Introduction

Throughout the world, innovators are creating solutions that can change lives. UNICEF’s Global Innovation Centre (GIC) works to bring these solutions to every corner of the world: With GIC’s support an idea that helps thousands in one country can now be deployed in another country – with the potential to catalyse improvements for millions of children globally.

The GIC identifies promising innovations and ensures these can be easily replicated, set up and utilized anywhere. This system is economical, adaptable to the local context, and open to constant improvement. The GIC has successfully launched innovative solutions in dozens of countries across multiple sectors and in complex situations, including in emergencies.

GIC’s platforms connect millions of young people to decision makers, help influence policies, engage the most marginalized communities and provide access to real-time health information for the hardest to reach villages. Everything GIC produces is shared open-source as a global public good in keeping with the Digital Principles for Development.

The GIC is demand driven and never works alone. Its Advisory Committee provides effective and essential insights. The GIC works with experts from Facebook, Google and IBM and partner with companies like ARM, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer as well as governments like the Republic of Korea. The GIC has alliances with youth organizations such as the World Association of Girl Guides and World Scouting Association. It collaborates with some of the brightest minds via academic partnerships in China and South Africa. The GIC leverages and provides support to a global network of UNICEF offices, specialists and UN organizations in 143 countries.

With their contributions, our donors allow UNICEF’s Global Innovation Centre to reach those most in need of life-changing, innovative solutions.
Real-time information

Unmonitored and unmeasured problems go unsolved. The ability to access credible, up-to-date information anywhere and at any time about the situation of children is indispensable to improving their lives and protecting their rights. RapidPro is a powerful tool that enables workers in the most remote, far-flung corners of the world to reach those most in need using accurate and timely information.

RapidPro’s open source software enables UNICEF and partners to gather powerful data on vital areas such as health, education, child protection and emergencies. In 2016 RapidPro was able to reach more people than ever before by integrating popular channels including Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Line and Viber. With easier access through these everyday channels, expectant mothers in Mexico can get essential health information and young people in Malawi can access free counselling advice. The possibilities are endless.

Automated airtime transfers are also being used in countries like Indonesia and Mozambique to ensure important information gets to where it is needed – quickly. To enable regular reporting and to help cut out burdensome reimbursement processes, automated airtime transfers reimburse health workers or government staff instantly once they report via SMS. This drives regular reporting, ensures the reimbursements are sent to the right people at the right time, and helps potentially life-saving data to be delivered when it is needed.

More and more countries have found RapidPro to be a valuable system for solving a variety of problems. In 2015 – the GIC’s first year of operation – 22 countries used RapidPro. This grew to 37 in 2016. Seventeen countries are currently working towards launching RapidPro with another 35 countries exploring its benefits.
Technology 4 Programme

In order to deliver results for children, the GIC has a unique role in supporting both UNICEF’s programme work and Information Communication Technology (ICT) functions. In 2016 UNICEF committed to supporting organization-wide initiatives to both innovate and bring those new ideas to scale.

More than 130 staff participated in a GIC learning series aimed at enabling ICT staff (‘super users’) to support country offices with RapidPro deployments and scale-up. This includes providing hands-on support in using the system and building flows, to helping programme colleagues acquire connectivity and handling issues around hosting, data security and protection.

A RapidPro Scale-Up Project was launched in 2016 by the Programme Division, ICT Division and the Office of Innovation. Continuing through 2017, it focuses on applying the system to emergency programming and building up further evidence of the effectiveness of real-time information for strategic decision making.
“Hi friend…”

A closer look at the SMS BIZ/U-Report counselling programme in Mozambique

Alfabeto and Belmira are part of a small team of activists powering the SMS BIZ/U-Report, Mozambique’s counselling service for adolescents and young people.

Each day, the team responds to hundreds of text messages and provides information on a variety of issues, such as HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health, early marriage and violence against children.

SMS Biz/U-Report has been growing quickly and in one year over 57,000 young Mozambicans have already registered. Visit http://uni.cf/2nMDTOu for the full story.
Youth empowerment

In 2016, a million more young people in 16 additional countries gained the opportunity to engage in positive change for their peers by responding to polls, reporting on issues, building their knowledge and supporting child rights.

Over the course of the year, U-Report was used to unveil corruption in health facilities in Uganda, help shape the national strategy on violence against children in Indonesia, and increase the number of children immunized against polio (via outreach services) in Cameroon from 6 million to 8 million in a single month. These are just a few concrete examples.

Scale Up: No Longer Bound to SMS

UNICEF is embracing improvements to ensure that tools such as RapidPro remain accessible and easy to use.

In February 2016, U-Report was a partner at the launch of Facebook’s F8 developer conference. The partnership with Facebook enables young people to sign up and join U-Report via Facebook Messenger from anywhere in the world. In Myanmar alone, 30 U-Report Ambassadors recruited 10,000 new U-Reporters via Facebook Messenger.

In November a similar partnership was launched with Viber, also enabling U-Reporters to sign-up and engage through the messaging app. This is the first time Viber has partnered with a UN agency.

Engagement: Automated Helpline of the 21st Century

Another achievement in 2016 was the launch of U-Partners, a new tool that allows partners to easily monitor, flag and respond to important questions based on specific keywords. This tool has thus far helped UNICEF partners respond to over 300,000 messages, questions or statements from U-Reporters.

For example, with the aid of U-Partners, over 3,000 people have received legal guidance in Uganda, while in Pakistan young people are receiving advice on handwashing and menstruation. In Mozambique 26,000 questions on sexual reproductive health were answered in November alone.

Change: Real-time Data Enables Real-time Decision Making

During 2016 U-Report launched in 16 more countries and added 1.1 million U-Reporters, with each country supported by GIC.
“In Mozambique, 26,000 questions on sexual health answered in one month”

“In 2016, 16 new countries, 1.1 million new U-Reporters”

“A new U-Reporter every 30 seconds”

“In Myanmar, 30 U-Report Ambassadors recruited 10,000 U-Reporters via Facebook Messenger”
Access to information

The Internet of Good Things (IoGT) is a set of free mobile and web-based resources and applications. IoGT makes life-saving and life-improving information available for free, even on low-end devices. It is a platform anyone can access at any time.

Topics and issues addressed by IoGT in 2016 included emergency information on the Zika virus, HIV and sexual health advice for adolescents, child online protection tips and early learning material and care practices. IoGT provided advice on key ways that people – even in the remotest areas – can change their behaviour, be it handwashing tips or ensuring that babies survive and thrive.

New features to better reach and engage users were also developed and launched. These upgrades include two-way communication, comments on stories and articles, polls and surveys so users can express their opinions, and support for audio multimedia files to reach low-literacy audiences.

By the end of 2016, IoGT mobile sites were launched in 22 more countries, making it available in 56 countries and territories. More than 1 million internet users accessed UNICEF’s IoGT content in a single month. The number of IoGT users doubled from 5.3 million in 2015 to 10.7 million in 2016.

“Access to information is a right and sustainable development relies on an informed society.”
Impact on learning and behaviour change

In 2016 GIC began monitoring IoGT to better understand its impact and benefits for children and caregivers. The feedback has been very positive...

99% of respondents say these tips are practical

84% of respondents say they have learnt at least a few tips by reading GIC’s early childhood development content.
94% of respondents say they will apply all or most of these tips with their child.

98% of respondents think they will share some information they’ve learnt on Early Life Tips with their family or community.
“Browsing around, I found that the information was relevant, unique and presented in a way that I haven’t found elsewhere.”

Tanisea Campbell,
Mount Alvernia High School, Jamaica
Read her story: http://uni.cf/2mjMWtp
Kolibri is a free, on and offline platform developed by GIC in partnership with the Foundation for Learning Equality (FLE). The platform aggregates and adapts high-quality global and local educational resources to help students, educators, lifelong learners and a variety of educational institutions meet their learning objectives.

The GIC developed Kolibri with FLE as a strong, scalable, open-source platform for disseminating high-quality education resources finetuned to meet local needs. Kolibri can track learner journeys to ensure that tailored remedial materials are available alongside regular assessments to support teachers and self-directed students. The result is increased access to quality education for the most vulnerable. Content is available online, and is also offered to users in offline settings, with support for low-power hardware such as low-cost tablets or older computers.

First piloted in Uganda, plans are in place to roll out Kolibri with refugee children in Greece, with potential implementation throughout refugee communities in the Middle East.
Design for children

Human-Centred Design (HCD) combines rigorous inquiry and creative analysis to develop interventions suited to address complex challenges. Drawing on the tools of ethnography, journalism, and systems thinking, it produces outputs drawn from an understanding of the cultures, economics and environments that shape human experience.

Tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences, HCD is thus well suited to the creation of child-centred policies and programmes to ensure that all children survive and thrive.

The first of GIC’s innovation principles – ‘design with the user’ – helps to ensure that it addresses challenges and develops solutions in a user/human-centred way. HCD takes this further. As a methodology for improving the effectiveness of UNICEF’s work, HCD can strengthen results across the board.

One of the best documented examples of the HCD approach in action comes from Nicaragua, where UNICEF, the Government, and social impact firm Reboot worked together for change in the country’s Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region. Through this collaboration, Reboot and UNICEF leveraged HCD to ensure that policy makers worked with mothers, teachers, service providers and children – ‘from the individual child up’ – to create child-centred policies. This experience was successfully replicated in the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region with positive findings from an independent evaluation.

In Myanmar, UNICEF started a partnership with Point B to train social case managers from the Department of Social Welfare with design thinking and HCD methods. This was to help effectively carry out a new social case management system in a country that historically barely had any social services. The training was a great success: It helped case managers better realize the importance and objectives of their work, to engage more with local communities to support their work, and to improve collaboration with colleagues.

Work is now under way in other countries such as Malawi and Malaysia to advance the use of HCD as a methodology to support more inclusive and child-centred policies, programmes and services, and to increase the capacity of service providers to deliver results for children.
Designing Solutions for Indonesia’s Children in the Age of Haze

A group of 30 designers, creative tech people, development professionals and marketing experts convened in Jakarta to examine Indonesia’s haze problem that affects the health of thousands of children. Organized by PulseLab Jakarta in partnership with UNICEF and Reality Check Approach, the co-design workshop looked at ways to protect children. A philosophy of ‘human-centred design’, which placed children at the heart of the design process, animated each phase of the workshop – from research to brainstorming to prototyping. Visit http://bit.ly/2mWpWNv for more.