
The Evaluation Office commissioned an evaluability assessment of the Strategic Plan in 2014. The assessment had the goal of providing UNICEF management with an independent analysis of whether the plan is robust and coherent, and the degree to which results can be measured, monitored and evaluated.

The specific objectives of the assessment were to:

- Assess the relevance, clarity and coherence of the Strategic Plan’s design.
- Assess the adequacy and validity of the indicators, tools and systems for monitoring, measuring and verifying results; and their use.
- Assess data and systems to determine the degree to which human and financial resources can be evaluated against the expected results.
- Provide guidance on approaches to the evaluation of the Strategic Plan.
- Provide evidence and recommendations to guide any enhancements required regarding the design of the Strategic Plan.

The Evaluability Assessment was designed to assess:

a) evaluability ‘in principle’: the internal logic and coherence of the Strategic Plan; and
b) evaluability ‘in practice’: the measurement system in place such as baseline, indicators and tools for data collection and analysis.

What is evaluability?

The OECD DAC defines evaluability as the extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion.

Evaluability assessment calls for the early review of a proposed activity in order to ascertain whether its objectives are adequately defined and its results verifiable.
The evaluability assessment was conducted in the first year of implementation of the plan to help management take early corrective action and inform the Mid Term Review of the Strategic Plan.

**Key Findings**

The evaluability assessment judged the Strategic Plan to be strong in many respects, while noting several ways in which the Strategic Plan can be further strengthened.

Ten key findings emerged from the evaluability assessment:

1. **The Strategic Plan is widely viewed as the most coherent and technically sound that UNICEF has developed to date.**

2. **The plan is relevant to the organizational mandate and international agreements to which UNICEF is bound**, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. While the Strategic Plan looks like a corporate-level plan that articulates a results structure from outputs to impact, **it is applied as a framework** and widely considered as such by staff. In other words, it provides an overarching framework within which country programme priorities are aligned with national priorities.

4. Although results statements appear at the output, **outcome and impact levels of the plan, there is very little description of how one level leads to or contributes to another. The ‘if-then’ statements that describe the connections of the causal chain are not explicitly stated.** This means that outcomes and impacts cannot readily be linked to UNICEF's actions.

5. The indicators examined in the assessment are generally well defined and specific to intended results, and **baselines exist.** However, a few performance indicators found in the results framework are weak and, in some cases, may impede evaluation through poor quality or limited interpretability.

6. The Strategic Plan is framed with an equity lens, however, the approach to **measurement of equity is weak.** Targets relating to sub-groups of interest are not well defined. There are uncertainties about whether comprehensive and reliable disaggregated data will be available. Additionally, there are differing understandings among staff of the organization's approach to measuring equity-related programming.

7. **Gender and human rights underpin all UNICEF programming. In the plan both are identified by output-level results** as opposed to being shown cutting across UNICEF’s work at all levels. Placement of gender equality as part of an output gives it greater visibility but may lead to a mistaken impression
that gender-focused activities are limited to this output. Similarly, although there has been a push for greater continuity of effort across development and humanitarian work and an emphasis on resilience, humanitarain action is also identified as one among six output level results, rather than a set of actions being undertaken across the organization.

8. Data sources and systems for indicator measurement are either in place or were in the process of being established at the time of the evaluability assessment.

9. The Strategic Plan does not articulate the level of resources required to achieve the anticipated results nor is it clear how resource flows would be tracked to align with the results of the Strategic Plan. This is because the organization has a means-based approach to budgeting; that is, budgets are based on revenues supplied rather than an aggregate costing of work necessary to achieve results.

10. Finally, country offices, with the strong support of regional offices, have already utilized a number of opportunities in the country programme cycle to reflect on the Strategic Plan and make adjustments in their programmes.

Conclusions

A strategic plan is a product of a planning process that defines an organization’s medium- to long-term goals, as well as the resources required to achieve them. It serves to establish and implement a vision within an organization and to support the organization to make choices and respond to emerging issues, needs and mandates. While the Strategic Plan articulates a results structure from outputs to impact and resembles a corporate plan, in practice it is applied as a framework. The reason for this lies in UNICEF’s decentralized mode of operation. Programme planning occurs in negotiation with national actors and results are achieved in partnerships with governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

This presents UNICEF with a conundrum: how can results be defined and aggregated meaningfully at corporate level if UNICEF operates in a highly decentralized manner? Mechanisms will be needed to aggregate results meaningfully but flexibly, keeping results central to the strategic plan or framework.

UNICEF’s Strategic Plan 2014-2017

Realizing the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged

Outcomes

Health HIV & AIDS Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Nutrition

Education Child Protection Social Inclusion

Outputs for each Outcome

Demand Supply Enabling Environment

Rights & Gender Equality Global & Regional Action Humanitarian Action
Key recommendations to UNICEF are as follows:

- **Reorient the Strategic Plan in line with its application as a framework.**
  
  It is recommended that the next round of strategy development should more explicitly account for the need for greater flexibility and adaptation (e.g. more flexibility at the level of outputs, reduced use of aggregated results reporting, greater recognition of context-specific variables).

  This should be fully considered and negotiated with key stakeholders, taking into consideration the UNICEF modus operandi as a highly decentralized organization. The Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (MTR) should, in addition to assessing progress in strategy implementation, further examine the implications of using a strategic framework approach for the 2018-2021 period and, accordingly, provide an indication of next steps.

- **Newly drafted country programme documents (CPDs) and country programme action plans (CPAPs) should be reviewed to better understand how they relate and contribute to the Strategic Plan.**
  
  With substantial regional office support, country offices are making efforts to adjust country programmes for better alignment with the Strategic Plan. Greater alignment of priorities and clarity of results could be facilitated through the review of newly developed CPDs and CPAPs and sharing of lessons. This process should review how well country offices have used determinants analyses and other tools to focus programmes on the rights of the most disadvantaged and excluded children in the country context; and in turn, how well these country-determined foci align with results articulated in the Strategic Plan.

- **Clarify results, measurement approaches and indicators for equity.**
  
  Equity is a central tenet of the UNICEF mission and is thoroughly integrated into the Strategic Plan. However, there is a lack of clarity in the Strategic Plan on defining results related to equity and indicating how these will be measured. It is not necessary for UNICEF to have just one single definition of equity. Rather, equity concepts that are employed need to be operationalized with sufficient clarity and rigor to allow measurement and evaluation.

- **Conduct a review and adjust, as needed, indicators and systems to measure progress towards the results of the Strategic Plan.**
  
  It is recommended that an assessment of the quality of the output-level performance indicators be conducted with particular attention to those generated through the country office annual reporting system. Any further adjustments to indicators should be based on objective assessment of the performance of this system. The review should be explicit about how results should be measured both at the country and global levels.

- **Conduct an exercise to determine the need for and feasibility of moving the organization towards budgeting practices that are more supportive of results-based management that enables better linking of resources and results.**
  
  Currently, the Strategic Plan’s integrated budget relies on projections of resource availability (i.e. means-based budgeting). The organization should explore various ways of linking results to resources and capacity.