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## United Nations Children's Fund

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

## Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan

### Summary\*\*

#### *Summary*

Gender equality is a cross-cutting priority for UNICEF, critical to fulfilling its core mission and mandate of equal rights for all children. The Gender Action Plans 1 (2014–2017) and 2 (2018–2021) approved by the UNICEF Executive Board in 2014 and 2017, respectively, were designed to guide the integration of gender equality into UNICEF policies, programmes and operations.

The evaluation presented here reviewed the quality, implementation and results of the two successive UNICEF Gender Action Plans during the period 2014–2019. Findings show that the Plans helped to create an important foundation for UNICEF efforts related to gender equality, such as providing an organizational framework for programmatic work and building the base for the organization's gender architecture and systems. The findings also indicate that under Gender Action Plan 1, resources for gender equality were successfully secured, allowing UNICEF to pursue the implementation of targeted programmes. Nevertheless, overall, the evaluation findings show limited aspirations and insufficient accountabilities for broad-based ownership of the Plans. Gender equality has yet to fully permeate programmes, institutional capacity and systems to the degree necessary to fully achieve mainstreaming across UNICEF.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VI.

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\* EICEF/2020/6.

\*\* The summary of the evaluation report is being circulated in all official languages. The full report is available in English from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website (see annex).

*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



## I. Introduction

1. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirmed the fundamental principle that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. Almost 25 years later, the gender landscape remains complex. Some countries have seen a change in public debate, with civil society bringing discriminatory gender norms and practices into the limelight.

2. Gender equality is deeply rooted in the UNICEF mission and mandate. The organization last evaluated its gender policy in 2008. Since then, UNICEF has developed a revised gender policy (2010)<sup>1</sup>, developed two successive Gender Action Plans for the periods 2014–2017 (E/ICEF/2014/CRP.12) and 2018–2021 (E/ICEF/2017/16), aligned to the respective UNICEF Strategic Plans, and issued major reports on workplace gender discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>2</sup>

3. The Gender Action Plans 1 and 2 provide the main vehicles for integrating gender equality into UNICEF policies, programmes and operations at all levels of the organization. Both Plans focused on two areas: (a) improving the internal environment for gender equality mainstreaming within UNICEF, including building the architecture and corporate systems required to enable a greater focus on gender equality; and (b) enhancing the integration of gender equality within programming.

4. The evaluation assessed the design and implementation of the Gender Action Plans as well as the internal environment for mainstreaming gender equality within UNICEF. The evaluation's two main objectives were: (a) to contribute to improving accountability for the organization's performance with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and (b) to generate evidence and learning with a view to strengthening gender equality in UNICEF programmes and operations.

## II. Evaluation approach: scope and methodology

5. The evaluation took place between February and October 2019. Conducted by an independent team of four gender specialists, it analysed global data, gathered input from more than 32 programme countries and reviewed a comprehensive range of internal UNICEF processes. The specialists studied more than 500 documents and conducted more than 360 interviews. Consultations were held between September and November 2019 to present preliminary findings to key stakeholders, including senior management at UNICEF headquarters and regional offices.

6. The evaluation encountered some constraints. Data on results — particularly in relation to Gender Action Plan 2, which remains at an early stage of implementation — were found to be limited and weaknesses in the organization's internal reporting systems were evident. For this reason, the evaluators were careful to apply appropriate caution, ensuring that all findings presented in this report were supported by validated and evidence-based information.

<sup>1</sup> Available at: [www.unicef.org/gender/files/UNICEF\\_Gender\\_Policy\\_2010.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/UNICEF_Gender_Policy_2010.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, Report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, 2019; UNICEF, Independent Panel Review of the UNICEF response to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, 2018.

### III. Findings of the evaluation

#### A. The Gender Action Plans as strategic instruments

7. The evaluation determined that both Gender Action Plans contained important elements of a quality strategic instrument, such as a clear definition of gender equality and, under Plan 2, a developed theory of change. They were also coherent with other global gender equality frameworks, including other United Nations frameworks, and closely aligned with the respective UNICEF Strategic Plans.

8. However, the design had some limitations. First, the vision of gender equality represented in the Gender Action Plans was pragmatic rather than aspirational, with a focus on improving the internal capacities and systems of UNICEF rather than looking towards structural change. Links from institutional change within UNICEF to higher-level gender equality results on the ground were either poorly defined (Plan 1) or rested largely on assumed, rather than evidence-based, pathways (Plan 2).

9. In terms of programmatic scope, the breadth of both Gender Action Plans and their alignment with the respective Strategic Plans meant that much of the organization's work on gender equality fell within their scope. At the same time, UNICEF country offices and regional offices reported that the landscape with regard to gender equality was evolving, particularly as it related to gendered social norms. As a result, the fixed objectives of the Plans risked a growing incoherence with shifting gender priorities on the ground.

10. In addition, some key areas of UNICEF programming were not captured in the Gender Action Plans. For example, humanitarian action (a cross-cutting priority that represents half of UNICEF programme expenditure), female genital mutilation/cutting and the release and reintegration of girls and boys from armed groups were not represented in Plan 2. Gender equality results were also presented in a siloed manner, with each programmatic area (e.g., child protection, health) having its own discrete gender equality results, with limited cross-cutting coherence between them.

11. A central assumption of the Gender Action Plans was that strengthening the organization's "enabling environment" in a number of key categories (see figure I) would generate demonstrable results for gender equality. Strong to moderate progress was observed in some of these categories. For example, UNICEF made considerable progress in building its internal architecture and systems related to gender equality over the period of the Plans, successfully creating a dedicated network of gender staff, which helped to improve attention to gender equality at the country and regional levels. It also worked hard to build gender parity in staffing, with good results to date.

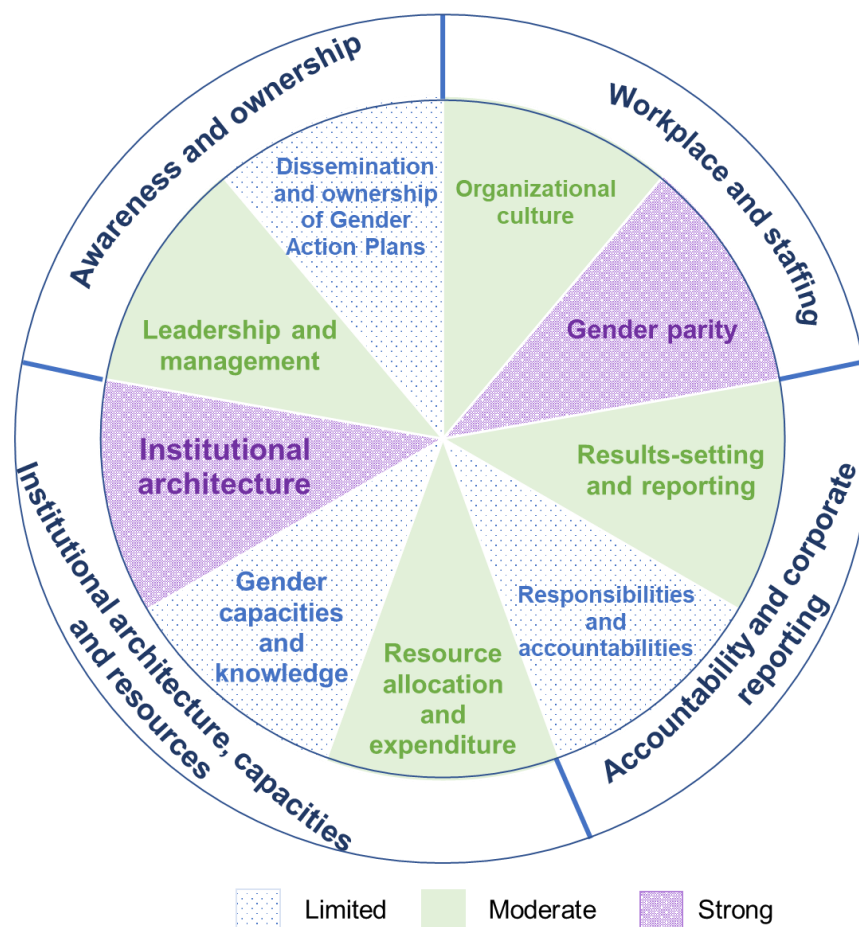
12. Other categories, however, showed only limited progress. Notably, while a comprehensive effort was made to disseminate the Gender Action Plans widely and generate broad ownership among staff, there was limited evidence of uptake in the wider organization. Indeed, the evaluation found limited awareness of Plan 2 across UNICEF, particularly at the field level. Overall, even where staff could reference Plan 2, most had little grasp of its content or its applicability to their work and even fewer were familiar with its associated tools and guidance.

13. Limited progress was also observed in the area of accountability. UNICEF leadership has made a wide range of public statements in relation to gender equality issues, addressing specific dimensions, such as adolescent girls, gender-based violence in emergencies, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, violence against women and gender parity in the workplace. Senior leaders have also actively participated in external gender-related events. However, there is still a need to

strengthen senior management efforts to clearly reference and communicate existing gender equality principles to enhance accountability at all levels of the organization.

14. Figure I summarizes progress on the implementation of the Gender Action Plans to date, focusing on key enabling environment clusters. These themes are expanded on further below.

Figure I  
Gender Action Plan implementation progress



## B. Institutional architecture and capacity-building

15. As noted above, UNICEF expanded its institutional architecture for gender equality under the Gender Action Plans, with the organization dedicating \$12 million to this purpose. Specifically, the establishment under Plan 1 of a dedicated gender unit at headquarters as well as regional gender advisers in the regional offices provided focal points for gender work within UNICEF, and these staff have played a major role in raising awareness of gender equality within the organization. At the time of the evaluation, 99 of 128 country offices reportedly met corporate requirements for gender specialists (where the country office budget is greater than \$20 million) and gender focal points (where the country office budget is less than \$20 million). However, challenges remain. For example, regional gender advisers are increasingly required to expand their remit to cover the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which risks diluting their focus on gender mainstreaming in programmes and operations.

16. Another challenge identified by the evaluation related to the architecture itself. The decision to locate the gender unit within the Programme Division at headquarters was a conscious choice, guided by the programmatic approach of the Gender Action Plan. However, evidence suggests that this arrangement has reduced the scope for the gender unit to influence corporate-level processes, including strategic planning and decision-making.

17. A similar pattern was observed with gender specialists at the country level. These were found to play a critical role in bringing gender to the forefront of UNICEF country programming and policy dialogue. Key success factors included: (a) having scope to focus on comprehensive mainstreaming, rather than being tasked wholly with programme management; and (b) reporting to the deputy representative, who is responsible for the programme coordination. Few gender specialists, however, had resources earmarked to support gender mainstreaming and their degree of influence on programmes was largely dependent on the willingness of other programme staff to engage. Their influence was also constrained by a lack of mandatory gender-related processes, such as requiring a gender review of such key programme implementation documents as the programme cooperation agreement.

18. The situation with regard to gender focal points — programme staff who are not dedicated gender specialists but who take on responsibilities for gender equality in addition to their regular duties — was found to be even more challenging. Gender focal points are required in country offices with a budget of less than \$20 million. However, this arrangement was regarded by many as a weak link, with some gender focal points lacking experience in gender equality issues. Fieldwork and interviews found little clear rationale for the appointment of gender focal points, although there was a perception among some staff that a national gender focal point could bring value to the office in the form of credibility with national partners, knowledge of cultural gender equality dynamics and the retention of gender capacity within the country. It was also noted that gender focal points experienced a blurring of the gender and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse agendas at the field level.

19. With regard to staff capacity, UNICEF conducted a needs assessment of dedicated gender staff in 2016 to inform the intended training activities. At the time of the evaluation, however, there had been no gender capacity assessment of UNICEF staff at large. Gender features only lightly within the UNICEF competency framework, as “respect for diversity and inclusion (including gender)”. To date, UNICEF gender training has focused mainly on enhancing the capacities of the organization’s dedicated gender staff and other key stakeholders, on the assumption that these skills will be passed on to other staff. Mandatory training for non-dedicated staff is not explicitly encouraged and external capacity development opportunities are rarely pursued in professional development plans.

20. Additionally, despite direct attempts to improve the organizational culture noted in Gender Action Plan 2 (i.e., UNICEF aims to be a more gender-responsive workplace, including family-friendly policies), these efforts are not always adequately implemented across the organization. Gender differences in levels of satisfaction, with women notably less satisfied than men, have repeatedly emerged in staff surveys.

## **C. Financing for gender equality**

21. Centrally provided Gender Action Plan resources include \$19 million of regular resources (available under Plan 1) directed to build regional and headquarters gender

capacities.<sup>3</sup> An additional \$15.6 million in dedicated financial catalytic resources was directed under Plan 2.<sup>4</sup>

22. Other resources, aimed at generating flexible resources, appear to be largely dedicated to specific targeted initiatives and do not provide UNICEF with flexible financing that supports institutional mainstreaming. These resources include the central gender thematic fund and private sector contributions. Gender thematic resources include \$872,000 provided over the lifetime of Gender Action Plan 1 and \$1.1 million in 2018 for Plan 2.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the evaluation had difficulty finding specific budgets dedicated to supporting gender equality mainstreaming at the country level. Evidence collected from the field (the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and the West and Central Africa Regional Office, as well as the Bangladesh, Colombia, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan and Sudan country offices) suggest that even relatively small amounts of resources, such as those available to regional gender advisers, demonstrated strong catalytic and leveraging power, as they were used to conduct research or studies and commission gender reviews and for awareness-raising and programmatic initiatives. Private sector resources were a growing source of funding for gender equality, with \$6.8 million contributed during the period 2018–2021. These resources are also largely allocated to specific initiatives, rather than to more-flexible mainstreaming efforts.

23. Overall, according to UNICEF monitoring data, the estimated percentage of programme expenditure on gender-transformative programming results, as defined by the UNICEF gender equality marker rating, increased from 8.3 per cent in 2013 to 14.1 per cent in 2018, approaching the organization's target of 15 per cent, with earmarked expenditures on targeted programmes, including child marriage and adolescent girls' health, nutrition, HIV and education, playing a critical role. A note of caution is advised, as some methodological issues have been flagged in the estimation of these expenditures using the gender equality marker (see additional discussion in the full evaluation report).

## **D. Performance monitoring and accountability**

24. Fieldwork for the evaluation found that the presence of gender specialists and focal points at country office level created a risk of devolving (or offloading) responsibility from other country office staff, with the gender specialist or focal point being assumed to be mainly or even solely responsible for gender equality.

25. Unlike the UNICEF gender policy, which specifies clear expectations for managers throughout the organization, the Gender Action Plans do not clarify the responsibilities of managers and staff who are not specifically dedicated to gender. Indeed, although the Gender Action Plan Steering Committee, chaired by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, and including regional and headquarters-level directors, reports annually to the Executive Board, there is no accountability for Gender Action Plan delivery at the individual level for managers or staff (e.g., in performance evaluations, country office annual reports or representative performance plans). For a highly decentralized institution such as UNICEF, this represents a significant gap. In this connection, there are lessons to be learned from other agencies, as shown in table 1.

<sup>3</sup> Gender Action Plan, 2014–2017; Gender Annual Results Report 2015, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Information received from the Gender Section, 5 September 2019.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF received \$386 million in contributions to thematic pools in 2018, of which \$1.1 million (0.26 per cent) was provided to the gender pool.

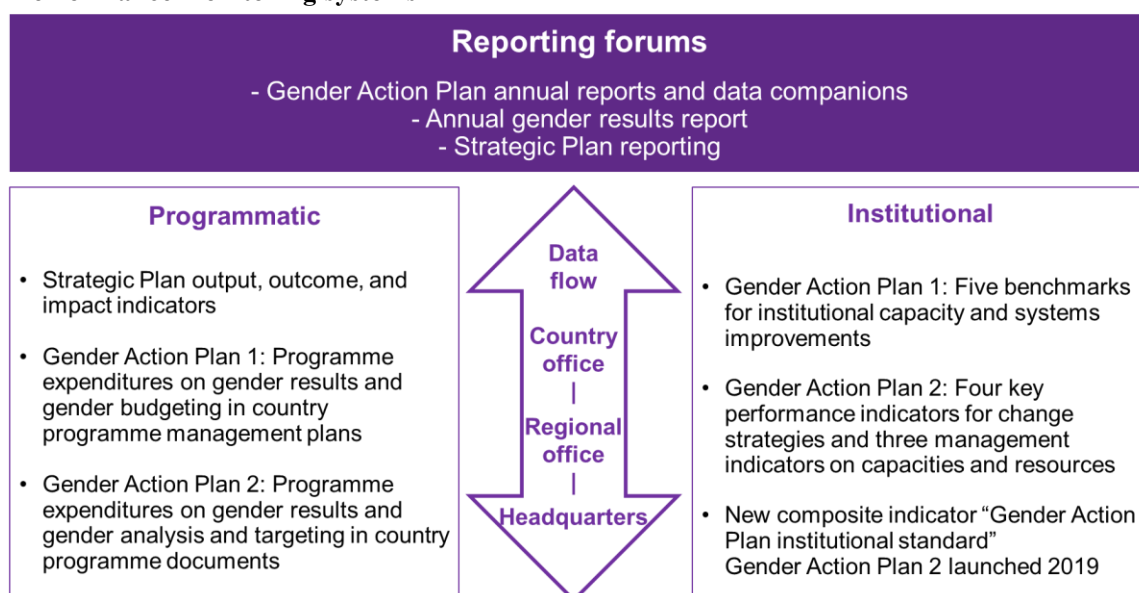
Table 1

**Other agencies: Staff accountability for gender equality**

- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS requires 100 per cent of staff at all levels to set a work and learning objective on gender.
- Since 2009, all managers of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been required to report on one mandatory key result on gender equality and gender parity in the UNDP results competency framework.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations includes gender equality in its performance evaluation management system for assistant directors-general, directors and gender focal points in decentralized offices and at headquarters, with mandatory activities and a set of performance indicators against which to measure progress.
- Under the Oxfam global performance framework, project staff report annually on generic output data in six thematic indicator areas, one of which is women's empowerment.

26. New performance monitoring systems were implemented during both Gender Action Plans (with some launched as recently as 2019), although the evaluation noted that they are still at early stages of implementation (see figure II) and their value is as yet unproven. With regard to programmatic allocation and expenditure, some improvement was observed, particularly since the introduction of the gender equality marker in 2010,<sup>6</sup> which has allowed greater depth and detail in data analysis. Programmatic monitoring, meanwhile, is fully aligned with the corporate reporting systems for the Strategic Plan. Finally, institutional performance monitoring systems have also improved, with a new composite indicator, the Gender Action Plan institutional standard launched in 2019. Despite these improvements, technical challenges with the monitoring system remain, which are described in the full report.

Figure II

**Performance monitoring systems**

<sup>6</sup> The gender equality marker is a tool used by United Nations organizations to track planned or actual investments in gender equality within programmes or projects. All outputs are marked with a gender equality marker rating at the beginning of a country programme or when funds are obtained.

27. Despite UNICEF efforts to integrate gender equality into evaluation and audit, its main two oversight functions, the evaluation found that this remains a challenge. Although there has been an increase in the percentage of evaluations rated as “outstanding” or “highly satisfactory” in addressing gender equality according to the requirements of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, performance has remained slow, moving from 50 to 65 per cent of evaluations during the period 2017–2018. Meanwhile, the Gender Action Plans contain no specific provisions for integrating gender equality in audits. The UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations includes gender in risk-based planning for each audit engagement, but as of August 2019, the office had not undertaken a gender audit of its internal systems and procedures.

## **E. Partnerships**

28. The evaluation found that UNICEF has proactively engaged in inter-agency global partnerships for gender equality, particularly at the headquarters level. As part of a move towards increasing inter-agency harmonization, UNICEF has partnerships for gender equality under the common chapter of its Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. However, at the country level, the organization could provide greater leadership. Although UNICEF participates at the country and regional levels in gender theme groups, working groups and the gender-based violence in emergencies cluster, the organization could take a more proactive role in countries in which UNICEF has greater and stronger capacity, working more closely with United Nations country teams and regional partnerships, as well as with civil society organizations and government partners, to advance gender equality.

29. Private sector partnerships have grown over time, and although the financial sums involved are not vast, they have the potential to more explicitly highlight gender equality within the UNICEF global brand and to develop scalable initiatives.

## **F. Gender in UNICEF programming**

30. The evaluation found that UNICEF increased its attention to and expenditure on gender equality in programming during the period 2014–2017. Expenditure on gender-related issues has increased towards the target of 15 per cent of total programme resources (recommended by the United Nations System-wide Action Plan). The main focus of these efforts was directed towards targeted priorities, particularly child marriage and secondary education for adolescent girls.

31. Corporate data reviewed by the evaluation showed that, as of 2018, 43 per cent of UNICEF country offices had met the Gender Action Plan 2 requirement to undertake a gender programmatic review once per programme cycle. This represents an increase from a baseline of 11 per cent in 2016. However, evidence suggested that some country offices were still unaware of this requirement or had not complied. Similarly, corporate data revealed that 83 per cent of country programme documents (CPDs) approved in the 2018 reporting year met or exceeded standards of gender equality excellence, while 74 per cent of UNICEF country offices included a gender-tagged standard indicator in their CPDs. Nevertheless, based on country office self-reporting, only 37 per cent of country offices in 2018 integrated gender equality into CPDs and programme strategy notes, with gender equality scoring the lowest among all dimensions assessed by quality reviews. Overall, evidence indicated that CPDs, programme strategy notes and annual plans showed some coherence with the targeted priorities of the Gender Action Plan, but limited recognition of gender equality within main programmatic approaches.



32. The evaluation found that programmatic approaches to the five targeted priorities of the Gender Action Plan<sup>7</sup> had significantly evolved. Highlights included expanded programmatic breadth under adolescent girls' health and nutrition, increased emphasis on the structural barriers to girls' secondary education, and multisectoral and multilevel approaches to child marriage/early unions. However, the need to change social norms around gender-based violence in emergencies was not consistently reflected in country programming. Implementation of the nine integrated programming areas<sup>8</sup> has also been uneven. Child protection has presented a significantly gender-transformative vision since 2015, while education and social inclusion had followed suit by 2018 (although programming in social inclusion had not yet caught up). Water, sanitation and hygiene and health and nutrition, meanwhile, did not consistently reflect gender equality concerns, and where these were addressed, the focus remained on equity of access. The exception in this regard was HIV programming, which has adopted a more gender-sensitive approach, looking at, for example, the specific gender-related vulnerabilities of girls and boys.

33. The evaluation found that UNICEF made growing use of multisectoral and cross-cutting approaches to address gender-related issues, such as, for example, the life-cycle framework. Additionally, significant progress has been made on innovation, which was identified in Gender Action Plan 2 as a cross-cutting opportunity for delivering on Plan results. In contrast, despite representing more than half of UNICEF corporate spending annually, humanitarian action lacked a strong focus on gender equality, with few references beyond "equal participation of men and women in programming" and some references to gender-based violence in emergencies.

34. At the normative level, support to strengthening policy frameworks aimed at addressing gender discrimination has become an increasingly prominent area of work for UNICEF over time, despite not being an explicit area of work within the Gender Action Plans.

35. The evaluation identified three main links from the Gender Action Plans to programming, namely the gender programmatic review, gender-dedicated staffing and the targeted priorities. This being said, much of the organization's gender equality work was being driven less by the Plans and more by factors in the external context (e.g., donor influence, system-wide processes, government priorities or to overcome specific impediments to other humanitarian or development results). As for actual results, establishing the links between the Plans and gender equality results at various levels of the organization has proven challenging, due in part to how limited those results actually were in the areas of mainstreaming and ownership across the organization.

36. Overall, the evaluation found that the inconsistent intersections between the Gender Action Plans and key strategic/programmatic documentation, combined with limited awareness of the Plans across UNICEF, suggested limited influence of these frameworks on programmatic results. While many of the organization's programmatic actions aligned with the Plans, these frameworks have not consistently acted as direct strategic drivers for programmatic choices, nor, by implication, have they consistently influenced the organization's broader programmatic results.

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<sup>7</sup> Promoting gender-responsive adolescent health; advancing girls' secondary education; ending child marriage; addressing gender-based violence in emergencies; and menstrual hygiene management.

<sup>8</sup> Gender equality for girls and boys and in care and support for all children; gender-equitable health care and nutrition; quality maternal care; gender equality in community health systems; gender equality in access, retention and learning; gender equality in teaching and education systems; prevention of and response to gender-based violence against girls and boys; gender-responsive water and sanitation systems; positive gender socialization for girls and boys.

## IV. Conclusions

37. Overall, the evaluation found that the Gender Action Plans provided a valuable organizational framework for UNICEF efforts on gender equality and helped to build the organization's gender architecture and systems from a limited base. They also succeeded in securing resources for gender equality under Plan 1 and enabled the organization to dedicate efforts and attention to some issue-based (targeted) priorities. The pragmatic approach of the Plans spoke to the UNICEF operating model and culture, successfully increasing programmatic attention to gender equality at both the country and headquarters levels.

38. Globally, the bulk of the organization's effort and resources was dedicated to the targeted priorities, and performance in these areas has been strong. Nevertheless, integrating gender equality into the core programmatic work of UNICEF, including humanitarian response, was more uneven and there was little evidence of direct links between programmes and the Gender Action Plans themselves. Critically, neither Plan was fully institutionally owned. Limited mainstreaming meant that both Plans suffered as a result of not being viewed as core business by many in UNICEF.

39. The Gender Action Plans also suffered from a confused identity. They were neither policies, which would require a range of institutional requirements and accountabilities to be set in place, nor true action plans, which would spell out timebound actions and deliverables, along with core responsibilities and reporting mechanisms. This hybrid identity constrained their scope for change. Rather than providing a clear trajectory towards gender equality results, the Plans provided more of an institutional change strategy: a statement of aspiration and necessity, but with insufficient steps, which lacked prioritization. Furthermore, there was no coherent understanding of what UNICEF would look like when gender equality had been comprehensively mainstreamed, and only a patchy recognition of shared responsibility for its achievement.

40. Capacity gaps for gender remain a challenge. The aim of "building the capacities of the few" had legitimate reasoning, but was done in the absence of broader awareness-raising across the organization. The voluntary approach has not succeeded in gender equality concerns being metabolized as "everybody's business" across a highly decentralized organization. Commitment to gender equality values, principles and approaches remains uneven across the organization. The valuable efforts of the gender unit are also constrained by its institutional positioning within the Programme Division, which limits its access to and influence over critical functional areas of policy, planning, operations and accountability. In addition, the blurring of the gender equality and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse agendas should be addressed, especially at the field level.

41. UNICEF has strongly engaged in global inter-agency partnerships for gender, mostly driven by its gender unit. At the country level, however, the picture is more blurred. Although system-wide reforms bring greater clarity to the United Nations country team's division of labour, UNICEF should find ways to show stronger coordination capacity mechanisms, particularly in countries in which UNICEF has a stronger presence compared with other agencies. In countries in which UNICEF has stronger capacity, the organization should work more closely and strongly with country teams to support other partners in advancing gender equality. To achieve this, UNICEF also needs a clear and explicit articulation of its position on gender equality, which would allow for better communication of the UNICEF global position, more appropriately defined roles at the country level and greater clarity when working with government partners.

42. Even in the context of current constraints, there is clear evidence that some UNICEF country office staff recognize the centrality of gender equality in achieving child rights. They are responding proactively in programming, policy dialogue and other areas of work. Gender-related issues are being addressed that are not reflected in the current Gender Action Plan, but which are central to the barriers to equality faced in operational settings. This upward push from the country level reinforces the centrality of gender equality to the UNICEF mandate and mission, as well as the importance of transformative approaches to change.

43. Overall, despite their obvious value to UNICEF, the Gender Action Plans have had some significant weaknesses. Most fundamentally for an organization dedicated to the realization of children, women's and girls' rights, the Gender Action Plans, particularly Plan 2, lacked ambition. They sought pragmatism rather than transformation, inadequately addressing structural barriers to change. In this, they were self-limited — and arguably reductionist — from the start.

44. Meeting the organization's stated goals in the area of gender equality requires not small-scale adaptation but a significant shift in UNICEF aspirations. It implies a much more assertive and comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality. UNICEF needs a firmer corporate framework, more robust accountabilities and stronger leadership at all levels — all within the context of inter-agency partnerships and the universality of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## V. Recommendations

45. The evaluation makes seven recommendations, supported by specific proposed actions. If undertaken, these recommendations will support UNICEF in realizing its potential for gender equality in line with its mandate in an increasingly complex world.

### **Recommendation 1: Prepare a revised corporate policy architecture for implementation during the period 2022–2025.**

46. The Gender Action Plan instruments have served a valuable purpose but are no longer adequate in a changing global environment. Instead of a Gender Action Plan 3, the institutional framework should be replaced with a refreshed gender policy and an associated implementation plan.

47. Proposed actions for recommendation 1: Refresh the gender policy, commensurate with the status of UNICEF as the world's agency for children and in line with the Beijing Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals, situated within the inter-agency context. The policy should:

- (a) Be based on a comprehensive and broad-based consultation process;
- (b) Firmly define the UNICEF position on gender equality within the inter-agency system;
- (c) Contain a clear statement of aspiration that positions gender equality as central to the realization of child rights;
- (d) Define the high-level gender equality results to which UNICEF will contribute, supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Declaration;
- (e) Encompass three pillars of action, namely:
  - (i) Gender equality results — normative and programmatic — covering the humanitarian-development continuum;

(ii) The UNICEF workplace, including gender parity in staffing and organizational culture;

(iii) Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse/sexual harassment and abuse, internally and externally;

(f) Support the achievement of results through a clear statement of planned institutional change to achieve results (see recommendation 2).

48. The policy should include:

(a) Clear concepts and definitions that reflect current country gender realities;

(b) A theory of change linking institutional results to transformative gender equality results;

(c) Defined accountabilities, from UNICEF leadership at all levels and downward (see recommendation 6);

(d) A robust results framework, including clear, timebound and measurable gender equality targets, applicable in diverse operating contexts and geared towards upstream work as well as service delivery;

(e) A clear strategy for execution, centred on UNICEF country and regional offices;

(f) A learning strategy for knowledge generation, distillation and sharing;

(g) A commitment to periodic review, for example every four years.

**Recommendation 2: Support the realization of the gender policy through a phased institutional strengthening process, reflected in a comprehensive implementation plan.**

49. The Gender Action Plan 1 built many valuable systems to help UNICEF to identify and track its progress on institutional strengthening. However, several of these would benefit from revision, to ensure fitness for the future.

50. Proposed actions for recommendation 2: Support the realization of the policy through a phased institutional strengthening process, reflected in a comprehensive implementation plan. The plan should clearly link institutional change to the gender equality results of the policy, including:

(a) Continued development of the gender architecture (see recommendation 5);

(b) Refreshed key performance indicators for a stronger emphasis on results and to reward inter-agency partnerships;

(c) A review of current corporate data systems to ensure accuracy and validity;

(d) Improved guidelines for the gender equality marker and gender tags, including a revised methodology for calculating aggregate-level gender-targeted expenditure and a requirement for quality assurance checks.

**Recommendation 3: Improve gender equality integration in headquarters and multisectoral programming.**

51. The targeted priorities of the Gender Action Plans have delivered some valuable issue-based results, but have also consumed energy from core programming. Within the new policy framework, mainstreaming gender and undertaking empowerment-focused initiatives should be prioritized.

52. Proposed actions for recommendation 3: For the new gender policy, integrate gender, including transformative initiatives that would position UNICEF as a key gender equality ally, into core programming areas.

- (a) Articulate within the policy an approach of gender equality integration within core humanitarian and development programming, complemented by transformative initiatives, particularly for women and girls;
- (b) Promote the use of multisectoral programming, particularly through life-cycle approaches;
- (c) Prioritize the incentivization and capacity strengthening of external partners, from a transformative perspective;
- (d) Require (and verify) gender equality analysis for all programmatic designs at headquarters level;
- (e) Require the integration of gender equality into headquarters programme results frameworks and annual results reporting, as well as evaluations and programme cooperation agreements.

**Recommendation 4: Embed gender equality into country and regional planning and programming.**

53. Ensuring that gender equality is addressed at the field level requires defining what gender equality means to UNICEF in the context of the operating environment, what results are sought over a defined period and how these will be achieved. Some UNICEF country offices have already embarked on this journey, but for others it requires urgent attention.

54. Proposed actions for recommendation 4: Require country offices and regional offices to integrate gender within their own country/regional programme documents, geared to gender realities on the ground and the priorities of the inter-agency system as reflected in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). UNICEF country/regional offices should:

- (a) Ensure the realization of the commitment to conduct gender programmatic reviews (already mandatory for all country offices);
- (b) Further define UNICEF collaborative advantages for gender equality at the country/regional level (as appropriate within the inter-agency system and UNDAFs/UNSDCFs);
- (c) Require an explicit statement of how the CPD and country programme management plan will contribute to the realization of the current Gender Action Plan /forthcoming policy results, what it will achieve for gender equality in the country and how it will contribute to the UNDAF/UNSDCF;
- (d) Develop a clear set of intended results for gender equality, geared to the UNDAF/UNSDCF as well as the priorities emerging for the UNICEF strategic plan;
- (e) Plan to dedicate resources to empowerment-focused gender approaches in the next iteration of CPDs;
- (f) Ensure that all associated tools and regulatory frameworks for UNICEF CPDs at the country level fully embed gender equality.

**Recommendation 5: “Bring gender home”: build gender capacities from a values-based perspective.**

55. The patchy awareness of gender equality mainstreaming across UNICEF indicates the need for a broad-based approach to capacity strengthening. Gender equality is an inescapably values-based concern, which forms an essential foundation from which to build technical capacities and realize equitable results for children.

56. Proposed actions for recommendation 5: Undertake broad-based training across UNICEF to ensure that gender equality awareness and technical competence reaches all corners of the organization:

- (a) Develop a strategy for mandatory and targeted training for all staff, including at the D1 and D2 levels, on gender from a rights and values perspective rather than a corporate compliance perspective;
- (b) Build gender equality into induction courses for all new staff, as well as leadership and management courses;
- (c) Enforce the Gender Action Plan requirement of a gender specialist for country offices with programme budgets exceeding \$20 million;
- (d) Professionalize the gender focal point network:
  - (i) Require each UNICEF headquarters division and unit, regional office and country office to have an appropriately sized team of gender focal points working in accordance with corporately developed terms of reference;
  - (ii) Require all gender focal points to undertake relevant GenderPro training;
  - (iii) Allocate realistic time in workplans for gender focal points to undertake gender equality-focused activities;
  - (iv) Add gender equality responsibilities to the performance appraisal and learning objectives of gender focal points;
  - (v) Require all country-level gender focal point networks to report to the deputy representative to enhance mainstreaming.
- (e) Seek to further work with other United Nations partners, particularly the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to build the gender equality capacity of partners, particularly Governments.

**Recommendation 6: Ensure leadership and embed accountabilities for ownership.**

57. Embedding gender equality within the organization requires clear and committed leadership to inspire staff as well as a directive approach supported by comprehensive accountability at all levels.

58. Proposed actions for recommendation 6: Articulate clear leadership, manifested in committed accountabilities at all levels:

- (a) Issue leadership statements (internal and external) on the role of the current Gender Action Plan (and subsequent gender policy when launched) in ensuring that UNICEF meets its aims on gender equality;
- (b) Embed accountability and recognition systems for gender equality results within key individual accountability and responsibility tools, including the performance plans of representatives and other management as well as within other key organizational functions (human resources, policy, programming, planning, data, monitoring and evaluation);

(c) Use the opportunity of the new performance management and talent management systems to embed individual responsibility and accountability for gender equality across the organization.

**Recommendation 7: Reposition the corporate gender unit for greater influence and oversight.**

59. The location of the gender unit within UNICEF constrains its ability to strategically influence the organization. It should be moved to a more central organizational positioning.

60. Proposed actions for recommendation 7: Going forward, it is critical that a repositioned gender oversight function actively engage in all areas of UNICEF work towards achieving gender equality objectives, including beyond programmes. In the context of the organization's new emphasis on matrix arrangements, the gender oversight function should have a direct reporting relationship to both programmes and management functions. To support this matrix management arrangement, gender mainstreaming should be promoted within headquarters structures by designating and training gender staff and/or focal points across all relevant divisions/offices (including, but not limited to, the Programme Division, the Office of Emergency Operations, the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, the Evaluation Office and the Division of Human Resources as well as units responsible for strategic planning and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment).

## VI. Draft decision

### *The Executive Board*

*Takes note* of the following documents presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2020:

(a) Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2020/12](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2020/13](#));

(b) Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, its summary ([E/ICEF/2020/14](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2020/15](#)).

## **Annex**

### **Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan**

1. Due to space limitations, the evaluation report of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan is not contained within the present annex.
2. The report is available from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_103801.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103801.html).

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