Evaluation of the UNICEF role as cluster lead/co-lead agency (CLARE II)

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Item 7: Evaluation of the UNICEF role as cluster lead/co-lead agency

Reference document: E/ICEF/2022/19
Evaluation purpose, scope and approach

• **Objective and purpose:** provide an updated assessment of how well UNICEF is fulfilling its cluster lead agency (CLA) responsibilities since the last evaluation 7 years ago, and offer insights and recommendations for improvements in the exercise of this role.

• **Scope:** covers global, regional and country-level perspectives (from 9 “focus” countries); WASH, Education, Nutrition, Child Protection with equal attention; both coordination and leadership aspects of CLA role.

• **Approach:** mixed methods – collecting, synthesizing and triangulating qualitative and quantitative evidence from internal and external sources.
Overarching findings

• UNICEF has generally delivered on the *coordination responsibilities* of its CLA role

• UNICEF has not performed as consistently well in its *leadership responsibilities*, which are less well understood and considered

• There is overall *insufficient institutional support* for the CLA role from across UNICEF, resulting in *inconsistency and unevenness* in how the role is fulfilled
Findings - Coordination

• UNICEF worked to ensure that clusters have dedicated capacity and tools in place; produced policies/guidance; and provided technical/operational support.

• Since the CLARE I, there have been achievements in the staffing of coordination positions in countries.

  **Staffing gaps remain at the country level**, however, where coordination positions are not always staffed in a timely and consistent manner.

• Over time, clusters have taken on more tasks, becoming conduits for processes – often at the expense of more strategic work. UNICEF as CLA has not given clear direction as to what the clusters’ focus should be.

• **Resource mobilization and allocation** have shed light on the issue of UNICEF’s dual role (as CLA and “donor”), feeding perceptions that UNICEF is more concerned with its own resourcing (rather than the collective cluster membership).
Findings - Leadership

• There are **positive examples of CLA leadership**, e.g.: the creation of the Cluster Coordinator Competency Framework by the Global Nutrition Cluster; the global WASH cluster’s approach to collective leadership.

• **Performance has been less strong in other areas**: i) Building consensus among cluster partners around a shared vision and strategy; ii) Bringing clusters closer together by working towards intersectoral connections; and iii) Sharing experiences on the cluster approach in HCTs and the IASC (ensuring clusters remain fit for purpose).

• The leadership role of the CLA should be a “**shared responsibility**” but is found to be essentially left to cluster coordinators (CCs) and the Global Cluster Coordination Section.

• **CC positions are not sufficiently incentivized within UNICEF**; coordination roles are not seen as attractive as others (with limited career path).
Findings - Leadership

• Co-leadership arrangements at country level have often been reduced to practical divisions of labour, resulting in **missed opportunities**. Different terminologies currently in use create **confusion on co-lead roles**, especially when arrangements are not put on paper.

• Over the years, a “patchwork of cluster doctrine” has made it difficult to clearly articulate accountabilities for CLAs.

• The **provider of last resort concept** is understood and applied in many different ways, with little progress in making its application more consistent since the CLARE I.

• There is a lack of a systematic approach to implementing key policy issues through the clusters; and generally limited direction provided by UNICEF as CLA on how clusters should implement and prioritize them – this has led to **significant variations in how the four commitments are pursued** in country-level clusters (much depends on the coordinator’s individual interpretation of the issues).
Recommendation 1

UNICEF should embrace, promote and operationalize the understanding that UNICEF work for children in humanitarian settings is even more effective when carried out on behalf of, and together with, the collective of actors. A change in approach is required for the organization to focus beyond what UNICEF can do alone, fostering a renewed recognition of the CLA role not as a mere “add-on” but as a core imperative to UNICEF’s mandate and an international commitment.

a. Cover key CLA functions from UNICEF core budget
b. Clarify how the CLA role is prioritized amid others and support further the “intersectorality” of the humanitarian response
c. Increase transparency around fundraising/funding for clusters to better manage perceived conflict of interest from its “dual role”; limit double-hatted cluster coordination positions
d. Promote and support strategic advisory groups (SAGs) as platforms of collective leadership
e. Provide clear direction on how clusters should implement key policy commitments (centrality of protection, accountability to affected populations, humanitarian-development nexus and localization)
Recommendation 2

In prioritizing its role for the collective of humanitarian actors, UNICEF should align internal systems with its CLA responsibilities, ensuring that these systems sufficiently recognize the central importance of the CLA role, and reflect the agency-wide accountability for the fulfilment of these responsibilities.

a. Ensure **CLA accountability** is addressed through a compact between UNICEF senior management, ROs and COs, and established metrics for performance management

b. **Human resources systems** should better support the CLA role
   - Ensure a proper career path for CC positions
   - Prioritize calibre of (internal) staff (versus standby partners) for filling cluster positions
   - Prioritize emergency recruitment through internal talent pool/deployment roster to fill gaps in coordination positions fast
   - Promote further the Global Nutrition Cluster (and other) competency frameworks for CC and information management recruitment
   - Prioritize investment/support to building national capacities for leadership and coordination
   - Strengthen tracking and monitoring of resources (staffing/funding) for cluster coordination
Recommendation 3

To strengthen accountability and learning, UNICEF should use the knowledge and experience it has gained as CLA, and from evaluations such as this one, to push for a reflection on how clusters can be adapted to the changing context in which humanitarian response takes place, and lead changes in the IASC to clarify the underlying tenets of the cluster approach.

a. Advocate within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for cluster guidance to be updated and cluster processes to be streamlined/rationalized

b. Advocate within the IASC for multi-year planning/funding for HNO/HRPs, strengthening monitoring of needs; and addressing transition of clusters

c. Report (through the Executive Director) at least once a year at the IASC principals meeting and to the Executive Board on how UNICEF is delivering on its CLA role; propose adjustments/new ideas related to the CLA role

d. Advocate for the clarification of co-leadership by the IASC, for a stronger definition of functions and implications

e. Advocate for the IASC to review the concept of provider of last resort, to ensure it is more consistently applied/rejected
Thank you.