | • CMAM became a national development priority
Dominican Republic  | Timely registration of births in prioritized hospitals  | • Achieved a high level of political support  
| | | • Raised the prominence of birth registration on the national policy agenda
Evaluation Office  | Protecting Children from Violence: UNICEF’s Strategies and Programme Performance  | • Paradigm shift on violence against children  
| | | • Restructuring of global strategic approach to child protection
Nigeria  | Girl’s Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3) Cash Transfer Programme (CTP) in Niger and Sokoto States  | • Diffusion to two new federal states  
| | | • State government support for scale-up and sustainability
Kazakhstan  | Pilot Programme Promoting Adolescent Mental Health and Prevention of Suicide  | • Diffusion to three other countries  
| | | • National support for scale-up and sustainability

**INTRODUCTION**

As stated in the UNICEF Evaluation Policy, evaluation unequivocally serves the organization’s mission and supports UNICEF in fulfilling its mandate. To do so, as the policy further notes, evaluations must contribute to learning, accountability and decision-making. In short, evaluations in UNICEF are expected to contribute to change. Without this purpose, there is a risk that evaluation becomes an exercise in compliance, and does not spark learning or contribute to programme and policy improvements.

To date, UNICEF has undertaken a number of studies of evaluation utilization which have focused mainly on the implementation of recommendations. However, evaluations can go far beyond immediate use, encompassing shifts in understanding and dynamic application of evidence. As a first step to understanding this broader type of influence, in 2015 the Evaluation Office put together an annex to its annual report to the Executive Board, describing a small sample of evaluations that have led to change. The exercise was eye-opening: The evaluations cited in the report seemed to have contributed to different types of influence.

This study builds on that initial exercise, providing an in-depth analysis of the extent of evaluation influence in UNICEF and the factors that contribute to it. Using a case study approach, the study takes a detailed look at eight influential evaluations from across the organization. In addition, the study draws on a broader sample of evaluations and evaluative

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studies as well as interviews and a desk review, to describe the ways in which evaluations have contributed to learning and change, and to provide an initial analysis of the factors that contribute to influence.

The study comes at a critical juncture in the work of UNICEF and other international development partners. Increasingly, international development relies on evidence and knowledge to develop and scale up interventions, translate solutions across contexts, and bring together actors and donors. Evaluation is expected to play a critical role in the follow-up and review processes of the Agenda 2030 by providing evidence to demonstrate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study provides a first look at the extent to which evaluation in UNICEF is accelerating the learning, innovation and change needed to realize the 2030 Agenda.

Defining and Analyzing Evaluation Influence

Efforts to analyze evaluation influence in UNICEF face an immediate challenge: Defining what is meant by influence and how it can be measured or analyzed. The idea of evaluation influence is relatively new, and the evidence base is scant, both in western countries and global south. To date, there is only one fully-developed model for analyzing evaluation influence, developed by Mark and Henry (2004). Their framework treats evaluation as an intervention and provides a “program theory of evaluation” that moves from inputs through outcomes. However, the model has a number of short-comings, not least its complexity, which make it difficult to apply.

In building a model of evaluation influence for UNICEF, this study draws on the framework developed by Mark and Henry, but simplifies it and adds elements and lessons learned from other researchers and models. The model describes influence on policy, including national laws and policies developed by governments, as well as on UNICEF organizational policy. In addition, the model includes influence on programmes, including national and sub-national programmes implemented with governments and partners.

For the most part, the changes sparked by evaluations will be instrumental, leading to changes in policy and programme design and implementation. Pilot projects may be scaled-up, programmes redesigned to more effectively reach vulnerable populations, or policy and guidance revised. Less frequently, evaluation can contribute to a social change, or a paradigm shift in the ways social problems are addressed. Finally, evaluations can contribute to the diffusion of best practices to new contexts, leading to replication in new countries, or uptake by other organizations.

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6 ‘Peer Review of the Evaluation Function’.
8 ‘Ten steps to making evaluation matter’.
Evaluation influence can also be conceptual and relational, laying the groundwork for change. A first step towards influence is often learning. Reflecting policy theory, most learning is assumed to be instrumental, dealing with the tools and techniques for policy and programme implementation. More rarely, learning can be social, changing the way that problems are understood and addressed. In addition, evaluations can influence relations and structures, leading to new coalitions and partnerships or contributing to organizational change. And finally, evaluations can influence advocacy and agenda-setting, providing evidence to move problems and solutions up organizational and political agendas.

At its base, the model proposed here identifies two types of inputs or factors that contribute to an evaluation’s influence. The first is the evaluation attributes, which include quality, credibility, relevance and timeliness of the evaluation (as identified by Mark and Henry), but also considers the intent, approach and degree of participation by stakeholders. The second factor, evaluation knowledge exchange, highlights the strategy for outreach and engagement with users before, during and after the evaluation. This factor is adapted from a model of research impact developed by Morton (2015), which emphasizes the importance of knowledge exchange among research users.

13 ‘Policy Learning and Failure’.
Model of Evaluation Influence

Evaluation Process

Evaluation Attributes
- Intent and approach
- Quality and credibility
- Relevance and timeliness
- Involvement of users (participation)

Evaluation Knowledge Exchange and Communication
- Strategy for outreach and engagement with evaluation users.
- Dissemination to public, policy and practitioners

Evaluation Influence

Laying the groundwork for change

Change in policies and programmes

Learning
Evaluation users have changes in knowledge about policies and programmes (instrumental or social learning)

Instrumental
Evaluation leads to changes in policy and programmes (termination, continuation, change in design, scaling, funding)

Relational
Evaluation contributes to new partnerships and shifts in ‘policy coalitions’

Social Change
Paradigm shift in policy and programme approaches

Advocacy and Agenda-Setting
Evaluation results used to advocate for improved policies and programmes, and to raise problems and solutions on policy agendas

Dissemination
Evaluation supports dissemination of programme or policy to new contexts (national, regional, global)

Policy and Programme Context
- Complexity of policy and programme environment
- Position of UNICEF and partners within the policy system
- National and organizational capacity and openness to conduct evaluations and use evidence
- Windows for change: scheduled (national development policies, SDG reporting) and unplanned (changes in government, disasters)
External factors are recognized in the literature as contributing to evaluation influence. The complexity of the policy environment, UNICEF positioning, and the window for policy influence will all play a role in influence. However, for this initial study, contextual factors are only lightly analyzed as part of timeliness and relevance, and further research is needed to explore this dynamic.

**METHODOLOGY**

To identify the extent to which evaluations are leading to change and the factors contributing to influence, the study used a qualitative approach, combining case studies, interviews with UNICEF staff members, and a document review.

At the outset of the study, the Evaluation Office asked each of the seven UNICEF Regional Offices as well as Evaluation Specialists in headquarters, to provide two to three examples of evaluations that were influential. Offices were asked to provide a range of evaluations, including organizational and programme, development and humanitarian, single and multi-country. For each evaluation, UNICEF staff members completed a template with detailed questions on influence, the evaluation attributes, and knowledge exchange and communication. Subsequently, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with UNICEF staff in Country, Regional and Headquarters Offices.

Based on the templates and interviews, the researcher prepared a series of eight case studies. The cases were selected to: 1) highlight evaluations in all regions and in different programming contexts, and 2) to illustrate the types of evaluation influence across the organization. In addition, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify the patterns of evaluation influence and the relationships between contributing factors and influence. The analysis drew on the eight case studies as well as the larger sample of examples and interviews. The findings were triangulated with information from a desk review of secondary sources on evaluation in UNICEF. These sources include meta-analyses, evaluation syntheses and strategic reviews by UNICEF and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

**Sample and case studies**

In response to the request for influential evaluations, 30 examples were provided from across the organization: 25 country office evaluations, one regional multi-country evaluation, and two corporate evaluations and two evaluative studies. Latin America and the Caribbean and the Evaluation Office in HQ shared the largest number of influential evaluations (six), closely followed by East Asia and the Pacific (five) and Europe and Central Asia (four). No region provided fewer than two evaluations. (A detailed list of the evaluations, by region, is included in Annex 2)

One example was selected from each region, as well as one from the Evaluation Office. The selection was done with an eye to illustrating a range of programmes and evaluation outcomes.

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17 ‘The Mechanisms and Outcomes of Evaluation Influence’.
The case studies, from the Dominican Republic, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, and one from the Evaluation Office, are available in the Annex 3.

Limitations and future research
This initial study was designed to be a light exercise, largely focused on documenting and describing evaluation influence in UNICEF. While the findings are largely descriptive, a preliminary analysis has been done on the correlations between factors and the degree of influence. Further research should be able to explain these relationships in more depth and with greater confidence. Likewise, the study has not distinguished between evaluation influence at the global and decentralized levels, or other differences between offices. Further research should examine these contextual distinctions. In addition, it is important to note that the sample focused only on evaluations that were highly influential; future research would benefit from looking at evaluations that did not achieve the same degree of influence in order to better understand both the contributing and constraining factors.

FINDINGS
Findings are grouped in two sections. In line with the model, the first section provides a description of the extent of evaluation influence. The second section explores the factors that contributed to evaluation influence and provides an initial analysis of the relationships between factors and influence.

1. Evaluation Influence

Conceptual, relational and advocacy: Laying the groundwork for change

Learning: Within the sample of influential evaluations, a common form of learning was corroborative; that is, evaluations provided independent confirmation of programme effectiveness, enabling UNICEF offices to advocate with greater confidence for specific policy and approaches. For example, in Nigeria and Togo, rigorous evaluations of UNICEF cash transfer programmes led to support for upscaling the approach. Another form of learning commonly reported was instrumental. The evaluations helped UNICEF and partners to identify and understand the changes needed in legislation, policy and guidance in order to improve policies and programmes.

A smaller, but still significant portion of influential evaluations contributed to conceptual shifts in how problems are understood and addressed. For example, impact evaluations of school-based water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes in Mali and Laos developed an evidence-base challenging the common wisdom that improving WASH in schools reduces absenteeism. At the global level, the evaluability assessment of the UNICEF Strategic Plan led to an organizational rethink of what constitutes a 'strategy' and how it should be developed. In line with the literature on policy learning, the study found that ‘paradigm shifts’ were less frequent and harder to plan for, but still an important part of evaluation influence in UNICEF.

Another type of learning flagged in the study, was capacity building for evaluation and results-based management. In Montenegro, an evaluation of Early Childhood Development
purposively involved a wide-cross-section of staff, and led to wider improvements in programme design and evaluability. In some cases, the evaluation was part of deliberate ‘learning through doing’. For example, in Yemen, an influential evaluation of the organization’s humanitarian response was conducted as part of a global training initiative to strengthen humanitarian evaluation.

**Relational:** Several influential evaluations led to a significant change in partnerships and positioning as a result of the evaluation. Often this was done by expanding the partners or sectors involved in addressing children’s issues. For example, in Guatemala, an evaluation of the National Strategy on the Protection of Human Rights of Girls, led to expanded partnerships with international and national Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Given the importance of coalitions in policy advocacy, and of UNICEF’s stated strategy of leveraging partnerships for results, the relational aspect of evaluation influence would benefit from greater attention.

**Advocacy and Agenda-Setting** were among the most commonly cited forms of evaluation influence found in the sample. This aligns with previous surveys, in which UNICEF respondents have identified policy advocacy as the greatest utility of evaluation. Often, advocacy is done by engaging a wide range of end-users in the evaluation process. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the evaluation of the Justice for Every Child Project involved a broad steering committee of ministries, NGOs and service providers, who subsequently scaled-up legal reforms and services for children. This advocacy tends to build on the strong relationships UNICEF has put in place as part of programme implementation.

Less frequently, UNICEF evaluations were used for advocacy with elected officials or in more political contexts. In Moldova, an evaluation on Early Childhood Development led to three parliamentary hearings on the issue. In other cases, evaluations achieved a high degree of influence by moving children’s issues up national policy agendas. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the evaluation led to birth registration being included among national development priorities. Evaluations that can demonstrate effective policy solutions to long-standing problems can potentially be influential well past their initial intent.

**Instrumental, Social Change and Diffusion – Change to policies and programmes**

**Instrumental:** The most common type of influence led to changes in the design and implementation of policies and programmes. The scale-up of programmes was frequently cited as an outcome along with **financial sustainability**, with number of evaluations leading to increased national funding of the programmes. This finding highlights the potential value of evaluations to improve sustainability, an area that has been flagged as weak in UNICEF. In some cases, the changes were internal, informing shifts in country programme strategies, or leading to changes in how the organization prepares for and responds to emergencies. For

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19 *The Advocacy Coalition Framework*.
example, the review of the UNICEF response to the Haiti Earthquake led to a new procedure for triggering corporate responses to large-scale emergencies, a system that has proven vital in recent years.

In multiple regions and countries, **influential evaluations were the result of pilot projects.** For example, in Argentina, a pilot evaluation demonstrated that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) could be used to improve access to education for adolescents in rural areas; this finding led to a shift in national education policy. What the pilot projects had in common was attention to design; consistently, the evaluations were part of thoroughly-planned and executed trial projects. At the other end of the spectrum, **formative evaluations have been instrumental in giving coherence to fragmented and often long-standing interventions.** In Myanmar, an evaluation of child protection system-building led to the development of a comprehensive policy framework, from national legislation through to guidelines for implementation.

**Social Change:** UNICEF evaluations have led to profound changes in how problems are understood and addressed. At the corporate level, the global evaluation on Protecting Children from Violence led to a paradigm shift in how child protection is addressed in the organization. In Vietnam, an evaluation of the emergency response to the drought and salt-water intrusion crisis contributed to a substantive change in government thinking about disasters, shifting from response to disaster risk reduction. Usually, the degree of influence achieved was unplanned – facilitated by a range of internal and external factors. Whether intentional or not, **the extent of social change identified in this first study is exceptional,** and a tribute to the organization’s strong track record of advocacy and results for children.

**Diffusion:** The least common form of influence cited in the sample was diffusion the replication of programmes and policies in new contexts and countries. The most significant example comes from Kazakhstan, where the evaluation of a school-based mental health project for adolescents contributed to uptake by three countries in Central Asia.

In summary, UNICEF evaluations had the most influence on learning and decision-making that shapes the design and implementation of policies and programmes. However, the extent of influence goes well beyond incremental use, encompassing the re-conceptualization of strategies or challenging the ‘common wisdom on how programmes contribute to results for children. In an impressive number of cases, evaluations have led to profound changes in how problems and policies are understood and addressed. Less frequently, evaluations helped transform partnerships and policy coalitions or led to diffusion across contexts, both areas where UNICEF Offices can do more to extend influence.

Table 2: Patterns of evaluation influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laying the groundwork for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in policies and programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Areas of strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Learning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Instrumental change</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Corroboration of approach</td>
<td>- Design and implementation of policies and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identifying gaps in coverage, guidance and legislation</td>
<td>- Scale-up of pilots and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conceptual shifts in programmes and strategies</td>
<td>- Financial sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evaluation and results-based management</td>
<td>- Comprehensive reform of policy frameworks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Advocacy and Agenda-setting</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social change</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Advocacy through evaluation process</td>
<td>- Paradigm shift in policies and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High-level political support</td>
<td>- Children’s issues and programmes at center of national development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Raising the profile of children’s issues and policies on policy agendas</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Room for growth</strong></th>
<th><strong>Diffusion</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational</strong></td>
<td><strong>To new states (federal) and countries</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expanded partnerships and coalitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Positioning of UNICEF in policy systems</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Contributing Factors

**Evaluation Attributes**

**Intent:** Nearly all of the evaluations in the sample were designed to be influential, with an eye to decision-making within UNICEF or advocacy with national governments. Learning was cited less frequently as a primary intent. These findings concur with a recent meta-analysis of UNICEF evaluations. However, for many of the Offices that took part in the study, the degree of influence achieved far outstripped the initial intent. Staff members reported surprise at the extent to which their evaluations contributed to significant changes. This suggests there is scope to ‘expand the horizon’ when it comes to evaluation influence in UNICEF.

**Approach:** As noted above, the sample was made up of summative, formative and impact evaluations, with a small number of evaluative studies. More than the specific approach, the study found that what matters most is investment in the evaluation, both in terms of attention and resources. Advisors in headquarters and the regional offices highlighted the need to focus additional resources on strategic evaluations, that contribute to organizational priorities and goals, or add information critical to decision-making. This finding is echoed in recent assessments of the evaluation function in UNICEF.

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To a large extent, the shift towards strategic evaluations is already underway in regions and countries with less focus on service-delivery and a greater reliance on Regular Resources. Some Country Offices reported advocating successfully with donors to make evaluations more meaningful. For example, in Cambodia, UNICEF convinced different donors to merge their project reviews into one higher-value evaluation, while in Vietnam, a donor agreed to re-programme emergency funding to support a real-time evaluation. Beyond financial resources, influential evaluations also require an investment of time, from both programme and evaluation staff.

**Quality and credibility:** Almost all of the evaluations in the sample were rated as ‘satisfactory’ or ‘highly satisfactory’, with just one evaluation rated as ‘fair’. This pattern indicates that evaluation quality is an important precondition to evaluation influence. An evaluation that is not technically sound is unlikely to be influential. Credible recommendations also were identified as important, and some Offices noted the need to revise them with implementing partners in order to make the recommendations stronger and more relevant.

**Ownership and the involvement of evaluation ‘users’**, in line with the evaluation literature on process use\(^{25}\) was identified as a determining factor in evaluation influence. For organizational evaluations, UNICEF staff members across different levels and offices were involved. For example, for the evaluation of the Philippines Country Programme 2012-2018, in addition to the country team, senior advisors from the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and the Representative from a neighboring country took part. For evaluations of national and sub-national policies and programmes, key government ministries and other development partners invariably were involved in reference groups and validation workshops.

Roughly a third of the evaluations in the sample were participatory, involving service-providers, parents and adolescents in the process. The degree of participation varied, from interviewing target populations to actively involving local stakeholders in developing workable solutions based on the evaluation recommendations. For offices that used a participatory approach, it was often considered to be one of the factors contributing to influence.

**Senior management:** One of the most cited factors for evaluation influence was the active support and involvement of UNICEF senior management in the evaluation process. This finding is reflected in a recent study of the UN system, which highlights senior management involvement as critical to internal evaluation use.\(^{26}\) Internally, senior managers facilitate the shift to strategic evaluations, making the link between evaluations and organizational priorities, or highlighting critical evidence gaps. Externally, senior managers can reach out to and engage a higher level of leadership in government and development partners. The case studies indicate that the more senior the level of UNICEF and government engagement in the evaluation, the higher the degree of influence on national and organizational policy agendas.

**Timeliness and relevance:** Timing was cited as an important element in evaluation influence. For the most part, evaluations were timed to influence key moments in the UNICEF

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programming process, frequently the preparation of new Country Programmes. **Overwhelmingly, attention to timing was internally focused.** An exception was with the evaluations of humanitarian response, which often aimed to be real-time or completed as soon as possible after the emergency, with a view to influencing governments and partners while attention was still high. At other times, timing was opportunistic. For example, in Malawi, an evaluation of the nutrition programme was used to influence the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, an opportunity not envisioned at the outset. The findings indicate that UNICEF Offices should increase attention to external policy windows during the planning and dissemination of evaluations.

In a few cases, the evaluations were aligned to longer-term changes in the policy context. For example, in Cambodia, an evaluation of community pre-schools was attuned to changes in the decentralization and de-concentration of government functions. In the Philippines, an evaluation of the Country Programme considered the organization’s position and strategic engagement within changing contexts. Only two of the evaluations cited alignment with the SDGs or other global policy frameworks. These examples raise the possibility that UNICEF could expand evaluation influence by looking past the immediate context of the specific programme and giving greater consideration to national and global agendas. As noted in the interviews, this approach requires an investment of time by programme staff and evaluation managers, as well as an understanding of the UNICEF position within complex policy environments - an area that would benefit from further research.

Another salient contextual factor was the demand for credible evidence from governments and partners. In some cases, this was led by ‘evidence champions’ within governments. In others, it reflected sustained work by UNICEF on national evaluation capacity development. In Nepal, the National Planning Commission (NPC) recently requested evaluations of UNICEF-supported programmes for nutrition and Early Childhood Development. This request followed a series of workshops, demonstrating that national demand and capacity for evaluation often work together.

In looking at the evaluations, a pattern emerges in which **the factors leading to influence - including intent, quality, resources, timing, and full engagement and ownership by users and stakeholders** – begin with the support and involvement of senior leadership. The factors do not work independently, but instead are inter-connected and mutually reinforcing. Underlying them is a commitment to creating an evaluation and learning culture. However, there is less attention to external opportunities and contexts, and these should be more explicit when planning UNICEF evaluations. As some cases illustrate, opportunities exist to work collaboratively with governments to undertake evaluations with a broader scope than just UNICEF projects and programmes and potentially leverage evidence for children in national and global agendas.

**Knowledge Exchange and Communication**

For the most part, the study found that evaluation findings and recommendations were shared with the primary users and stakeholders. Often this was done through validation workshops and other forms of direct engagement with line ministries involved in the evaluation process. Fewer
than half of the evaluations were shared with a broader audience: most commonly high-
level decision-makers or stakeholders at the sub-national level. Some regions have begun to
ask evaluation managers to identify broader audiences at the planning stage, through
dissemination strategies and ‘concept notes’, a promising practice that should be used more
widely within UNICEF.

Relatively few of the countries and offices covered by the study have invested in communication
products to make recommendation findings accessible to the wider public and vulnerable
populations, a finding echoed in the UNEG peer review.²⁷ Some offices prepared accessible
summaries that included infographics and visuals, but this remains rare. Likewise, outreach to
the media was reported less frequently. Given the critical role that the media plays in influencing
public agendas, and the strong communication capacity within UNICEF, more Offices should
invest in communicating evaluation findings to the media and programme beneficiaries.

Likewise, there was less evidence of sharing evaluation findings outside of the initial context, or
outside of UNICEF. Generally, learning remains confined to the context in which the
evaluation was conducted, and within UNICEF. This finding indicates that knowledge
management of evaluations, an output highlighted in the revised evaluation policy, remains a
work in progress.²⁸ UNICEF staff members need time to engage with external knowledge
networks – and to work with governments and partners in creating platforms to promote policy
solutions for children.

Interviewees flagged the emerging good practice of preparing syntheses of evaluation findings.
For example, at the global level, a synthesis of humanitarian evaluations contributed to a
decision to update the UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies. However,
concerns were also raised that syntheses are not being used by programme counterparts, and
there is a remaining last step of connecting evaluations with planning.

Figure 1: Factors contributing to evaluation influence in UNICEF

²⁷ Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of UNICEF.
CONCLUSION
To what extent have evaluations at UNICEF been influential? And what factors contribute to or constrain evaluation influence? The findings of this study show a wide-ranging and surprising degree of influence. Influential evaluations were reported from all regions and covering almost all aspects of UNICEF work. The extent of an evaluation's influence often far outstripped initial expectations, indicating there is room to raise the bar when it comes to evaluation influence in UNICEF.

Most commonly, influence lead to the improved design and implementation of policies and programmes. Many of the evaluations were of pilot projects, highlighting the value of intentional and well-designed approaches to programme innovations. In other cases, the evaluations prompted the re-conceptualization of long-standing programmes, leading to the comprehensive reform of policies. What distinguished the influential evaluations from those that had less of an impact was the scale and scope of change achieved. Among the most salient outcomes was an increase in government funding and ownership, showing that evaluations can contribute to sustainability - an area that has been flagged for improvement in UNICEF.

Among the most exciting findings were the multiple examples of social change -paradigm shifts in how problems are addressed. In some cases, the evaluations demonstrated effective policy solutions to long-standing problems. In other cases, evaluation influence was achieved by challenging existing thinking and approaches. As indicated in theories of the policy process, this type of influence is rare and difficult to achieve; the number of cases cited is a tribute to UNICEF programmes and advocacy for children, as well as its investment in credible and relevant evaluations.
However, the study found fewer examples of diffusion – that is, the replication of programmes and policies to new contexts. This finding indicates that UNICEF still has room to improve when it comes to sharing evaluation evidence and knowledge across countries and externally, a strategy essential to accelerating progress for children in line with Agenda 2030. Likewise, the study identified room for improvement in the attention to external opportunities and contexts. The evaluations in the sample were largely timed to internal programming cycles, and a stronger orientation to SDG national reviews and policy windows could further strengthen evaluation influence.

In analyzing why and how these evaluations were influential, a picture emerges of interconnected and mutually reinforcing factors. Evaluations that were strategic and designed for utilization, well-resourced, and had strong ownership by staff and partners tended to be the most influential. Underlying these factors was championing and support from senior management. When it comes to knowledge exchange and communication, the findings suggest that more effort is needed to make evaluation findings accessible to wider audiences, including stakeholders, policymakers and the public. To do so requires a shift away from viewing evaluation only as an accountability exercise, but also as an opportunity to leverage credible evidence for children.

While the study revealed a compelling range of evaluation influence – and the salient factors that contribute to influence – it also raised a number of questions. Further research should help to answer these questions and inform the development of guidance to further increase evaluation influence across the organization.