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Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Management response to the evaluation report

Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF management response to the evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which was completed in 2022. It provides a summary of the recommendations made and the actions that the organization has taken, and will take, to address them.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section III.

* E/ICEF/2023/9.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



I. Overview

1. The evaluation of the UNICEF response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is broadly positive. This novel virus, and its wider impacts on children and their communities, created an organization-wide “stress test”. UNICEF was found to be well positioned with a mature, decentralized structure. Prior investments made in remote working systems, as well as learning culture and ability to adapt, enabled an effective response. UNICEF was able to deliver at scale and to be a key player in the global response to COVID-19.
2. Overall, UNICEF agrees with the proposed recommendations in the evaluation. In particular, UNICEF welcomes recommendations to further strengthen preparedness, and considerations of gender and equity. Although the role of UNICEF in the COVID-19 pandemic may have been unclear to some in the early weeks of the pandemic, a clear internal vision was shared in March 2020 that guided global programming. It was organized around two strategic priorities: (a) public health response to reduce novel coronavirus transmission and mortality; and (b) continuity of health, HIV, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, gender-based violence, social protection and other social services, and assessing and responding to the immediate socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 response.
3. The evaluation was necessarily focused narrowly on the single public health emergency of COVID-19, which has constrained its recommendations. Many of the issues identified in the evaluation were already identified and addressed internally by the time that the evaluation was released. Consequently, there are an unusually high number of actions in the management response that are already under way or completed. In many instances, UNICEF plans are more ambitious and far-reaching than the recommendations of the evaluation.
4. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 presents a deep reflection and learning from the COVID-19 experience. Provisions for local procurement have already been integrated with the UNICEF emergency procedures and the Supply Division procedure on procurement in emergencies. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 response have been regularly communicated with country offices and the global supply community. Furthermore, UNICEF has been responding to rolling public health emergencies since the outbreak of COVID-19, including Ebola virus disease and cholera outbreaks in more than 25 countries in 2023 alone. This continual practice of public health emergency response continues to strengthen and refine the strategic and programmatic performance of UNICEF.
5. While UNICEF agrees, in principle, with the recommendation to “revisit the global ethos of partnership in vaccines”, UNICEF notes that the evaluation conflated some issues relating to partnerships for vaccine supply and delivery. Likewise, the evaluation could have better contextualized the analyses across the value chain, noting the highly complex and rapidly evolving COVID-19 vaccine landscape at the time. The UNICEF Evaluation Office’s upcoming evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to the Access to COVID-19 Tools-Accelerator (ACT-A) response offers an opportunity to unpack the UNICEF COVID-19 vaccine response.
6. The evaluation report lacked evidence to fully support its recommendation on knowledge management and learning system for public health emergencies, and no assessment of the existing knowledge management system was presented.

II. Key evaluation recommendations and UNICEF management response

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
<p>Evaluation recommendation 1: In line with recommendations from the 2020 Humanitarian Review, develop a clear corporate narrative for the role of UNICEF in public health emergencies</p> <p>Rationale: The early phase of the response was characterized by a period of internal debate within UNICEF primarily focusing on what the role of UNICEF should be. Given the diversity of views on this, a clearer corporate understanding of the role of UNICEF within public health emergencies, which recognizes the wider effects of such crises, as per the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and the findings of the Humanitarian Review, will support preparedness and generate a stronger sense of “one organization” under conditions of acute pressure.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>1 (a): At senior management level, conduct an emergency preparedness exercise, mapping out UNICEF corporate positioning in public health emergencies, and building on the Core Commitments for Children for public health emergencies. Clearly articulate commitments and response modalities, notably when such an emergency happens in a conflict setting versus a non-conflict setting.</p> <p>1 (b): Prepare contingency plans and corporate communication narratives on the “whole of UNICEF” role in such an emergency situation.</p>				
UNICEF developed a white paper titled “Putting the Best Interest of Children, Women and their Communities at the Centre of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response”.	Programme Group (Health Programme Team/Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	First quarter 2023	Completed	UNICEF, “Putting the Best Interest of Children, Women and their Communities at the Centre of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response”, March 2023
UNICEF is complementing the white paper with a separate Strategic Plan of Action (internal/external).	Programme Group (Leadership Team and Health Programme Team/ Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	Third quarter 2023	Under way	
UNICEF will include a stronger focus on public health emergencies and health systems strengthening, including increased emphasis on systematic inclusion of epidemic/pandemic in emergency preparedness risk analysis at country office, regional office and headquarters levels as it revises its emergency preparedness guidance.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Risk Analysis and Preparedness Section) Programme Group (Health Programme Team/ Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 1 (c): Ensure that all divisions/units are sighted on their role in public health emergency response, to ensure a more cohesive internal and external narrative.</p>				

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UNICEF is complementing the white paper with a Strategic Plan of Action, which will be monitored.	Programme Group (Leadership Team and Health Programme Team/Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	Third quarter 2023	Under way	
UNICEF capacities on public health emergencies preparedness and response are strengthened through the roll-out of the public health emergency toolkit. It provides an overview of actions and public health emergency response plan templates that country offices should use for public health emergencies preparedness and response.	Programme Group (Health Programme Team/Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	PHE-Toolkit (internal)
Evaluation recommendation 1 (d): Develop protocols for pre-financing commitments for both procurement and programming, in future public health emergency responses.				
Develop protocols for “no-regrets” financing for both procurement and programmes for future public health emergency preparedness and response efforts.	Programme Group (Health Programme Team/HERP) Office of Emergency Programmes Supply Division (COVID-19 Tools and Health Emergency Unit and Emergency Coordination Unit) Division of Financial and Administrative Management	Fourth quarter 2023	Not started	
Conceptualize and provide a detailed design of a no-regrets financing facility for procurement of future public health emergency preparedness and response efforts.	Supply Division (COVID-19 Tools and Health Emergency Unit and Programme Services Centre)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 2: Refresh the corporate narrative on the priority of COVID-19.</p> <p>Rationale: External perceptions, particularly from United Nations partners, are that the UNICEF response to COVID-19 has become focused on vaccination, and that the wider dimensions of the response risk losing momentum. It will be important to ensure that the corporate narrative reflects the significance of COVID-19 in the programmatic work still to be undertaken on the ground.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				

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Evaluation recommendation 2 (a): Internally, consider how a more consistent approach and narrative can be adopted to partners across different parts of the UNICEF “house”.				
UNICEF developed a white paper titled “Putting the Best Interest of Children, Women and their Communities at the Centre of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response” (external).	Programme Group (Leadership Team and Health Programme Team/ Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	First quarter 2023	Completed	UNICEF, “Putting the Best Interest of Children, Women and their Communities at the Centre of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response”
UNICEF is complementing the white paper with a Strategic Plan of Action (internal/external).	Programme Group (Leadership Team and Health Programme Team/ Health Emergency Response and Preparedness)	Third quarter 2023	Under way	
UNICEF is developing an standard operating procedure for public health emergencies, based on the Core Commitments for Children, including to facilitate a coordinated response.	Programme Group (Health Programme Team/ Health Emergency Response and Preparedness) Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Field Support Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
Evaluation recommendation 2 (b): Reflect the continued social and economic effects of COVID-19 in corporate external communications and reporting, including the 2023 UNICEF Annual Report.				
Embed COVID-19 interventions into country and multi-country Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeals and reporting in 2022.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Director’s Office)	December 2021	Completed	“Introduction to HAC 2022: criteria and principles” (internal) Global Annual Results Report 2021: Humanitarian action
Evaluation recommendation 2 (c): Ensure their reflection of the social and economic effects of COVID-19, and the wider dimensions of the response, in Executive Board meetings and agenda items.				
Present the evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and management response, to the Executive Board.	Evaluation Office Office of Emergency Programmes Programme Group	June 2023	Under way	
Continue to present to the Executive Board progress on key indicators for children as related to	Programme Group	December 2023	Under way	

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the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, as part of regular reporting on the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring Office of Emergency Programmes			
<p>Evaluation recommendation 3: Consider undertaking a functional review of the public health emergency capacity of UNICEF across the organization</p> <p>Rationale: Currently, UNICEF, like many international agencies, is battling both humanitarian and development crises on multiple fronts. Many crises are now protracted, with the boundaries between “development” and “humanitarian” action increasingly unclear. Public health emergencies span these boundaries. The 2020 Humanitarian Review recommended increased technical capacity at all levels for public health emergencies. For any future pandemic, it is clear that both development and humanitarian action will be needed. UNICEF staff corporately, therefore, need to possess emergency response skills and be able to respond to public health emergencies at different levels.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 3 (a): Conduct a functional review of public health emergency capacity across UNICEF as an organization, its skills and expertise, with a view to considering how its existing emergency capacities can be broadly extended across the UNICEF “house”.</p>				
Conduct an external evaluation of UNICEF work in public health emergencies, including a review of UNICEF public health emergency capacities.	Evaluation Office	Third quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 3 (b): Seek to build emergency response capacity in all UNICEF staff, as applicable to their working area.</p>				
Deliver a comprehensive nine-month humanitarian learning programme for senior managers, the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop (HLW) Series, to an additional 144 senior managers, bringing the total number of participants to 388.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	Second quarter 2024	Under way	HLW Information Page HLW – Humanitarian Leadership Workshop (internal)
Finalize updated blended and systematic training programme of Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) course for all staff in collaboration with regional emergency advisers.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	EPR training materials Training and simulations repository–humanitarian action and EPR (internal)
Develop a multilingual humanitarian learning local-responder platform (M3LP – core units focused on emergency preparedness and response for humanitarian practitioners).	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	Agora Humanitarian Learning Channel UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action Learning Channel
<p>Evaluation recommendation 4: Build preparedness for public health emergency response across UNICEF.</p>				

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<p>Rationale: The pandemic has highlighted the varying degrees of preparedness for public health crises across UNICEF country offices. It is critical that staff in all country offices are trained in emergency preparedness and that all offices have appropriate emergency preparedness plans in place.</p>				
<p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 4 (a): Ensure that each country office/regional office has a preparedness plan in place for public health emergencies.</p>				
Strengthen guidance on public health emergency links to preparedness plans in the updated emergency preparedness guidance.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Risk Analysis and Preparedness Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
Ensure that all country and regional office sector leads contribute to the development and implementation of preparedness plans of adequate quality.	Regional offices	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 4 (b): Require each country office/regional office to conduct a simulation exercise of its Business Continuity Plan.</p>				
Office Business Continuity Plans are to be exercised, at minimum, once every 12 months (more frequently in high-risk duty stations) such that business continuity readiness is maintained.	Division of Financial and Administrative Management (Continuity and Resilience Unit)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	UNICEF Procedure on Business Continuity Management (Procedure/DFAM/2022/001)
<p>Evaluation recommendation 4 (c): Clarify UNICEF positioning on risk during public health emergencies – whether risk-averse, risk-tolerant or risk-hungry.</p>				
Support country and regional offices and headquarters in understanding humanitarian risks and defining the emergency risk appetite of UNICEF for each emergency (including public health emergencies).	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Field Support Section) Emergency Procedures Business Owners	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	UNICEF Emergency Procedures
<p>Evaluation recommendation 5: Revisit the global ethos of partnership in vaccines in particular.</p>				
<p>Rationale: COVID-19 has highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of UNICEF international partnerships in the pandemic response. In the specific area of vaccine provision, reconsidering the ethos of partnership will help to rebuild relationships and maximize outcomes for those who still badly need UNICEF support.</p>				
<p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 5 (a): Engage with partners to discuss – with an open mind – respective comparative advantages and opportunities for collaboration and partnership in both vaccine delivery and country preparedness. Approach roles from the perspective of “greatest benefit to those in need” rather than territorial concerns.</p>				
Identify the top three to five partners that UNICEF	Programme Group (Health	Fourth	Under way	

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engages with in the vaccine ecosystem and conduct bilateral and/or multilateral discussions on roles and responsibilities for vaccine supply, country preparedness and delivery during public health emergencies.	Programme Team) Supply Division (COVID-19 Tools and Health Emergency Unit and Vaccine Centre)	quarter 2023		
Identify best practices from the COVID-19 vaccine delivery partnership.	Programme Group (Health Programme Team)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 6: Also in line with findings from the Humanitarian Review, reassess supply chain and procurement requirements and procedures for public health emergencies.</p> <p>Rationale: The UNICEF Supply Chain function has undergone considerable reflection and lesson-learning since the COVID-19 response. As the Humanitarian Review notes, however, improvement can still be undertaken, and most specifically on local procurement, where UNICEF has room to enhance scope for country offices to undertake their own procurement, particularly under emergency conditions.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 6 (a): Reconsider the Core Commitments for Children levels of preparedness, potentially expanding these to enable large-scale public health responses where needed.¹</p>				
Improve the standing capacity section of the emergency preparedness guidance to focus on realistic goals and capacity, in terms of providing a defined response package to a set number of people in a certain amount of time.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Risk Analysis and Preparedness Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 6 (b): Specifically consider how local procurement and other adaptations could help to maximize emergency response under pandemic conditions.</p>				
Ensure local procurement is integrated in emergency procedures.	Supply Division	Second quarter 2022	Completed	UNICEF Procedure on Procurement in Emergencies (Procedure/SD/2022/017) UNICEF Emergency Procedures
<p>Evaluation recommendation 6 (c): Redress reputational effects at country level by communicating externally lessons UNICEF has learned in its Supply Chain function since COVID-19.</p>				

¹ There are no “Core Commitments to Children levels of preparedness” defined in the Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action.

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Supply chain lessons learned from COVID-19 documented and communicated externally through annual report and other publications.	Supply Division	2022	Completed	UNICEF Supply Division, “Supply Report 2021: one year of UNICEF supply action and achievements”, June 2022 UNICEF Supply Division, “COVID-19 Impact Assessment on Global Logistics and Supplies”, September 2021
<p>Evaluation recommendation 7: Intensify the focus on equity and gender in emergency response.</p> <p>Rationale: The response to the emergency conditions of COVID-19 has shown an unsystematic approach to gender and equity at best. A clearer articulation of why equity and gender matters in public health emergency response, and how it should be considered at all levels, will support equitable outcomes.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 7 (a): Clarify the role of gender in public health emergency response by creating an initiative led by the Office of Emergency Programmes to communicate the role of gender and equity in all emergency responses.</p>				
Develop a resource kit for gender equality and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.	Programme Group (Gender Equity Team)	Second quarter 2021	Completed	“Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action: gender equality – overview”
Draft and disseminate priority actions for gender-responsive emergency preparedness, including integration into UNICEF internal emergency preparedness guidance.	Programme Group (Gender Equity Team) Office of Emergency Programmes (Risk Analysis & Preparedness Section)	Third quarter 2022	Completed	UNICEF action brief, “Gender Responsive Emergency Preparedness: principles and priority actions for UNICEF country offices”
<p>Evaluation recommendation 7 (b): Embed gender and equity considerations in all HACs and their approval processes, more from a “transformative” perspective than from a “quantitative” one.</p>				
Gender and equity considerations are included in all HAC appeals from needs assessment, development, quality assurance, and approval processes.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Director’s Office)	Third quarter 2022	Completed	2023 HAC Guidance Package includes the tip sheets, etc.; updated annually (internal)
<p>Evaluation recommendation 7 (c): Require corporate reporting on HACs to include gender and equity considerations.</p>				

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Guidance and templates for situation reports reporting against HAC appeals to include gender in results reporting, including sex- and age-disaggregated data.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	Third quarter 2022	Completed	
Consolidated Emergency Reports (CERs) reflect gender- and age-disaggregated results and analysis	Office of Emergency Programmes (Director's Office) Public Partnerships Division	Third quarter 2022	Completed	2021 and 2022 Consolidated Emergency Reports (internal)
<p>Evaluation recommendation 8: Define and establish the corporate-level knowledge management and learning system for public health emergencies.</p> <p>Rationale: The pandemic response has shown up several fault lines in UNICEF knowledge management, guidance and learning systems for emergencies – ranging from the volume to the quality of learning products and guidance produced.</p> <p>Management response: Partially agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendation 8 (a): Conduct a consultation exercise with country offices regarding the volume, quality and relevance of guidance and learning products generated during 2020 and 2021, with a view to mapping out real-world demands during corporate emergency conditions.</p>				
Consult globally on guidance and learning produced in 2020 and 2021.	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (Data and Analytics Team and Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management) Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	2022	Completed	
Establish a formal review process for streamlining and harmonization of guidance.	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring Programme Group (Leadership Team)	Third quarter 2020	Completed	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 8 (b): Map the range of learning products produced internally during the pandemic, including internal websites, guidance, learning and other exercises, and review scope for their rationalization in light of demands in any future event.</p>				
Mapping of learning products.	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (Data and Analytics Team and Organizational Learning and	2022	Completed	

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
	Knowledge Management) Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)			
Evaluation recommendation 8 (c): Develop, for emergency situations which require rapid adaptation and innovation at corporate level, an organization-wide “clearing house” or vetting system to ensure that learning and guidance produced is a) demand-driven, b) relevant to needs, and c) of a quality and design that speaks to country office needs on the ground. Define the role of regional offices within this system.				
Develop a light and empowered coordination mechanism and standing operating procedure for planning, consulting, finalizing and publishing knowledge products for global use in response to next pandemics and other (public health) emergencies.	Programme Group (Leadership Team) Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section) Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management)	Fourth quarter 2023	Not started	
Single templated internal-UNICEF SharePoint site to be deployed for new emergencies as a single global hub containing or linking to all guidance, updates, knowledge products and tools for response.	Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence & Learning Section) Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring Programme Group (Leadership Team)	Fourth quarter 2023	Underway	
External-facing digital platforms and associated standard operating procedures enable [when needed] specific public microsite creation to share technical knowledge products and guidance with external partners.	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring Office of Emergency Programmes (Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section)	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	

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Procedures for ethics in evidence generation (research, evaluation and data collection) and supporting resources are being reviewed and updated, including ensuring that requirements are flexible and agile enough to support safe and ethical evidence generation in emergency settings.	UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight	Fourth quarter 2023	Under way	

III. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/18](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/19](#));
 2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, its summary ([E/ICEF/2023/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/21](#)).
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