

A young girl with dark skin and curly hair is smiling warmly. She is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned scarf. The background is a solid, bright blue. In the top right corner, there is a white rectangular box containing the UNICEF logo and the text 'for every child'.

unicef 

for every child

UNICEF Assessment Report on Joint UN Interventions, 2021 | Main Report

December 2021



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Public Partnerships Division
UNICEF Headquarters, New York

Acronyms

CMT	Country Management Team	RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
CO	Country office	RMT	Regional Management Team
FGDs	Focus group discussions	RO	Regional office
GMT	Global Management Team	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
HQ	Headquarters	SG	Secretary General
JRM	Joint Resource Mobilization	SMQ	Strategic Monitoring Questions
MAF	Management Accountability Framework	UNCT	UN Country Team
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund	UNDCO	UN Development Cooperation Office
PIDB	Programme Information Database	UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
PPD	Public Partnership Division	UNDS	United Nations Development System
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review	UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
RAM	Results Assessment Module		
RC	Resident Coordinator		



Executive summary

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the approaching timeline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for Member States and the UN Development System (UNDS) to act in a concerted fashion to ensure acceleration of the SDGs achievement. Guided by the various UN Reform streams and the principles of the Funding Compact, UN sister agencies are increasingly engaged in joint UN interventions to deliver various sectoral priorities. Common indicators are used to measure progress against such joint efforts. For example:

- *Percentage of country offices that are engaged in joint programmes* to which UNICEF has registered progress, i.e., from 62 per cent in 2017 to 84 per cent in 2020, exceeding its Strategic Plan milestone for 2020, which was 72 per cent, as well as the target set for 2021, which was 74 per cent.
- *Percentage of non-core resources received from inter-agency pooled funds* is another indicator, showing an increase from 9.6 per cent in 2017 to 11.1 per cent in 2019 with a slight decline in 2020 (9.4 per cent) due to a decrease in humanitarian contributions from interagency pooled funds.

In UNICEF, despite these trends, the contributions of joint UN interventions towards results for children is not yet well documented. The majority of joint UN interventions (58 per cent) are driven by availability of funds and donor encouragement. Lack of donor recognition and visibility of UNICEF's significant investments and efforts are also gaps observed.

For these reasons, an assessment of UNICEF's engagement in joint UN interventions was carried out in 2021 with the aim to establish an organization-wide perspective on (i) what is working and not working; (ii) systems issues pertaining to efficiencies around programmatic and operational aspects; (iii) contribution towards UNICEF's results and the SDGs; and (iv) potential strategies to maximize the benefit derived from joint UN interventions.

Data collection for the assessment involved a review of secondary resources, an internal survey involving respondents from five sections in Headquarters (HQ) Programme Division, 80 from country offices (COs), and 13 from regional offices (ROs). Focus group discussions were also conducted with six government donor partners and all donor partner focal points in the Public Partnerships Division. UNDP, UNFPA, and WFP were also involved in the survey. A verification and validation exercise were also undertaken through sharing of the first draft of the report with donor partners, UN Resident Coordinators Offices (UNRCO), UN Agencies, UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), UNICEF HQ Divisions and UNICE internal reference group composed of HQ, regional and country offices. The lack of similar assessments in recent years focusing on systems issues following the introduction of UN Reform within and outside UNICEF has limited assessments to previous comparable qualitative data and perceptions on joint UN interventions.

Findings of the assessment outline the potential benefits derived from well-designed joint UN interventions. These include a shared recognition of



the UN working together as a platform for the most efficient use of limited resources; the value added of a multisectoral response; acknowledgement that no single agency can provide a comprehensive response to national priorities in silos; and recognition of the contribution of joint UN interventions to government ownership and sustainable results. The assessment also identifies that joint UN interventions are not adequately explored and understood. A full-on success requires a balanced approach towards agency-specific and UN-wide priorities, including the active engagement of UN agencies' senior leadership. UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) results groups should be strengthened to guide sector-based dialogue for more organic and programme-driven partnerships, leading to the most effective use of quality pooled resources. The recurring programmatic and procedural issues demand further study to bring in much-needed systems of harmonization. Donor partners can also contribute to improving effectiveness and efficiencies by reducing conditionalities. Less earmarking would allow the flexibility to engage in programmes that are fit for purpose and adaptable to a changing environment. The high expectations placed on the Resident Coordinator system by UN Reform should address accountabilities and division of roles. The wealth of knowledge that each agency brings should afford them visibility and independent engagements where they make the greatest difference.

The assessment has identified the need to employ strategies that pertain to a results-oriented approach; a culture of continuous learning for

evidence generation to map out realistic entry points for results; the need to incentivize efficient engagements; and, more specifically, the need for the proper interpretation and application of the UN Reform streams in alignment with agency systems for seamless integration. To this effect, the following recommendations map out areas to be addressed by UNICEF individually and collectively with all stakeholders, i.e., UNDCO, donor partners, the Resident Coordinator system, and UN sister agencies (for detailed recommendations please see section 6):

1. Recommendation 1: Adopt a structured and evidence-based approach to priority setting.

This includes sector-wide dialogue at all levels facilitating efficient UN Country Team (UNCT) common priority identification and UNICEF's selective engagement in areas where joint UN interventions make a difference, including sustaining UNICEF-specific undertakings leading to long-term results for children.

2. Recommendation 2: Measure results vis-a-vis UNICEF and UN-wide priorities and targets.

This includes the adoption of the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) results and expenditure indicators for impact measurement with guidance to periodic aggregation of results from joint UN interventions towards UNICEF outcome level results, complemented by the proper application of the Results Assessment Module (RAM) and Programme Information Database (PIDB) codes.

3. **Recommendation 3: Respond to recurring procedural and capacity gaps** by establishing conceptual clarity on 'jointness' for joint UN interventions, addressing lack of interoperable programme and operational approaches, and clear interpretation as well as application of the UN Reform streams, such as the Management Accountability Framework, common management features, and mutual recognition.
4. **Recommendation 4: Promote value add of joint UN interventions including through donor UNRCO and UNCT visibility** It is essential to build donor confidence by showcasing results for joint UN interventions, issue-based fundraising targeting big-ticket items, and a long-term partnership as opposed to approaching donors when funding needs arise. In addition, it is important to promote shared visibility to and recognition of the value that each agency brings as a building block to the One UN.
5. **Recommendation 5: Facilitate the Resident Coordinator system engagement for programme-driven approaches** through delineation of accountabilities between RC Office and UN agencies, in accordance with the MAF on programming, resource mobilization, and partnerships with host governments and donor partners. This includes leveraging the RC system as needed to complement agency specific undertakings.
6. **Recommendation 6: Address donor conditionalities and non-compliance with United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) standards, which** will help to identify the root causes of (i) current low capitalization of some of the pooled funds despite commitment to the Funding Compact; and (ii) the varying donor conditionalities and deviations from application of the UNSDG standards. It will also help to advocate for harmonization of donor conditionalities.
7. **Recommendation 7: Incentivize evidence-based engagement for feasible entry points** by instituting periodic evaluations of joint UN interventions for continues learning and informed decision-making to identify feasible entry points and to promote innovation. In addition, put in place performance indicators allowing staff recognition and systematic documentation as well as dissemination of good practices and lessons learned; and ensure expert time investment in areas that are guaranteed to bring adequate resources for result.

In conclusion, this assessment exercise is the first of its kind for UNICEF, providing evidence on the pros and cons of delivering programmes through joint UN interventions. It identifies potential areas for consideration to guide a meaningful engagement with UN sister agencies, especially as the UN Development System is increasingly expected to work together. The findings and recommendations resulting from this exercise are also clear indicators in terms of the need for a concerted effort among the UN system and partners to bring about the required improvements to make UN inter-agency programme and funding arrangements fit for purpose.

Overall, the outcome of this exercise serves as a baseline encouraging future similar assessments with more country, regional and thematic focus. It also serves as a building block on areas that should be further unpacked and improved:

8. Internally focusing on policy, programmatic, operational, and resource mobilization to establish streamlined and structured approaches among the various divisions in Headquarters, regional offices, and country offices.
9. Externally focusing on key engagements at the political and technical level with UN sister agencies, the Resident Coordinator system, UNDCO, and donor partners.
10. More specifically, proper interpretation of the various UN Reform streams and their alignment with individual UN agency rules and regulations, if they are to serve the intended purpose.

As a next step, UNICEF should consider operationalizing the proposed recommendations and strategies in consultation with UN sister agencies and partners, supported with a clear workplan and timelines. Within UNICEF, a coordinated plan should be developed between HQ and regional and country offices to take forward the recommendations from this exercise.

Background



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Recently arrived refugee children in Bidi bidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe district of Uganda 28 February, 2017

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Members States are committed to achieve the SDGs through improved financing mechanisms, including pooling of resources and support to enhanced collaboration within the UN Development System (UNDS). The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) will guide the UN Country Teams' collective response to national development plans. The Decade of Action by the UN Secretary-General (SG) also states that "the 2030 Agenda requires bold changes" to the UNDS for the emergence of a new generation of country teams, centred on a strategic UNSDCF and led by an impartial, independent, and empowered Resident Coordinator. Further, the SG's 2021 Vision Statement states that "the Sustainable Development Agenda is the negotiated blueprint for our partnership with governments and societies to build peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive societies on a healthy planet. The Decade of Action is aimed at transforming institutions and structures, broadening inclusion and driving sustainability."¹ This reaffirms that the SDGs remain central to national development plans demanding enhanced partnerships among the UNDS given their inter-disciplinary nature, and requiring a multi-sectorial and multi-partner response.

In view of this, UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021 takes UN Working Together as part of its change strategy, with two major indicators: one on country office joint engagements with UN sister agencies, and another on resources coming through the UN inter-agency mechanisms. These indicators are in alignment with the 2016 QCPR indicators² and the UN funding compact measure of the UN Reform implementation progress. Monitoring of data shows that the results against these indicators have exceeded the UNICEF Strategic Plan targets for 2021. In 2020, 84 per cent of UNICEF offices delivered programmes in collaboration with UN sister agencies against a target of 72 per cent, while the target for 2021 stands at 74 per cent (see charts 1a and 2a).³ In 2019 resources received through UN inter-agency mechanisms accounted for 11 per cent of UNICEF's Other Resources against a target of 10.5 per cent.⁴ However, in 2020 resources received accounted for 9.4 per cent of UNICEF's Other Resources against a target of 11 per cent.⁵ The slight decline is attributed to reduced resource allocations for humanitarian interventions through UN interagency pooled funds,

while development interventions registered an increase by 15 per cent compared to 2019. In terms of thematic focus, health followed by child protection, social inclusion, and cross-sectoral areas were priority areas delivered through joint UN interventions (see chart 1b). Expenditure levels⁶ have also shown a growth of 264 per cent in 2020 compared to 2017 (see chart 2b).



A happy girl in the village of Zaliohoua, in the Midwest of Côte d'Ivoire.

¹ UN Secretary General's Vision Statement, "Restoring Trust and Inspiring Hope" (23 March 2021), p. 8.

² Please see detailed indicators in section 5.3.2.

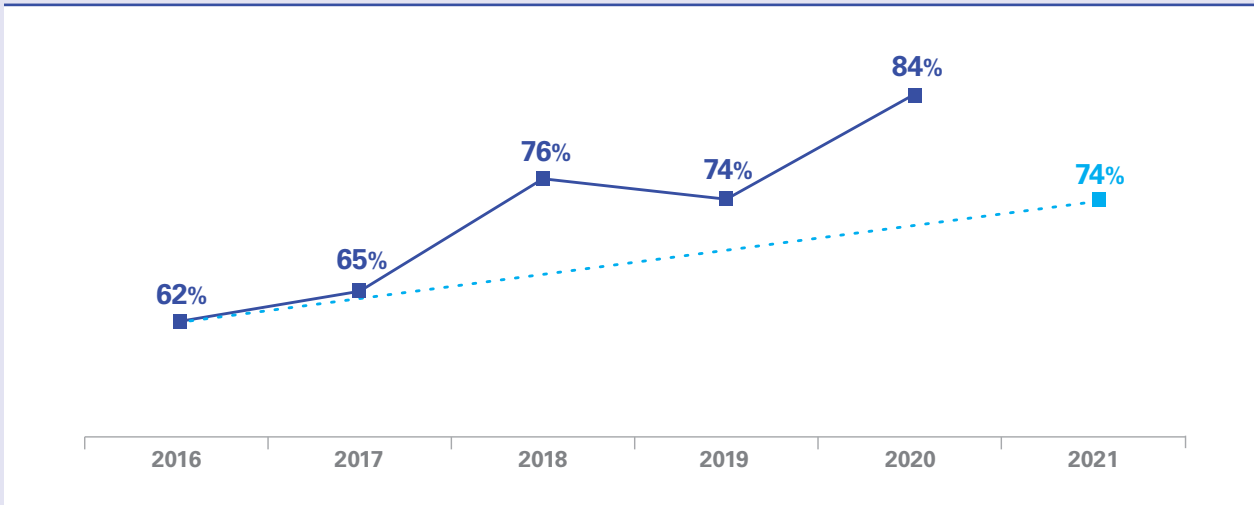
³ This includes all forms of UN interagency instruments apart from CERF and Country based pooled humanitarian funds.

⁴ This is inclusive of CERF and Country based pooled humanitarian funds.

⁵ 2019 (ORR: 230.6 million; ORE: 311.2 million); 2020 (ORR: 279 million; ORE: 243.5 million).

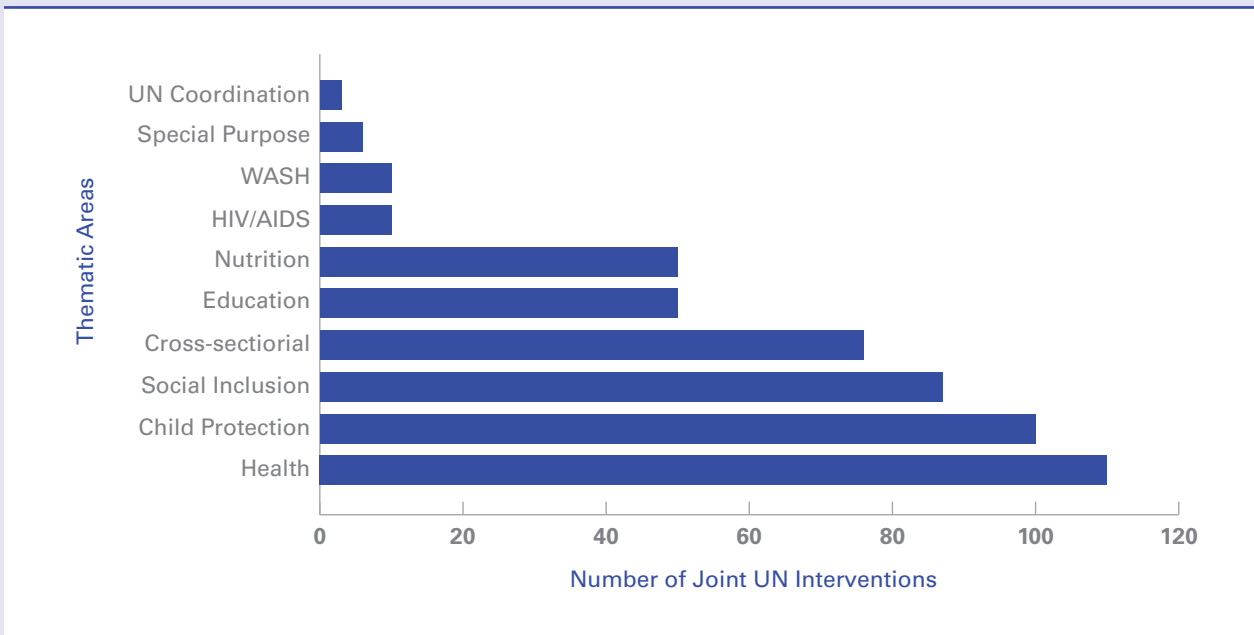
⁶ Important to note that the QCPR indicator for expenditure might be adopted by the UNICEF Strategic Plan while annual expenditure rates are computed using UNICEF Strategic Monitoring Questions (SMQ) data.

Chart 1a: UNICEF country office engagement in joint UN interventions, 2020



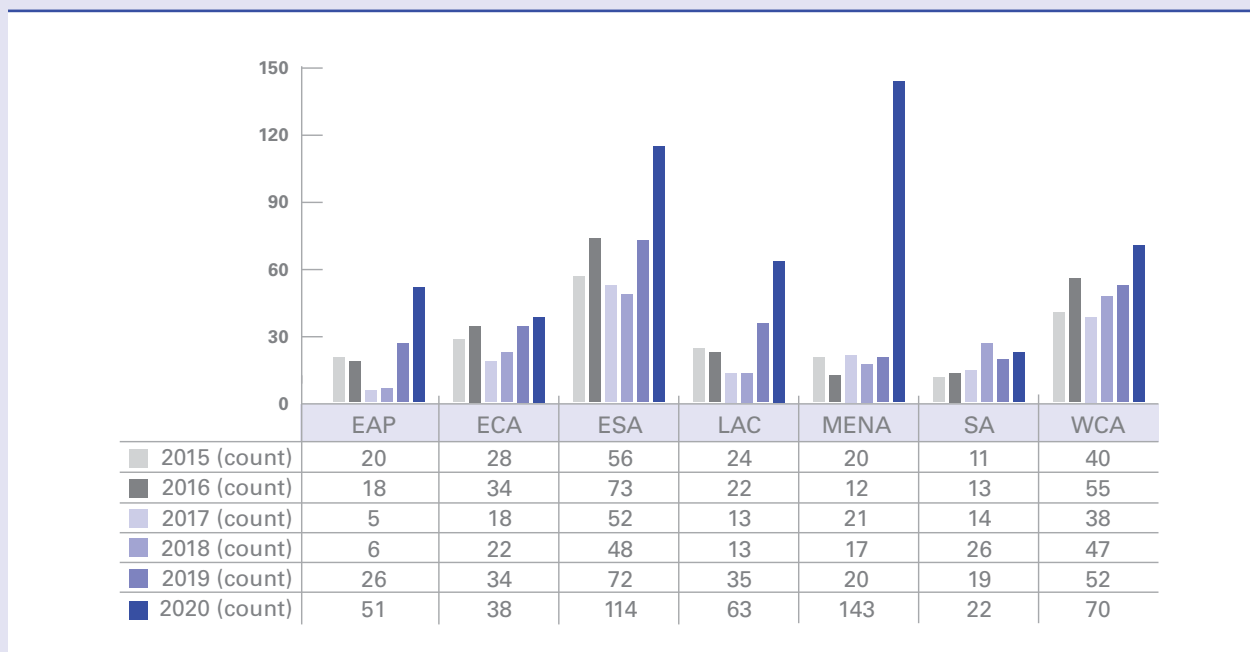
Source: Executive Director’s Annual Report 2020, p. 48

Chart 1b: UNICEF thematic priorities delivered through joint UN interventions, 2020



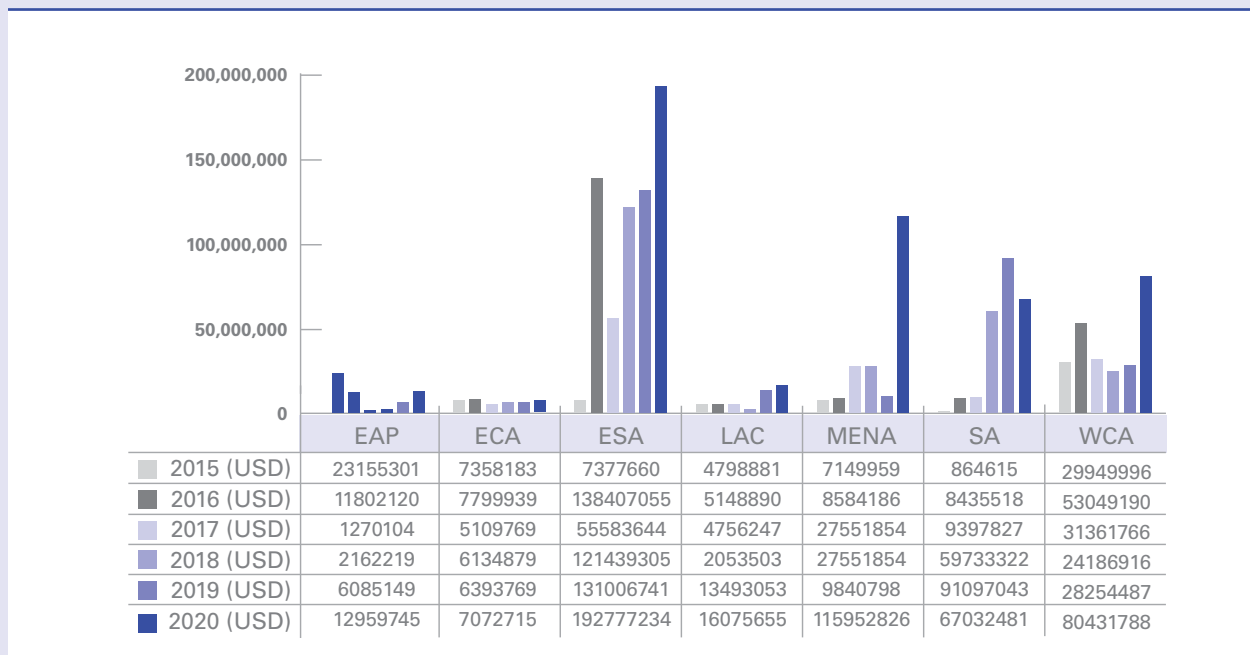
Source: Strategic Monitoring Questions data from UNICEF COs

Chart 2a: Number of UNICEF country offices engaged in delivering joint UN interventions, 2015–2020



Source: Strategic Monitoring Questions data from UNICEF COs

Chart 2b: UNICEF joint UN intervention expenditures per region, 2015–2020⁷



Source: Strategic Monitoring Questions data from UNICEF COs

⁷ The Middle East and North Africa is the top region for joint programmes delivered, while higher expenditure is registered in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region due to the large volume of donor contributions to the region.

Despite such growth, however, the following observed challenges have triggered the need for this assessment exercise:

- Limited data and documentation on whether such increasing trends on joint UN interventions are contributing towards UNICEF's priorities as well as positioning UNICEF as one of the actors for achievement of the SDGs.
- Need to better position UNICEF in the changing UN operational and aid environment to promote child rights. Lack of systemic recognition of results, revenue, as well as expenditures from Joint UN interventions preventing evidence generation for advocacy, donor recognition, and resource mobilization.
- Need for recognition of the amount of technical investment by UNICEF country offices in joint UN interventions (see chart II) that calls for proper assessment of 'what is working' and 'what is not working' in order to ensure that such investments are contributing towards UNICEF's results for children as well as the organization's contribution towards the SDGs.

- Need for strategic approaches beyond transactional focus for tangible support to country offices from the stage of programme inception, rather than coming in at the tail end of the process, i.e., review and clearance of agreements.
- No evidence on efficiencies of the UN inter-agency mechanisms to deliver joint UN interventions helping to reduce transaction cost, strengthen capacity, and knowledge sharing for informed engagement with partners and to have UNICEF as a credible and preferred partner by Member States.

This assessment has also been undertaken in the context of the SG's 2021 Vision Statement, which talks about "embarking on the United Nations 2.0" and bringing about several changes, some of which include:

- Performance and results orientation: Focusing on delivery and measuring the success of our work, learning lessons from what has not worked, and being driven by impact.
- Work culture: Simplifying and reducing unnecessary bureaucratic processes and fostering a work culture of collaboration.⁸



Girls in front of their school in the village of Tamroro, in the center of Niger.

⁸ SG's Vision Statement, pp. 13-14.

1. Purpose of the assessment



The assessment aims to serve as the basis for the development of a global strategy that will guide UNICEF country offices, regional offices, and headquarters to maximize the impact of UN inter-agency programme and funding mechanisms, thus enhancing the contribution of joint UN interventions towards results.

Specific objectives

1. To learn from what has worked well, to identify challenges, and to explore best practices and lessons learned for cross-learning within and outside UNICEF.
2. Provide evidence and recommendations for organizational approaches to ensure:
 - The contribution of joint UN interventions to UNICEF goal areas and to position UNICEF as one of the main contributors to achievement of the SDGs in collaboration with UN sister agencies.
 - The seamless integration of joint UN interventions within UNICEF programmes, partnerships, resource mobilization, and operational processes, thus ensuring reduction of transaction costs as well as increased efficiency, in turn leading to better results measurement, donor recognition, and UNICEF visibility.



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Girls going home after school school, in Toumodi-Sakassou, in the center of Côte d'Ivoire.

2. Methodology



This assessment builds on evidence gathered through a literature review and secondary data together with a primary data collection through surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Formative discussions and tool development:

To kick start the exercise, brainstorming sessions were held to set the scope and focus of the assessment. The sessions were attended by UNICEF Headquarters Public Partnership and Programme Divisions, country and regional offices, and donors. Based on the review of literature, secondary data, and the brainstorming sessions, questionnaires were developed to administer the survey and FGDs that can be found under Annex XI.

Review of literature and secondary data: With the view to align the exercise with key developments and policies of the UN, the outcomes of the literature⁹ reviewed are cross-referenced and presented in the various sections of this report to strengthen findings. Reference was also made to secondary data, such as UNICEF's Strategic Monitoring Questions (SMQs) 2017–2020, and by measuring progress against the QCPR indicators on UN working together, including opportunities and challenges to deliver programmes.

Data collection: Primary data was collected through surveys and FGDs.

■ **Surveys:** The primary data collection was supported by a survey administered to UNICEF Headquarters Programme Division and country and regional offices. As a result, it was possible to get five responses from Programme Division, 80 from country offices (CO), and 13 from regional offices (RO). The data were instrumental for gathering evidence and the perspectives of UNICEF offices. The responses accounted for 100 per cent of RO, 74 per cent of CO, and 50 per cent of HQ programmes. The questionnaires focused on assessing benefits and challenges, and on a thorough look at programme, resource mobilization, and operational processes. Success factors, alternative arrangements, and potential areas of support required from Headquarters, regional offices, UNDP, UNFPA, and WFP were all covered by the survey.

■ **Focus group discussions:** All FGDs were held virtually (via Zoom) due to COVID-19 and recordings were shared with all respondents. The FGDs were open to all donors and conducted with those that confirmed participation, i.e., Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, each assessing their experience with UNICEF more specifically on programmes delivered through UN inter-agency mechanisms. In doing so, attention was given to identifying best practices for further replication and areas for improvement. Different PPD teams were also consulted to understand the current UNICEF practice and potential areas of engagement in support of joint UN interventions. (See section 8 for a list of participants to the survey and FGDs.)

Data analysis: Data collected were analysed and categorized into benefits, success factors, and areas of improvement with recommended strategies and actions to make joint UN interventions fit for purpose.

Triangulation: Assessment and evaluation reports consulted prioritized assessing thematic and substantive areas, which were used to triangulate data gathered through this assessment exercise.

Limitations: The lack of similar assessments in recent years focusing on systems issues following the introduction of UN Reform within and outside UNICEF has limited assessments to qualitative data and perceptions on joint UN interventions. Except for the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) office assessment of the Funding Compact's inter-agency common management features,¹⁰ the very few assessments available prioritize only thematic and substantive issues.

⁹ Assessment reports of the Common Chapter; Ebola MPTF; Peacebuilding Fund; Global Joint Programmes to Prevent Early Child Marriage and FGM; German Development Institute's study on Earmarking in the Multilateral Development System: Many Shades of Grey; 2021 Management Accountability Framework; 2021 Funding Compact report; the SG's 2021 QCPR Implementation report; QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021–2024; UNSDCF; and UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

¹⁰ December 2020 (sharepoint.com) – MPTF Stakeholder Forum.

3. Definition of key terminologies



The terms **'joint UN interventions'** and **'joint UN engagements'** will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this assessment report. These terminologies refer to the various UN inter-agency mechanisms encompassing joint programmes, joint programming, and UN to UN agreements. Where necessary, the report will also make references to each specific UN inter-agency instrument.

Joint programmes A joint programme is a set of activities contained in a joint workplan and related Funding Framework, involving two or more UN entities contributing to the same Cooperation Framework outputs. Pooled funding or other funding mechanisms can fund joint programmes. Other stakeholders can be engaged as implementing partners.¹¹

Joint programming This refers to a collective effort by UN agencies to work together without a formal joint agreement and arrangements. This requires signing a bilateral agreement guided by each UN agency's own policies, and as such it does not provide a common platform or legally binding arrangement to work together.

According to the UNSDCF guidance notes, joint programming, UN organizations, and national partners collectively prepare, implement, monitor, and evaluate development activities aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda and other international and regional commitments.¹²

UN to UN inter-agency agreement This refers to an inter-agency instrument that is mainly used to manage financial transactions. involves outsourcing activities to another expert UN agency. Unlike the common support cost rates, individual agencies will apply their own cost recovery rate to cover for core functions.

Country-level pooled funds/ Multi-partner trust funds¹³ A country-level pooled fund is a financing instrument available to each UNCT to consolidate and leverage funding towards the country priority SDGs as established in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. These funds make sense when two or more UN organizations wish to receive funding from one or more donors to achieve common results, and closely coordinate their implementation.

The MPTF office acts as an administrative agent, also referred to as the 'trustee' for these funds, providing its expertise in pooled funding, including the transparency and accountability systems that the Funding Compact expects.¹⁴



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Iren from Nagorno-Karabakh standing outside the cabins.

¹¹ UNSDG, "United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework: Internal Guidance" (June 2019), p. 27.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ This is in reference to development pooled funds and excludes CERF and Country Based Humanitarian Pooled Funds

¹⁴ UNSDG, "Guidance Notes for Country-level Pooled Funds" (2020), pp. 2–3.

4. Main findings



This section provides the main assessment findings based on data gathered using the methodologies outlined in section 3. In doing so, this section presents specific findings on potential benefits, success factors, and proposed areas of improvement. The detailed findings capturing experiences of all stakeholders consulted are presented in Annex I-VI.

4.1 Specific findings: Benefits of joint UN interventions

In the current shrinking overseas development assistance environment, a coordinated effort among the UN Development System – more specifically, the use of joint UN platforms and joint UN instruments for programming – is generally regarded as a means to more efficiently make use of limited resources to achieve the SDGs. Feedback from respondents of the assessment exercise shows that joint UN interventions that are designed in a consultative manner and informed by the appropriate evidence come with multiple benefits. Opportunities derived from such arrangements, such as shared systems and technical expertise, integrated approaches, and multisectoral responses, are found to be some of the major incentives, making joint UN interventions fit for purpose with the endorsement from national governments. They are also noted to address donor fatigue due to the UNDS siloed and piecemeal approaches.

Overall, as outlined in chart 3, benefits of well-designed joint UN interventions include national ownership, synergies and complementarities, enhanced efficiencies, and effective handling of cross-cutting priorities, thus leading to sustainable results. For example, the UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund underscores the contribution of a coherent approach among partner UN agencies to the success of its joint response.¹⁵ In general, there is consensus regarding the benefits of enhancing the credibility of the One UN approach among host governments and donors to make the UN a partner of choice. More specifically for UNICEF, such an approach is noted to provide the platform for comprehensive sectoral engagement, building on each UN agency's expertise and specialization to fulfil child rights.

Chart 3: Benefits of Joint UN Interventions (UNICEF Offices Response)

Ownership and sustainable results
Synergy and complementarities
Efficiency gains
Deliver cross-sectoral programmes

4.2 Specific findings: What does a successful joint UN intervention mean to UNICEF?

UNICEF country offices articulated that successful joint UN intervention should meet the following criteria: (i) result in a strong impact for children; (ii) have programmatic synergies and operational efficiencies; (iii) promote stakeholder confidence in the One UN brand; and (iv) mitigate risks associated with donor conditionalities.

Strong impact for children: The success of joint UN interventions is when they add value to UNICEF's Strategic Plan results for children. This would mean providing the platform for genuine joint engagement, with a focus on equity and ultimately leading to national ownership of the various development and humanitarian responses. More importantly, it would lead to a convergence of mandates, niches, and capacities among the participating UN agencies, helping to avoid any 'heavy lifting' imposed on only a single or few agencies.

Success also means impact, reach, and results to communities; the ability to bring about innovation; the promotion of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; and the ability to deliver a multi-dimensional response to vulnerabilities. Programmatically, such convergence will give the power to UNICEF and UN sister agencies to address difficult topics collectively. It also means the ability to tap into and utilize the diverse specialized expertise, programmatic approaches, as well as comparative advantages

¹⁵ UNDP, "UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund," p. 25. .



Girls at the Asuokaw Methodist School in the Eastern Region in Ghana.

of UN sister agencies on behalf of children within a given UNCT to build complementarities towards common goals for sustainable results.

Programmatic synergies and operational efficiencies: This refers to joint UN interventions emanating from country programmes anchored in the UNSDCF, further complemented by joint in-depth problem analysis to establish commonly agreed theory of change, priorities, and milestones. Operational arrangements should be simplified with a light coordination and governance arrangement, establishing clear accountabilities among participating UN agencies and ensuring effective and efficient resource mobilization, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The willingness to make the appropriate time investment for negotiation and preparatory work to enhance the quality of programme design is also a key step to ensuring success.

Stakeholder confidence in the UN brand: An approach built on trust among like-minded UN personnel at all levels and beyond is essential to identify realistic national needs, to embark on achievable results, and to manage stakeholder expectations. Such approaches built on trust would mean equal visibility while the UN operates collectively as One. This would also mean the recognition and flexibility for individual UN agencies to deliver programmes that come with far-reaching results that have an impact on the wider UN system.

Mitigate risks associated with donor conditionalities: Flexible, realistic, and harmonized donor conditionalities adaptable to programming realities on the ground are important for the success of joint UN interventions. This would mean a consultative approach among UN agencies and donors, building consensus on realistic requirements that are fit for programmatic needs.

4.2.1. EXAMPLES OF JOINT UN INTERVENTIONS

Argentina: The UNSDCF and COVID 19 Fund served as a platform for a participatory approach to collective needs identification for the most vulnerable and excluded populations.

Bangladesh: Ending child marriage UNICEF-UNFPA joint programme strengthened upstream strategic interventions including advocacy for effective implementation of National Plan of Action (NAP) to end child marriage, supporting government with development of M&E framework and costed NAP.

Burundi: Peacebuilding funding proposals guided by a pre-defined and agreed criteria by UNCT facilitated identification of programmes with strong quality and relevant to the needs on the ground.

Cameroon: Government participation and adequate field presence of UNFPA and UNICEF facilitated timely technical and supply contributions, frequent consultation, supervision and monitoring of progress leading to more demand to services on reduction of neonatal, child and maternal mortality.

Costa Rica: UNSDCF and joint UN funds are noted to facilitate a coordinated approach among UN agencies and improvements towards results.

DRC: Integrated programme approach between UNICEF and WFP helped improve school retention of girls and boys including adolescents in crisis affected areas with the provision of nutritious meals specially in food insecure zones in Tanganyika by WFP, and assistance to improve quality and access to education and system strengthening by UNICEF.

ECARO: A consultative approach at Regional Director's level has helped bring UNDP's integrator role for the SDGs and UNICEF's expertise in social sectors enabling both agencies to perform more effectively at the country level in response to COVID 19. In the long run, this collaboration will help provide a coordinated support to national governments to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and build resilience to crisis and shocks to countries in Europe and Central Asia region.

Guatemala: A local initiative on adolescent and reproductive health supported by the joint effort of UNICEF, UNFPA, and PAHO has facilitated government ownership and scale-up of interventions.

India: A joint government-UN UNDAF work plan established in 2018 is facilitating national ownership and better programme delivery. It also maps out all agency activities linked to UNINFO and coordinated by seven results groups.

HQ Child Protection: Joint programmes that are established and led by a partnership among 2–3 agencies are found to be effective due to the composition of partners with the appropriate mandate. **Ending Child Marriage and the FGM/C Joint Programmes** managed by UNICEF and UNFPA, respectively, were cited as examples to this effect.

HQ HIV/AIDS: UNAIDS Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (**UBRAF**) was established in 1994 with the recognition that no single agency can deliver effective programmes by itself, acknowledging the value of UN working together at the global, regional, and country level. The Joint Programme is supporting 100 countries, guided by harmonized monitoring and reporting mechanisms at all levels for result.

HQ Gender: Gender interventions are better coordinated among UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women given their complementing mandates but varying niche, which helps reach a variety of vulnerable groups with a multisectoral approach. Such efficiencies cannot be achieved through siloed approaches, which may result in duplication of efforts.

HQ Nutrition: FAO, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO created UN Nutrition, which brings together the four UN agencies working on Nutrition and Food Security. This will facilitate establishing coherent narratives, greater efficiencies, and clarity in accountabilities, especially in areas where there is high probability for overlap.

Madagascar: Increased school access and retention through a long-term partnership among UNICEF, WFP, and ILO designing a complementing programme on education, school canteen and classroom construction. Clear division of role, engagement in common project sites and a collective approach to address donor conditionalities were factors contributing to the success of the joint intervention.

Malawi: Strong Program Management Unit supporting daily operations, use of government structures, district level presence, common geographic focus, a robust planning, M&E framework as well as clear information flow facilitated an improved food and nutrition response delivered in partnership with FAO.

Mexico a local initiative to address obesity supported jointly by UNICEF, PAHO and FAO was found to guarantee, identification of attainable results, ownership, scaleup and integration with other sectors.

Papua New Guinea: WHO-UNICEF integrated measles-rubella and polio campaign helped exceed the 95% vaccination target to support to the country.

Philippines Leveraging UNESCO Bangkok's expertise in ICT in Education was instrumental for UNICEF, primarily in the use of ICT in the education policy planning guide, complementary financial planning resource and exposure to varied country experiences.

Philippines: Leveraging FAO's technical expertise on disaster forecasting helped ensure an inclusive and risk-informed shock-responsive social protection intervention resulting in more resilient communities in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Serbia: A multi-country peacebuilding programme targeting similar priorities across 3 countries by UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO empowered the three agencies to reach more government ministries and deal with target groups in a coordinated manner that helped meet programme goals and earn stakeholder trust.

South Sudan: Application of existing agency instruments i.e., the use of WFP's logistics capacity by UNICEF and FAO as an integrated rapid response mechanism for hard-to-reach areas has facilitated multisectoral response and cost-effective programme delivery.

South Sudan: Geographic convergence in the joint UNICEF–WFP nutrition programme, which aligns locations for UNICEF outpatient treatment sites to screen and treat children with severe acute malnutrition and the WFP therapeutic supplementary feeding sites for moderately malnourished children were found effective.

State of Palestine: The strong leadership of the RC as chair of the Sawasya Steering Committee facilitated clear lines of accountability that led to successful delivery of priority areas under the Joint Programme for Justice.

Syria: Integrated programming approach facilitating UNICEF's efforts on the reduction of stunting complemented with an engagement by WFP and FAO to address household food security.

Syria: UNICEF - UNRWA development of a new curriculum for out-of-school children to pursue supportive learning programmes, which will be applied by other stakeholders such as NGO partners.

Syria: Close working relation with Japan on 'My School, My Community' joint project supported by UNFPA, UNHCR, WFP, FAO and UN-Habitat facilitated community-based learning with a wider reach to children and adults. Also a lesson on importance of broadening the donor base for joint interventions.

The Gambia: Strengthening community access to justice, community policing and effective SGBV response – a very unique programme that brings together UN agencies working on prevention and treatment in the sphere of sexual gender-based violence and access to justice for victims of human rights violations.

WCARO: Joint UN interventions based on regional priorities facilitate coordinated technical support to country offices. For instance, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is funding a regional resilience programme in Sahel, implemented by UNICEF country offices in **Mali, Mauritania, and Niger**, in close collaboration with WFP. UNICEF WCARO is involved in the overall coordination of the programme, advocacy and donor recognition support as well as directly implementing a research and learning component.

Somalia: integrated support to nutrition and education in Somalia [UNICEF, WFP, FAO - Germany's support]

- Advance preparation, establishing common understanding early on if the joint programme is fit for purpose, leading to a joint proposal and budget development, which over time translated into joint messages and joint results. Also complemented with a participatory approach that included joint planning, implementation, and monitoring as well as engaging communities.
- Cost efficiencies in having 100 integrated nutrition sites instead of 200 separately managed by WFP and UNICEF. Beneficiaries see the programme as one, and they do not see which agency delivers what. In addition, communication with the government was harmonized despite the fragmentation seen in early stages of the programme.
- Registration and selection of the same beneficiaries supported by contracting the same implementation partners to steer the programme.

- UNICEF, WFP, and FAO as three agencies have a wider reach than a single agency delivering programmes to target communities; recognition to leverage each other's experience and strength.
- 'People matter' as it is all about working together to resolve problems requiring the flexibility and experience of the people involved, which should not be underestimated.
- Willingness to invest time and resources for further scale up; continuous learning and adjustments to programmes based on assessment of the value added to target communities and a platform to practice integration and sustainably.
- Contractual arrangement between the donor and participating UN agencies is noted as an aspect to look into to encourage more harmonized approaches.

4.3 Specific findings: Areas of improvement

This section outlines proposed areas of improvement as identified by respondents to the assessment exercise. Improvement areas identified cover: (i) programmatic aspects linked to government ownership, priority setting, and results measurement; (ii) capacity gaps and procedural issues looking into the recurring problems around programme, operational, and resource mobilization approaches; (iii) partnerships with the Resident Coordinator System and donor partners; and (iv) issues that would require revisiting policy areas, such as conceptual clarity on joint UN interventions, commitments, and accountabilities and the need to re-examine entry points to joint UN interventions.

4.3.1 LACK OF PROGRAMMATIC COMPLEMENTARITIES AS A DETERRENT TO GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP

Missing complementarities: Data collected points to many instances of limited host government ownership due to joint UN interventions being often designed in a rushed manner to comply with tight deadlines for funding applications. Such joint UN interventions often are simply a 'cut and paste' from individual agency workplans, instead of being a true reflection of a consultative and evidence-based approach. Data collected from country offices also points to the same concern in relation to the UNSDCF that should serve as the basis for joint UN interventions. The involvement of line ministries as sector leads is also noted to be challenged by higher-level UN and government political decisions, such as ministries of finance or foreign affairs. This prevents opportunities to situate programmes within sector-lead ministries that would have facilitated expert-level engagement, ultimately ensuring buy-in and national ownership.

Lack of integrated programming approaches: Host government ownership is further affected by lack of integrated programmatic approaches. Development of integrated programmes among UN agencies are found to take considerable time due to the challenges to designing coherent narratives supported with clear theories of change and specific activities. Inconsistent application of cross-sectoral principles is found to be a bottleneck to integrated actions. Examples noted include programming for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Accountability to Affected Populations. Some agencies also may not have as strong long-standing Results Based Management tradition thus making it difficult to collectively design programme goals, targets, and indicators.

4.3.2 RESULTS MEASUREMENT AND PRIORITY SETTING

On **results measurement**, a review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan and systems shows that:

- UNICEF's Strategic Plan measures its commitment towards the UN working together through two QCPR indicators that are focused on country-level engagements and resources received. Expenditures are self-reported by its country offices, as the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 does not have targets to measure expenditures arising from joint UN interventions. According to data collected from UNICEF field offices annually, using the Strategic Monitoring Questions (SMQs), a review of the first indicator on country-level engagement (*percentage of country offices that are engaged in joint programmes*) clearly shows an increasing trend in the percentage of country offices that are engaged in joint programmes – from 62 per cent in 2017 to 84 per cent in 2020. This exceeds the strategic plan milestone of 72 per cent for 2020, as well as the 74 per cent target set for 2021.

Milestones	Baseline 2017	Milestone 2018	Milestone 2019	Milestone 2020	Target 2021
Expected		66%	70%	72%	74%
Actual	62%	76%	74%	84%	87%

- The second indicator (*percentage of UNICEF non-core resources received from inter-agency pooled funds*) includes both development and humanitarian contributions, showing an increase from 9.6 per cent in 2017 to 11.1 per cent in 2019. In 2020, however, there was a slight decline in the total non-core received (9.4 per cent), primarily due to a decrease in humanitarian contributions.

Milestones	Baseline 2017	Milestone 2018	Milestone 2019	Milestone 2020	Target 2021
Expected		10%	10.5%	11%	11.5%
Actual	9.6%	7%	11.1%	9.4%	9%

- Expenditure levels grew by 264 per cent in 2020 compared to 2017 as self-reported by country offices. These figures also serve as proxy indicators of UNICEF's staff time and resources invested on joint delivery of programmes, and clearly show that UNICEF is fulfilling its commitments towards the UN Reform.
- UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021 did not have indicators to measure expenditure under joint UN interventions. The SG's 2021 QCPR report identifies the lack of a common definition of 'joint activities' as a bottleneck to measure expenditures for joint UN interventions.¹⁶

Expenditures ¹⁷	2017	2018	2019	2020
Actual	135.0 million	225.5 million	296.8 million	493.3 million

¹⁶ The SG's 2021 QCPR Implementation Report.

¹⁷ There are no QCPR or Funding Compact milestones for 2018–2021. UNICEF expenditures are self-reported by COs as part of the SMQ data.

- The contribution of UN inter-agency engagements and pooled resources to UNICEF's Strategic Plan results and the SDGs are not specifically monitored and evaluated within UNICEF's system. Some 90 per cent of the expenditures from joint UN interventions remain underreported in UNICEF's internal planning, monitoring, reporting and financial management system due to the lack of results indicators and application of the appropriate Programme Information Database codes within the UNICEF Results Assessment Module (RAM).
- UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 talks about compliance with the 2020 QCPR requirements to align national development plans, the UNSDCF's, country programmes, including adopting the various operational streams of the UN Development System Reform. It continues to talk about the major global joint programmes without reference to how the increasing country-level joint UN interventions are linked to its Strategic Plan goals. Nor does it interpret the operational streams of UN Reform and how they will be made interoperable with UNICEF internal systems in order to bring about the required harmonization and simplification of processes.¹⁸

On priority setting, the key findings from the analysis of UNICEF country offices and UN agencies responses indicate:

- Programme design is often influenced by priorities of specific UN agencies or by media influenced issues, rather than joint inter-agency needs assessment. In most cases this is attributed to lack of dedicated capacity and tight deadlines to submit proposals. This finding is also supported by the "Peacebuilding Synthesis Report on Evaluation and Evaluability Assessment," which cites challenges around the lack of joint analysis and planning affecting the relevance and quality of its joint response.¹⁹
- As shown in chart 5, 58 per cent of UNICEF's joint UN interventions are also found to be triggered by donor encouragement and/or availability of funds.
- Common priority setting is a challenge that could benefit from strengthen HQ support in alignment with the Strategic Plan priorities to contribute to the mainstream UNICEF programmes. For example, the evaluability assessment of the Common Chapter of the Strategic Plan (2018–2021) for UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNWomen being a platform to meet the SDGs, the lack of guidance on the scope, intent, and accountability on joint UN engagements has led to the perception that such approaches are redundant.²⁰
- There is a gap between the short-term project-based approach to joint UN interventions and the need to take a long-term view of programming for impact. This is in some cases is attributed to insufficient funding and limited duration of joint UN interventions. It is also a missed opportunity

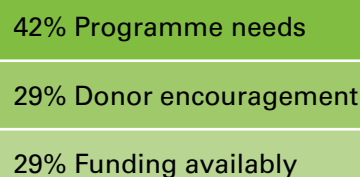
Priority areas delivered through joint UN interventions are presented in chart 4.

Chart 4: UNICEF priorities delivered through joint UN interventions



UNICEF's 58 per cent engagement in joint UN interventions is the result of donor encouragement and funding availability, as shown in chart 5.

Chart 5: Triggers to joint UN interventions



¹⁸ UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025, p. 21–22.

¹⁹ Ernstorfer, Anita, "Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund: Synthesis Review 2020"

²⁰ King and Vivanco, "Joint report on the evaluability assessment of the common chapter to the strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women" (2020), p. 43.

for continuous learning, as it inhibits tapping into the wealth of experience and investments across the different sectoral priorities, including substantive knowledge gained from UN sister agencies.

- The tendency towards ad-hoc, funding-based project priorities as opposed to sector-wide programmes that are short lived and have a narrow focus prevent investment into long-term partnerships as well as the cross-fertilization of ideas.

4.3.3 BALANCING UNICEF AND UN-WIDE PRIORITIES

Balancing UNICEF's strong commitment to the UN Reform with its agency-specific mandate will be important. In some cases there is a tenuous linkages between the joint UN interventions that are mushrooming at the country level and the UNICEF Strategic Plan priorities.

Currently, at the field level there is lack of clarity on how to balance the level of engagement and effort across UNICEF and UN-wide priorities as well as accountabilities to both. This is noted to be overburdening and forcing experts to engage in parallel processes. Results reporting through UN INFO and UNICEF RAM could be cited as an example here. In addition, there is a challenge to position the organization programmatically in the context of the wider UN agenda without having its priorities being overshadowed.

Similarly, such concerns are also extended to the lack of structured approach at the UNICEF HQ level, notably when it comes to forging partnerships and resource mobilization for joint UN interventions and pooled funds vis-à-vis UNICEF's individual resource mobilization undertakings.

Given the changing aid and UN operational environment, UNICEF offices note that more work should be done so that the organization could benefit from balancing its flexible funding with earmarked funds. The need for UNICEF's proactive engagement on joint UN interventions is also noted by UNICEF country offices and donor partners.

4.3.4 CAPACITY GAP AS A DETERRENT TO STRONG JOINT UN PERFORMANCE

Several UNICEF offices raised the issues of capacity gap and (unhealthy) competition among participating UN agencies as a major hindrance to the success of joint UN interventions.

Some of the capacity gaps highlighted are:

- Weak programme design that fails to identify the appropriate needs and the sequence of engagements, also risking the inclusion of UN agencies that do not necessarily add value.
- Limited geographic footprint and field presence, hindering implementation on the ground.



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Children are carrying water from a source built by the UNICEF in Tshinyama, a village near Miabi, located 30 km north-west of Mbuji-mayi, in the direction of Kananga, in the province of Kasai Orientale, in the south Of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a region plagued by conflict between the militia of the traditional leader Kamuina Nsapu and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) since June 2016.

- Leaning on the most vocal UN agency to take a lead role, or to be part of a joint programme, irrespective of their capacity.
- Partnerships driven by an agency's need for funding as opposed to partnerships driven by programme needs and agency expertise.
- Heavy lifting imposed on bigger UN agencies despite small UN agencies getting an equal share of the funding in the absence of adequate field presence.
- Inclination to share funds equally in some of the globally initiated pooled funds instead of a needs-based investment of limited resources at hand.
- Inability to operate at an equal pace due to financial constraints to bring on board appropriate expertise in a timely manner – some agencies depend on the joint programme fund itself to begin recruiting expert staff.

The impact of these capacity gaps is many-fold:

- Preventing agencies in a joint programme from moving at an equal pace in every stage of the programme delivery and affecting the overall results and continuity of joint efforts for scale up.
- The participation of poorly performing agencies that are noted to drag behind better performing ones, affecting the credibility of the UN as whole.
- Given their strong field presence and technical expertise across different sectors as well as in planning and communications, some UN agencies find themselves investing significant time and effort to ensure the success of joint UN interventions. In some cases, this is noted to hamper these UN agencies from the time required to deliver other internal agency specific responsibilities.

4.3.5 PROCEDURAL CHALLENGES

Overall, lack of harmonization of UNICEF work processes with that of joint UN processes are found to be prominent across all country offices, UN agencies, and donor partners surveyed. These include programme policies, processes, and procedures as well as resource mobilization attached to varying donor conditionalities. In general, such procedural challenges continue to cause cumbersome processes, high transaction costs, and poor coordination, resulting in inefficiencies within UN Country Teams. As a result, technical staff are

forced to prioritize sorting out administrative issues rather than investing time into addressing substantive issues.

Programmatically, UN agencies follow different approaches:

- Individual agency goals, interest, programming approach, and implementation strategies lead to difficulty in setting common and complementing priorities. For example, despite Results Based Management being a QCPR priority, not all UN agencies apply this approach consistently as a programming tool.
- Different planning cycles, programme proposals, and reporting requirements both by UN agencies and donor partners are also found to be a challenge for joint UN engagements.
- Poorly coordinated consultations and excessive preparatory time for planning among UN agencies are noted to lead to shortened delivery time for programmes. This is further aggravated by extended delays between approval of proposals and allocation of funds, while implementation timelines are kept the same with no consideration for adjustment. Internal UN agency processes and donor conditionalities are noted as contributing factors to such inefficiencies.
- The short duration of joint programmes is also noted to discourage the time investments required for a results-oriented approach, instead targeting rushed expenditure and reporting.

Joint UN initiatives at the global or country level come with their own set of rules, which are not in alignment with UNICEF's system. The same concerns are raised by UN agencies covered by this assessment. Such inconsistencies include the following:

- Creating parallel planning, monitoring, and reporting that lack interoperability due to varying requirements among UNICEF internal results reporting procedures (RAM), UNINFO (the UN planning, monitoring and reporting platform) and donor reports.
- Monitoring frameworks with high frequency programmatic field visits and complex data compilation with downstream partners to comply with donor conditionalities in excess of the UN standard agreements.
- Programme Management Units are found to be inadequately equipped to deal with strategic issues, to instil harmonized approaches, and to play a neutral role to serve all agencies equally.

Operationally, despite the agreement on mutual recognition, UN agencies continue to apply their individual, different implementation modalities:

- Some UNICEF country offices are found to strictly adhere to their own procurement system, while other UN agencies are flexible to use other UN agency systems.
- Donor partner audits, due diligence, and assurance needs are not synchronized with the UNSDG standards as outlined in the standard agreements. As such, there is no clarity if such increasing variations result from donor concern over gaps perceived/observed in the UN system.
- Only a few UN agencies follow the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers, while UNICEF works in partnership with almost 30 UN agencies, the majority of which come with their own divergent approaches to financial risk management and management of implementing partners.
- Some agencies use direct implementation modalities, others work with implementing partners, leading to dealing with varying policies and timeframes to implement activities and to achieve results. This also has an implication on budgeting and funds management, in general introducing a lot of complexities that are hard to explain to donors. For example, the varying financial expenditure reporting approach among participating UN agencies conflicts with UNICEF's internal policy for 3–6 months liquidation of outstanding funds, affecting performance of a given country office.

UN inter-agency instruments, lack of common knowledge, and varying applications:

- The UNSDG standards for joint programme and trust fund arrangements encourage harmonized programme engagements and equal partnerships for joint results. The UN to UN inter-agency transfers is another mechanism, but is purely transactional, targeting individual agency programmes. Application of such instruments require improved adherence to the UNSDG standards and a central entity to monitor compliance with those standards, in order to ensure coordinated as well as a multisectoral response towards the SDGs.
- Comprehension of joint UN instruments and their application(s) varies considerably among UN agencies and donors.
- Currently, there is an increasing trend in the use of the UN to UN agreement to replace a joint

programme modality. For example, the use of UN to UN agreement modality as a share of all the UN interagency mechanism utilized for UNICEF implemented joint UN interventions as increased from 28% in 2020 to 40% in 2021. This is found to be mainly attributed to a lack of common understanding of the various UN inter-agency instruments for programmes among donors and agencies. It is also attributed to competitive behaviour among the agencies to gain donor visibility. The interest of donor partners to use UN to UN agreements is noted to be the need to transfer risk as well as responsibility to UN agencies. All of these lead to:

- Siloed approaches that conflict with the principles of UN Reform for integrated and multisectoral programme engagements, treating UN sister agencies as subcontractors, and thus leading to unhealthy competition.
- Time invested on negotiations, reporting, and cost recovery rates, including the risk of multiple requirements imposed on the implementing agencies.
- Inability to attain the increasing demand for donor recognition and the double dipping of cost recovery/support costs on donors.

Resource mobilization

- In addition to concerns over competition and donor conditionalities, varying approaches to resource mobilization followed by different UN agencies prevent joint efforts. Some agencies are autonomous enough to fundraise at the field level due to their decentralized approach, whereas some are heavily dependent on their headquarters due to their centralized system.

4.3.6 THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR SYSTEM

The central role of the Resident Coordinator (RC) system to bring together UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and to ensure a coordinated response to national priorities under the umbrella of the UNSDCF is acknowledged by 70 per cent of respondents from field offices.

However, the following gaps are observed in the RC system:

- Overlaps and lack of clarity on the role of the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) when it comes to technical lead roles for joint UN

interventions that should be handled by the respective UN agency with the appropriate comparative advantage. Here it might help to note that the 2021 QCPR implementation report states that the response of programme country governments against the indicator on minimization of duplication of efforts by the RCO shows a decline from 77 per cent in 2017 to 69 per cent in 2020.²¹ Such observations emanate from a lack of coordinated efforts for support of national priorities.

- In line with the MAF we need clarity and alignment on two issues: (i) How do we balance the role of the RCO with the existing practices of individual agencies on donor and government engagements for joint UN interventions? and (ii) How do we leverage the RCO to create partnerships with host governments and donors for joint UN interventions?
- In the majority of cases, the pooled fund management role assigned to the RCO by donor partners is not informed by an assessment of the available capacity within the RC system.
- Due to limited RCO capacity, in some countries individual agencies are often asked to volunteer to take a lead role in coordination and management of some of the RCO functions, on joint UN interventions, which places an additional burden on country offices.
- The RCO has considerable influence over the allocation of many of the joint funding opportunities. This in itself is noted to be fine by the majority of the respondents, but the manner in which the allocation is done – based on ‘consensus and appeasement’ rather than technical expertise and a jointly agreed clear criteria – is a challenge.
- Reference is also made by some field offices that for many smaller agencies such funds are ‘lifelines’. ‘The one man – one vote principle’ translates as equal votes in the UNCTs, resulting in skewed allocation of resources to agencies without technical capacity, in turn leading to the failure of pooled funds to meet the objective that they have been set up for.

4.3.7 DONOR CONDITIONALITIES, NON-COMPLIANCE WITH UNSDG STANDARDS FOR JOINT PROGRAMMES

Feedback from UNICEF field offices and the HQ Divisions shows that the majority of donor partners are proponents of the UN Reform, with a strong expectation for the UN to work together. Internal UNICEF records also show that during the period 2017–2020 donors such as Canada, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have registered a steady growth in their contribution to joint UN interventions. However, a few gaps are observed from the side of donor partners due to the following factors:

Funding compact commitments and conditionalities:

- The UNSDG 2021 Funding Compact commitments status update notes “stalled or showing slow progress”²² in the number of donors contributing to inter-agency pooled funds. A study by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation states that “Should Member States fulfil the potential of the Funding Compact, this would enable UN country teams to scale up integrated programming and policy support across mandates, thereby accelerating progress towards the SDGs being achieved.”²³
- Some donors are noted to support joint UN interventions to avoid dealing with multiple UN agencies as opposed to their commitment to promote coordinated and integrated programmatic responses. This usually comes with the risk of identifying lead UN agencies, which do not necessarily have the appropriate capacity to perform the role effectively.
- Donor conditionalities are a major hindrance to the success of joint UN interventions, contributing to competitive behaviour and heavy transaction cost, mainly due to a fragmented approach by donors failing to reduce their conditionalities.
- A ‘one size fits all’ approach is also noted a hindrance, as donor requirements are found not to be adapted to or appropriate for programmatic and operational context and lacking the flexibility to respond to emerging issues.

²¹ QCPR Implementation Report – GA Resolution 72/233 (2021), p. 15.

²² UNDCO, “Funding Compact, Status of Implementation” (June 2021), p. 5.

²³ Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, “Financing the UNDS: Time to meet the moment,” p. 22.

Non-compliance with UNSDG standards:

- Despite commitments to the UN Reform, not all donors are supporting joint UN interventions in line with the agreed UNSDG standards for joint programmes.²⁴ Such non-compliance leads to heavy transaction costs and deviation from the objective of a coordinated effort for long-term results, efficiency gains, as well as a multisectoral response to meet the SDGs.
- In addition, such non-compliance is found to be a major source of competition among the participating UN agencies, preventing donor recognition and visibility of investments made by UN agencies. Similarly, the German Development Institute study “Earmarking in the Multilateral Development System: Many Shades of Grey” identifies the adverse impact of inconsistent fund channelling mechanisms used by some donors, leading to competition and

disjointed approaches, and thus underscoring the importance of joint programmes to bring agencies together.²⁵

4.3.8 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND VISIBILITY

UNICEF is noted as one of the lead UN agencies with a robust resource mobilization system. It is also recognized as a champion for children’s agenda and a partner of choice among donors and national governments. Feedback from field offices shows that UNICEF has played a significant role, beyond its mandate and priorities, devoting its resources to support joint UN interventions, in particular in areas where capacity gaps are observed regarding technical expertise and funding – both by UN agencies and national governments.

Chart 6: Mapping donor compliance with UNSDG standards

UNSDG standard		Remarks
Compliant	Non-compliant	
Canada EU Italy Norway Spain Sweden Switzerland The Netherlands United Kingdom	China France Germany India Japan South Korea United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ China, India, and South Korea: Noted as emerging donors ■ EU: Same level of paperwork both for low- and high-value funds ■ Germany: Very keen to support joint programmes but limited by internal legal procedure, hence channelling resources through bilateral agreements ■ Italy and Switzerland: Unlike previous practice, now apply the UNSDG standards ■ UK: Lead contributor but with own due diligence procedures

²⁴ UNSDG Guidance Note on Joint Programmes

Resource mobilization efforts for joint UN interventions are led by UNICEF country offices, in large part due to decentralized donor approaches and opportunities. While this is empowering to country offices, it also comes with the following challenges:

- Country offices noted that ad hoc support by Headquarters on joint UN interventions, which is offered mostly when requested by country offices prevents a structured dialogue, guidance, and support on areas such as (i) realistic investment of time and energy on funding opportunities that are guaranteed to bring resources; (ii) addressing donor conditionalities; and (iii) support on negotiation.
- External respondents as well as some UNICEF field offices identify the need for the systematic prioritization of areas requiring integrated multisectoral responses to child rights, and that demand the coordinated engagement of UN sister agencies. As result, they are calling for HQ and regional office support to trigger the right partnerships and resource mobilization efforts.

On Joint Resource Mobilization (JRM), there is a need to monitor effectiveness due to the following factors:

- Most UN joint efforts are noted to take the availability of resources as a driving force to work together, mainly to address funding needs rather than as a collaboration anchored on programme needs and a results-oriented approach, thus undermining the notion of the UN as a partner of choice.
- Despite the UN Reform principles, JRMs are found to overshadow resource mobilization efforts of individual agencies, rather than complement them.
- UNSDCF priorities as a mechanism to identify JRM is underutilized.
- Fundraising efforts are also found to focus on an individual project approach rather than a broader sector-wide approach targeting big-ticket items. This limits long-term partnerships for results. Here, it will help to take note of the experience from a joint UN engagement in Nigeria, whereby partner UN agencies leveraged their advocacy and convening power to build harmonized partnerships, leading to coordinated support to communities living with HIV.²⁵

On visibility:

- Even though this is beyond joint UN interventions, it is worth mentioning that the expectation for UN agencies to align themselves behind the One UN logo, branding, and communications strategy need to be revisited. Despite the significant role being played by UN agencies such as UNICEF and the expertise that each UN agency brings for the success of joint programmes, the expectation to report results under the One UN logo makes UN agencies invisible. It limits showcasing UN agency contributions to donor partners and host governments.
- Communication platforms such as press statements and high-level forums involving political influencers and VIPs are very limited in showcasing an individual agency's contribution to the wider UN priority. Such practices seem also to prevent engagements focused on evidence-based priorities that are in alignment with national priorities. It is relevant to note here that progress against the QCPR indicators measuring the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator joint, impartial, and comprehensive assessment of development needs as reported by programme country governments shows a decline from 53 per cent in 2017 to 29 per cent in 2019.²⁷
- Concerns are also raised on UNICEF's need to associate itself with better programme results and products that are vetted, as opposed to a pure focus on compliance to UN working together. Such concerns are attributed to reputational risks arising from poor performance linked to the inclusion of UN agencies without the appropriate technical and financial resources.

4.3.9 INSUFFICIENT FUNDS ALLOCATIONS AND CHALLENGES TO POOLED FUNDS CAPITALIZATION

In compliance with the UN Reform, there is an increasing trend by donor partners to deliver sectoral priorities through joint UN interventions.

The majority of these engagements tend to be challenged by:

- Insufficient funds allocation despite the significant expert time invested to design proposals, thus limiting the ability to cover substantive as well as the support costs crucial to operationalize

²⁵ German Development Institute, "Earmarking in the Multilateral Development System: Many Shades of Grey" (2020).

²⁶ UNAIDS, "Regional and Country Report" (2019), p. 57.

the actual programme. At the same time, such limited funds become a source of competition as participating UN agencies start to carve out funds to cover operating costs and overheads, rather than programmes. This ends up having the donor partner make final decisions on programme priorities, which may not be aligned with programme needs at hand.

- In addition, the larger and better funded agencies tend to lose over time or to invest heavily in the \$200–300K programmes alongside UN sister agencies with much lower capacity.
- Big-ticket items such as malnutrition that require investments of millions of dollars are usually pushed through joint UN interventions, which end up with quite minimal funding allocation. This is found to be overwhelming for smaller country offices, extra pressure on lead UN agencies contributing to heavy transaction costs, and a huge disincentive for larger agencies to engage.

UN pooled funds remain undercapitalized preventing long-term investment for results:

- Programmatically, lack of capitalization of some of the pooled funds prevents having predictable resources to facilitate long-term investments for results and impedes the continuity of response to national priorities.

- Currently, while overall growth is observed on inter-agency pooled funds, some of the global pooled some of the global funds are not capitalized to the required level. For example, Member States committed to capitalize the Joint SDG Fund by \$290 million per annum. However, in the last three years the Fund was capitalized by only \$213 million. The COVID-19 MPTF targeted to raise \$1 billion between April 2020 and 2022 unfortunately managed to raise only \$86 million as of December 2021. Progress against the QCPR indicator on the number of donors contributing to inter-agency pooled funds shows a declining rate from 59 countries in 2017 to 39 in 2019.²⁸ Joint UN interventions delivered with such funding source usually come with host government endorsement as one of the main eligibility criteria for funding. In cases where the UN is not able to fulfil its commitments due to shortage of funds, this will lead to reputational risk and will adversely affect the trust of host governments.
- Use of such limited resources are also further challenged at the country level by lack of a participatory process and robust technical criteria to identify programmes that are relevant and of good quality. Such approaches also lead to building perceptions such as ‘personality driven’ and ‘biased’ approaches, overall becoming a disincentive to future joint engagements.

²⁷ QCPR Implementation Report – GA Resolution 72/233 (2021), p. 10.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

4.3.10 COMMITMENTS AND CREDIBILITY

Successful collaboration is often found to be dependent on pre-existing partnerships and interpersonal relations. A genuine intent to respect individual agency mandates and a collaborative attitude is found to help build shared commitment, leading to successful joint UN intervention. However, some of UNICEF's donor partners note competition among UN agencies as a 'killer factor' that does not support the notion of working together. To this effect, donor partners suggest that such practice may demand legally binding arrangements to maintain accountability and avoid interference on individual agency boundaries, encouraging an integrated approach. Concerns over competition are observed both by donor partners and UN agencies themselves, which is attributed to several factors, including the following:

- a. Ensuring appropriate balance between agency-specific mandate and UN system-wide priorities.
- b. Funding constraints and the ability of only a few UN agencies to finance their system, leading to fierce competition and deviations from application of the appropriate UNSDG standards for equal partnerships such as joint programme approaches.
- c. Personality-driven approaches and bias against certain UN agencies were noted as major hindrances to working together, often discouraging the participation of UN agencies that can bring value added to a given priority area.
- d. The fragmented approach to deliver UNSDCF priorities are found to create donor fatigue as the relevant Results Groups cease to exist once joint priorities are set and each agency starts to engage in separate resource mobilization, leading to significant overlap.

Due to gaps in the attribution of results and recognition, there is a shared observation among donors and UNICEF offices that more preference is given to earmarking, i.e., donors channelling resources through bilateral arrangements instead of the UNSDG standard procedures (i.e., joint programmes). Such arrangements will lead to UN agencies that are the direct recipient of donor funding passing funds or 'sub-contracting' other agencies



Happy girl smiling in the village of Koun Fao, in the North East of Côte d'Ivoire.

through the UN to UN inter-agency mechanisms, often blocking visibility to the sub-contracted agency that is actually responsible for delivering the programme. Under such arrangements, the 'contributing agency' passes funds on behalf of the donor to the 'recipient agency', with the credit going to the contributing agency that is playing the liaison role and sharing the consolidated progress report with the donor, but not to the UN agency delivering the programme. Increasing use of such arrangements is preventing UNICEF from providing adequate recognition to donors.

Overall, for the UN Reform to bring the intended results and for UN agencies to remain committed to invest in joint interventions, respondents to this assessment exercise raise the following key questions:

- a. How does the UN Reform facilitate strategic engagements to speak with One Voice for coordinated advocacy and resource mobilization, while ensuring due recognition to individual agency visibility as well as donor recognition?
- b. How does the UN Reform help set realistic and good quality common priorities to shift away from overlapping programming, operational, and reporting processes?

These questions echo the points raised in a paper produced by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation for the 18 June 2021 informal consultation on the Funding Compact, highlighting gaps observed to translate the Funding Compact commitments and their application at the country level.²⁹

4.3.11 CONCEPTUAL CLARITY ON 'JOINTNESS' AND MANDATE CREEP

There is a shared observation among the UN Development System and donors that joint UN interventions, more specifically joint programmes, tend to be a consolidation of UN agency activities but not a true picture of 'jointness'. Current joint UN engagements are also found to lend themselves to a risk of 'mandate creep' as there are too many priorities and too many UN agencies stretching the scope of a realistic joint programme undertaking. It is also possible to see from the responses provided that joint UN interventions are described as efforts to 'share the cake' (using a country office response verbatim), but are not anchored on programme results or a needs-based approach. Again, this raises the issue of few UN agencies relying on joint funds as a means to mobilize funds. Existing UN joint programme guidance notes are found to prioritize fund management rather than a programme-focused approach, thus limiting the proper use of such joint platforms.

It is important to base decisions to engage in joint UN interventions on the nature of the programme and the country context, instead of a mere focus on funding and funding instruments. As a result, donors to UNICEF for joint UN interventions note that funding proposals could benefit from addressing the following

areas in a structured manner: *What is the issue to be addressed? What does it take to respond to the issue at hand? Are there other related factors that should be addressed, that may impact the success of the programme to be delivered? Is UNICEF the only actor or do we need to bring other UN agencies on board? Any external expertise needed outside of the UN? How do we address a single outcome collectively and what are our individual responsibilities, including their linkages? What are the partnership and funding instruments to be used? And what does success look like to us – for example, if we are to address a child right, how should integration be manifested?*

4.3.12 ENTRY POINTS

The UN harmonization and simplification process goes back to the Millennium Development Goals era whereby the UN Development System (UNDS) made tremendous efforts to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, registering a significant increase in the UN response in the humanitarian and development fields. Despite this, the proposed areas of improvements in this section show that the UNDS continues to deal with a recurrent problem of competition, fragmentation, and procedural issues, leading to high transaction costs as well as to a heavy administrative burden. Furthermore, respondents to this assessment exercise note that despite the recognition of such recurring challenges:

- a. There is a strong push for joint UN engagements, demanding quick solutions to the proposed areas of improvement so as to maintain momentum on current collaborative undertakings towards the SDGs. More specifically, there is a need for HQ and regional support to guide how the UN Reform streams could be applied to this effect.
- b. The push to have all sectoral areas delivered through joint UN engagements is noted as an aspect that requires further study. There is concern about gaps in the availability of lessons from existing joint UN interventions to inform both the substantive and process aspects of joint programmes, especially given challenges that appear in a repetitive manner.
- c. Beyond the mere focus to prove that UN agencies are working together, the need for an evidence-based approach and for building the culture of continuous learning are identified as necessary to build on good practices and for innovation where traditional joint UN interventions fail to bear results.

²⁹ Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, "Fulfilling Potential of Funding Compact at Country Level" (consultation, 18 June 2021), pp. 1–3.

4.4 Summary findings

The findings show that there is shared understanding of the benefits that could be derived from a well-designed, high-quality joint UN intervention. Challenges persisting around strategic programmatic issues and their operationalization are also acknowledged by all, raising the questions: *Does the UNDS need to reconsider its entry point for programming? What does 'jointness' mean to the UNDS? How are the growing joint UN interventions made relevant to the broader national response? Who is responsible to bring harmonization? What are the lessons from the long years of joint UN investments? How would the UN Reform contribute to address such recurring issues?*

The wide range of respondents who took part in this assessment exercise confirm that the findings are applicable to UNICEF and its partners. As a result, the findings should serve as a baseline and a frame of reference for areas that should collectively be addressed by UNDS and donor partners, while encouraging similar periodic assessments by typologies that include regional focus, programme nature (development and humanitarian), and country income level.



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For World Children's Day, the children of the Bingerville orphanage took control of their dance class. They expressed their joy by free dances, jumped and ran everywhere. For every child a voice. #GoBlue

5. Proposed strategies and recommendations

Overall, the findings identify that the major shortcomings in the context of joint UN interventions is related to the lack of a results-oriented approach, recurring problems of non-interoperable processes, and failure of their application in areas where they bring value added, rather a mere adherence by all stakeholders to fulfil the UN Reform commitments.

To maximize the benefits derived from joint UN interventions, the assessment participants emphasized the importance of having strategies linked to institutionalizing a results-oriented approach, to ensure shared understanding and continuous learning on programmatic and procedures aspect of joint programmes, and to incentivizing efficient engagement. This section summarizes key recommendations proposed for the wider UN system as well as for UNICEF to achieve the proposed strategies.

Section 6.1 provides a brief action plan that forms the basis for UNICEF and stakeholders to prioritize the recommendations for improvement and address in line with their accountabilities.

Recommendation 1: Structured and evidence-based approach to priority setting

- Targeted technical support from regional offices or HQ should provide technical support to UNCTs for joint problem analysis and common priority identification. This would facilitate the design of quality joint UN interventions with complementing priorities and targets in a fast-tracked manner. It would also lead to setting realistic integrated results, managing expectation among stakeholders, and ultimately ensuring government ownership.
- The RCO should ensure a One UN voice to identify priorities that are evidence-based while responding to national needs, as opposed to being taken over by the most vocal UN agency. In this regard, the Common Country Assessment and UNSDCF should be applied to their fullest as a basis for joint UN interventions and to determine clear accountabilities between the UNCT and RC system.
- The UN system should continue to strengthen integrated partnerships with all development actors beyond exclusive UN interagency engagements. This would encourage expanding learning and leveraging for a shift away from traditional joint engagements and realistic priority identification to enhance UNCT relevance.

- **Internally for UNICEF**, it will be important to identify areas (thematic areas, sectors, countries, strategic plan outcomes) where joint UN interventions would accelerate achievement of results for children and invest into joint programmes as a key strategy for delivery of those results. Such a structured approach could also be extended to UNSDCF priority setting and would allow UNICEF to make realistic investments of its expert time and resources for children. (UNICEF Lead Divisions: Regional and HQ Programme Sections; Data, Analytics, Planning, and Monitoring)
- In line with the 2020 QCPR priorities for the provision of social services and the participation and protection of women and girls from all forms of discrimination,³⁰ UNICEF should work to establish the appropriate awareness among Member States on the importance of creating a balance between joint and bilateral engagements to sustain existing UNICEF-specific undertakings that are leading to long-term change for women and children. (UNICEF Lead Divisions: Public Partnership; Programme Group; and Data, Analytics, Planning, and Monitoring)
- UNICEF should provide an organization-wide direction on joint UN interventions. This means, beyond the current mapping of global joint programmes, the Strategic Plan should consider putting forth a clear strategy to prioritize children's agenda while programming with UN sister agencies. Furthermore, clear alignment should be established between UNICEF's Strategic Plan priorities and the increasingly initiated country-level joint UN interventions, which were close to 500 in 2020. These involve partnerships with up to 30 UN sister agencies covering all goal areas. (UNICEF Lead Division: Data, Analytics, Planning, and Monitoring)
- Headquarters and Regional Programme sections should support country offices by establishing global and regional joint UN technical partnerships for sector-wide dialogues to address the extended time taken to identify common priorities; and ensure use of corporate agency agreements to map out comparative advantages of UN sister agencies per sectoral priorities to address challenges of competition. (UNICEF Leads: HQ and Regional Programme Sections)

³⁰ A/RES/75/233- E- A/RES/75/233-Desktop (undocs.org), pp. 3,11,12.

Recommendation 2: Results focus and balancing UNICEF and UN-wide priorities

- The 2020 QCPR puts strong emphasis on a results-oriented approach and the application of Results-Based Management to programming for an impactful engagement to achieve the SDGs and to ensure national ownership.³¹ The QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021–2024 has also put in place indicators for results measurement linked to the Cooperation Framework, ‘joint activities’, and UNCT annual results reports to host governments.³² Accordingly, the current practice to measure progress on joint UN interventions should consider adopting these QCPR indicators for results and expenditure reporting beyond annual measurement of country office engagement and resources that do not necessarily show impact of UNCTs collective effort. Importantly, the application of such indicators should be in alignment with agency-specific systems to avoid parallel processes and additional work.
- **Internally for UNICEF**, its Strategic Plan 2022–2025 puts strong emphasis on joint programmes as enablers to bring resources with a detailed account on global joint programmes under its partnerships and financing section.³³ The Strategic Plan implementation should urgently prioritize results measurement and establish linkages with country-level initiatives by:
 - incorporating a joint UN lens in existing UNICEF strategies, guidelines, plans, programmes, and platforms³⁴ for an informed and impactful engagement.
 - ensuring selective engagement on areas that bring results while at the same time setting clear direction to country offices in terms of the level and types of UN engagements expected, in alignment with the Strategic Plan priorities that should be adapted to the country context.
- developing indicators for result and impact measurement at all levels, with guidance to periodic aggregation of results from joint UN interventions with UNICEF outcome level results. In doing so, efforts should be made to ensure that the UNCT result measurement processes such as UNINFO/UNCT annual report arrangements, donor reporting requirements, and UNICEF results reporting are interoperable.
- UNICEF’s Results Assessment Module 3.0 should prioritize the VISION tag and/or application of Programme Information Database (PIDB) codes for “UN working together” as an implementation strategy. This would lead to system-generated data for results and expenditures simultaneously showcasing UNICEF’s work to partners on UNICEF external website and transparency portal.
- Identify regional priorities to integrate, measure, and guide results for joint UN interventions, as well as impact measurements in collaboration with the respective programme section at HQ level.
- UNICEF should commit to ‘whole-of-office’ support to joint UN interventions, similar to regular programmes with adequate appropriation of support from planning, operations, and communications units beyond programme teams.
- Targeted Regional Office or HQ support is needed to strengthen coordinated efforts across programmatic, operational, and resource mobilization aspects of joint UN interventions, through integrated approaches both within UNICEF and externally with UN sister agencies.

³¹ A/RES/75/233- E- A/RES/75/233-Desktop (undocs.org).²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

³² QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021-2024, pp. 1,8,16.

³³ UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

³⁴ Strategic Plan, resource mobilization strategy, and RAM 3.0 planning and reporting, including PIDB codes, network meetings, etc.

Recommendation 3: Responding to recurring procedural and capacity gaps

On procedures:

- The 2021 revision of the global guidance notes for joint programmes should prioritize conceptual clarity on what we mean by ‘jointness’ and should provide clear mechanisms for programming and operational procedures. This should also encourage digitization of joint UN interventions processes and alignment with the UNDCO’s working definitions and baseline for Funding Compact common management features.³⁵
 - *Internally for UNICEF, it will be important to provide guidance on what the common management features and mutual recognition mean, including how they should be applied in alignment with internal processes. This would also mean for UNICEF to provide open feedback to clearly communicate with UNDCO on aspects of the common management features that are not applicable by proposing alternate mechanisms that would facilitate effective joint engagements.*
- There is an urgent need for a UN inter-agency critical review of processes and procedures to address concerns over transaction costs and overburdening engagements. Most importantly, there is a need to ensure interoperability between an individual agency and the UN-wide systems pertaining to programmes, operations, resource mobilization, and partnership aspects of joint UN interventions. UNDCO as a custodian to manage UN system compliance and improvements can play a critical role to coordinate streamlined approaches in this regard. This is particularly important to address deviations arising from donor and UN agency requirements.
- Efforts to simplify monitoring and reporting processes, including redundancies of governance structures for joint UN interventions, should consider the use of existing country-level programme technical/results groups instead of creating new structures and requirements.

This also means ensuring consistency among the requirements outlined in the Management Accountability Framework (MAF), programme documents, legal agreements (Standard Administrative Arrangement and Memorandum of Understanding), operational manuals, and communication and resource mobilization strategies. Such consistencies would form the basis to addressing donor conditionalities in a coordinated fashion.

- *Internally for UNICEF, HQ guidance should be provided on interpretation of the QCPR indicators and their practical application by UNICEF. This is particularly important as progress against such UN-wide indicators would rely on data generated by country offices coming from the multiple country-initiated joint UN interventions. The QCPR monitoring framework indicators for 2021–2024 include use of UNINFO, results against cooperation framework outcome indicators, UNCT results reports to host governments, joint evaluations, and common management features.³⁶*

On capacity gaps

- UNDCO should build the appropriate structure across the board in order to establish common understanding and application of instruments that are fit for purpose through regular orientation and experience exchange on UN inter-agency mechanisms for programming, partnerships, and resource mobilization to UN agencies, donors, and other stakeholders.
- To ensure optimal capacity for implementation of joint UN interventions, UNSDG guidance notes for joint programmes and trust funds should consider including clear selection criteria for funding eligibility that should factor in a UN agency’s ability to avail the required resources and expertise – from programme inception, to design, to delivery – with assurance for field presence or alternate means to implement the agreed joint interventions. Such guidance should also form the basis to initiate joint UN engagements that are stand-alone among two or three UN agencies or are UNCT-wide.

³⁵ Funding Compact Implementation Status Update (Nov 24, 2021), p. 4.

³⁶ **Common management features:** A well-articulated strategy, including innovation features where relevant; clear theories of change; solid Results-Based Management systems; well-functioning governance bodies supported by effective secretariats; quality assurance on issues of United Nations norms and values; risk management systems and strategies; operational effectiveness/reporting/visibility/transparency standards; and planning and funding for joint and system-wide evaluations that meet UNEG norms and standards (MPTF Office).

- Consistent application of the [UNSDG | UNSDG Results-based Management Handbook](#) among UN sister agencies and consideration for its review since it was last developed in 2011 would also be a mechanisms to ensure a coherent approach to and the design of quality joint UN interventions.
 - **Internally, UNICEF** should continue the use of its SharePoint site for joint programmes and pooled funds, thus ensuring information sharing – including designing a training package on Agora.
 - Programmatically, recommendation points 1 and 2 as noted above should apply and respond to capacity gaps with technical support from the HQ programme group and regional programme sections.

Recommendation 4: Resource mobilization, advocacy, communications, and visibility

On resource mobilization and advocacy

- As a matter of priority, joint UN interventions should enhance efforts to measure results so that donors are encouraged to continue funding joint UN engagements. This would also help minimize the number of unfunded proposals, as observed in some of the global UN pooled funds.
- Parliamentary space at the capital level and all resource mobilization platforms should be used to amplify issue-based fundraising targeting big-ticket items, such as children, sectoral areas, or the broader SDGs to increase the pool of funds for multilateral arrangements, instead of the current focus on individual projects.
- Promote joint resource mobilization efforts guided by the UNSDCF priorities, encouraging long-term partnerships as well as predictable and flexible funding that is also adaptable to emerging issues.
- Leverage the RC system's high-level partnerships with host governments and the donor community to complement individual agency resource needs by discouraging time invested to fundraise for individual projects, with the exception of donor orphan countries. This should also be guided by the spirit of the MAF, which promotes a coordinated UNCT approach to resource mobilization in support of the UNSDCF/joint UN interventions objectives with RC and UNCT members contributing and leveraging the rich networks.

■ **Internally for UNICEF**

- *With the changing UN operational environment and the requirements of UN Reform, there is a need for UNICEF to use multiple strategies for resource mobilization, investing in the quality of pooled funds and joint programmes, and leveraging UN resources for results for children.*
- *UNICEF should play a proactive lead role to UNSDCF results groups, humanitarian clusters, and any sector coordination groups, and should take a strategic approach to alliance building with UN sister agencies. Such an approach will help tap into the specialized expertise of UN sister agencies for children while helping UNICEF showcase its commitment to joint UN interventions, making it a natural partner of choice for all stakeholders.*
- *Organization-wide guidance should be made available on mobilizing and managing UNICEF-specific efforts versus Joint Resource Mobilization efforts to ensure a streamlined approach to prioritizing children's agenda while working on the UN-wide priorities. It is also helpful to map out how each of the UNICEF funding streams could be used for bilateral and joint UN engagements to tap into opportunities to advance child rights.*

On communications and visibility

- Even though this is beyond joint UN interventions, it is worth mentioning that UN communications strategy should allow shared visibility and recognition, given the value added that each agency brings, including facilitating the scale-up of existing good practice that are the building blocks to the success of One UN. The success of the One UN approach is reliant on the successful performance of individual agencies, each of which requires its share of recognition and visibility to be well resourced.
- It is important for all joint UN intervention programme documents, legal agreements, and communications strategies to be aligned with the 2021 MAF, which states that "The RC coordinates UNCT system-wide communications efforts with due regard to relevant roles and responsibilities of individual agencies, to promote and advocate for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in all its dimensions and the commitment to leave no one behind."³⁷

- **Internally for UNICEF**, application of PIDB codes is a means to ensuring the attribution of results to specific contributing donors, while donors should prioritize application of the UNSDG Standard Administrative Arrangement and Memorandum of Understanding to allow recognition of their contribution to joint UN interventions.

Recommendation 5: Facilitating the Resident Coordinator system engagement for programme-driven approaches

- Current revision to the UNSDG guidance notes on joint programmes (2014) should prioritize reflecting on the newly strengthened RC system, delineating the accountabilities between Resident Coordinator's Offices (RCOs) and UN agencies for programming, resource mobilization, and partnerships. To this effect, there is also a need to ensure compliance among the contents of the different UN instruments, i.e., the MAF, UNSDCF, programme documents/proposal, as well as UNSDG partnerships agreements.
- In order to ensure that funds are channelled to the appropriate needs at hand, such guidance notes should equip the RC system with the necessary tools and criteria to identify the UN agency with the appropriate mandate and capacity while selecting participating UN agencies for joint programmes under global or country-level pooled funds.
- Recognition of a UN agency's capability to undertake programming and fundraising successfully should continue to apply, as not everything should be managed by the RC system. The 2021 MAF also states that the RC supports joint programme formulation only as needed.³⁸ Joint engagements should be practiced where they make a difference but should not lead to losing individual UN agency legacy. With the proper guidance, both joint programmes and individual entity programming should co-exist to ensure the UN's impact on national priorities.

- The UNSDCF should provide the basis for mapping out programmes and resource mobilization efforts to be managed bilaterally and jointly, including host governments and donor partnerships. In relation to this, the 2021 MAF also notes that "the RC and UNCT jointly support the mobilization of resources with and on behalf of the UNCT for joint UN efforts and country-team-wide plans and initiatives as framed within the UNSDCF."³⁹

Recommendation 6: Corrective measures to donor conditionalities and non-compliance with UNSDG standards

- Member States' approaches to capitalize pooled funds and to adequately fund joint UN interventions should be further assessed against commitments made to the Funding Compact to understand inconsistencies and to recommend the appropriate actions.
- Assess the reasons for varying and increasing donor conditionalities in order to understand if these are attributed to gaps observed in the UN programme and operational systems. Such assessments should guide a consultative process between UN sister agencies and donors to harmonize requirements.
- Institute regular consultation between donor partners and the UNDS that is targeted to systems improvement and to replicate good approaches. This should also be complemented with Recommendation 3 on regular training and orientation.

³⁷ UNSDG, "Management Accountability Framework and Resident Coordinator System" (2021), p. 17.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 19.p

³⁹ Ibid., p. 20. p

Recommendation 7: Incentivizing evidence-based engagement for feasible entry points

- **Internally for UNICEF**, incentivize organization-wide and staff engagement on joint UN interventions by introducing the appropriate performance indicators as follows:
 - Organization-wide engagement should target global, regional, and country management team platforms to showcase, monitor, document, and disseminate good practices and lessons, systematically informing organization-wide decisions on future joint UN engagements.
 - Staff engagement should target those at the political, senior leadership, and technical expert level.
- Periodic evaluation and impact assessments of joint UN interventions should be undertaken as a mandatory step at all levels, which is also one of the 2020 QCPR indicators. However, attention should be given beyond substantive issues. Evaluations, for example, should also assess the effectiveness and efficiency of UN inter-agency instruments for results delivery. The outcome of such an exercise should be widely disseminated to identify programmes that are feasible to be delivered jointly with sister agencies, with a detailed look into application of the 'joint programme' and 'joint programming' approach.
 - **Internally for UNICEF**, such an exercise should help to identify if joint UN interventions are contributing to country programmes and strategic plan goals, including UNICEF's engagements to accelerate achievement of the SDGs. As a result, an evaluation and impact assessment of joint UN interventions should be conducted in a structured manner and periodically at the country level, with support of HQ and regional offices.
 - This should include an in-depth look into countries and regions with higher revenue, expenditures, and a number of joint interventions so as to draw lessons.
- UN pooled funds should consider a longer life-cycle, preferably aligned with the UNSDCF timeline. It is necessary to identify clear value proposition and strategies to ensure capitalization as well as increased funding cap, as this would facilitate: (i) a shift from ad hoc engagements, thus ensuring continuity of programme delivery for sustained results; (ii) better integration and complementarity with existing initiatives; (iii) better management of expectations among partners; (iv) an improved investment of expert time on joint UN interventions that are guaranteed to produce resources; and (v) the earned trust of host governments and civil society.
- The UN should also learn from the success story of external partners, such as NGO consortiums and enhancing partnerships beyond the UN, and should have an external-facing approach by bringing in non-UN partners to expand the knowledge base. The 2020 QCPR monitoring framework has set out the relevant indicators, such inclusive approaches, guiding UNCTs structured engagement.⁴⁰
- Non-traditional areas such as partnerships with international financial institutions, the private sector, and global programme partnerships should be given considerations to widen the resource base in the current shrinking overseas development assistance environment, which also provides an opportunity for learning and knowledge beyond the traditional approaches. Here it will be important to take note of the SG's common agenda paper, where he underscored the central role of the private sector to achieve the SDGs.⁴¹

⁴⁰ QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021–2024, p. 8.

⁴¹ "Our Common Agenda: Report of the UN Secretary-General" (2021), p. 75.

5.1 Action plan

Recommendations	UNDS	UNICEF ⁴²	Donor partners
<p>R1: Structured and evidence-based approach to priority setting</p> <p>1.1 UN Inter-agency sector-wide dialogue to guide mapping of joint UN engagements at the UNSDCF level and delivery of joint UN interventions</p> <p>1.2 Organization wide direction- linkages among UNICEF strategic plan, country programmes, and joint UN interventions – programmes where UNICEF can make a difference</p> <p>1.3 HQ and RO support to CO engagement to prioritize UNICEF’s niche</p> <p>1.4 Application of corporate agreements for priority and role mapping between UN agencies in alignment with UNSDG standards</p>	DCO, All UNDS HQ	HQ, RO, CO programme sections DAPM, PG PPD, PG, RO PG, PPD	
<p>R2: Results focus and balancing UNICEF versus UN-wide priorities</p> <p>2.1 Adopt QCPR results and expenditure indicators in UNICEF Strategic Plan</p> <p>2.2 Guidance to joint UN interventions results aggregation to UNICEF outcomes and outputs through RAM and PIDB codes application</p> <p>2.3 Clear HQ direction to RO and CO engagement on joint UN interventions</p>		DAPM DAPM, PG OED, PG, PPD	
<p>R3: Responding to recurring procedural and capacity gaps</p> <p>3.1 Orientation on UNSDG programming, operational, and reporting systems</p> <p>3.2 Harmonization and systems interoperability, including interpretation of MAF, mutual recognition, common management features, and UNINFO</p> <p>3.3 Training packages and webinars</p>	DCO DCO DCO	PPD, RO, CO DAPM, DFAM, GSSC, PPD PPD	All
<p>R4: Resource mobilization, advocacy, communications, and visibility</p> <p>4.1 Guidance to fundraising for big-ticket/sector-wide priorities</p> <p>4.2 Organization wide direction - guidance to UNICEF advocacy, fundraising, and leveraging for joint UN interventions</p> <p>4.3 UN communications strategies balanced with recognition of UNCTs and RCOs</p>	DCO, UNCT DCO, UNSDG	HQ, RO, CO PPD	All

Recommendations	UNDS	UNICEF ⁴²	Donor partners
<p>R5: Facilitating the Resident Coordinator system engagement for programme driven approaches</p> <p>5.1 Streamline requirements among the MAF, UNSDCF, and joint programmes</p> <p>5.2 Streamline partnerships with host governments and donor partners</p> <p>5.3 Equip RCOs with clear guidance and a checklist to identify needs-based priorities, and UN agencies with the right comparative advantage</p>	<p>RCO, UNSDG</p> <p>RCO, UNSDG</p> <p>DCO, UNCT, UNSDG</p>	<p>COs, PPD, PG</p> <p>COs, PPD</p>	
<p>R6: Corrective measures to donor conditionalities and non-compliance with UNSDG standards</p> <p>6.1 Donor partners consultation to address enhanced capitalization of pooled funds</p> <p>6.2 Harmonize donor conditionalities and deviations from UNSDG standards</p>	<p>DCO, UNSDG</p> <p>DCO, UNSDG</p>		<p>All</p> <p>All</p>
<p>R7: Incentivizing evidence-based engagement for feasible entry points</p> <p>7.1 Periodic evaluation instituted in country programmes to assess impact and process efficiency for aggregation of lessons at the regional level</p> <p>7.2 Documentation and dissemination of lessons per thematic area and region – what are the factors for success?</p> <p>7.3 Global, regional, and country management teams strategic oversight to monitor overall progress, guide entry points and innovative approaches</p> <p>7.4 Performance indicator for staff accountability and recognition</p> <p>7.5 Quality pooled funds with clear value proposition attracting multiyear contribution and adequate funding cap</p>	<p>DCO</p> <p>DCO</p> <p>DCO</p>	<p>CO, RO, Eval Off</p> <p>CO, RO, Eval Off</p> <p>GMT, RMT, CMT</p> <p>HQ, RO, CO</p> <p>HQ, RO, CO</p>	

⁴² DAPM (Data, Analytics, Planning, and Monitoring), DFAM (Division of Financial and Administrative Management), Eval Off (Evaluation Office), GSSC (Global Shared Service Centre), PPD (Public Partnerships Division), and PG (Programme Group).

6. Survey and focus group discussion participants



Children playing in a ball pit at the FAR Children's Support Center in Yerevan.

Country Office		Regional Office	Headquarters		Donor Partners	UN Agencies
			Programmes	Public Partnerships		
Afghanistan	Jordan	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO)	Child Protection DAPM (WASH)	Africa	Belgium	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Argentina	Kirghizstan			CANZUSI	Germany	
Bangladesh	Kosovo	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)	Gender HIV/AIDS Nutrition	China	Ireland	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
Bangladesh	Lao PDR			FISHA++	Sweden	
Bangladesh	Lesotho	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)		Germany and Belgium	Switzerland	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
Bangladesh	Madagascar			Japan	United Kingdom	
Bangladesh	Malawi	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)		Nordics Team		World Food Programme (WFP)
Belize	Malawi			UK and Ireland		
Benin	Malawi	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO)				
Bhutan	Mali					
Bhutan	Mauritania	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Bolivia	Mexico					
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Moldova	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Botswana	Moldova					
Brazil	Mozambique	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Burundi	Nepal					
Cambodia	Nicaragua	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Cambodia	Pakistan					
Cameroon	Papua New Guinea	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Central African Republic	Peru					
Chile	Sao Tome and Principe	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Chile	Sierra Leone					
Colombia	South Sudan	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)				
Costa Rica	South Sudan					
Cuba	Sri Lanka	Middle East and Northern Africa Regional Office (MENARO)				
Dominican Republic	State of Palestine					
Ecuador	State of Palestine	Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)				
Egypt	Sudan					
El Salvador	Syria	Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)				
Gabon	Thailand					
Gambia	The Gambia	Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)				
Guatemala	Turkey					
Guinea-Bissau	Uganda	West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)				
Guyana and Suriname	Uzbekistan					
Haiti	Venezuela	West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)				
Honduras	Venezuela					
Honduras	Viet Nam	West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)				
India	Zambia					
Indonesia	Zambia					
Jamaica	Zimbabwe					

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A mother holds her child up as she queues with others to register her child's birth and receive birth certificate from a registrar at the Chipata Clinic, Lusaka, Zambia, Tuesday 22 November 2016.

List of annexes

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Annex III: Data collected on Joint UN Interventions – UNICEF Headquarters Programme Division

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The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been working in the south-eastern Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), alongside the Government of Bangladesh, through the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP) since 1996. The purpose of the ICDP is to ensure basic social services to children and women who have become disadvantaged because of the long standing instability and remoteness of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. A cornerstone of the ICDP are the 'para centres'- community centres that UNICEF and the government introduced into Bangladesh in 1985.



For more information contact:
Solome Zemene - szemene@unicef.org

Public Partnerships Division
United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza New York, NY 10017, USA

www.unicef.org

Tel: 212 326 7420

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