

UNICEF Contribution

UNICEF is fully committed to creating spaces and opportunities for the full participation of a broad range of civil society actors in its programming, advocacy, and partnerships.

A recent analysis of UNICEF's expenditures vis-à-vis partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) showed that on an annual basis, UNICEF partners with approximately 3,000 national CSOs and 300 international CSOs. It is noteworthy that expenditure to government partners has been approximately equal with expenditure to partners in civil society *with a trend toward an increasing percentage of funds going to civil society*, from 41% in 2010 to 52% in 2015. Though there is a slight decline in 2016 with civil society percentage dropping down to 49%, the overall upward trend of civil society is maintained.

The recently adopted UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 affirms a clear commitment to enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships, stating: "Reflecting the people-centred nature of the 2030 Agenda, we will support innovative platforms that strengthen collaboration with Governments as well as with civil society and the private sector. We will build on recent progress in engaging citizens through volunteerism, empowerment, participation and other means to strengthen national ownership and capacity, and delivery of the sustainable development agenda. We will also intensify collaboration through multi-stakeholder partnerships at national, regional, and global levels, and assist in improving mutual accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals in such partnerships." The new Strategic Plan commits that "Collaboration with civil society partners will be increased, including engagement with non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, foundations and academic institutions, to advocate and act on behalf of children." During the development phase of the new strategic plan, UNICEF issued a broad call for consultation with civil society to garner feedback on the draft plan. This call was issued to a global database of over 3700 CSOs, through an online survey as well as through a series of open-invitation webinars where members of CSO groups could engage in Q&A sessions with UNICEF staff developing the plan. This was the first time such a broad based consultation process with civil society was an essential part of UNICEF's global development phase of its Strategic Plan and was appreciated by civil society.

UNICEF creates space for engagement with civil society in a myriad of ways at global, regional, and national levels. UNICEF provides a flexible framework within which partnerships can be organized formally (using three modalities for formal partnerships) or informally. Informal partnerships are established when the type of collaboration does not require a formal agreement, e.g. when CSOs cooperate for joint advocacy or knowledge sharing. CSOs have to fulfill the general requirements, such as a commitment to the core values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, respect for UN standards, including human rights, transparency and integrity, the capacity to carry out the partnership, and the potential to deliver results. UNICEF's partnerships framework and guiding principles for partnerships are available through their website and guide partnership vetting decision-making. Full information regarding UNICEF civil society partnerships are found on both internal and external websites. Joint ownership is a defining feature of partnerships; through an initial and ongoing consultative process, both parties agree on the objectives and results to be achieved, including the implementation strategies and resources that each partner will contribute.

As a decentralized structure, UNICEF's formal partnerships with civil society are formed primarily at the country level. They are created to carry out diverse joint activities, including advocacy, programming, service delivery, awareness-raising, knowledge sharing, emergency response, research, prevention activities, capacity development and fundraising. Partnerships may also serve to engage in advocacy and policy reform or responding to humanitarian emergencies. UNICEF works with a broad range of CSOs that share its objective of realizing children's rights. Naturally, many CSO partners focus specifically on children, but they may also focus on other issues that affect children's rights such as poverty, climate change, health, gender equality and violence. Besides these country initiatives, other forms of cooperation exist including the UNICEF National Committees, the global advocacy networks for children, the NGO Committee on UNICEF (officially mandated to make presentations at UNICEF Executive Board Sessions, which are webcast), and standby agreements in emergencies. UNICEF also has a particular focus on partnering with religious communities. Guidance is issued by Headquarters on partnering with diverse sets of civil society groups.

Additionally, UNICEF devotes financial and human resources to focus on civil society partnerships across the organization – at headquarters and regional levels. Regional Offices have senior level Partnerships Advisors that guide regional and country level work with regards to partnerships, including civil society partnerships.

Across headquarters, several staff members focus specifically on various aspects of civil society engagement – New York and Geneva have staffed and officially mandated civil society liaison functions that manage an array of issues related to relationship management. Specific teams in New York and Geneva also separately manage operational and procedural issues related to civil society engagement. In 2015, New York headquarters embarked on a comprehensive consultation process with CSOs to revise UNICEF’s contractual procedures. This was a direct response to addressing recurring difficulties that civil society partners were having with UNICEF’s “cumbersome” operational procedures – as a result the processes were simplified to respond to civil society concerns. This exercise is being revisited in 2018 to keep an on-going level of responsiveness to changing needs. In some specific cases, UNICEF adapted its processes to partner more efficiently with key CSOs with which the organization partners with most frequently.

While still in development, UNICEF will soon launch “The UN Partner Portal”. The portal will be a shared database across UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF to map CSOs in each country and share CSO screening results. A major purpose of the portal is to share screening/vetting results across agencies so that we can collectively decrease the amount of time it takes to process partnership agreements, as well as to create a more fair and transparent vetting system across agencies.

An area of increasing potential in the era of Agenda 2030 is UNICEF’s engagement with civil society for the monitoring and review of the goals using various methods of social accountability. Beyond working together on programme implementation, there are a number of ways that UNICEF supports the widening public space for civil society voices to be increasingly included.

In this regard, UNICEF is working closely with civil society at the global level through sharing of key asks/advocacy messages on the SDGs for influencing voluntary national reviews (VNRs); and working at national level to improve/facilitate consultations with civil society and children. UNICEF provides a set of key asks/principles and advocacy messages to our country offices and national committee offices regarding the SDG Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the annual High-level Political Forum (HLPF). These are, in turn, used by our Country and National Committee offices in discussions with the UNCT and/or Government Ministry leading the VNR process. In 2017, “external” versions of each of those key asks were produced and shared with key civil society actors in advance of the HLPF and UNICEF will continue to share

this messaging for future HLPFs. Starting in 2017, in addition to the cross-cutting asks, UNICEF produced sector specific asks based on the Goal areas under “special review” during the HLPF in 2017. UNICEF will conduct a similar activity for the goal areas under review in 2018 to the extent they relate to children and youth. UNICEF is working with civil society to determine appropriate ways of including children in SDG implementation actions. There has been increased government interest in consulting with children and/or youth as part of developing their VNRs and meaningfully engaging children in taking action on the SDGs in local and national contexts. For example 35 of the 43 countries who did a VNR in 2017 have reported consulting with children and/or youth as part of their process.

At the country level, any number of social accountability mechanisms are supported by UNICEF. Independent human rights institutions (IHRIs) are recognized as an important part of the accountability landscape. UNICEF supports the work of IHRIs and sees them as key allies in the advancement of children’s rights and as holding potential for increased contributions to social accountability for the SDGs. Including civil society in national platforms via human rights institutions for example is one way that UNICEF is able to open up space for civil society in public platforms. Some examples from the last couple of years include:

UNICEF-Morocco has a growing collaboration with the *Conseil National des Droits de l’Homme* or National Human Rights Council (Morocco’s NHRI). This engagement has since 2011 focused on knowledge generation and advocacy, and is now growing through a new strategic partnership on capacity building on child rights monitoring. This initiative is expected to benefit not only the NHRI’s own staff, but also civil society, media and the private sector. Supported by the EU and specific Member States, this initiative is expected to eventually take on a regional dimension. Working to strengthen 13 commissions through decentralization and working with civil society at the local government level. Media is engaged as a partner at local level to monitor and disseminate information on child rights. Evidence is generated from the local level and Rabat formulates a response.

UNICEF-Kosovo conducted a country-wide Know your Rights Campaign (RKLA10) in collaboration with the office of the Ombudsperson. This strategic partnership is an attempt to create an innovative system of monitoring the violation of rights. As a result, there is an increased awareness of rights under Kosovo legislation and CRC and 4,387 users (46% female) of the Know Your Rights platform and other 7,000+ users were actively involved in the development of 3 right violation reports submitted to the Ombudsperson Institution. To prepare adolescents and youth for professional readiness (RKLA 10), 1,003 young people

(57% female) increased their skills and knowledge through mentorship in the design, development, and implementation of 36 youth-led social impact projects. There is an expanded opportunity for participation, community service, and engagement in municipal decision-making processes for the most vulnerable adolescents. For example, 112 Roma and Ashkali youth trained in community needs assessment, project cycle management, and non-formal advocacy resulting in 6 youth-led advocacy actions.

UNICEF has supported a number of initiatives aimed at bringing civil society actors closer to government processes. A notable example is Nepal:

The Nepalese Government legislated for decentralized governance through the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999. Building on a strong foundation of civic engagement through a plethora of community networks, this legislation platform was an important window of opportunity that advanced discussions with Government on strengthening social accountability for children's rights, resulting in the Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) initiative led by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MOFALD). Building on efforts to improve the capacity of 15,000 children's clubs across the country, Bal Bhelas or children's consultations have been mainstreamed in the Government's largest decentralized and local governance programme, the Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP), and they occur prior to the local government annual planning processes. These consultations, informed by the results of participatory tools (visioning and risk mapping) similar to community scorecards, and by budget monitoring, culminate in public hearings at which the children's clubs present their recommendations to the local government. These have a real impact in village, district and municipal budgets, supported by a national policy decision that 10–15 per cent of the local capital block grant budget must be dedicated to children, especially the most marginalized. To ensure that the children's clubs and consultations are inclusive, the local bodies give attention to avoiding elite capture, and to ensuring that the most disadvantaged children are represented. Because children are involved in essentially political processes, great care is taken to protect them from being exposed to security risks that may occur as a result of their participation. The CFLG process has enhanced coordination and collaboration among sectoral line agencies, local associations, civil society and development partners on child rights issues and has provided a forum for sectoral convergence. Out of the 23 districts in which UNICEF Nepal promoted social accountability investments during 2008–2012, five have elevated their Human Development Index (HDI) to a point where UNICEF's focused support is no longer required, and annual monitoring

continues to register increasing district level HDIs. Four other districts have made significant HDI progress and will soon no longer require intensive UNICEF assistance. Boosted by demonstrated success, the cabinet approved the National Strategy on Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) in July 2011, leading to local bodies allocating over US\$ 48 million per year of the Government's own funding to disadvantaged children and women across the country, with priorities informed by Bal Bhelas. In Nepal, social accountability, in this case through children's clubs, accompanied, instigated and depended on legal and policy reforms, and on judicial and administrative accountability.

New technologies must also be given due emphasis. UNICEF has used a number of new communication tools to reach a greater number of voices. For example, U-Report stands out as an excellent tool to include the voices of children, youth, and civil society in national level dialogues. Through a simple SMS-based platform – millions of users have signed up around the world to report back on a broad range of issues affecting their lives. This information is shared with Government partners as an additional way to take civil society feedback into account.

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