

Report from the UNICEF- NGOs Consultation for Partnership in Humanitarian Settings

“Enhancing the Culture of Partnership”

Geneva, 11-12 November 2019

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the main issues and recommendations arising from the recent *UNICEF-NGOs Consultation for Partnership in Humanitarian Settings*, which was held in Geneva on 11th-12th November 2019. The consultation were convened with recognition by both UNICEF and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/Civil Society Organizations(CSOs) -- herein ‘NGOs’-- that to better meet the needs of children living in today’s most challenging humanitarian contexts, the mutual partnership needs to be further strengthened.

The consultation was jointly convened by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), a large Geneva-based NGO Consortium, and UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS). They were attended by delegates from 46 NGOs (national and international); and selected UNICEF staff members from Country Offices, Regional Offices and HQs (New York and Geneva).

Prior to the consultation, ICVA had researched and published in April 2019 a [scoping study](#), based on interviews with many of UNICEF’s key humanitarian NGO partners. The scoping study highlighted several issue areas where NGOs partners felt UNICEF should further invest, to strengthen and deepen its partnership management. The scoping study formed the basis of the consultation.

A full detailed report of the consultation was produced by ICVA ([NGO Consultation Full Report](#)) including notes from all presentations, details of all recommendations discussed by groups, and a full list of delegates.

This report provides a synthesis of over 106 recommendations from conference delegates into 6 key issue areas. The report also provides details of solutions proposed by UNICEF to address each respective issue, as well as a timeline for their implementation.

2. Executive Summary

UNICEF wants to be a more predictable, dependable and principled partner in both humanitarian advocacy and action. This objective was clearly set out by UNICEF EMOPS Director Manuel Fontaine in his opening of the UNICEF-NGOs consultation. The primary enabler for achieving this goal for UNICEF entails being a better overall partner, having more focus on quality, equity and accountability, and being more prepared for humanitarian action. UNICEF strives to be the donor and partner of choice for civil society organizations in emergencies.

During two days of consultation, UNICEF and its national and international NGO partners deliberated the following subjects:

- Challenges and opportunities in humanitarian settings;
- The revised Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Action;
- Principles of Partnership (PoP) as a framework for renewed engagement;
- Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA);
- New initiatives and opportunities in the operationalization of partnerships;

- Duty of Care (DoC) to staff and partners; and
- Localization.

Each session on these thematic issue areas was jointly presented by a technical lead from UNICEF and two NGO partners, one of which in most cases was a national/local CSO, with substantive experience in this area. Mixed working groups of UNICEF and NGO partners were then convened to further discuss and identify the main partnership challenges, and to suggest recommendations. In total 106 recommendations were made through the two days, all of which are documented in the descriptive consultations report (link above). The issues and recommendations were then discussed internally to UNICEF, sorted and grouped into six (6) recurrent key themes:

Key issues and recommendations:

1. UNICEF's Core Commitment for Children (CCCs) in humanitarian contexts are not commonly known or utilized by all NGO partners. The CCCs need to be better known and reflected in planning and partnership agreements. **Recommendation: UNICEF to invest in a comprehensive roll out strategy of the revised CCCs, involving a proactive reach out to NGOs.**
2. Partnership Management. UNICEF lacks a consistent culture of partnership, with clear and open communication, across all offices and all staff. **Recommendation: A renewed investment in partnership management with clear organizational accountabilities.**
3. UNICEF operational partnership procedures are not always well understood by international and national NGO partners. This includes a lack of knowledge on who to contact in UNICEF on operational issues. **Recommendation: Diffusion of clear guidelines on NGO partnership procedures, as well as an overview of whom NGOs can contact in UNICEF Country Offices, Regional Offices and HQs Divisions.**
4. UNICEF is sometimes perceived as having a weak advocacy voice in some humanitarian contexts, despite its well positioned status. It is not clear how NGO partners can engage with UNICEF in joint advocacy efforts at country, regional or global level. **Recommendation: Renewed focus on understanding on how and when UNICEF and NGO partners can jointly advocate to further children's rights in humanitarian contexts.**
5. The localization agenda is yet to be fully evidenced by UNICEF and its international NGO partners globally, although some promising practices are emerging. **Recommendation: UNICEF to draft a global strategy and roll out plan for the implementation of the localization agenda, in accordance with its NGO partners and donors.**
6. There are several issues relating to NGO partnerships, which reach beyond the mandate of UNICEF as a sole agency and are generic to the whole UN / Humanitarian Country Team (i.e. on harmonization of costs, PSEA, data management, duty of care). **Recommendation: UNICEF to advocate for a harmonized approach in the UN / H-CT family at country level, based on consultations with NGO partners on, *inter alia*, PSEA, data management and Duty of Care.**

Detailed solutions under each key theme can be found in the main body of this report below including a proposed timeline for the implementation of each solution. UNICEF, together with ICVA, will disseminate the recommendations made by UNICEF in this report through a series of outreach activities.

UNICEF EMOPS is committed to hold regular (yearly) consultations with its NGO humanitarian partners to discuss key operational issues, propose solutions and to review progress against the recommendations in this document. In 2020 several additional 'deep dive' focused consultations on specific topics will be convened with NGOs, to include Localization and PSEA.

3. Summary of sessions

3.1. Challenges and Opportunities in Humanitarian settings

The session to 'set the scene' was introduced by EMOPS Director Manuel Fontaine with questions from ICVA Executive Director Ignacio Packer. It was further complemented by a presentation on the ongoing UNICEF Humanitarian Review exercise by Steven Lauwerier.

Comparable figures show that the number of people in need, in humanitarian contexts globally, has increased by some 22 million over the past year. The main drivers of need are protracted and highly violent conflicts, extreme weather events associated with climate change, and under-performing economies. These themes look set to continue and further increase. The four primary humanitarian challenges for UNICEF and its partners in upcoming five years will be: 1) increasing numbers of protracted crises; 2) public health emergencies; 3) climate change; and 4) large-scale migration/displacement.

Over 50% of the funding UNICEF received in 2018 was targeted for humanitarian programming. Last year UNICEF responded to 285 humanitarian situations in 90 countries, worked with 1,403 NGOs partners (67% national NGOs), as well as with governments. UNICEF's comparative advantage is its decentralized approach. While supplies are a major component of both preparedness and response, human resources are the key to quality humanitarian interventions, whether through full time UNICEF employees or through standby partnership deployments working together with partners.

4. The Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Action

The [CCCs](#) set out UNICEF's obligations to children in humanitarian contexts. They guide UNICEF's programming approach, and therefore the approaches of partners working together with UNICEF in humanitarian contexts. Currently under revision, the CCCs will continue to guide UNICEF and its Partners' work, as a programming reference, as well as an advocacy and communication tool, establishing a set of standards to be upheld in all contexts where there is a crisis.

Key Issues: UNICEF's **Core Commitment for Children (CCCs)** in humanitarian contexts are not universally known or utilized by all NGO/CSO partners. The new CCCs will need to be better reflected into humanitarian planning documents and partnership agreements.

#1. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	Timeline	Responsible for action
(a) Invest in a comprehensive rollout and dissemination strategy and raise awareness on the new CCCs –	Throughout 2020	EMOPS
(b) Include roll out sessions for every UNICEF CO, extended to NGOs as well	Throughout 2020	EMOPS/ROs
(c) All humanitarian programme documents (PDs) to include specific reference to the CCCs.	2020	EMOPS/DAPM

5. The Principles of Partnership Framework

NGO partners AMEL and Plan International shared several best practice examples of working with UNICEF in Lebanon (AMEL), and internationally (Plan). As part of their presentations, and during further discussion in groups and plenary, several challenges and issues were raised relating to NGO's experience of working with UNICEF in field.

- i. **Key Issues:** UNICEF lacks a consistently applied culture of partnership and open communication with NGOs across all offices and all staff.
- There is lack of an open space/partnership forum at country level where NGO partners can raise strategic, programmatic or operational ideas or concerns, without fear of reprisal.
 - Partnership management skills are not a key competency measured in performance management and appraisal, and partners often feel 'unequal.'

#2. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	Timeline	Responsible for action
(a) Roll out a digitalized reporting platform (Partner Reporting Portal) for UNICEF's NGO partners to submit quarterly progress reports and humanitarian reports and share programme progress/concerns during programme implementation. Partner reports will be accessible to all Country Office UNICEF staff, therefore allowing improved UNICEF monitoring of programme progress and partner feedback.	Throughout 2020	DAPM, ICTD
(b) Communicate consolidated findings from the NGO Partner Consultation, and ICVA Scoping Study, to senior UNICEF staff in Country and Regional Offices, and seek localized solutions which include commitments to address perceived lack of culture of partnership such as increased involvement of partners in humanitarian and development planning cycles, designation of Partnerships Officers –or at least functions -- at CO level.	Throughout 2020	EMOPS with other divisions (TBC)
(c) Capture partnership development timelines in eTools adopting countries in UNICEF's corporate performance management platform to monitor partnership development process.	Throughout 2020	DAPM, ICTD, DFAM

(d) Roll out the Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring Service (CCPM) to all countries where clusters are activated, in order to give UNICEF partners a forum to provide feedback on UNICEF's performance as cluster lead	Throughout 2020	GCCU
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ii. **Key Issues:** UNICEF is sometimes perceived as having a weak advocacy voice in some humanitarian contexts, despite its well positioned status with governments and the international community.

- It is not clear what UNICEF's core advocacy messaging is in humanitarian contexts
- It is not clear how NGO/CSO partners can engage with UNICEF in joint advocacy efforts at country, regional or global levels

# 3. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	timeline	Responsible for action
(a) UNICEF will strengthen its advocacy and visibility to better protect children under attack in today's conflicts, as well as to improve the lives of children affected by all humanitarian crises, working together with NGO partners internationally, regionally and locally.		EMOPS, ROs
(b) UNICEF will develop a training module for Country Offices on how to engage local NGO partners on advocacy around UNICEF key causes, as part of its advocacy capacity development initiative		DOC, EMOPS

6. Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

UNICEF and partners ABAAD (Lebanon) and World Vision International (USA) shared best practices and challenges in addressing PSEA.

A key issue that arose through group and plenary discussion was the lack of harmonization in approaches across the UN family. While many NGOs have already developed and implemented tools for responding to PSEA, many local NGO partners and governments have not had resources to be able to bolster their PSEA capacity. Plenary discussion also reflected on the challenges of implementing a victim-focused PSEA framework in contexts where government are not supportive.

Key Issues: There are several issues relating to the UN's interaction with NGOs on PSEA (and more broadly), which reach beyond the sole mandate of UNICEF.

- Lack of harmonization across agencies in areas of PSEA, programme costs including salaries, data protection approaches (in relation to PSEA)
- Lack of common UN-wide approach to the localization agenda
- Lack of harmonization in terms of Duty of Care principles.
- Lack of common advocacy plan which encompasses INGOs and local NGOs

#4. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	Timeline	Responsible for action
(a) Lead and influence the UNCT and HCT-wide approach on PSEA	Ongoing through 2020	DAPM, OED
(b) Contribute to the formation of a country wide communications and advocacy plan through the UNCT/HCT, including contributing technical expertise and resources	Various, according to UNCT/HCT workplan	COs
(c) UNICEF to advocate for Duty of Care to be standardized at a UNCT level, through its work and leverage at the UN High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM)	Ongoing through 2020	DHR, COs,
(d) Continue to lead and advocate for a harmonized approach on partner PSEA assessments and capacity development across all UN Agencies, Funds & Programmes	December 2020	DAPM

7. New initiatives and opportunities in the operationalization of partnerships

UNICEF and NGO partners ASAM (Turkey), and OXFAM (International) provided an overview of the operationalization of partnerships, according to new UNICEF policy and procedures, and the grand bargain commitments of harmonization and simplicity. The plenary and working groups discussed the practicalities of partnership arrangements and several issues and recommendations were put forward and subsequently consolidated:

Key Issues: UNICEF operational partnership procedures are not always well understood by International and National NGO partners, including who to contact in UNICEF on operational issues.

- Processes are not always clear and appear to be onerous and complicated
- Timelines for fund release vary and can be delayed
- NGOs are unsure who to contact for operational questions and who to contact for broader partnership issues

#5. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	Timeline	Responsible for action
(a) UNICEF to publish and disseminate clear NGO/CSO guidelines on partnership arrangements, providing step by step guidance on partnership agreements, budgeting, financial management, and reporting (b) UNICEF to conduct outreach activities to ensure all partners can access these documents	2020 Q1	DAPM
(c) UNICEF to provide CSO implementing partners an overview of the different relevant staff functions within each respective Country Office, including the staff members (i.e. Deputy Representative;	Ongoing	EMOPs, ROs, COs

Chief PME; Section Chief or other) responsible for broader partnership issues.		
(d) UNICEF to ensure that the eTools partner-facing modules (UN Partner Portal, Partner Reporting Portal) are rolled out to all target offices to support greater consistency and harmonization in partnership processes	2020 - 2021	DAPM, ROs
(e) UNICEF to engage NGOs, including national NGOs, in the design and finalization of an operational handbook on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), as well as the roll out and testing	2020	EMOPS

8. Duty of Care

UNICEF and NGO partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the South Sudan NGO Forum presented the current status of the Duty of Care principles and some promising practices from the field. Challenges were also raised and discussed in plenary. Given that Duty of Care is a new concept in the operationalization of partnerships, and one that reaches much more broadly than just UNICEF, the recommendation to remain ceased on this matter and to advocate for its inclusion in the UNCT/HCT agenda is captured above under solution 6 (a). Duty of Care is also captured within the revised CCCs, and therefore, directly relates to the CCC’s dissemination under solution 1 (a) above.

9. Localization

UNICEF and NGO partners Respect Cameroon and ACBAR (Afghanistan) presented some of the opportunities and early achievements in the realization of the localization agenda, as well as some of the major challenges in moving change forward, in accordance with Grand Bargain principles. The plenary and working groups further articulated the recommendations.

Key Issues: The localization agenda is yet to be fully realized by UNICEF and its international NGO partners, although some promising practices are emerging.

- At a global level, national NGOs are generally not well represented in relevant conferences and forums
- At national level there is no existing long-term strategic plan for the roll out of localization (either from UNICEF or INGOs)
- The risk of local NGO staff being ‘poached’ by international NGOs remains high
- UNICEF could better use its privileged relationship with Governments to bring National NGOs, Local NGOs, INGOs and UN agencies together

# 6. Solutions proposed by UNICEF based on consolidated recommendations	Timeline	Responsible for action
(a) Conduct a further deep dive consultation with CSOs/NGOS on localization to influence and inform UNICEF’s common global approach	Q1 2020	EMOPS

(b) Conduct consultation with partners (UN agencies, donors, and regional networks of CSOs) on localization to influence and inform UNICEF’s common global approach	Q1 2020	EMOPS
(c) Produce UNICEF-wide guidance note for Country Offices on operationalizing localization commitments and roll out globally to all UNICEF offices	Q2 2020	EMOPS

10. Next steps

As reaffirmed by EMOPS Director Manuel Fontaine last November, EMOPS is firmly committed in having a continued, strong and constructive dialogue with its NGO partners on humanitarian operational matters. One element of this strategy will be for UNICEF to hold regular consultations with its partner NGOs. In this respect, it is expected that the next global NGO consultation will be held in Q3 2020 (TBC) so as to review progress in the implementation of the solutions identified and to further discuss other outstanding operational issues. Internally UNICEF will enhance its institutional approach to NGOs by bringing closer together key stakeholders in this partnership. (i.e. DAPM; DOC; EMOPS; ROs and COs). UNICEF will also monitor the implementation of the recommendations on a bi-annual basis, sharing progress with its partner ICVA for dissemination with the larger NGO community.

In addition, UNICEF will continue to engage its humanitarian partners on the issues raised in the consultation and will convene targeted specific consultations on key topics – such as Localization, as the organization continues to develop its strategic and implementation guidelines. A series of webinars is also planned for early 2020 to address some of the key issues moving forward.

UNICEF is determined in improving its partnership with NGOs in humanitarian settings and in addressing the critical operational concerns that they raise.