Social Protection Strategic Framework

Integrated Social Protection Systems:
Enhancing equity for children

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UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework
Concept Note for Consultation

Summary and key messages

The Social Protection Strategic Framework outlines UNICEF’s approach to social protection, including priorities for current work and a proposed agenda for future action. UNICEF’s work in social protection is a response to the organisation’s mandate to fulfill children’s rights, including the right to access services and an adequate standard of living. Social protection contributes to UNICEF’s equity-focused approach to development, as it helps to ensure equal access to services and is conducive to equitable human development outcomes for children.

The Framework presents UNICEF’s conceptual understanding of social protection: proposed definition, core components, as well as rationale for UNICEF’s work on child-sensitive social protection.

UNICEF understands social protection as the set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation. In this sense, it identifies four core components: social transfers, programmes to ensure access to services, social support and care services, and legislation and policy reform to remove inequalities in access to services or livelihoods/economic opportunities. UNICEF recognizes social protection as essential in furthering the rights of children and their families to an adequate standard of living and in achieving equitable outcomes, as well as a way to address the multidimensional nature of children’s vulnerabilities.

The Framework promotes the development and strengthening of integrated social protection systems as a highly effective approach for addressing the multiple and compounding vulnerabilities faced by children and their families. It provides an overview of key design and implementation considerations, including instruments, structures, and challenges. The Framework also outlines three core principles for action: (i) Inclusive Social Protection; (ii) Progressive Realization of Universal Coverage, and (iii) National Ownership and Context Specificity.

Additionally, as a way forward, the Framework discusses emerging issues for social protection programming, including humanitarian action, youth development, urbanization and migration, and identifies potential roles for social protection, as well as research and practice gaps.

Based on UNICEF’s mandate as well as its local and global capacity and experience, the document discusses the organization’s potential contribution and value-added vis-à-vis other actors and partners in the field, and within the global social protection agenda.
I. Introduction

UNICEF is committed to social protection as an essential intervention for the realization of children’s rights to social security, social insurance and an adequate standard of living.

Social protection is also a crucial policy tool for supporting equity and social justice. Social protection measures strengthen the capacity of families to care for their children and remove barriers to services that stand in the way of achieving goals and progress for children. Evidence as well as UNICEF’s own experience demonstrate the role of social protection in improving the lives of children, families and communities across the MDGs and beyond, often with stronger impacts for the poorest and most disadvantaged. Social protection is thus an essential channel for filling the gap between populations that are adequately reached and those that are excluded, and for promoting equity in access to services and the realization of children’s rights.

UNICEF has been working on social protection for many years as part of its global mandate to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is an increasingly influential partner in social protection at national and international levels. UNICEF’s engagement in social protection spans over 124 programmes in 88 countries. This reflects a growing number of country programmes engaging in social protection policy, cash transfers, and family and social support services, including those for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), as well as a number of other areas. Yet, in many ways, this widespread engagement is also a product of framing long-standing work in new and explicit ways: aspects of UNICEF’s existing work can be considered part of a social protection system – UNICEF’s work on education user-fee abolition, health insurance, and nutrition supplementation, for example.

UNICEF work in social protection also includes a strong commitment and leadership in promoting the Social Protection Floor Initiative - joint effort to promote access to essential services and social transfer for the poor and vulnerable - including supporting countries in the development of social protection priorities within this framework.

The Social Protection Strategic Framework aims to provide a clear framework for UNICEF’s work on social protection; argue the case for social protection and children; articulate UNICEF’s position on key issues, providing clear arguments and evidence; and outline a policy agenda for social protection and children, including UNICEF’s contribution within a broader social protection agenda. The Framework is currently undergoing consultation with external partners and stakeholders, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2011.

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1 Articles 26 and 27 – Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Supported by other articles, including 18, 19, 28 and 32. http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm
II. Making the case for social protection and children: The role of social protection in ensuring children’s well-being and contributing to national development

Increased relevance of social protection in current context

Although social protection policies and programmes have been included as key components in the poverty reduction agendas of many countries, current developments and recent trends have increased their relevance and heightened the political momentum around them. Some of the key drivers for the renewed emphasis on social protection programmes and their proliferation worldwide are: concerns about the impact of increasing volatility at the macro and household levels, the persistence or increasing inequalities in economic and human development, the re-examination of sustainable development goals in light of the impacts of climate change, and changing population trends due to demographic changes and population movement. The Framework discusses these drivers and how social protection interventions have become a key policy tool to prevent and address global transformations and their impacts at the national and household levels.

The importance of children in social protection

The Framework discusses UNICEF’s rationale for social protection and children, including (i) internationally recognized children’s rights to social protection; (ii) child-sensitive social protection in response to the multidimensional and dynamic nature of children’s vulnerabilities; (iii) the high returns to investment on children and impacts on intergenerational transmission of poverty; and (iv) social protection as a tool for achieving equitable outcomes.

Children’s right to social protection

Social protection is central to the UNICEF mission of realizing children’s rights, including a focus on the most disadvantaged children. As recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children have the right to social security and insurance and to an adequate standard of living. Social protection supports the realization of other rights laid out in the CRC and human rights documents. Social protection interventions contribute to preventing, removing and eliminating the social and economic vulnerabilities of children, women and their families. As such, it is considered to be a strategic and essential tool in helping children and their families meet basic needs and in expanding their opportunities to reach their full potential.

Multidimensional nature of children’s vulnerabilities: child-Sensitive social protection

In addition to sharing many of the same sources of vulnerability faced by their families and communities, children face age-specific vulnerabilities which differ from those of adults or have more serious consequences, such as increased vulnerability to malnutrition, disease and abuse. As we know, children also tend to be over-represented among the poor – as stated by the 2005 Progress on Children Report, more than half of children in


\[^3\] CRC. See articles 26 and 27.
developing countries suffer from at least one form of severe deprivation.4

Based on UNICEF’s work on multidimensional child poverty and disparities, UNICEF has a unique role to play in ensuring that social protection programmes are responsive to children’s rights and needs. Social protection helps to protect people during vulnerable periods in the lifecycle. Child-sensitive social protection, therefore, considers different dimensions of children’s well-being, and addresses “the inherent social disadvantages, risks and vulnerabilities children may be born into, as well as those acquired later in childhood.”5 It is also incumbent upon UNICEF to make the case for children within social protection activities, and for the role social protection plays in improving children’s lives, survival and development, while breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

**Investing in children**

Child-sensitive social protection has the potential to impact long-term development, enhance economic returns as well as contribute to social processes and cohesion. In other words, investing in children’s human capital – nutrition, education, and health care – can have impacts on long-term productivity by enhancing the labour force in the long run. Furthermore, investing in early ages can potentially prevent and counteract cycles of poverty and exclusion. Social protection programmes and polices remove barriers to access to services and thus contribute to human capital accumulation and inter-generational cycles of exclusion. Moreover, access to social protection can potentially reduce instability in future generations, strengthening the social contract between governments and civil society.

**Social protection as a tool for achieving equitable access, while contributing to equitable outcomes**

In line with UNICEF’s mission of “ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children”6 and based on a human rights approach to development as well as the principles of universality, non-discrimination and participation, UNICEF is promoting an equity-focused approach to the realization of children’s rights. Such an approach promotes interventions that reduce and/or eliminate unfair and avoidable circumstances that deprive groups – including children – of their rights. In this process, there is a need to understand and address the underlying causes of inequity and to ensure equal access to services – education, health care, sanitation, clean water, protection – and resources. Although inequalities affect both adults and children, the impact of inequality on children last throughout their life-cycle and may hinder their development potential and long-term wellbeing.7

Social protection represents a critical policy and programming tool for addressing inequity. Social protection interventions tackle economic and social barriers that prevent access to services and hinder families’ ability to provide for their children’s wellbeing, focusing on the most vulnerable sectors and thus contributing to a fairer redistribution of resources and benefits. For instance, cash transfer programmes provide households with additional income to address disparities between wealth quintiles. In this sense,

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households are better able to invest in children’s wellbeing and human development. Furthermore, legal and policy reform can remove discrimination and unfair treatment towards excluded individuals, including women and children, thereby ensuring their equal access to services.

III. UNICEF’s approach: Integrated systems for equitable outcomes

UNICEF’s approach to social protection recognizes the importance of understanding the linkages between multidimensional poverty and vulnerability; the need to address economic and social vulnerabilities, and the promotion of integrated social protection systems to achieve equitable outcomes.

Definition and conceptual framework

UNICEF defines social protection as “the set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation”. Social protection is essential to furthering UNICEF’s commitment to the realization of the rights of children, women and families to an adequate standard of living and essential services.

Within this broad set of policies, and based on this definition, UNICEF’s work on social protection concentrates on four social protection components:

- **Social transfers:** transfers to protect and prevent individuals and households from economic shocks while supporting the accumulation of human and financial assets (Cash transfers, food transfers, public work programmes, nutritional supplementation);

- **Programmes to ensure access to services:** programmes to overcome social barriers to access at the community, household and individual levels (cash transfers, birth registration, user fee abolition, health insurance);

  - **Social support and care services:** human resource-intensive interventions to identify and respond to social vulnerability and deprivation at the child and household levels (Child care services, home base care);

  - **Legislation and policy reform:** changes to policies/legislation in order to remove inequalities in access to services or livelihoods/economic opportunities, thereby helping to address issues of discrimination and exclusion (maternity leave, inheritance rights, employment guarantee schemes).

UNICEF’s definition of social protection is based on an understanding of poverty and deprivation as a multi-dimensional and dynamic reality. This understanding of poverty leads to three central concepts that underpin UNICEF’s work on social protection, which have policy implications for social protection in practice:

- Vulnerability entails both exposure to risk and the capacity to respond and cope.
- Both social and economic vulnerabilities are important, and often intertwined.
- Vulnerabilities are shaped by underlying structural social, political and economic factors.
Understanding vulnerability matters because it points to ways in which social protection policy and programmes can be strengthened in order to achieve better outcomes. The implications for social protection in practice flow directly from the three central concepts in understanding vulnerability. If vulnerability is the relationship between risk and the capacity to respond, social protection must work on both reducing exposure to risks and strengthening individuals' and households' capacities to deal with these threats in an integrated manner.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of considering both economic and social vulnerabilities, and how one feeds into the other, highlights the need for a broader range of social protection instruments to achieve desired objectives, and for more integrated social protection packages or systems in order address intersecting and compounding vulnerabilities.

Finally, for social protection to reduce vulnerability, it must also tackle the underlying economic and social relationships that shape it. This is not to say that social protection alone will change these structures or that all programmes that address these are social protection; social protection is obviously part of much broader social changes. However, social protection can contribute in two ways: (i) explicitly tackling power, discrimination and inequality within programme objectives, including considering different types of instruments; and (ii) adjusting the design and implementation of social protection programmes, as well as through greater attention to participation and empowerment of participants, and staff training.

**Integrated systems for equitable outcomes**

UNICEF calls for the development of integrated social protection systems that address multiple age and gender-specific vulnerabilities through multi-sector social protection policies and programmes. This implies integrating social protection interventions with sector objectives, with different actors at all levels, as well as with parallel investments in supply and quality of services. At the same time, it implies building and/or strengthening key structures and mechanisms to address social and economic vulnerabilities of children and their families throughout the life-cycle.

By “integrated” we mean social protection systems which:

- address economic and social vulnerabilities, and their intersection;
- require a mix of social protection interventions based on assessed needs and context;
- facilitate inter-sectoral coordination, in order to address the multidimensional nature of poverty and exclusion and the practical necessity of effectively implementing social protection programmes which impact the work of multiple sectors.

Furthermore, sustainable and effective systems also require:

- coordinating interventions with appropriate supply-side investments to enhance availability and quality of services;
- framing social protection strategies within a broader set of social and economic policies that promote human development and growth.

**Social protection “systems”** identify key structures and mechanisms that facilitate addressing multiple vulnerabilities in a holistic and integrated manner. This includes: defining policy frameworks and legislation where social protection policies and programmes are mainstreamed into
poverty reduction strategies; building single-registry systems for beneficiaries; identifying appropriate and effective institutional arrangements to facilitate and ensure coordination among sectors, levels and financing mechanisms (horizontally and vertically); monitoring and evaluating systems for social protection expenditure and performance, among others.

The Framework discusses the rationale behind the integrated systems approach, the elements of an integrated system and certain key design and implementation considerations. The Framework also acknowledges the challenges of an integrated systems approach, and draws on examples of this approach in different developmental and political contexts.

Three key principles for UNICEF’s work on social protection:

Inclusive social protection:

Social protection is a critical tool for advancing inclusive and equitable outcomes. UNICEF has a unique role to play in ensuring that social protection interventions are responsive and sensitive to the needs of all children, given the particular vulnerabilities and risks they face. In this context, one of the key principles for UNICEF work in this area is inclusive social protection: promoting interventions that are sensitive to the different dimensions of exclusion and their manifestations.

Mainstreaming inclusive social protection entails considering: what are the dimensions of exclusion and their most common manifestations? What are the shared vulnerabilities faced by excluded groups? How can social protection contribute to social inclusion, addressing multiple (and compounded) dimensions? And how does one ensure that social protection interventions and programmes are inclusive, i.e.: gender sensitive, as well as sensitive to the added vulnerabilities of excluded groups?

In other words, inclusive social protection implies moving away from targeted approaches towards particular groups and looking at the underlying causes of exclusion that these groups share – such as discrimination and stigma, traditional social norms preventing use of services, and limited assets and visibility – while considering the additional vulnerabilities associated with each specific dimension. From a child-sensitive perspective, most vulnerable children often experience age-specific vulnerabilities compounded by other sources of vulnerability shared at household and community levels, such as gender, ethnicity and/or disability.

**Social Protection Floor: an integral component in the development of integrated social protection systems.**

In response to the global financial and economic crises, the UN system chief Executives board (CEB) established the Social Protection Floor Initiative, as a joint effort to promote access to essential services and social transfer for the poor and vulnerable. In other words, a Social Protection Floor (SPF) is the first level of a comprehensive national social protection system that helps to realize human rights for all through guaranteeing: universal access to essential services (such as health, education, housing, water and sanitation and other services as nationally defined); and social transfers in cash or in kind, to guarantee income security, food security, adequate nutrition, and access to essential services.

UNICEF’s call and work to strengthening integrated social protection systems includes supporting countries in the implementation and priorities in line with developing a Social Protection Floor.
**Progressive realization of universal coverage**

As a human-rights organization, UNICEF considers universality a key principle of its work on social protection. UNICEF supports universal coverage: all people shall be covered by appropriate and effective social protection mechanisms. In other words, universal coverage entails that social protection programmes and schemes are available to everyone according to need. A universal approach has the potential to expand the net of protection and reduce exclusion errors, as well as reduce the stigma associated with some targeting methods.

At the same time, UNICEF recognizes the challenges inherent in providing universal coverage given resource and capacity constraints and the state of development of social protection structures and mechanisms in individual countries.

With this in mind, UNICEF advocates for *progressive realization*, supporting countries in identifying and building the most appropriate approach or mix of interventions that will enhance social and economic policy objectives, and be more conducive to the ultimate goal of universalization. In other words, although the universal coverage of social protection is the ultimate goal, there is recognition that reaching such a goal may require subsequent steps: for instance, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

**National systems and context-specificity**

UNICEF supports long-term, nationally owned and led systems. Work on social protection must fall within and support the national framework. Only in exceptional circumstances would UNICEF consider supporting ad-hoc, temporary safety nets.

In other words, except in cases where government capacity to implement or coordinate is weak or when there is a humanitarian crisis, UNICEF will not implement or fund others’ implementation of social protection programmes outside of government collaboration. This principle does not preclude UNICEF from supporting others – civil society, children, etc. – in their initiatives to influence, participate, and engage with social protection policy and programmes. In addition, there is a recognition that there is no ‘one size fits all’ blueprint for social protection policies. Different types and combinations of programmes, as well as different design and implementation modalities, are required to respond to context-specific vulnerabilities, national priorities, and national capacities and constraints.
IV. Integrated social protection systems

Multi-sectoral approach: Social protection as a tool for enhancing sector outcomes

Given the importance of integrating interventions to address multidimensional vulnerabilities, as well as to contribute to equitable access and inclusion, the Framework reviews the potential linkages between social protection and sector outcomes, as well as possible ways to better take advantage of these linkages. For instance, well-functioning social protection systems can contribute to addressing some of the underlying causes of increased risk to violence, abuse and neglect of children, while at the same time prevent children from being separated from their parents and/or care-givers. Similarly, interventions such as social health insurance, removal of user fees and cash transfers can reduce financial barriers to accessing effective health services and/or covering related costs such as transportation and supplies. It can also be argued that reforms and anti-discriminatory legislation, such as maternity leave and/or accessible child care, allows parents to spend more quality time with their children and thus contribute to improving the quality of an environment that is conducive to the healthy and balanced development of young children.

Reaching specific sector outcomes such as child survival and/or equitable education for all relies on different enabling factors, namely: (i) equitable access to services and goods; (ii) social inclusion; as well as (iii) changes in behavior and (iv) supply of adequate and efficient services. As shown in Graph 1, social protection can potentially have a direct impact on the removal of social and economic barriers to basic services and can thus contribute to ensuring equitable and inclusive access to services and goods, while at the same time indirectly fostering and contributing to the increased availability and quality of services.

Graph 1: Social Protection and Sector Outcomes

Direct impact: Social protection can contribute to remove barriers – social and economic – to access and demand/use services and essential goods/resources

Indirect impact: Social protection can foster improvements in supply of quality and pertinent services as well as contribute to changes in behavior
The Framework discusses linkages between social protection and key sectors, including education, health, nutrition, early childhood development, HIV/AIDS, child protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene. Each section identifies and discusses sector-specific vulnerabilities and evidence of the impact of social protection on enhancing certain outcomes. Although existing evidence is mostly concentrated in specific sectors such as health, education and nutrition, the Framework discusses the potential role of social protection in reducing gaps in access and enhancing income security.

Child protection

The Framework recognizes the conceptual and programmatic synergies between social protection and child protection, as well as the ways in which social protection can potentially contribute to enhancing child protection outcomes that address specific vulnerabilities. For instance, social protection can contribute to both the ‘preventive’ and the ‘protection’ functions of child protection, addressing some of the underlying risk factors of abuse, violence and exploitation, while at the same time increasing families’ and communities’ resilience and capacity to recover and respond to impacts. Moreover, UNICEF’s approach to child protection has increasingly moved towards the creation and strengthening of systems to support prevention and response to risks. Social protection can play a key role in strengthening many aspects of this system – mainly access to basic social services such as health and education, enhancing caregivers’ capacity, as well as relevant legislation and policy reform – thereby enhancing child protection outcomes. The Framework identifies and discusses child protection policies and instruments serving social protection functions, including birth registration and family support services. At the same time, it reviews programmatic linkages that enable a multidimensional and comprehensive approach to addressing children’s vulnerabilities to poverty, exclusion, as well as violence, neglect and abuse.

Health and nutrition

Ensuring access to health and nutrition is a critical component of social protection interventions, which have proven effective at enhancing households’ capacity to overcome financial, economic as well as social barriers to access of health services, especially among the most vulnerable populations. Social protection plays several critical roles, namely: preventing the poverty-inducing effects of ill-health as well as healthcare and nutrition costs; protecting vulnerable populations by reducing ill-health, disease and inadequate nutrition; and promoting real incomes and capabilities by smoothing spending on health and nutritious diets while increasing productivity as a result of improved health and nutrition. The Framework discusses examples of health and nutrition-specific vulnerabilities while discussing potential interventions for addressing them.

HIV-sensitive social protection

HIV-sensitive social protection refers to a “strategic and systemic social response to poverty, marginalization and associated harms, that also protects vulnerable children in the face of challenges posed by HIV through links with other sectoral or issue-focused programmes.”¹

The Framework discusses how HIV-sensitive social protection can reduce vulnerability to HIV infection, improve and extend the lives of people living with HIV, and support individuals and households. Specifically, social protection interventions have the potential to contribute to (i) reducing barriers to access (structural, economic and social) to HIV/AIDS services, mainly prevention and treatment; and (ii) reducing

¹ UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, 2008
the impacts of HIV/AIDS, such as loss of productivity and human capital, financial barriers to health services, increased financial burden and medical expenses, social stigma, and discrimination (which excludes people from access to services), while enhancing the capacity of households to care for family members and their needs. In addition, the Framework discusses the importance of integrated and comprehensive social protection systems for addressing the multidimensional and multisectoral risks and vulnerabilities faced by people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as the potential of these systems for supplementing responses at all points along the disease pathway.

The Framework discusses specific examples where social protection has been developed as a critical response for children affected by HIV and AIDS, providing risk mitigation as well as responses to addressing structural economic and social vulnerabilities.

**Education**

Equitable and inclusive education systems depend on both demand and supply-side interventions. On the one hand, lack of appropriate infrastructure, socio-culturally pertinent systems, as well as programmes and policies to ensure quality of services (i.e.: curricula, certification of teachers, etc.) are at the core of education service delivery. On the other hand, financial and social barriers to accessing education services – such as income, opportunity costs associated with sending children to school (labor trade-off), school fees (formal and informal), cultural/awareness barriers, gender biases, distance and location – are key factors in determining education outcomes.

The Framework discusses how social protection interventions can make investments in education more equitable. In other words, the extent to which these interventions can contribute to removing some of the main barriers to access of education services, increasing demand and use which, alongside investments in service provision, can enhance human development outcomes.

The Framework also draws on the experience and approach of the Out of School Children Initiative and discusses the role of social protection interventions including abolition of school fees, grants, subsidies, cash transfers, school feeding programmes and micro-supplements, as key responses to addressing the underlying causes and determinants of children not being at school.

**Early Childhood Development (ECD)**

As a composite outcome, ECD entails interventions in the first critical years of development that promote children's social and emotional development, educational readiness, improved health and nutritional status, cognitive development, physical and motor development. UNICEF's work in ECD has tended to concentrate on improving parental knowledge and skills to provide for young children's multidimensional survival, physical and psycho-social needs. Interventions have focused on: preventing abuse, neglect and abandonment in the early years; increasing access to quality early childhood health and education services; and prioritizing the inclusion of marginalized children and families.

The Framework discusses the potential contribution of social protection to improved ECD outcomes by: supporting families' caring of their children, dismantling barriers that inhibit access to or investments in services, and ensuring the availability of quality basic services.

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**Water and Sanitation (WASH)**

Access of WASH-related services is largely dependent on the supply of services but also on the affordability of services, gender dynamics and information regarding hygiene, sanitation and environmental practices. Although WASH is an area with which social protection linkages are still emerging, the Framework discusses the potential role of social protection interventions in enhancing WASH-related outcomes. In other words, it discusses how social protection may directly impact access to safe water and sanitation coverage by removing social and financial barriers (start-up and maintenance), and indirectly affecting behavioral change by linking benefits to complementary activities such as training and awareness campaigns on hygiene practices, water safety, open defecation, and other.

**Design consideration and implementation priorities**

The Framework calls for the development and the strengthening of integrated social protection systems as the most effective way to address the multidimensional nature of children’s vulnerabilities. As an integral component of UNICEF’s approach, the Framework presents an overview of some of the challenges associated with the design and implementation of integrated social protection systems: how to identify the best strategy and/or mix of interventions? What are the most appropriate mechanisms and structures for effective implementation? How to finance interventions? How to assess results and impacts?

Although not intended as an exhaustive or detailed assessment or guidance, the Framework highlights: i) the role of vulnerability assessments in identifying the most appropriate approach and interventions; (ii) institutional arrangements, coordination mechanisms and structures to facilitate systems integration; (iii) monitoring and evaluation and participation approaches; and (iv) critical considerations associated with inclusive design. A discussion of some of the issues associated with financing, as well as political and institutional contexts and dynamics is also considered. In addition, the Framework discusses UNICEF’s position in relation to specific design and policy debates including conditionality and benefit size.

**The role of vulnerability assessments**

The Framework discusses the role of vulnerability assessments in deciding what the most appropriate and effective set/comboction of interventions are; how they fit into a wnder social protection strategy; how they complement each other and how they enhance expected sectoral outcomes. As a key starting point, child poverty and vulnerability assessments can help understand the vulnerabilities and multiple deprivations faced by children, women and households. Based on a multidimensional poverty approach, a solid understanding of the factors that render different children, women and households vulnerable and, consecutively, a prioritization among these is critical to providing some guidance on the most effective approach and/or potential interventions.
**Institutional arrangements, coordination mechanisms and structures to facilitate systems integration**

Effective implementation implies: establishing appropriate structures to provide strategic direction, as well as strong administrative and institutional capacity for implementing and developing programmes; establishing mechanisms to ensure appropriate administration of systems; as well as ensuring horizontal and vertical linkages. The Framework discusses different institutional options for facilitating integration and a systems-approach to social protection, as well as key mechanisms and structures – e.g. single registries and Management and Information Systems (MIS) – to ensure effective management of information, programme management and accountability.

**Horizontal and vertical linkages (multisector coordination, supply side investments and national/regional linkages)**

Effective implementation implies ensuring strong horizontal and vertical linkages. Horizontal linkages mean developing incentive mechanisms for identifying and operationalizing links between social protection programmes and sector outcomes, including inter-ministerial coordination bodies, and/or common targeting systems, etc. And vertical linkages entail ensuring that different bodies and/or levels – national, regional, municipal, community – involved in implementation are coordinated. The Framework reviews some examples of strategies to create incentives for horizontal and vertical integration, as well as some of the most relevant operational challenges.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Framework examines how monitoring and evaluation structures can potentially enhance policy, as well as operational design and implementation. A discussion of some key issues to consider when implementing monitoring and evaluation processes is also included. In addition, the framework includes a reflection of the state of evidence on social protection impacts and outcomes, key conclusions that can be inferred from the existing evidence, and research gaps.

**Participation and accountability**

UNICEF’s work in social protection is framed within the human rights concepts of universality, accountability, non-discrimination and participation.

The Framework discusses: what do we mean by participation in the context of social protection systems? How do we operationalize participation to ensure that particularly those who are excluded, marginalized and less likely to have a voice or power – children, women, youth, indigenous groups and children with disabilities – are included in interventions and are able to claim their rights?

**Financing**

While the extent to which social protection programmes result in medium-term and long-term benefits is widely recognized, a key constraint and challenge that has emerged in the international development and policy discourse revolves around financing.

The Framework discusses affordability, costing and financing issues around social protection systems, including: different mechanisms and options available for assessing affordability and developing cost estimates; challenges in financing integrated interventions (e.g.: political economy, donor coordination, fiscal constraints, high initial costs, the inter-sectoral nature of social protection, counter-cyclical demand, etc.; the financing options available (domestic and
international); different approaches and strategies between LIC and MICs.

Institutional capacity

A key challenge in the effective implementation of integrated social protection systems is institutional and administrative capacity at all levels: national, regional and local/community levels. The Framework reviews some of the most pressing institutional challenges in terms of human and financial capacity, and the potential role for UNICEF support in the development of countries’ capacity to design, implement and effectively deliver social protection services.

Politics of social protection

At a global level, most of the discussion on social protection has been focused on policy, technical and programming aspects. However, implementers at country level are also confronted by the politics of social protection. The Framework acknowledges the importance of politics in social protection programming and discusses the extent to which the political context and political economy can influence the approach and design of social protection interventions, as well as their potential impact on state-citizen dynamics.

The Framework provides an overview of some of the key elements to consider, including: (i) formal and informal institutions, such as policy and legal frameworks, and social norms that can have a strong influence on how social protection is perceived and understood; (ii) decision-making actors – including policy makers, parties, elites and donors – and their pressures and incentives in defining social protection strategies, as well as their role in the decision-making process around public expenditures and fiscal space; (iii) governance structures that would allow effective implementation, as well as transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Key debates on design

Building on UNICEF’s on-going work, value-added and expertise, the Framework outlines the organization’s position on some critical debates in design, including: conditionality, scaling up and expansion, and benefit size.

Conditionality

Cash transfer programmes have become one of the preferred and widely used social protection instruments across regions. There is increasing evidence on the impact and outcomes of both conditional cash transfers (which are given to beneficiaries conditional on particular actions such as sending children to school or attending regular health visits), mainly from Latin America, and unconditional transfers (transfers given to beneficiaries without any specific requirements, beyond eligibility). Although there is evidence to suggest that both have positive outcomes, the particular role and attribution to conditionality remains an open debate.

As a rights organization, UNICEF has been mostly involved in supporting unconditional transfers and programmes. However, support to conditional schemes has also been considered in countries such as Kenya and Indonesia. The Framework outlines key factors to assess when
considering conditional vs. unconditional transfers, including: existing capacity (technical and financial), such as capacity to enforce compliance; the added cost and technical expertise required from monitoring systems; the availability of services, etc.

**Piloting and scaling up of programmes**

Particularly with cash transfers but also with other types of social protection interventions, pilots have been a popular model. Starting interventions on a smaller scale has certain advantages, including opportunities to modify and improve design, building capacity, and building evidence to help evaluate and make the case for going to scale. However, the proliferation of pilots has also highlighted some of the challenges of this approach.

The Framework reviews issues to consider, including: what is the potential for scaling-up if the pilot is successful (i.e. the model and capacity & finance requirements need to be scale-able); and how to facilitate a “learning by doing” process, committing to expansion over time, but recognizing that getting it perfect from the start is impossible.

**Benefit Size**

There is considerable evidence on the impact of social protection programmes, particularly cash transfers, on different social outcomes. However, there is somewhat less empirical evidence on the particular components – such as benefit structure and size – of such instruments and the extent to which these impact outcomes.

The Framework discusses some of the elements to be considered when identifying the most appropriate design, including: trade-offs between a simple benefit structure and significantly more sophisticated designs; potential unintended effects on intra-household and gender dynamics; the size of transfer in relation to the objectives of enhancing households’ capabilities to reduce and/or remove financial barriers of access and thus have an impact on poverty and consumption levels; and the heterogeneity of beneficiaries (i.e.: gender, age), which may influence the elasticity of certain outcomes and thus require the introduction of specific changes for responding to such differences.
V. Inclusive Social Protection

As mentioned earlier, the design of social protection programmes and policies need to assess how they can potentially contribute to social inclusion, while at the same time be sensitive to specific vulnerabilities and impacts on children and their families.

In general terms, mainstreaming social inclusion implies considering:

- **Age and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities** of children and adults throughout the life-cycle when assessing the most appropriate interventions;

- **Intra-household dynamics and balance of power**: even though most social protection programmes are household-targeted, it is essential to consider the mechanisms and intra-household dynamics that may affect how children are reached, with particular attention to the balance of power between men and women within the household and broader community in order to ensure that design does not exacerbate exclusion and/or is conducive to benefitting all children in the household;

- **Participation and accountability** mechanisms for including citizens and potential programme participants in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection systems and programmes;

- **Dimensions of exclusion and added vulnerabilities** making special provisions to reach children and adults who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including those that are marginalized due to their gender, disability, lack of parental care, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS status or other factors.

The Framework discusses some dimensions of inclusion including gender, ethnicity and/or minority status and disability, including key considerations in terms of design, implementation and evaluation.

The Framework discusses some dimensions of inclusion including gender, ethnicity and/or minority status and disability, including key considerations in terms of design, implementation and evaluation.

Table I\(^\text{10}\) presents examples of how adjustments in design and implementation of social protection programmes and policies can address the specific vulnerabilities associated with the three dimensions of exclusion previously mentioned.

\(^{10}\) Extract from full version table available in Social Protection Strategic Framework (draft under review)
### Inclusive Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Disability</th>
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</table>
| Inclusive design | - Adjustments in transfer size and targeting to address specific gender vulnerabilities.  
- Transfer recipient and potential unintended impacts on intra-household dynamics  
- Eligibility criteria which does not exclude women benefits  
- Collection and distribution points that does not exacerbate time poverty while addressing potential mobility restrictions  
- Facilitating child-care services to encourage participation of women in public work programmes | - Adjustment of the registry systems as well as targeting instruments (i.e.: surveys) in order to include auto-identification criterion, as well as community validation of potential beneficiaries.  
- Selection of interventions that consider socio-cultural characteristics  
- Considering geographic location of vulnerable indigenous communities in delivery mechanisms | - Considering adjusting benefit size to include added costs associated with disability treatment and care  
- Appropriate mix of interventions to address vulnerabilities  
- Considering specific barriers to access benefits; adjustment in design of co-responsibilities to respond to the characteristics of children with disabilities and their families. |

| Inclusive implementation | - Ensuring that men and women are actively encouraged to participate in program- at all stages; developing adequate awareness raising and information mechanisms and channels on program’s benefits and processes  
- Complementary activities  
- Integrate social transfers or other instruments into broader social inclusion interventions | - Consultation and information sessions with indigenous stakeholders to increase the understanding and knowledge on the benefits  
- Family support to beneficiaries to enhance impact of transfers. | - Complementary activities: outreach and information |

| Inclusive evaluation | - Development of gender-specific (indicators)  
- Collection of gender differentiated data to monitor and assess impacts on gender dynamics  
- Participation of beneficiaries in accountability/social audit mechanisms, etc. | - Participation in the design and implementation and evaluation (ie: social audit) of social protection interventions.  
- Promote the integration of ethnic-disaggregated data in national census and/or socio-economic surveys to enhance evaluation of impacts of programmes | - Disaggregated data into national surveys and census, as well as in baselines for programmes’ evaluation to measure impacts |

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11 Holmes Rebecca and Nicola Jones (2010)” How to design and implement gender-sensitive social protection programmes” ODI Tool-kit.
VI. Key emerging areas for social protection

Changing contexts and new global emerging issues have underlined the need to assess and discuss the role of social protection systems and their implications in new contexts. The Framework attempts to highlight some of these key trends and discuss how these affect policy-making in different settings, including the potential role of social protection. Some of the identified areas are:

**Humanitarian response and social protection**

UNICEF is a recognized partner in humanitarian action. Given the increased complexity of emergencies and lessons learned from past engagements, UNICEF works within a broader definition of humanitarian action, going beyond emergency response to include preparedness for response, and response which includes early recovery. In other words, UNICEF’s approach to humanitarian action has concentrated not only on providing relief in sudden-onset emergencies, but in chronic crises and fragile contexts as well. This translates to increased efforts in: (i) increasing resilience; (ii) promoting interventions that will create a solid base for sustainable recovery; and (iii) establishing links between emergency response and medium and long-term development. In this context, there is an increased interest in the role social protection can play in the different stages of humanitarian action addressing key vulnerabilities, providing children and their families with the necessary tools to prevent as well as mitigate impacts of emergencies. The Framework discusses the role of social protection in the different stages of humanitarian response, including disaster risk management, climate change, and conflict areas. It also identifies research and knowledge gaps.

**Adolescence and youth development**

Although not a new global trend, there has been increased interest in identifying innovative approaches for addressing youth-specific vulnerabilities, as well as opportunities for influencing change in this critical transition period. Many countries are currently experiencing important processes of demographic change and thus considering not only potential implications in terms of resources and employment, but also in terms of their potential for social change and development. As discussed by UNICEF’s 2011 *State of the World’s Children - Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity*, adolescents are at a critical standpoint in their lives where adequate access to health, education and other basic services would enhance their transition into adulthood while contributing to breaking inter-generational cycles of poverty. In response, issues associated with youth unemployment, adolescent health behavior, adolescent pregnancy and inadequate access to secondary education, are becoming a centerpiece for many countries in different regions. The Framework discusses youth-specific vulnerabilities and how social protection interventions and systems can address them.

**Social protection and the urban poor**

The particular characteristics of urban settings – informality, high population density, high mobility and socio-economic diversity – raise important challenges for the design of social protection interventions. Moreover, specific vulnerabilities associated with particular groups, such as migrants and out of school

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youth, may also require certain adjustments to programmes in urban settings.

The Framework lays out some of the added vulnerabilities faced by groups in urban settings and discusses some of the design and implementation issues to consider when adapting social protection instruments in these settings.

Migration

There is an increased interest in exploring the potential linkages between social protection and migration. The Framework discusses (i) migration as a risk mitigation strategy, (ii) the extent to which social protection can potentially reduce push factors for international and internal migration, and (iii) how social protection programmes and policies can mainstream and address the vulnerabilities children and their families face in their countries of origin and/or destination. In addition, the Framework identifies as an emerging area outstanding questions on the most effective as well as the most politically feasible strategies for addressing vulnerabilities faced by children and their families in the context of migration.

VII. UNICEF and the Global Social Protection Agenda

The global social protection agenda has been evolving over the past years. On the one hand, countries are increasingly recognizing that social protection systems are essential to building resilience, as well as to protecting households from the impacts of crises and shocks. In response, many countries are working towards strengthening and/or expanding their existing programmes or developing integrated systems to better respond to multidimensional risks and vulnerabilities.

Moreover, there has been a conceptual shift in the understanding of social protection, from a narrow definition that considered only short-term responses to economic risks, to a broader approach that considers social vulnerabilities as well as the transformative potential of social protection interventions.

In this context, UNICEF has a critical role to play, contributing to the global debate and progress on social protection. Specifically, based on UNICEF’s overarching approach of promoting integrated systems, as well as the set principles that guide our work on social protection, UNICEF’s contribution concentrates on:

**Strong field presence and strong partners in social protection in many regions**

Although it varies by region and country, UNICEF is an increasingly influential partner in social protection at national and international levels. A key determinant of this level of influence and leadership is its presence on the ground and its constant interaction with partners and local stakeholders at all levels. In this sense, UNICEF is recognized as a convener and facilitator, especially in contexts where there are a multiplicity of actors and potential agendas.

**Approach: integrated systems for address economic and social vulnerabilities**

UNICEF plays a strategic role by raising awareness on the critical importance of considering economic and social vulnerabilities when addressing
interventions to further children’s and their family’s standard of living. As previously discussed, while the work of some actors concentrates on addressing economic vulnerability and/or risk, UNICEF’s strategic focus on children and women recognizes the importance of considering both social and economic vulnerability, and how they feed into each other. This, in turn, has policy and programme implications. Economic support measures alone will not be sufficient but must be implemented in tandem with interventions to address social vulnerability and exclusion. This makes UNICEF a unique partner for complementing and enriching income and production-focused approaches to vulnerability and exclusion.

**Inclusive social protection**

UNICEF has a unique role to play in ensuring that social protection programmes are responsive to children’s rights and needs. *Child-sensitive social protection* considers different dimensions of children’s well-being, and addresses “the inherent social disadvantages, risks and vulnerabilities children may be born into, as well as those acquired later in childhood.” It is also incumbent upon UNICEF to make the case for children within social protection, and for the role of social protection in improving children’s lives, survival and development, while breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Moreover, as one of its key principles, UNICEF calls for inclusive social protection systems that take into consideration the shared dimensions of exclusion among the most vulnerable, recognizing at the same time the additional vulnerabilities of certain groups, including girls, minority and indigenous children, as well as children with disabilities and/or impacted by HIV/AIDS.

**VIII. Call for Action**

(section under development and consultation)
Integrated Social Protection Systems: Enhancing Equity for Children

UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework
Annotated Outline

I. Executive Summary
   [Summary of strategic orientation, main overall messages of Framework and main issues in each section]

II. Introduction and Objectives (of Framework)
   Purpose of Social Protection Strategic Framework:
   1. To provide a clear framework for UNICEF’s work on social protection, which can be used for communication with external partners and other audiences.
   2. To argue the case for social protection and children and to articulate UNICEF’s position on key issues, providing clear arguments and evidence.
   3. To outline a policy agenda for social protection and children, including UNICEF’s contribution within a broader movement/agenda.

III. Making the case for Social Protection and Children: (Rationale)
   - Increased relevance of social protection in current context
     o Increasing volatility and inequality: major global threats undermine progress towards equitable development – food and financial crises, humanitarian crises, and fiscal austerity.
     o Social Protection: contributing to the progress and equity of the MDGs.
     o Changing population trends and patterns, sustainable development and climate change.
   - Importance of Child-Sensitive Social Protection (Rationale)
   - The child’s right to social protection [including, international legal frameworks in support of child sensitive social protection]
   - Multidimensional vulnerabilities [How are children vulnerable?]
   - Equity consideration: [How does social protection fit into UNICEF’s equity debate ]

IV. UNICEF framework for Social Protection (Given the context, UNICEF defines a framework for action)
   - Conceptual Approach:
     o Definition
     o Breakdown: risk and vulnerability
     o Life-cycle approach to social protection; inter-generational transmission of poverty and exclusion
     o Multidimensional aspects of poverty: social and economic components
Children’s vulnerabilities: causes of vulnerabilities. Different types of vulnerabilities between adults and children

V. UNICEF’s response: Approach and Principles

- Approach: Integrated Social Protection Systems [This section will describe what we mean by integrated systems and its relevance in terms of child-sensitive social protection]
- Principles [review of key principles guiding UNICEF work in social protection]
  - Inclusive social protection
  - Progressive realization of universal coverage
  - National ownership and context specificity

- UNICEF’s response: Priority Actions: Policy, Practice and Advocacy (Given the framework for action, UNICEF identifies programming and policy priorities)

VI. Programming and Policy Agenda (How to put into practice programming and policy priorities)

- Components/Instruments
  - Social transfers
  - Programs to enhance access to services
  - Social support and care services
  - Legislation and policy reform to ensure requisite and non-discrimination on access of services

[This section will include an overview of the main social protection components and instruments. Key message in this section: decision on components and instruments largely depend on (i) objectives of social protection and (ii) particular context characteristics. Moreover, given the multidimensional nature of children’s vulnerability, a combination of interventions may be the most appropriate strategy. Examples for some instruments will be provided].

- Multi-Sectoral Approach: [This section will provide an overview of the most relevant sectors involved in social protection. The review explores the main relationships between and among sector-specific vulnerabilities and social protection interventions; linkages with complementary investments; evidence on impact of interventions; and common policy and programmatic challenges. Specific examples are provided to illustrate key points.]

  - Child Protection [linkages between child and social protection; shared objectives and specific differences; child-protection related vulnerabilities and associated social protection interventions or programmatic linkages]
  - Health and Nutrition [health-related vulnerabilities – child survival and nutrition-and associated social protection interventions; barriers to access and role of social protection in their removal; equity-focused approached to health]
  - HIV/AIDS [HIV-specific vulnerabilities and related social protection interventions for prevention, treatment and care and support; differences between HIV-sensitive and HIV-targeted interventions]
- **Education** [education and equity; barriers to access education services and role of social protection interventions in their removal; out-of-school children; opportunities and challenges associated with school feeding programs]

- **Early Childhood Development** [specific vulnerabilities during early childhood; how can SP address them? Barriers to access of ECD services and role of social protection interventions in their removal; how can social protection enhance ECD outcomes? ]

- **Water and Sanitation** [barriers to access of water sanitation services and role of social protection interventions in their removal; inter-sectoral approach and links with health and education]

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### VII. Integrated Social Protection Systems: Design and implementation priorities

**Design and Implementation Priority action areas:**

- Selection of appropriate design: The role of Vulnerability Assessments:
- Institutional Arrangements [institutional considerations in the design of social protection systems and interventions; donor coordination]
- System mechanisms and structures (MIS, registry systems, etc)
- Horizontal and vertical linkages (multisector coordination, supply side investments and national/regional linkages]
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Participation; Evidence
- Inclusive social protection [design and implementation considerations]
- Key debates- Cash Transfer Design
  - Conditionality [arguments to support and against conditionality; UNICEF position: context specific; not enough evidence on specific impact of conditionality on child-sensitive outcomes]
  - Piloting and Scaling Up
  - Benefit size and structure

**Key Challenges**

- Financing
- Institutional Capacity
- The Politics of social protection

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### VIII. Emerging Issues for Social Protection policy and Programming

*This section includes an initial list of potential emerging issues/settings where social protection interventions may play a role. It attempts to discuss the main problematic, while fostering debated around the potential role of UNICEF in these settings.*

- Humanitarian Action
- Adolescence and Youth
- Social Protection and the Urban poor
- Migration

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### IX. Call for Action

- Value added [UNICEF’s contribution to global social protection agenda]
- Call for Action
Integrated Social Protection Systems: Enhancing Equity for Children

UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework
Consultation Strategy

UNICEF has become an influential partner in social protection, providing technical and financial assistance to governments across the various regions. There is an increased interest among both HQ and national office specialists on social protection and its potential contribution to furthering UNICEF’s mission and mandate to protect and help realize children’s rights, particularly by reducing inequity and addressing both economic and social vulnerabilities. In this context, UNICEF is currently developing a Social Protection Framework to guide its work in this area.

Main objectives include:
- To provide clear framework for UNICEF’s work on social protection, that can be used for communication with external partners and other audiences.
- To argue the case for social protection and children and to articulate UNICEF’s position on key issues, providing clear arguments and evidence
- To outline a policy agenda for social protection and children, including UNICEF’s contribution within a broader movement/agenda.

Social protection interventions require a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral approach. The development of the SP Framework entails an integrated effort involving the strong engagement and input of key partners in the formulation of pertinent and adequate policies and programs. As such, the formulation process will be supported by a multi-stakeholder consultation process. The objective of this process is to: (i) contribute to the formulation of an integrated approach to social protection; (ii) enhance the pertinence and quality of the Framework; (iii) provide a platform for the discussion of key policy issues around social protection; (iii) identify potential activities to be implemented after the approval of the Framework; as well as (iv) create and strengthen channels for the participation of key stakeholders in UNICEF’s social protection efforts.

Consultation Themes

Thematic discussions:
- Equity and social protection
- Integrated social protection systems
- Linkages between social protection and programmatic approach (sectoral approach)
- Emerging issues in social protection agenda
- Cross-cutting themes: Social Inclusion and Gender; participation
- Implementation challenges : Main issues
Process-related areas:
- What kind of information should the Framework provide?
- What kind of information will the Framework NOT provide?
- What next steps should be taken after the Framework has been approved? (e.g.: technical guidance documents on implementation; further detail on sector pieces; regional frameworks, etc.)

Strategic Approach:
- What is the role of UNICEF in social protection? (Policy processes; setting agendas)
- UNICEF examples: best practices, lessons learned to illustrate key points
- What is the role of strategic partners in furthering social protection goals and objectives?

Process
The Social Protection Strategic Framework will be consulted internally and externally.

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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1:</td>
<td>Development and Approval of Internal Consultation Plan (May 2011) - Completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2:</td>
<td>Face-to-face and e-based internal consultation (July-October 2011) - Completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 4:</td>
<td>External Consultation (November-December 2011) – On-going</td>
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</table>

Actors: Consultation will involve stakeholders at all levels: internally, including programmatic and policy sections, regional and national specialists (social protection, social policy and sector areas), as well as strategic external partners (ie: UN agencies, IGOs, child-focused NGOs, etc).

Channels for consultation will include: (i) face to face meetings at HQ, regional and country levels; (ii) webinar-based discussions; (iii) email correspondence; (iv) UNICEF-Social Policy Website. In addition the team will identify and take advantage of key regional and global events where the Framework can be presented and discussed.

For the purpose of transparency, the consultation strategy, the Framework outline and final draft will be posted on the Social and Economic Policy Community of Practice (internal) and, once approved, in the Social Protection section of the external UNICEF site. In addition, a summary of all comments will be sent to all participants.

Deliverables:
- Consultation Plan: Completed
- Draft 1: Framework: (first draft for internal review) Completed
- Concept Note (external) Completed
- Final draft (integrating internal comments) On-going
- Final approved draft (integrating internal and external comments)
### Timeline: Consultation and Deliverables

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase I: Development and Approval of Consultation Plan</td>
<td>DPP; PD; Regional /National</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase II: Internal Consultation</td>
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<td>Annotated Outline and Concept Note</td>
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<td>Phase IV: External Consultation</td>
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<td>Concept Note (External)</td>
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**Contacts:**
Questions on the consultation process and/or the Strategic Framework can be forwarded to Jennifer Yablonski (jyablonski@unicef.org) and/or Natalia Winder (newinderrossi@unicef.org)