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Report on the progress of gender equality work in UNICEF

Summary

This report is submitted pursuant to Executive Board decision 2012/8, which requested UNICEF to report on the progress of its gender equality work, in line with the strategic priority action plan for gender equality 2010-2012 and the successor to the plan, during the 2013 annual session of the Executive Board. This report may be read in conjunction with the annual report of the Executive Director (E/ICEF/2013/11) and the related data companion.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the report and comment on the progress made by UNICEF in its gender equality work.

* E/ICEF/2013/10.



I. Introduction

1. The UNICEF report to the Executive Board on gender equality for 2013 comes as the Strategic Priority Action Plan for Gender (SPAP) 2010-2013 is ending and a new plan for 2014-2017, in alignment with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017, is under development. In addition, an end-of-cycle review of the current SPAP, covering progress on eight priority change areas over the past three years, was recently completed. Therefore, this report encompasses both annual progress and the findings of the end-of-cycle review.

2. The review finds that UNICEF organizational processes on gender mainstreaming and its leadership and commitment to gender equality have strengthened in the last three years, and the organization has been effective in inter-agency mechanisms and in developing key tools and measures for planning and tracking progress on gender mainstreaming. However, it also finds that technical capacity on gender and the adequacy and effectiveness of resource allocation remain important concerns. Equally important are gaps in systematically monitoring programmatic work in the field and capturing its relationship to substantive results, which the next gender action plan will address.

II. Background

3. The 2008 evaluation of gender equality as a foundational principle at UNICEF concluded that the organization had “failed to implement its 1994 Gender Policy systematically.” It observed that this was due (as in other multilateral organizations) to a primary failure in the organization’s “understanding of what is actually required to mainstream gender equality in a development programming and emergency setting.” UNICEF had generated many good practices in gender-equitable programming, the evaluation noted, but they reflected individual efforts rather than systemic strategy and support that would ensure they would be shared and scaled up. It further noted that UNICEF needed to ensure that the policy went “beyond being stated as a priority on paper [and that it] be treated as a real institutional priority and operationalized accordingly.”

4. UNICEF responded to the evaluation findings with an immediate and concerted effort. In 2009, a management response and initial one-year plan were developed to address the evaluation’s recommendations. Supported by a special one-year allocation of \$4.25 million from the Office of the Executive Director, implementation of the one-year plan led to a number of important immediate results. The most visible was issuance of an updated gender policy in May 2010. The Gender Equality Task Force, chaired by the then Director of Policy and Practice and comprising senior staff members from regional offices and headquarters, was established to guide and monitor implementation of the one-year plan and develop a longer-term strategic plan, the SPAP, completed in 2010.

5. The SPAP 2010-2012 took a comprehensive approach and laid out eight areas needing change: (1) accountability and strategic framework; (2) capacity and knowledge; (3) leadership, influence and advocacy; (4) programming; (5) ‘doing what we advocate’; (6) partnerships; (7) financial resources; and (8) communications. Responsibility for the SPAP and its benchmarks rested with all parts of the organization. Following the 2008 evaluation, the Executive Board

requested annual reporting on progress with regard to gender equality, and UNICEF has been reporting on the benchmarks specified in the SPAP. At the 2012 annual session, the Board asked UNICEF to review implementation of the SPAP over the three-year period and use the findings to develop a new action plan so that this expression of commitment and action to gender equality would be strengthened in the future.

6. Determining that aligning the next Gender Action Plan with the organizational Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 would be key to its effectiveness and success, UNICEF extended the current SPAP by one year. At the end of 2012, UNICEF also initiated an end-of-cycle review as a first step in developing the new Gender Action Plan 2014-2017. The Gender and Rights unit, now in the Programme Division, led the review, and the Gender Equality Task Force served as the main coordinating and consultation mechanism. All seven regions and most headquarters divisions contributed through responses to questionnaires, phone interviews and submission of key documents. In addition, the review used data collected through annual reports and the UNICEF annual monitoring system over the past three years. The review focussed on three key questions:

(a) What progress was made under the 2010-2012 SPAP, and what challenges were encountered?

(b) What are the critical gaps that the SPAP did not address or execute?

(c) What lessons learned from the past three years are key for shaping the next Gender Action Plan?

III. Progress and challenges

A. Overview

7. The 2010-2012 SPAP rollout and implementation were led by the Division of Policy and Practice (now Division of Policy and Strategy) until early 2012. At that point, the Gender and Rights unit was moved to the Programme Division, which then took over this primary responsibility. The Division of Policy and Practice facilitated the development of organization-wide guidance, tools, processes and monitoring mechanisms, but its distance from programmatic work also posed challenges.

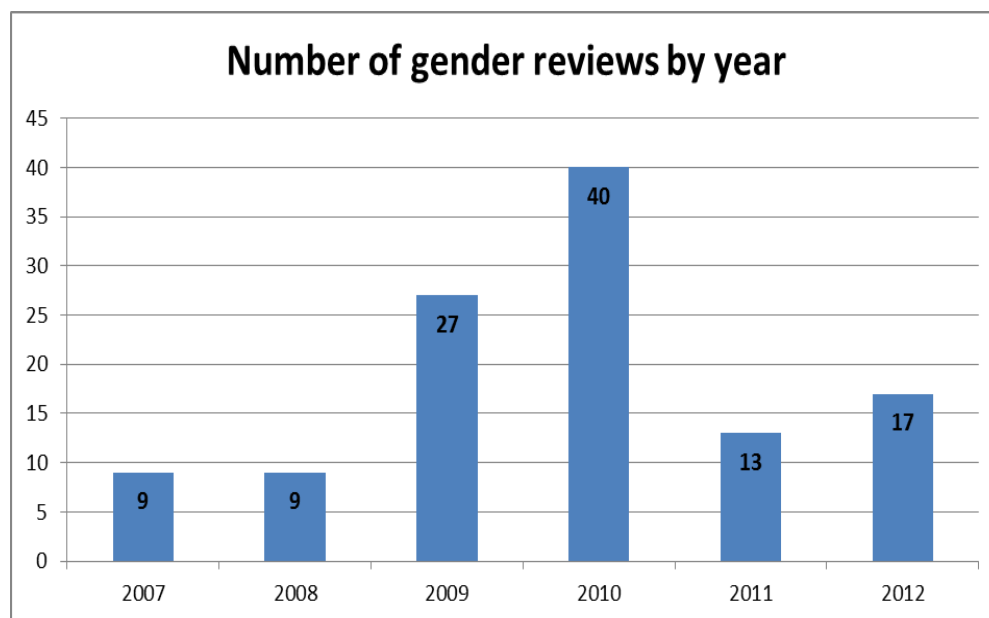
8. The comprehensive nature of the plan, with almost 200 action items, also posed implementation obstacles. Several desired activities could not be implemented due to constraints in time and resources, and fewer than half of the 19 benchmarks could be operationalized to collect meaningful data. Despite these difficulties, the SPAP has played an important role in ensuring leadership commitment on gender; putting in place benchmarks and systems for tracking progress; and integrating a gender focus in country planning and review processes. The following section discusses progress and challenges in each of the eight priority change areas defined by the SPAP. Although the difficulties of operationalizing the proposed benchmarks made annual tracking somewhat challenging, a more comprehensive picture emerged over the three years due to the rich information garnered during the end-of-cycle review.

B. Accountability, strategic framework and resources

9. The 2010 revision of the 1994 UNICEF policy on gender equality was the anchoring action for the 2010-2012 SPAP, and it coincided with adoption of gender strategies and plans by several regional and country offices. The immediate one-year infusion of funds greatly supported this effort, as did the assessments undertaken by regions and countries as part of the global evaluation. The Americas and Caribbean Regional Office (TACRO) and the East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) developed gender strategies in 2009, and in 2012 EAPRO updated its strategy to take into account the equity refocus and shifts in country programmes. In 2010, the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) released its strategy, and the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS) developed a gender strategy in 2012.

10. The action items in these strategies were often similar to the global SPAP, especially in terms of raising awareness of the UNICEF gender policy, ensuring systems of accountability and identifying technical support. However, unlike the global plan, these regional strategies also made an effort to articulate priority gender issues. For example, the EAPRO strategy identified sex selection, gender-based violence, trafficking, gender disparities in education, and gender inequalities in adolescence. TACRO highlighted teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS among adolescents, in addition to gender-based violence. The EMOPS strategy articulated gender-specific goals for each of its clusters (nutrition, water and sanitation, education and protection).

11. The strong signal from UNICEF leadership in updating the policy, an executive directive requiring gender reviews and the availability of the one-time funds were all important in prompting countries to begin gender reviews of their country programmes. Regional reports across the board indicate that completion of country gender reviews, which had been lagging, has been a major accomplishment during the last three years. As figure 1 shows, the number of reviews increased sharply beginning in 2009, from 9 each in 2007 and 2008 to 27 reviews in 2009 and 40 in 2010. The fact that the numbers have come down since then (13 reviews were performed in 2011 and 17 in 2012) may mean that the countries are now settled into a steadier but higher rate of review. It could also mean that progress stalled once the initial impetus abated. Between 2011 and 2012, the proportion of country programmes that had undergone a gender review in the last four years remained essentially unchanged at 76 per cent. This percentage just exceeds the SPAP target of 75 per cent, and it will be important to help prevent that there is no slippage going forward.

Figure 1: Number of gender reviews by year

12. As the pace of completing reviews improved, UNICEF turned its attention to improving their quality as well as the need for follow-up action. In October 2011, a core package of guidance and tools on gender reviews was produced to assist country offices in conducting the reviews in a more comprehensive manner that would support meaningful outcomes. The package uses a gender audit model and a participatory self-assessment methodology that sharpens organizational learning on gender equality during the review process. In 2012, this package was pilot-tested in two countries — Jamaica and the Sudan — in cooperation with the respective regional offices in order to foster sustainable support to country offices. It is currently being rolled out to all regions and countries through a series of webinars.

13. The package incorporates the development of an action plan and links to either the midterm reviews of country programmes or the development of country programme documents. This approach encourages countries to view the gender reviews as part of the country programme process, rather than as a separate exercise. Reference to gender reviews is also made in the guidance for midterm reviews to ensure the sustainability of the practice. The Sudan country office provides an example of the success of this approach: within two months of completing its gender review, the office produced an action plan that has been formally adopted by the country management team and is being implemented. The critical issue for the next year will be whether countries and regions can sustain the quality and follow-through of gender reviews.

14. Progress on other action items in the SPAP priority area of accountability and strategic framework has been less satisfactory. Almost all the regions noted that translating strategies and actions plans into effective work and management plans has been a challenge. Many regions are strongly committed to integrating and prioritizing gender in their work, but they find that implementing and translating gender equality and mainstreaming concepts into concrete results for children

remains uneven across countries and sectors. Two barriers commonly cited are the lack of specified funding and competing priorities for staff time. An important challenge is that programme activities are generally carried out sectorally, while gender issues are not always identified as belonging to a sector. With most offices not having a dedicated gender officer to provide leadership, coordination and technical guidance, gender issues are the responsibility of many across sections.

15. This requires careful attention to prevent work on gender equality becoming nobody's responsibility when it is theoretically everybody's responsibility. This is perhaps one reason why the Division of Human Resources found that it could not institute a system of universal gender assignments and accountability into the performance assessment system as planned. No region has been able to implement the SPAP approach of having a blanket, across-the-board system in which all staff have key assignments on gender equality and all supervisors hold them accountable for those assignments during performance assessments. Many offices voiced the sentiment that "while the awareness of the priority of gender equality is present ..., it is challenging to get everyone on board to get the technical know-how and adhere to the practical application of gender equality principles." There is increasing recognition that while it is critical that everyone recognize gender equality as an organizational priority, it is equally important to define precisely the responsibility for guiding the execution of gender work.

16. Perhaps the major contributing factor to the difficulty in translating strategies and plans into action was the fact that the SPAP was not costed or resourced beyond the one-time funding, which was expended through 2010. This has meant that regional and country resourcing of locally relevant priorities on gender is not always systematic and embedded within regional office management plans and country programme management plans, but instead is reliant on individual leadership and initiative. Systematic implementation of programmatic priorities was also made difficult by the resource allocation system, which channelled funds largely through the five focus areas specified in the MTSP. Within this structure, gender equality came to be perceived as both limited to and subsumed under education, as the lead sector for focus area 2, and thus not eligible for direct funding. For SPAP priorities, therefore, resources often had to be cobbled together on the fringes of this structure.

17. Thus, regions and countries note that, when available, resources for gender are often fragmented across multiple funding streams. This makes it difficult to plan and execute strategic, scalable initiatives, short-changes coherent visioning and fundraising, and leads to smaller, disjointed work streams, relying on short-term consultants. For gender mainstreaming and organizational effectiveness, it would be preferable to have longer-term engagement of professionals who could strategize and implement major initiatives, build internal capacity and bring in additional funds.

18. Reporting on gender equality results has been equally challenging. The MTSP 2006-2013 structure did not highlight outcome indicators on gender beyond focus area 2. In fact, several indicators within other focus areas had relevance for gender. However, as neither the MTSP nor the SPAP made a substantive case regarding this relevance, the gender aspect of many indicators was largely invisible to the organization as a whole.

19. Fortunately, in many cases, regions and countries mobilized their activities around certain gender indicators regardless of this limitation because they found key

gender issues and results important for their local context. Similarly, sectoral staff championed a number of key gender issues that had a “home” in the MTSP. As such, there were many proactive efforts to achieve gender-relevant results, such as reduction in violence against girls and women, greater awareness of the differentiated needs of girls and boys in HIV prevention, and adequate sex-specific sanitation facilities in schools. Without an overarching results framework on gender, however, it has been impossible to determine the collective effectiveness or cumulative impact of these efforts. This critical omission is an important lesson learned, and every effort is being made to rectify it in the next Strategic Plan. Equally critical will be addressing the gap of systematic fundraising and resource allocations for effective programming on gender that translates into measurable results.

C. Capacity and expertise

20. The gender evaluation of 2008 noted the lack of capacity and expertise on gender as a key concern. In particular, it noted that the system of reliance on gender focal points needed serious revision. While the SPAP prioritized this area of action, the end-of-cycle review suggests that action items in this area for the most part have not met with success. Despite much guidance and provision of tools and trainings, country and regional staff continue to identify technical capacity on gender as a critical gap. The issue of exactly how to define “gender expertise” and “technical capacity” with reference to UNICEF programmatic work, and how to enhance and mobilize the appropriate expertise with available resources and within the UNICEF structure, will be important areas of focus for the next action plan.

21. Recently, UNICEF offices at country, regional and headquarters levels provided data for a review on gender expertise across the United Nations system, coordinated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The mapping of UNICEF capacity on gender identified 3 gender specialists or advisors at headquarters, 2 at the regional level and 27 in countries. These numbers are supplemented with 166 gender focal points across UNICEF country offices. The end-of-cycle review mirrored many of the limitations and challenges with the gender focal points that were cited during the evaluation: lack of clarity on mandate on gender versus sectoral work; confusion regarding role in sharing information versus guiding technical work; junior status and lack of influence; and lack of gender expertise. An important step during the next action plan development process, therefore, will be to understand better the difference in roles, qualifications, expectations and performance between the 27 gender specialists and the 166 focal points.

22. Many country and regional offices have made efforts to improve the focal point system, with mixed success. One strategy has been to appoint focal points at a more senior level. EAPRO adopted a system in which section chiefs serve as gender focal points, with the expectation that they would be best positioned to advance sector-specific gender issues. In some situations, this has been effective, especially where the staff member is strongly committed to gender issues and can provide leadership in designing and implementing programme strategies and facilitate access to resources. In other cases, the experience has been less successful, as busy senior staff members are found to have neither the time nor the background to provide the needed support for data analysis, identification of bottlenecks and barriers,

development of the right partnerships, or hiring the right staff or consultants. An alternative approach has been to establish gender committees or task forces, as has been done, for example, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) and MENARO also have formed gender committees to provide regional direction and review. However, there are challenges in convening and maintaining some of these regional groups. In MENARO, for instance, the committee was formulated a year ago but it has yet to meet while in WCARO, adequate attendance during side events at Regional Management Team meetings has been an issue.

23. Building a reliable network of staff with technical expertise on gender must be a high priority for the next action plan; drawing upon the 27 specialists and tapping the most skilled and influential focal points would be an important starting point for this purpose. The action plan development process will facilitate better understanding of the demand for gender expertise at all levels — from strategic and technical direction at headquarters level; to oversight, technical support and quality assurance at regional level; to hands-on expertise in integrating gender in programmes at country level.

24. The end-of-cycle responses have already begun to provide insight on what staff mean when they emphasize the need for “dedicated gender expertise”. Of particular importance are the success stories they cite regarding the effectiveness of such expertise in shaping better programmes and achieving gender equitable results. Responses to an EMOPS survey were strong on this sentiment: “I would attribute the catalyst for improvements to gender-responsiveness in our cluster to the deployment by our agency of dedicated gender-in-emergency support This full-time embedded support helped make gender a more regular issue for us and gave us the human resources to do some of the thinking and analysis we had not been able to do.” Similarly, in Nigeria, the presence of a gender and development specialist has contributed to UNICEF support for a violence against persons prohibition bill. The Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) noted that the most important factor facilitating its accomplishments on gender was the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative education and gender specialist position. In Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), having access to technical leadership and top gender experts was key to prioritizing an HIV programmatic focus on pregnant women who have been drug users. In MENARO, a staff member with gender expertise has been essential to providing timely and effective support to countries in mainstreaming gender, including in carrying out midterm reviews, developing country programme documents, conducting situation analyses and developing results frameworks.

25. Thus far, good faith efforts made at headquarters and in regional offices to expand technical expertise in the field have not aligned well with the articulation of capacity needs by field staff, and this will have to be addressed through different strategies. In 2010, a global gender roster was established as a one-stop shop for recruitment of external gender experts. Links were also provided to other external resources such as the gender capacity stand-by project roster, of which a number of countries have taken advantage. In addition, some regional offices, including EAPRO, developed their own gender rosters to complement the global roster. The main challenge has been maintaining these rosters and keeping them up to date; after the initial period, they have fallen into disuse.

26. The other major capacity building effort undertaken during the SPAP addressed improving the quality of training on gender. At the global level, the e-learning course “Gender Equality, UN Coherence and You” was launched in March 2011 to provide an introductory orientation to gender concepts and issues. This course was made a prerequisite to enrolling in UNICEF programme process training workshops, yet there has been very low participation in the course — only about 5-7 per cent of professional staff completed it in 2011 and 2012. The paradox of this situation needs to be addressed.

27. Regional and country offices have also undertaken a range of training efforts on their own to build capacity on gender. These efforts provide both important lessons learned and potential models for more effective training. For example, MENARO incorporated gender sessions in regional meetings and workshops, including in relation to education in emergencies, adolescent programming and water, sanitation and hygiene. In Kyrgyzstan, a gender mainstreaming capacity-building workshop was organized on data disaggregation, gender analysis, and monitoring and evaluation. As part of the workshop, programme units integrated action on gender issues within their existing work plans. WCARO contracted the KIT/Royal Tropical Institute to provide coaching combined with training for eight countries in the development and rollout of specific plans, programmes and deliverables. The issue now is how to sustain the impact of these trainings, as demand for further training and capacity-building continues in all parts of the organization.

D. Knowledge management

28. The two main mechanisms for knowledge management and sharing on gender issues at global level — a self-assessment of gender mainstreaming survey in UNICEF and a community of practice on gender — have not been as effective as anticipated due largely to lack of participation. Response rates to the survey were consistently around 10 per cent. A community of practice was established to facilitate sharing of good practices and knowledge with respect to work on gender issues, and to connect staff with each other to develop capacity and collaborate to find innovative solutions. However, active participation in and contribution to the community of practice has remained low since it began, with around 2 per cent of members taking active part in 2011 — well below the 25 per cent target. Competing priorities and lack of familiarity with this medium of knowledge sharing may have been factors in the low utilization.

29. Along with capacity and technical expertise, mechanisms for regular sharing of information and experience and for learning practical solutions on gender issues continue to be in high demand from UNICEF regional and country offices. Unlike other technical focal points, gender focal points do not envision themselves as part of a larger network of experts, as the gender role is usually a side bar to their main functions and duties. Moreover, when they move from one office to another, they do not always carry the focal point role with them. Several regions identified functioning gender networks as an unachieved goal during these last three years. As MENARO noted, “... another result that was not achieved was to develop a vibrant and effective gender focal point system and network in the MENA region ... there has not been a regional network meeting where gender focal points could meet, exchange ideas and receive training. In the past three years, many initiatives took

place at regional and country office levels, but there has not been a systematic exchange of good practices.”

30. Globally, as well, there is need for a regular forum for exchange, learning and strategizing regarding UNICEF gender priorities and programming. The mechanism closest to serving this purpose is the Gender Equality Task Force, established initially to monitor implementation of the one-year plan and following that, the SPAP. The Task Force has been serving well as an organizational mechanism to facilitate the flow of SPAP-related information to and from headquarters and regional and country offices. While currently it is only a mechanism for exchange of information related to organizational processes and systems, the Task Force presents a potential platform for periodic engagement among high-level UNICEF staff members who have a strong commitment to gender equality and can help shape strategic and substantive issues.

E. Leadership and partnerships

31. UNICEF has been able to make much stronger progress in the area of leadership, influence and advocacy, as prioritized by the SPAP. At the most senior level, in the last three years UNICEF has shown visible commitment to gender issues. The current Executive Director has championed gender equality and the empowerment of girls as a critical aspect of the refocus on equity. To strengthen expertise and leadership on gender, UNICEF created and in 2012 filled a D-1 post for a Principal Adviser, Gender, Rights and Development. Together, these actions, especially in the last year, have increased the UNICEF presence, voice and effectiveness in important international forums and partnerships on gender issues. This includes new partnerships such as A Promise Renewed, in which gender equality has been framed as one of five structural determinants of child survival; and the emerging global partnership to end child marriage, GirlsNotBrides. It also includes the post-2015 agenda, for which UNICEF co-chairs the inequalities task force with UN-Women, as well as existing initiatives such as the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative or the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign.

32. UNICEF has played an active role in inter-agency processes and initiatives to promote gender equality, as a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, and often in collaboration with UN-Women. For example, in 2011, UNICEF participated in the piloting of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UN SWAP) to implement the Chief Executives Board policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women, led by UN-Women. In addition, in partnership with other agencies, UNICEF continues to facilitate the reporting of United Nations country teams to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women during its pre-sessional working groups meetings. In 2011-2012, UNICEF also served as co-chair (with UNDP) of the UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality’s Sub-Group on Accounting for Resources for Gender Equality, which developed a set of common principles and standards for gender equality markers for the United Nations system.

33. For the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child, UNICEF (named lead agency to mark the day) worked in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women and GirlsNotBrides to organize a high-level event on ending child marriage, the theme for the day. The Day was also marked by many country

offices. Over the last two years, EMOPS has strengthened its engagement and visibility in inter-agency partnerships on gender. It co-chaired the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) sub-working group on gender equality and humanitarian action, represented the IASC in relevant forums and, through its co-chair role, disseminated gender tip sheets for Mali, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and the Sahel region. This IASC engagement will continue during 2013.

34. At the regional and country levels, the end-of-cycle review indicates a more mixed picture on inter-agency partnerships. For example, staff in MENARO report that inter-agency coordination on gender issues presents a challenge; only sporadically are resources shared or capacities combined. In contrast, EAPRO reports very successful regional engagement with initiatives such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and UNAIDS. This has resulted in gender-sensitive research and advocacy reports that have been used by government and development partners. Civil society partnerships show a similar pattern; in some regions, such as the South Asia Regional Office (ROSA) and TACRO, UNICEF has partnered effectively with women's groups, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to promote girls' education, the fight against violence and improvement of sanitation and menstrual hygiene. In contrast, WCARO and MENARO report difficulty in finding strong civil society partners to mobilize gender issues. An important finding from a recent assessment of development effectiveness at UNICEF is that partners engaged through programme cooperation agreements are rarely screened for capacity and expertise on gender. This is clearly a bottleneck to building stronger alliances and achieving gender-equitable results.

35. Within UNICEF itself, there is increasing evidence of strengthened leadership on gender issues at the field level. Three regions — EAPRO, CEE/CIS and ROSA — have instituted the practice of having gender issues as a standing agenda item at their Regional Management Team meetings. In ROSA, gender issues are also featured in the regional network meetings on education, HIV and AIDS, and child protection and in capacity-building initiatives with partners. Other regions address progress in selected Regional Management Teams. In several regions, the deputy regional director has at times served as the gender focal point, signalling the region's prioritization of gender issues. In MENARO, the deputy regional director serves as the supervisor and champion of the regional gender advisor.

36. For many staff, the UNICEF mandate for promoting gender equality is clear from its mission statement, gender policy and the SPAP, but the implications for their work are less clear. Staff members are especially confused by the contrast between gender equality being presented as an overarching normative principle while it is collapsed as one of many cross-cutting strategies, both in the organizational structure and in the MTSP. As EAPRO noted: "The large volume of policy documents circulating through country offices and competing priorities — e.g. on results monitoring for equity and change management — have, in some cases, contributed to gender issues being relegated to the background. Further work is needed to align the gender and equity agendas within the UNICEF results framework. Even more basically, there are varying understandings of what gender mainstreaming means at the practical level."

F. Programming

37. UNICEF has made serious efforts to improve and track its processes for programme planning for gender, with some success, but also with important and continued gaps. The progress on data collection and availability has been more marked. UNICEF has also undertaken an effort to track expenditures through the Gender Equality Marker, which serves some organizational purposes well, but it can be further improved.

Data on gender issues

38. There have been significant improvements in the collection and availability of sex-disaggregated data on a wide range of issues relevant to the work of UNICEF. The last round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS4) produced data for more than 60 countries on more than 100 indicators, with data available by sex. MICS4 also has specific modules on harmful practices that have strong gender dimensions, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting. UNICEF has analysed and used such data in reporting on gender disparities in its key reports and publications, including *The State of the World's Children* and *Progress for Children*. In particular, the 2012 edition of *Progress for Children* presented sex-disaggregated data on adolescents on more than 30 indicators, across different domains of well-being. At the country level, gendered data analysis has focused on a range of issues, including gender-based violence, trafficking, HIV/AIDS, child marriage, gender disparities in education and regarding the status of adolescent girls.

39. UNICEF has contributed to the preparation of sex-specific child mortality estimates, as part of the work of the Interagency Group for Mortality Estimation, which released estimates for the first time in 2013. UNICEF co-chairs the technical working group on indicators for the Interagency Expert Group on Gender Statistics, which has identified a core set of 52 indicators for global reporting on gender statistics. Sex-disaggregated data are now available through www.childinfo.org for most indicators, although an important limitation is that “gender” is currently not a readily accessible, user-friendly category for reviewing a range of relevant indicators.

40. This gap in making gender-relevant data more visible and accessible to a broader range of audiences may be one reason why the current assessment is that most of the available data are yet to be analysed from a gender perspective. Other reasons include lack of awareness of gender issues and the analysis that can be conducted to understand them better. Additionally, analysed data need to be disseminated more widely and effectively, both internally and externally. This is an area for improvement essential for better, more evidence-based programmes and advocacy efforts for gender equality.

41. Besides the disaggregation of data by sex, there is an emerging recognition of the importance of considering gender equality not only as an outcome in and of itself, but also as a determinant of child well-being and rights. This perspective of gender inequality as a structural bottleneck and barrier is becoming evident in the work that is being done on the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES). Gender indicators are beginning to be identified and included in the MoRES guidance on evidence-based strategies. However, these efforts are at the initial

stages and will require measurement expertise on gender at headquarters and regional levels for appropriate content and guidance to be developed and mainstreamed.

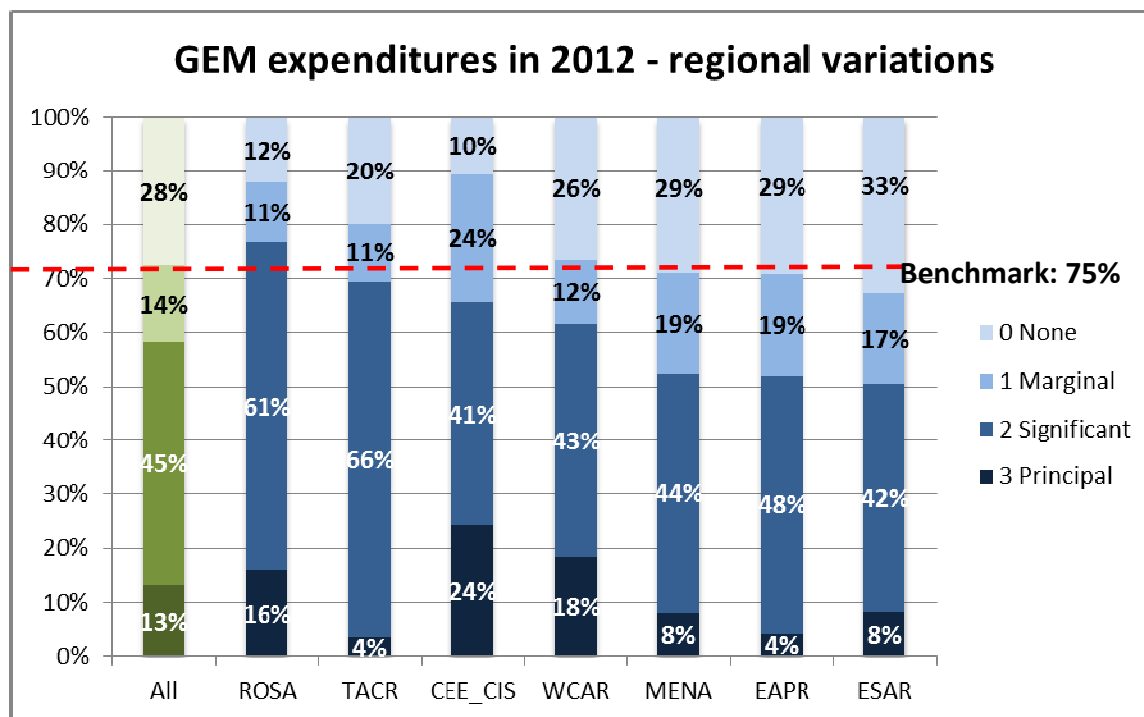
Gender Equality Marker

42. The Gender Equality Marker (GEM) was developed to track expenditures on output-level intermediate results that are expected to contribute to advancing gender equality or the empowerment of girls and women. The GEM requires a self-assessment of every intermediate result funded by the programme budget against a four-category scale that ranges from 0 (not expected to contribute to gender equality in any noticeable way) to 3 (advancing gender equality is a principal objective of the result). The marker was integrated into the existing UNICEF enterprise management system in 2011 and applied by country and regional offices, and in 2012, it was applied at all levels — country, regional and headquarters — with the move to VISION. Starting in 2012, the IASC Gender Marker, which has a similar four-category classification regarding humanitarian programmes, became fully operational as well, both in UNICEF and as a mandatory part of the Consolidated Appeal Process Online Project System.

43. GEM data shows that in 2011, 39 per cent of all intermediate results were classified as contributing significantly to gender equality and 11 per cent as contributing principally. In 2012, the proportion contributing significantly rose to 44 per cent, while the proportion contributing principally remained unchanged. The combined percentage in 2012 slightly exceeds the SPAP target of 50 per cent. The IASC Gender Marker for humanitarian situations shows a similar percentage of 58 per cent of UNICEF projects classified as contributing principally or significantly to gender equality in 2013.

44. Figure 2 shows the distribution of expenditures by GEM categories in 2012, by region and for UNICEF overall. At 58 per cent, expenditures contributing principally or significantly to gender results are below the SPAP target of 75 per cent. Currently, only one region, ROSA, meets this target. Over the 2011 and 2012 period, data by MTSP key result areas have consistently shown that a higher proportion of expenditures in education and child protection have been classified as contributing principally or significantly to gender equality than in other areas. Data for 2012 indicate that strides have been made in increasing the proportion of expenditure on gender equality results in key result areas related to young child survival and development, for which these figures had traditionally been among the lowest. Of particular note are increases in the area of nutrition (improved practices and access to commodities and services) — from 40 to 59 per cent — and with respect to lifesaving interventions for children in humanitarian situations — from 41 to 69 per cent.

Figure 2: GEM expenditures in 2012 — regional variations



45. While the GEM provides useful information on gender priorities and expenditures, it is based on self-assessment and staff members' understanding of gender issues, and as such, data generated through the GEM may not always be objective. At the country level, deputy representatives are responsible for quality assurance, but they may lack both the expertise and the time to review the coding chosen by their staff. Feedback from regional offices for the end-of-cycle review indicates that the GEM has proven to be both an opportunity and a challenge; while it has provided an important opportunity to discuss how UNICEF contributes to gender equality, regional staff often find it difficult to set up an objective verification of the GEM ratings despite the guidelines provided by headquarters.

46. The verification process for the IASC Gender Marker, which is independently vetted by an IASC Gender Standby Capacity Initiative (GenCap) Advisor, provides some important insights on the GEM coding by staff. The 2012 mid-year review showed that there was almost 100 per cent overreporting towards more positive scores in the IASC Gender Marker coding. While 70 per cent of the self-assessed results were coded as contributing principally or significantly to gender equality, the proportion dropped down to 36 per cent after review by the gender adviser.

47. It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the percentages emerging from the GEM, staff continue to highlight resources as a major constraint in undertaking work on gender. Lack of dedicated funding is seen as contributing to the continued capacity gap and preventing resource optimization. As CEE/CIS notes, "Resource constraints lead to an overall fragmented approach to gender mainstreaming rather than a well-planned and systematic one."

Country programmes

48. The SPAP led to regional and country offices developing tools and guidance to integrate gender in the main work of the organization by ensuring that gender equality concerns are taken into account in country programme documents, country programme action plans, programme cooperation agreements with partners and in monitoring and evaluation processes. Complementing these practical tools in the field, the UNICEF programme policy and procedures electronic manual and the programme planning process training have been revised to increase the focus on gender equality as a normative principle within the country programme process. One shortcoming of the gender benchmark in the current MTSP has been its lack of indicators to track the effective use of these tools and guidance. In the new Strategic Plan 2014-2017, the benchmark has been considerably strengthened to provide an annual review of how well country programme processes are taking advantage of these resources.

49. Organizational efforts to integrate gender in country programme documents had significant impact early on, but it does not seem to have been sustained past 2009. Qualitative reviews by independent evaluators have indicated that the percentage of country programme documents approved by the Executive Board that meet established organizational standards for the application of gender mainstreaming has increased, from 45 per cent in 2007 to 59 per cent in 2009, but plateaued at that level for the next three years. The initial jump in the figures could be attributable in some part to the greater organizational focus on gender in 2008-2009 following the gender evaluation. The challenge remains in continuing that momentum. It should also be noted that, despite this initial progress, the percentage of country programme documents meeting standards for gender equality has consistently been the lowest among all other key performance indicators evaluated, including the human rights-based approach, communication for development, results-based management and equity.

50. Clearly one concern with both the application of the GEM and country programme documents is how country staff define and articulate gender issues and gender equality or empowerment results, and how this then gets reflected in reporting and planning mechanisms. For example, countries working on adolescent issues, which are a significant proportion of programmatic work in TACRO, ROSA and MENA, are predominantly addressing gender issues, but not always classifying them as such. Given organizational history, staff may also more readily associate gender with child protection and education issues than with the other focus areas. Similarly, there may be substantial activity and important successes on gender programming, but internal tracking mechanisms make it difficult to assess whether the successes are the exception or the rule.

51. Regional analyses suggest the continued need to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and documentation of gender-focused programme initiatives. Currently, country office annual reports from most regions tend to report mainly on process-related activities rather than programmatic action activities or higher-level gender equality results achieved. One important insight from the end-of-cycle review is that there is a common misunderstanding that gender equality is largely about gender mainstreaming. For many staff, therefore, the process of mainstreaming (rather than the outcomes for children that it can help to achieve) becomes the goal.

52. This challenge of determining whether programmes are effectively implementing gender strategies and achieving gender equitable results, or whether they are effective but simply not able to adequately report on them, is a central issue to be resolved through the gender action plan development process. For example, a recent development effectiveness review of UNICEF by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs found that less than one third of the programmes documented in their sample of UNICEF evaluations effectively addressed gender equality, and in another third, it was not addressed at all. In future, it will be important to assess whether this latter third lacked effective documentation, or effective implementation.

G. Work environment and communications

53. UNICEF has made some strides in fostering a more gender-equitable work environment, although progress on some desired fronts is not yet satisfactory. Achieving gender parity in senior level posts has been a priority for the organization, but the progress has been slower than desired. The proportion of female staff at the P-5 level or higher has risen, from 38 per cent in 2006 to 42 per cent in 2012, but is considerably below the target of 50 per cent. The urgency of this disparity has been noted at the highest levels, with the Executive Director advocating gender parity in various messages across the organization and requiring that half of shortlisted candidates for all senior-level posts be women. Senior management and hiring officers are being made increasingly aware of the importance of gender parity in senior positions, and targeted outreach for qualified candidates is conducted by the Division of Human Resources. UNICEF is very committed to increasing awareness and use of flexible working arrangements, which are in place but not always exercised.

54. With regard to internal and external communication of gender materials and priorities, again, the progress is mixed. The new gender policy was actively disseminated initially, and there was significant interchange on the SPAP with the regional offices. However, a system or portal for regularly collating and showcasing work on gender issues needs to be updated, on both the internal and external websites. Most of the benchmarks developed for tracking progress on communications could not be operationalized since they would require tracking and classifying un-countable numbers of speeches, publications, press releases, postings, etc. Providing improved visibility and regular updates on gender as a core area of UNICEF's work on the website could also facilitate regular tracking of external communications, through monitoring of hits to specific web pages.

IV. The way forward

55. The 2010-2012 SPAP focused primarily on systems and processes. While UNICEF has not been able to fully implement or track all the ambitious components in the eight change areas, it has made notable progress on leadership commitment, inter-agency partnerships, strengthening of planning and reporting processes, and most of all, ownership by regional and country offices with regard to gender as an institutional priority. An important missing element has been the ability to track and assess whether these processes and systems are leading to the desired results on

gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The next gender action plan will build on the foundation laid and will address this gap by focusing primarily on the achievement and monitoring of gender-equitable programmatic results.

56. The end-of-cycle review indicates that results and capacity are the two areas that require the most concerted attention. With regard to results, the next action plan will more proactively address gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as important outcomes in addition to addressing gender mainstreaming as an important process. Defining these concepts and their relevance for the work of UNICEF will be key to defining which gender issues are priorities for the organization, why they are priorities and how they fit together. For this effort, specifying results in terms of measurable indicators is critical, and UNICEF has already made considerable headway in framing gender in the results matrix for the next Strategic Plan. A collaborative process with all sectors and with field staff has helped to define results for gender equality and empowerment throughout the Strategic Plan 2014-2017 development process, ensuring that key outcome and output-level indicators are reflected in each result area.

57. The next action plan will consolidate and amplify the gender results incorporated in the Strategic Plan, highlighting the synergies and efficiencies across result areas and showcasing the whole as larger than the sum of its parts. The action plan will also link content and results through an overarching framework and theory of change, providing the programmatic platform that regions and countries can act upon, ensuring that the framework is embedded in the equity refocus. This framework will need to be a simple, accessible and dynamic model that readily allows field staff to “translate” the gender discourse into context-specific activities that UNICEF and partners can work on to achieve the desired results, especially for girls, who tend to experience the gender disadvantage in addition to the other disadvantages of poverty, minority status, disability, etc.

58. A similar concerted effort will be required in shaping and finalizing the next Gender Action Plan with regard to gender capacity and expertise. An important step will be identifying the skills and experience that best fit the needs defined by staff and the definition of job responsibilities that would function effectively within the UNICEF system to ensure that gender is prioritized not only in programme design, but also in implementation. It is clear that at some level technical expertise is already being used for work on gender, but it needs some realignment, and in the words of field staff, it needs to be used “more smartly.” The smart use of resources to tap existing expertise, assign responsibility and strengthen UNICEF capacity on gender is essential not only to achieve gender-equitable results but also to achieve all UNICEF results. Thus, well-thought-out investment in the right expertise on gender is critical for organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

59. The process for developing the next action plan has been initiated with the end-of-cycle review and consultations with Member States regarding the new Strategic Plan. It will continue during the remainder of year with an internal technical consultation, strategy development meeting with senior management and consultations with external stakeholders. UNICEF expects to share the new Gender Action Plan 2014-2017 with Executive Board members by early 2014.