INCLUSIVE DATA CHARTER

DRAFT ACTION PLAN
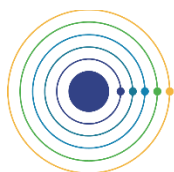
Introduction: Data for Action

UNICEF work on data for children is based on a simple premise: **We believe that smart demand, supply and use of data drives better results for children**. When the right data are in the right hands at the right time, decisions can be better informed, more equitable, and more likely to protect children's rights.

Effective use of disaggregated data can help us not just track results for children, but also shape those results with better insights about what's working, what's not, which children are thriving and which are being left behind. Both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNICEF's Strategic Plan explicitly recognize the key role of data in achieving results. The ultimate success of each plan will rely on data that are fit-for purpose and put to use for children.

Supporting the demand, supply and use of data for children requires both realigning UNICEF's existing data resources as well as making new investments in the future directions of data.

Three years ago, UNICEF embarked on an exercise to identify the most strategic data investments for the coming decade. The process of identifying those investments included consultations across the organization, discussions with partners, and a critical look at prior investments. The result was UNICEF's Data for Children Strategic Framework. The Framework both articulates why UNICEF believes in the power of data and lays out a vision for how that power can be better harnessed. The launch of the Inclusive Data Charter (*see* Box 1) this month, gives UNICEF the opportunity to distil critical elements of the Data for Children Strategic Framework into this Action Plan, outlining key strategic shifts UNICEF is undertaking to make itself fit for purpose in an ever-changing data landscape.

Ultimately, the goal of UNICEF's data work is the same as its overall mission: to identify, prevent, and respond to the threats that keep children from realizing their full potential. Practically, that means working to better match up the demand, supply, and use of data for children. While the specifics look different in every context in which UNICEF works, the core commitment remains the same.

UNICEF is working to make sure that, by 2030, decision makers at all levels are calling for appropriate data, have the right data available at the right time, and make use of those data to improve the situation of children and families.

Over the course of the next decade, UNICEF is committed to aligning its data resources and its ambitions to achieve that vision.

Box 1:
Inclusive Data Charter Vision & Principles:

"… *Between now and 2030, we will work to improve the quality, quantity, financing, and availability of inclusive and disaggregated data as well as the capacity and capability to produce and use it* …"

Principles:
1. All populations must be included in the data.
2. All data should, wherever possible, be disaggregated to accurately describe all populations.
3. Data should be drawn from all available sources.
4. Those responsible for the collection of data and production of statistics must be accountable.
5. Human and technical capacity to collect, analyze, and use disaggregated data must be improved, including through adequate and sustainable financing.

Transforming data into results for children

Realigning UNICEF data efforts to address gaps in our current work as well as opportunities on the horizon requires shifts in the focus of some of our data work. To this end, UNICEF will:

START work to:

- **Drive intelligent demand for data.** UNICEF will sensitize decision makers at all levels – from ministers to activists – on how they can improve results for children by demanding and using appropriate data and data analysis. As part of our efforts to advocate for the proactive use of data for results, we will document and share examples where data are being used to improve children's lives

- **Integrate data.** With partners in and outside of government, UNICEF will develop, use and share tools that bring multiple data sources and types together. These tools can both minimize the burdens of reporting and sharing data as well as enable new types of data analysis that provide new insights about the well-being of children.

- **Exploit cross-sectoral data.** UNICEF will help governments link administrative data systems across sectors to better address issues that transcend traditional silos. This may include either ground-up efforts such as multi-ministry beneficiary databases to improve coordinated service delivery or analysis of existing data across sectoral areas to identify areas or groups with overlapping vulnerabilities.

- **Accelerate support for SDG monitoring and implementation.** As part of its commitment to support countries in collecting and using data for the SDGs, UNICEF will strengthen its efforts to innovate and accelerate results from household surveys, including Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). This work will allow UNICEF to better support countries in identifying and adapting the best tools to achieve the most timely, cost effective and useful results for children. UNICEF will strengthen its own efforts to make sure that those data are used for decision-making at all levels.

STOP work that:

- **Encourages piecemeal approaches to data work and the proliferation of disconnected pilot projects.** Instead, we will promote coherence in both guidance and communication as we work to achieve sustainable and scalable solutions across all our data work. With better coordination, we will reduce the burden of one-off or disconnected projects on country offices while improving the effectiveness of our data investments.

- **Takes a tools-first approach.** UNICEF has a range of tools at its disposal for responding to the data needs of any particular context, but we must start with a clear understanding of the needs and context before creating new tools or deciding which existing tools to use. We will promote a strategic approach that starts with a needs analysis and then provides country offices with a menu of options to address those needs.

- **Does not meet necessary quality standards.** Different data types are appropriate for different purposes, and those distinct purposes require varying degrees of statistical reliability, disaggregation and comparability. Focusing on using the right type and quality of data at the right time means we will stop data collection efforts that are either unconnected to an end use or do not meet the quality standards required for that use.

- **Is disconnected from practical use for children.** As the potential areas of data work expand, so too does the risk of diluting our limited data resources. Our capacity will be tightly focused on data work that directly impacts the lives of children.

REDUCE:

- **The collection of redundant data.** In part through improved coordination with others and in part by scaling back our own duplications, we will support efforts to reduce the collection of data that is already available through other channels or partners.
- **Analytical work on issues that are well-covered by others.** The potential areas of work on data for children will always far outstrip our available resources. Recognizing this, for topics that are well-covered by our partners, we will refocus our efforts on making sure that children are represented in the work of others. We will shift our substantive emphasis to issues that receive less attention from our partners and on cross-cutting issues that impact multiple aspects of child-wellbeing.
- **Time to insight and action for data.** Many data have relatively short lifespans for usefulness. Whether delays stem from politics, processing or communication, they all endanger the usability of data. We will redouble efforts to become more agile and to reduce the time it takes to turn data insights into action.

INCREASE work to:

- **Make data work fit-for-purpose in all contexts.** While UNICEF works in some of the most challenging contexts in the world, our data tools and skills are not always well matched to those environments. We are committed to shifting our own approaches to data to make them relevant for and appropriate to a wider range of contexts, with a particular emphasis on fragile and humanitarian contexts.

- **Simplify data communication.** The overwhelming majority of people in a position to help children – from allocating resources to providing better services – are not data specialists. They need data tools that allow them to quickly understand how data about children apply to their jobs and what action they can take in response. UNICEF will meet their needs by simplifying our data communication, providing timely and actionable insights. We will always work to tie the implications of the data to concrete actions that can be taken to drive change for children.

- **Raise the floor on "data savvy" capacity and skills.** While most stakeholders need simple, data-informed headlines rather than complex tables and caveats, they also need a basic understanding of what kinds of data are fit for what kinds of purposes. UNICEF will invest in focused capacity development for key stakeholders in governments and in UNICEF itself when more advanced data skills are required.

- **Build common platforms and improve coordination.** UNICEF will increase efficiency and effectiveness by promoting the sharing of data in common platforms both internally and externally. At the country level, UNICEF will work to promote transparency and data sharing across ministries, within UN country teams and among international organizations and similar stakeholders. Within UNICEF, we will develop data sharing platforms across the organization. These platforms will reduce the work required to collect, validate and share data, enabling better data communication and use.

- **Accelerate collection and use of data from children and communities.** UNICEF will build on the success of U-Report and similar products to increase government and non-government collection and use of data that reflect the views, priorities and insights of children and communities. UNICEF will increase efforts to make sure that ethical protocols are in place and respected for the protection of all those – and especially children – involved in data collection processes.

- **Maximize the value of real time monitoring and response.** UNICEF will expand the commitment and capacity of governments to track and respond to intermediate outcomes for children in real-time. This will include strengthening administrative data systems across all UNICEF areas of work, from identifying whether teachers are in school and teaching to tracking whether child survivors of violence are receiving protection and support services, or how well health clinics are serving the most marginalized.

Making data a team sport

Most organizations recognize that data in the hands of a few data experts can be powerful, but data at the fingertips of many is what will be truly transformational. One of UNICEF's greatest strengths is its broad network of country offices and its comparative advantage in local level service delivery and systems strengthening. However, our work in countries and support to countries must become less a function of the effort and talent of individual staff working alone. To be sustainable and scalable, our work must reflect, share, and capitalize on the good practices and ideas throughout the institution and our partner network.

To that end, in line with the Inclusive Data Charter, UNICEF will scale up institutional support for strategic data investments, identify the needs that are most common across offices and respond to them in bulk (whether through the creation of long term agreements, talent pools, sample RFPs or guidance). These practical tools – while not glamorous – can eliminate weeks or months of work for any office that seeks to take advantage of them. In new areas of data work, this form of support also has the added value of building capacity for the data community at regional and country levels, with critical elements of knowledge-exchange and quality assurance, together with documenting effectiveness of approaches.

To carry this work forward, UNICEF needs the active involvement of external partners as well as colleagues around the world. Here are a few ways to help unleash the power of data for children:

- **If you are a UNICEF regional and country office**: share your data experiences and talk about what your office needs to make data work better. Data strategy colleagues can work with you to plan the most effective investments and way forward. Get started through the intranet site at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/DRP/ DataforChildren/

- **If you are a potential data or technology partner**: start a conversation with the UNICEF data team (data@unicef.org). The team can tell you about the most pressing data challenges standing in the way of progress for children; you can help identify links between your work and the solutions that children need.

- **If you are a potential funding partner**: UNICEF needs your support – and a much larger team of data advocates – to make this work scalable and sustainable. Together, let's begin a conversation about exciting opportunities to strengthen data work across the world.