
Summary of Findings

What this document seeks to do

This document provides an overview of the purpose, outcomes and expected actions arising out of the 2012 Global Evaluation of the Application of a Human Rights Based Approach to UNICEF Programming. The full text Evaluation report and related items may be found here.

Rationale and objectives

As part of its commitment under the Medium Term Strategic Plan to undertake an evaluation of its two foundation strategies (Human Rights Based Approach to Programming and Gender Equality), the Evaluation Office commissioned in 2011 a Global Evaluation of the Application of a Human Rights Based Approach to UNICEF’s Programming. The purpose of the assignment – which is based on programming evidence from 2007 to the present - was to evaluate whether there is adequate organizational understanding and commitment to HRBAP, and to identify strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of HRBAP. Recommendations were sought to identify changes needed to make UNICEF more effective in applying HRBAP.

Methodology and conceptual analysis

The Evaluation drew upon both qualitative data (collected from interviews, focus groups and existing survey data) as well as quantitative data gleaned from extensive document reviews and field observation by Evaluation team members. The data gathering phase consisted of six Country Office missions to countries deemed representative in terms of their contexts: Cambodia, Chile, Haiti, Kenya and Serbia. Four Regional Office missions were conducted, to Geneva (CEE/CIS), Nairobi (ESARO), Panama City (TACRO) and Nairobi (ESARO). Information was also gathered on the situation in 38 Country Offices through document review, key informant interviews with stakeholders inside and outside of UNICEF, and a review of previous HRBAP assessments. The Evaluation was overseen by a reference group and was managed by UNICEF’s Evaluation Office.

After carefully researching the UNICEF approach to HRBAP and best contemporary thinking on HRBAP outside of UNICEF, the Evaluation team developed its conceptual framework to assess HRBAP application. This framework focuses on the program level and the corporate/institutional level, and uses a cross-cutting lens to understanding the effects of country context (with particular attention given to humanitarian environments), Focus Area, and programming phase. The conceptual framework consists of the five core principles that subsequently guided the Evaluation: normativity, non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency. More detail about the conceptual framework can be found in Chapter 2 of the report.
The findings

The Evaluation is organized in three blocks following the introductory 3 chapters. These blocks consist of: a) the review of how UNICEF conceptualizes HRBAP and how well understood it is within the organization (Chapter 4); b) how well HRBAP is applied at the field level (Chapter 5); and c) how well UNICEF maintains an enabling environment to develop organizational capacity and to allow HRBAP practice to flourish (Chapter 6).

The evaluators presented 49 findings and 14 recommendations. For ease of reference and understanding, this summary addresses the programmatic implications in five related categories - the “Five C’s”: Conceptualization, Coherence, Commitment, Comprehensiveness and Capacity. Key findings, recommendations and implications of each are noted next.

Conceptualization

UNICEF’s understanding of HRBAP is in line with global good practice (e.g. the UN Statement of Common Understanding, 2003). This understanding has been absorbed throughout the organization as a flexible and adaptable body of actions. While there are similarities and differences in the way in which Country Offices apply the HRBAP principles, the Evaluation finds that country context is a key determinant in the way they are applied. For example, strong government commitment to democracy and rule of law generally engender an application of all principles, including participation. By contrast, many emergency settings create acute difficulties in applying the principles. Full information on the conceptual framework used to carry out the Evaluation and how they generally play out in UNICEF programmes can be found in Chapter 2 of the report, particularly Finding 4.

Coherence

There is coherence between HRBAP and key UNICEF policies (e.g. the MTSP, Gender Policy) and sectoral strategies. This is highlighted by an increased focus on disparities, and marginalized and excluded groups within the context of the equity framework. The Evaluation however identifies numerous opportunities to foster greater coherence between HRBAP and Equity through strengthening the rights language of the latter and highlighting how integral equity is to human rights and HRBAP. There was surprisingly little difference noted in HRBAP adherence and coherence across the different Focus Areas/Sectors. Even when there was little overt conceptualization in HRBAP terms, the sectors are largely acting in ways generally consistent with HRBAP principles. Of all the Focus Areas, Child Protection had the consistently best coherence with the full HRBAP approach. More details on coherence are located in Chapter 2, particularly Findings 5, 6 and 7.

Commitment

There continues to be overall high commitment to HRBAP within the organisation, particularly due to its role in supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Externally, UNICEF is perceived to demonstrate effective leadership on HRBAP, including within humanitarian and emergency contexts, particularly in light of being among only five UN agencies to adopt an organisational framework (i.e. 1998 Executive Directive) and through presently co-chairing the UNDG Human Rights Mainstreaming Mechanism. UNICEF received very high marks from the evaluators for its meaningful engagement with multiple UN human rights bodies in Geneva and New York. At the country level, Representatives and Deputies were found to play a critical role in ensuring HRBAP standards in programme preparation, implementation and monitoring. The Evaluation recommends that efforts to be made to sustain this commitment by developing, at the highest level, an overall strategy for applying
an HRBAP and increasing accountability for HRBAP at all levels of the organisation. It recommends developing an HRBAP policy to replace the 1998 Executive Directive as a means of sustaining and building the momentum of the past gains in the application of HRPAB, as well as more structured engagement with the treaty body system and increased investments in capacity building across all levels of staff. For details on commitment, see Chapters 4 and 5 of the report, especially the content surrounding Findings 10, 11, 15, 22, and 29.

**Comprehensiveness**

While efforts are being made by UNICEF staff to integrate all HRBAP principles into programming, this has not been comprehensive or consistent. The CO assessment found that UNICEF’s adherence to the principle of normativity, particularly in regard to the CRC, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights instruments is the best applied principle across the organization. There appears to be a mixed application of the participation principle, coupled with lack of explicit references to how the participation of rights holders affects programme strategies. Non-discrimination is rated as satisfactory to weak, due in part to data collection and disaggregation challenges. Accountability and transparency are also satisfactorily to weakly applied. The programming implications of lack of consistency in the application of the principle of non-discrimination in particular manifests itself in the exclusion of key vulnerable groups across UNICEF regions, Focus Areas and contexts, in spite of commendable efforts to mitigate this. In noting the absence of a systematic approach to ensuring that UNICEF programming is fully inclusive, the Evaluation serves as an important entry point for appreciating challenges of programme implementation from an equity perspective. More on comprehensiveness can be found in Chapter 5 of the report, particularly Findings 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29.

**Capacity**

UNICEF staff are, by and large, integrating HRBAP concepts and principles into their work. The Evaluation however notes that this is substantially based on their own understanding rather than on knowledge of the organisational theory and principles of HRBAP and its application in different sectors and contexts. Staff therefore require greater assistance in interpreting and operationalizing HRBAP in all sectors, throughout the entire programme cycle and in difficult country contexts. Currently available guidance and tools do not provide sufficient support to staff in implementing an HRBAP. Recommended actions include improving the quality of HRBAP training, improvements in recruitment and performance assessment practices, and examining different organisational staffing options to strengthen the ability of staff to implement HRBAP. For details on findings around capacity, see Chapters 5 and 6 with special reference to Findings 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43.

**Additional Information**

This summary does not cover the richness of the full evaluation. The report and supporting materials about the evaluation can be found through the links provided above. Please stay alert for announcements about web seminars on the evaluation findings and other events where all can participate.