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Evaluation of UNICEF approaches to advocacy

Summary**

Summary

Since its establishment in 1946, UNICEF has remained a steadfast champion for the rights and well-being of children on a global scale. Guided by the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF advocacy initiatives are unwaveringly committed to influencing decision makers, engaging with stakeholders and mobilizing the public to take meaningful actions in support of children. This enduring commitment was reaffirmed in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, where the pivotal role of advocacy was acknowledged as an indispensable tool for realizing ambitious objectives and ensuring that no child is left behind. The global advocacy priorities, approved by the Executive Director in 2020, are well entrenched in the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and each priority has an integrated global strategy, which is being implemented at global, regional and national levels.

The evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of UNICEF approaches to advocacy was commissioned by the UNICEF Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy. Undertaken between November 2022 and July 2023, the evaluation had two complementary purposes. The formative evaluation aimed to increase the success of advocacy efforts, proactively clarify advocacy approaches to support the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and identify early adjustments that can be made in the present advocacy structure, supporting elements and plans that could increase the success of advocacy efforts. The evaluability assessment focused on ensuring that a meaningful future summative evaluation of advocacy efforts can be carried out by the end of the current Strategic

* E/ICEF/2024/10.

** The evaluation report summary 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.



Plan in 2025.

The evaluation provides crucial and timely evidence to guide the UNICEF advocacy strategy and enhance the likelihood of advocacy success. It emphasizes the significance of advocacy as a change strategy, integrated into all UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Areas as a fundamental approach to achieving outcomes for children.

The evaluation concluded that while UNICEF has established advocacy as a critical function and an integral part of its work, there is still a need for appropriate resource structures to align advocacy ambitions with clearly defined roles in planning and programming for advocacy, expanding financial resources, institutional agility, and maintaining the multisectoral programmatic approach. It acknowledges that the global advocacy priorities provide organizational focus and direction on core advocacy areas while also noting that there is a need for a fusion of bottom-up and top-down approaches to promote their greater uptake.

Building on the findings and conclusions presented in the report, the evaluation puts forward nine recommendations that were co-created and validated by key internal and external stakeholders.

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

I. Introduction

A. Background to the subject of the evaluation

1. Advocacy is the deliberate process, based on demonstrated evidence, to directly and indirectly influence decision makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute to the fulfilment of children's and women's rights.¹ In the very first line of its mission statement, UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly "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".² UNICEF advocacy efforts are guided by the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.

2. Over the past few years, UNICEF has undergone important structural changes to reinforce its advocacy and communication strengths and address its challenges. To ensure that the organization is driven by effective advocacy and communication that work in an integrated way to drive results for children, in January 2022 the Division of Communication became the new Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, also allowing for a closer partnership between the Division and the Programme Group. In the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, advocacy has been integrated across all Goal Areas as a key route to achieving results for children, and as a critical change strategy.

3. The global advocacy priorities (GAPs), approved by the Executive Director in 2020, are well entrenched in the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Each priority has an integrated global strategy, which is being implemented at global, regional and national levels. The four GAPs are:

(a) GAP 1: Build a global movement for vaccine affordability, availability and equity as a contribution to strengthening primary health care, which contributes to Goal Area 1 of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

(b) GAP 2: Drive a global advocacy effort to tackle the learning crisis, prioritizing the most vulnerable and marginalized children, including through closing the digital divide, which contributes to Goal Area 2 of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

(c) GAP 3: Secure investment and action to support and protect the mental health of children and young people, and to bring an end to neglect, abuse and childhood traumas that drive poor life outcomes, which contributes to Goal Areas 1 and 3 of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

(d) GAP 4: Work with and for children to tackle environmental degradation and climate change, so that they have access to clear water, clean air, and a safe and sustainable environment, which contributes to Goal Area 4 of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

In addition to these priorities, the advocacy change strategy integrated in the current Strategic Plan also includes areas such as advocacy for child poverty and inclusive social protection (Goal Area 5) and humanitarian advocacy.

4. Despite the prominence of advocacy in the UNICEF mandate and Strategic Plans over time, UNICEF has never conducted a comprehensive corporate evaluation of its

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives*, UNICEF, New York, 2010.

² UNICEF mission statement.

advocacy work. The 2021 assessment of UNICEF by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) acknowledged the challenges in measuring and quantifying normative advocacy efforts using the existing corporate monitoring system. To this end, this early evaluation of advocacy represented an opportunity to learn about the current status of advocacy in UNICEF, as well as to maximize the success of advocacy efforts at all levels and prepare the ground for the future final evaluation to be conducted at the end of the current Strategic Plan.

B. Purpose, objectives, scope and intended users

5. The evaluation had two complementary purposes:

(a) The **formative evaluation** aimed to increase the success of advocacy efforts, proactively clarify advocacy approaches to support the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and identify early adjustments that can be made in the present advocacy structure, supporting elements and plans that could increase the success of advocacy efforts.

(b) The **evaluability assessment** focused on ensuring that a meaningful future summative evaluation of advocacy efforts can be carried out by the end of the current Strategic Plan (2025). It focused on gathering evidence about the internal logic and design of the advocacy change strategy, as well as the planning, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting systems in place. The supporting purpose was to improve the theory of change (as well as the practices of change) that the advocacy change strategy included in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 is based on, identify the factors that will allow for a meaningful evaluation of the contribution of UNICEF advocacy work to the overall Strategic Plan success, and provide timely and comprehensive information needed from the start to the end of advocacy campaigns and other efforts.

6. The evaluation addressed two key questions: (1) How can UNICEF further enhance the effectiveness of its advocacy efforts?; and (2) What steps can be taken to ensure the readiness of the advocacy strategy for a future final evaluation?

7. The overall scope of the evaluation included multiple organizational levels, with the advocacy change strategy and the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 as references. The Global Communication and Advocacy Strategy for the period 2019–2022 also helped to inform the analysis, as did the midyear review of the Strategic Plan, 2002–2025, and the revision of the GAPS, whose structure was inherited from the previous cause framework implemented by UNICEF from 2018 to 2021. The geographic scope was global (meaning it included all levels of interest, i.e. global, regional, national and subnational), and the chronological scope was the period 2022–2025. To ensure that the exercise did not imply that only the global priorities deserve the deepest attention, advocacy priorities originating at each organizational level were examined (including National Committees for UNICEF). However, the GAPS received the most attention. The evaluation included a focus on assessing how organizational levels collaborate to achieve a whole-of-UNICEF effect. It also considered organizational capacities, including conceptualization, enabling environment, implementation, and evidence generation and use.

8. Primary intended users included staff at the headquarters level, staff involved in the institutional and operational implementation of advocacy approaches at regional offices, country offices and sub-offices, and staff at National Committees. Secondary intended users included donors and Member States, UNICEF partners, other implementation partners and rights holders, and secondary partners.

II. Methodology

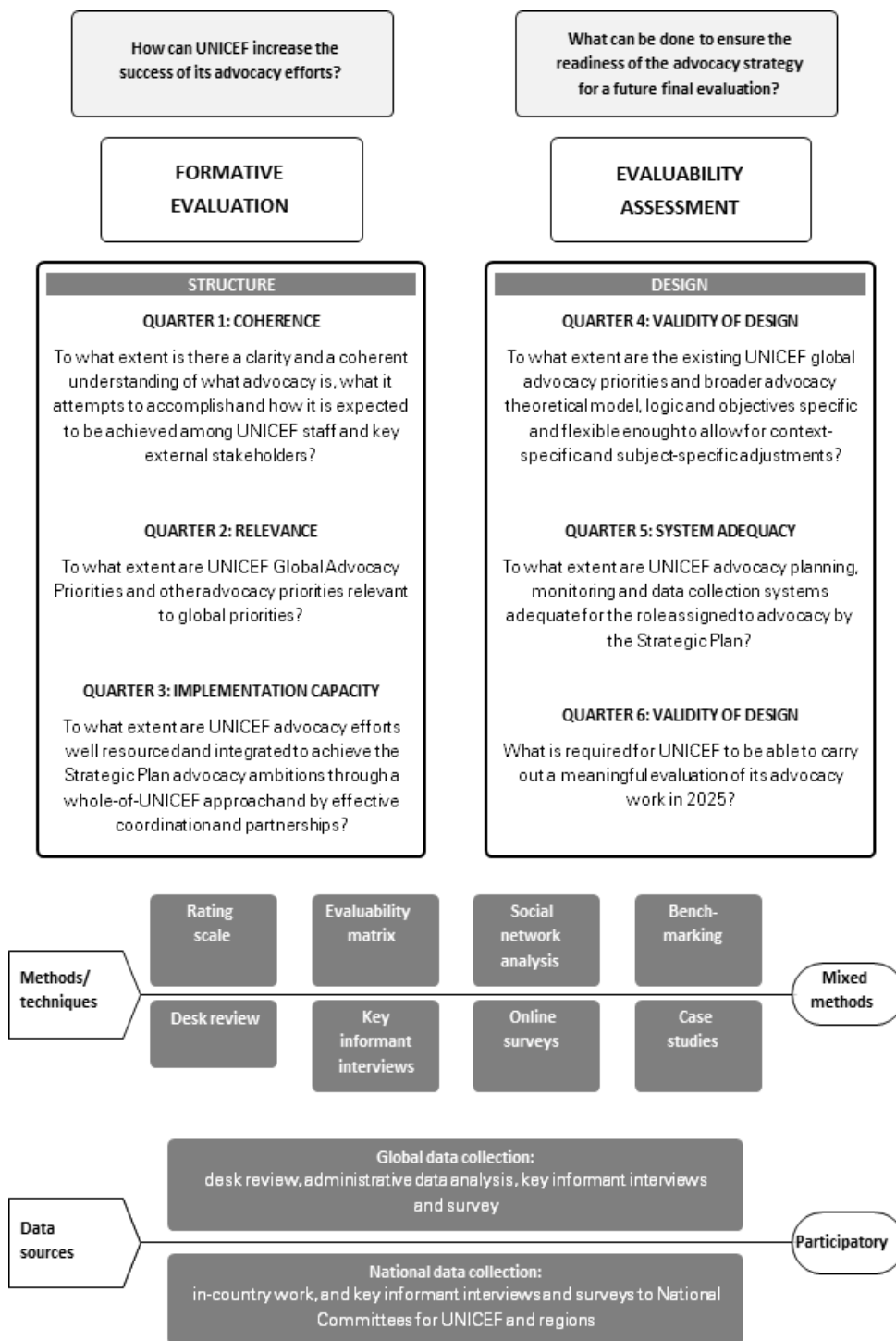
A. Overall approach

9. The evaluation was conducted according to relevant UNICEF and United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards, as well as ethical guidelines for evaluation. Gender and other cross-cutting considerations were incorporated in the evaluation design. The evaluation approach combined qualitative and quantitative strategies, using complementary sources of information and ensuring that cross-cutting issues were embedded in the assessment. It followed an open and flexible approach and considered different types of triangulation (data, method and investigator triangulation). It also followed an improvement-oriented, forward-looking and formative approach that aimed to identify current strengths and weaknesses in the design and implementation of the UNICEF advocacy change strategy. The approach was theory-based, utilization-focused and participatory. It considered a complexity-aware system thinking approach, in the sense that it ultimately put particular focus on establishing the interlinkages and interdependence expected at all levels of the advocacy plan. More than 300 documents were reviewed, some 100 interviews were conducted, six case studies³ focusing on the GAPS, humanitarian advocacy, and child poverty and inclusive social protection were analysed, and the results of a global survey with over 300 responses were reviewed.

10. The evaluation's goals, approaches, questions, methods and data sources are summarized in figure I.

³ Case studies included the UNICEF country offices in Afghanistan and Indonesia, the UNICEF regional offices and country offices in Eastern and Southern Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and West and Central Africa, the Italian Committee for UNICEF–Foundation Onlus, and the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF.

Figure I
Evaluation methodology and approach



Source: Evaluation team.

Analytical framework and data-gathering tools

11. Methodological strategies and data-gathering techniques are summarized in the table below.

Table 1
Data collection strategies

Methodological strategies	Research techniques	Data-gathering tools
Qualitative strategies (Content analysis, discourse analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Literature and desk review (primary and secondary data) ▪ Semi-structured interviews ▪ Focus group discussions ▪ Validation workshops ▪ Social network analysis ▪ Benchmarking exercise ▪ Expert input ▪ Observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key informant interview protocols ▪ Analytical framework/matrix ▪ Observation diary/notes
Quantitative strategies (Descriptive and/or inferential statistical analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Desk research (primary and secondary data) ▪ Online survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scoring tool (only some indicators) ▪ Review notes ▪ Questionnaires

Source: Evaluation team.

12. To ensure the reliability of data-gathering tools, several internal quality assurance procedures were conducted, such as ensuring that the definition of categories for qualitative data was clear and that all of the team members had a shared understanding of each key concept. The level of evidence confidence was assessed using a four-level rating scale, with ratings ranging from a single line of evidence with weak triangulation to multiple lines and levels with very strong triangulation.

13. A social network analysis focused on linking the GAPs with different partners to identify potential areas of collaboration and synergy generation. The evaluation team also carried out a benchmarking exercise that provided inputs on how other agencies and organizations understand, design, implement, monitor and evaluate advocacy efforts, taking stock of their experiences to date.

14. Eight validation workshops were conducted. These included four theory of change workshops carried out to review and validate the theory of change of each GAP and produce an overarching theory of transformation to establish a global framework for the UNICEF advocacy change strategy in both development and humanitarian settings. Three internal workshops were also carried out to validate the evaluation findings and preliminary conclusions, and one session was convened to co-design the recommendations.

Limitations and mitigation measures

15. It was not in the scope of the present evaluation to assess organizational performance at the outcome level. The evaluation was not designed to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the implementation process or to evaluate achievements to date, and the analysis does not include an assessment on the effective use of resources. The evaluation puts focus on the four GAPs and covers advocacy contributions to all Strategic Plan Goal Areas. The generalizability of findings across the organization was identified as a limitation. The evaluation considered context-specific results (case studies results) as well as broader data sets (survey, progress reports, monitoring data, funding data, etc.) to generalize claims and findings. Alternatively, clear limits and boundaries for findings and conclusions were determined.

III. Findings

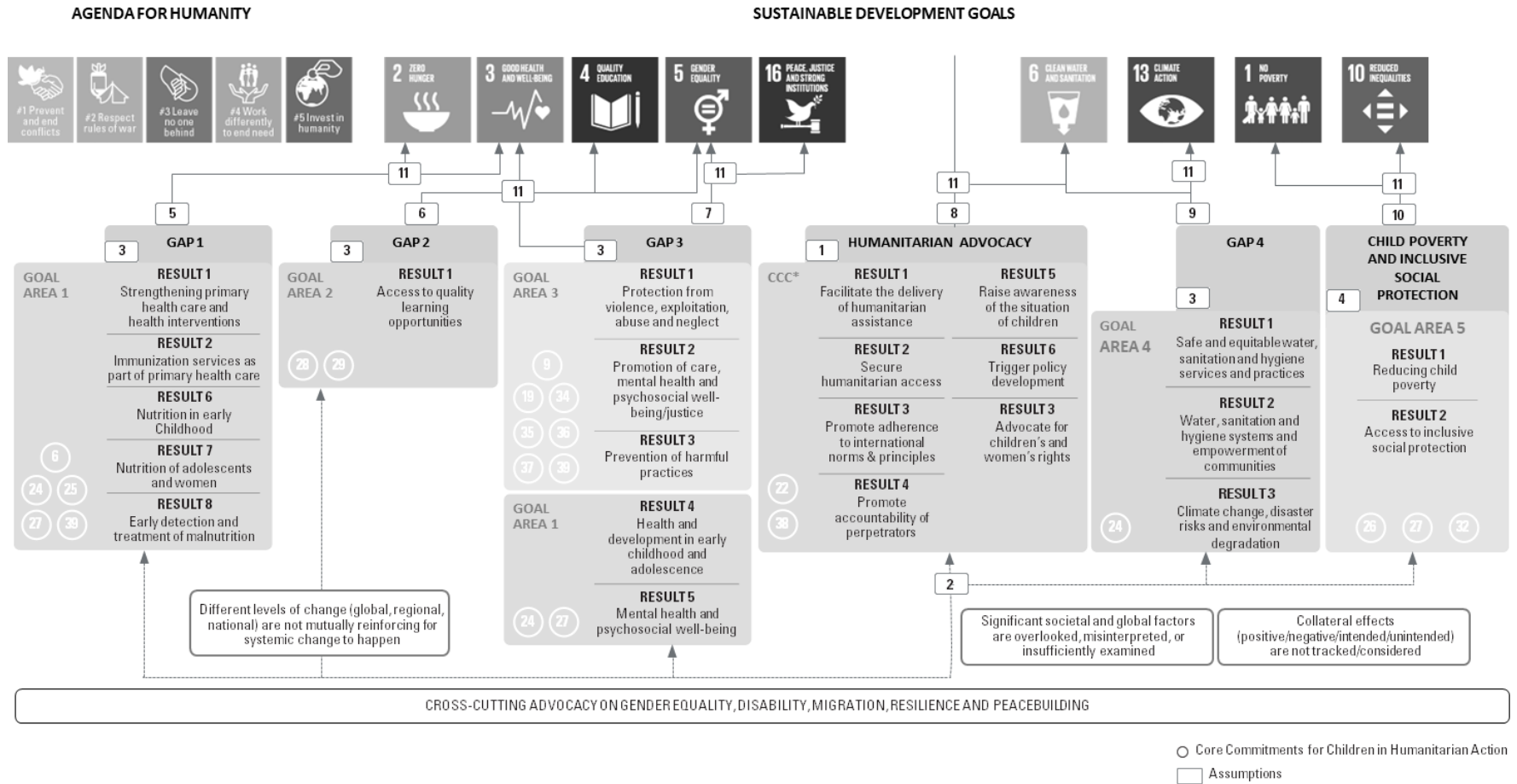
16. **There is a clear and broad definition of advocacy within UNICEF, and staff members understand its importance and relevance.** Staff members generally understand the goals of advocacy and the main advocacy approaches, although the diverse contexts in which UNICEF operates and the broad definition of advocacy contribute to some confusion. The results of the key informant interviews show that, in an overall sense, informants at all levels referred to the importance of “advocacy” and knew that advocacy went beyond communication to influence change through data, evidence, programming and financing to facilitate changes in policy and programmes at different levels. Fundraising is still regarded as one of the primary goals of advocacy. UNICEF strengths for advocacy include its reach, brand, mandate and ability to engage youth. However, limitations such as a limited ability to speak out in certain contexts, agility, advocacy capacities and prioritization compared with other organizations affect UNICEF advocacy work.

17. **The UNICEF definition of advocacy aligns with global definitions shared by other relevant organizations,** which primarily focus on efforts to influence at various levels for systemic changes. The UNICEF approach to setting and integrating advocacy priorities is more top-down, while other organizations define priorities with a bottom-up approach (from local to global), set priorities in both directions (top-down and bottom-up), or define them geographically.

18. **The GAPS align with most thematic areas in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025,** with the main exception of child poverty and inclusive social protection, and the specific area linked to fast-tracking the end of HIV/AIDS. The main strength of the GAP structure is that it contributes to strengthening the prioritization of central advocacy themes, enabling a consistent organization-wide approach. GAPS also contribute to being more strategic and results-oriented by having a unified advocacy focus and messaging while tracking, aggregating and consolidating results from the national to the global level and maintaining a consistent methodology for advocacy priorities.

19. Based on the validated theory of change of each GAP and the inclusion of other relevant areas, the evaluation team designed a theory of transformation. The goal of the theory of transformation is to establish a global framework for the UNICEF advocacy change strategy in both development and humanitarian settings. Key elements that explain how change is supposed to happen and specific overarching goals the change strategy directly contributes to are included. The logic and elements include feedback loops, negative contributions, and assumptions, the latter specifying the necessary conditions for change to happen at all levels, leading to the contribution to major goals. Figure II below illustrates the theory of transformation.

Figure II
UNICEF Global Advocacy Strategy theory of transformation



ASSUMPTIONS

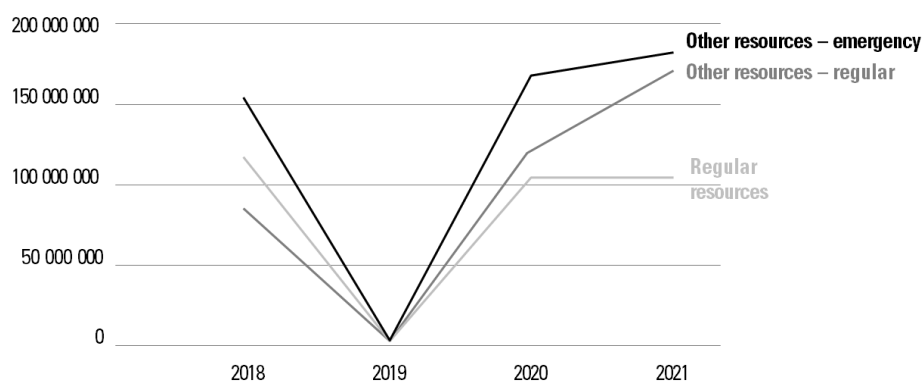
1. Humanitarian advocacy is linked to all relevant areas covered by the GAPs and other relevant priorities as per the sectoral commitments and programme approaches, part of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.
2. Relevant coordination measures are taken to ensure that the Office of Emergency Programmes, the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, and the Programme Group work together efficiently towards the achievement of relevant advocacy goals. Humanitarian advocacy strategies are actioned in a coherent manner at country, regional and global levels to address priority child rights issues and critical programming or policy gaps. Clear roles and responsibilities for advocacy and communication are established, as well as relevant advocacy and communications strategies.
3. The GAP theories of change are revised periodically to ensure their relevance and contribution to designated Goal Area results. In addition:
 - The communication and advocacy change strategy is complemented and creates synergies with the rest of the eight change strategies considered for the Strategic Plan.
 - No organization, entity or network governs, controls or oversees transformation; synergistic interactions drive and hasten the change process, and UNICEF systematically records the role played to achieve changes at all levels.
 - Alliances are nurtured and sustained, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders involved share a common vision and advocacy strategy, and are meaningfully contributing towards achieving expected goals.
 - GAP initiatives follow a complexity theory approach, which means that they apply systems thinking when formulating and implementing relevant actions. Among other things, this implies identifying simple, complicated and complex aspects of the interventions to address them properly while systematically monitoring interrelationships and critical assumptions included in the theories of change.
 - Engagement across sectors/GAPs is promoted for systemic change. Knowledge-sharing systems are maximized for cross-fertilization of collective learning and experience sharing.
4. Social protection develops a theory of change that seeks synergies and complementarities with GAPs at different levels. The Division of Global Communication and Advocacy includes specific activities/sub-activities for joint cooperation with UNICEF Social Protection team.
5. GAP 1 ensures that relevant interconnection between vaccines, nutrition and climate are effectively done, seeking potential synergies with other relevant GAPs to maximize the integration of the child survival concept. The list of priority countries is updated accordingly.
6. GAP 2 continues exploring complementarities with GAP 3 and GAP 4, as well as with humanitarian advocacy, leveraging more opportunities to work with organizations from the private sector.
7. GAP 3 continues strengthening results with GAP 2 and exploring other ways of connecting with GAP 4 and GAP 1, considering the set of joint partners shared. The list of priority countries is updated accordingly.
8. Humanitarian advocacy is linked to all relevant areas covered by the GAPs and other relevant priorities as per the sectoral commitments and programme approaches, part of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.
9. The focus of GAP 4 is clearly established so as to ensure that its cross-cutting nature is effectively implemented and reflected in other GAP areas and beyond, following the UNICEF Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan.
10. Social protection is included in Division of Global Communication and Advocacy workplans with specific activities/sub-activities for joint cooperation.
11. Advocacy stakeholders (UNICEF, partners and others) connect and engage with other relevant internal and external networks (e.g. digital transformation, innovation, partnerships and engagement, etc., and external organizations promoting child rights, among others) to ensure that synergies are generated. Values, principles and related actions enable systems transformation at the highest level for contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Global and local perspectives (“glocal”) are interconnected and integrated to ensure that advocacy at the local level is highly contextualized and grounded while being able to aggregate results, keep track of major scale changes and inform the global level. Innovative measurement approaches complement existing standardized indicators to provide nuanced explanations of the level and depth of change achieved.

Source: Evaluation team.

20. **Funds allocated by UNICEF to advocacy have fluctuated since 2018, but UNICEF still allocates more than other organizations analysed.** The proportion of funds allocated for advocacy out of the total UNICEF funding fluctuated from 3.5 per cent to 5 per cent, with a sharp decrease in 2019, when advocacy only represented 0.22 per cent of the total budget of the organization. Disregarding the situation in 2019, the average proportion of funds allocated for advocacy is 4.3 per cent of the total. The figure below shows global trends over time of the funding for advocacy.

Figure III

Trends of global funding for advocacy, 2018–2021 (in United States dollars)



Source: UNICEF data.

21. The analysis per region shows a wide variance of total and proportional advocacy funds across regions and time. During the period analysed, advocacy disbursements in the West and Central Africa Region totalled almost \$170 million, whereas those in the Europe and Central Asia Region were below \$32 million (not even 20 per cent of those in the West and Central Africa Region). Advocacy disbursements in headquarters were in the mid-range of all regions.

22. While advocacy and communication activities, including public, political, humanitarian and business advocacy, receive significant resources, concerns about limited financial resources for advocacy were expressed at all levels, especially at headquarters. However, those involved in advocacy mostly believe that there is efficient resource utilization. On average, 64 per cent of all informants have a positive perception of the adequate use of resources. In 2023, UNICEF allocated 5 per cent of its workforce directly to communication and advocacy issues, less than other organizations assessed. Seventeen per cent of the staff dedicated to advocacy in UNICEF are based at headquarters, which is close to the global distribution of UNICEF staff (80 per cent of the advocacy work takes place at regional and country levels, and 20 per cent of the work is taking place or supported at the headquarters level).

23. No major alternative strategies were identified as more cost-effective other than ensuring that advocacy is adequately strategized at different levels and that clear roles and responsibilities are established and followed. Whenever relevant, it is important to break silos and maximize synergetic work among GAPS and other relevant advocacy priorities. Regarding collaboration at the different levels, the expertise in advocacy of National Committees for UNICEF could be further taken into account at the global level, and closer collaboration could yield better advocacy procedures and results.

24. **The UNICEF Advocacy Capacity-Building Initiative is crucial for enhancing staff skills at all levels.** Most informants believe that they are proficient in basic advocacy techniques but lack advanced skills, especially in terms of political

intelligence. Several informants noted that political intelligence and the ability to frame and shape policy requests are lacking at both global and country levels. An exception was the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF advocacy work in the context of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP26, noted as a good practice where access to political intelligence greatly facilitated strategic planning and specific actions. Informants at the national level (and especially those from National Committees for UNICEF) expressed feeling more supported in implementing advocacy initiatives than their counterparts at regional and global levels. Limited fundraising skills pose challenges for GAP teams, particularly at headquarters. Mandatory advocacy training is not in place.

25. Roles, responsibilities and collaboration for advocacy are defined globally, but the approach lacks systematization in primary planning documents. Global roles, responsibilities and collaboration expected for advocacy purposes have been defined in the “Compendium on the Organization of UNICEF”, the document of reference on existing functions, lines of responsibility and accountability within the organization. But the approach is not systematized and reflected in primary planning documents and, at the global level, tension still exists in defining the roles and accountability across divisions for advocacy purposes. An exception identified as a good practice at headquarters was the creation by the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy of a specific role for humanitarian advocacy to liaise with the Office of Emergency Programmes, strengthen coordination, and ensure that advocacy is effectively translated in humanitarian settings with the support of both co-leading divisions.

26. Despite having ample capacity, UNICEF effectiveness is reported to be hindered by limited cohesion, a competitive approach across divisions and teams, and a bureaucratic structure at the global level, which slows decision-making and agility. The limited definition of roles and responsibilities also manifests when integrating global and national advocacy.

27. Country and regional offices are transitioning to a greater focus on advocacy while maintaining existing personnel, communication roles and skill sets. Despite relevant examples of coordination and cross-collaboration among teams and divisions, coordination challenges persist, internally and externally. Internal challenges include integrating advocacy efforts at different levels and improving inter-GAP coordination across divisions at headquarters. Externally, limited structures for coordination with civil society organizations was identified as the main challenge. Networks for advocacy exist but lack specific strategies for development and strengthening.

28. The GAP theories of change include important elements but lack causal link assumptions, feedback loops, and explanations of how changes occur at different levels. Barriers and limitations are identified, but sources and rationale assumptions are not clearly indicated. Periodic revision and adaptability to different contexts is recommended, but there is a lack of specific approaches to identify and categorize the different components of the advocacy work based on their level of complexity. Funding constraints lead non-prioritized areas to rely on project-based funds for advocacy work.

29. The GAPs have undergone changes to adapt to the post-COVID-19 context, with the first and second priorities being the most adapted. Despite the levels of adaptability shown by GAPs, there is still awareness at the global level of the challenge of maintaining their relevance in a rapidly changing global context and considering emerging issues. Integration of GAPs is primarily top-down, although some **examples** of bottom-up integration were found. There is a need for more effective integration of advocacy work into practice, particularly at the country office

level. Access to systematic information on partnerships is very limited, hindering the ability to seek complementarities and engage partners at different levels. The planning procedures and tools at global, regional and national levels demonstrate clear linkages with the Strategic Plan goals through the use of advocacy core standard indicators. Child poverty and inclusive social protection, although not designated as a GAP, contribute to the overall advocacy strategy and Strategic Plan Goal Area 5. However, their representation within the advocacy section of the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy is indirect, primarily through support and capacity-building initiatives.

30. The planning procedures and tools at the global, regional and national levels demonstrate clear linkages with the Strategic Plan goals through the use of advocacy core standard indicators. At the national level (including both country offices and National Committees for UNICEF), seven advocacy core standard indicators are deployed globally and all country offices are required to employ them. This contributes greatly to ensuring adequate linkages between planning and Strategic Plan goals. These indicators link to GAPS as well as to humanitarian, and child poverty and inclusive social protection advocacy work.

31. The number of recommendations for advocacy-related issues from previous evaluations is very limited, especially considering that no global evaluation on the issue has been carried out to date. Nonetheless, some examples identified could be linked to planning-related recommendations included in relevant evaluations, such as the effort to measure the existence of advocacy strategies in development and particularly in humanitarian contexts and the initiative to ensure that each advocacy effort or strategy is based on a theory of **change**.

32. The monitoring and evaluation system for advocacy includes key elements such as baselines, targets, data-collection periodicity, monitoring responsibilities, verification sources, transparency measures and reporting mechanisms. **Overall, the advocacy indicators are well designed, but have limited capacity to measure the role of UNICEF in achieving advocacy goals and contextual factors.** Certain indicator templates have varying levels of analysis, and not all comply with established criteria. The system lacks information on cost per activity or indicators in the Results Assessment Module. Gender and disability-inclusion indicators are included for specific plans, but their responsiveness is not fully considered in the main monitoring and evaluation systems, at least for advocacy. Instructions on a complexity-aware approach to monitor advocacy initiatives are also lacking. Methodological notes lack reference to data-collection periodicity, and qualitative remarks are underutilized to enhance understanding of advocacy results. The existing advocacy and communication standard indicators focus more on measuring communication than the pathways of change in advocacy initiatives.

33. Advocacy practitioners acknowledge the current limitations in measuring and reporting on advocacy and the need to embrace uncertainty in monitoring and evaluation and collect more qualitative data to understand results better. The introduction of monitoring and evaluation tools and efforts (such as advocacy core standard indicators, “success stories”, etc.) to broaden the focus on monitoring processes and mid-level results has been positively received at national and global levels.

34. Survey results show that staff who are more involved in advocacy initiatives have a higher positive perception of the utility of the evidence generated through the monitoring and evaluation system for advocacy towards decision-making. Informants at the national level (country offices and National Committees for UNICEF) have a stronger positive opinion of the utility of data generated through monitoring compared with **informants** at the regional level. Following this trend, when it comes

to assessing the actual use of monitoring and evaluation data and evidence for advocacy-related decision-making, informants at the national level have a much higher positive perception. When it comes to the monitoring and evaluation system being sensitive to the different contexts in which advocacy is implemented, informants at the national level, and particularly at the National Committee level, expressed more positive views.

35. Respondents thought there were limited monitoring and evaluation resources and staff at the national level and felt that more support for monitoring and evaluation is needed. The need to revise GAP theories of change and indicators was highlighted at the global level. The perceived limited monitoring and evaluation resources and staff at the national level and the reliance on external funding for GAP impact monitoring and evaluation activities. Aggregating results from offices was the main gap identified in reporting advocacy at the global level. At the national level, the main reporting tool does not specifically address advocacy in a particular section, but rather as a cross-cutting theme. The current structure reporting to Strategic Plan goals is perceived to blur the visibility of the specific results of advocacy at the national level.

IV. Conclusions and the way forward

36. **UNICEF has consolidated advocacy as an indispensable function, seamlessly integrated into its core work.** The measures to establish advocacy as an effectively integrated critical function encompass significant structural and programmatic changes and endeavours to enhance capacities, sharpen skills and promote engagement at all levels. While these processes are still being consolidated, positive results are already emerging in the form of staff understanding and recognition of the importance and relevance of advocacy, along with improvements in advocacy skills across UNICEF. Informants at all levels suggested the importance of being strategic when undertaking advocacy to ensure a clear and shared understanding of advocacy across units, teams and divisions.

37. **There is an overriding need for appropriate resource structures that align with the ambitious advocacy goals of UNICEF.** A sustainable structure for funding streams still needs to be implemented to support advocacy as a change strategy and contribute to Strategic Plan goals. While the change management strategy is in place globally, it requires full operationalization and systematization to effectively establish clear lines of responsibility at all levels. UNICEF ambitions in advocacy still need to be matched by relevant **funding** and human resource structures, especially at the global level, but also at regional and national levels.

38. The shift towards integrated advocacy efforts involves implementing relevant internal strategies and processes to adopt an organization-wide advocacy approach. Several gaps have been identified in this regard, where the organization could adopt a more strategic **approach** to advocacy efforts at all levels and in different settings. Nonetheless, the use of financial resources available is considered efficient by informants. Enhancing cost-effectiveness primarily relies on establishing clear roles and responsibilities for advocacy and adopting a more strategic approach in advocacy efforts.

39. **While some positive examples were identified, there is still a lack of a comprehensive definition of advocacy roles and a strategic approach that hinders coordination.** Past experiences underscore the criticality of effective collaboration in shaping a comprehensive advocacy strategy based on global thematic pillars. The vision paper of the Strategic Plan underscores the importance of recognizing advocacy roles and establishing integrated working methods as core functions, but these objectives remain partially fulfilled.

40. **The GAPS provide organizational focus, ensuring consistent support to specific areas over defined time periods.** Considerable potential for inter-GAP cross-fertilization was identified. There is still some debate around whether the selected thematic areas remain relevant, whether to maintain existing priorities or introduce emerging **issues**, and how to do that in the context of existing GAPS without diluting results and efforts.

41. The evaluation results reveal that the GAPS have shown adequate levels of adaptability, including to the post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) landscape. There is a need to reinforce existing approaches, mechanisms and tools to periodically categorize, review and adapt to contextual changes with more systematic approaches. The extent to which **non**-prioritized areas are included in the strategies and plans of crucial divisions remains an issue to be addressed.

42. Strategically, the current approach for integrating advocacy mainly flows in one direction (top-down) and could be further strengthened and meaningfully adapted to the realities on the ground with a higher bottom-up uptake. The focus is not only on remaining relevant but also on ensuring that progress towards advocacy results is effectively tracked.

43. **To enhance the readiness for a meaningful outcome-focused evaluation of advocacy, it is essential to incorporate complexity-aware approaches that align with the nature of advocacy work.** There are indications that staff members are comfortable dealing with uncertainty and understand the complex nature of advocacy work.

44. **Relevant advocacy work can be accomplished with thematic and advocacy experts.** The perception that UNICEF needs to possess strong programmatic expertise in a specific area to advocate effectively is shifting. While this view has yet to be widely accepted within the organization, there is a growing sentiment that the previous notion is no longer valid and that relevant advocacy work can be accomplished with the support of thematic specialists, advocacy experts, UNICEF evidence functions, and external support through research and data analytics. The swift adaptation to the COVID-19 scenario, where UNICEF began campaigning against school closures after initially hesitating to do so, further exemplifies this shift.

45. UNICEF, historically programme-focused, has evolved to appreciate the significance of global advocacy, even in areas unrelated or not extensively linked to programmatic initiatives. This shift emphasizes their commitment to addressing critical global issues such as climate change and adolescent mental health while increasingly working with middle-income countries that may not necessarily require service delivery but focus on advancing key policy frameworks and reforms. However, those efforts combine well-established vaccines, health, child survival and education programmes. This signifies a shift in the organizational logic, where advocacy efforts are now linked to areas beyond historical programmatic experience. It reflects the adaptability and willingness of the organization to remain relevant and address critical issues beyond its traditional areas of focus.

46. **Being strategic is the key to having an organization-wide integrated advocacy approach.** It is understood that for advocacy efforts to succeed, it is important for everyone involved to have a clear understanding of what advocacy means and how it should be done. Advocacy practitioners and other staff at all levels agree that being strategic is key to achieving this shared understanding across different units, teams and divisions. Being strategic means carefully planning and using smart tactics to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding advocacy. This helps teams to work together smoothly, coordinate their efforts effectively, and ultimately have a bigger impact with their advocacy work.

V. Recommendations

47. The following nine recommendations are those prioritized in the evaluation report, following the analysis and interpretation of the evaluation findings. They were co-created and validated by key internal and external stakeholders during the evaluation process.

48. Clarify accountabilities and strengthen the roles and responsibilities and the systems for advocacy work in UNICEF. (Very high priority; likely to be cost-neutral or cost-saving)

Clear role definition is identified as a weakness in implementing advocacy work. Joint global advocacy workplans should be developed by the advocacy co-leads of both development and humanitarian advocacy. Those workplans should be used to prioritize and articulate collaborative advocacy work with other relevant units and divisions at headquarters and across offices at the regional and national levels (including National Committees for UNICEF), as part of an integrated advocacy strategy. The matrix management approach⁴ should be reinforced. To do that, two reporting lines should exist, one for the functional area (direct supervisor) and one for the advocacy initiatives from the relevant functional and/or thematic area that each advocacy practitioner is involved in (second reporting officer). UNICEF should continue developing and including advocacy issues in role descriptions, guidelines and performance indicators, explicitly defining advocacy responsibilities. Efforts should also be made to strengthen accountability systems globally to ensure timely decision-making and effective delivery of advocacy results.

49. Strengthen and rethink the GAPs framework design for the next Strategic Plan. (High priority; likely to be cost-neutral or cost-saving)

The GAPs framework design should be fine-tuned to incorporate existing thematic areas more meaningfully. More specifically, the fourth GAP should contribute across the different areas of impact, including but not exclusively focusing on water, sanitation and hygiene. This will align the GAPs with the programmatic approach given to climate, eventually leading to greater cross-fertilization of results in this critical area. UNICEF also should ensure a better alignment between the GAPs and the Goal Areas identified in the Strategic Plan. For example, following the current structure, the GAPs should include child poverty and inclusive social protection and also give relevance to this area in the annual workplans of key co-leads. If the organization decides not to prioritize all Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan, the GAPs should be defined following a bottom-up approach. The organization should foster cross-GAP collaboration and ensure that relevant changes made to the GAPs are effectively translated and communicated at different levels. The Global Advocacy Task Force⁵ should continue to play a central role in setting strategic visions and priorities for advocacy. All GAPs should be represented in the Global Advocacy Task Force (all GAP leaders should be included), and there should also be representatives from key thematic areas considered in the Strategic Plan.

50. Integrate advocacy more systematically at all levels. (Very high priority; financial resources needed to separate advocacy and communication roles)

The prevailing top-down approach for integration of advocacy at all levels should be balanced with a more prominent bottom-up approach for selecting GAPs. UNICEF should enhance stakeholder engagement in the design and prioritization of the GAPs.

⁴ Matrix management in UNICEF is implemented with the addition of a second supervisory officer from the relevant functional/thematic area of the staff member's deliverables.

⁵ A Global Advocacy Task Force was formed to set the vision and priorities for advocacy work at UNICEF.

Regional and country-level involvement should be encouraged to ensure the co-creation of agendas, transparency in priority-setting, credibility, buy-in, and ownership of the GAPS. The bottom-up approach also refers to accommodating regional and country-specific priorities that may fall outside the GAPS. GAPS could focus on global events and campaigns while maintaining a global focus and allowing flexibility for regions and countries to address their unique advocacy needs and adapt the priorities accordingly. This way, a top-down and bottom-up approach could be reinforced: Headquarters can act as a curator of policy and knowledge, and country offices can share lessons learned with regional offices and headquarters. Advocacy and communication roles should be separated strategically. This represents a significant step that should be gradually introduced in UNICEF. It will help to take advocacy work to a higher level and serve as a strategy to ensure that there is a clear distinction between the two roles and that they are widely understood, with an emphasis that communication is complementary to advocacy, but not a substitute. UNICEF should also enhance political intelligence. To do so, it is recommended that the organization define clear cross-organizational strategies for developing and sustaining networks that are shared across divisions and offices, including mechanisms for mapping networks and influencing pathways for effective advocacy; leverage local staff knowledge and networks, foster collaboration with external stakeholders, implement a systematic cross-organizational political intelligence-gathering process, and establish clear reporting channels; and develop a structured approach for intelligence gathering, utilizing technology tools, and establishing clear reporting channels that will ensure efficient and effective dissemination of political intelligence, supporting informed decision-making and advocacy efforts.

51. Match existing resources with advocacy expectations and ambitions. (Very high priority; additional financial and human resources might be needed depending on the options considered)

UNICEF should ensure that the level of funding and human resource structures align with the organization's ambitious advocacy goals, particularly on a global level. Exploring strategies for diversifying funding sources and securing long-term commitments to sustain advocacy efforts would be essential. This may involve engaging with strategic partners, exploring different and/or innovative funding models, and advocating for core funding.

52. Maximize partnerships for advocacy. (High priority; additional financial and human resources might be needed depending on the options considered, particularly for assessing the effectiveness of partnerships)

UNICEF should systematically promote the use of information on partnerships in its global corporate partnership management platform for private and public sector relationships worldwide (UNISON) to have a shared global database of partnerships made at all levels in which to take decisions, and define potential cross-collaboration and synergies. UNICEF must develop specific strategies for selecting and ensuring partners' added value for advocacy at any given time, and apply them systematically. Learning from other organizations' approaches to engaging with partners can help UNICEF to establish effective partnerships to advance its advocacy goals. A systematic and shared system for identifying, developing and sustaining partnerships would also ensure homogeneity and effectiveness in addressing the three main partnership strategies considered for advocacy. UNICEF should establish a framework for evaluating partnership effectiveness, particularly in terms of advocacy outcomes. Partnerships with influential global institutions should be strengthened to leverage critical influence on child rights advocacy. While partnerships with civil society organizations are seen as more relevant at the country level, UNICEF should not neglect expanding such partnerships at the global level. Investing in building

strong relationships with civil society organizations globally can facilitate knowledge-sharing, best practices and collective advocacy efforts, enhancing the impact of UNICEF on child rights at both national and international levels. UNICEF also should explore opportunities for closer collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to align advocacy efforts and leverage their expertise and resources in addressing child rights issues. Building and strengthening relationships with influential donors such as the United States Agency for International Development and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should be prioritized.

53. Continue developing advocacy skills and capacities. (High priority; additional financial resources might be needed)

UNICEF should make advocacy training mandatory and prioritize specific thematic areas for advanced advocacy training. Mandatory training can be included as part of staff onboarding and professional development programmes, and specific efforts should also be made to ensure that advocacy is considered a core part of the skills and capacities of representatives at regional and country levels. This can be achieved through training, clear guidelines and effective communication from headquarters. Beyond training, UNICEF should conscientiously focus on developing a culture of advocacy. The organization should leverage the existing wealth of experience and expertise of National Committees for UNICEF. To further strengthen organizational learning, knowledge management and sharing of approaches should be prioritized. Developing an advocacy community of practice and enhancing the advocacy web portal on the intranet are among the actions to consider.

54. Strengthen planning and reporting for decision-making. (High priority; additional financial resources might be needed)

UNICEF should strengthen communication and information-sharing, particularly across GAPs. Improved communication channels and mechanisms should facilitate coordination and information-sharing between different units, divisions and levels involved in different GAPs. Regular meetings, calls and updates can keep all stakeholders informed and aligned with advocacy initiatives.

55. Improve the design and theoretical models of the advocacy change strategy. (Very high priority; likely to be cost-neutral or cost-saving)

UNICEF should ensure that the validated theories of change are disseminated, known and owned by advocacy practitioners at the different levels to ensure that advocacy strategies follow a consistent logic informed by global theoretical models but adapted to the realities and challenges of each particular context. The existing internal guidelines and templates for designing theories of change should be updated to ensure that causal connections and pathways at different levels and across elements of the theory of change are included, as well as causal link assumptions and the identification of feedback loops. UNICEF should ensure that developed theories of change are periodically tested and adapted, following a strategic testing approach, and a monitoring system specifically devised to track programmes addressing complex development problems through a highly iterative and adaptive approach. Theories of change are living documents, and this approach ensures that they evolve through time as information emerges and are based on the results of what is working and what is not, and why.

56. Improve the monitoring and evaluation approach of the advocacy change strategy. (Very high priority; likely to be cost-neutral or cost-saving)

UNICEF should fine-tune existing outcome indicators to reflect better the contribution and role of UNICEF and the context in which results are achieved. UNICEF should strengthen advocacy standard indicators guidelines shared with/used by country offices by including advocacy output indicators that cover all of the main steps/areas of change included in the revised theories of change, and ensure that the different branches of the theories of change developed (global, regional or national) are categorized based on their level of complexity. UNICEF should select a series of sentinel indicators that track the most relevant assumptions included in the theories of change to keep track of changes in critical contextual and cause-effect conditions to effectively and timely identify them for adaptability. UNICEF should ensure that “success stories” are also used by country offices to complement existing indicators, as they would provide a wealth of nuanced information to complement indicators for the final assessment of achievements. Success stories can play a significant role in explaining “how” and “why” changes occurred. Social network analysis should be used to complement existing initiatives (such as stakeholder analysis and global advocacy situation analysis) to enhance the quality of intelligence on which decisions are based and better understand the connectivity with different stakeholders and their level of influence to maximize engagement and synergetic actions while identifying leverage points for implementation purposes.

VI. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2023 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2024/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/21](#));
2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of UNICEF approaches to advocacy, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/22](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/23](#));
3. *Further takes note* of the evaluation of UNICEF investments towards institutional strengthening for social and behaviour change, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/24](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/25](#)).

Annex

Evaluation of UNICEF approaches to advocacy

1. Due to space limitations, the evaluation of UNICEF approaches to advocacy is not contained within the present annex.
 2. The report is available on the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/evaluation-unicefs-approaches-advocacy>.
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