Evaluation of Innovation in UNICEF Work
Synthesis Report
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PREFACE

Beginning in 2014, UNICEF embraced innovation as one of its key strategies to achieve results for children. That commitment is reaffirmed in its current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and is evident in the organization’s programming and institutional architecture. Indeed, since 2014, significant progress has occurred in a relatively short period of time, backed by clear strategic intent and targeted investment. A number of formal structures have evolved, and new milestones achieved. Further, innovation ranks high on the agenda of UNICEF’s new Executive Director.

With the increased foothold of innovation in UNICEF, it is important and timely to take stock of these efforts through high quality evidence to inform decision-making, learning and accountability. As UNICEF moves into the second year of its current Strategic Plan (SP), addressing these knowledge gaps has acquired renewed urgency, and is the subject of the present evaluation. This evaluation analyses the extent to which UNICEF is optimally positioned (‘fit for purpose’) to implement innovation as a strategy.

The evaluation comes at a time when the organization is considering how best to maximize its resources for innovation. It is our intent that the evaluation should inform those decisions in an impartial manner, backed by credible evidence.

The approach taken for this evaluation was new and different for the Evaluation Office, designed to create rigorous evaluation products over a shorter timeframe. It was a modular evaluation, with distinct pieces of work that culminated in the present synthesis report. I’d like to thank Deloitte Canada, which led the design and conduct of innovation case studies, and Moore Stephens, which led the organizational assessment. This evaluation was made possible through the collective efforts of UNICEF staff and partners across levels. Twenty-eight country offices supported the evaluation, either through remote study or country visit. Each of the innovation case studies had a set of case ‘owners’ who provided essential input and guidance to the evaluation team. The Evaluation Reference Group and the heads of divisions that are directly involved in innovation were highly engaged and provided timely and considered advice throughout. Reference Group members included: Tanya Accone, Kristoffer Gandrup Marino, Ana Cristina Matos, Christian Larsson, Mari Denby, Ian Thorpe, Raquel Wexler and Hawi Bedasa. I’d also like to thank Beth Plowman, who designed and managed the evaluation and brought her own expertise to bear by providing inputs to finalize the report. Finally, thanks to Celeste Lebowitz, Geeta Dey and Dalma Rivero, who provided administrative support, and Erin Tettensor, who supported the writing and editing of the report.

George Laryea-Adjei
Director, Evaluation Office
UNICEF
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<td>ARIDA</td>
<td>Acute Respiratory Infection Diagnostic Aid</td>
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<td>ASR</td>
<td>Accelerated School Readiness</td>
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<td>Annual Work Plan</td>
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<td>EAPR(O)</td>
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<td>Global Innovations Centre</td>
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<td>GSS</td>
<td>Global Staff Survey</td>
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<td>HQ</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>OECD-DAC</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<td>OED</td>
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<td>Office Management Plan</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Introduction

The world is changing faster than ever before, and so too are the challenges facing its most vulnerable. Conflict and displacement, disasters and climate change, urbanization and disease outbreaks are growing increasingly complex and inter-related, demanding new strategies and approaches. Innovation for development – exploring new ways of delivering programmes, with new partners and new technologies – is increasingly recognized as crucial to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNICEF has made innovation a corporate priority. Yet the extent to which this investment has translated into meaningful and sustainable outcomes for children has not been systematically analysed. Neither has the organization undergone an assessment to determine the extent to which it is optimally positioned (‘fit for purpose’) to implement innovation as a strategy. As UNICEF moves into the second year of its current Strategic Plan (SP), addressing these knowledge gaps has acquired renewed urgency, and is the subject of the present evaluation.

Evaluation purpose and scope

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to generate important information for organizational learning and accountability. The evaluation objective was to assess UNICEF’s ‘fitness for purpose’ to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve the outcomes and goals defined in its strategic plans for the period 2014-2021. It also sought to provide insights on how innovation contributes to UNICEF’s goals and objectives, as well as how innovation might contribute to increasingly effective organizational responses in the coming years. Accordingly, the evaluation examines innovation in both a retrospective and formative manner.

The evaluation was conducted through separate yet inter-related projects corresponding to the main lines of inquiry. These included innovation case studies, an organizational assessment, and a synthesis to integrate learning and generate conclusions and recommendations. This report covers the synthesis and represents the final evaluation report.

Based on this design, each of the two main elements (i.e. the organizational assessment and case studies) was intended to contribute to the overarching synthesis in a specific manner. The purpose of the organizational assessment was to provide evidence on UNICEF’s ‘fitness for purpose’ to innovate as a key strategy to achieve its outcomes and goals from 2014-2021 as defined in its prior and current SPs. The purpose of the innovation case studies was to provide evidence of how specific innovations have progressed through stages of development from ideation to scale, with in-depth consideration of multiple pathways and dynamics that underpin innovation within the organization.

The intended users of the evaluation are primarily an internal audience of UNICEF decision-makers, across levels. The synthesis report will serve as a tool for UNICEF to assess its progress in innovation and make decisions regarding future directions. The 13 innovation case studies are expected 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.

The evaluation covers the period corresponding to two strategy cycles, namely 2014-2017 and 2018-2021. To the extent possible, activities in 2018 were included. The evaluation looks across various organizational units at headquarters (HQ) and other levels (i.e. regional and country offices), and considers countries with varying degrees of capacity.

The scoping for this evaluation showed a wide variety of types of innovation across UNICEF. The following categories were used to help structure the lines of inquiry:

- ‘Hard’ technologies, commonly referred to as “product innovation” within UNICEF; to enable sector-specific results, with examples including diagnostic tools for the prevention of diseases, emergency shelters or water pumps;
- Information and communications technology (ICT), particularly mobile technologies, as cross-sectoral enablers for information...
management, service delivery, performance monitoring, participation and advocacy;

- Innovative methodologies, approaches and processes (‘soft’ technologies) like behaviour change approaches or design thinking, allowing for wider programmatic impact.

The organizational assessment (OA) used a framework that builds on studies of organizational effectiveness in promoting and managing the innovation cycle. The framework groups these themes into three overarching categories: values, structure and systems.

1. **Organizational values** – The collective ‘ways of thinking’ that shape the manner in which staff work and influence the wider organizational culture, with specific reference to UNICEF’s innovation activity.

2. **Organizational structures** – UNICEF’s institutional architecture, including the configuration of staff and departments across the organization and its individual parts. These structures influence what kind of innovation takes place, as well as where and when it occurs.

3. **Organizational systems** – The processes and networks supporting the flow of information, knowledge and resources that support UNICEF’s work.

These thematic areas provided the structure both for the OA fieldwork and the findings presented in this synthesis report. The main questions addressed through the evaluation are as follows:

**Values:**

- To what extent is innovation implemented as a global strategy for UNICEF?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s organizational culture stimulate or incentivize innovative thinking?
- To what extent is UNICEF able to accept the risks associated with pursuing innovative solutions?
- To what extent do UNICEF’s innovation approaches and initiatives foster ownership among government and other entities? To what extent are they aligned with national priorities and agendas?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s approach to innovation support its equity agenda (disability, gender, ethnicity)?

**Structures:**

- To what extent do formal structures exist to support innovation in different parts of the organization?
- To what extent does the decentralized nature of UNICEF affect its innovation work? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses for innovation work within this structure?
- To what extent does UNICEF adopt / mainstream innovation within its programmes?
- To what extent is space created for new ideas by ‘intrapreneurs’?
- How effectively does UNICEF leverage resources for innovation across offices, divisions and levels?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s engagement with industry and the private sector benefit innovation?
- How effectively does UNICEF leverage resources for innovation from diverse sources?

**Systems:**

- Are skills and expertise for innovation adequately developed and appropriately distributed through the organization?
- Does UNICEF have adequate staff capacity for providing leadership, advocacy and technical guidance/support in innovation? If not, what factors are constraining effective performance?
- To what extent is UNICEF’s innovation work designed and implemented according to quality programme planning and design principles?
- To what extent do UNICEF management practices facilitate the implementation of innovation as a strategy?
- To what extent does the UNICEF management model respond to practical needs for innovation?
- Does UNICEF’s approach to innovation contribute effectively to organizational learning, including evidence from ‘failures’?
- To what extent have learning and insight generated by innovation been used to shape UNICEF’s approach to programmes?
• How effectively are activities, results and good practices of innovation work documented and shared?

For the case studies, a mixed methods approach was used to examine the innovation process in specific instances with a focus on key issues, lessons, challenges and successes. Data were gathered through desktop review, key informant interviews, and where appropriate, observation and online surveys. Nine of the 13 case studies had field missions to countries where the innovation under study was being implemented. Data collection methods used in the OA included interviews with staff in twenty-five country offices, all regional offices and headquarters units as well an online survey and document review.

Overall, the evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach with a summative emphasis (2014-2017). The evaluation methodologies are primarily qualitative and based on key informant interviews as linked to an online survey. To the extent possible, the evaluation also draws on existing in-house sources of information, including the Global Staff Surveys (GSS), SP-linked key performance indicators, office plans, annual reports and financial data. To the extent possible, triangulation was conducted between sources and methods.

Conclusions

Organizational values

For the purposes of this evaluation, “values” are defined as collective ways of thinking that shape the way an organization works. To assess the role of UNICEF’s values in supporting innovation, the evaluation examined a number of elements including (a) the extent to which there is strategic clarity around innovation, as well as the extent to which that strategy is implemented; (b) whether organizational culture incentivizes innovation and its associated risks; and (c) how the approaches used to partner with programme countries foster ownership among government and other entities.

On the theme of organizational values, the evaluation found that UNICEF has clearly signalled its strategic intent through placement of innovation as a core element in strategic plans spanning the period of 2014-2021.

However, the evidence suggests that UNICEF, overall, is falling short on actual implementation. Based on KPI data, slightly more than half of COs (55 per cent) reported use of innovation as an implementing strategy (2017). Similarly, just over half (55 per cent) of staff agreed or strongly agreed that ‘new ideas and innovations are supported in my office’, based on the global staff survey (2018).

Aspects of organizational culture appear as barriers to innovation. Based on multiple sources, staff feel that risk-taking and acceptance of failure are largely absent. Only one third of online survey respondents felt that staff were encouraged to take risks in order to innovate, and a similar proportion agreed that their COs have created space to discuss and learn from failures. Some respondents pointed to the requirements of donor funding as a factor in low risk acceptance. However, the weight of the evidence pointed to a set of ingrained management practices as a greater impediment.

There were mixed opinions as to the extent of management support for innovation. Where staff do feel enabled to innovate, a critical factor is the supportive stance of their immediate supervisors. In these instances, managers are credited with creating the ‘space’ for innovation. At country level, the role of the representative and deputy representative is a critical factor in how staff perceive innovation and their ability to pursue it.

However, staff still work through the time-consuming procedures related to fundraising, recruitment and procurements. While these processes may work with traditional partners (e.g. line ministries), they are not well suited to engaging the private sector, where more nimble processes may be needed. In addition, innovative work is often seen as ‘something extra’ running parallel to routine programming.

Another significant obstacle to progress is the differing understandings of innovation among staff. To some extent, this limited shared understanding centres on the role of technologies in UNICEF’s work on innovation. Many respond-
ents felt that UNICEF had come to focus too greatly on technologies, particularly digital technologies, as representing innovation, to the detriment of other potential approaches like product innovation and programming approaches.

UNICEF could account for the context in which different COs and ROs work in a more systematic manner. Understanding of the innovation ecosystem within which UNICEF is an actor is a necessity, and staff should be supported to assess and operate within the innovation ecosystem with the people, processes and resources required to do so.

UNICEF’s experience with working with programme country partners demonstrates that considerable attention to issues of ownership is needed, including planning for the necessary steps, resources and time required to achieve this. Likewise, planning should also examine and account for the systems capacities to fully implement innovations, including how those may need to be strengthened and the duration and resources needed to achieve this.

Organizational structures

For the purposes of this evaluation, “structures” refer to UNICEF’s institutional architecture, including its physical footprint, governance and administration, and the formal and informal configuration of staff and departments throughout the organization. These structures influence what kind of innovation takes place, as well as where and when it occurs. Data collection involved offices and units with an innovation remit (i.e. OoI, ICTD, SD IU) as well as the wider set of structures that promote and support innovation across levels. The emphasis was on internal structures; external-facing arrangements such as partnerships were included to a limited extent.

During the period covered by the evaluation, there has been considerable change within the three units with innovation remit (OoI, SD IU, ICTD). Entering into the period 2018-2021, strategies and OMPs of these units show diverse approaches to issues such as risk management and governance as well as shifts in direction based on the SP and new priorities (e.g. ICT Strategy, Products and Markets Global Supply Strategy of the Supply Division). As these changes play out, it will be important to clarify and communicate these new roles and how they relate to other units with formal innovation remit.

Overall, staff awareness of these structures and their ability to support innovative ideas is relatively low. The findings suggest that far greater investment is needed to translate the innovation work of these structures into scalable programmes.

While the OoI was viewed positively for its ability to ‘think outside the box’, respondents saw a number of ways in which its practices lacked transparency and appeared incongruent with priorities on the ground. Some interviewees clearly expected that the fairly recently-created office would help them navigate potential donor and partner relationships (including private, for-profit) and advise them on the innovation work within their country programmes.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the institutional architecture for innovation is the highly decentralized nature of UNICEF. Consistent with this, much innovation within UNICEF occurs in a diffused manner outside of the formally-recognized innovation structures. UNICEF’s decentralized structure has both benefited and hindered innovative activity in a variety of ways in recent years. Important benefits of the decentralized structure include strong partnerships with country actors, knowledge of in-country situations, and understanding of stakeholder needs. In general, UNICEF COs are best placed to develop solutions to problems taking the local context into consideration, to align with country priorities and to integrate into country-level plans and systems.

However, this structure also makes it more difficult to move ideas through the hierarchy, and the onus for fundraising falls more on country-level staff. These factors can result in projectization or a piecemeal organizational approach to innovation, with small sums of money, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer. It is particularly frustrating for CO staff to have nurtured an innovation, demonstrated its effectiveness and then have no funds available for taking it to scale.
Many recognized that support for COs could not follow a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model and that differing solutions would be needed based on an assessment of needs. The role of the deputy representatives emerged as particularly pivotal in encouraging innovation, working cross-sec-torally and integrating new ways of doing things into programmes.

Both CO and RO staff interviewees felt that central units could support them more effectively by acting as mediators or translators for innovation activities, by brokering contact with relevant innovation experts and by supporting their fundraising efforts for innovation.

UNICEF has long experience in supporting the development, testing and mainstreaming of innovations. In the cases studied, ecosystem factors that particularly impacted on UNICEF’s support to mainstreaming an innovation included the presence of a policy or framework, capacities of the individuals and systems that will eventually operate the innovation, and having a funder with the intent to bring to scale.

UNICEF is not entirely clear about the staffing model it is pursuing with regard to innovation capacity – whether it is seeking to concentrate innovation skills and activities in certain specialist teams or rather to mainstream innovation across the workforce. There was recognition from respondents of the benefits of having an embedded team member with innovation skills and ‘know-how’. Several skill sets were mentioned that would better enable UNICEF’s innovation, some of which could be strengthened among existing staff. To date, however, innovation work has been heavily reliant on external consultants working through short-term agreements. Issues of ‘in-sourcing’ versus ‘out-sourcing’ of these skills have yet to be addressed.

During the period 2014-2017, innovation was treated in a manner similar to the other well-established implementation strategies (e.g. inclusion in expenditure coding, KPIs, annual report templates). However, guidance around these and other programme planning and results-based management systems (e.g. CPDs, annual reports, etc.) provides scant consideration of innovation. This limited guidance to staff reduces the degree to which even the most effective management practices can embed innovative behaviours and approaches, and hence support innovation activity.

A point that emerged repeatedly during fieldwork for the evaluation was that the very hierarchical management style of the organization was seen to influence its approach to innovation. Notable was the key role of senior staff across a range of organizational units (notably representatives, deputy representa-tives and directors) in setting the ‘tone from the top’ with regard to innovation. The fact that
the majority of UNICEF staff feel that there is no clear message about their role in innovation confirms that these issues have yet to be sufficiently addressed. Compounding this is the lack of emphasis on a matrix approach to management which has the potential to reduce the prevalence of silos and very hierarchical decision-making structures.

There are contrasting opinions within the agency as to the correct focus for UNICEF’s innovation activities – notably between focusing on existing, tried-and-tested technologies that need scaling up vis-à-vis those that need developing from early stages. Other agencies have used a portfolio management approach as a tool to find that balance. Use of a portfolio management approach could help UNICEF to ensure that its resources are well-aligned with its strategic priorities, its comparative advantages and unique positioning.

Despite the existence of various fora for information-sharing, there is scope for UNICEF to achieve more consistent recording, documenting and disseminating of innovation-related lessons. Currently, the lack of such institutionalized knowledge management and feedback loops limits UNICEF’s ability to learn from successes and failures. This issue is compounded by a reluctance to highlight perceived ‘failure’ more widely – even where this could provide significant learning opportunities and improved effectiveness going forward. Structured documentation processes, such as that used in the SD IU Innovation Review Board, should be reviewed as good practice.

In making resource decisions, the team found that UNICEF’s financial management systems provide limited information on budgeted and actual expenditure on innovation. The best available data suggest that spending on innovation has tripled between 2014 and 2017, from $14 to $44 million. However, the system underlying these figures does not allow UNICEF management to readily obtain a comprehensive, forward-looking innovation budget, or a comprehensive retrospective financial analysis. As a result, UNICEF management cannot easily obtain a clear global overview of spending on innovation within the organization, let alone a view on the robustness (or otherwise) of innovation budgeting in a given office or unit.

UNICEF has the capacity to provide and leverage considerable amounts of funding for innovation, and is working in several important ways to leverage external resources for innovation to benefit children. These engagements are taking on new and different forms including the development of priority shared value partnerships, consultations with industry around products, and market-shaping. These developments should be closely monitored to allow fine-tuning of approach.

Despite these efforts, however, there are clearly barriers to finding funds for innovation. The majority of UNICEF staff feel that there are insufficient resources for innovation and a lack of clarity in processes to access funds for that purpose.

Recommendations

Recommendation area 1: Develop a shared strategic vision and approach that directly addresses fundamental constraints in the current approach and drives decision-making across the organization.

UNICEF should be commended for clearly signalling its intent to use innovation as a means of delivering results for children. However, UNICEF can achieve greater organizational coherence and impact by establishing a strategic vision and approach that builds on a shared understanding of priority challenges and informs decision-making across the organization. UNICEF’s strategic vision and approach must include considerations and principles on innovation in humanitarian settings.

The approach needs to directly address key barriers and impediments to innovation through the development of UNICEF-wide positions on:

a. Lack of appetite for risk as a major impediment to innovation;

b. How different parts of the organization contribute to innovation;

c. Commitment to increased transparency of governance/oversight and decision-making roles within dedicated innovation units;
d. More standardized approaches and processes, based on good practices already used in parts of the organization, should be adapted for wider use;

e. Clarity on medium- and long-term staff requirements to enable implementation of innovation as a core strategy.

f. Greater attention to and investment in learning and uptake.

Recommendation area 2: Act on needed structural change to advance innovation as a means of achieving results for children.

The period 2014-2017 saw many changes regarding the innovation architecture. However, many staff are dissatisfied with the current organizational set-up and there appears to be appetite for structural changes within UNICEF to address many of the issues identified throughout the evaluation. To that end, in the final stage of the evaluation, options have been developed for the organization’s consideration. Key elements emerging from these options include the following:

UNICEF has unique strengths in its decentralized structure and strong collective capacities at centralized levels. Ample attention is needed at the local level regarding ideas, projects/products to prioritize and how to take these to scale. At the same time, strong central units are needed to leverage the power of the whole through learning from both failures and successes across settings and working towards systematized and replicable approaches. As part of any structural adjustment, UNICEF should balance these structures, their respective strengths and roles.

In order to provide clear strategic vision and manage the wide-ranging innovation portfolio, a senior management role is needed at the Deputy Executive Director level to oversee the various dimensions of organization’s agenda. This post would have direct responsibility for aspects of the innovation portfolio, notably new Innovation Enabling Services teams, as well as serving as the focal point for matrix management of innovation capacities and resources across UNICEF. This position would also have responsibilities for working closely with managers of internal systems (e.g. budgeting, recruitment) to develop needed adaptations for the purposes of innovation.

Innovation Enabling Services teams should also be created, with responsibility for portfolio management and prioritization as well as development and provision of frameworks, tools and processes, monitoring, evaluation, knowledge-sharing, learning and feedback. These teams would support country offices in a range of activities such as identifying and engaging new and/or unfamiliar partners (e.g. local tele-communication firms), partnership arrangements (e.g. shared values partnerships, innovative financing), systems issues and funding opportunities (e.g. identifying funding sources and options for differing types and stages of innovation processes). For certain innovations, COs may require support capacity to scan the innovation ecosystem with consideration of risks associated with legal, data, and regulatory framework issues.

Currently, the roles and responsibilities of existing units with innovation remit are unclear to some and suggest potential overlap. Therefore, as part of recommended structural changes, leadership for digital innovation should be housed under the ICT Division, which should also bring together various parts of headquarters that are currently working on digital innovation. Appropriate measures should be instituted to mitigate any adverse effect of this recommendation on other core functions of the ICT Division.

There is a need for dedicated innovation staff in COs, especially in medium to large programmes, and also in ROs. The role played by the regional T4D specialists is, in general, widely recognized and appreciated and should serve as a model. Innovation staff are best placed under the deputy representative as a means to ensure programme relevance and cross-sector participation. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ model for this support, and efforts should be tailored to specific country and CO variables. UNICEF should also ensure that the ‘eco-system’ in which an innovation is unfolding is well understood, and should garner ownership and anticipate the requirements of scale, hand-over and exit.
Recommendation area 3: Utilize a portfolio management approach for innovation.

UNICEF has yet to clarify how its unique structures and resources are optimally positioned to innovation and scale – whether to focus on existing, tried-and-tested technologies that need scaling up or to emphasize those that need developing from early stages. UNICEF should use a portfolio management approach to ensure that its resources are well aligned with its strategic priorities, comparative advantages and acceptable levels of risk. Such an approach should help mitigate or overcome the projectization or piecemeal organizational approach to innovation in which small sums of money, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer are common. A portfolio approach should be utilized in which the time and resources dedicated to innovation initiatives are weighed accordingly. Portfolio management should inform decision-making by identifying who is doing what in innovation across the organization, what resources are being spent and what results are being measured.

A more detailed version of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations appears below.
Introduction

Le monde change plus rapidement que jamais et il en va de même des difficultés auxquelles se heurtent les groupes les plus vulnérables. Les conflits et les déplacements de populations, les catastrophes naturelles et les changements climatiques, l’urbanisation et les épidémies de maladies sont autant de facteurs qui deviennent de plus en plus complexes et interdépendants et qui exigent l’adoption de nouvelles stratégies et approches. L’innovation au service du développement (l’examen de nouvelles façons d’exécuter les programmes, avec de nouveaux partenaires et à l’aide de nouvelles technologies) est de plus en plus reconnue comme essentielle pour la réalisation des objectifs de développement durable et la concrétisation de la promesse du Programme de développement durable à l’horizon 2030.

L’UNICEF a fait de l’innovation une priorité dans l’ensemble de l’organisation. Or, la mesure dans laquelle cet investissement s’est traduit par des résultats significatifs et durables en faveur des enfants n’a pas été systématiquement analysée. L’organisation n’a pas non plus évalué jusqu’à quel point elle est positionnée de façon optimale (« adapté aux objectifs visés ») pour mettre en œuvre l’innovation en tant que stratégie. Alors que l’UNICEF entrait dans la deuxième année de son actuel Plan stratégique (PS), le comblement de ces lacunes dans les connaissances a acquis une urgence nouvelle et fait l’objet de la présente évaluation.

But et portée de l’évaluation


L’évaluation a été effectuée dans le cadre de projets distincts mais interdépendants qui correspondaient aux principaux champs d’enquête, à savoir : des études de cas d’innovation, une évaluation organisationnelle et une synthèse destinée à intégrer l’apprentissage et à formuler des conclusions et recommandations. Le présent document constitue à la fois cette synthèse et le rapport d’évaluation final.

Conformément à ce modèle, chacun des deux éléments principaux (l’évaluation organisationnelle et la série d’études de cas) avait pour objet de contribuer de manière spécifique à la synthèse globale. L’évaluation organisationnelle visait à recueillir des données factuelles sur le degré d’« adaptation aux objectifs visés » de l’UNICEF lui permettant de mettre en œuvre l’innovation en tant que stratégie clé pour atteindre ses résultats et ses buts entre 2014 et 2021, tels qu’ils ont été définis dans le PS antérieur et le PS actuel. Les études de cas d’innovation avaient pour finalité de fournir des données probantes sur les manières dont des innovations précises avaient franchi les stades d’élaboration, de l’idéation jusqu’au déploiement à grande échelle, tout en prenant en considération, de manière approfondie, les multiples cheminements et dynamiques qui sous-tendent l’innovation au sein de l’organisation.

Les utilisateurs prévus de l’évaluation sont essentiellement un public interne de décideurs de l’UNICEF à tous les échelons de l’organisation. Le rapport de synthèse servira d’outil qui permettra à l’UNICEF d’évaluer ses progrès
en matière d’innovation et de prendre des décisions au sujet des orientations futures. On compte que les 13 études de cas d’innovation seront utilisées en tant qu’outil de partage des connaissances par le personnel de l’UNICEF, ainsi que par un éventail de parties prenantes comprenant les partenaires gouvernementaux, les autres organismes et initiatives des Nations Unies, les partenaires du développement et les responsables de la mise en œuvre.


La détermination de la portée de l’évaluation a mis en lumière une grande variété de types d’innovation au sein de l’UNICEF. Nous avons utilisé les catégories d’innovations suivantes en vue de structurer les champs d’enquête :

- les technologies « dures », couramment appelées des « innovations de produit » à l’UNICEF, qui permettent d’obtenir des résultats propres à un secteur — mentionnons comme exemples les outils diagnostiques de prévention des maladies, les refuges d’urgence et les pompes à eau ;
- les technologies de l’information et de la communication (TIC), en particulier les technologies mobiles, en tant que catalyseurs intersectoriels de la gestion de l’information, de la prestation de services, du suivi de la performance, de la participation et des actions de plaidoyer ;
- les méthodologies, approches et processus innovants (les technologies « douces ») tels que les approches axées sur le changement des comportements ou la réflexion conceptuelle, pouvant engendrer un plus vaste impact programmatique.

1. Valeurs organisationnelles. Les « modes de pensée » collectifs qui façonnent les méthodes de travail du personnel et qui influent sur la plus vaste culture organisationnelle, en particulier dans le contexte des activités d’innovation de l’UNICEF.


3. Systèmes organisationnels. Les processus et les réseaux qui soutiennent les flux d’informations, de connaissances et de ressources en faveur du travail de l’UNICEF.

Ces champs thématiques ont constitué la structure du travail d’évaluation organisationnelle sur le terrain et des constatations présentées dans le rapport de synthèse. Les principales questions examinées dans le cadre de l’évaluation ont été les suivantes :

Valeurs :

- Dans quelle mesure l’innovation est-elle mise en œuvre en tant que stratégie mondiale pour l’UNICEF ?
- Dans quelle mesure la culture organisationnelle de l’UNICEF encourage-t-elle ou stimule-t-elle la réflexion innovante ?
- Dans quelle mesure l’UNICEF est-il à même d’accepter les risques associés à l’application de solutions innovantes ?
- Dans quelle mesure les approches et initiatives de l’UNICEF en matière d’innovation favorisent-elles l’appropriation par les gouvernements et autres entités ? Jusqu’à quel point s’alignent-elles sur les priorités et programmes nationaux ?
- Dans quelle mesure l’approche de l’UNICEF en matière d’innovation appuie-t-elle son programme d’équité (handicap, égalité des sexes, appartenance ethnique) ?
Structures :
• Dans quelle mesure existe-t-il des structures officielles favorisant l’innovation dans les différentes parties de l’organisation ?
• Dans quelle mesure la nature décentralisée de l’UNICEF influe-t-elle sur son travail d’innovation ? Quelles sont les forces et faiblesses relatives en ce qui concerne le travail d’innovation au sein de cette structure ?
• Dans quelle mesure l’UNICEF adopte-t-il ou généralise-t-il l’innovation au sein de ses programmes ?
• Dans quelle mesure l’UNICEF tire-t-il profit des ressources en faveur de l’innovation dans les bureaux, les divisions et les niveaux organisationnels ?
• Dans quelle mesure l’engagement de l’UNICEF avec l’industrie et le secteur privé contribue-t-il à l’innovation ?
• Dans quelle mesure le travail d’innovation de l’UNICEF est-il conçu et mis en œuvre selon une planification de programme et des principes de conception de qualité ?

Systèmes :
• Les compétences et l’expertise en matière d’innovation sont-elles adéquatement développées et réparties de manière appropriée dans l’ensemble de l’organisation ?
• L’UNICEF possède-t-il des capacités suffisantes en personnel pour assurer un leadership, mener des actions de plaidoyer et fournir des orientations ou un appui technique dans le contexte de l’innovation ? Sinon, quels facteurs restreignent l’efficacité de la performance ?
• Dans quelle mesure le travail d’innovation de l’UNICEF est-il conçu et mis en œuvre selon une planification de programme et des principes de conception de qualité ?
• Dans quelle mesure les pratiques de gestion de l’UNICEF facilitent-elles la mise en application de l’innovation en tant que stratégie ?
• Dans quelle mesure le modèle de gestion de l’UNICEF répond-il aux besoins pratiques en matière d’innovation ?
• Dans quelle mesure l’approche de l’UNICEF à l’égard de l’innovation contribue-t-elle efficacement à l’apprentissage organisationnel, notamment sous l’angle des données factuelles concernant les « échecs » ?
• Dans quelle mesure les apprentissages et les aperçus générés par l’innovation ont-ils été utilisés pour façonner l’approche de l’UNICEF vis-à-vis des programmes ?
• Avec quelle efficacité les activités, les résultats et les bonnes pratiques se rapportant au travail d’innovation sont-ils documentés et partagés ?


Conclusions

Valeurs organisationnelles

Pour les besoins de la présente évaluation, les « valeurs » sont définies comme étant des modes de pensée collectifs qui façonnent la
manner dont une organisation travaille. Afin d’évaluer le rôle des valeurs de l’UNICEF dans l’appui à l’innovation, l’évaluation a examiné un certain nombre d’éléments, notamment : a) la mesure dans laquelle il existe une clarté stratégique relative à l’innovation et la mesure dans laquelle cette stratégie est mise en œuvre ; b) le fait que la culture organisationnelle encourage ou non l’innovation et les risques qui y sont associés ; c) les façons dont les approches utilisées pour former des partenariats avec les pays de programme favorisent une appropriation par les gouvernements et autres entités.


Des aspects de la culture organisationnelle apparaissent comme étant des obstacles à l’innovation. Selon de multiples sources, les membres du personnel estiment que la prise de risques et l’acceptation des échecs sont largement inexistantes. Seul le tiers des répondants au sondage en ligne estimait que le personnel était encouragé à prendre des risques afin d’innover, et une proportion comparable se disait d’accord avec le fait que le bureau de pays avait créé un espace permettant de discuter des échecs et d’en tirer des leçons. Certains répondants ont signalé que les exigences liées au financement par les donateurs constituent un facteur expliquant la faible acceptation des risques. Cependant, la majeure partie des données factuelles indiquait que la présence d’un ensemble de pratiques de gestion profondément ancrées constituait un obstacle de plus grande importance.

Les avis étaient partagés sur la mesure dans laquelle la direction appuie l’innovation. Dans les cas où les employés se sentent autorisés à innover, un facteur crucial est l’attitude de soutien de leurs supérieurs immédiats. Dans de tels cas, les gestionnaires sont reconnus pour avoir créé l’« espace » nécessaire à l’innovation. Au niveau des pays, le rôle du représentant et du représentant adjoint a une influence déterminante sur la façon dont les employés perçoivent l’innovation et leur capacité à la mettre en œuvre.

Néanmoins, le personnel doit toujours composer avec les procédures chronophages liées à la collecte de fonds, au recrutement et aux achats. Bien que ces processus puissent être efficaces avec les partenaires traditionnels (p. ex., les ministères d’exécution), ils se prêtent mal à une mobilisation du secteur privé, où des processus plus souples peuvent être nécessaires. En outre, le travail innovant est souvent considéré comme un apport accessoire qui s’effectue en parallèle de la programmation courante.

Un autre important obstacle au progrès réside dans les compréhensions différentes de l’innovation au sein du personnel. Dans une certaine mesure, ce peu de compréhension commune concerne le rôle des technologies dans le travail d’innovation de l’UNICEF. De nombreux répondants estimaient que l’UNICEF en était venu à trop mettre l’accent sur les technologies (en particulier, les technologies numériques) comme représentant l’innovation, au détriment d’autres approches potentielles comme les innovations de produit et les approches programmatiques.

L’UNICEF pourrait rendre compte plus systématiquement du contexte dans lequel les différents bureaux de pays et bureaux régionaux travaillent. Comprendre l’écosystème d’innovation dans lequel l’UNICEF est un acteur est une nécessité et les employés devraient être encouragés à évaluer l’écosystème d’innovation et à y fonctionner avec les personnes, processus et ressources requis à cette fin.

L’expérience de travail de l’UNICEF avec les partenaires des pays de programme montre qu’une attention considérable à la question de l’appropriation s’impose, notamment pour ce qui est de planifier les étapes, les ressources et
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le temps nécessaires afin d’occasionner cette appropriation. De même, lors de la planification, on devrait examiner et rendre compte des capacités des systèmes à mener les innovations à bien, notamment en ce qui a trait à la nécessité potentielle de renforcer les innovations, ainsi qu’à la durée et aux ressources nécessaires pour y parvenir.

Structures organisationnelles

Pour les besoins de la présente évaluation, le terme « structures » désigne l’architecture institutionnelle de l’UNICEF, à savoir son empreinte physique, sa gouvernance et son administration, ainsi que la configuration formelle et informelle des effectifs et des unités dans l’ensemble de l’organisation. Ces structures exercent une influence sur les types d’innovation qui se produisent ainsi que sur les endroits et les moments où ils se produisent. La collecte de données a été axée sur les bureaux et les unités ayant des attributions en matière d’innovation (c.-à-d. le Bureau de l’innovation, la Division des technologies de l’information et de la communication et l’unité de l’innovation de la Division de l’approvisionnement), de même que sur le plus large ensemble de structures qui promeuvent et appuient l’innovation à tous les niveaux de l’organisation. La priorité a été accordée aux structures internes ; les arrangements avec des entités externes, tels que les partenariats, n’ont été inclus que de façon limitée.

Pendant la période visée par l’évaluation, il s’est produit des changements considérables dans les trois services ayant des attributions en matière d’innovation (Bureau de l’innovation, Division des technologies de l’information et de la communication, unité de l’innovation de la Division de l’approvisionnement). Pour la période 2018-2021 qui est maintenant amorcée, les stratégies et les plans de gestion de bureaux de ces trois unités traduisent des approches diverses à l’égard de questions comme la gestion des risques et la gouvernance, ainsi que des changements d’orientation fondés sur le Plan stratégique actuel et les nouvelles priorités (p. ex., stratégie relative aux technologies de l’information et de la communication, stratégie mondiale d’approvisionnement en matière de produits et de marchés de la Division de l’approvisionnement). À mesure que ces changements seront mis en œuvre, il importera de clarifier et de communiquer ces nouveaux rôles, aussi bien que leurs liens avec d’autres unités qui ont des attributions formelles en matière d’innovation.

Globalement, la connaissance par le personnel de ces structures et de leur capacité à appuyer les idées innovantes est relativement faible. Les conclusions laissent penser qu’il faudra effectuer un investissement beaucoup plus considérable pour traduire le travail d’innovation de ces structures en programmes pouvant être déployés à grande échelle.

Si le Bureau de l’innovation était considéré d’un œil positif en raison de sa capacité à « sortir des sentiers battus », en revanche, les répondants percevaient qu’à certains égards, ses pratiques manquaient de transparence et semblaient être incompatibles avec les priorités sur le terrain. Certains des employés interrogés s’attendaient manifestement à ce que ce bureau mis sur pied assez récemment les aide à gérer les relations avec les donateurs et partenaires potentiels (dont ceux du secteur privé à but lucratif) et qu’il les conseille au sujet du travail d’innovation dans le cadre de leurs programmes de pays.


Toutefois, cette structure rend encore plus difficile la tâche de faire cheminer les idées au
sein de la hiérarchie, et la responsabilité de la collecte de fonds incombe encore davantage au personnel des bureaux de pays. Ces facteurs peuvent conduire à une « projetisation », c’est-à-dire une approche organisationnelle fragmentée en matière d’innovation, s’accompagnant de petites sommes, de brefs cycles de financement, d’un roulement élevé du personnel et d’un transfert insuffisant des connaissances. Il est particulièrement frustrant pour les fonctionnaires des bureaux de pays d’avoir soigneusement fait progresser une innovation et d’en avoir démontré l’efficacité, pour voir ensuite qu’il n’y a pas de fonds disponibles pour la déployer à grande échelle.

Bon nombre reconnaissaient que le soutien aux bureaux de pays ne pouvait pas se conformer à un modèle unique et qu’il fallait adopter des solutions différentes fondues sur une évaluation des besoins. Le rôle des représentants adjoints a été mis en lumière comme étant particulièrement décisif pour ce qui est d’encourager l’innovation, de travailler sur un axe intersectoriel et d’intégrer de nouvelles façons de faire aux programmes.

Tant dans les bureaux de pays que dans les bureaux régionaux, les fonctionnaires interrogés estimaient que les groupes centraux pourraient les appuyer plus efficacement en faisant office de médiateurs ou de traducteurs des activités d’innovation, en facilitant les contacts avec les spécialistes de l’innovation pertinents et en appuyant leurs efforts de collecte de fonds en faveur de l’innovation.

L’UNICEF possède une longue expérience de soutien à l’élaboration d’innovations, à leur mise à l’essai et à leur généralisation. Dans les cas étudiés, les facteurs écosystémiques ayant une incidence particulière sur le soutien de l’UNICEF à la généralisation d’une innovation comprenaient l’existence d’une politique ou d’un cadre d’action, les capacités des personnes et des systèmes qui prendront ultérieurement l’innovation en charge et la présence d’un bailleur de fonds qui a l’intention de déployer l’innovation à grande échelle.

À mesure que le travail de l’UNICEF dans le domaine de l’innovation évoluera et sera axé sur de nouveaux défis, il importera de mobiliser de nouveaux partenaires. De nouvelles formes de partenariat sont utilisées pour engager le secteur privé, par exemple, les partenariats fondés sur des valeurs communes prioritaires. Les fonctionnaires interrogés se sont dits préoccupés par le fait que l’UNICEF (dans le cas présent, les bureaux de pays) ne soit peut-être pas suffisamment préparé à évaluer les risques avant de se coller avec les enjeux de la confidentialité des données ou de l’identité auto-souveraine.


Systèmes organisationnels

Pour les besoins de la présente évaluation, l’expression « systèmes organisationnels » est définie comme désignant les processus et les réseaux à l’appui des flux d’information, de connaissances et de ressources qui soutiennent le travail de l’UNICEF, y compris dans le domaine de l’innovation. Ces systèmes couvrent tant les aspects liés aux ressources humaines comme les capacités/moyens en matière d’effectifs et les systèmes et pratiques de gestion, que la gestion des connaissances et les systèmes qui servent à obtenir, mettre à profit et gérer des fonds en faveur de l’innovation. À certains égards, ce thème s’est avéré le plus difficile à évaluer, du fait que bon nombre des systèmes d’information existants ne permettent pas de ventiler les données jusqu’au niveau d’une stratégie spécifique comme l’innovation.

L’UNICEF n’a pas défini de façon entièrement claire le modèle de dotation en effectifs qu’il entend appliquer en ce qui a trait aux capacités d’innovation – c’est-à-dire, la question de savoir s’il entend concentrer les compétences et les activités en innovation au sein de certaines
équipes de spécialistes, ou plutôt généraliser l’innovation et l’étendre à l’ensemble des effectifs. Les répondants reconnaissaient les avantages d’intégrer à une équipe des membres possédant des compétences et un savoir-faire en innovation. Ils ont mentionné plusieurs ensembles de compétences qui facilitaient davantage l’innovation à l’UNICEF, et ont indiqué qu’il serait possible de renforcer certains de ces ensembles au sein du personnel existant. Jusqu’à présent, toutefois, le travail d’innovation a fortement tablé sur la conclusion d’ententes à court terme avec des consultants externes. Les questions liées au recours aux ressources internes, par opposition à l’externalisation, pour mettre à profit ces compétences n’ont pas encore été abordées.

Durant la période 2014-2017, la façon de traiter l’innovation était analogue à celle appliquée aux stratégies de mise en œuvre bien établies (p. ex., inclusion dans le codage des dépenses, indicateurs clés de performance, modèles de rapport annuel). Cependant, les orientations relatives à ces systèmes de planification de programme et de gestion axée sur les résultats ainsi que d’autres (p. ex., descriptifs de programme de pays, rapports annuels, etc.) ne prétendent guère attention à l’innovation. Ces orientations limitées à l’intention du personnel réduisent la mesure dans laquelle les pratiques de gestion même les plus efficaces peuvent intégrer les comportements et les approches innovants et soutenir ainsi les activités d’innovation.

Un point qui a été soulevé à maintes reprises pendant le travail sur le terrain effectué dans le cadre de l’évaluation est que le style de gestion très hiérarchique de l’organisation est vu comme influençant son approche de l’innovation. On a mentionné en particulier que les fonctionnaires de rang supérieur dans une série d’unités organisationnelles (notamment, les représentants, les représentants adjoints et les directeurs) jouaient un rôle clé en donnant le ton à partir du sommet de la pyramide en matière d’innovation. Le fait que la majorité des employés de l’UNICEF estiment ne pas avoir reçu de message clair sur leur rôle dans l’innovation confirme que ces questions n’ont toujours pas été adéquatement prises en considération. La situation est aggravée par le manque d’importance accordée à une approche matricielle de la gestion qui puisse réduire la prévalence des cloisonnements administratifs et des structures très hiérarchiques de prise de décisions. Il y a des opinions divergentes dans l’organisation sur la priorité exacte qui a été fixée pour les activités d’innovation de l’UNICEF – notamment, la question de savoir si l’accent doit être mis sur des technologies existantes et éprouvées ou sur des technologies qui en sont aux premiers stades de mise au point. D’autres organismes ont utilisé une approche de gestion de portefeuille comme outil pour trouver l’équilibre entre ces deux optiques. Une démarche de gestion de portefeuille pourrait aider l’UNICEF à bien aligner ses ressources sur ses priorités stratégiques, ses avantages comparatifs et son positionnement unique.


Au titre des décisions sur les ressources, l’équipe a constaté que les systèmes de gestion financière de l’UNICEF ne fournissent que des informations limitées sur les dépenses budgétisées et réelles dans le secteur de l’innovation. Les meilleures données disponibles indiquent que les dépenses en innovation ont triplé entre 2014 et 2017, passant de 14 à 44 millions de dollars. Cependant, le système qui sous-tend ces chiffres ne permet pas à la direction de l’UNICEF d’obtenir facilement un budget d’innovation prospectif complet ni une analyse financière rétrospective complète. Résultat : la direction de l’UNICEF ne peut pas obtenir facilement un aperçu mondial clair des dépenses en innovation au sein de l’organisation, a fortiori un aperçu de la robustesse (ou

Malgré ces efforts, toutefois, il existe manifestement des obstacles à la collecte de fonds pour l’innovation. La majorité des employés de l’UNICEF estiment que les ressources affectées à l’innovation sont insuffisantes et que les processus permettant d’accéder à des fonds à cette fin manquent de clarté.

Recommandations

Recommandation 1 : Élaborer une vision stratégique et une approche communes abordant directement les contraintes fondamentales de l’approche actuelle et guidant la prise de décisions dans toute l’organisation.


L’approche doit s’attaquer directement aux principaux obstacles et entraves à l’innovation en énonçant des positions à l’échelle de tout l’UNICEF sur les questions suivantes :

- le manque d’appétit pour le risque en tant qu’obstacle majeur à l’innovation ;
- les façons dont différentes parties de l’organisation contribuent à l’innovation ;
- un engagement envers une transparence accrue de la gouvernance et du contrôle, ainsi que des rôles décisionnels au sein des unités consacrées à l’innovation ;
- des approches et processus plus standardisés, fondés sur de bonnes pratiques déjà appliquées dans certaines parties de l’organisation, devraient être adaptés en vue d’une utilisation plus répandue ;
- la clarté sur les besoins en effectifs à moyen et long terme pour permettre la mise en œuvre de l’innovation en tant que stratégie fondamentale ;
- une plus grande attention à l’apprentissage et à la prise en charge, et un investissement accru à cet égard.

Recommandation 2 : Agir pour apporter les changements structurels nécessaires afin de faire progresser l’innovation en tant que moyen d’obtenir des résultats en faveur des enfants.


L’UNICEF possède des forces uniques du fait de sa structure décentralisée et de ses solides capacités collectives aux niveaux organisationnels centralisés. Il faut accorder beaucoup d’attention à l’échelon local en ce qui a trait aux idées, aux projets et produits à privilégier et au déploiement à grande échelle. Parallèlement, des unités centrales fortes sont nécessaires pour tirer profit du pouvoir que confère l’ensemble, en tirant des enseignements des échecs aussi bien que des succès dans tous les contextes, et en élaborant des approches
systématisées et reproductibles. Dans le cadre de tout ajustement structurel, l’UNICEF devrait viser l’équilibre entre ces structures ainsi qu’entre leurs points forts et rôles respectifs.

Afin d’établir une vision stratégique claire et de gérer le vaste portefeuille de l’innovation, il faut instituer une fonction de gestion de haut niveau, à l’échelon des directeurs généraux adjoints, assurant la supervision des diverses dimensions du programme de l’organisation. Le titulaire de ce poste serait directement responsable d’aspects du portefeuille d’innovation, notamment les nouvelles équipes de Services de facilitation de l’innovation, et deviendraient le référent pour la gestion matricielle des capacités et des ressources en matière d’innovation dans l’ensemble de l’UNICEF. Il aurait également la responsabilité de travailler en étroite collaboration avec les gestionnaires des systèmes internes (p. ex., budgétisation, recrutement) afin de mettre au point les adaptations nécessaires aux fins de l’innovation.

Des équipes de Services de facilitation de l’innovation devraient également être créées et être chargées de la gestion du portefeuille et de l’établissement des priorités, ainsi que des aspects suivants : l’élaboration et la mise à disposition de cadres d’action, d’outils et de processus, le suivi, l’évaluation, le partage des connaissances, l’apprentissage et les retours d’information. Ces équipes appuieraient les bureaux de pays dans le cadre d’une série d’activités telles que la détermination et la mobilisation de partenaires nouveaux et/ou peu connus (p. ex., entreprises de télécommunications locales), la conclusion de nouvelles modalités de partenariat (p. ex., partenariats axés sur les valeurs communes, financement innovant), les questions concernant les systèmes et les occasions de financement (p. ex., détermination des sources et options de financement pour différents types et stades de processus d’innovation). Dans le cas de certaines innovations, les bureaux de pays pourraient avoir besoin de capacités de soutien pour analyser l’écosystème d’innovation en prenant en considération les risques associés à des problèmes juridiques, de données et de cadre réglementaire.

À l’heure actuelle, les rôles et responsabilités des unités existantes qui ont des attributions en matière d’innovation ne sont pas clairs pour certains et semblent indiquer des chevauchements potentiels. Par conséquent, dans le cadre des changements structurels recommandés, le pilotage de l’innovation numérique devrait être intégré à la Division des technologies de l’information et de la communication, au sein de laquelle devraient aussi être rassemblées diverses unités du siège qui travaillent actuellement à l’innovation numérique. Des mesures appropriées devraient être instituées pour atténuant tout effet négatif de cette recommandation sur d’autres fonctions centrales de la Division.

Il est nécessaire d’affecter des employés spécialisés en innovation dans les bureaux de pays, particulièrement dans le cas des programmes de moyenne et grande ampleur, de même que dans les bureaux régionaux. Le rôle que jouent les spécialistes régionaux de la technologie au service du développement est, en général, largement reconnu et apprécié et devrait servir de modèle. Il est préférable que le personnel chargé de l’innovation relève du représentant adjoint, afin d’assurer la pertinence par rapport au programme et la participation intersectorielle. Il n’existe pas de modèle unique pour ce soutien et les efforts devraient être adaptés en fonction des variables spécifiques aux pays et aux bureaux de pays. L’UNICEF devrait également veiller à ce que l’« écosystème » dans lequel une innovation se déroule soit bien compris, et l’organisation devrait susciter l’appropriation ainsi que prévoir les besoins liés au déploiement à grande échelle, à la cession et à la sortie.

Recommandation 3 : Adopter une approche de gestion de portefeuille pour l’innovation.

L’UNICEF n’a pas encore clarifié comment ses structures et ressources uniques seront positionnées de façon optimale en faveur de l’innovation et du déploiement à grande échelle – la question de savoir si l’accent doit être mis sur des technologies existantes et éprouvées afin d’en accroître l’échelle, ou sur des technologies en phase de développement – est le sujet d’une vérification par des experts de l’innovation. L’UNICEF devrait adopter une approche de gestion de portefeuille pour veiller à bien aligner ses ressources sur ses priorités stratégiques, ses avantages comparatifs et des niveaux de risque acceptables. Cela devrait
contribuer à atténuer ou à surmonter la « projétisation », c'est-à-dire l’approche organisationnelle fragmentée en matière d’innovation, qui s’accompagne fréquemment de petites sommes, de brefs cycles de financement, d’un roulement élevé du personnel et d’un transfert insuffisant des connaissances. Il faudrait appliquer une approche de portefeuille dans le cadre de laquelle le temps et les ressources consacrés à l’innovation sont pondérés en conséquence. La gestion de portefeuille devrait étayer la prise de décisions, en identifiant qui fait quoi dans le domaine de l’innovation à l’échelle de l’organisation, quelles ressources y sont consacrées et quels résultats sont mesurés.

Une version plus détaillée des principales constatations, conclusions et recommandations est présentée ci-après.
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

Introducción
El mundo está cambiando más rápidamente que nunca, y lo mismo ocurre con los desafíos a los que se enfrentan sus habitantes más vulnerables. Los conflictos y los desplazamientos, los desastres y el cambio climático, la urbanización y los brotes de enfermedades son cada vez más complejos y están interrelacionados, lo que exige nuevas estrategias y enfoques. La innovación para el desarrollo, es decir, la exploración de nuevas formas de aplicar los programas, con nuevos asociados y con nuevas tecnologías, se reconoce cada vez más como un elemento crucial para alcanzar los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible y la promesa que encierra el Programa de Desarrollo Sostenible para 2030.

UNICEF ha convertido la innovación en una prioridad institucional. Sin embargo, todavía no se ha analizado sistemáticamente hasta qué punto esta inversión se ha traducido en resultados sustanciales y sostenibles para los niños. La organización tampoco ha sido objeto de una evaluación para determinar en qué medida se encuentra en una posición óptima (“apta para el propósito”) para aplicar la innovación como estrategia. A medida que UNICEF avanza hacia el segundo año de su actual Plan Estratégico, hacer frente a estas lagunas en los conocimientos que ha adquirido una urgencia renovada, y es el tema de la presente evaluación.

Objetivo y alcance de la evaluación
El objetivo general de la evaluación es generar información que resulte valiosa para el aprendizaje y la rendición de cuentas en la organización. El objetivo de la evaluación era determinar la “aptitud para el propósito” de UNICEF en la tarea de emplear la innovación como estrategia clave para lograr los resultados y metas definidos en sus planes estratégicos para el período 2014-2021. También trató de proporcionar información sobre la forma en que la innovación contribuye a las metas y objetivos de UNICEF, así como sobre la forma en que la innovación puede ayudar a que las respuestas de la organización sean cada vez más eficaces en los próximos años. En consecuencia, la evaluación examina la innovación de manera retrospectiva y formativa. La evaluación se llevó a cabo a través de proyectos separados pero interrelacionados que correspondían a las principales líneas de investigación. Estos incluyeron estudios de casos de innovación, una evaluación institucional y una síntesis para integrar el aprendizaje y generar conclusiones y recomendaciones. Este informe abarca la síntesis y representa el informe final de la evaluación.

Sobre la base de este diseño, cada uno de los dos elementos principales (es decir, la evaluación institucional y los estudios de casos) tenía por objeto contribuir a la síntesis general de manera específica. El propósito de la evaluación institucional era proporcionar pruebas sobre la “aptitud para el propósito” de UNICEF en la tarea de innovar, como estrategia clave para lograr sus resultados y objetivos entre 2014 y 2021, tal como se definieron en sus programas estratégicos anteriores y actuales. El propósito de los estudios de caso sobre innovación era proporcionar pruebas de cómo las innovaciones específicas han progresado a través de las etapas de desarrollo desde la conceptualización hasta la escala, con una consideración profunda de las múltiples vías y dinámicas que sustentan la innovación dentro de la organización.

Los usuarios previstos de la evaluación son principalmente un público interno compuesto por responsables de la adopción de decisiones de UNICEF, a todos los niveles. El informe de síntesis servirá de instrumento para que UNICEF evalúe sus progresos en materia de innovación y tome decisiones sobre las orientaciones futuras. Se espera que el personal de UNICEF y una serie de interesados, incluidos los asociados gubernamentales, otros organismos e iniciativas de las Naciones Unidas, los asociados para el desarrollo y los encargados de la ejecución, utilicen los 13 estudios de casos sobre innovación como instrumentos para el intercambio de conocimientos.
La evaluación abarca el período correspondiente a dos ciclos estratégicos, a saber, 2014-2017 y 2018-2021. En la medida de lo posible se han incluido actividades realizadas en 2018. En la evaluación se examinan las diversas dependencias orgánicas de la sede y de otros niveles (por ejemplo, las oficinas regionales y las oficinas en los países) y se tienen en cuenta los países con distintos grados de capacidad. El alcance de esta evaluación mostró una amplia variedad de tipos de innovación en todo UNICEF. Para facilitar la estructura de las líneas de investigación se utilizaron las siguientes categorías:

• Tecnologías “duras”, comúnmente conocidas como “innovación de productos” en UNICEF, que permiten obtener resultados específicos para cada sector, con ejemplos que incluyen herramientas de diagnóstico para la prevención de enfermedades, refugios de emergencia o bombas de agua;

• La tecnología de la información y las comunicaciones (TIC), en particular las tecnologías móviles, como facilitadores intersectoriales de la gestión de la información, la prestación de servicios, la supervisión del desempeño, la participación y la promoción;

• Metodologías, enfoques y procesos innovadores (tecnologías “ blandas”), como los enfoques de cambio de comportamiento o el pensamiento creativo, que permiten que el impacto programático sea más amplio.

La evaluación institucional utilizó un marco que se basa en estudios sobre la eficacia de la organización en la promoción y gestión del ciclo de innovación. El marco agrupa estos temas en tres categorías generales: valores, estructura y sistemas.

1. **Valores institucionales** – Las “formas de pensar” colectivas que determinan la manera en que trabaja el personal e influyen en la cultura institucional en general, con referencia específica a la actividad de innovación de UNICEF.

2. **Estructuras organizativas** – La arquitectura institucional de UNICEF, incluida la configuración del personal y los departamentos de toda la organización y de cada una de sus partes. Estas estructuras influyen en el tipo de innovación que se produce, así como en el lugar y el momento en que se produce.

**3. Sistemas institucionales** – Los procesos y redes que apoyan el flujo de información, conocimientos y recursos que facilitan el trabajo de UNICEF.

Estas esferas temáticas sirvieron de base a la estructura de este informe de síntesis tanto en lo que se refiere al trabajo de campo de la evaluación institucional como a las conclusiones presentadas. Las principales cuestiones que se abordan en la evaluación son las siguientes:

**Valores:**

• ¿En qué medida se ejecuta la innovación como estrategia mundial de UNICEF?

• ¿En qué medida la cultura organizacional de UNICEF estimula o incentiva el pensamiento innovador?

• ¿Hasta qué punto puede UNICEF aceptar los riesgos asociados con la búsqueda de soluciones innovadoras?

• ¿En qué medida los enfoques e iniciativas de innovación de UNICEF fomentan la apropiación por parte del gobierno y de otras entidades? ¿Hasta qué punto están alineados con las prioridades y los programas nacionales?

• ¿En qué medida el enfoque de innovación de UNICEF apoya su programa en favor de la equidad (discapacidad, género, etnicidad)?

**Estructuras:**

• ¿Hasta qué punto existen estructuras oficiales para apoyar la innovación en las diferentes partes de la organización?

• ¿En qué medida la naturaleza descentralizada de UNICEF afecta su trabajo de innovación? ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas y debilidades relativas al trabajo de innovación dentro de esta estructura?

• ¿En qué medida la organización adopta/integra la innovación en sus programas?

• ¿Hasta qué punto los “intraemprendedores” crean espacio para nuevas ideas?

• ¿Con qué eficacia aprovecha UNICEF los recursos para la innovación en todas las oficinas, divisiones y niveles?

• ¿En qué medida la colaboración de UNICEF con la industria y el sector privado beneficia a la innovación?
EVALUACIÓN DE LA INNOVACIÓN EN LA LABOR DE UNICEF

¿Aprovecha UNICEF de manera eficaz los recursos para la innovación procedentes de diversas fuentes?

Sistemas:

- ¿Se desarrollan adecuadamente las habilidades y la experiencia en materia de innovación y se distribuyen adecuadamente a través de la organización?
- ¿Dispone UNICEF de personal suficiente para proporcionar liderazgo, promoción y orientación y apoyo técnico en materia de innovación? De no ser así, ¿qué factores limitan el desempeño efectivo?
- ¿En qué medida el trabajo de innovación de UNICEF se diseña e implementa de acuerdo con los principios de planificación y diseño de programas de calidad?
- ¿En qué medida las prácticas de gestión de UNICEF facilitan la aplicación de la innovación como estrategia?
- ¿En qué medida el modelo de gestión de UNICEF responde a las necesidades prácticas de la labor de innovación?
- ¿Contribuye eficazmente el enfoque innovador de UNICEF al aprendizaje institucional, incluidas las pruebas obtenidas de los “fracasos”?
- ¿Hasta qué punto se han utilizado el aprendizaje y los conocimientos generados por la innovación para dar forma al enfoque de UNICEF a los programas?
- ¿Con qué eficacia se documentan y comparten las actividades, los resultados y las buenas prácticas del trabajo de innovación?

En general, la evaluación utilizó un enfoque de métodos mixtos con un hincapié en la recapitulación (2014-2017). Las metodologías de evaluación son principalmente cualitativas y se basan en entrevistas con informantes clave vinculadas a una encuesta en línea. En la medida de lo posible, la evaluación también se basa en las fuentes internas de información existentes, incluidas las encuestas mundiales del personal, los indicadores clave del desempeño vinculados a los programas especiales, los planes de oficina, los informes anuales y los datos financieros. Siempre que se pudo se realizó una triangulación entre las fuentes y los métodos.

**Conclusiones**

**Valores institucionales**

A los efectos de esta evaluación, los “valores” se definen como formas colectivas de pensar que conforman el funcionamiento de una organización. A fin de evaluar el papel de los valores de UNICEF en el apoyo a la innovación, en la evaluación se examinaron varios elementos, entre ellos: a) la medida en que existe claridad estratégica en torno a la innovación, así como el grado de aplicación de esa estrategia; b) si la cultura de la organización fomenta la innovación y los riesgos que entrañan, y c) la manera en que los enfoques que se utilizan para asociarse con los países donde se ejecutan programas fomentan la apropiación del proyecto por parte del gobierno y otras entidades.

En cuanto al tema de los valores de la organización, la evaluación llegó a la conclusión de que UNICEF había señalado claramente su intención estratégica mediante la inclusión de la innovación como elemento básico en los planes estratégicos que abarcan el período comprendido entre 2014 y 2021.

Sin embargo, las pruebas sugieren que UNICEF, en general, se está quedando por debajo de las expectativas en la ejecución real. Sobre la base de los datos de los indicadores clave de desempeño, algo más de la mitad de las oficinas en los países (55%) informaron del uso de la innovación como estrategia de ejecución (2017). Del mismo modo, poco más de la mitad (55%) del personal estuvo de acuerdo o
muy de acuerdo en que “en mi oficina se apo-
yan las nuevas ideas e innovaciones”, según los resultados de la encuesta mundial del personal (2018).

Varios aspectos de la cultura de la organización aparecen como obstáculos a la innovación. Sobre la base de múltiples fuentes, el personal considera que en gran medida no se asumen los riesgos ni se aceptan los fracasos. Sólo un tercio de los que respondieron a la encuesta en línea consideraron que se alentaba al personal a asumir riesgos para innovar, y una propor-
ción similar estuvo de acuerdo en que sus oficinas en los países habían creado un espa-
cio para debatir sobre los fracasos y aprender de ellos. Algunos encuestados señalaron las necesidades de financiación de los donantes como un factor que contribuye a la baja acepta-
ción del riesgo. Sin embargo, la mayoría de las pruebas señalaban que un impedimento mayor era la existencia de un conjunto de prácticas de gestión muy arraigadas.

Hubo opiniones encontradas en cuanto al alc-
cance del apoyo de la dirección a la innovación. Cuando el personal se siente capacitado para innovar, un factor fundamental es el apoyo de sus supervisores inmediatos. En estos casos, a los gestores se les atribuye la creación del “es-
pacio” necesario para la innovación. A nivel de país, el papel del representante y del represen-
tante adjunto es un factor decisivo para que el personal perciba la innovación y su capacidad de llevarla a cabo.

Sin embargo, el personal sigue trabajando a través de procedimientos que consumen mucho tiempo y que están relacionados con la recaudación de fondos, la contratación y las adquisiciones. Si bien estos procesos pueden funcionar con asociados tradicionales (por ejemplo, los ministerios competentes), no están bien adaptados para involucrar al sector privado, donde puede ser necesario contar con procesos más ágiles. Además, el trabajo innovador se considera a menudo como “un elemento adicional” paralelo a la programa-
ción habitual.

Otro obstáculo importante para el progreso es que el personal comprende de manera difer-
ente la innovación. Hasta cierto punto, esta comprensión compartida y limitada se centra en el papel de las tecnologías en la labor de UNICEF en materia de innovación. Muchos de los que respondieron consideraron que UNICEF había llegado a prestar demasiada atención a las tecnologías, en particular a las tecnologías digitales, como representantes de la innovación, en detrimento de otros posibles enfoques, como la innovación de productos y los enfoques de programación.

UNICEF podría dar cuenta del contexto en el que las distintas oficinas en los países y las ofi-
cinas regionales trabajan de manera más sisté-
mática. Es necesario comprender el ecosistema de la innovación en el que participa UNICEF, y se debe apoyar al personal para que realice evaluaciones dentro del ecosistema de innova-
ción, y opere con las personas, los procesos y los recursos necesarios para ello.

La experiencia de UNICEF en la colaboración con los asociados en los países en que se eje-
cutan programas demuestra que es necesario prestar considerable atención a las cuestiones relativas a la apropiación, incluida la planifica-
ción de las medidas, los recursos y el tiempo necesarios para lograr ese objetivo. Del mismo modo, en la planificación también se deben examinar y contabilizar las capacidades de los sistemas para aplicar plenamente las inno-
vaciones, incluida la forma en que tal vez sea necesario fortalecerlas, así como la duración y los recursos necesarios para lograrlo.

Estructuras organizativas

A los efectos de esta evaluación, las “estructu-
ras” se refieren a la arquitectura institucional de UNICEF, incluyendo la huella física, la gober-
nanza y la administración, así como la configu-
guración formal e informal del personal y los departamentos de toda la organización. Estas estructuras influyen en el tipo de innovación que se produce, así como en el lugar y el mo-
mento en que se produce. En la recopilación de datos participaron oficinas y unidades con un mandato relacionado con la innovación (es de-
cir, la Oficina de Innovación [OoI], la División de Tecnología de la Información y la Comunicación [ICTD], y la Unidad de Innovación de la División de Suministros [SD IU]), así como un conjunto más amplio de estructuras que promueven y apoyan la innovación en todos los niveles. Se hizo hincapié en las estructuras internas; los
acuerdos de cara al exterior, como las asociaciones, se incluyeron de forma limitada. Durante el período que abarca la evaluación, se han producido cambios considerables en las tres unidades con competencias en materia de innovación (Ool, SD IU, ICTD). Al entrar en el período 2018-2021, las estrategias y los planes de acción de estas unidades muestran diversos enfoques de cuestiones como la gestión del riesgo y la gobernanza, así como cambios de dirección basados en el programa especial y en las nuevas prioridades (por ejemplo, la estrategia de la TIC o la estrategia mundial de suministro de productos y mercados de la División de Suministros). A medida que estos cambios se vayan produciendo, será importante aclarar y comunicar estas nuevas funciones y la forma en que se relacionan con otras unidades que tienen competencias formales en materia de innovación.

En general, el conocimiento que el personal tiene de estas estructuras y de su capacidad para apoyar ideas innovadoras es relativamente bajo. Los resultados sugieren que se necesita una inversión mucho mayor para convertir el trabajo de innovación de estas estructuras en programas cuya escala sea posible ampliar.

Si bien la Ool se valoró positivamente por su capacidad de “pensar independientemente”, los encuestados consideraron que sus prácticas carecían de transparencia y parecían incongruentes con las prioridades sobre el terreno. Algunos entrevistados esperaban claramente que la oficina, de reciente creación, les ayudara a explorar las posibles relaciones con los donantes y los asociados (incluidos los privados, con fines de lucro) y les asesorara sobre la labor de innovación dentro de sus programas de país.

Tal vez la característica más significativa de la arquitectura institucional para la innovación sea el carácter altamente descentralizado de UNICEF. En consonancia con esto, gran parte de la innovación en UNICEF se produce de manera difusa fuera de las estructuras oficialmente reconocidas en materia de innovación. La estructura descentralizada de UNICEF ha beneficiado y obstaculizado la actividad innovadora de diversas maneras en los últimos años. Entre los beneficios importantes de la estructura descentralizada se incluyen una sólida colaboración con los actores nacionales, el conocimiento de la situación en el país y la comprensión de las necesidades de las partes interesadas. En general, las oficinas de UNICEF en los países son las más indicadas para elaborar soluciones a los problemas teniendo en cuenta el contexto local, alinearse con las prioridades de los países e integrarse en los planes y sistemas nacionales.

Sin embargo, esta estructura también dificulta el traslado de las ideas a través de la jerarquía, y la responsabilidad de la recaudación de fondos recae más en el personal de los países. Estos factores pueden dar lugar a una proyección o a un enfoque organizativo poco sistemático de la innovación, con pequeñas sumas de dinero, ciclos de financiación cortos, una elevada rotación del personal y una transferencia insuficiente de conocimientos. Es particularmente frustrante para el personal de la oficina en el país haber fomentado una determinada innovación, haber demostrado su eficacia y luego no tener fondos disponibles para llevarla a escala.

Muchos reconocieron que el apoyo a las oficinas en los países no podía seguir un modelo válido para todos los casos y que se necesitarían soluciones diferentes basadas en una evaluación de las necesidades. El papel de los representantes adjuntos se reveló especialmente crucial para fomentar la innovación, trabajar intersectorialmente e integrar nuevas formas de hacer las cosas en los programas.

Tanto los entrevistados del personal de las oficinas en los países como de las oficinas regionales consideraron que las unidades centrales podían prestarles un apoyo más eficaz actuando como mediadoras o traductoras de las actividades de innovación, mediando en los contactos con los expertos en innovación pertinentes y apoyando sus esfuerzos de recaudación de fondos para la innovación. UNICEF tiene una larga experiencia en la tarea de apoyar el desarrollo de las innovaciones, su puesta a prueba y su integración. En los casos estudiados, los factores del ecosistema que más influyeron en el apoyo de UNICEF a la integración de una innovación concreta fueron la presencia de una política o marco, la capacidad de las personas y los sistemas que eventualmente operarán la innovación, y la
existencia de financiación con la intención de llevarla a escala.

A medida que la labor de innovación de UNICEF evolucione y asuma nuevos desafíos, será importante contar con nuevos aliados. Se están utilizando nuevas formas de asociación para involucrar al sector privado, como por ejemplo mediante asociaciones con entidades que compartan valores prioritarios. Los entrevistados expresaron su preocupación por el hecho de que UNICEF (en este caso las oficinas en los países) no esté adecuadamente preparado para evaluar el riesgo antes de pasar a las cuestiones de privacidad de los datos o de identidad autosoberana.

En el período 2014-2017 se produjeron una serie de cambios en la arquitectura de la innovación. Sin embargo, muchos funcionarios están insatisfechos con la actual estructura organizativa, y existe el deseo de que se introduzcan cambios estructurales en UNICEF para abordar muchas de las cuestiones señaladas a lo largo de la evaluación. Con ese fin, en la etapa final de la evaluación se elaboraron opciones sobre las estructuras para su examen por la organización. Estas se tratan como parte de las recomendaciones que figuran a continuación.

Sistemas institucionales

A los efectos de esta evaluación, los “sistemas organizativos” se definen como los procesos y redes que apoyan el flujo de información, de conocimientos y de recursos que sirven de base a la labor de UNICEF, incluso en lo que respecta a la innovación. Estos sistemas abarcan tanto los aspectos relacionados con los recursos humanos relativos a la capacidad de dotación de personal, los sistemas de gestión y las prácticas, como la gestión de los conocimientos y los sistemas para obtener, aprovechar y gestionar la financiación relacionada con la innovación. En cierto modo, este tema resultó ser el más difícil de evaluar, ya que no es posible desglosar de manera significativa muchos de los sistemas de información existentes al nivel de una estrategia específica como la innovación.

UNICEF no tiene muy claro el modelo de dotación de personal que está aplicando con respecto a la capacidad de innovación, tanto cuando se trata de concentrar las aptitudes y las actividades de innovación en determinados equipos de especialistas o, más bien, de incorporar la innovación en toda la fuerza laboral. Los encuestados reconocieron los beneficios de contar con una persona que posea capacidades en materia de innovación y “conocimientos prácticos” y que esté integrado en el equipo. Se mencionaron varios conjuntos de aptitudes que permitirían mejorar la innovación en UNICEF, y que el personal existente podría adquirir o reforzar. Sin embargo, hasta la fecha, el trabajo de innovación ha dependido en gran medida de consultores externos que trabajan por medio de acuerdos a corto plazo. Todavía no se han abordado las cuestiones de la “subcontratación interna frente a la “subcontratación externa” de estas competencias.

Durante el período 2014-2017, la innovación se trató de manera similar a las demás estrategias de ejecución bien establecidas (por ejemplo, inclusión en la codificación de los gastos, los indicadores clave de rendimiento, las plantillas de informes anuales). Sin embargo, la orientación sobre estos y otros sistemas de planificación de programas y de gestión basada en los resultados (por ejemplo, los documentos de programas por países, los informes anuales, etc.) apenas tiene en cuenta la innovación. Esta orientación limitada al personal reduce el grado en que incluso las prácticas de gestión más eficaces pueden incorporar comportamientos y enfoques innovadores y, por lo tanto, apoyar las actividades de innovación.

Un punto que surgió repetidamente durante el trabajo de campo de la evaluación fue que el estilo de gestión muy jerárquico de la organización influyó en su enfoque de la innovación. Fue notable el papel clave del personal de alto nivel en una serie de unidades organizativas (en particular, representantes, representantes adjuntos y directores) a la hora de establecer el “tono marcado por la dirección” con respecto a la innovación. El hecho de que la mayoría del personal de UNICEF considere que no hay un mensaje claro sobre su papel en la innovación confirma que aún no se han abordado estas cuestiones suficientemente. A esto se suma la falta de atención a un enfoque matricial de la gestión que tenga el potencial de reducir la prevalencia de los silos y de estructuras de toma de decisiones muy jerárquicas.
Existen opiniones divergentes dentro del organismo en cuanto al enfoque correcto de las actividades de innovación de UNICEF, en particular entre centrarse en las tecnologías existentes, de eficacia demostrada y comprobada, que deben ampliarse, y aquellas que es preciso desarrollar desde las primeras etapas. Otras agencias han utilizado un enfoque de gestión de carteras como herramienta para encontrar ese equilibrio. La utilización de un enfoque de gestión de carteras podría ayudar a UNICEF a garantizar que sus recursos estén en consonancia con sus prioridades estratégicas, sus ventajas comparativas y su posición única.

A pesar de la existencia de diversos foros para el intercambio de información, UNICEF puede aspirar a lograr un registro, documentación y difusión más coherentes de las enseñanzas relacionadas con la innovación. En la actualidad, la falta de una gestión institucionalizada de los conocimientos y de los circuitos de retroinformación limita la capacidad de UNICEF para aprender de los éxitos y los fracasos. Este problema se ve agravado por la renuencia a poner de relieve de manera más amplia los supuestos “fracasos”, incluso cuando ello podría ofrecer importantes oportunidades de aprendizaje y mejorar la eficacia en el futuro. Se deben evaluar como una buena práctica los procesos de documentación estructurados, como los que se utilizan en la Junta de Examen de la Innovación de la Unidad de Información de la División de Suministros.

UNICEF tiene la capacidad de proporcionar y movilizar considerables cantidades de fondos para la innovación, y está trabajando de varias maneras importantes para movilizar recursos externos en favor de la innovación en beneficio de los niños. Estos compromisos están adoptando formas nuevas y diferentes, incluyendo el establecimiento de asociaciones prioritarias de valor compartido, y consultas con la industria en torno a los productos y la configuración del mercado. Esta evolución debe ser objeto de un estrecho seguimiento para poder perfeccionar el enfoque.

Sin embargo, a pesar de estos esfuerzos, existen claros obstáculos a la hora de encontrar fondos para la innovación. La mayoría del personal de UNICEF considera que los recursos para la innovación son insuficientes y que los procesos para acceder a los fondos destinados a ese fin son poco claros.

Recomendaciones

Esfera de recomendación 1: Elaborar una visión y un enfoque estratégicos comunes que aborden directamente las limitaciones fundamentales del enfoque actual e impulsen la adopción de decisiones en toda la organización.

Hay que elogiar a UNICEF por señalar claramente su intención de utilizar la innovación como un medio para obtener resultados en favor de la infancia. Sin embargo, UNICEF no puede lograr una mayor coherencia y repercusión en la organización mediante el establecimiento de una visión y un enfoque estratégicos que se basen en una comprensión común de los problemas prioritarios y sirvan de base para la adopción de decisiones en toda la organización. La visión y el enfoque estratégico de UNICEF deben incluir consideraciones y principios sobre la innovación en los entornos humanitarios.

El enfoque debe abordar directamente los principales obstáculos e impedimentos a la innovación mediante la elaboración de posiciones a nivel de todo el UNICEF sobre:

a. La renuencia al riesgo como un impedimento importante para la innovación;
b. Cómo las diferentes partes de la organización contribuyen a la innovación;

c. Compromiso con una mayor transparencia de las funciones de gobernanza/supervisión y toma de decisiones dentro de las unidades de innovación especializadas;

d. Deberían adaptarse para su utilización más amplia los enfoques y procesos más normalizados, basados en las buenas prácticas ya utilizadas en algunas partes de la organización;

e. Claridad sobre la necesidad de personal a medio y largo plazo para facilitar la implementación de la innovación como estrategia central.

f. Mayor atención e inversión en el aprendizaje y la asimilación.

Esfera de recomendación 2: Actuar con relación al cambio estructural necesario para promover la innovación como medio de lograr resultados para la infancia.

En el período 2014-2017 se produjeron muchos cambios en la arquitectura de la innovación. Sin embargo, muchos funcionarios están insatisfechos con la actual estructura organizativa y parece que existe un gran interés en que se introduzcan cambios estructurales en UNICEF para abordar muchas de las cuestiones señaladas a lo largo de la evaluación. Con ese fin, en la etapa final de la evaluación se han elaborado opciones para su examen por la organización. Entre los elementos clave que se desprenden de estas opciones figuran los siguientes:

UNICEF tiene fortalezas únicas debido a su estructura descentralizada y sus sólidas capacidades colectivas a nivel centralizado. Es necesario que se preste mucha atención a nivel local a las ideas, proyectos y productos para priorizarlos y saber cómo llevarlos a escala. Al mismo tiempo, se necesitan unidades centrales sólidas para aprovechar el poder del todo mediante el aprendizaje tanto de los fracasos como de los éxitos en todos los entornos y la adopción de enfoques sistematizados y replicables. Como parte de cualquier ajuste estructural, UNICEF debería equilibrar estas estructuras con sus respectivas fortalezas y funciones.

A fin de ofrecer una visión estratégica clara y gestionar la amplia cartera de innovaciones, sería necesario establecer una función de gestión superior a nivel de Director Ejecutivo Adjunto para supervisar las diversas dimensiones del programa de la organización. La persona que ocupe este puesto se encargaría directamente de los distintos aspectos de la cartera de innovación, en particular de los nuevos equipos de servicios de apoyo a la innovación, y serviría de centro de coordinación para la gestión matricial de la capacidad y los recursos de innovación en todo UNICEF. Este puesto también tendría la responsabilidad de trabajar en estrecha colaboración con los administradores de los sistemas internos (por ejemplo, presupuestación, contratación) para desarrollar las adaptaciones necesarias con fines de innovación.

También deberían crearse equipos de servicios de apoyo a la innovación, responsables de la gestión y el establecimiento de prioridades de la cartera, así como de la elaboración y el suministro de marcos, herramientas y procesos, supervisión, evaluación, intercambio de conocimientos, aprendizaje y retroinformación. Estos equipos prestarían apoyo a las oficinas en los países en una serie de actividades como la identificación y participación de asociados nuevos o desconocidos (por ejemplo, empresas locales de telecomunicaciones), acuerdos de asociación (por ejemplo, asociaciones de valores compartidos, financiación innovadora), cuestiones de sistemas y oportunidades de financiación (por ejemplo, identificación de fuentes de financiación y opciones para distintos tipos y etapas de los procesos de innovación). Para ciertas innovaciones, las oficinas en los países pueden requerir apoyo a la capacidad para explorar el ecosistema de innovación teniendo en cuenta los riesgos asociados con cuestiones jurídicas, de datos y de marcos reglamentarios.

En la actualidad, las funciones y responsabilidades de las unidades existentes con competencias en materia de innovación no están claras para algunos y sugieren la posibilidad de que se produzcan duplicaciones. Por consiguiente, como parte de los cambios estructurales recomendados, el liderazgo de la innovación digital debería estar a cargo de la División de Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación, que también debería reunir a diversas partes de la sede que trabajan actualmente en la innovación digital. Deberían
adoptarse medidas adecuadas para mitigar cualquier efecto negativo de esta recomendación en otras funciones básicas de la División de Tecnología de la Información y las Comunicaciones.

Se necesita personal dedicado a la innovación en las oficinas en los países, especialmente en los programas medianos y grandes, y también en las oficinas regionales. El papel desempeñado por los especialistas regionales en T4D es, en general, ampliamente reconocido y apreciado y debería servir de modelo. El personal de innovación está mejor situado bajo la autoridad del representante adjunto como medio para garantizar la pertinencia del programa y la participación intersectorial. No existe un modelo único para este tipo de apoyo, y los esfuerzos deben adaptarse a las variables específicas de cada país y de cada oficina en el país. UNICEF también debe asegurarse de que se comprenda bien el “ecosistema” en el que se está desarrollando una innovación, y debe lograr la apropiación y anticiparse a los requisitos de escala, traslado y salida.

Esfera de recomendación 3: Utilizar un enfoque de gestión de carteras para la innovación.

UNICEF aún no ha aclarado cómo sus estructuras y recursos únicos están en una posición óptima para la innovación y la escala, ya sea para concentrarse en las tecnologías existentes, probadas y demostradas, que es necesario ampliar, o para hacer hincapié en aquellas que es necesario desarrollar desde las primeras etapas. UNICEF debería utilizar un enfoque de gestión de cartera para garantizar que sus recursos estén bien alineados con sus prioridades estratégicas, ventajas comparativas y niveles aceptables de riesgo. Este enfoque debería ayudar a mitigar o superar el enfoque de la innovación basado en la proyectización o en un enfoque organizativo fragmentario, en el que son comunes las pequeñas sumas de dinero, los ciclos de financiación cortos, la elevada rotación del personal y la insuficiente transferencia de conocimientos. Debe utilizarse un enfoque de cartera en el que el tiempo y los recursos dedicados a las iniciativas de innovación se sopesen en consecuencia. La gestión de la cartera debe ser la base de la toma de decisiones al determinar quién está haciendo qué en materia de innovación en toda la organización, qué recursos se están gastando y qué resultados se están midiendo.

A continuación se ofrece una versión más detallada de los principales resultados, conclusiones y recomendaciones.
1. INTRODUCTION
The world is changing faster than ever before, and so too are the challenges facing its most vulnerable. Conflict and displacement, disasters and climate change, urbanization and disease outbreaks are growing increasingly complex and inter-related, demanding new strategies and approaches. Innovation for development – exploring new ways of delivering programmes, with new partners and new technologies – is increasingly recognized as crucial to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Accordingly, international development partners have increased their focus on, and investment in, innovation.

UNICEF has made innovation a corporate priority, integrating it into its strategy, programming and institutional architecture. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 listed innovations as one of seven implementation strategies, and the current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, identifies “fostering innovations in processes and practices based on new technologies” as a key change strategy in reaching the organization's stated goals.

UNICEF has long recognized the transformative potential of innovation to improve the lives of children. It was among the first United Nations entities to establish in-house capacity, beginning in 2007 with the creation of a dedicated innovations unit at headquarters (located in the Division of Communications and later transferred to the Supply Division). As innovation became increasingly recognized as an important part of UNICEF’s work, a complex innovation architecture emerged at various levels, tasked with identifying, prototyping and bringing to scale technologies and approaches that strengthen UNICEF’s work for children. A number of formal structures evolved, and new milestones came in rapid succession. In 2009, an Innovation Unit was established as part of UNICEF’s Supply Division, with a particular focus on product innovation. Innovations labs emerged in multiple country offices, with the first established in the Uganda Country Office in 2010. Another milestone came in 2014, with the establishment of the Global Innovation Centre, and in 2015 with the launch of the Innovation Venture Fund. These structures, including the Global Innovation Centre, the Venture Fund and the innovation unit, were merged in 2016 to form the Office of Innovation. Also in 2016, a new strategy for Information and Communications Technologies integrated innovation as one of its core areas of strategic focus. The Information and Communications Technologies Division (ICTD) is providing critical support for ICT-related innovation across countries, regions and divisions.

Taken together, this represents a significant evolution in a relatively short period of time, backed by clear strategic intent and substantial investment. Yet the extent to which this investment has translated into meaningful and sustainable outcomes for children has not been systematically analysed. Neither has the organization undergone an assessment to determine the extent to which it is optimally positioned (‘fit for purpose’) to implement innovation as a strategy. As UNICEF moves into the second year of its current Strategic Plan (SP), addressing these knowledge gaps has acquired renewed urgency, and is the subject of the present evaluation.
2. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND SCOPE
2.1 CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

With the increasing significance of innovation in UNICEF, it is important to generate high-quality evidence for decision-making, learning and accountability. Internal analysis that contributed to the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 saw the application of new approaches and technologies in UNICEF programmes as an important factor in achieving results. This emphasis came about, in part, due to experience with an equity refocus, which included a push for cost-effective innovations to reach children who live at the margins of social development or are especially vulnerable to violence and exploitation. The analysis concluded that the push toward innovations should be institutionalized and included as a core strategy for programming. For the purposes of the corporate strategy, planners were encouraged to position innovation as an organizational priority and to embed mechanisms into the plan that could guide ways to identify, test and scale up innovations for children, as well as to ensure quality control and learn from failures.

Innovation became an explicitly-stated element of UNICEF strategy, and one of seven key implementation strategies for the organization.\(^1\) Innovation in UNICEF has come to be defined as “something new or different that adds value.”\(^2\)

Findings from recently-conducted reviews confirm the growing relevance of innovation within UNICEF. The UNICEF Review of Development Effectiveness (2012-2015)\(^3\) found that:

UNICEF has made progress in fostering a commitment to innovation, including a willingness to experiment with different models of programme support and service delivery and to use emerging technologies in innovative ways. However, there are also indications that the emphasis on innovation can be strengthened by developing a clear definition of innovative programming and focusing greater attention to programming innovations during the design of programmes and services. There is also scope for greater emphasis on documentation and taking proven innovations to scale.

The mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017\(^4\) recognized:

The increasing success of UNICEF in catalysing and promoting innovations. The key lesson to emerge in this area is that innovation work needs to be further integrated with other elements of the UNICEF programme and operations in varying country contexts, to ensure that they are responding to priority needs, to make clear evidence-based decisions on when to scale up or replicate innovations, and to ensure that effective innovations are incorporated into the mainstream of UNICEF programming.

This organizational emphasis has carried over into the new SP, 2018-2021,\(^5\) in which innovation is identified as a key change strategy in reaching the organization’s stated goals.


\(^2\) United Nations Children’s Fund, “Office of Innovation Management Plan (2014-2017)” UNICEF, New York, 2016. An earlier iteration of the definition was: “to do anything that is new or different that adds value and has a concrete impact” Source: United Nations Children’s Fund, “UNICEF and the Next MTSP: Key opportunities and challenges for programming”, UNICEF, New York, 2012. Partner agencies use variations of the definition such as “the successful exploitation of new ideas that create value at scale” (NESTA) or “a new solution with the transformative ability to accelerate impact” (International Development Innovation Alliance).


2.2 PURPOSE

With the inclusion of innovation as an implementing strategy in the SP, 2014-2017, the UNICEF Evaluation Office identified innovation as a priority topic for inclusion in the Global Evaluation Plan (2014-2017). After scoping and a competitive tender in 2017, the evaluation was launched in early 2018. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to generate important information for organizational learning and accountability. Organizational learning will be served by evaluation insights on how UNICEF undertakes innovation, the approaches used by differing organizational units, and identification of barriers and facilitators. The evaluation also serves an accountability purpose by examining the mandates and roles of differing units and describing their influence on organizational effectiveness.

The evaluation objective was to assess UNICEF’s ‘fitness for purpose’ to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve the outcomes and goals defined in its strategic plans for the period 2014-2021. It also sought to provide insights on how innovation contributes to UNICEF’s goals and objectives, as well as how innovation might contribute to increasingly effective organizational responses in the coming years. Accordingly, the evaluation examines innovation in both a retrospective and formative manner.

The evaluation was conducted through separate yet inter-related projects corresponding to the main lines of inquiry. Per Figure 1 below, these include: innovation case studies, an organizational assessment, and a synthesis to integrate learning and generate conclusions and recommendations. This report covers the synthesis and represents the final evaluation report.

Based on this design, each of the two main elements (i.e. the organizational assessment and case studies) was intended to contribute to the overarching synthesis in a specific manner:

- The purpose of the organizational assessment was to provide evidence on UNICEF’s ‘fitness for purpose’ to innovate as a key strategy to achieve its outcomes and goals from 2014-2021 as defined in its prior and current SPs. Its objectives included:
  - Document how the concept and practice of innovation has evolved in UNICEF during the period of the SP, 2014-2017;
  - Demonstrate how innovation as a strategy was intended to be implemented and how the organization has adapted to this corporate priority;
  - Assess the outcomes of the strategic focus on innovation for UNICEF’s objective to promote and protect children’s rights and their well-being;
  - Provide strategic guidance for the organization on issues relating to innovation going forward under the current SP, 2018-2021 and beyond, towards the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

- The purpose of the innovation case studies was to provide evidence of how specific innovations have progressed through stages of development from ideation to scale, with in-depth consideration of multiple pathways and dynamics that underpin innovation within the organization. The specific objectives were to:
  - Provide detailed descriptions of a set of innovations across stages of the development continuum, inclusive of contextual influences;
  - Assess the application of innovation principles or other standards for a set of innovations, with particular attention to issues of ownership and scale;
  - Produce clear conclusions and recommendations for policy, strategy and management decisions to further enhance innovation as key change strategy.

Terms of Reference for these components appear in Annex 1 for the organizational assessment and Annex 2 for the innovation case studies. The full reports of those components are appended to this synthesis report.

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6 The organizational assessment and innovation case studies are appended to this Synthesis Report.
Figure 1: Case studies and the organizational assessment are synthesized in a capstone report

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

<table>
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<th>Physical tools / hardware</th>
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<th>Zika Dx</th>
<th>Ht./Wt devise</th>
<th>Drones</th>
<th>RUTFs</th>
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<td>Methods &amp; approaches</td>
<td>Data Must Speak</td>
<td>Acc. Early Learning</td>
<td>Children, climate, environment</td>
<td>Adol. Toolkit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Focus of case study analysis:**
- Outcomes
- Scale
- Enablers and constraints
- Innovation principles
- Stakeholders, partnerships & ownership
- Funding & resources
- Evidence generation & learning

**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 management
- Scaling and mainstreaming of innovation solutions

**ELEMENT 3**  Capstone / Synthesis

Based on findings from each element and additional data collection as needed
The intended users of the evaluation are primarily an internal audience of UNICEF decision-makers, across levels. The synthesis report will serve as a tool for UNICEF to assess its progress in innovation and make decisions regarding future directions. The thirteen innovation case studies are expected 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.

2.3 SCOPE

The evaluation covers the period corresponding to two strategy cycles, namely 2014-2017 and 2018-2021. To a lesser degree and as appropriate, the evaluation also examines an earlier period, when the impetus for innovation and some of the current structures were taking shape. To the extent possible, activities in 2018 were included. The evaluation looks across various organizational units at headquarters (HQ) and other levels (i.e. regional and country offices), and considers countries with varying degrees of capacity (low, medium and high). Throughout this report, the term offices or units “with innovation remit” is used to refer specifically to the Office of Innovation (OoI), the innovation unit of UNICEF’s Supply Division (SD IU) and the Information and Communication Technologies Division (ICTD).

The scoping for this evaluation showed a wide variety of types of innovation across UNICEF. The following categories were used to help structure the lines of inquiry:

- ‘Hard’ technologies, commonly referred to as “product innovation” within UNICEF, to enable sector-specific results, with examples including diagnostic tools for the prevention of diseases, emergency shelters or water pumps;
- Information and communications technology (ICT), particularly mobile technologies, as cross-sectoral enablers for information management, service delivery, performance monitoring, participation and advocacy;
- Innovative methodologies, approaches and processes (‘soft’ technologies) like behaviour change approaches or design thinking, allowing for wider programmatic impact.

The organizational assessment (OA) used a framework that builds on studies of organizational effectiveness in promoting and managing the innovation cycle. The framework groups these themes into three overarching categories: values, structure and systems.

1. Organizational values – The collective ‘ways of thinking’ that shape the manner in which staff work and influence the wider organizational culture, with specific reference to UNICEF’s innovation activity.

2. Organizational structures – UNICEF’s institutional architecture, including the configuration of staff and departments across the organization and its individual parts. These structures influence what kind of innovation takes place, as well as where and when it occurs.

3. Organizational systems – The processes and networks supporting the flow of information, knowledge and resources that support UNICEF’s work.

These thematic headings provided the structure both for the OA fieldwork and the findings presented in this synthesis report. Throughout the assessment, it was apparent that topics clustered by these three themes were not mutually exclusive and some could arguably be positioned under differing themes.
The evaluation also adapted criteria defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC). The criteria used for this evaluation include: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and ownership, and equity focus.

Relevance was gauged in relation to mandate, strategy and goals, innovation principles, situation of the most disadvantaged and global priorities as well as regional, country and divisional strategies and plans. Efficiency was gauged by the resources made available for innovation through funding, human resources, expertise, time and training. Effectiveness was determined broadly, based on achievement of goals and targets set out in UNICEF’s SP as well as multi-year regional, country and divisional plans. Impact on the organizational and systems level was assessed by changes in UNICEF’s programmes, policies and operations. Sustainability and ownership were assessed through analysis of the various organizational arrangements, roles and responsibilities for innovation, and engagement with external stakeholders. Finally, the equity focus was gauged by its explicit and implied inclusion in advocacy and dialogue and across the approaches and practices for innovation.

The main questions addressed through the evaluation are as follows:

Values:
- To what extent is innovation implemented as a global strategy for UNICEF?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s organizational culture stimulate or incentivize innovative thinking?
- To what extent is UNICEF able to accept the risks associated with pursuing innovative solutions?
- To what extent do UNICEF’s innovation approaches and initiatives foster ownership among government and other entities? To what extent are they aligned with national priorities and agendas?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s approach to innovation support its equity agenda (disability, gender, ethnicity)?

Structures:
- To what extent do formal structures exist to support innovation in different parts of the organization?
- To what extent does the decentralized nature of UNICEF affect its innovation work? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses for innovation work within this structure?
- To what extent does UNICEF adopt / mainstream innovation within its programmes?
- To what extent is space created for new ideas by ‘intrapreneurs’?
- How effectively does UNICEF leverage resources for innovation across offices, divisions and levels?
- To what extent does UNICEF’s engagement with industry and the private sector benefit innovation?
- How effectively does UNICEF leverage resources for innovation from diverse sources?

Question was originally phrased as: To what extent has innovation been adopted / mainstreamed outside those entities with a formally recognized innovation role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strategic intent</td>
<td>• Formal structures with innovation remit</td>
<td>• Procedures for planning and programming,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategy implementation</td>
<td>• ‘Models’ of mainstreaming within the</td>
<td>budgeting and monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appetite for risk</td>
<td>organization</td>
<td>• Human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alignment with national</td>
<td>• UNICEF partnerships in support of</td>
<td>• Knowledge management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context, priorities and</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>• Leveraging of external resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agendas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Systems:

- Are skills and expertise for innovation adequately developed and appropriately distributed through the organization?
- Does UNICEF have adequate staff capacity for providing leadership, advocacy and technical guidance/support in innovation? If not, what factors are constraining effective performance?
- To what extent is UNICEF’s innovation work designed and implemented according to quality programme planning and design principles?
- To what extent do UNICEF management practices facilitate the implementation of innovation as a strategy?
- To what extent does the UNICEF management model respond to practical needs for innovation?
- Does UNICEF’s approach to innovation contribute effectively to organizational learning, including evidence from ‘failures’?
- To what extent have learning and insight generated by innovation been used to shape UNICEF’s approach to programmes?
- How effectively are activities, results and good practices of innovation work documented and shared?

2.4 METHODS

This section describes the methods used in the three component elements of the evaluation: the OA, the innovation case studies and the synthesis. More detailed descriptions of the methodologies can be found in the reports of the relevant component(s). Overall, the evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach with a summative emphasis (2014-2017). The timing allows for a complete review of the earlier strategy period (2014-2017) as well as capturing events that unfolded as the new strategy cycle (2018-2021) and its associated planning documents (e.g. office management plans) were being launched.

The evaluation methodologies are primarily qualitative and based on key informant interviews. During the period February to October 2018, over 400 interviews were conducted, representing a wide range of UNICEF staff as well as partners. Individuals interviewed appear in Annex 3. To the extent possible, the evaluation draws on existing in-house sources of information, including the Global Staff Surveys (GSS), SP-linked key performance indicators, office plans, annual reports and financial data. To the extent possible, triangulation was conducted between sources and methods.

It is worth noting that interviews sought a far narrower profile than that used for other data sources such as GSS and the online survey conducted for this evaluation. Therefore, information from interviews can differ or contrast with online survey responses, as surveys were intended to have a wide reach and achieve greater diversity of respondents. These differing data sources are considered as complementary rather than contradictory.

2.4.1 Organizational assessment

Multiple methods were used in the organizational assessment both in terms of data collection and analysis. Principal data collection methods included key informant interviews (KIIs), e-surveys, document review, and compilation of UNICEF human resources and financial data. A more detailed description of the methods used appears in “Organizational Assessment of Innovation in UNICEF: Final Report” (Appendix 1).

Key informant interviews

Three distinct rounds of in-depth, semi-structured KIIs were conducted between February and July 2018. Taken together, interviews were completed with nearly 120 UNICEF staff and external stakeholders. A full list of interviewees for the organizational assessment can be found in the final report of the OA as cited above.

Interviews with staff in country and regional offices were a significant source of information for the organizational assessment team. Based on purposive sampling of UNICEF country offices (COs), an initial selection of five to six COs per region (total 38 COs) were requested to participate in the assessment. Of these 38, 25 agreed to participate (see Table 1 below).
Table 1: UNICEF country office participation in the organizational assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific*</td>
<td>Thailand*, Indonesia*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern and Southern Africa*</td>
<td>Malawi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkmenistan, Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean</td>
<td>Guyana, Suriname, Mexico, Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>Sudan, Morocco, Egypt, Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West and Central Africa</td>
<td>Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes country visit

Interviews with RO and CO staff targeted a small number of positions that were considered knowledgeable of and engaged in innovation in their offices. In other words, staff members were purposively selected based on their ability to provide an account of the internal structures and systems and of innovation activity taking place within their COs. In each CO, interviews were sought with the Deputy Representative, the head of one CO programme, and the innovation focal point or officer (where such a post was present). In total, 76 CO staff were interviewed, including six Regional and Deputy Directors and 19 Representatives and Deputy Representatives. The number of individuals interviewed by unit or division appears below.

Table 2: Organizational assessment interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HQ / central units</th>
<th>ROs/COs</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E-surveys

Electronic surveys were employed to reach a wider range of UNICEF staff and other stakeholders, using the online survey package Questback. The intent of the surveys was to reach a much wider and more diverse pool of respondents than the interviews.

The surveys and interviews were intended to capture a range of perspectives and experiences about innovations in UNICEF. And indeed, there were several instances in which interviews and surveys revealed differing points of view; these are discussed under Findings below.

HQ and RO/CO surveys

Two surveys were aimed at UNICEF staff, one addressed to ‘central’ respondents in New York, Copenhagen and other HQ locations (e.g. the Global Shared Services Centre in Budapest), and the other to staff in regional and country offices. The survey of HQ staff was sent to a random sample of 1,018 staff including both ‘general services’ and ‘professional’ staff, covering all HQ divisions and locations. The survey ran between 28 June and 13 July 2018. Seventy-three (73) individuals responded (a response rate of 7 per cent).
The survey of CO/RO staff was sent to the same offices covered by our interview sample. The survey link was sent to 38 individuals who served as focal points for the evaluation within their respective office(s). These recipients were instructed to complete the survey themselves and to forward to colleagues in their office(s). In this manner, 52 responses were received. As the exact denominator is not known, it is not possible to calculate a response rate for this survey.

The surveys aimed to explore respondents’ perception of and engagement in innovation activities at UNICEF. Surveys also explored the extent to which an innovation and learning culture is present across UNICEF, respondents’ experiences of accessing various types of support for innovative activity, and the most common barriers / enablers to innovation in different settings.

**Target Product Profile participant survey**

In addition to the surveys of UNICEF staff, a short survey was conducted of UNICEF suppliers who had participated in UNICEF’s product innovation processes. This survey aimed to explore suppliers’ experiences of different phases of the process, including aspects such as the ‘target product profile’ (TPP, discussed in Section 3.2.4 below), request for proposals and field trials (where relevant). The survey ran between 5 and 13 July 2018.

**Document review**

A wide range of key documents from UNICEF were reviewed and utilized in different ways. Particularly important documents included: office management plans, annual reports, organograms and budgets, risk management documents, standard operating procedures, management plans and/or workplans for individual innovations. The annual GSS, notably those conducted in 2017 and 2018, were used to the extent possible, as were UNICEF’s key performance indicators (KPIs) for the period 2014-2017. In some cases, it was not possible to complete all the expected analysis, due to difficulties in obtaining the required documents. This was the case, for example, with country programme management plans, job descriptions and project workplans.

**Analysis of UNICEF human resource and financial data**

**Human resource / staff data**

Data were sought on staff resources specifically relevant to innovation, including: organograms and staff lists, job descriptions for staff specifically working on innovation activities (in OoI and SD IU as well as innovation officers and technology for development analysts), and financial data covering expenditure on innovation-specific staffing, where available. The evaluation team did not ultimately report quantitative data on innovation-related staff (see Limitations below).

**Financial data**

Available data relating to budgeting for innovation were sought from the offices, divisions and COs covered in the fieldwork, as well as multi-year office management plans (OMPs), annual work plans (AWPs), management plans (MPs) and country programme documents (CPDs), including budgets for individual projects where available. Information and explanations were sought on these budgets, in particular their breakdown by type of expenditure and activity, the underlying assumptions and rationale for the relevant figures.

Expenditure data were acquired from the ‘Strategic Plan analysis cube’ from UNICEF’s Insight system for the period 2014-2017. The cube is an Excel-based tool that allows analysis of UNICEF’s programme expenditure using UNICEF programmatic data coding parameters. Important limitations in the use of these were noted in the terms of reference (ToRs) and encountered throughout the analysis.

**Limitations**

A number of limitations and constraints were encountered in fieldwork and analysis. Key limitations are highlighted here and a more complete description appears in the final report of the OA. Several limitations are commonly encountered in global thematic evaluations. For example, with key informant interviews, there is a limit to the depth of detail that can be gained from one-hour interviews; therefore, selected elements of the topic guides were
prioritized in order to gather the most relevant material possible. For the document review, difficulty was encountered in obtaining all the documents requested from participants, despite targeted requests and follow-up. Additional important limitations include the following:

**E-surveys**

- Due to limited time frames as well as the diverse locations and administrative structures involved, response rates for the e-surveys were low. In addition, the software used did not allow respondents to save their work and return to the survey, which likely also depressed participation and response rates. For this reason, the data have been used with caution throughout the report—typically as supporting evidence, triangulated against other sources.

**Analysis of UNICEF human resource and financial data**

- Significant limitations were encountered in acquiring data with regard to both human resources and finance. Often this was due to the ways in which innovation was (or was not) disaggregated in terms of human resources (e.g. no central staff listing or pool designated as ‘innovation’). This meant that assessing the capacity and distribution of UNICEF’s innovation human resources relied on qualitative methods (primarily interviews, and to a lesser extent the GSS and online surveys carried out by the team).

- Data from UNICEF’s ‘Strategic Plan analysis cube’ were used for simple analysis of innovation expenditure using the General Intervention Code (GIC 007) (‘Innovation’). This represents UNICEF’s best single and centralized source of data on expenditures. However, these data should be treated with caution due to differing understandings and application of the GIC coding for reporting expenditures. These limitations mean that robust evaluation and analysis of the total envelope of financial resources used by UNICEF on innovation is not possible. These data are therefore presented at a higher level of aggregation (by year, sector, region and not by CO or individual units).

**2.4.2 Case studies**

For the case studies, a mixed methods approach was used to identify how the innovation process has played out in specific instances, and to bring to light key issues, lessons, challenges and successes. Both qualitative and, where available, quantitative data were gathered through desktop review, case study informant interviews, and where appropriate, observation and online surveys. Recognizing the uniqueness of each case, data collection methods differed slightly for each case study. Data collection activities occurred concurrently. Raw data were organized into master case study files with interview notes, survey results, and documentation catalogued in a single evidence file for each innovation case study.

During scoping and development of the ToR for this evaluation, over 100 innovations were identified through document review and interviews with UNICEF staff. This allowed the elaboration of key characteristics of interest and facilitated a multi-step approach to selecting case studies. Key characteristics included: type of innovation, stage of innovation and UNICEF units involved in the innovation. Details on the step-wise selection process can be found in the ToR for the case studies and in the more detailed implementation plan. The selected cases appear in the table below.

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9 A more detailed description of the methods used for each case study appears in “UNICEF Innovation Case Studies” appended to this synthesis report (Appendix 2).
### Table 3: Innovations chosen for case studies represent a diverse array of programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation solution</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation</td>
<td>Package of guidance, tools and supplies to support country programmes to reach and engage adolescents ages 10-18 affected by conflict and other crises through education, child protection, youth development and/or peacebuilding initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated School Readiness</td>
<td>An accelerated 150-hour pre-literacy and pre-numeracy program for children entering Grade 1 who have not attended pre-school. Grade 1 teachers are trained in engaging pedagogical methods, used to teach an accelerated, two-month curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute Respiratory Infection Diagnostic Aid (ARIDA)</td>
<td>An automated respiratory counting device, possibly including pulse oximetry, that helps healthcare workers diagnose pneumonia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children, climate and environment</td>
<td>Evolution of the approach taken on children, climate and the environment by the Zimbabwe Country Office, one of the first COs dedicating resources to the topic of climate and the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Must Speak</td>
<td>Information feedback systems and tools for increasing accountability. Using data to improve school planning, performance and learning outcomes, leaving no one behind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drones</td>
<td>Testing and use of various applications of drones in a development context, including drone corridors and drones for vaccine and emergency supply delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height length measuring device</td>
<td>Accurate measurement device suitable for field data collection, with the aim of first driving development of an incremental improvement, and secondly a radically improved device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs)</td>
<td>Therapeutic, high-nutrition foods administered to malnourished children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RapidPro</td>
<td>Open-source software that allows the user to easily build and scale mobile-based applications. It collects data via short message service (SMS) and other communication channels (e.g. voice; social media channels such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp) to enable real-time data collection and mass communication with target end-users, including beneficiaries and frontline workers. RapidPro powers U-Report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primero</td>
<td>Open source software application that aims to help partners securely and safely collect, store, manage and share data for child protection-related incident monitoring and case management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-Report</td>
<td>Suite of communications platforms, including SMS and social media, designed to give young people a chance to voice their opinions on issues that they care about in their communities, encourage citizen-led development and create positive change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somleng</td>
<td>A collection of open-source telephony tools that provide an efficient and low-cost interactive voice response and SMS platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zika diagnostics</td>
<td>A sensitive and specific ZSIKV and beyond (point of care) diagnostic tool to improve diagnoses, with an advance purchase commitment to incentivize industry investment into appropriate research and development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case study questions were structured around a modified version of Deloitte’s “Doblin Framework for Innovation.” Within this framework, four thematic dimensions (approach, organization, resources and capabilities, and metrics and incentives) are used to frame the elements necessary to enable successful innovation.

**Figure 3: Doblin Framework for Innovation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES</th>
<th>METRICS AND INCENTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are leaders enabling innovation to scale?</td>
<td>Are resources being used efficiently and effectively?</td>
<td>What incentives encourage and discourage adoption?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do innovations move from ideation to scale?</td>
<td>Are the right partners in place to scale the innovation?</td>
<td>What targets, indicators and systems are used to manage success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are innovation principles applied?</td>
<td>What tools have/will enable the innovation to scale?</td>
<td>How are users and stakeholders engaging with the innovation throughout its lifecycle?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Interviews were used to capture the perspectives of case study informants on evaluative questions, and to help the evaluation team build a picture of the innovation process for each case.

Interview guides included a mix of open-ended, descriptive, normative and cause-and-effect questions. Interviews were not identical; interviews focused on those questions most relevant to each case study informant type and on questions that were not otherwise answered by desktop review. These discussions were guided by interview protocols and held with project team members, implementing partners, ministries and other government partners and community members. Notes were documented for all interviews and analysed according to case study themes. The case study team utilized recordings in five cases with the permission of interviewees to support note-taking.

Interviews were held with nearly 300 stakeholders across levels (see table below).
### Document review

As no centralized knowledge management systems were employed for innovations, Deloitte utilized an information request form to solicit initial documentation from innovators. Following the identification of gaps, further requests were required to collect sufficient documentation to adequately answer the majority of evaluation questions.

Review of primary sources produced by UNICEF (e.g., guidance documents, donor reports, work plans, proposals, terms of reference and communication materials) enabled the case study team to understand individual innovation pathways, organizational structures, resources, stakeholders, design, implementation and scaling processes, and country presence.

With few exceptions, formal information-gathering and documentation during innovation processes tended to be ad hoc, somewhat limiting the reliability of information. In particular, little quantitative information was collected by case study teams. Overall, data quality was identified as a challenge; Deloitte was often unable to verify the completeness and security of data, and consistency of information between sources was a challenge for some cases.

### Field visits/Direct observation

Nine of the 13 case studies had field missions to countries where the innovation under study was being implemented. These visits provided a view into the innovations at work within the context of complex country-level ecosystems, and allowed examination of underlying organizational and partnership arrangements. Field visits occurred in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Denmark, Indonesia, Malawi, Ukraine and Madagascar. As several of the case studies were product innovations, travel to and frequent communication with Supply Division was essential.

Analytical techniques included: content analysis and thematic coding of qualitative data, ‘story development’ through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data; and consolidation, visualization and, where possible, statistical analysis of available quantitative data.

### Limitations

- **Cases do not systematically assess the impacts or outcomes of innovation.** The case study evaluation framework aimed to capture perspectives on outcomes and impacts of innovations, when appropriate. However, given the early stage of many innovations as well as the limited scope and rapid approach to conducting these cases, the case studies do not evaluate outcomes or impacts related to each innovation case.

- **The selection of cases is not intended to be representative all of/the total of innovations at UNICEF.** The sampling methodology for selection of cases (the number, type, and locations of field visits) is not randomized and, due to the highly qualitative and contextual nature of case studies, findings cannot be generalized to innovation at UNICEF as a whole. As such, cross-case analysis should be done with consideration of this limitation.

- **Single-use cases are employed for innovations with multiple applications.** The sampling methodology employed for selection of field visit locations for these cases was deliberative. The project team was able to gain perspectives on the various applications of an innovation through interviews with global stakeholders. To gain further insight, observations and more in-depth interviews were conducted on a single use case/application for this innovation.

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10 Some case studies are in early stages of development (e.g. Zika diagnostics) and required no field mission.
Due to the nature of innovation, it was anticipated that some innovations would continue to evolve during case study implementation. Cases present a reconstruction of the innovation process up to August 2018. Subsequent activities and priorities shared by stakeholders have been captured where possible, but case studies do not strive to make forward-looking statements or conclusions.

2.4.3 Synthesis

The objective of the synthesis was to bring together key findings of the OA and case studies in a concise form that could inform decision-making. The synthesis component utilizes the framework (values, structures, systems) of the OA. The synthesis process was based on preliminary findings of the OA (after two rounds of Reference Group review). Themes emerging from the preliminary findings were identified and used to code the case studies. Qualitative data analysis software (QDA Miner) was utilized for cross-case analysis. This thematic coding and analysis of the case studies produced coded segments which were compiled, triangulated with other sources (e.g. interviews, documentation) and then integrated into this report.

2.4.4 Evaluation management

The evaluation was managed by the UNICEF Evaluation Office (EO) in UNICEF’s New York headquarters. The Evaluation Office is responsible for the day-to-day oversight and management of the evaluation and for management of the evaluation budget. The EO assures the quality and independence of the evaluation and guarantees its alignment with the Norms and Standards and Ethical Guidelines of the United Nations Evaluation Group, provides quality assurance checking that the findings and conclusions are relevant and recommendations are implementable, and contributes to the dissemination of the findings and follow-up on the management response.

The first stage in the evaluation was a scoping exercise. From February to May 2017, initial research and scoping included literature review, 20 in-depth interviews with innovation focal points from Programme Division (PD) sections, Office of Innovation, Supply Division, ICTD, the Division of Data, Research and Policy (DRP), and the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS), as well as internal document review (CO reports, existing evaluation and research reports). Findings from this phase were shared in a webinar (22 May 2017). Based on the scoping, the evaluation was designed with the main elements (case studies, organizational assessment, synthesis) and a decision taken to conduct the case studies and OA through external contractors. The synthesis process and reporting was to be completed in-house, led by the Evaluation Office.

Competitive tendering processes were launched through a request for proposals (RFP) for the organizational assessment (RFP issued 27 September 2017) and the innovation case studies (RFP issued 21 November 2017). Awards were made to Moore Stephens (8 January 2018) for the organizational assessment and to Deloitte Canada (13 February 2018) for the innovation case studies.

Consistent with EO practice, an evaluation reference group (RG) was convened to serve in an advisory capacity. Invitations for Reference Group members were issued to chiefs/heads of offices (Office of Innovation; PD; ICTD; DRP; EMOPS; Supply Division; and the West and Central Africa Regional Office). RG members contributed extensively throughout the evaluation process including in developing ToR and selecting contractors, guiding those teams to relevant documents and individuals for interview, and reviewing and discussing deliverables.

In the later stages of the evaluation process, the recommendations were discussed by a group of senior managers on two occasions.

11 Participants attending both sessions included: Deputy Executive Director; Field Results; Director, Supply Division; Director, ICTD; Deputy Director, Programme Division; Director, Office of Innovation; Director, Evaluation Office; and Office of the Executive Director.
(in November and December 2018). This group provided useful inputs on all recommendations (across values, structures and systems) and had particular interest in the recommendations around structure. At the request of this group, the Evaluation Office developed a set of options for the structural recommendation, specifically related to potential re-configuration of roles, responsibilities and structures. Evaluation Office engaged external expertise (i.e. innovation in the public sector and in development) to develop these options, which were presented and discussed by the senior management group. Based on those reviews, one proposed structure seemed best aligned with early-stage thinking of follow-up actions. That proposed structure appears in Annex 4.
3. FINDINGS
3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

For the purposes of this evaluation, “values” are defined as collective ways of thinking that shape the way an organization works. They can be both explicit (for example, UNICEF’s formal core values of diversity and inclusion, integrity and commitment) and implicit (for example, informal or ‘unofficial’ attitudes held by staff members). Values form part of a wider organizational ‘culture’ – that is, a shared set of ideas and behaviours that influence how an organization carries out its work. Based on literature review, organizational characteristics for successful innovation include the existence of a clear, shared focus on endpoint, including strategic clarity, supportive leadership, and buy-in from staff regarding the current strategy and ways of managing that strategy.

To assess the role of UNICEF’s values in supporting innovation, the evaluation examined a number of elements including (a) the extent to which there is strategic clarity around innovation, as well as the extent to which that strategy is implemented; (b) whether organizational culture incentivizes innovation and its associated risks; and (c) how the approaches used to partner with programme countries foster ownership among government and other entities. The evidence base for this set of questions came primarily from staff interviews, as well as UNICEF data on KPIs and findings from GSSs, the QA online survey, and extensive document review.

3.1.1 Innovation as a change strategy in UNICEF

Strategic intent

UNICEF’s formal position on innovation is captured in its SPs for 2014-2017 and 2018-2021, both of which place innovation among the core strategies to achieve results for children. In the SP, 2014-2017 “identification and promotion of innovation” appears as one of several key implementation strategies, while the SP, 2018-2021 identifies “fostering innovation” and “harnessing the power of business and markets for children” as enablers, or “how strategies”.

In the SP, 2014-2017, innovation is positioned alongside other major implementation modalities such as capacity development, evidence generation and service delivery. UNICEF outlined its role as helping to identify the most promising innovations for application in different contexts, supporting partners to adopt, adapt and scale up those approaches that are most useful. The accompanying theory of change (ToC) also highlighted innovation by identifying rapidly changing technologies and their wider impacts on children’s lives as a ‘key risk’ that could hinder UNICEF’s progress toward its highest-level results.

Three measures were identified to mitigate this risk:

- Addressing innovation systematically across the organization through an innovation unit;
- Continuous scanning of the external environment to detect technological shifts that affect children’s lives; and
- Reviewing the evidence continually to identify new approaches.

Despite the prominence of innovation as a risk factor and an implementation strategy, there were correspondingly few details in the
ToCs for the individual programmatic focus areas (e.g. child protection, education, health). Several of the focus areas identified a specific innovation area in which they would work, including products, ICT and ‘soft technology’. For example, the child protection section listed the use of mobile technology to support birth registration systems, while the nutrition section included the piloting of a market-based micronutrient powder programme. Other sectors referred more generically to supporting innovative technologies and processes that contribute to their sector priorities.

The SP, 2018-2021 also included a ToC, and, as with the previous cycle, there were few details provided about how innovation was to be implemented across goal areas. Examples were listed of innovative activity already well underway (e.g. working with markets to further product development and availability including diagnostic tools, vaccines and health technologies; U-Report in multiple countries). The key assumption in the ToC associated with innovation was simply that UNICEF and others would continue to improve their ability to identify, support and scale up successful innovations.

Strategy implementation

Looking across the two strategic periods, there is evidence of growth, albeit modest, in the use of innovation as an implementation strategy (see Figure 2).13 Beginning in 2015, under half (46 per cent) of UNICEF COs reported that they were practicing or partially practicing innovation as an implementation strategy; by 2017, that figure had risen to 55 per cent. The awareness of innovation and its role in UNICEF’s work was also evident in our interviews with UNICEF staff across organizational units. Key messages heard from staff included the following:

- Innovation is a key UNICEF priority and important to help staff “do their work as best they can”;
- Innovation is a “way of thinking” and encompasses more than “the shiny new object” (a phrase used by several interviews in their explanation of what innovation is and is not);
- Many interviewees referred almost verbatim to the ‘official’ UNICEF definition of innovation14 – i.e. “doing something new or different that adds value”.

The mid-term review of the SP, 2014-201715 also confirmed an increase in uptake of and support for innovations in UNICEF. However, a key lesson identified was that innovation work needed to be further integrated with other elements of programme and operations in varying country contexts. Areas identified for focus included: ensuring that innovations are responding to priority needs; making clear evidence-based decisions on when to scale up or replicate innovations; and ensuring that effective innovations are incorporated into the mainstream of UNICEF programming. These themes reappeared frequently during the course of this evaluation.

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Figure 4: Annual reporting data show a modest increase in the use of innovation as an implementation strategy among UNICEF country offices during the period 2014-2017

Source: Key Performance Indicator data collected annually in reporting process and maintained by Data, Research and Policy Division.

One factor explaining the relatively modest up-take during the 2014-2017 period may be related to the significance attached to ‘strategy’. For UNICEF, implementation strategies are typically focused on major streams of activity that have been practiced over long periods of time and across multiple areas of programming, such as capacity development or service delivery. In this context, the practice of innovation as a strategy is comparatively nascent.

It is interesting to note that while COs reported relatively low use of innovation as such, they reported much higher use of newer technologies, digital platforms and social media (95 per cent in 2017).\(^\text{16}\) Two factors are potentially at play. First, it may be that these technologies are no longer seen as innovations but simply another tool in the communications toolkit. Another possible explanation is that newer technologies are viewed as innovations but are not considered by country offices to represent a ‘strategy’ as such, but are rather considered a tool, activity or project.

Central to this discussion is the way in which UNICEF staff perceive and define innovation. The evaluation used both interviews and the online survey to interrogate staff understanding of what innovation means in the context of UNICEF and its work. The survey results show that over two-thirds of staff responded favourably (agreed/strongly agreed) to a statement

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\(^{16}\) Question phrased as: “Does the country office promote through the use of newer technology, digital platforms and social media information, evidence and knowledge that can influence achievement of results for children especially of the most disadvantaged?”
that they had a clear idea of what innovation means in the context of UNICEF’s work.

However, while staff perceive that they have a clear understanding of what innovation means to UNICEF’s work, they nevertheless view the definition of innovation in varied terms. The overall lack of clarity around UNICEF’s use of the word innovation is reflected in the multiple definitions to be found in various documents, for example in the Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (PPPM) and guidance for the 2017 annual reports which frame innovation slightly differently. These differences are found in external documents as well.

Open-ended responses to the online survey were reviewed and categorized into three groups, as follows:

- Those responses that clearly indicate an appreciation for multiple innovation types (product, ICT/digital and soft technologies/approaches);
- Definitions using more general terms related to achievement of objectives; and
- Those that consider innovation to be fairly synonymous with technology. More information on these responses appears in the table below.

Also notable in these responses is a degree of ‘push back’ against the view that innovation is primarily technological (e.g. “… but it should not be reduced to technology”). This theme emerged consistently across data sources (i.e. interviews, surveys, document review).

Table 5: The online survey shows that UNICEF staff have various understandings of innovation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Definition of innovation</th>
<th>Illustrative response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly references differing types of innovation (i.e. product, technological, processes)</td>
<td>“Innovations at UNICEF range from new ways to structure programmes to new products and technologies…”</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General reference to improved performance and greater effectiveness/efficiency in achieving results</td>
<td>“Innovation can be described as steps and improvements towards efficiency and effectiveness by new ways of doing things.”</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More narrowly construed as technology</td>
<td>“My perception of innovation in the context of UNICEF is that it is mainly about technology”</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 United Nations Children’s Fund, Programme Planning Process Manual, UNICEF, New York, sub-section 3.218: “In UNICEF, innovation is defined as a process by which an idea, technology, or partnership is translated into a product, service or process that brings about better results for children. To be called an innovation, this idea, technology, or partnership must remove a current barrier or bottleneck, and be replicable at the scale at which UNICEF works. Innovation involves deliberate application of information, imagination, learning from failure, and initiative in deriving greater or different value from existing or shrinking resources.”

18 Instructions to complete the 2017 Annual Reports described innovation as being about: “generating important opportunities to advance progress towards results for children. Innovation in UNICEF is about doing something new or different that adds value, and is not always about technology”.

19 An example comes from the following: International Development Innovation Alliance, “Insights on Measuring the Impact of Innovation”; IDIA, 2017, in which UNICEF is represented as having two sets of terminology related to investment stages of scaling. One is related to product innovation (i.e. proof of concept /field trial /scale) and one related to the Office of Innovation (i.e. Futures /Ventures /Scale).

20 There were 130 responses to the open-ended question, which asked: “Please state briefly what you understand by the term ‘innovation’ in the context of UNICEF and its work”.

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A critical part of achieving strategic clarity comes from senior staff across the organization, who set the ‘tone from the top’ with regard to innovation. Evidence from the online survey suggests that the majority of UNICEF staff feel that there is no clear message about their role in innovation (Figure 5), either from senior management or from their office management.

Figure 5: The majority of UNICEF staff do not perceive a clear message from senior management with regard to innovation

Finally, evidence from the interviews and other sources\(^\text{21}\) points to the role of the SP as a guide for work at the country level, with CO priorities being determined based on a range of contextual factors (e.g. national development priorities, United Nations Development Assistance Framework). Indeed, a theme heard throughout the interviews at CO and RO levels was the importance of accounting for the various contexts in which different COs and ROs work (including a focus on development, humanitarian or fragile situations), the type of challenges they face (by sector, but also by target beneficiary group), the nature of relationships and partnership with national governments and other partners, and the capacity of offices to implement and fund innovation. Strategic priorities such as equity are among the types of considerations that are well-addressed through contextualization (see Box 1 on innovation and the equity agenda).

This theme emerged frequently across sources and suggests a need for greater attention to the innovation ecosystems within UNICEF. An innovation ecosystem can be considered as that set of different actors, relationships and resources

\(^{21}\) An evaluability assessment of the SP 2014-2017 found that while the SP is articulated as a plan, it is applied in practice as a framework. Country offices use the SP not as a directive but as guide when determining UNICEF’s role in the country, based on national development priorities and context as reflected in the situational analysis and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.
that all play a role in taking an innovation to from ideation to impact at scale.\textsuperscript{22}

To implement UNICEF’s strategy successfully, staff should be supported to assess and operate within the innovation ecosystem with the people, processes and resources required to do so.

### 3.1.2 Innovation culture within UNICEF and appetite for risk

The evaluation also examined the extent to which UNICEF promotes or incentivizes innovative thinking as an element of organizational ‘culture’ exhibited by a shared set of ideas and behaviours.

The evaluation found that staff do not yet fully perceive an enabling environment for innovative work. Global staff surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018 show that slightly above half of respondents (57 per cent and 56 per cent respectively) agreed or strongly agreed that new ideas and innovations were supported in their offices.\textsuperscript{23}

The GSS also showed that male respondents were more favourable about such encouragement (61 per cent) compared to females (50 per cent), a difference worth exploring further. Similarly, the online survey conducted for this evaluation found only 54 per cent of respondents agreeing that “the culture in my office/division encourages staff to be innovative”.

Information gathered through interviews, particularly with CO- and RO-level staff, provides a more nuanced picture.\textsuperscript{24}

Interviews suggest that some staff are encouraged to think about and discuss innovative ideas, and that if they have such an idea, they are usually supported to develop it. There were, of course, differing experiences and points of view that emerged from across sources, including the importance of supportive office management and leadership (“The country representative here is open-minded to trying things, it’s a good, enabling environment,” “Leadership in COs is essential”), and a range of impediments encountered even with supportive leadership (“I have been able to develop these ideas further but without proper resources and support. It’s viewed as a pet project.”). These points are addressed in the systems chapter of this synthesis report (e.g. leadership, human resources, planning, budgeting).

As part of the examination of culture, the evaluation asked about staff perception of risk-taking in relation to innovation. Online surveys, interviews and other available data suggest that staff perceive the organization to have a relatively low appetite for risk when it comes to innovation (see, for example, Figure 6).\textsuperscript{25}

When questioned about barriers to innovation, interview respondents most frequently cited risk aversion as a serious constraint, and based on online survey data, only one-third of respondents felt they were encouraged to take risks in order to be innovative. The evaluation

\textsuperscript{22} International Development Innovation Alliance, “What is an Innovation Ecosystem?”, IDIA, https://www.idiinnovation.org/ecosystem, accessed 19/01/19. The same source provides a fuller definition of an innovation ecosystem as the “enabling policies and regulations, accessibility of finance, informed human capital, supportive markets, energy, transport and communication infrastructure, a culture of supportive innovation and entrepreneurship, and networking assets, which together support productive relationships between different actors and other parts of the ecosystem.”.

\textsuperscript{23} GSS conducted between 2008 and 2014 also addressed these questions, albeit with different language. Those surveys asked about degree of agreement with the statement “I am encouraged to find new and better ways of doing things.” Across four surveys, it was found that two-thirds (67-68 per cent) of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

\textsuperscript{24} Based on selection criteria, interviewees were primarily those with knowledge of or some responsibility for innovation within their office. Therefore, a far narrower profile than that of the GSS data reported above. Information from interviews can differ or contrast with online survey responses, as surveys were intended to reach widely and achieve greater diversity of respondents.

\textsuperscript{25} Although not directly comparable in phrasing, GSS (2008, 2009 and 2011) have also examined risk appetite by asking: “In my office, we take calculated risks to achieve organizational goals rather than playing it safe” and found that just over half of respondents agreed/strongly agreed (51\%, 52\% and 56\%).
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was not able to examine how differing types of risk (e.g. financial, reputational) might be weighed differently, or whether tolerance varies by differing types.

Figure 6: Staff report that risk taking for innovation is not encouraged

Source: MS on-line survey
Question was phrased as: “Staff in my office are encouraged to take risks in order to be innovation.”

Related to risk is the willingness to accept and learn from unsuccessful endeavours. Each year, COs report on an organization-wide KPI on whether they have (or have created) a space to discuss failures. Data from the period 2014-2017 show that fewer than one-third of COs reported creation of such a space. A number of country offices (27) provided written comments that described means of reviewing and discussing failure as part of management team meetings, mid-year and annual reviews and strategic moments of reflection. These included both internal processes and those carried out with stakeholders and partners.

The majority of interviewees agreed that taking risks was necessary for innovation, and the mantra ‘fail fast and move on’ was mentioned by several staff in different offices and divisions. In explaining why they felt that UNICEF did not encourage risk-taking to support innovation, staff cited issues such as donor expectations that funding will deliver on agreed results, entrenched mindsets and staff, and bureaucratic processes.

Notably, staff suggested that they generally have to ‘bootstrap’ innovative ideas (i.e. find the funds, test the premise and find some level of success) before receiving any significant

26 These percentages may be somewhat low due to the phrasing of the question, which asks: “Does the country office create space for discussing failures in a public manner and learning from them particularly with a view toward blogging and sharing online?” Italicics added. In survey parlance, this is known as a “double-barreled” question in that multiple concepts are introduced, thereby making interpretation of yes/no responses difficult.

27 In reflecting on failures, one deputy representative wished that staff felt more comfortable with failures: “We haven’t mastered that detachment yet; we’re passionate.”
investment of resources from their department/office. Interviewees noted few incentives to innovate (in the words of one respondent, “There are no incentives for programmes to be innovative. It is not obligatory, there are no specific guidelines on how to do it. It is additional work and no funding for it”).

To an extent, a relatively risk-averse approach by UNICEF is understandable (and indeed advisable), given its mandate to protect children and young people. Some interviewees suggested that broader reputational risks, linked to UNICEF’s status as a high-profile, publicly-funded organization with an obligation to demonstrate good governance and value for money, also play a role. Interviewees at RO and CO level, in particular, mentioned the expectation of donors that UNICEF deliver on agreed results. These views may reflect a tension between, on the one hand, UNICEF’s core focus on managing risks to programme delivery, and on the other, its appetite for more cutting-edge innovation activities. They also reflect the fact that the three broad categories of innovation described above – hard, soft and ICT – each have different risk profiles and implications for risk management. For example, ICT/digital innovations generally face fewer regulatory hurdles than product innovations (e.g. new types of vaccines); for the latter, safety standards are higher and the consequences of product failure are potentially far more serious. The lighter regime of regulatory ‘checks and balances’ for technology innovation make it the ‘path of least resistance’, but potentially at the expense of other, lower-tech (but possibly more effective and/or relevant) solutions to the issues threatening children’s health and well-being worldwide.

28 Indeed, a small number of CO interviewees recounted how some innovation initiatives and activities (both CO- and HQ-driven) had necessitated significant levels of ‘firefighting’ on their part in order to manage risks to UNICEF’s reputation. This was particularly the case where new technologies were being introduced and implementation plans were not fully thought through.

29 One recent example is Supply Division’s extensive testing of new designs for emergency tents in a French wind tunnel facility.
Box 1: UNICEF approach to innovation in support of its equity agenda

During the period under review, UNICEF has had a clearly defined equity agenda intended to accelerate progress towards achieving the rights of all children. The degree to which UNICEF innovation work takes equity considerations into account differs although several of the innovations examined are indeed targeted in their design and development to marginalized groups. Examples of these include:

- Development of an accessible latrine slab for disabled people which SD IU has been developing through a Target Product Profile and procurement process in 2017-18.
- Accelerated School Readiness, in Ethiopia, is aimed at providing quality, accessible pre-primary education in rural and remote areas. It is in these areas where children are most likely to drop out of formal schooling after Grade one.
- Primero, while focused on case management of child services, is also flexible and adaptable, allowing the user to manage a broad range of child protection services and concerns, including incidences of gender based violence and violations of children’s rights and the reunification of unaccompanied or separated children.
- The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation is a package of technical guidance, tools, activities and physical supplies intended to develop the capacity of adolescents, specifically those affected by conflict, poverty, humanitarian crisis.
- UReport, a digital engagement platform for youth, addresses gender issues through several avenues. In countries including Kosovo and Ukraine, youth are directly engaged in poll topics dealing with issues of gender inequality and gender based violence. In other regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a pronounced digital divide and women and girls are less likely own or have control of a cell phone or to be empowered to voice their opinions. In these situations, COs and partners reach out to that audience in particular, for example, through radio stations with women DJs, association with famous and empowered women, and discussion of relevant women’s issues through ads and polls.

However, many of the management systems (e.g. business case templates) which support innovation in UNICEF do not fully or explicitly integrate equity considerations. One good practice identified is the Risk Impact Tool used by SD IU which asks reviewers to score the extent to which proposed products directly target vulnerable populations and whether the product [has] the ability to reach vulnerable populations (e.g. products for children with disabilities).

Finally, online survey responses indicate that more can be done to harness innovation for greater equity returns. Fewer than half of all responses indicate that innovation in their office/division clearly supports the UNICEF equity agenda with regard to disability and (asked separately) gender.

3.1.3 Partnering with programme countries

UNICEF’s work with host countries is guided chiefly by a mutually-agreed country programme document (CPD), which outlines the programmatic areas of work for a period of three to five years. CPDs are based on an analysis of needs and priorities, and must be approved by the host government as well as UNICEF’s Executive Board. It is within this programming context that any major CO commitment to introduce/pilot innovation is undertaken.

The need for contextual adaptation and local ownership is reflected throughout UNICEF’s work. It is well recognized that failing to ensure this could jeopardize any handover of innovations and potential scale-up. The online survey found that only 50 per cent of CO and
RO respondents agreed or strongly agreed that innovation activity in their office is well aligned to the priorities and needs of the country (or region, depending on respondent). Twenty-nine percent disagreed/strongly disagreed and 21 percent did not know.

Opinions vary on the extent to which UNICEF adequately aligns innovation with country (or regional) priorities and needs. Feedback from CO- and RO-level interviews indicated that innovation activity is (or should be) driven by country needs and national priorities. Others commented on HQ-led initiatives that were not well aligned with field priorities. Interviewees sometimes referred to such activities as “solutions seeking problems” (i.e. driven by a top-down view of needs rather than the de facto situation on the ground). In East Africa, where UNICEF support for digital innovation has had the longest opportunity to evolve, a multi-country review found that those initiatives are not yet wholly ‘owned’ by government partners.

CO interviewees mentioned examples of individual line ministers whose enthusiasm or lack thereof determined the degree of support for their work on innovation. This being said, while lack of government buy-in was mentioned by staff as an impediment to innovation, it ranked low in comparison to others. Among the case studies, lack of buy-in was mentioned in a few instances, for example in Malawi, where officials were initially sceptical about the drone corridor project. Government support eventually came after the CO articulated a clearer connection with UNICEF’s work and explained how the corridor could improve results for children. For ARIDA, a major government decentralization process in Nepal posed significant challenges in terms of government buy-in for the project, delaying the ability to begin studies. Implementation of Primero in Sierra Leone was unexpectedly delayed due to political shifts that resulted in drastically reduced support for government social workers (the key users of the new Primero system).

Synthesized findings point to a number of factors that appeared particularly relevant to UNICEF’s experiences in fostering ownership. Supportive environments, including policy frameworks and systems, emerged as especially important. Ensuring the innovation is anchored in a policy or a policy-related directive has been instrumental in several of the cases. A number of examples are summarized below and given fuller treatment in the complete individual case studies.

In Ethiopia, the Accelerated School Readiness Programme (ASR) was driven by a well-recognized problem related to limited pre-primary access and quality. Between 2007-2010, the Ethiopia country office worked closely with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to advocate for greater attention to early childhood care and education, and in 2010, the MoE released the National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education, which created a supportive environment for efforts to improve access to and quality of early learning programs. Based on the results of a pilot of ASR in one region (2015), the Federal Ministry of Education and the CO have expanded the program for use in three additional regions. UNICEF is now advocating for policies that will enable government to self-fund the program. The timeline covered here (> 10 years) also illustrates a strength in UNICEF’s role as long-term partner to government and its ability to cover different facets of the innovation ecosystem – from supporting a policy initiative on childhood education to exploring alternatives in order to expand access to those services through an innovative approach.

In some cases, partnering with governments to introduce innovations and bring them to scale depended on initial efforts to strengthen or consolidate existing systems. In Sierra Leone, for example, the CO aims to support the institutionalization of Primero and its adoption into government policy. However, doing so requires strengthening of systems and capacities. Nota-

31 Another example from Ethiopia is related to the ARIDA case, which responded to Ministry of Health interest in innovations with the potential to contribute to its “national medical oxygen and pulse oximetry scale-up road map”.
32 UNICEF and many government stakeholders view ASR as just one part of a larger pre-primary toolkit available to the government to improve equity of access.
bly, there was no common case management process for child protection being used across government or partners. Therefore, standard operating procedures were designed and rolled out in conjunction with Primero.

Not all innovative products, processes or digital/ICT tools are intended to transition to government ownership. This is evident, for example, with UNICEF’s work in citizen engagement platforms such as U-Report, which are intended to be co-owned across stakeholders, including United Nations agencies and youth organizations, through steering committees. There are currently 53 countries with such steering committees, and government is a lead partner in all countries.

In the case of Ukraine, the U-Report steering committee has brought a diverse set of actors around the table to consider issues that are important to youth. The U-Report steering committee in that country is led by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, with the CO’s chief of education as co-chair. Members include representatives of four line ministries, a parliamentarian ombudsman for human rights, two seats for representatives of the youth committee, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research, United Nations Volunteers, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Office of the Resident Coordinator. The Steering Committee reviews and refines proposed polls and discusses the results of concluded polls, including issues identified and potential solutions. Recent polls have addressed issues related to education and youth employment, violence and bullying, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and ecology, and HIV/AIDS and sexual education. Partners interviewed described a range of ways in which the data were used within their agencies or ministries.

Even with shared governance, there is a perception both within UNICEF and among partners that U-Report remains a UNICEF-led innovation. Models are emerging for co-funding arrangements (e.g. in Mozambique, between the CO and the United Nations Population Fund) and other avenues to transition and ownership, whereby other partners take on greater responsibilities. If not already documented, it might be beneficial to systematically examine these models and the role of other agencies and organizations in shared ownership and costs.

Evidence from across the case studies demonstrates that innovating with partners and generating ownership requires time, which may stand at odds with elements of the ‘fail fast and move on’ ethos of innovation. In several of the cases examined, pilots and demonstrations may be completed within months, but the processes of creating with government and partners, strengthening needed capacities and systems, and positioning an innovation for mainstreaming will require a period of at least three to five years.

3.1.4 Key findings: organizational values

- UNICEF has clearly signalled its strategic intent to utilize innovation as an important means to achieve results for children during the period 2014-2021.
- However, this strategic intent was not made sufficiently operational to set an organization-wide course or direction. UNICEF lacks an explicit overarching ‘innovation strategy’, setting out how it intends to go about innovation, what it intends to achieve, and how staff throughout the organization can contribute.
- UNICEF’s use of innovation as a strategy remains relatively limited as reported by

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33 The U-report study also describes the case of U-Report Uganda, where the value of the tool in soliciting input from young people was recognized by government.

34 In 2014, the CO responded to the crisis situation in the east of Ukraine. At that time, the CO’s capacity to source and send polls and analyze and report data was limited. Therefore, the Ukraine CO contracted a partner organization, the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research, a social research NGO, to support in the ongoing management of U-Report. Their continued role and provision of analytics and visualization of poll results enables the integration of results into government decision-making and their use by youth and adolescent development stakeholders.
country offices, with slightly more than half stating that they practice it in full or in part.

- Recent global staff surveys suggest that there is a perception among staff that they are not fully encouraged to innovate.

- Concepts and definitions of innovation varied among staff, with many reflecting that UNICEF’s efforts may be too focused on technological innovation.

- Although all parts of UNICEF display various elements of innovation culture, there are a number of barriers to making this culture more pervasive and effective. When questioned about barriers to innovation, interview respondents most frequently reported that risk aversion was a serious barrier.

- The expectations of funders for results carries considerable weight in risk considerations.

- Notably, staff suggested that they generally have to ‘bootstrap’ innovative ideas (i.e. find the funds, test the premise and find some level of success) before receiving any significant investment of resources from their department/office.

- Accounting for the contexts in which different COs and ROs work (e.g. the nature of relationships with national governments and other partners, and the capacity of offices to implement and fund innovation) emerged as a critical factor. While these factors are recognized, the way they are accounted for within UNICEF’s innovation work could be strengthened.

- Understanding of the innovation ecosystem within which UNICEF is an actor is a necessity, and staff should be supported to assess and operate within that system, including with the people, processes and resources required to do so.

- UNICEF’s experience with working with programme country partners demonstrates that considerable attention to issues of ownership is needed, including planning for the necessary steps, resources and time required to achieve this.

- Planning should also examine and account for the systems capacities to fully implement innovations, how those may need to be strengthened, and the duration and resources needed to do so.
3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

For the purposes of this evaluation, “structures” refer to UNICEF’s institutional architecture, including its physical footprint, governance and administration, and the formal and informal configuration of staff and departments throughout the organization. These structures influence what kind of innovation takes place, as well as where and when it occurs.

Data collection included offices and units with an innovation remit (i.e. OoI, ICTD, SD IU) as well as the wider set of structures that promote and support innovation across levels. The emphasis was on internal structures; external-facing arrangements such as partnerships were included to a limited extent. Guided by the key evaluation questions, this section briefly introduces the various structures and their positioning vis-à-vis innovation, analyses how UNICEF’s decentralized nature affects its innovation work, and discusses issues around resource mobilization and engagement with the private sector.

3.2.1 Offices and units with a formal innovation remit

Several units and offices are recognized as having an innovation remit. Some have long held responsibilities for the development of innovations. The Supply Division (SD) has several decades of experience in product innovation and recently consolidated that work in the SD IU (2009). Since the mid-2000s, UNICEF has placed an emphasis on ICT-enabled technologies, with units emerging initially in the east Africa region. The Uganda CO innovations unit created played an instrumental role. One lab gave rise to the Global Innovation Centre (GIC), which together with a ventures fund and an innovation unit, were combined into the Office of Innovation (OoI) in 2016, with the aim of facilitating UNICEF’s innovation work within the wider organization. Finally, ICTD has emerged as a critical support function for ICT-related innovation across countries, regions and divisions. ICTD has recently undergone a strategic re-alignment to enhance its contributions to UNICEF’s strategic priorities and strengthen its interface with other units; this transformation itself could be viewed as example of organizational innovation.

The information below summarizes points on each unit, with a focus on OMPs for the period 2018-2021, including goals, risks, governance and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Office of Innovation

- Established in February 2016 by bringing together existing units, including the Global Innovation Centre and the innovation unit and a ventures fund. first OMP (2014-2017) was submitted in response to a request from the Office of the Executive Director (OED) that the newly unified team develop a common, coordinated strategic plan. Per that OMP, OoI’s specific accountability is to: “identify and scale up successful innovations worldwide; engage and inspire external stakeholders; foster South-South and North-South cooperation”.

- OoI units are structured as follows: a scale unit that aims to expand the application of solutions though support for the roll-out and scale-up of a select portfolio of proven, innovative solutions; ventures, a unit that manages the Ventures Fund and makes investments in open-source frontier technology so UNICEF might shape markets and learn about/guide these technologies to benefit children; and a futures unit that identifies emerging and trending technologies, looks at a two- to five-year horizon and works with big technology partners and emerging industries.

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35 The units that would eventually be integrated into the Office of Innovation began to take shape in 2009 with the creation of the T4D Unit in the Uganda Country Office.
• The OoI OMP, 2018-2021 identifies the office’s highest-level result as: “accelerating results for children through innovation and influencing the external content to create an enabling environment for others to innovate for children”. The means to achieve this result were by identifying and scaling up successful innovations worldwide, engaging and inspiring external stakeholders and fostering South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation. Priorities were defined through consultation involving OED and innovation focal points across regions.

• Risks for the achievement of the goal are identified (e.g. risk aversion, insufficient leverage and communication needed to position its work in a competitive and evolving area of work; inadequate funding).

• The Ventures Fund has raised more than $16 million and since 2014 has supported 59 investments across 39 countries, including CO-led projects and start-up investments.

• Looking forward, Ool seeks a catalytic investment of $4 million from the ICT board to develop a more robust data platform to collect real-time data, combining, analysing and anonymizing data from private sector firms.

• In 2017, the GIC supported some 90 countries to adapt innovation solutions. For example, by mid-2018, the RapidPro platform was used across 53 countries (including real-time programme management and monitoring in 29 countries) and powers part of U-Report in 45 countries.

• The GIC governance includes an advisory committee made up of GIC staff, social innovators and representatives of the partners that fund the work.

• The OMP includes a proposal for an accelerator fund for scaling innovative solutions that aims to provide resources to bring proven open-source innovations to scale.\textsuperscript{38}

• The Ool/GIC actively supported the development of regionalT4D positions through creation and recruitment of these roles, curriculum development and capacity-building to prepare the newly-recruited staff for these key positions.

• The OMP also proposed a new position of ‘innovation deployment specialist’. This position would serve as a bridge between stages of innovation, from prototyping to mainstreaming into programmes.\textsuperscript{39}

• The OMP, 2018-2021 does not describe its M&E-related plans. It does describe an upward reporting process through which updates on progress and challenges are provided (i.e. OED and the Global Management Team).

Supply Division Innovation Unit

• SD IU works to drive research and development (R&D) and accelerate scale-up of products which are not available on the market but fulfil a priority need in the unique context in which UNICEF and its partners operate.

• While UNICEF has a long history of involvement in product innovation and market shaping, SD IU was established in 2009. Structures and processes were introduced including the Innovation Review Board (2011) and target product profiles (2014).

• As part of the SD OMP/ products and markets strategy, product innovation seeks to help increase access to and provision of affordable, fit-for-purpose products and services both globally and locally.

• SD IU has outlined ways that COs and ROs can incorporate elements of the strategy in their programmes – for example, through maintaining dialogue with local manufacturers and suppliers to convey product needs, participating in field trials (e.g. ethical approvals, data analysis) and developing scale-up plans.

• Governance structures for SD products and markets includes a ‘cascading’ set of advisory groups, both internal and external, operating at the strategic, sector and project levels.

\textsuperscript{38} United Nations Children’s Fund, “UNICEF Office of Innovation Management Plan 2018-2021”, UNICEF, New York, 2018, pp. 11. Ool provided the following update: “It is called Accelerate to Scale and refers to the expertise and processes to accelerate an innovation through the transition to scale phase. This includes the deployment, evidence and validated business model as well as proposal that will better enable that innovation to raise funding”.

\textsuperscript{39} Office of Innovation, OMP 2018-2021, pp. 15.
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- A notable element is the Innovation Review Board (IRB), which consists of senior staff from SD and serves as the core entity for decision-making, including ‘stage-gating’, for product development projects.
- The strategy note on products and markets (as part of the SD OMP, 2018-2021) elaborates a theory of change, assumptions, implementation roles across the organization, a communications plan and performance targets.

Information and Communications Technology Division

- ‘Back-office’ characteristics of ICT support shifted substantially with the development of the ICT strategy (2016), which seeks to strengthen ICTD’s interface with other units (e.g. via business relation managers at HQ and T4D analysts in the ROs).
- The ICTD OMP, 2018-2021[^40] seeks to “transform and build partnerships to successfully implement UNICEF programmes globally through the use of innovative technology-enabled solutions for better outcomes for children.” The new strategy entails three pillars of work, including operational efficiency and effectiveness, programme effectiveness, and innovative use of technology solutions. The third (innovation) pillar focuses on:
  - Technical guidance and support to COs beyond traditional methods of programming;
  - Developing capabilities within COs and ROs to apply innovations (e.g. drones, wearables, Blockchain and disruptive technologies) as they are introduced;
  - Partnering with the technology sector, private sector, NGOs, government and other strategic alliances.
- The OMP includes a detailed consideration of risks. Oversight and project management systems are identified lieu of M&E plans.

No performance measures are mentioned, although reference is made to industry forms of continuous solutions evaluation and value realization monitoring.

Knowledge and perceptions of formal innovation structures across the organization

To understand the extent to which these structures are known to staff for their innovation remit, the online survey asked a) whether staff (HQ/RO/CO) knew where to find information on UNICEF’s innovation approach and b) whether they knew of structures to help them share ideas with innovative potential. Fifty per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew where to look for information on UNICEF’s approach to innovation. Thirty-eight per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they knew of clear and established structures for support in developing their ideas further.

Information from interviews provide a more detailed picture on views of these formal structures. Of the three offices with remit for innovation, SD IU and ICTD were mentioned infrequently. Throughout the interviews, OoI[^42] was praised for its ability to provoke new ways of thinking, for example by spreading the idea of ‘failing fast’. Some respondents pointed to positive interactions with OoI staff. The support provided for bringing existing innovations to scale was particularly valued. Many interviewees felt that the OoI was generally supportive, and visits to COs by the Director of OoI were appreciated.

That said, the weight of the evidence suggests that for UNICEF, having a single, central unit sent a signal that the function was being centralized, which therefore meant innovation

[^40]: Ibid.
[^41]: Question was phrased as: “Drawing on your existing knowledge only, please state briefly where you would look (for example documents, websites) in order to find out about UNICEF’s approach to innovation”.
[^42]: It is important to recognize that OoI as a structure was created in 2016, and that reference to the “office of innovation” throughout the assessment oftentimes refers to the component units and their operations prior to their placement in the OoI.
was ‘something others do’. A few interviewees saw this as a potential deterrent to innovating outside that structure, and others questioned its placement outside of, and relationship to, programmes.

A number of respondents pointed to perceived shortcomings in the work of the OoI. Most frequently, respondents felt that the OoI was disconnected from the priorities of COs and inadequately attuned to the needs of contextualizing innovations to the setting. Some CO interviewees felt that involvement and buy-in of local innovation experts and stakeholders was negatively influenced when innovations were viewed as proceeding without due regard to local context.

It was also noted that the OoI devotes considerable time and attention to ‘branding’ its products and ‘selling’ its ideas to others (sometimes expressed as ‘self-promotion’). Respondents felt that materials produced were ‘good news stories’ with little meaningful insight about pitfalls or struggles encountered. Some innovations were seen as ‘oversold’ at the expense of other technologies that may better fit the need. When it appears that UNICEF is backing a specific solution, it can hinder the agency’s ability to serve as an honest broker with governments in the search for solutions.

There was a frequently-expressed perception among interviewees and survey respondents that the OoI predominantly focused on ICT-enabled innovation. Some CO and RO staff are sceptical about the concrete benefits of innovations viewed as arising from the Office of Innovation. Several of those interviewed expressed the opinion that the OoI might achieve greater impact by supporting ROs and COs to engage with partners and acquire funding to innovate. Finally, a number of respondents expressed frustration with a perceived lack of transparency and difficulty in acquiring documentation or information from the OoI.

### 3.2.2 Innovation at the decentralized level

UNICEF is a highly decentralized organization, and as such it is not surprising that in practice, much of its innovation work could be characterized as unfolding without much fanfare among a complex network of individuals, units and offices within UNICEF, as well as with external partners and stakeholders. Because it is embedded within routine programming and operations, much of this activity is not categorized as part of the ‘formal innovation structure’.

This point – that much of innovation within UNICEF occurs in a diffused manner outside of the formally-recognized innovation structures – was evidenced in online survey findings and interviews. Results highlight a number of informal channels through which innovation takes place – or, even if ‘formalized’, routes that do not involve centralized innovation teams. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of online survey respondents reported that they had opportunities to be involved in innovation at UNICEF, while 57 per cent stated that they were involved in innovation.

This is consistent with interview responses, in which a number of individuals were recognized as innovation champions – either because they have pushed forward a particular project or are focused on making their office, section, or department more innovative generally. These individuals, or ‘intrapreneurs’, are not always those with innovation-related titles or mandates; in fact, often they are not. Interviews suggest that those giving innovation an initial push range from representatives through to junior programme officers. Especially in COs, ‘intrapreneurs’ are predominately line staff.

That said, the position of an ‘intrapreneur’ (specifically his or her level of seniority) within the organization does appear to determine the degree to which s/he is listened to and given the space needed to pursue ideas. Also important is the clarity of the decision-making process for new ideas to be moved forward, as well as the individual’s ability to stay in his/her position long enough to see the idea through.
Given UNICEF’s decentralized nature, country and regional offices have a pivotal role in the innovation function. However, this role varies, as it depends on decisions by CO/RO management (in discussion with host country governments) regarding priority areas for UNICEF’s work in a given country/region.

Regional Offices

ROs have multiple important roles in supporting innovation. One means is through the development of regionally-adapted strategies and guidance related to innovation. ROs also support COs by disseminating information and supporting replication of innovative approaches, helping to further mainstream innovations and achieve scale. A few examples of this type of support include:

Eastern and Southern Africa:
- In-person training for ICT and T4D focal points from all COs, covering best practices for establishing country-level governance and management processes and training on key skills, including human-centred design and end-to-end software product life-cycle management.
- A review of technological innovations in civil registration and a multi-region research study on digital learning and education technology.
- Support to countries on innovative financing mechanisms for vaccine procurement, to ensure timeliness of supplies and eliminate risk of stock-outs.
- A multi-country child helpline that strengthens case management and referrals and reduces duplication of systems at the country level.

East Asia and the Pacific:
- Support to three COs to pilot human-centred design processes for adolescents related to health and sexuality education.
- Support for tracking and monitoring of public expenditures for children at central government level through innovative use of existing data sets.

Europe and Central Asia:
- Innovative approaches arising from the humanitarian response for children affected by the migration crisis, including the ‘One-UNICEF’ model and its accompanying framework for collaboration, which aimed to bring UNICEF and its National Committees together to contribute to a combined UNICEF response.\(^43\)

Latin America and the Caribbean:
- Drafting of an innovation framework and a mapping of activities across countries (ongoing).
- Innovative approaches to advocacy vis-à-vis a range of decision-makers to advance the rights of children on the move.
- Use of cash transfers (Dominica) and U-Report in the regional response to Category 5 hurricanes.
- Support to country offices to explore fiscal frameworks to invest in children involved in extractive industries.

In more than one region, work is underway, through T4D specialists, to identify optimal support solutions based on a typology of countries and their innovation needs. To illustrate, in larger COs, dedicated innovation staff would be placed under the deputy representative to reinforce their cross-cutting and programme-based roles, while smaller COs might be supported by a regionally-based talent pool. While it is possible to see that this thinking is taking place already, there is still a tendency towards an ad hoc rather than routine approach to supporting country offices.

Country Offices

Country offices in UNICEF vary widely in their size and diversity. In general, it appears that smaller offices can be managed more horizontally than larger offices, and incorporate more bottom-up input into decision-making based on

team discussions. In comparison, large offices such as Nigeria, India or the Democratic Republic of Congo are considerably more complex, with layers of authority including field or zonal offices that support the CO. Country offices dealing with emergency or crisis situations, some in chronic or sequential occurrences, have unique barriers to innovation work (e.g. reliance on surge staff or otherwise frequent turnover), and should be supported accordingly. In these settings, when innovative solutions do arise as part of programming, the likelihood that it would be documented seems low.

Across all data sources, it emerged that CO leadership support of innovation was a critical factor for COs to work in that space. In particular, the role of the deputy representative was raised across data sources as pivotal in supporting innovation in an integrative, office-wide manner. The placement of innovation staff with the deputy representative could contribute to breaking down ‘silos’ (e.g. sector or sub-sectors operating in a divided and isolated manner) by facilitating multidisciplinary problem-solving.

In several COs, integrated work is already being supported through new or re-worked structures to implement innovation in a more cross-divisional manner. One means of doing this is by establishing innovation review groups or task forces at CO level. For example:

- In the Myanmar CO, a taskforce looks for needed innovations and identifies the type of support required to roll them out and to bring them to scale.
- In the Belarus CO, a cross-divisional innovation team identifies entry points for innovative solutions in the office and for programme work.
- In the Kenya CO, an innovation community of practice was developed to oversee the potential application and adoption of new technologies, processes and partnerships within the office.
- Similar structures have been established in the India CO and the Cote d’ Ivoire CO.

**Interface between HQ, RO and CO on innovations**

Despite its decentralized nature, relationships between the levels (HQ, RO, CO) adhere to well-established procedures. Notably, CO staff turn first to the RO for support; when necessary, the RO will contact HQ. Some staff expressed the opinion that these established lines of communication, as well as the sequencing of required approvals, can act as an obstacle to innovation. An innovative idea can be stymied at multiple levels and, at best, will be relatively slow-moving. Some CO respondents point out that even when financial barriers are removed, for example when HQ provides catalytic funding, work can be halted or delayed by layers of decision-making within the CO.

Staff in COs and ROs consistently suggested that central units could effectively support them by acting as a mediator or ‘translator’ for innovation activities. This might involve an innovation expert discussing current needs with COs or ROs and matching these to innovative solutions, including brokering contact between offices and relevant experts to support implementation based on needs.

The evaluation did not assess structures such as PD or EMOPS in detail, as the focus was on formal structures with innovation remit. However, case studies identified the value of having technical advisory input and engagement throughout the innovation process. The formal and informal mechanisms within those divisions to support innovation across levels should be fully outlined moving forward.
3.2.3 Structures and mainstreaming innovation

This element of the evaluation sought to identify approaches used and assess whether innovation was adopted or mainstreamed. In order to be mainstreamed, an innovation would need to be integrated into all aspects of a relevant system (e.g. education system, health system) including the processes and parameters that shape the system. The implication is that mainstreaming involves a ‘systems approach’ rather than a ‘project approach’.

UNICEF has, over decades, supported innovations for children, including mainstreaming them into systems and procedures as well as scaling them up in programmes. Examples of this practice are numerous and only a very few are highlighted here.

- In the 1960s and 1970s, UNICEF was at the front line of supporting the development of oral rehydration salts, termed “potentially the most important medical advance of this century”. Currently, UNICEF procures and distributes approximately 55 million oral rehydration packets a year, and is now also procuring a version co-packaged with zinc.

- The Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF in 1991. The initiative is a global effort to implement practices that protect, promote and support breastfeeding, for example through training health workers to support and encourage early and exclusive breastfeeding. It is estimated that 28 per cent of the world’s maternal and newborn facilities have been designated ‘baby-friendly’ at some point in time, although countries have found it difficult to maintain designation (and re-designation) status over more than a few years.

- Starting nearly 15 years ago, UNICEF played an important role in the development of Penta vaccines (DTP-HepB/Hib) by working closely with then newly-created GAVI Alliance to guide and incentivize suppliers to develop Penta vaccine products of greater efficiency (i.e. multi-dose products). Over the same period of time (2000 to 2016), pentavalent vaccine coverage in GAVI-supported countries has increased from 1 per cent to 78 per cent.

- In the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS (PMTCT), UNICEF spearheaded the adoption of the Option B+ policy as a simplified protocol to start pregnant women on antiretroviral treatment regardless of CD4 count. This represented a disruption to established policy-making processes for PMTCT (i.e. typically WHO-led, supported by technical experts). It was spurred by a bottom-up approach based on a country-level initiative (Malawi) and eventually supported by normative agencies. Throughout the process, UNICEF served as a leading agenda-setting agency for the approach and was key in securing its widespread, rapid implementation. Recently, an evaluation of Malawi’s Option B+ program found that over 88 per cent of HIV-infected pregnant women were on antiretroviral treatment in pregnancy and that overall,

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44 Evaluation question: “To what extent has innovation been adopted / mainstreamed outside those entities with a formally recognized innovation role?” The question, as phrased, was based on an erroneous assumption (i.e. that units with innovation remit innovate and other units adopt). In fact, the majority of innovation within UNICEF occurs outside of these units. Therefore, the question was re-framed to focus on UNICEF’s experience in mainstreaming innovation within programmes.


The following section uses information from the case studies to address evaluation questions on the approaches used within UNICEF to mainstream or bring to scale innovative solutions. Despite the diversity of types of innovation (products, ICT/digital, process) and their differing, anticipated end points, there are themes that emerge frequently across cases, including: supportive national policies or frameworks within which an innovation can be grounded; enabling systems; government leadership in the innovation process; strong partnerships arrangements; and donors committed to the objective of achieving scale.

The first case described here is from UNICEF’s work in product innovation, which aims to achieve ‘scale’ by incentivizing development of products that would eventually be readily available through markets. Indeed, several of the approaches, tools or products highlighted at the beginning of this section demonstrate the demands associated with mainstreaming innovative products and bringing them to scale (e.g. longer time-frames).

It is important to note how UNICEF’s unique structure and positioning contributed to the mainstreaming of an innovation like ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF). The RUTF case study is used here to demonstrate how the process of mainstreaming and taking to scale ranged from the issuance of new global norms and standards related to community-based treatment for acute malnutrition (done jointly by UNICEF and other United Nations agencies) to working with local producers to create quality, locally-sourced RUTF. Its development drew on UNICEF capacities across areas such as product innovation, programming, policy dialogue, advocacy, operations and emergency response, among others.

The RUTF case highlights some of the common themes identified above: supportive policies or frameworks that spurred growth in demand and production; a focus on systems strengthening, government leadership at key stages of the innovation process; and strong partnerships arrangements.

- Beginning in 2001, the Supply Division issued a first long-term agreement with a firm that was the only qualified supplier of RUTF at the time.
- By 2004, interest and demand for RUTF began to grow, as its efficacy was demonstrated in the field. In order to improve the capacity to meet growing global demands, Supply Division began considering new sources of the product.
- In 2006, in response to increased demand, SD began to work with manufacturers in programme countries with the potential to produce RUTF for local use. However, early experience found that the quality of RUTF production was low and production capacities insufficient to meet local demand, resulting in continuing reliance on imported product. In response, Supply Division further focused its efforts on expanding the supplier base, increased production capacity, and improving quality of RUTF.
- In 2007, international community members issued a joint statement that officially endorsed an approach to addressing acute malnutrition in community settings (i.e. community management of acute malnutrition [CMAM]). The approach included RUTF as an important element, since children presenting uncomplicated cases of severe acute malnutrition could receive RUTF or other nutrient-dense foods at home.
- The international adoption of the CMAM model contributed significantly to increased use of RUTF (demand nearly

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51 WHO, UNICEF, United Nations System standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSSCN), and the World Food Program.
52 Bazzano, Potts, Bazzano and Mason, 2017. The Life Course Implications of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food for Children in Low-Income Countries. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. Of note is the following: Severe acute malnutrition is confirmed in children under five with visible severe wasting, nutritional oedema, or mid-upper arm circumference of less than 115 millimeters, measured using a simple coloured plastic strip. Under the CMAM model, uncomplicated cases of severe acute malnutrition can be treated at home or in the community using RUTF, while cases that include medical complications or no appetite require inpatient care using therapeutic milk.
doubled the year following the joint statement). In introducing CMAM to programme countries, it was seen as an advantage that efforts would be led and coordinated by Ministries of Health building on existing health systems-strengthening efforts.

- In 2008, UNICEF was unable to meet global demand for RUTF, which rose as a result of famine in the Horn of Africa. Accordingly, SD made the decision to open the market to new RUTF manufacturers through a competitive RFP process.
- SD also commissioned a study to identify gaps and opportunities for the RUTF supply chain in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia; findings pointed to important bottlenecks for procurement of supplies, including transportation duration and accurate demand forecasting, as well as limits to production capacity. Based on the study’s findings, efforts to strengthen supply chains included: continuing to diversify the supplier base through a competitive RFP process; pre-positioning buffer stock in strategic locations; developing a demand-forecasting tool to make more accurate predictions.
- Working closely with suppliers to increase production capacity, SD has improved its ability to respond to emergencies, and in 2011, SD was able to meet a sudden increase in demand caused by a severe drought in Africa, while maintaining uninterrupted global supply.
- In 2015, RUTF for acute malnutrition was included in the in the Codex Committee for Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses and the Codex Committee for Food Hygiene, which set regulations to ensure safe foods for international trade and provides manufacturers with guidance from the Food and Agriculture Organization and WHO.

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54 Ibid.
Figure 7: The RUTF pipeline has scaled up dramatically in recent years thanks to the efforts of UNICEF and partners

The RUTF scale-up process has taken a market-driven approach and is part of SD’s regular procurement processes. However, the majority of RUTFs are procured using donor funding; therefore, co-financing options for RUTF are being explored with an aim of national governments budgeting for procurement of RUTF. To facilitate this movement, Supply Division is working to have RUTF included on the WHO Essential Medicines List, which would assist with long-term budgeting and planning and reduce reliance on donor funding, accelerating sustainable scale-up.

In the example above, scaling up and mainstreaming of RUTF benefitted from inclusion in global guidance (i.e. joint statement, Codex Alimentarius), having CMAM led by Ministries of Health (many of which were already focused on community-based management of childhood illnesses) and systems strengthening.

A UNICEF evaluation reviewed the progress of integrating CMAM into national health systems in five case study countries. For UNICEF, COs, with support from RO and PD, would be at the forefront of that effort. In case study countries, CMAM was initiated as part of emergency response, or was being piloted or otherwise introduced in a limited manner. Over a number of years, national stakeholders progressively assumed greater ownership and CMAM, with expansion of coverage and mainstreaming in government systems. In 2012, governments in 63 countries had established partnerships with UNICEF, the World Food

55 For more on the WHO Essential Medicines List, see https://www.who.int/medicines/publications/essentialmedicines/en/.
Programme, WHO, donors, and NGO partners to implement CMAM.\textsuperscript{57}

The scaling-up and mainstreaming of RUTF spanned a time frame of over 15 years and illustrates the duration and continuity of effort required for certain types of innovation. Other innovation cases studies are currently in a focused phase of mainstreaming into government policies and systems. The Data Must Speak case, for example, exemplifies the steps being taken to mainstream and achieve scale as a central priority. The section below highlights its progress, with consideration of the cross-case themes identified above.

- Data Must Speak (DMS), with technical support from UNICEF PD and COs, aims to strengthen accountability relationships among government, teachers, parents and students. It does so by tailoring data-based tools on key variables for actions based on the needs of each user group, including within Ministries of Education (MoE), school inspectors, head teachers, parent-teacher associations, and community members.

- In its first phase, the DMS initiative worked across levels (HQ/PD, regional and country offices) to support Ministries of Education to initiate the programme. Much of this work involved consultation with education stakeholders to identify and select tools that could be applied appropriately and were aligned with MoE capacities. DMS is now in its second phase, supported, in part, by a grant acquired by the PD/education section from the Global Partnership for Education. Phase II focuses on embedding tools already developed within MoE processes and engaging with Ministry actors beyond those initially involved in the project, and on expansion into a limited number (two to three) of new countries.

- In Madagascar, Data Must Speak began in 2014. Some data tools (i.e. school profiles) had been used previously in Madagascar and were understood by actors across levels of the education structure. However, these previous efforts lacked funding to achieve scale, failed to be integrated into existing systems, and resulted in tools that were largely redundant and uncoordinated. The MoE thus had a strong incentive to create standardized tools that could be used across the country in a systematic manner. This was a main driver of the Ministry’s ownership of the process and a key role in the Ministry’s decision to rapidly scale up DMS.\textsuperscript{58}

- In Madagascar, an important challenge included systems factors. DMS implementation was delayed while data and school indicators were standardized across multiple existing education databases. That process required almost three years and may have led to flagging interest among partners. However, UNICEF stakeholders and MoE representatives saw these improvements as critical to ensuring the relevance and timeliness of the data that underpins the DMS tools.

- The DMS project builds on experience from previous, related projects of partners and benefits from ongoing collaboration with partners including the World Bank Group, Agence Française de Développement, and the European Union across countries. Collaboration among partners provides greater access to technical expertise and networks and human and financial resources for project development and implementation. In Madagascar, these partners have provided financing to bring DMS to other regions. This included funding from the World Bank, which helped scale up the innovation to 12 regions, and AFD, which will finance bringing DMS to four of the remaining regions.
Further on the theme of mainstreaming and capacities, stakeholders – including UNICEF, NGO partners, governments and donor agencies – recognized the ability of digital monitoring to enhance timely access to data. However, sources also pointed to the fact that increased access must be accompanied by increased use in order to lead to better outcomes – a point that underpins UNICEF’s Data for Children Strategic Framework. This suggests that programme action is required to ensure that intended users have the capabilities to harness the data and use them to inform programming. This point was noted in the RapidPro case in Sierra Leone and in early iterations of digital monitoring for health in Uganda.

Also relevant to structures and mainstreaming, UNICEF launched an initiative in 2017 to strengthen national real-time monitoring systems through the scale up of RapidPro. The initiative is implemented through a joint steering committee that includes the OoI, ICTD, PD, and the Field Results Group. The initiative was launched with a share of UNICEF’s ‘set-aside funding’ and supports upfront costs of establishing or scaling up national real-time monitoring (through RapidPro). The initiative has disbursed $2.4 million to 11 countries. In addition to the funding, the initiative provides interdisciplinary technical and quality assurance from HQ and ROs, as well as standardized documentation and lessons learned.

3.2.4 UNICEF’s partnerships for innovation

This section addresses evaluation questions related to innovation and partnerships, including engagement with industry and the private sector. These questions focus on how partnerships benefit UNICEF’s innovation work and, in particular, the extent to which engagement with industry and private sector benefits innovation. The evaluation did not attempt to view partnerships for innovation in a comprehensive manner, as this would be impractical. Instead, this section focuses on several relatively new modalities to engage partners, particularly private sector actors.

Working with partners is, in and of itself, one of UNICEF’s key implementing strategies, represented in both strategy cycles being considered here. Virtually all of UNICEF’s innovation activities could be described as ‘innovation partnerships’, since they almost invariably involve engagement with external stakeholders, be they end-users, suppliers, academic institutions, NGOs, governments or regulators. Moreover, as noted above, UNICEF’s activities at country level are conducted in partnership with host governments as part of approved programmes of cooperation with the host country.

One of the OoI’s core accountabilities is to engage and inspire external stakeholders. In keeping with this, the work carried out by the OoI relies on an expansive network of partners of various types (i.e. private sector, academia, government, United Nations and civil society). Broadly, the OoI engages with private sector partners by convening corporations, designers, entrepreneurs and other development partners in ways that capitalize on the intersection between high-growth tech industries and social good. These partnerships, particularly with the private sector aim to:

61 The questions associated with this theme included: To what extent do UNICEF’s external engagements in innovation enable UNICEF and its partners to deliver results and To what extent does UNICEF’s engagement with industry and the private sector benefit innovation?
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- Strengthen government systems/institutions using technology such as real-time information, chatbots, and health info centres.
- Apply machine learning to gain critical insights into the needs of vulnerable populations and make more informed decisions about how to invest resources.
- Partner with internet platforms, such as Facebook Messenger, to increase access to information for vulnerable populations.
- Explore emerging technology solutions with the technology sector, including opportunities that have the potential to deliver social impact in new contexts.

For some areas (e.g. data science research or wearables and sensors technology), partnership priorities have been identified and are described in prospectus-like documents that introduce priority areas of interest and opportunities, as well as a list of prospective partners, criteria for partnership, and illustrative budgets for types of activities. One of these partnerships, between UNICEF and ARM, a global semi-conductor and software design firm, is described in Box 2.

**Box 2: Shared value with private sector partners**

In 2015, UNICEF and ARM, a global semiconductor and software design company, signed a multi-year partnership to accelerate the development of new technologies to overcome the barriers that prevent millions of families from accessing basic health, education and support services. The ARM partnership consists of three main pillars and aims to benefit the partner and leverage UNICEF’s added value:

- **Scale-up**: Select and fund existing UNICEF projects that have been identified for scale-up.
- **Technology Growth Areas**: Launch a joint ‘Technology for Good’ challenge in the wearables and sensors space.
- **Exposing Market Opportunities**: Conduct market analysis in priority areas to understand business opportunities, with a focus on hardware.

The partnership with ARM financially supported the ‘urban innovation and wearables for good’ work in 2017 and the scale up of U-Report, and has given UNICEF access to a network of private sector companies doing business for social good. In 2017, the partnership produced an urbanization use-case handbook and spurred further work with ARM and others to conduct research and market analysis in Jakarta, Nairobi and Mexico City to identify opportunities for technology actors to reach urban poor in emerging markets, profitably and at scale.

Similarly, SD IU depends on partnerships to advance its efforts in market-shaping, funding, product development, and field trials and/or scaling up. This can include partnerships with donors, country governments, technical and normative agencies (e.g. disease-specific partners, coalitions, forums), other United Nations agencies and NGOs. SD IU also has a number of official partnerships, including the United States Agency for International Development for Advance Market Commitment of Zika diagnostics. The unit has developed a set of key messages for different types of partners. Another approach to engaging expertise involves subject matter experts consulted as part of the SD IU processes and approach to target product profiles (TPPs). This sees SD IU leverage SD’s market-pull forces to encourage its suppliers to develop innovative solutions to UNICEF’s needs. Two illustrations in Text Box 3 below serve to outline how these consultations engage expertise across disciplines and industries.

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Many interviewees described the need for new forms of partnership with the private sector beyond approaches that focus on corporate social responsibility or philanthropy. While this is new ground for many in UNICEF, there are promising practices such as the Priority Shared Value Partnerships (PSVPs)\(^{63}\) approach, in which partnership with companies is based on shared value (e.g. commercial interest to the partner). Led internally by Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, these agreements are aimed at leveraging the resources, influence and reach of business where they align with/address priorities identified in the SP. (For example, UNICEF is working with a Japanese housing and building materials company to ensure that affordable and appropriately-designed toilets are available for purchase in low income countries).

The PSVPs were developed in a step-wise process\(^{64}\) culminating in a listing of 38 priority prospect companies. The list was discussed and agreed among stakeholders and endorsed by UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director of Partnerships, the executive directors of National Committees, Supply Division and Programme Division. Information about the progress of these steps is available in a transparent manner (internal to UNICEF).

Once a partner has committed to moving ahead, an iterative process of co-creation is begun, which includes valuation of both financial and non-financial inputs and agreement around targets to be reached together. As of July 2018, PSVPs are in place with Amadeus, ARM, Football Club Barcelona, H&M, Lego, LIXIL and Unilever, and discussions are underway with Alibaba, Adidas, Amazon, Apple, Disney, Facebook, Google, Mastercard, Microsoft, Millicom, NEC, Orange, Pfizer, Philips, Softbank, UPS.

Challenges to this approach have been recognized, including the time and staff commitment required to facilitate this way of doing business across the organization. In addition, since these partnerships are relatively new, the extent to which PSVPs have furthered UNICEF’s objectives while adding value for partners has not yet been assessed. As a performance metric for the SP, 2018-2021, UNICEF seeks to increase the “number of priority integrated partnerships that harness their core business, research and development, advocacy and marketing power for the cause of children” from six at baseline to 30 in 2021.

Notwithstanding the benefits, real and potential, of these arrangements, it appears that there may be further scope to strengthen UNICEF’s partnerships to support innovation. UNICEF staff cited a number of impediments to working with potential partners in the private sector, such as approval processes via their hierarchies (including National Committees) and challenges with aligning objectives between UNICEF and partners. Greater clarity was sought regarding fundraising for innovation. While time pressures in general were noted as a challenge in innovation, this challenge was compounded when innovating through partnerships.

UNICEF also must consider how it can incentivize private sector involvement. For example, in the Humanitarian Drone Corridor in Malawi, the number of applications received in the first year were fewer than expected. A number of case study informants indicated that they felt that large organizations, of the type that were initially targeted for the corridor, were not interested in taking on the risk associated with testing in the environment of Malawi and likely had other options for beyond visual line-of-sight flight testing. No initial market analyses were done in advance of establishing the corridor, and this lack of insight into demand has likely contributed to some misalignment with the private sector.

Notably, interviewees raised the issue of whether UNICEF has adequately assessed the risks of partnering with firms in the context of data privacy and other concerns. Several interviewees pointed to the need for staff to

\(^{63}\) Previously known as ‘Priority Integrated Partnerships’, not to be confused with Product Innovation Projects undertaken by SD

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Box 3: Industry engagement to spur product innovation on behalf of children.

Engagement with industry is a core element of the UNICEF SP, 2018-2021 and a priority approach for the Supply Division. Two cases in which industry is engaged with the intent of galvanizing markets for specific needs are used to illustrate the approach.

In November 2014, during the height of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, UNICEF SD convened a global consultation with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) industry to provide global forecasts and advocate for sufficient global supply. Over 15 manufacturers, representing the vast majority of global production capacity, participated, as well as key partners. The PPE consultation enabled development of new manufacturer and supplier connections that led to new long-term agreements. These have in turn significantly reduced the prices of PPE items (e.g. coveralls, masks, hoods and gowns, and aprons).

An ongoing stakeholder/industry consultation involves innovating solutions to improve the monitoring of faecal contamination in drinking water, a problem that affects an estimated 1.8 billion people. In November 2016, the Supply Division and the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation hosted an event bringing together practitioners, subject matter experts, and product developers to identify possible solutions and determine a strategy to accelerate development of products that meet UNICEF’s needs. Stakeholders had opportunity to question the requirements in the TPP and UNICEF provided clarity on requirements and also learned of potential challenges industry may have in accelerating product development.

know and understand these risks as well as new avenues of working with partners. For example, one CO respondent noted that: “Partnering with the business sector also revealed demand for UNICEF guidance on corporate social responsibility and on children’s rights and business principles”.

The evaluation also examined how UNICEF leverages funding from diverse sources across offices, divisions and levels, and found numerous examples of UNICEF doing so successfully, often using its own resources as a ‘catalyst’ to generate matching funds from other sources. One of the most significant ways UNICEF leverages external funding is through the product innovation work of SD. Donors are a critical component of SD IU’s ability to drive R&D as well as to bring innovations to scale.

In 2014, UNICEF created TPPs, which serve as a basis to communicate requirements for products that are currently not available on the market but fulfil a priority need for UNICEF and its partners. TPPs include information on how the new product will be used, by or for whom, and the minimum and ideal performance criteria. The purpose of TPPs is to guide industry to develop products that meet UNICEF’s needs, however they do not act as the final procurement specifications but rather as a list of desired requirements that combined describes the ideal product considering the context.

An online survey was used to query a set of suppliers – specifically those with whom SD IU is engaged in earnest on product innovation and development, particularly through the TPP process. The section below is triangulated from several sources, including interviews with private firms and online survey results. The results indicate that:

- The TPP provided a good basis for the supplier to innovate on behalf of UNICEF – although some respondents indicated that the TPP was too prescriptive. That said, UNICEF set out to be relatively specific in its innovation goals, whilst suppliers are in the first instance seeking to leverage products already under development for a wider market;
- The TPP is generally useful in focusing suppliers’ product development activities on UNICEF’s needs; a majority of suppliers indicated as much;
- Further use of procurement commitments (e.g. advanced market commitments) would encourage greater mutually beneficial R&D investment by suppliers;
- According to a majority of respondents, procurement commitments would stimulate R&D investment within their organizations.

Despite these mainly positive results, a majority of supplier respondents nonetheless feel there
is scope for UNICEF to do more to encourage them to innovate for the benefit of UNICEF. The proposed improvements mostly focused on market commitments (and more discussion around the problems for which UNICEF is seeking solutions). The abovementioned lack of procurement commitments was also often cited as a reason why the TPP was not fully useful for product development - i.e. suppliers want commitments before investing significant time and resources in product development.

In several instances, it was noted that CO staff are not aware of the work of SD IU, even in some cases when product development was being pursued by the CO. Looking ahead, SD IU plans to address these challenges, for example through supporting development of local innovation and expertise to influence markets. The unit further anticipates that suppliers in local markets will require access to investment funding and will build on efforts being piloted by SD and the Division of Finance, Administration and Management to help achieve scale of current local supplier financing efforts.

3.2.5 Key findings: organizational systems

- UNICEF has three main structures with a clear innovation remit: the innovation unit of the Supply Division, the Office of Innovation, and the Information and Communication Technology Division, each with wide-ranging and evolving responsibilities for innovation.
- The SP, 2018-2021 and associated OMPs and strategy notes provide a range of detail about these structures and their intent. As UNICEF’s approach continues to evolve, it will be important to clarify and communicate the roles of each of these units. Among key finding related to these structures:
  * Risk assessment, project management approaches and governance structures differ between the three.
  * Staff awareness of these structures and their ability to support innovative ideas is relatively low.
- The assessment found a degree of scepticism and discontent among staff about the way innovation activities are currently structured. The creation of a single office labelled “innovation” was seen by many staff as a centralizing move.
- Many respondents saw the OoI as disconnected from the needs and priorities of the field.
- Greater investment is needed in the function of translating the innovation work of these structures into programmes. The new regional positions dedicated to T4D serve this role and are, in general, widely recognized and appreciated.
- A significant feature of the institutional architecture is the highly decentralized nature of UNICEF. Consistent with this, much innovation within UNICEF occurs in a diffused manner outside of formally-recognized innovation structures.
- UNICEF COs are well placed to develop solutions that take the local context into consideration and align with country priorities, and to integrate these into country-level plans and systems.
- However, this decentralized structure also makes it more difficult to move ideas through the hierarchy, and the onus for fundraising falls more on country-level staff.
- These factors can result in projectization or a piecemeal organizational approach to innovation with small sums of money, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer.
- The role of the deputy representative emerged as pivotal in encouraging innovation. In general, the seniority of staff members was seen as an important factor in allowing them to innovate.
- Both CO and RO interviewees felt that central units could support them more effectively by acting as a mediator or translator for innovation activities, by brokering contact with relevant experts, and by supporting their fundraising efforts for innovation. To date, UNICEF’s approach to supporting COs in innovation has been largely ad hoc.
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- UNICEF has a long history of supporting the development, testing and mainstreaming of innovations. In the cases summarized here, factors influencing the likelihood of success include the presence of a policy or framework; capacities of both individuals and systems that will eventually operate the innovation; and having a funder with the intent to bring to scale.

- UNICEF’s experience with mainstreaming innovation demonstrates an ability to actualize innovation throughout the cycle – from global-level policy dialogue on priority needs, to testing and refining solutions, to working through partners, notably government, to introduce and mainstream these solutions.

- As UNICEF’s work in innovation evolves, new partners are being engaged and new forms of partnerships created. Interviewees expressed concern that UNICEF may not be adequately prepared to assess risk before moving into emerging issues and requested that UNICEF prepare guidance in priority areas such as biometrics.

- UNICEF has made good progress in engaging private sector partners to support innovative activity, leveraging its reputation, market share and buying power as well as long-standing supplier relationships. Particular strengths include SD’s use of TPPs to specify needs and incentivize R&D innovation by potential suppliers.

- However, with some notable exceptions, COs appear to be less successful at leveraging innovation partnerships with private sector firms in-country, with questions raised about the roles of the CO, HQ and National Committees.

3.3 ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

As described above, for the purposes of this evaluation, “organizational systems” are defined as the processes and networks supporting the flow of information, knowledge and resources that support UNICEF’s work, including with regard to innovation. These systems cover both human resource-related aspects such as staffing capacity/capability, management systems and practices, as well as knowledge management and systems for obtaining, leveraging and managing innovation-related funding.

To assess the role of these systems in supporting innovation, data collection included online survey results, document review, and interviews with staff across levels, including those directly involved in these systems functions (e.g. human resources, finance). The team also reviewed and analysed available data on human resources (HR) and expenditure (both budgeted and actual) relating to innovation during the period 2014-17, chiefly drawn from individual budgeting documents held by individual offices and organizational units, HR dashboards and management reports, and the UNICEF programme expenditure monitoring strategic cube.\(^6\)

3.3.1 HR systems and innovation

This section considers the extent to which UNICEF is able to access innovation skills and expertise both internally and from external sources. The questions sought to examine skills and expertise for innovation as distributed through the organization, and staff capacity for providing leadership, advocacy and technical guidance/support in innovation.

Based on available information, it was not possible to fully assess whether UNICEF’s staffing arrangements provide sufficient capacity for

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\(^6\) The ‘cube’ is an Excel-based tool that allows analysis of budget and expenditure using UNICEF programmatic data classifications. Expenditure is classified using a range of codes including a “General Intervention Code” and a “Specific Intervention Code.” Innovation activities can be coded according to either of these. General Intervention Codes are derived from implementation strategies such as innovation, capacity development, South-South cooperation, evaluation, monitoring, etc. Specific Intervention Codes are specific strategic areas of cooperation that are distinct and non-overlapping (to the extent possible) within each programme area outcome.
innovation. The main limitations were the lack of any single, centralized staff listing or talent pool designated as ‘innovation’, and the fact that HR dashboards and management reports do not offer an option to identify staff involved in innovation. Similarly, seeking to identify innovation-related roles using job descriptions does not provide a complete picture, since job descriptions do not necessarily reflect the reality of a role. For example, T4D analysts based in ROs are officially classified by job description as ICTD staff, but their remit is expected to cover wider innovation. In addition, there is no way of identifying and quantifying staff who spend only a portion of their time on innovative activities. According to online survey results, 57 per cent of respondents reported involvement in innovation activities.

Quantitative data limitations notwithstanding, the evaluation team was able to obtain qualitative evidence on the adequacy and distribution of human resources for innovation from both interviews and online surveys of UNICEF staff. This evidence suggested that important progress is being made but that current arrangements fall short.

Interviewees pointed to a number of challenges regarding staffing, and these are outlined below. However, in examining the HR issue, there was uncertainty around the intended distribution of innovation skills and activities. Respondents differed in their opinions on the extent to which innovator-type thinking and skills should be mainstreamed across the workforce (e.g. with staff receiving training and being incentivized to become ‘innovators’) or centralized with certain specialist staff or teams. In sum, there is no clear and consistent position as to UNICEF’s intentions for building and distributing innovation-related skills within the organization.

Survey respondents were asked whether they believe their offices had access to specialist skills and expertise. There appears to be some degree of difference between RO/COs and HQ in this regard, with 34 per cent of HQ respondents in agreement (strongly agree and agree combined) while 42 per cent of RO/CO respondents did (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: The majority of UNICEF staff did not agree that their offices had access to sufficient specialist skills and expertise in innovation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HQ / central units</th>
<th>ROs/COs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree/Strongly agree</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree / Disagree</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree/Strongly agree</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree / Disagree</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: MS online survey and key informant interviews. Survey question: “We have access to sufficient specialist skills and expertise to help our office to be innovative.”
Staff members’ more detailed explanations for these views (from both free text survey responses and interviews) suggested several areas of attention for UNICEF regarding HR and innovation. These points appear below.

- UNICEF may not yet have found the right balance between several skill sets: specialized technology skills (e.g. artificial intelligence or SMS technology), non-technology related innovation, programme experience or familiarity, and expertise in managing innovation, particularly around the innovation eco-system and in the scaling up phase. Taken together, these skills can help navigate potential implementation barriers on the ground, avoiding the need to find ‘workarounds’ as piloting takes place.
- As stated elsewhere in this report, UNICEF informants expressed the importance of having a staff member with the skills and mandate to support the programme team to adopt and leverage technology that will enhance programming. For example, UNICEF informants in Sierra Leone described the instrumental role that the T4D specialist played in scaling up RapidPro across programmes.
- Interviews and survey findings indicate that at CO level, some staff felt that the roles of innovation focal points are poorly defined and experience high turnover. Innovation focal points are often employed on a short-term basis linked to a specific innovation project, which makes it difficult for them to provide more general innovation support to their colleagues.
- Moreover, it was important that the T4D (or innovation) specialist was not situated in a specific programming area but rather was seen as a central resource for the CO, reporting directly to the deputy representative.
- Survey respondents indicated that some UNICEF managers appear uncertain of the skills and expertise required for innovation, and that they are therefore unaware of what might be required or available either in-house or externally.
- There are opportunities to re-tool and build capacities in-house as one means of strengthening human resources for innovation. The right balance for UNICEF should account for both internal capacities and seeking external expertise.
- Evidence points to the importance of bringing different skills together in teams around a solution. Several case studies mentioned have the right ‘mix’ as critical. For example, the case study on the height/length measuring device found that having a product designer\(^{66}\) on the team was an important contribution, as was having a technical (nutrition) specialist and a contracts manager who offered insights on procurement. In another case, relatively new staff in the Zimbabwe CO found more traction in raising the profile of children and environment issues when they worked with experienced UNICEF staff members with a depth of knowledge of the organization and specific sectoral topics.

Fieldwork for this evaluation suggests that the following are particular challenges to developing skills and expertise with regard to innovation:

- **Staff rotation/turnover practices:** While UNICEF’s policy of mandatory staff rotation provides a valuable opportunity for all staff to gain programme experience in the field, regional or HQ locations, it can also impair continuity and institutional memory. Turnover in general is an issue; UNICEF informants have shared experiences whereby T4D specialists in COs have left and all knowledge and progress was lost, as there was no adequate succession planning or support in place.
- **Generic job descriptions.** Some staff suggested that the use of generic job descriptions reduces UNICEF’s ability to identify and employ people with the exact skills and experience tailored to a specific role.
- **Reliance on short-term consultants.** Many respondents mentioned the reliance on short-term personnel as a contributor to the ‘projectization’ of innovation. These

\(^{66}\) The product designer brought a critical understanding of the level of iteration required to develop innovative products and an in-depth understanding of the logistical requirements.
consultants often lack seniority and are on short-term contracts, limiting their ability to shepherd innovation processes over time.

- **Performance management and incentive systems.** As noted in Section 3.1.2, UNICEF’s performance-management systems and metrics do not currently incentivize risk-taking or innovative approaches.

- **Absence of the designation of appropriate talent groups** to enhance innovation, and a strategy to attract the right talent mean high level and dedicated capacity is not widespread.

- **Reliance human resources management arrangements** that hinder cross-organizational approaches to achieving results across countries with the intent of considering alternative models to best address demands.

3.3.2 Managing innovation

This section focuses on how UNICEF’s systems for managing programmes and organizational units that support innovation. The questions examined in this area include whether quality programme planning and design principles are used for innovation and whether management practices facilitate the implementation of innovation as a strategy and respond to practical needs for innovation.
A key way in which central management influences innovation is through the requirements it places on individual parts of the organization with respect to planning, reporting and monitoring. When it comes to these processes, the evaluation found that UNICEF guidance on promoting innovation as a strategy appears uneven.

For UNICEF, the Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (PPPM) provides guidance to offices and divisions on how to write planning documents such as OMPs, CPDs and country programme management plans. The PPPM outlines programme considerations for each of the implementation strategies of the SP, 2014-2017, including innovation. Guidance in this regard is uneven. For example, the PPPM states that innovation should ideally feature in programme strategy notes and “should also be fully integrated in annual, multi-year and rolling work plans demonstrating the convergence of partners around such ideas, ensuring adequate resource allocation necessary for their realization.” Yet the guidance for creating those notes does not specifically address innovation.

Other forms of guidance and support available through the PPPM include a template for staff to summarize innovation projects as well as a link to a map that provides information on individual innovations across countries. This innovation mapping effort appears to be inactive. A link to UNICEF innovation labs available

68 PPPM, Chapter and section 3.224.
there also appears to be inoperative. The PPPM currently provides a listing of good standards as appears in the box below.

All UNICEF offices and divisions are obliged to report on innovative activity in a dedicated section of their annual reports. However, these do not always capture complete data on activity or achievements with regard to innovation, notably in relation to UNICEF’s strategic goals. Possible reasons for this include word limits as well as limited guidance as to how innovation is defined in this context and how teams should describe the associated activities. Very few country office annual reports provide details of outcomes or impact in general, and therefore they are of little use in understanding or quantifying how UNICEF’s innovation activities are helping to meet its strategic goals. This is especially important as few COs have specific programme indicators relating to innovation. As seen in Figure 9 below, only a minority of staff believe that their offices have a clear process for monitoring the results achieved when trying out innovative ideas.

At the highest level of strategic reporting, UNICEF compiles data on key performance indicators (KPIs) across all country offices, which are utilized in the Executive Director’s annual report (EDAR) to the Executive Board. For the strategy cycle 2014-2017, there were three indicators related to innovation, which also parallel the PPPM standards above.

- Has the country office supported real-time systems at national level that allow UNICEF to identify gaps for the most marginalized communities?
- Does the country office create space for discussing failures in a public manner and learning from them – particularly with a view toward blogging and sharing online?
- Does the country office support translation of innovative processes and ideas from different contexts (other countries or regions) into its work?

These limited incentives in terms of mandatory reporting on innovation, coupled with the lack of explicit recognition for innovative risk-taking in staff performance management frameworks, reduce the degree to which management practices can embed innovative behaviours and approaches, and hence support innovation activity.

In terms of monitoring, the SP, 2014-2017 included approximately 290 indicators organized by “outcome areas” (i.e. health, WASH, nutrition, child protection, HIV/AIDS, education and social inclusion). Of these, only four related to innovation. This would appear somewhat inconsistent with the priority placed on innovation in the plan. Meanwhile, the results framework for the SP, 2018-2021 includes only a single indicator related to innovation (i.e. “percentage of countries implementing proven real-time information innovations at scale, including adaptation for humanitarian response”). If innovation, as a corporate strategy, is to be made operational, then stronger means of tracking and reporting are needed.

The evaluation also identified a number of management tools and practices to facilitate innovation being developed at country and regional levels. Several of these are listed below.

- Introduction of country-level strategies on innovation, notably in India, Jordan and Malawi (also in preparation in Bangladesh).
- Development of templates to document new ideas in an efficient way, such as a ‘strategic moment of reflection’ document in Turkmenistan.
- Employment of a consultant specifically to focus on changing the office structure to make it a more efficient and effective environment for knowledge-sharing (Thailand).
- Introduction of a monthly two-hour time for staff across different programme teams to discuss innovation approaches and opportunities (Guyana and Suriname).

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70 The 2017 Annual Report makes reference to the ‘Principles for Innovation and Technology for Development’ (document is entitled: Principles for Digital Development). However, it does not actually define any different types of innovation, or give clear examples.

71 In addition, the data companion to the EDAR for the period 2014-2017 includes an innovation-related KPI for Supply Division, namely: “Innovations that reach a predefined endpoint”, defined as projects that are closed or brought to scale.
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- Strategy development for innovation work, including governance/decision-making structure (T4D working group), business case tool, an overall fundraising strategy, and strengthened project management capability (Uganda).
- With technical assistance from the RO, nine country offices in the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR) developed or updated their T4D and innovation strategies, as well as establishing governance structures, standard operating procedures and management tools (Angola, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda).
- Also in ESAR, a programme monitoring and response initiative, involving Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, was designed to include peer-to-peer learning and documentation of innovations as part of the programme design. A case study was also developed on lessons learned on scaling up these approaches in country.

Some of these items may represent good practice within UNICEF and should be shared accordingly.

Figure 10: Managing an innovation portfolio can help align resources with strategic intent


Managing innovation as a portfolio

Organizations can align their innovation resources with that part of the innovation continuum that best fits their accepted levels of risk, strategic goals and unique advantages. For example, a theme heard among interviewees was that UNICEF should focus attention and resources on the ready-to-scale phase, as opposed to research and development. Many organizations make decisions about this alignment or balance through the use of a portfolio approach. A portfolio approach is aimed at balancing (e.g. between investing in scaling up or in new technologies) assets or resources in a manner consistent with the strategic goals of the organization. Use of a portfolio approach can help an organization’s approach to innovations evolve from isolated initiatives or projects to more a cohesive and balanced set of initiatives aligned with strategic intent.72

Figure 10 above shows innovation ‘types’ aligned against varying degrees of programme or organizational and technical uncertainties. The block labelled “Core programmes” represents innovation as it might occur within programmes operating with relatively low degrees of uncertainty. In contrast, future-oriented elements that operate with greater degrees of uncertainty appear in block labelled “New bets”. Investments in this area operate in an environment characterized by a high degree of uncertainty on both technical and organizational axes.

As a tool, the figure above can assist decision-makers in resource allocation. Depending on organizational priorities, value, for example in terms of financial and human resources, can be assigned to each of the blocks.

Risk management

Management systems and practices in the organizational units with a specific innovation remit (OoI, SD IU and ICTD) vary as a result of their different architectures, individual managers, and the historical context in which each has developed. For example, SD IU and ICTD are both heavily rooted in the use of agile project management, including the recommended use of internationally-recognized project management approaches (notably PRINCE2 and PMBOK). The SD IU, in particular, is cited throughout interviews as having a rigorous yet clear approach.

One element of managing innovation is weighing and deciding on acceptable risk. To some degree, all parts of UNICEF responsible for innovative activity (i.e. with an innovation remit) conduct risk assessments before and during their innovation projects. A brief summary of the methods and procedures used by units with an innovation remit appear in Table 6.

Table 6: Risk management tools and approaches utilized by offices/units with an innovation remit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Risk tools and approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supply Division Innovation Unit</td>
<td>The SD Innovation Review Board (IRB) uses a risk impact tool, introduced in October 2016, incorporated into the product development cycle of the SD IU. It is used to assess and monitor risk throughout the lifecycle of a product and is thus a “living” document developed at the start of a project and reviewed at each stage gate. The tool focuses on three areas (need, risk, and impact), and is completed by multiple team members to reduce bias and ensure a rounded view. Risk is assessed across three main categories (financial, operational and “do no harm” principle). Projects that are closed or discontinued are analysed and a report prepared through use of a project closure form. The OMP, 2018-2021 includes a theory of change for products and markets inclusive of the conditions required for change (i.e. assumptions). In sum, SD IU has a clear and robust risk assessment framework in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Innovation</td>
<td>The Ool approach to risk management is based chiefly on the Principles of Digital Development. Within the GIC team, a prioritization matrix assesses projects against the Principles, along with issues related to risk, such as sustainability and impact. The GIC uses generic theories of change with the intent that each country-specific implementation can use and adapt. While allowing flexibility, it also transfers the responsibility for risk-assessment to the country offices or partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Division</td>
<td>Risk mitigation is an acknowledged feature of strengthened ICT governance and will focus on process improvement for prioritization and strategic alignment of ICT-enabled initiatives globally. The OMP, 2018-2021 identifies several categories of risk along with levels and mitigation measures. The portfolio of activity conducted by the ICT team must have risk plans completed for all projects, which are reviewed on a regular basis. In line with the direction set with the ICT strategy and the OMP, additional measures (i.e. resources, governance, benchmarking) have been put in place to ensure balance between the three pillars. In sum, ICTD has a very clear and robust risk assessment framework in place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted above, individual units with remit for innovation have developed risk management frameworks with differing formats and structures; in other words, there is no single overarching risk approach for innovation within the organization. Some respondents felt it an HQ responsibility to provide clear direction in this regard. However, there were also different views as to whether the diverse contexts and approaches of various UNICEF offices can be reconciled and codified into a consistent framework for innovation and risk. While there are risk templates and discussions on risk at the level of projects or individual innovations, it is unclear how these fit with UNICEF’s overarching enterprise risk management strategies.

A multi-country review of ICT (ICT4D) applications in ESARO similarly found that “UNICEF is an organization rich with processes, regulations and systems that seek to remove risk and to demonstrate accountability. However, these same systems (e.g. procurement) also have the unintended effect of limiting the risk-taking necessary for identifying, creating and cultivating ICT4D solutions. Although outlets such as the Global Innovation Centre are a best practice, UNICEF should also encourage responsible risk-taking at the CO level”.

As an example of finding solutions, in one case study, UNICEF and partners were particularly concerned with data security requirements for Primero, a child protection case management system. UNICEF did not have a data protection policy to inform the processes and structure of Primero. As the design process involved close inter-agency collaboration, UNICEF looked to policies on data use and protection in other protection organizations, namely the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to inform the design of Primero. This experience, in turn, led to the addition of step in the design process called ‘data protection impact assessment’, in which an implementation team in a country conducts a risk assessment to ensure adequate data protection and security procedures are in place.

3.3.3 Knowledge management, learning and innovation

The evaluation also looked at the extent to which UNICEF’s internal systems support effective knowledge management and learning from innovation, with a particular focus on organizational learning, how learning and insights shape programmes, and documentation and other mechanisms used to share knowledge.

Fieldwork for the evaluation identified a range of mechanisms used by UNICEF staff to disseminate and access information on innovation. A common example was discussing progress with innovation projects at routine CO and RO staff meetings. ROs have a series of regional programme meetings that staff consider to be essential information-sharing platforms. Several ROs have held specific regional innovation workshops, bringing together regional actors working in this space within and outside of UNICEF. HQ teams have a number of formal mechanisms for capturing and disseminating innovation-related learning. For example, online survey respondents referred to ICON or Yammer as resources they would use to learn about innovation. There are also several community of practice sites related to innovation projects, as well as other less formal idea exchange platforms. Since the establishment of regional T4D posts, RO engagement with COs and HQ on innovation also appears to have increased – leading, for example, to regional innovation mapping exercises.

Despite these various mechanisms, the results of staff surveys and interviews suggest a mixed picture as to how effectively UNICEF is supporting innovation by sharing relevant knowledge and experience. Many interviewees suggested that they would not necessarily describe UNICEF as a ‘learning organization’, because systems are not set up to support and nurture learning and knowledge-sharing consistently across all its parts. Best practices and standards regarding the integration of documentation and learning into innovation projects are needed.

73 In 2018, 192 T4D & innovation initiatives were captured with the following characteristics: ESARO Year in Review 2018. T4D and innovation.
Interviewees cited the decentralized nature of UNICEF as a challenge, with limited ability to move information laterally (e.g. a useful factsheet is developed about an issue in one country but staff in other locations will not necessarily ever see it.) The organizational assessment found that, even where offices have formalized processes for developing innovative ideas (e.g. concept notes), there were no systems or tools to capture, access and disseminate such ideas more widely – either within the same office or between countries/offices. Staff in country offices repeatedly emphasized that the demands of their core work made it difficult to find time for reflection, documentation and dissemination of lessons learned, both generally and with specific regard to innovation.

Despite these challenges, 88 per cent of COs reported that their offices support translation of innovative processes and ideas from different contexts (other countries or regions) into their work. Sixty per cent of RO/CO and 44 per cent of HQ/central-level staff agreed that “UNICEF supports me to be more innovative by sharing good practice examples from elsewhere in the organization.” Some respondents spoke positively of mechanisms such as bilateral information-sharing partnerships between individual divisions, webinars, and good-practice platforms such as ICON. Others reported that their performance management systems had been modified to address the issues of skills and knowledge-sharing, for example to include criteria and indicators related to the use of knowledge-sharing tools such as Yammer.

However, despite these relatively positive findings regarding dissemination of good practice, staff were notably less positive about UNICEF’s...

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**Figure 11: UNICEF staff see room for improvement in knowledge-sharing with regard to unsuccessful innovations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree/Strongly agree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree / Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HQ / central units</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROs/COs</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** MS online survey and key informant interviews. Question was phrased as: “UNICEF supports me to be more innovative by sharing good practice examples from elsewhere in the organization.”

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74 UNICEF. CO Annual Reports: Benchmark Key Performance Indicators. 2017.
75 See <http://unicefstories.org/tag/icons/>. 
approach to learning from when things had gone less well. As seen in Figure 11 below, just over half of CO/RO staff and less than twenty per cent of HQ/central units agreed that they are supported through sharing information on innovations that have not worked. In interviews, staff mentioned that having specific information on ‘what went wrong’ in other settings would be beneficial.

A number of respondents felt that UNICEF’s focus appeared to be on marketing its ‘success stories’ rather than acknowledging or disseminating messages that might be perceived as criticism or ‘failure’. Some respondents suggested that this reluctance to highlight perceived failure was linked to UNICEF's low risk appetite. In particular, some felt that future funding could be jeopardized if donors felt that their resources had been used in ‘failed’ innovations.

Of course, there are examples of positive progress in acknowledging the learning opportunities provided by ‘failed’ innovations. For example, a ‘failure fair’ was held at a UNICEF Executive Board meeting in 2015, and a workshop was held by the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office on ‘celebrating failure’ during a recent regional management team meeting. Interviewees in several COs commented positively on the way senior leadership in those offices promoted a culture of learning from failure.

The evaluation intended to examine the extent to which learning and insight generated by innovation have been used to shape UNICEF’s approach to programmes. However, there is currently little documentation providing details of uptake of learning and knowledge from UNICEF’s innovation activities into its programming. Several interviewees suggested that the mechanisms for capturing and disseminating good practice between staff members also limit UNICEF’s ability to feed back innovation-related learning consistently into programming approaches. Other interviewees suggested that country programme evaluations had little or no focus on innovation specifically. In many cases, innovation-related learnings appear in sector-specific assessment and reports, and are thus not easily identifiable. Among the case studies, a number of important research and evaluation efforts are integrated. These include:

- Adolescent kit for expression and innovation. Indonesia CO commissioned an evaluation to assess the extent to which the adolescent kit promotes the positive outcomes it sets out to achieve; to learn to what extent the kit is an effective tool to prepare adolescents to participate in decision-making processes in their communities; and to provide a set of recommendations on how the kit can be better institutionalized in the work of existing government partners.
- Accelerated school readiness. The Ethiopia CO leveraged initial funding to secure an additional $150,000 for a rigorous randomized control trial.
- Data Must Speak. The Programme Division is overseeing a mutli-country formative evaluation.
- Drones used to deliver results for children. The Malawi CO commissioned a study on the costs associated with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles for transportation of laboratory samples in Malawi (2016).
- Children, climate and environment. The Zimbabwe CO partnered with an environmental studies institute to prepare two studies: Children and Climate Change in Zimbabwe (April 2014) and Sustainable Energy for Children in Zimbabwe (N.d., 2015). A goal of the former was to equip UNICEF and policymakers with information to incorporate children into planning for national policies, planning and practices in the area of climate change.

Recently, a number of documents prepared by various offices and divisions provide staff with resources in several of leading areas of concern. These include:

- Open Source: What is it, how to choose a license and to share UNICEF’s work? A Guide for UNICEF country offices developing or implementing new technologies or content (Office of Innovation, no date).
- Ethical Considerations When Using Geospatial Technologies for Evidence Generation: A discussion paper and a research
3.3.4 Finance systems and innovation

With regard to finance, the evaluation attempted to identify common characteristics of organizations associated with innovative behaviour. Questions addressed issues of robust budgeting, financial planning, leveraging and tracking of resources. In addition to interviews, online surveys and document review, these questions were also to be examined through secondary analysis of UNICEF expenditure data. However, the assessment was impeded by several factors:

- **Robustness of internal budgeting for innovation:** UNICEF guidance\(^{76}\) prescribes certain requirements with regard to innovation budgets and financial reporting, and the team found that the budget documentation of selected organizational units complied with these requirements. However, in addition to compliance with *de minimus* requirements for reporting, the team was tasked with examining ‘robust’ budgeting, which also requires budget figures to be underpinned by sound and transparent assumptions regarding activities, cost drivers and risks.\(^{77}\) However, the team struggled to acquire the details underlying the budgeting process, as these are not required by UNICEF internal guidance.

- **Total resource envelope for innovation:** UNICEF does not produce global innovation budgets covering key figures such as total programmatic cost or staff costs related to innovation. It is therefore not possible to obtain a total ‘innovation budget’ for UNICEF, and hence assess the relevance and appropriateness of resources allocated to and/or spent on innovation.

![Figure 12: UNICEF’s spending on innovation increased threefold between 2014 and 2017](image)

**Source:** UNICEF. Strategic Analysis Cube, 2014-2017

\(^{76}\) See OMP 2018-2021 guidance document (Table 2) and technical instruction, integrated budget submissions of COs, ROs and HQ divisions for budget year 2017 and quadrennial budget, 2018-2021.

\(^{77}\) See, for example, [https://www.pwc.com/il/he/events/assets/2017/15-6/best_practice_in_the_budget_and_planning_process.pdf](https://www.pwc.com/il/he/events/assets/2017/15-6/best_practice_in_the_budget_and_planning_process.pdf)
• *Expenditure tracking*: Available information regarding ‘actual’ expenditure on innovation\(^7\) is somewhat more complete, though still limited. The primary data source, the ‘strategic analysis cube’, does not provide a complete picture, in that it includes programme costs only (and not staff costs), and is most likely subject to differing understandings and use of codes across units and individuals. Taken together, these factors would likely lead any budget analysis to underestimate spending on innovation.

With these limitations in mind, the team used the available data at an aggregate level to describe recent trends in UNICEF’s innovation expenditure and to make some general observations.

**Expenditure on innovations**

Figure 12 shows the trend in annual reported spending on innovations between 2014 and 2017 (under General Intervention Code 007 ‘Innovation’).

UNICEF’s spending for innovation, based on the best available data, increased from just over $14 million in 2014 to $44.1 million in 2017.\(^8\) The significant increase during this period reflects the increasing strategic importance placed on innovation within the organization. In addition, spending across regions and HQ increased in both absolute amounts and as a relative percentage of total spending. By programme outcome areas, too, there was a considerable increase in reported innovation expenditures across all sectors. Additional figures appear in Annex 5.

While only 52 of 156 countries reported spending on innovation in 2014, by 2017 this number had increased by more than 50 per cent, to 80. Nevertheless, the data suggest there were 67 COs, ROs or divisions with zero spending on innovation in the period 2014 to 2017. Based on the available data, 81 per cent of innovation spending takes place at CO/RO levels.

Table 6 shows the top ten interventions areas ranked by their spending on innovation between 2014 and 2017. These ten items account for about one third of innovation spending.

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\(^7\) Guidance for PIDB codes states that: “Innovation is a process by which an idea, technology, or partnership is translated into a product, service or process that brings about better results for children. Innovation involves deliberate application of information, imagination, learning from failure, and initiative in deriving greater or different value from existing or shrinking resources.”

\(^8\) One reason that the expenditure may be skewed (towards an indication of higher HQ spending) is that innovations that are already embedded into programs in COs are likely not coded as Innovation anymore but differently.
Outcome Area | Specific Intervention | Innovation-coded Expenditures (2014-17)
--- | --- | ---
Health | Maternal and newborn tetanus elimination/General | $1,903,316
Education | Education -support to achieving global and regional goals | $1,686,938
HIV/AIDS | HIV testing and counselling in adolescents | $1,681,643
Nutrition | Infant and young child feeding implementation | $1,590,969

**Availability and sources of funding for innovation**

Despite the increases in overall spending, the lack of resources for innovation was a frequent complaint amongst respondents to our survey of UNICEF staff (Figure 13). Fewer than one in five respondents agreed that there were sufficient financial resources for their offices to try out innovative ideas.

Interviewees suggested that a range of issues related to the lack of funding. Much of the commentary addressed the relatively narrow manner in which funds can be used, since agreements with funders are often based on results with specific targets. Others saw missed opportunities when programme proposals are written with no explicit request for innovation funding. Some interviewees (chiefly, though not exclusively, in COs/ROs), suggested that the finances utilized by the HQ-based units could potentially be used with greater impact by COs/ROs, or indeed by parts of OoI, to scale up already-proven solutions.

**Figure 13: UNICEF staff perceive that insufficient resources are available for innovation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online survey</th>
<th>Key informant interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HQ / central units</strong></td>
<td>At times, we’re hesitant to innovate because the resources are earmarked for specific activities – most COs operate with 80% OR and 20% RR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROs/COs</strong></td>
<td>[In this CO], there are some ideas but they are often dismissed because there are no funds even to try. We’re quite conservative in allocating resources and do not have space to manoeuvre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** MS online survey and key informant interviews. Survey question: “Are there sufficient financial resources available for people in my office to try out innovative ideas.”
The OoI engages in raising and disbursing funding to COs for efforts designed to bring innovations to scale. Based on available information, an estimated $17 million was raised and $15.5 million allocated to COs for activities such as U-Report ($1.86m), digital health and RapidPro ($12.6 million) and Upshift ($2.5 million). The Ventures Fund (managed by the ventures unit of the OoI) was mentioned by a number of staff, and it was understood that it does not address the constraints noted above because it is not a fund for innovation per se, but rather is earmarked for a specific type and stage of innovation – namely early-stage, open-source technology solutions. Although the fund has supported a number of solutions since its inception, its very specific scope does limit its support for the full range of UNICEF’s innovation activities.

Few respondents agreed that their office had clear processes to access financial resources to try out innovative ideas, as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Staff do not perceive that processes for accessing financial resources for innovation are clear

A few examples were provided where such processes are in place. These included guidance for how to request budget allocations to support product innovation and clear processes to apply for and agree on next steps to test innovative fundraising ideas (in one CO). The Innovation Review Board for product development was cited for clarity, including with regard to financial allocation.

Most recently, a new initiative spearheaded by the Executive Director is also providing funding to bring promising innovations to scale. In March 2018, the Executive Director tasked the organization with the identification and selection of innovations that demonstrated (a) high potential impact for children, (b) readiness to be taken to scale and (c) a strong rationale for UNICEF involvement.

Sixteen innovation cases were submitted from across HQ divisions and offices. Multiple rounds of review included a ‘challenge group’ (consisting of UNICEF staff, including from COs, as well as representatives from outside the organization), which identified five cases...
as most strongly meeting defined criteria. Those teams then prepared an investment proposal for catalytic funding over four years. Those investment cases were reviewed by an advisory group consisting of colleagues with expertise in finance, evaluation, evidence, ICT, partnerships, gender and perspectives from the field. The advisory group’s recommendations were reviewed and final recommendations for investment prepared for the Executive Director.

In September 2018, three projects received approval for the first two years of scale-up (2018 – 2019). These are: HIV point-of-care early infant diagnosis in the West and Central Africa region ($1.8 million), a package of essential pneumonia interventions ($2 million), and Primero ($2 million). An additional project, “Digital Health to Support Institutionalizing Community Health”, received seed funding.

3.3.5 Key findings: organizational systems

- **UNICEF does not currently have a complete picture of its internal staff capacity** regarding innovation, particularly in offices without a formal innovation remit.
- **It is not entirely clear what staffing model UNICEF is pursuing** with regard to innovation capacity – whether it is seeking to concentrate innovation skills and activities in certain specialist teams or to mainstream innovation across the workforce. To match programme needs, various skills sets may be needed. There was, however, recognition of the benefits of having an embedded team member with innovation skills and ‘know-how’.
- **Barriers to staffing** for the purposes of innovation include a reliance on short-term consultants, staff rotation and turnover, and generic job descriptions.
- **Centralized management systems** devoted to programme planning and results-based management provide scant consideration of innovation.
- **The hierarchical structure of the organization is perceived by staff to influence its approach to innovation.** Notable was the key role of senior staff in setting the ‘tone from the top’ with regard to innovation.
- **UNICEF financial management systems provide limited information on budgeted and actual expenditure on innovation.** As a result, **UNICEF management does not currently have a clear and comprehensive overview, either by individual organizational units or overall, of expenditures on innovation.** This hampers the organization’s ability to plan and monitor the resources used for innovation, as well as to analyse performance and identify where and how to target innovation resources to best effect.
- **There are contrasting opinions within the agency as to the correct focus for UNICEF’s innovation activities** – notably between focusing on existing, tried-and-tested technologies that need mainstreaming versus those that need developing from early stages. Other agencies have used a portfolio management approach as a tool to find that balance. The lack of a clear management message on these points has created tensions between different teams with a role in innovation, and risks to the effectiveness and efficiency of innovation activities.
- **Despite the existence of various fora for information-sharing, there is scope for UNICEF to achieve more consistent recording, documenting and disseminating of innovation-related lessons.** Currently, the lack of such institutionalized knowledge management limits UNICEF’s ability to learn from successes and failures. This issue is compounded by a reluctance to highlight perceived ‘failure’ more widely – even where this could provide significant learning opportunities and improved effectiveness going forward.
4. CONCLUSIONS
This evaluation aimed to analyse UNICEF’s ‘fitness for purpose’ to employ innovation as a key strategy, and sought to assess the degree to which innovation serves to achieve UNICEF’s goals and objectives. Overall, the evaluation concluded that significant progress has been made in several key components of the approach. However, there is still substantial ground to cover, and changes are needed if innovation is to bring meaningful and sustainable results for children.

Within each of the three themes examined by the evaluation – namely, organizational values, structures and systems – findings pointed to progress and successes as well as important impediments and barriers. Table 7 below identifies the leading barriers to innovation drawn from all three themes. Quotes from interviewees are included for colour.

Table 8: Main barriers to innovation in UNICEF

1. Risk aversion – “Innovation will fail most of the time, and UNICEF doesn’t necessarily (or systematically) have a way of looking at failure as part of innovation. Can they reward failure? Encourage risks?”

2. Funding – “One of the biggest barriers is the funding for innovation here. Most of the money is from external donors and they want results quick, so there is a feeling that UNICEF needs to play it safe.”

3. Staff capacities – “In many cases, UNICEF staff are not too willing to do new things and are more comfortable doing things in their tried and tested ways.”

4. Lack of time and space – “Innovation is seen as an ‘additional’ thing to do, rather than part and parcel of what people are supposed to do – an extra.” “When? How? Ideas are there but no time or support has been given to that.” In addition, innovation requires longer-term time frames when it comes to product innovation, attaining scale or mainstreaming within a country programme.

5. Lack of understanding of innovation – “At UNICEF there is no unified clear understanding of what innovation is. It is not institutionalized yet – and this is a huge problem.”

6. Bureaucracy – “Administrative processes in UNICEF can stifle innovation. Everything has to be reported and audited, stringent planning processes, etc. These can put people off from innovating.”

7. Government buy-in – “If a ministry is not receptive to UNICEF’s activities, then they can’t go very far.”

4.1 ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

On the theme of organizational values, the evaluation found that UNICEF has clearly signalled its strategic intent through placement of innovation as a core element in strategic plans spanning the period of 2014-2021.

However, the evidence suggests that UNICEF, overall, is falling short on actual implementation. Based on KPI data, slightly more than half of COs (55 per cent) reported use of innovation as an implementing strategy (2017). Similarly, just over half (55 per cent) of staff agreed or strongly agreed that ‘new ideas and innovations are supported in my office’, based on the global staff survey (2018).

Aspects of organizational culture appear as barriers to innovation. Based on multiple sources, staff feel that risk-taking and acceptance of failure are largely absent. Only one third of online survey respondents felt that staff were encouraged to take risks in order to innovate,
and a similar proportion agreed that their COs have created space to discuss and learn from failures. Some respondents pointed to the requirements of donor funding as a factor in low risk acceptance. However, the weight of the evidence pointed to a set of ingrained management practices as a greater impediment.

There were mixed opinions as to the extent of management support for innovation. Where staff do feel enabled to innovate, a critical factor is the supportive stance of their immediate supervisors. In these instances, managers are credited with creating the ‘space’ for innovation. At country level, the role of the representative and deputy representative is a critical factor in how staff perceive innovation and their ability to pursue it.

However, staff still work through the time-consuming procedures related to fundraising, recruitment and procurements. While these processes may work with traditional partners (e.g. line ministries), they are not well suited to engaging the private sector, where more nimble processes may be needed. In addition, innovative work is often seen as ‘something extra’ running parallel to routine programming. Another significant obstacle to progress is the differing understandings of innovation among staff. To some extent, this limited shared understanding centres on the role of technologies in UNICEF’s work on innovation. Many respondents felt that UNICEF had come to focus too greatly on technologies, particularly digital technologies, as representing innovation, to the detriment of other potential approaches like product development and programming approaches.

UNICEF could account for the context in which different COs and ROs work in a more systematic manner. Understanding the innovation ecosystem within which UNICEF is an actor is a necessity, and staff should be supported to assess and operate within the innovation ecosystem with the people, processes and resources required to do so.

UNICEF’s experience with working with programme country partners demonstrates that considerable attention to issues of ownership is needed, including planning for the necessary steps, resources and time required to achieve this. Likewise, planning should also examine and account for the systems capacities to fully implement innovations, including how those may need to be strengthened and the duration and resources needed to achieve this.

4.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

UNICEF has three main structures with a clear innovation remit. These three units – the innovation unit of Supply Division, the Office of Innovation, and the Information and Communication Technology Division – have wide-ranging and evolving responsibilities for innovation.

While the OoI was viewed positively for its ability to ‘think outside the box’, respondents saw a number of ways in which its practices lacked transparency and appeared incongruent with priorities on the ground. Some interviewees clearly expected that the fairly recently-created office would help them navigate potential donor and partner relationships (including private, for-profit) and advise them on the innovation work within their country programmes.

ICTD, meanwhile, is undergoing an important shift in its role with respect to innovations, as described in Section 3.2.1 above. Of particular note are new regional positions dedicated to T4D, which are widely recognized and appreciated by staff. As these changes play out, it will be important to clarify and communicate these new roles and how they relate to other units with formal innovation remit. For example, in interviews, staff already question the role of ICTD and the regional T4D specialists vis-à-vis the units of the OoI. While the units with innovation remit largely ‘stay in their lanes’, some of the work pursued by the OoI does seem to veer into product innovation, with little or no engagement of the expertise available in SD IU.

Overall, staff awareness of these structures and their ability to support innovative ideas is relatively low. The findings suggest that far greater investment is needed to translate the innovation work of these structures into scalable programmes.
Perhaps the most significant feature of the institutional architecture for innovation is the highly decentralized nature of UNICEF. Consistent with this, much innovation within UNICEF occurs in a diffused manner outside of the formally-recognized innovation structures. UNICEF’s decentralized structure has both benefited and hindered innovative activity in a variety of ways in recent years. Important benefits of the decentralized structure include strong partnerships with country actors, knowledge of in-country situations, and understanding of stakeholder needs. In general, UNICEF COs are best placed to develop solutions to problems taking the local context into consideration, to align with country priorities and to integrate into country-level plans and systems.

However, this structure also makes it more difficult to move ideas through the hierarchy, and the onus for fundraising falls more on country-level staff. These factors can result in projectization or a piecemeal organizational approach to innovation, with small sums of money, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer. It is particularly frustrating for CO staff to have nurtured an innovation, demonstrated its effectiveness and then have no funds available for taking it to scale.

Many recognized that support for COs could not follow a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model and that differing solutions would be needed based on an assessment of needs. Importantly, that work is already underway in several regions. The role of the deputy representatives emerged as particularly pivotal in encouraging innovation, working cross-sectorally and integrating new ways of doing things into programmes.

Both CO and RO staff interviewees felt that central units could support them more effectively by acting as mediators or translators for innovation activities, by brokering contact with relevant innovation experts and by supporting their fundraising efforts for innovation. As one respondent from a small CO stated: “It would be useful to have some kind of team that could come to small offices and provide concrete support for innovation, adding temporary capacity to small offices for innovation”.

UNICEF has long experience in supporting the development, testing and mainstreaming of innovations. UNICEF’s experience with mainstreaming innovation demonstrates an ability to actualize innovation throughout the cycle – from global-level policy dialogue on priority needs, to testing and refining solutions, to working through partners, notably government, to introduce and mainstream these solutions. In the cases studied, ecosystem factors that particularly impacted on UNICEF’s support to mainstreaming an innovation included the presence of a policy or framework, capacities of the individuals and systems that will eventually operate the innovation, and having a funder with the intent to bring to scale.

As UNICEF’s work in innovation evolves and takes on new challenges, new partners will be important. New forms of partnership are being used to engage the private sector, for example through priority shared value partnerships. Interviewees expressed concern that UNICEF (in this case COs) may not be adequately prepared to assess risk before moving into issues of data privacy or self-sovereign identity.

The period 2014-2017 saw a number of changes regarding the innovation architecture. However, many staff are dissatisfied with the current organizational set-up, and there is appetite for structural changes within UNICEF to address many of the issues identified throughout the evaluation. To that end, in the final stage of the evaluation, options on structures were developed for the organization’s consideration. These are discussed as part of the recommendations below.

### 4.3 ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

In some ways, this theme proved the most difficult to assess, as many of the existing information systems are unable to disaggregate to the level of a specific strategy such as innovation.

**UNICEF is not entirely clear about the staffing model it is pursuing** with regard to innovation capacity – whether it is seeking to concentrate innovation skills and activities in certain specialist teams or rather to mainstream innova-
tion across the workforce. There was recognition from interviewees of the benefits of having an embedded team member with innovation skills and ‘know-how’. Several skill sets were mentioned that would better enable UNICEF’s innovation, some of which could be strengthened among existing staff. To date, however, innovation work has been heavily reliant on external consultants working through short-term agreements. Issues of ‘in-sourcing’ versus ‘out-sourcing’ of these skills have yet to be addressed.

During the period 2014-2017, innovation was treated in a manner similar to the other well-established implementation strategies (e.g. inclusion in expenditure coding, KPIs, annual report templates). However, guidance around these and other programme planning and results-based management systems (e.g. CPDs, annual reports, etc.) provides scant consideration of innovation. This limited guidance to staff reduces the degree to which even the most effective management practices can embed innovative behaviours and approaches, and hence support innovation activity. A point that emerged repeatedly during fieldwork for the evaluation was that the very hierarchical management style of the organization was seen to influence its approach to innovation. Notable was the key role of senior staff across a range of organizational units (notably representatives, deputy representatives and directors) in setting the ‘tone from the top’ with regard to innovation. The fact that the majority of UNICEF staff feel that there is no clear message about their role in innovation confirms that these issues have yet to be sufficiently addressed. Compounding this is the lack of emphasis on a matrix approach to management, an approach that has the potential to reduce the prevalence of silos and very hierarchical decision-making structures.

There are contrasting opinions within the agency as to the correct focus for UNICEF’s innovation activities – notably between focusing on existing, tried-and-tested technologies that need scaling up versus those that need developing from early stages. Other agencies have used a portfolio management approach as a tool to find that balance. Use of a portfolio management approach could help UNICEF to ensure that its resources are well-aligned with its strategic priorities, its comparative advantages and unique positioning.

Despite the existence of various fora for information-sharing, there is scope for UNICEF to achieve more consistent recording, documenting and disseminating of innovation-related lessons. Currently, the lack of such institutionalized knowledge management and feedback loops limit UNICEF’s ability to learn from successes and failures. This issue is compounded by a reluctance to highlight perceived ‘failure’ more widely – even where this could provide significant learning opportunities and improved effectiveness going forward. Structured documentation processes, such as that used in the SD IU Innovation Review Board, should be reviewed as good practice.

In making resource decisions, the team found that UNICEF’s financial management systems provide limited information on budgeted and actual expenditure on innovation. The best available data suggest that spending on innovation has tripled between 2014 and 2017, from $14 to $44 million. However, the system underlying these figures does not allow UNICEF management to readily obtain a comprehensive, forward-looking innovation budget, or a comprehensive retrospective financial analysis. As a result, UNICEF management cannot easily obtain a clear global overview of spending on innovation within the organization, let alone a view on the robustness (or otherwise) of innovation budgeting in a given office or unit.

UNICEF has the capacity to provide and leverage considerable amounts of funding for innovation, and is working in several important ways to leverage external resources for innovation to benefit children. These engagements are taking on new and different forms including the development of priority shared value partnerships, consultations with industry around products, and market-shaping. These developments should be closely monitored to allow fine-tuning of approach.

Despite these efforts, however, there are clearly barriers to finding funds for innovation. The majority of UNICEF staff feel that there are insufficient resources for innovation and a lack of clarity in processes to access funds for that purpose.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS
Recommendation area 1:
Develop a shared strategic vision and approach that directly addresses fundamental constraints in the current approach and drives decision-making across the organization.

UNICEF should be commended for clearly signalling its intent to use innovation as a means of delivering results for children. However, UNICEF can achieve greater organizational coherence and impact by establishing a strategic vision and approach that builds on a shared understanding of priority challenges and informs decision-making across the organization. UNICEF’s strategic vision and approach must include considerations and principles on innovation in humanitarian settings.

The approach needs to directly address key barriers and impediments to innovation through the development of UNICEF-wide positions on:

- Recognize risk-taking as a necessary component of innovation. This issue can be addressed, in part, through approaches to risk management within the organization, specifically around innovation. To the extent that risk aversion is related to broader organizational culture, other approaches will be needed to shift mindsets. A culture of admitting mistakes and learning from them is a needed element. HQ should lead on approaches to risk management particularly for innovation. Donors’ expectations and considerations around investing in innovation also plays an important part in this equation, and should be addressed as part of this area.

- How different parts of the organization contribute to innovation. UNICEF should increase the clarity of the organizational structure with regard to innovation, including documenting and delineating the mandates, responsibilities and purposes of UNICEF’s dedicated innovation units (OoI, SD IU, ICTD) as well as those of agency leadership, divisions, regional offices, country offices and other parts of the organization. A matrix management approach could provide staff with a far better understanding of where to turn for support and assistance across levels and functions.

- Commitment to increased transparency of governance/oversight and decision-making roles within dedicated innovation units. New innovation initiatives require better coordination, planning and collaboration across divisions at the planning stages to ensure alignment around key priorities. A matrix management arrangement should enable programme/technical staff to co-lead innovation processes based on their expertise and understanding of practical application in real-world settings.

More standardized approaches and processes, already used in parts of the organization, should be adapted for wider use (examples include SD IU stage-gate approach and IRB as well as business cases as used by the ICT Board). Overall, UNICEF investments in innovation should be guided by stronger, clearer problem definitions and use cases developed early in the process.

- Clarity on medium- and long-term staff requirements to enable implementation of innovation as a core strategy. UNICEF should examine its anticipated skill requirements for innovation specifically, including an analysis of the extent to which staff needs for innovation can be addressed through fixed-term positions (including capacity building for staff as needed) versus outsourcing and reliance on consultants and short-term assistance.

- Greater attention to and investment in learning and uptake. An estimated 80 per cent of innovation spending occurs at country and regional levels. The vast majority of experiences generated through these investments are not captured in any structured or systematic manner. UNICEF should incorporate the time and resources required to document lessons learned and to feed these back as a requisite part of innovation design. This important function should capture and share learning (including false-starts and failures) with the specific aim of informing programmes – with an emphasis on organizational learning, rather than headline results of any specific project.
Periodic review of the strategy. The strategy should be reviewed on a regular basis with a possible evaluation of achievements once implementation is rolled out.

**Recommendation area 2:**
Act on needed structural change to advance innovation as a means of achieving results for children.

The period 2014-2017 saw many changes regarding the innovation architecture. However, many staff are dissatisfied with the current organizational set-up and there appears to be appetite for structural changes within UNICEF to address many of the issues identified throughout the evaluation. To that end, in the final stage of the evaluation, options have been developed for the organization’s consideration. Key elements emerging from these options include the following:

UNICEF has unique strengths in its decentralized structure and strong collective capacities at centralized levels. Ample attention is needed at the local level regarding ideas, projects/products to prioritize and how to take these to scale. At the same time, strong central units are needed to leverage the power of the whole through learning from both failures and successes across settings and working towards systematized and replicable approaches. As part of any structural adjustment, UNICEF should balance these structures, their respective strengths and roles.

In order to provide clear strategic vision and manage the wide-ranging innovation portfolio, a senior management role is needed at the Deputy Executive Director level to oversee the various dimensions of the organization’s agenda. This post would have direct responsibility for aspects of the innovation portfolio, notably new Innovation Enabling Services teams, as well as serving as the focal point for matrix management of other innovation structures and resources across UNICEF. This position would also have responsibilities for working closely with managers of internal systems (e.g. budgeting, recruitment) to develop needed adaptations for the purposes of innovation.

**Innovation Enabling Services teams** should also be created, with responsibility for portfolio management and prioritization as well as development and provision of frameworks, tools and processes, monitoring, evaluation, knowledge-sharing, learning and feedback. Oversight responsibility for ventures, futures, and systems support to country and regional offices would also fall under this structure. These teams would support country offices in activities such as identifying and engaging new and/or unfamiliar partners and partnership arrangements (e.g. shared values partnerships, innovative financing), systems issues and funding opportunities (e.g. identifying funding sources and options for differing types and stages of innovation processes). For certain innovations, COs may require support capacity to scan the innovation ecosystem with consideration of risks associated with legal, data, and regulatory framework issues. Responsibility for development and coordinating the implementation of a suitable staffing strategy for innovation would fall under this unit.

Currently, the roles and responsibilities of existing units with innovation remit are unclear to some and suggest potential overlap. Therefore, as part of recommended structural changes, leadership for digital innovation should be housed under the ICT Division which should also bring together various parts of headquarters that are currently working on digital innovation. Appropriate measures should be instituted to mitigate any adverse effect of this recommendation on other core functions of the ICT Division.

There is a need for dedicated innovation staff in COs, especially in medium to large programmes, and also in ROs. The role played...
by the regional T4D specialists is, in general, widely recognized and appreciated and should serve as a model. Innovation staff are best placed under the deputy representative as a means to ensure programme relevance and cross-sector participation. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ model for this support, and efforts should be tailored to specific country and CO variables. UNICEF should also ensure that the ‘eco-system’ in which an innovation is unfolding is well understood, and should garner ownership and anticipate the requirements of scale, hand-over and exit.

**Recommendation area 3:**
Utilize a portfolio management approach for innovation.

UNICEF has yet to clarify how its unique structures and resources are optimally positioned along the innovation and scale-up spectrum – whether to focus on existing, tried-and-tested technologies that need mainstreaming or to emphasize those that need developing from early stages. UNICEF should use a portfolio management approach to ensure that its resources are well aligned with its strategic priorities and comparative advantages and acceptable degrees of risk. Such an approach should help mitigate or overcome the projectization or piecemeal organizational approach to innovation in which small sums of money, short funding cycles, high staff turnover and insufficient knowledge transfer are common. A portfolio approach should be utilized in which the time and resources dedicated to innovation initiatives are weighed accordingly. Portfolio management should inform decision-making by identifying who is doing what in innovation across the organization, what resources are being spent and what results are being measured.
REFERENCES


