Formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming

Summary

The formative evaluation is a forward-looking exercise, designed to provide insights and recommendations for practical improvements in the UNICEF approach to the humanitarian, development, peace nexus (until now referred to by UNICEF as “linking humanitarian and development” (LHD) programming).

In addition to that primary purpose, the evaluation is aimed at documenting the progress of UNICEF work in LHD to serve as a baseline to inform a global evaluation of UNICEF work on LHD programming that will take place in the next quadrennium and contribute to UNICEF learning under the unprecedented and evolving circumstances presented by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The evaluation included a review of nexus approaches in the 10 largest country offices, ranked by humanitarian expenditure.

Overall, UNICEF has made significant progress in advancing the nexus in its programming. Most notably, in 2019, the publication of the mandatory Procedure on Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming, which brings together existing strands of humanitarian and development programming, marked an important milestone for the organization. In 2020, the revision of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action further advanced the organization’s attention to LHD programming. Many country offices have seen improvements in their programme planning and, as a result, have created the basis for better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

* E/ICEF/2021/23.
** The summary of the evaluation report is being circulated in all official languages. The full report is available in English from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website (see annex).
Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.
While the evaluation concluded that there is no consistent, organization-wide understanding of the Procedure, it has started to resonate. The Procedure has been incorporated into and used to support the development of the most recent country programme documents, as well as annual and rolling work plans.

The evaluation also found clear and consistent policy commitments to furthering LHD programming in coordination processes, to better supporting local humanitarian action and to strengthening national and local systems and capacities for humanitarian responses linked to development.

Several areas could be strengthened, however, including the situating of the nexus within the UNICEF policy framework; the planning and reporting systems needed to support more coherent programming; and some specific elements of UNICEF programming. UNICEF needs to do more to institutionalize and contextualize the nexus within and across the organization for more effective implementation at the country level.

Section IV contains conclusions and recommendations. Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section V.
I. Introduction

1. There is a long history of practice, debate and policy around linking different types of interventions in crises. In the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse centred on the premise that greater linkages between humanitarian and development programming would improve the process of recovery or rehabilitation from crises. At the same time, it was recognized that transitions from humanitarian to development programming did not represent a simple linear progression; often humanitarian and development approaches were carried out simultaneously, processes of recovery were fragile and countries or regions were prone to slipping back into crisis. The following decade saw calls for greater coherence among different actors in recovery and rehabilitation from crises. At the same time, humanitarians warned that certain distinctions were necessary to maintain if humanitarian principles were to be respected. Similarly, there have been calls to pay more attention to the balance of humanitarian substitution, on the one hand, and support to existing government-led services in maintaining access to social services on the other.

2. The terminology has evolved along with the debate. In order to stress the lack of a linear progression from humanitarian action to development, some began using the terms humanitarian and development “continuum” and “contiguum”. More recently, the term “resilience” has become widely used as a framing and analytical device and United Nations documentation has discussed “integration”. “Nexus” is the latest term to gain widespread traction.

3. The current nexus initiatives emerged from a series of interlinked policy processes, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, the United Nations reform process, the refugee response framework and such Member State processes as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR). This momentum is further evidenced by the increased involvement of the World Bank in the peace and development arenas.

4. UNICEF, too, has evolved and is making concerted efforts to link its development and humanitarian programming in order to improve programming and achieve better results for children. The evaluation is a forward-looking examination of these efforts.

II. Evaluation objectives, scope and methodology

5. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to critically assess UNICEF efforts in linking humanitarian and development (LHD) programming to improve and strengthen that linkage going forward. The secondary purposes of the evaluation are to:

   (a) Document the progress of UNICEF work in the area of LHD to serve as a baseline to inform the global evaluation of UNICEF work on LHD programming that will take place in the next quadrennium;

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(b) Contribute to UNICEF learning under the new and unprecedented circumstances presented by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic;

(c) Add to the body of work available to the international development and humanitarian communities as they consider how best to link humanitarian and development programming and address challenges similar to those faced by UNICEF.

6. As a formative exercise, the evaluation considers primarily recent developments and assesses the direction of LHD work. The team used the 2019 Procedure on Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming (hereafter referred to as “the Procedure”) as a focus, but the concept was understood more broadly to include the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It assesses how well UNICEF has integrated its programming and how well it is supporting functions, such as human resources, fundraising and monitoring, have enabled more integrated programming. It also assesses UNICEF leadership and engagement at the inter-agency level to advance the nexus agenda.

7. The evaluation is organized around 13 evaluation questions, which are grouped into five themes, each corresponding to a section in the evaluation report. The evaluation criteria used include coherence, connectedness, coverage and effectiveness. The themes are:

(a) **Definition and coherence**, which focuses on the coherence of the Procedure itself, as well as its coherence with the wider architecture of the international aid system and within the UNICEF regulatory framework. It also covers how well the Procedure has been communicated, understood and implemented (as well as implementation constraints);

(b) **Partnerships and the nexus**, which considers the leadership role of UNICEF with regard to the nexus, how well UNICEF is coordinating on nexus issues and the extent to which UNICEF is aligned with other coordination efforts in the humanitarian and development spheres. It also looks at the extent to which UNICEF is strengthening systems, working with partners on the nexus and advancing the localization agenda;

(c) **Implementing the nexus in planning and programming**, which looks at how well risk-informed programming, emergency preparedness, accountability to affected populations (AAP), gender, social protection, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding are reflected in planning and implemented in programming;

(d) **Internal systems and structures**, which covers planning, monitoring and reporting, as well as the financial and human resources necessary to implement the nexus;

(e) **COVID-19**, which looks at how well UNICEF has integrated the nexus into its response to the pandemic.

8. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting, synthesizing and triangulating qualitative and quantitative evidence from internal (UNICEF) and external sources. The evaluation design, which was originally based on six in-country case studies, had to be changed with the onset of COVID-19, which made travel impossible. Instead, data were collected along three layers: (a) a review of all countries listed in the Procedure; ³ (b) a more detailed review of the 10 largest country offices by humanitarian expenditure (2019); ⁴ and (c) two in-depth country case studies of programming in Ethiopia and

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³ Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

⁴ Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and Yemen.
Indonesia. The time frame falls within the period of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, from January 2018 through October 2020.

III. Evaluation findings

A. Definition and coherence

9. This section explores the ways in which UNICEF has defined and positioned LHD programming by examining the treatment of the concept in the UNICEF regulatory framework, with a particular focus on the LHD Procedure. This is followed by a look at how the concept of LHD is communicated to, and ultimately received and interpreted by, staff at the country-office level. The analysis draws on a review of the most relevant documentation from UNICEF policies, procedures and guidance as well as interviews across UNICEF.

10. The section also considers the ways in which UNICEF addresses the potential tensions between its humanitarian and development mandates. It asks how such tensions are handled in policies, procedures and guidance and ultimately in practice. In doing so, it takes experiences from country case studies, supplemented by evidence from other evaluations and interviews.

11. The approach of “linking humanitarian and development programming” is at odds with the widespread adoption of the term “nexus”. It is possible to argue that the term “linking” makes sense for UNICEF, but the language is ultimately limiting. In some contexts, there is no development framework with which to link, or direct linkages are inappropriate on grounds of principle, and in others there is no ongoing humanitarian action with which to link. In both cases, however, substantial components of the LHD Procedure still apply. This notion of linking two separate modes of programming is, in part, an internalization of the heavily bifurcated assistance architecture that has developed over time and persists. While the distinct modes of operation are important in some contexts, the recently adopted system-wide definitions of the “nexus” emphasizing coherences and connectivity are superior.

12. The concept of LHD was not integrated into the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 prominently enough. Within the Strategic Plan, the concept of LHD is subsumed under humanitarian programming and one of its change strategies. This is not to say that LHD has not been a priority for UNICEF; rather that it has been one of many priorities that compete in a system in which resources and the political capital to drive change are limited. Given that a combination of significant downward pressure from senior management and cross-organizational engagement are required to drive substantial change, a first step would be to elevate LHD in the next Strategic Plan.

13. The LHD Procedure and the Core Commitments for Children represent the most recent efforts of UNICEF to introduce a nexus approach more consistently and systematically across its programming. The Procedure brings together a broad, interconnected range of policies, procedures and guidance that span the full spectrum of UNICEF humanitarian and development work. Its publication marked an important milestone for the organization.

14. Similarly, in 2020, the revision of the Core Commitments for Children was an important milestone. The Core Commitments make a substantive reference to LHD and include a formal commitment to “foster coherence and complementarity between humanitarian and development programming”. They show an improvement in terms of how UNICEF treats LHD issues, providing greater clarity, both conceptually and practically, on linking humanitarian and development programming at the levels of

5 ‘Regulatory framework’ applies to the full set of UNICEF policies, procedures and guidance.
policy, programming and operations. Additionally, the adoption by UNICEF of the OECD Development Assistance Committee Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and its common definitions is another important step forward.

15. The peace component of the nexus approach is noticeably absent in the organization’s framing of LHD in the Procedure. The Procedure does commit UNICEF to “where appropriate, address the causes of conflict and violence through appropriate peacebuilding approaches”, but provides no further guidance. The role of UNICEF in sustaining peace and peacebuilding is better emphasized and clarified in the revised Core Commitments, both at the policy and programme levels.

16. Generally, existing policy-level guidance risk reinforcing the misperception that LHD is a humanitarian issue. As mentioned, the treatment of LHD is most evident and comprehensive in the revised Core Commitments. Although this is a positive step, it is also problematic from a whole-of-organization standpoint, given that the Core Commitments are the key policy framework for UNICEF humanitarian action. Although formally applicable to all UNICEF programming, they are most often associated with countries with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal.

17. There are inconsistencies in the way that tensions between humanitarian principles and development approaches are addressed in UNICEF policies and guidance. The Procedure does not explore the possible tensions between the components of the organization’s dual mandate and offers no practical guidance as to how to bridge those components. The revised Core Commitments, which were designed to apply in all contexts, are clear on the need to apply humanitarian principles and safeguard operational independence. The Programme Framework for Fragile Contexts also contains clear guidance on the need for UNICEF to carefully navigate development commitments to working with States and humanitarian principles.

18. The possible tensions between the organization’s humanitarian and development mandates and peace are highly specific to each country office’s specific political and operational setting. This relates to the larger finding of the evaluation that contextualizing the guidance is as important as integrating it into planning processes. The support of regional offices and headquarters divisions, particularly the Programme Division Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peace Section, will be vital in this process. The Nexus Framework for the South Asia Region is an example of the necessary contextualization.

19. In terms of institutionalization, the general concept of LHD programming is recognized across UNICEF. The evaluation survey respondents demonstrated an understanding of the concept of LHD. Familiarity with the concept, however, does not equate to familiarity with the Procedure. Although the Procedure covers a wide range of themes, interviewees had a tendency to reduce it to a single one of its component parts when describing it – often resilience or system strengthening, if those had particular resonance in their country or region.

20. While the evaluation concluded that there is no consistent and organization-wide understanding of the LHD Procedure, it is clear that it has started to resonate in a key way: the Procedure has been incorporated into and used to support the development of the most recent country programme documents (CPDs) and annual reviews. This has resulted in more numerous as well as more-concrete references to LHD approaches in new planning and programme design. Given that so many CPDs will be developed in 2021, it is important that country offices are supported to embed nexus and LHD approaches into their planning and design.
B. Partnerships and the nexus

21. This section considers the intersection of nexus approaches in the organization’s role as a leader and partner in development and humanitarian interventions, including its role as a cluster lead in humanitarian settings, and the extent to which UNICEF is aligned with other coordination efforts in the humanitarian and development spheres. It also assesses UNICEF work to build civil society capacities through its local partnerships and strengthen national systems through its work with Governments.

22. Overall, the evaluation found clear and consistent policy commitments to linking humanitarian and development programming in coordination processes; to better supporting local humanitarian action; and to strengthening national and local systems and capacities for humanitarian responses linked to development.

23. A key strength is that across humanitarian and development programmes, system strengthening and capacity development are integral to UNICEF strategies and approaches. The evaluation found that among the elements of the nexus, as defined in the Procedure, action was strongest in system strengthening and capacity-building. The evaluation found that the organization’s strong partnerships with host Governments and extensive partnership agreements with civil society organizations strengthen systems for preparedness and disaster response.

24. Such efforts are generally more focused on government systems, however. Efforts to build local civil society capacities or transform local partnerships in line with nexus commitments were less consistent and views of partners on the performance of UNICEF in this area were mixed. Some noted that relationships were partly hindered by rigid UNICEF systems, poor communication on nexus-related strategies and minimal inclusion of partners in the programme planning and design processes. Additionally, civil society partners sometimes perceive their relationship with UNICEF to be less of a partnership and more contractual. The flexibility of multi-year funding is rarely passed on to partners. UNICEF needs to pay more attention to strengthening civil society systems and capacities in the context of the nexus.

25. Such strengthening will require leadership and capacities that will allow UNICEF to engage more effectively in strategic and principled partnerships across the nexus. It includes the capacity to analyse civil society actors and interpret the partnership landscape.

26. UNICEF effectively uses its leadership or co-leadership of multiple sectors to promote inter-agency LHD strategies and is advancing the nexus through joint programming with other United Nations agencies. UNICEF was seen as having a comparative advantage in LHD and nexus coordination through its strong dual mandate, subnational presence and strong relationships and networks with Governments. The challenge for UNICEF, and where it was sometimes perceived as falling short, was in maximizing those strengths through staff equipped with strong coordination and leadership capacities and who are able to work confidently across humanitarian and development programming.

27. While UNICEF coordination is effective within sectors, such as the water, sanitation and hygiene and nutrition sectors, it is less effective across sectors. There is limited evidence that UNICEF is purposefully bringing together development and humanitarian programming in the same geographical areas/populations (convergence approaches) and fostering strong linkages with peacebuilding efforts. There is also a

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6 This includes: Inter-Agency Standing Committee roles; the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals; the New Way of Working outlined in the World Humanitarian Summit; and the Agenda for Humanity and emphasis on collective outcomes.
need for stronger engagement with actors, such as the World Bank, that are strengthening their engagement in fragile and conflict contexts.

C. Planning and programming

28. The LHD procedure commits UNICEF to strengthening its work in the areas of risk-informed programming, emergency preparedness, AAP, gender and disability responsiveness, peacebuilding and social cohesion and linking humanitarian cash and social protection. This section explores the progress made on those commitments. Overall, while progress is being made in this area and strong guidance has been developed, this is not consistently resulting in effective action in fragile contexts.

29. The organization’s commitments to risk-informed programming and emergency preparedness are clear in policies and guidance. Country offices receive strong support in those areas from regional offices and headquarters and there is clear evidence that the Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming is being used in CPDs and annual reviews. More can be done, however, to ensure that in country offices the guidance is appropriately contextualized, dynamic and iterative, with an explicitly practical focus (i.e., that translates more easily into a foundation for achieving results for children). There remains a significant lack of analytical capacity for comprehensive risk and contextual analysis, including socioeconomic analysis and conflict analysis.

30. UNICEF has been an active player in efforts to promote more-collective approaches to AAP globally and at the country level. AAP is still not systematically embedded in UNICEF planning and programming in humanitarian action. While staff recognize the importance of AAP, it is not comprehensively incorporated into key country documents, and recent evaluations have highlighted the weakness of AAP mechanisms within sectors and country programmes. Training on AAP has begun in some regions and an AAP handbook was published in 2020 that should support the organization to move this agenda forward. 7

31. There was little evidence from the interviews that UNICEF is effectively connecting AAP initiatives in its humanitarian work with accountability and participation approaches in its development work, although the evaluation notes an example of good practice on which to build. Existing Programme Policy and Procedure guidance does recognize the need to connect development and humanitarian approaches to accountability, but there is little evidence that this is happening in practice. The basics of good humanitarian AAP practice need to be in place before this can happen.

32. UNICEF has clear commitments and strong policies and guidance on gender, disability and inclusion and staff recognize the importance of gender and disability responsiveness. However, policy commitments on gender and disabilities have not yet translated into consistent practice in humanitarian contexts, protracted crises, and contexts affected by fragility, including in LHD programming. There is little evidence that UNICEF is linking humanitarian and development approaches to gender and disability within its country programming.

33. UNICEF has made strong policy commitments to supporting shock-responsive social protection, developed an effective body of guidance in this area and is in a strong position to work effectively with Governments and development partners on that agenda. This has the potential to be an important area for advancing LHD programming and nexus approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the

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shock-responsive social protection agenda; Governments across the world are expanding and adjusting their social protection responses. UNICEF responded by supporting shock-responsive social protection in 114 countries in 2020, up from 40 countries in 2019.

34. While the role of UNICEF in sustaining peace and peacebuilding is emphasized and clarified in the revised Core Commitments, there is continuing uncertainty among UNICEF staff on the organization’s peacebuilding role. In general, peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive programming are considered weak links in UNICEF planning processes and programming and are under-prioritized in UNICEF human resource management. Country offices generally lack the skills and capacities for conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. While there are examples of strong conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding approaches in country offices and projects, these do not yet constitute a systematic and consistent approach to peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity across the organization. UNICEF could better embed conflict sensitivity in its approaches to risk-informed programming and preparedness in development contexts in which there is a history or high risk of conflict.

D. Internal systems and structures

35. This section considers the internal systems and structures, such as planning, monitoring, reporting and human resources, that support LHD. It also considers how UNICEF internal financial systems support LHD and the extent to which UNICEF is galvanizing partners to mobilize resources and utilize financing in a way that supports LHD.

36. Overall, the siloed nature of UNICEF reporting, financing and staffing approaches as they relate to either humanitarian or development activities, has challenged the organization’s ability to link and foster coherence between related mechanisms and areas of work. Challenges reporting on, financing and staffing nexus approaches are rooted in the bifurcated assistance architecture, which UNICEF has internalized in its structures. The organization’s reporting and financing systems – and to some extent staff skill sets and mind sets – have been tailored to deal with both sides of the binary, rather than foster connectivity and coherence between them.

37. In the current Strategic Plan, LHD is defined as a way of creating more-effective programming, rather than as a goal in itself. This is deliberate and appropriate and in keeping with the norms of results-based management systems. The end result, however, is that there is no effective method for estimating the extent to which nexus approaches are operationalized. The use of data extrapolated from coding against the humanitarian marker as a proxy is inadequate and activities associated with nexus approaches are in a grey area. The tagging system does not interpret whether UNICEF is making progress towards LHD; rather it quantifies the contribution of activities to each mode of programming. The indicator set appended to the Procedure is based on existing indicators that country offices are already required to report use. While this was done intentionally to avoid burdening country offices, the indicator set is a weak proxy. Although consistently measuring and reporting against these indicators as a set would represent an improvement, the situation calls for more-innovative solutions for quantifying the proactive application of nexus approaches.

38. The lack of funding for linking activities and nexus approaches has been a significant (often the most significant) constraint to undertaking nexus work. The largest humanitarian crises, which are almost entirely funded by emergency resources, have little flexibility to address nexus issues. Funding for sustainable solutions competes with the demands of acute needs, and humanitarian funding is the most inflexible in terms of time frames and activities. At the country level, there have been calls to conduct more-concerted advocacy with donors; to make a more fundamental
shift towards alternative revenue streams that are moving into the nexus space; and to make more regular resources available to allow for more flexibility in programming.

39. The evaluation also found that UNICEF needs to strengthen the skills, capacities and mind sets of its staff to better meet its LHD commitments and programme effectively across the nexus. This includes both strengthening staff capacities in such key nexus-related areas as peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity, AAP, gender and disability and cultivating staff with mind sets that enable them to pivot between development and humanitarian approaches, including to support advocacy and resource mobilization.

40. UNICEF has adopted the bifurcated approach to humanitarian and development work common to entities outside UNICEF, in which longer-term socioeconomic development and short-term emergency response are treated as separate spheres of action. In addition, inertia on the part of senior leadership has hindered the reform of internal systems and structures to advance the LHD agenda, which is only one of many priorities for UNICEF. The inefficiencies inherent in separate planning and reporting systems and the necessary/constant workarounds are clear across the organization.

E. COVID-19 and the nexus

41. This section examines the ways in which UNICEF has taken forward its commitments to LHD programming in its global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

42. The unprecedented scale of the pandemic has required both emergency response and the adaptation of development support. However, an explicit nexus approach has been largely absent from the architecture and structure of the global COVID-19 response. This has reinforced a siloed approach and led to underfunding of responses to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

43. In many countries, UNICEF is successfully and appropriately working with and through States to strengthen State-led responses to COVID-19. In doing so, the organization’s strong relationships and networks with line ministries across multiple sectors and its subnational presence are an advantage.

44. While the switch to emergency mode in the organization’s initial response to COVID-19 was appropriate, as the response continues, greater attention will need to be given to how to adapt long-term development programming and bring together emergency and development skills and capacities across the organization. This is recognized in broad strategy terms, but more-detailed support needs to be provided to country offices to guide their efforts to adapt development programming approaches to the pandemic.

45. There is a need to more fully integrate COVID-19 adaptations into CPDs and maintain funding for both wider development programming and ongoing emergency responses. There is scope for COVID-19 to accelerate progress on shock-responsive social protection and strengthen local and national capacities for disaster risk management. Innovations developed to enable reporting on COVID-19 represent opportunities to more successfully integrate approaches to reporting on humanitarian and development work within UNICEF systems.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

46. Overall, UNICEF has made significant progress in advancing the nexus in its programming. Most notably, in 2019, the publication of the mandatory Procedure on
Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming, which brings together existing strands of humanitarian and development programming, marked an important milestone for the organization. Similarly, the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action show a marked improvement in terms of how UNICEF treats LHD issues. The organization’s adoption of the OECD Development Assistance Committee Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and its common definitions is another important step forward. Many country offices have demonstrated improvements in their programme planning, and as a result, have created the basis for better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

47. Several areas could be strengthened, however, including the organization’s general approach to the nexus; the placement of the nexus within the UNICEF policy framework; the organizational systems needed to support more-coherent programming; and certain elements of UNICEF programming. UNICEF needs to do more to institutionalize and contextualize the nexus within and across the organization for more-effective implementation at the country level.

48. The recommendations of the evaluation are organized around the five themes detailed above. They are designed to help UNICEF further strengthen its nexus work to ensure better results for children.

**Theme A: Definition and coherence**

49. There is space to improve the overall approach of UNICEF to the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. The current framing of “linking” humanitarian and development programming neglects the peacebuilding dimension and reinforces the notion that these are two discrete ways to programme. This notion is, in part, a reflection of the heavily bifurcated assistance architecture that has developed over time. However, it is essential that UNICEF embrace the QCPR approach that focuses on “cooperation, coherence, coordination and complementarity among development, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and sustaining peace”, rather than reinforcing two siloed modes of programming.

50. The fact that LHD was not been prominently integrated into the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 reflects the reality that LHD has been one of many priorities that compete in a system in which resources and the political will to drive change are limited. To raise the profile of this issue, UNICEF needs to elevate it within its new Strategic Plan to provide senior managers and staff across the organization with a stronger framework for engagement.

51. There are inconsistencies in the way that tensions between humanitarian principles and development approaches are addressed in UNICEF policies. The revised Core Commitments and the Programme Framework for Fragile Contexts are stronger on this issue than the Procedure. As a result, for UNICEF, transitioning from the implementation of a development framework to operating as an independent humanitarian actor remains a challenge.

52. The organization’s commitment to engaging with the peacebuilding theme of the nexus approach is unclear, as is the extent of its potential role. The Procedure does commit UNICEF to “where appropriate, address the causes of conflict and violence through appropriate peacebuilding approaches”, but provides no further guidance. The role of UNICEF in sustaining peace and peacebuilding is better emphasized and clarified in the revised Core Commitments, at both the policy and programme levels.

53. The Procedure has had traction within UNICEF, particularly in supporting the development of recent CPDs and annual reviews, demonstrating a marked improvement since the Procedure’s publication. However, the evaluation found a lack of a consistent and organization-wide understanding of the nexus and the Procedure’s
requirements, partly due to the lack of a defined process for rolling out the Procedure and communicating it effectively to country offices.

**Theme A recommendations**

(a) Adopt the approach and language of the nexus in keeping with the 2020 QCPR. Rather than “linking”, the emphasis should be on strengthening cooperation, coherence, coordination and complementarity internally across UNICEF planning, programming and reporting, and externally through United Nations-wide mechanisms. Responsibility: the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(b) Ensure that this new approach and language are integrated fully and prominently into the next Strategic Plan. All programme policies, procedures and guidance should clearly state the requirement for coherent, collaborative and complementary approaches to the fullest extent possible in all UNICEF programming. While this integration is being completed, a second iteration of the Procedure is warranted, in line with normal revision schedules. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes;

(c) As part of this process, ensure that a clear statement of the UNICEF role and contribution in relation to the peace dimension of the nexus and the centrality of humanitarian principles is integrated into the next Strategic Plan and all programme policy, procedures and guidance, including the revised Procedure. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes and Programme Division;

(d) Ensure that all major programming tools, including new CPDs and annual and rolling work plans, reflect an explicit, coherent and collaborative approach across humanitarian and development programming, including contributions to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional offices;

(e) Create and implement a communication and roll-out strategy and process for the revised Procedure. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes and Programme Division.

**Theme B: Partnerships and the nexus**

54. Across humanitarian and development programmes, UNICEF strategies and approaches are built around system strengthening and capacity development. While this represents a core strength, the work focuses primarily on national and subnational government systems. UNICEF needs to give more attention to strengthening civil society approaches in the context of the nexus.

55. Partnerships with civil society organizations should be true to the spirit of partnership cooperation agreements. This means ensuring that UNICEF is perceived as a partner and not a donor.

56. In its cluster lead role, UNICEF is a key coordination agency in humanitarian settings and well positioned to work towards coherent approaches within and across its specialist sectors. However, the organization lacks the coordination and leadership capacities to work confidently across humanitarian and development programming. With additional investments in this area, UNICEF would be able to maximize its leadership role in nexus-related programming.
57. UNICEF needs to more explicitly promote the geographical convergence of humanitarian and development approaches and forge stronger linkages with peacebuilding actors.

**Theme B recommendations**

(a) Review and strengthen how UNICEF approaches its civil society partnerships, in line with its localization commitments. In doing this, emphasize achieving better results for children through more-coherent and collaborative nexus approaches. Where UNICEF has flexible and multi-year funding, pass this on to partners. Responsibility: Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Public Partnerships Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(b) Invest in training and support to ensure that UNICEF staff in leadership, senior programme and coordination roles (within sectors and across headquarters and regional and country offices) can coordinate confidently across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming. This includes building skills for better managing transitions; better supporting ministries and local government units responsible for disaster risk reduction; and better supporting sector ministries on preparedness. UNICEF staff should be able to coordinate across modes of programming and programme sectors, integrating any new learning effort into the new overarching rights and results-based management training. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Division of Human Resources, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support).

**Theme C: Planning and programming**

58. While UNICEF is making progress and developing strong guidance in the areas of risk-informed programming, emergency preparedness, AAP, gender and disability responsiveness, linking humanitarian cash and social protection, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding and social cohesion, the guidance is not consistently translating into effective action at the country level.

59. There is evidence that the institutionalization of risk-informed programming is improving, meaning that the Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming is being applied more consistently. Several country offices noted a lack of analytical capacity for comprehensive risk and contextual analysis, including conflict analysis, and a somewhat static approach to risk analysis. More can be done to ensure that the Guidance is contextualized appropriately for each respective context and integrated into UNICEF planning and programming processes. Ultimately, the approach to risk in each country should be dynamic and iterative, with an explicitly practical focus.

60. The dual mandate of UNICEF, strong body of guidance and firm policy commitments have positioned it to effectively link humanitarian cash and social protection approaches in fragile and conflict-affected places. UNICEF is advancing this agenda in several country contexts and the COVID-19 response has given the organization new impetus to strengthen and expand social assistance in times of crisis.

61. The UNICEF approaches to conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding are weak. There is a lack of consistent understanding at the country level, a lack of capacity for conflict analysis and the roll-out of the guidance/policy attention has been limited.

**Theme C recommendations**

(a) Develop and implement a strategy to strengthen the application of the Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming at the country level. Ensure that its application is dynamic, iterative and directly linked to existing programming and managing systems.
Regional offices and Programme Division should play a stronger role in interpreting and contextualizing the Guidance for application at the country level. Responsibility: Programme Division (including the Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peace Section), Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(b) Embed AAP more systematically in planning and programming for humanitarian action, in line with guidance and Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability commitments. Create two-way linkages between humanitarian approaches to AAP and development approaches to social accountability and participation. Responsibility: Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(c) Take forward policy commitments to gender- and disability-responsive programming in humanitarian contexts. Drawing on gender and disability programmes in the development context, make humanitarian programmes more responsive to the rights of women and girls and those with disabilities. Responsibility: Programme Division, Office of Emergency Programmes and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(d) Develop and implement a strategy and invest further in the capacities and staff needed to strengthen the UNICEF approach to peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity and improve the treatment of peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity in the next Strategic Plan and the revised LHD Procedure, as well as its roll-out and associated guidance (i.e., UNICEF Programme Guidance for Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding and UNICEF Guidance for Conflict Analysis). Responsibility: Programme Division, Office of Emergency Programmes, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(e) In addition to including conflict analysis in approaches to risk-informed programming, ensure that conflict sensitivity is consistently and continuously emphasized in planning and programme development and adjustment. This needs to be undertaken in a way that supports coherence and complementarity between humanitarian and development programming. Responsibility: Programme Division, Office of Emergency Programmes and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support).

**Theme D: Internal systems and structures**

62. UNICEF support for systems and structures is designed to service bifurcated external systems that are not always supportive of nexus approaches. Workarounds have become institutionalized, which has led to inefficiencies. While UNICEF will need to continue to engage in such processes as the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework and humanitarian response planning process – which will likely remain aligned with CPDs and Humanitarian Action for Children appeals – greater alignment and coherence can still be forged in UNICEF internal processes and systems.

63. Given that LHD is not prioritized as a goal in itself in the current Strategic Plan, the organization lacks a framework for effectively estimating the operationalization of nexus approaches. The organization’s current coding systems are inadequate for measuring progress towards LHD. This situation calls for innovative solutions to quantifying the application of nexus approaches.

64. Country offices continue to see the lack of flexible and appropriate financing for nexus approaches as the most significant obstacle to planning for and
implementing these approaches. Given its dual mandate and prominent position in the international community, UNICEF can play a larger role in advocating for systemic change and new standards in support of nexus approaches. The organization has yet to fully exercise this authority.

65. There are weaknesses in the provision and allocation of the human resources needed to support nexus approaches. There is a need for staff to have a mix of humanitarian, development and peace skills, particularly at the senior management level in country offices. Additionally, there is a need to review training, capacity strengthening, mentoring, coaching and other forms of skills development for staff and partners to understand specific capacity gaps with regard to nexus commitments.

66. The following recommendations are intended to encourage UNICEF to build on existing work streams and change processes to support nexus approaches.

**Theme D recommendations**

(a) At the country level, harmonize and combine work planning processes for humanitarian and development programming using stronger context and risk analysis, including conflict analysis. At the headquarters level, wherever possible, harmonize and combine the guidance on development and humanitarian programming and ensure that it is reflected in the Programme Policy and Procedure platform, the UNICEF gateway to programming guidance. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(b) At all levels (country, regional and headquarters), review programme performance management structures (monitoring, measurement and reporting) to support the implementation of a combined reporting system that brings headquarters reporting structures together (Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring). Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(c) In parallel with this review, develop an improved set of specific indicators to track the prevalence of nexus approaches. Develop a nexus marker, similar to the humanitarian marker, and provide robust and regular staff training to support its use. Responsibility: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(d) Drawing on stronger results-based planning (including multi-year) and reporting, take a leadership role in conducting advocacy to advance global humanitarian financing commitments and increase levels of quality funding (predictable, flexible and multi-year) that can support nexus approaches. Responsibility: Office of the Executive Director, Public Partnerships Division, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and regional and country offices (including through regional office and headquarters support);

(e) Re-examine the system for designating and distributing funding streams (other resources-regular/other resources-emergency) and/or the budget allocation processes in support of nexus approaches. Investigate whether priority can/should be given to nexus approaches in the targeting of other resources-regular and other resources-emergency and whether this designation remains relevant. Responsibility: Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, Public Partnerships Division, Programme Division and Office of Emergency Programmes;
(f) Emphasize the recruitment of staff with mixed development, humanitarian and peace skills and capacities, especially at the management level. Invest in strengthening human resource capacities to undertake and/or support context and risk analysis (including conflict analysis) in country and regional offices, as appropriate. Review training at all levels, including partner training, to ensure that nexus approaches are integrated. Responsibility: Division of Human Resources, Office of Emergency Programmes, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring and Programme Division.

Theme E: COVID-19 and the nexus

67. The system-wide COVID-19 response risks reproducing humanitarian and development siloes and missing opportunities to strategically link humanitarian and development programming. In its COVID-19 response, UNICEF has adapted its ways of working to respond to the pandemic in ways that create real opportunities for better linking programming for public health emergencies and development programming in its planning and reporting systems. Investing in both the immediate response (i.e., infection prevention and control) and alleviating the medium- to long-term socioeconomic impacts has provided an important foundation for improving nexus programming. UNICEF can build on these foundations, as well as its work with and through States to strengthen State-led responses to the pandemic, which have relied on its strong relationships and networks with government line ministries across multiple sectors, as well as its subnational presence.

Theme E recommendations

(a) Maximize learning and opportunities for linking humanitarian and development programming and contributions to peace and social cohesion provided by the COVID-19 response, including through more-integrated planning and reporting systems and simultaneous investment in short- and medium-term measures. Responsibility: Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division and Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring:

(b) Build on the momentum of the COVID-19 response to further support shock-responsive social protection and strengthen local and national capacities for disaster risk management. Responsibility: Programme Division and Office of Emergency Programmes.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, its summary (E/ICEF/2021/28) and its management response (E/ICEF/2021/29).
Annex

Formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming

1. Due to space limitations, the formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming is not contained within the present annex.