Joint Statement
Second Regular Session 2021
UNICEF Executive Board

Agenda Item 10: Formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming

Chair/Madame Chair

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following cross regional group of Member States: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, The United States, and my own country, The United Kingdom.

We very much welcome the recent progress UNICEF has made to bring greater coherence to its humanitarian and development programming, as evidenced in the ‘formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming’. But, as the evaluation makes clear, there is still more that can be done in this area. It is encouraging that UNICEF has already taken steps towards implementing the evaluation’s recommendations, including through the emphasis on greater coherence across the humanitarian and development pillars of its work, and the addition of peacebuilding as a new cross-cutting programme in its new Strategic Plan for 2022-2025. We very much welcome this.

As acknowledged in the General Assembly’s adoption of the 2020 QCPR, we all have a responsibility to manage risks before they become humanitarian crises. We must also ensure that humanitarian responses not only meet the immediate life-saving needs of the population, but connects with early recovery as appropriate in the specific context. This work requires long-term investments in development to address the root causes of fragility and conflict and better coordination of our efforts across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding arenas, ensuring not only
that humanitarian needs are more effectively mitigated and addressed, but also reduced.

UNICEF has a critical role to play in this regard, and we would like to highlight three areas of focus, which we believe will enable UNICEF to strengthen its contribution:

First, we would like to see UNICEF embed a deeper organisational culture change in terms of a widespread understanding across the agency of the need and means to deliver humanitarian-development-peace approaches to programming. This requires addressing the siloed nature of UNICEF’s humanitarian and development activities, including in the areas of planning, reporting, financing and staffing, which have served to reinforce bifurcated approaches. It also means a greater investment in skills training and capacity building for staff in areas such as comprehensive risk and conflict analysis, conflict-sensitive approaches to programming, strengthening resilience and peacebuilding. We commend UNICEF for recent efforts to upskill existing staff and to recruit new staff to ensure it has the right skills to deliver on these recommendations, and encourage it to continue to prioritise investments in this area to improve further coordination across programmes. We would welcome a future update from UNICEF on revisions to the UNICEF Procedure on Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming as well as its plans for communicating this across the agency and to partners.

Second, we would like to see UNICEF collaborate more closely with local, national, regional as well as international actors – including UN sister agencies and the Resident Coordinator’s Office and IFIs – to tackle the multidimensional drivers of conflict. This should include building the capacity of local partner organisations, sharing information and undertaking joint analysis in order to improve coherence and achieve better outcomes for vulnerable populations, particularly children and their families. We believe that Cox’s Bazar provides a good model of such working that could inform work in other contexts. In the next Strategic Period, how will UNICEF better embed and integrate such partnerships to deliver nexus approaches?

Third, and linked to the above point, is the importance of ensuring accountability to affected populations (AAP), as well as gender- and disability- responsive approaches, and strengthening partnerships with local civil society. We are concerned by the evaluation’s findings that AAP is insufficiently embedded in
UNICEF planning and programming in humanitarian action, and that there are gaps in accountability and participation approaches in its development work. We are also concerned by the finding that there is little evidence that UNICEF is linking humanitarian and development approaches to gender and disability within its country programming. We urge UNICEF to embed AAP, gender and disability more systematically across all programming, and ensure they are consistently considered and addressed throughout the programme management cycle.

Let me conclude by highlighting again the 2020 QCPR’s emphasis on the importance of greater coordination and cooperation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. We therefore reiterate our full support for UNICEF’s commitment to this approach. The management response lays out a number of concrete steps that UNICEF will take and we look forward to future updates to the Executive Board on its progress.