

# Enhancing subnational and local governance to accelerate results for children



Subnational and local governance programming  
framework for UNICEF country offices and  
national committees



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# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

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UNICEF's new Strategic Plan recognizes the critical role local governments and actors play in the realization of children's rights. They ensure access to basic social services, such as water and sanitation, health, nutrition, education, child, and social protection; create opportunities for children and youth to actively engage and participate in all local processes, establish accountability mechanisms that strengthen social contract, while also effectively translate programming objectives into concrete financial commitments for sustainable impact. Moreover, current crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the increase in the intensity and multiplicity of conflicts, have once again, highlighted their essential contribution as the actors who are, many times, at the forefront of preparedness and response.

Engaging with local governments and other local stakeholders supports critical transformation in systems building and enhanced local capacities, contributing to improved service delivery, better accountability, adequate financial prioritization, while making sure children needs are prioritized and protected, especially those of the most marginalized. As a result, UNICEF has been engaging with local governments and actors for many years, across different entry points: in 2022, 158 country offices and 25 UNICEF National Committees are working on different elements of local governance programming, aiming to further enhance results for children at the subnational and local level.

This Framework aims to support UNICEF Teams in Country Offices and National Committees as they enhance and scale-up their programming and engagement with partners at subnational and local levels. It applies a territorial approach and provides a number of engagement approaches that may be considered as entry points for subnational and local governance programming.

In the countries where UNICEF is engaging programmatically at subnational and local levels, the Framework highlights the importance of understanding the functional assignments of local governments as part of the decentralization process. These functional assignments include service delivery and operational accountabilities of different levels of governance (national, regional, local).

Looking forward to scaling up UNICEF approach and support at local and subnational levels, to accelerate results for children, adolescents and their families.



**Natalia Winder Rossi**

Director, Social Policy and  
Social Protection  
Programme Group  
UNICEF Headquarters.

# Acronyms and abbreviations

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<b>CFCI</b>	Child Friendly Cities Initiative
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>EMOPS</b>	Office of Emergency Programmes
<b>GA</b>	Goal Area
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>HIC</b>	high-income country
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>PFM</b>	public finance management
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>VLR</b>	voluntary local review
<b>WASH</b>	water, sanitation and hygiene



# Glossary

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**Decentralization** is a process in which authority for planning, management and resource allocation is transferred from the central government to regional or local government departments. There are three types of decentralization: devolution is the transfer of authority to local government; delegation is the transfer of authority to semi-autonomous public authorities (e.g., housing authorities); and de-concentration is the transfer of authority to ministry departments at the subnational level.

**Local governance** refers to the way local decisions are made and implemented. This includes decisions regarding the mobilization, prioritization, allocation and utilization of public resources to deliver local goods and services, and ultimately – whether explicit or implicit – who will benefit from the services. Local governance is shaped by formal national, regional and local government policies, and by informal interactions and relationships among various levels of government and local actors (e.g., local government, private sector, civil society, communities, traditional or religious leaders). While decentralization is intended to formalize local governance, local governance takes place in both centralized and decentralized contexts.

**Local government** refers to local-level bodies and institutions created by a constitutional, legislative, or executive power for the purpose of carrying out specific functions. The term ‘local government’ includes all levels of government below the national level (or state level, in federal contexts). Local government exists in contexts that are rural (e.g., districts, communes) and urban (e.g., towns, municipalities). Local government includes institutions with varying mandates and powers, for example: mayor or governor (appointed or elected); local councillors or assembly members (appointed or elected); technical and administrative units that deliver services assigned to local government (e.g., education department, social affairs department); and local offices of semi-autonomous government agencies (e.g., water authority). Local governments usually play a prominent role in local governance.

**Local actors** are the wide range of stakeholders at subnational and local levels engaged as part of the local governance processes, such as de-concentrated structures of national line ministries, local service providers, the private sector, civil society, communities, traditional or religious leaders, local think tanks and media.

**Social accountability** is an approach in which citizens and other people act individually or collectively to hold duty bearers to account (in this case local governments) for their decisions and actions, and to influence decision making and service delivery.

**Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** is the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the **2030 Agenda**, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress. Localization relates both to how local and regional governments can support the achievement of the SDGs through action from the bottom up and to how SDGs can provide a framework for local development policy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Global Taskforce on Local and Regional Governments, UNHABITAT, UNDP Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at the Subnational Level: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/roadmap\\_for\\_localizing\\_the\\_sdgs\\_0.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/roadmap_for_localizing_the_sdgs_0.pdf)



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# 1

## Background and rationale

The full realization of children’s rights, the reduction of child poverty, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require coordinated action between national, subnational and local structures, including governments and multiple other actors. The role of local actors is critical to ensure the meaningful progress towards, and impact of, the SDGs for children, families and communities. At least 105 of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs will not be reached without proper engagement and co-ordination with subnational and local governments.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), all levels of government are required to put in place systems to ensure that children’s rights and basic needs are met, and all conditions are in place for children to reach their full potential.<sup>3</sup>

Regional and local governments are the levels of governance closest to people. Along with other local actors within the governance systems, including community structures and non-government organizations, local governments are best placed to understand the needs and capacity of local communities, and the resources that exist in their territories, as well as being best placed to respond in the most efficient ways, and coordinate and deliver public services, while promoting social and economic development. In recognition of this, many countries are adopting SDG localization as a framework for local development policy to support local and regional actors in rural and urban settings. This requires a ‘whole of society’ approach and partnerships with public institutions, the private sector, and communities to achieve sustainable development.

Subnational policies and actions are also critical for addressing inequities and multiple deprivations experienced by children. National averages hide important inequalities within countries and territories associated with differences in economic capacity, coverage and quality of services, as well as the capacity of subnational structures to plan, deliver and monitor services. This translates into disparities in child poverty and other child outcomes. Moreover, even though rural areas face a higher aggregate level of poverty and child poverty than urban areas, a deeper territorial approach within urban areas shows that approximately 350 million children live in urban slums and informal settlements,<sup>4</sup> facing high levels of deprivation.

Subnational and local governance programming, therefore, has a critical role in reducing poverty, improving equity and enhancing the well-being of children, adolescents and their caregivers. This role has substantially increased with the wave of decentralization starting in the 1990s and the increasing urbanization trends in the last years. Decentralization, as one of the most important reforms of the past 50 years, has resulted in an increase of economic importance of subnational government between 1995 and 2016,<sup>5</sup> so that by 2016, subnational government spending accounted for 24.1 per cent of total public spending and 8.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on average.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> OECD (February 2020,) *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report*

<sup>3</sup> Art 3, Art 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>4</sup> Economic and Social Council, UNICEF 2021, *Evaluation of UNICEF’s work for children in urban settings*

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2021), *Making Decentralisation Work: A Handbook for Policy-Makers*, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies

<sup>6</sup> 2019 Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment

There are three critical direct pathways through which subnational development contributes to children's rights across contexts, including in fragile and humanitarian contexts:

- providing effective and equitable financing and delivery of social services;
- ensuring child-friendly infrastructure, environments and living conditions; and
- developing responsive institutions and good governance at the subnational level that supports social cohesion and strengthens the social contract.<sup>7</sup>

The **effective and equitable financing and delivery of goods and social services** by national, regional and local governments and other local actors are the most immediate and direct means through which children's rights are realized at the subnational level. The role of subnational and local governments in service delivery varies between countries, depending on the nature of the decentralization process and policies. In some countries, service delivery remains a responsibility of the central government, but in others, subnational and local governments have direct control in priority setting, programme design, financing and delivery, and implementation. Given the increased rates of decentralization around the world, the role of subnational and local governments for service delivery is significantly increasing. Globally, one quarter of public spending is at the subnational level, of which education, social protection and health combined make up almost 47 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Education accounts for 23.6 per cent of subnational government spending, social protection for 12.4 per cent, and health for 10.7 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

The **infrastructure, environment and living conditions for children** are also strongly influenced by the actions of subnational governments and other local actors. Issues such as housing conditions, local transport and road safety, air quality and pollution, water and sanitation, the provision of recreation and play facilities, school facilities including canteens and playgrounds, planning decisions, and general public safety are frequently part of the responsibility of local authorities that need to work with communities and private actors to ensure children can grow up in a safe and clean environment.

The way subnational governments and agencies make decisions at the subnational level is also critical to ensuring the full realization of citizens' and children's rights through **responsive institutions that support social cohesion and strengthen the social contract**. Subnational and local governments and other local institutions can play a key role in establishing strong and effective accountability mechanisms at the local level that enhance transparency and strengthen social inclusion. They can provide key entry points for meaningful child and community participation in local decision making, empowering children, adolescents and their caregivers to be engaged, and have their voices heard about matters affecting their lives. The participation and involvement of other local governance stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, the private sector and others, in decision-making processes at the local level are also critical for ensuring that views and needs of different groups are being considered.

As front-line responders to humanitarian crises and emergencies, subnational and local governance structures are essential to sustaining vital services and support for children and their families, including meeting basic human needs such as access to water and sanitation, food, and shelter that contribute directly to reductions in child mortality, and bolstering child protection during rescue and recovery operations. They also have a prominent role in fostering recovery, promoting peace, reducing fragility, and in disaster risk preparedness, reduction and response. Developing and using conflict analysis when engaging at the local level in fragile and conflict-affected settings is a prerequisite for UNICEF programming. Conflict analysis identifies specific conflict dynamics and how they play out at the local

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<sup>7</sup> There are other indirect pathways, such as through economic investments and job creation, however, these are not the main focus of UNICEF's work.

<sup>8</sup> United Cities and Local Governments, *World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment*



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level. This helps UNICEF better understand how the conflict context and UNICEF work interact; it also helps prevent unintended (negative) consequences of the programme work. In the cases when local governments may be part of the conflict, the role of community organizations and other non-state local actors as part of local governance systems in supporting humanitarian response is critical.

Despite their critical role, in many countries subnational and local governance structures face serious capacity and resource constraints that prevent them from effectively implementing their key functions. Strengthening the capacity of these vital actors to define priorities, implement effective programmes, and ultimately support the realization of children's rights is essential as a complement to UNICEF's engagement at the national level. This requires harmonized and multisectoral programming that combines the local governance approach with context-specific applications addressing the issues within territories and using a range of potential engagement platforms.

# 2

## Objectives of the guide

Considering the role of subnational and local governance systems for the enhancement of children's rights and SDG implementation, this guide aims to:

- **Outline the long-term vision and desired outcomes of UNICEF's programming** at subnational and local levels.
- Apply a territorial lens **to support UNICEF country teams to translate UNICEF's long-term vision into effective and coherent programming at subnational and local levels**, taking into account specific governance structures, their roles and responsibilities, development levels and territorial contexts, and supporting context-appropriate subnational and local programming.
- **Provide a clear strategic outline of the application of UNICEF's urban and local governance strategies** to enable stronger partnership with other United Nations agencies, donors, and partners.
- **Support UNICEF staff to measure and monitor the programmatic impact** of UNICEF's subnational and local programming on children's rights and the SDGs.

In this guide, the vision adopts a **territorial lens** as a principle for sustainable local development and SDG implementation, looking beyond administrative boundaries and making interlinkages between cities and their surrounding zones, and between rural and urban areas, analysing challenges and identifying policy solutions that work for whole territories. It takes a multi-level governance approach to consider both the linkages between higher and lower levels of government, their institutional, financial, and local capacity aspects (vertical dimension) and the interactions between territories, regions or between municipalities (horizontal dimension). The territorial lens also implies considering the range of government and non-government actors contributing to children's development within a geographical area.

UNICEF's subnational and local programming approach aims to contribute to a common set of multisector results derived from the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 through a common Theory of Change and building on a common set of principles. The approach takes into account national policy frameworks and priorities, and their implementation to address specific issues at subnational and local levels. It also considers specificities that need to be applied to different contexts, including rural, urban, and fragile and humanitarian contexts.



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This guide is primarily for UNICEF staff. It applies also to National Committees, and should be applied in line with the Cooperation Agreement, the [Programming Guidance for High Income Countries \(HICs\)](#)<sup>9</sup> and any further associated internal guidance. This guide may also inform external partners and governments at all levels with an interest in UNICEF's approach to subnational and local governance programming. This guide is complemented by other existing or forthcoming notes addressing programming in specific contexts and specific engagement strategies. UNICEF's basic programming approach for subnational and local governance programming is the [Local Governance Approach to Programming](#), which outlines the main local governance programming areas for UNICEF engagement at the subnational and local levels in both urban and rural contexts. The specific strategies for programming in the urban context are laid down in the Technical Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings. Finally, there is specific guidance relating to one of the prominent engagement approaches, the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI). A list of relevant guidance notes is provided in the Annex.

This document provides advice on the selection and application of guidance based on the programming context and programming objectives set out in the country programme or in the National Committee planning document.

<sup>9</sup> Users of this framework document external to UNICEF can find information from the [UNICEF Executive Board Document E/ICEF/2021/26 on UNICEF experience in high-income countries and in countries transitioning from upper-middle-income to high-income status](#)





# 3

## Theory of Change for UNICEF subnational and local governance programming

An effective subnational and local governance approach can significantly contribute to reducing child poverty and enhancing children's well-being. It contributes to the establishment of a safe and sustainable environment for children and to equitable access to health and immunization services, nutrition, education and child protection services, adequate water and sanitation, and inclusive social protection, including in humanitarian contexts. Moreover, through this approach children, adolescents and their caregivers are better able to participate in decision-making processes at subnational and local levels, ensuring adequate and relevant interventions, while also contributing to strengthening social accountability and social cohesion, and building communities' social capital. Enhancing child participation is primarily a contributory factor to 'enhancement of child well-being', as children's needs and aspirations are better reflected in local policy making and programming.

In the context of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UNICEF's subnational and local governance programming approach contributes directly to the mid-term results of its **Goal Area 5 (GA5): Local governance structures in urban and rural settings have enhanced capacity and agency for participatory decision making and delivery of poverty reduction programmes, including in fragile and humanitarian contexts** (Output).

Subnational and local governance programming will also contribute to the achievement of outcomes across all other four Goal Areas (GAs) of the UNICEF Strategic Plan: health and nutrition, education, child protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). All Goal Areas include addressing fragile and humanitarian settings, and support the mid-term changes toward system strengthening outlined in the Strategic Plan. Examples of sectoral results that may be supported through the subnational approach are included in Chapter 8.1 of this guide.

**Critical intermediate outcomes** from UNICEF's subnational and local governance programming include:

- **Child-sensitive policies and programmes at local level are based on evidence and disaggregated data.**

UNICEF will strengthen the capacities of local actors for **generation and use of evidence** on the situation of children, including strengthening to manage, collect, monitor and analyse local data, to enhance understanding of the deprivations faced by children, adolescents, their caregivers, and communities and to use this data to inform context specific and evidence-based policies and plans.

- **Local development policies, strategies, plans and budgets are child responsive.**

UNICEF will strengthen the **capacity of subnational and local governance systems** to develop child-responsive and risk-informed **policies, strategies, budgets, financing and plans**. Specifically, it will support equitable allocation of resources, revenue mobilization for the implementation of child-related programmes, and effective utilization of resources including in complex territorial governance systems, such as large urban settings.

- **Children, adolescents, caregivers and communities have a say in local-level decisions that affect their lives.**

UNICEF will support **inclusive, participatory, transparent and accountable decision-making processes** at subnational and local levels by enhancing the voice and agency of all children, adolescents, caregivers and communities to effectively address local issues including issues related to reducing exclusion, inequality and poverty.

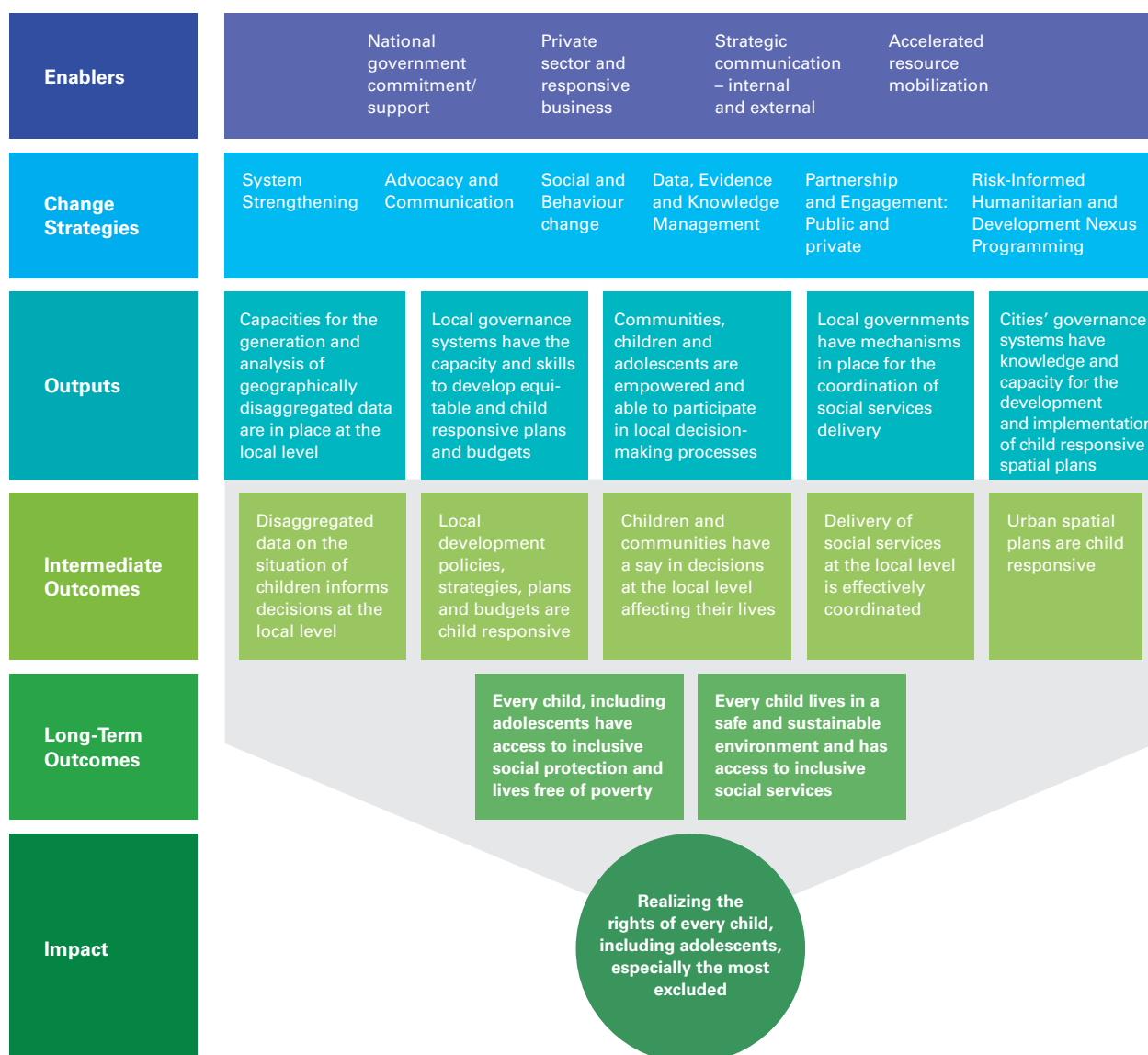
- **Delivery of social services – education, health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, social protection and early childhood development – at the local level is efficient and effectively coordinated.**

UNICEF will support the establishment of **platforms and mechanisms for effective and efficient delivery and coordination** of services and other interventions for children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities at subnational and local levels, including in fragile settings and humanitarian situations, through UNICEF’s role as Cluster Lead agency, and within complex territorial governance systems, such as large urban settings.

- **Urban spatial plans are child responsive**

UNICEF will support cities and towns to develop and implement **child responsive spatial plans** that provide safe and sustainable environment for children in urban spaces, especially for most deprived children living in slums and informal settlements.

### Theory of Change Schema





Subnational and local governance programming will be implemented through the application of the **change strategies** outlined in the Strategic Plan, with a specific focus on:

- **System strengthening**, supporting the development of child responsive systems and institutions at national, regional and local levels. System strengthening will include improving the alignment and coordination between different levels of government – national, subnational and local; strengthening planning, financing and delivery capacities of local stakeholders, including local governments, civil society groups and communities; generating, analysing and using data and evidence for enhanced understanding of local needs, deprivations and capacities to inform programming; strengthening planning and Public Finance Management Systems; ensuring the delivery of social services across the lifecycle and bringing together multiple sectors; and ensuring that spatial planning in urban settings addresses needs for safety and well-being of children.

- **Advocacy, communication and awareness raising** on child rights to enhance the understanding of local governments and actors on child rights, concepts and how to translate them into programmatic results, including through local frameworks, strategies, policies and programmes.
- **Community engagement, and social and behaviour change** to support effective strategies for strengthening children and adolescent participation, empowerment of parents and caregivers, understanding and addressing social norms, and supporting social accountability strategies for improved child outcomes and poverty reduction at subnational and local levels.
- **Data, evidence and knowledge management** for improved disaggregated, territorial data collection and evidence generation in support of the selection and application of promising strategies for local governance programming, integrating conflict- and climate-related risks, territorial (intra-urban), and gender and inclusion dimensions for best addressing the needs of all children, including the most marginalized.
- **Partnership and engagement** with other United Nations agencies, international organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector will be critical for further advancing children's rights through leveraging and enhancing programming approaches, establishing networks and mobilizing resources for children.
- **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming** to support a programmatic approach viewed as a continuum of interventions that acknowledge the need to integrate risk and preparedness dimensions in development contexts, while also considering addressing chronic drivers of poverty and exclusion in humanitarian response.

In UNICEF programming, adopting a multisectoral subnational and local governance programming approach should always be considered in country programmes where UNICEF seeks to achieve results at subnational and local levels by working with and through national, subnational and local governments, and other subnational actors in one or more programme sectors.

UNICEF's decision to work at the subnational level in any country is based on factors including its relevance to the achievement of country programme results, the status of decentralization, the extent of the roles and authority of subnational governments, the agreement of national authorities, the roles and responsibilities of other local stakeholders such as civil society and community groups, the private sector, and the capacity of the implementing offices.<sup>10</sup> Along with local governments, the role of non-government actors at the local level for strengthening social accountability and building the social contract is pivotal and should be taken into consideration when programming decisions are made.

In country programmes where a subnational approach is essential for achieving results for children at scale, work should focus on enhancing the capacity of national, subnational and local governance institutions and systems. There should be an assessment of where to work based on considerations of both urban and rural settings,<sup>11</sup> and should include addressing territorial and intra-urban disparities that are masked by national averages, and issues of informality and slums in urban spaces. Programming will be implemented through a multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that identifies common opportunities, bottlenecks and capacity gaps at the territorial level, looking at common needs for the development and application of context-specific programmes and action plans that enhance the critical elements of agency and voice of children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Implementing offices are UNICEF Country Offices and the National Committees. National Committees should always use this guide in conjunction with the Cooperation Agreement and the [Programming Guidance for High-Income Countries \(HICs\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF applies national definitions for urban and rural settings



# 4

## Key principles of UNICEF subnational and local governance programming

Implementing subnational and local governance programming is based on common principles of a multisectoral approach, the application of a territorial lens, and context-specific and bottom-up programming.

### 4.1 Multisectoral approach

Implementation of multisectoral programming is a key strategy for holistic and rights-based responses for children and the environment in which they live. This is particularly relevant at subnational and local levels where UNICEF can effectively support and scale up good practices in system strengthening and capacity building, co-ordination of service delivery, behaviour change activities, and communities' engagement.

The subnational and local programming approach when connected to local governance can enhance the comprehensive delivery and coordination of the main social services to effectively address the compounding needs of children across the lifecycle. This, by building the capacities for planning, coordination, and resourcing across sectors at subnational level, and by strengthening accountability of subnational institutions to local citizens.

In addition to enhancing the delivery, adequacy and impact of critical social services across sectors (e.g., primary health care, healthy diets and nutrition services, education, access to water and sanitation, child protection measures including birth registration, protection from violence against children, and addressing harmful practices, as well as social protection, child care and family friendly policies), the multisectoral approach can support stronger convergence between sectors ensuring better coherence and complementarity at subnational and local levels, and can help to identify critical entry points for integrated support and collaboration. This, in turn, can improve impact, adequacy and use of resources.

### 4.2 Territorial perspective for subnational and local governance programming for children's rights

A territorial perspective on development is a powerful and necessary lens for improving development outcomes. It provides a conceptual, analytical and operational framework for understanding and addressing the complexity of the structural, economic, social and spatial needs that exist within territories. This perspective makes it possible to define relevant administrative, spatial and functional territories that make sense for local actors to respond to collectively to address identified development needs.

The territorial approach considers the territory as governed and influenced by a community of actors (urban and rural local governments, community organizations, non-government organizations, the private sector, etc.) dealing with common challenges and defining appropriate actions and policies. This helps anchor development strategies to address specific rights of children, adolescents and their

**Box 1: Territorial strategy: Example from Paraguay**

In Paraguay UNICEF is engaging at the subnational level through a territorial strategy, where they engage with local governments beyond the administrative boundaries of one municipality, selecting groups of municipalities (cluster of municipalities), based on an assessment of vulnerabilities of the child population in the whole territory, UNICEF helps plan and implement interventions that provide solutions to all municipalities in the territory, influencing local decisions and expanding opportunities for children and adolescents in the territory. This approach enables efficiencies, the exchange of capacities and knowledge among local actors and promotes local results-based management.<sup>12</sup>

caregivers, and to look beyond administrative boundaries and harness the interlinkages between cities and their surrounding areas, and between rural and urban areas. For example, working on access to water in a particular territory may involve working with local communities in relation to local water management, and at the same time working with regional institutions on water infrastructure. It also enables the integration of sectoral policies within the territory and allows for the identification of synergies between different sectors for strengthening delivery of social and other services through a multisectoral approach.<sup>13</sup> Taking a territorial perspective to subnational programming effectively supports the achievement of SDGs at local level, allowing for an inclusive response to development challenges in each territory, including by enhancing inter-regional capacity and potential.

Differences between territories affect certain aspects of development programming. These include, for example, the complexity of governance arrangements, existing capacities and development potential, considerations of spatial planning, the types of deprivations children face, and the nature of the environment in which they live. Taking the territorial context into account for local development requires a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities, as well as their capacities and opportunities, to effectively identify appropriate and adapted policy solutions that work for specific territories. This brings incremental value to national development efforts and leverages the contribution of all key actors and stakeholders at national, subnational and local levels. The multisectoral approach of the territorial perspective ensures subnational programming addresses cohesively the identified challenges through better-targeted policies, integrated solutions and adequate capacity development.

## 4.3 Context-appropriate programming

To support the effective design of subnational and local governance programmes, UNICEF's work should be adapted and responsive to the specific issues encountered in different territorial contexts, for example working in remote rural areas or working in slums and informal urban settlements. This means that issues addressed also reflect the specificities of the local area based on a bottom-up identification of priorities. At the same time, it also utilizes common components that apply to all subnational and local governance systems, and enable integrated local governance programming, for example, supporting child-responsive planning and budgeting, financing of services and strengthening accountability.

### 4.3.1 Urban contexts: Intra-urban issues and informal settlements

The rapid urbanization in many parts of the world in the recent years has led to an explosive growth of populations in cities, often leading to people living in dense and congested surroundings. Urbanization, which is largely unplanned and unregulated, raises a myriad of development challenges, including massive environmental, socio-economic and spatial challenges. Although poverty levels

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF Paraguay Territorial Strategy

<sup>13</sup> *Fostering a Territorial Perspective for Development – Towards a wider Alliance*, White Paper.

**Box 2: Slums and informal settlements**

As of 2018, the global population living in slums exceeded 1 billion, 300 million of whom are children. Most refugees and internally displaced populations also go to cities, and often end up living in slums and informal settlements. The population burden of many cities has far outpaced their infrastructure and service provision capacities. Unplanned urban expansion is a driver of environmental degradation and risk. Informal settlements at the edges of cities tend to be in the most exposed areas in terms of natural disasters, with limited access to early warning systems and protective infrastructure.

remain higher in rural areas, poverty averages often mask large intra-urban disparities. While, on average, urban residents enjoy better access to services, a substantial number of urban children are being left behind. For example, in 1 in 4 countries, the poorest urban children are more likely to die before their fifth birthday than the poorest children in rural areas. And in 1 in 6 countries, the poorest urban children are less likely to complete primary school than their counterparts in rural areas.<sup>14</sup>

Urban governance is part of the system of local governance, which includes national urban policies, plans and budgets. Large cities are usually characterized by complex governance structures that include national, regional and municipal levels to varying degrees across sectors, often with overlapping jurisdictions. **Urban programming** should be informed by an understanding of urban governance system, which includes a comprehensive analysis of the decentralization process in the country, the way power and authority are exercised, and how local decisions are made and implemented at the local/city level. Urban programming also involves the manifestation and quality of political participation, transparency and accountability of locally elected representatives and local government officials, inclusiveness of dialogue and decision-making processes and the participation of children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities in these processes, local finances, and local public financial management as well as other qualitative measurements.

**4.3.2 Rural contexts**

Rural areas are characterized by lower population density, higher poverty levels, poorer infrastructure, weak or non-existent governance institutions, and limited access to services, including health, education and protection, and a poor or absent enabling environment for economic activities and development. The World Bank Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty<sup>15</sup> suggests that 24.5 per cent of children living in rural areas are living in monetary poor households, compared to 7 per cent of those living in urban areas. Extreme poverty remains primarily a rural phenomenon. About 80 per cent of the extreme poor live in rural areas with almost half of the extreme poor, about 45 per cent, being children under the age of 15 years.<sup>16</sup> And 85 per cent of those living in multidimensional poverty are in rural areas, and rural poverty has particular characteristics.<sup>17</sup> Poor families in rural areas experience more overlapping deprivations in access to basic social services (education, health and social protection) and in access to basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, electricity and housing) than their urban counterparts. Insufficient access to education and basic health services compounded by multiple forms of malnutrition greatly affect children, leading to learning difficulties and poor health, as well as lower productivity and earnings over their lifetime.<sup>18</sup> Common challenges that impact children's access to services in rural areas, particularly remote areas, include issues to do with transport or the structure of services such as multi-grade or remote services. The situation differs from country to country and even within countries, where national poverty averages can mask substantive regional inequalities.

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF (2018), *ADVANTAGE OR PARADOX? The challenge for children and young people of growing up urban*

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (October 2020), *Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update*

<sup>16</sup> Castaneda *et al.* (2018), *A New Profile of the Global Poor*

<sup>17</sup> FAO (2022), *Measuring Rural Poverty with a multidimensional Approach*

<sup>18</sup> FAO (2019), *Framework to Rural Extreme Poverty*



To address development challenges, subnational and local governance programming in rural areas should address inequalities through strengthening systems and institutions within rural settings, including non-formal community institutions; building the capacities of stakeholders including children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities; and establishing clear links with subnational and national government institutions and systems. When programming in rural areas, implementing offices should try to bring together all relevant programming components of different sectors in a convergent way at the local level to maximize the results for children within the respective territories. Rural contexts might be completely different in terms of executive bodies, their authority, responsibilities and capacities for planning and managing local resources, and delivery of services. Engagement with rural governance systems should be informed by a situation analysis that considers the best ways of achieving the desired outcomes for children. Local governance represents a mix of the local context, history, institutions, culture and power relations. Therefore, governance strategies in rural contexts should be based on careful reflection of the decentralization context; the power relations including the role of non-formal actors, and the results for children that the country programme aims to achieve.

### 4.3.3 Fragile and humanitarian contexts

After the [World Humanitarian Summit in 2016](#) and through the [Grand Bargain Agreement](#) process, there has been a push for international humanitarian actors to accelerate the operationalization of localization commitments, which recognize that local actors, including local governments, are essential in ensuring timely delivery of assistance to those affected by the crisis. UNICEF has committed to advancing these normative frameworks by strengthening local systems and maintaining the local capacity to scale up humanitarian action without leaving any child behind.<sup>19, 20</sup> Through the humanitarian cluster approach, UNICEF is also supporting the system-wide preparedness and technical capacity development to respond to humanitarian emergencies and provide clear leadership and accountability in engaging with local and national actors, including with local authorities.

In these contexts, it should be recognized that it is the state's responsibility to aid and protect people affected by a crisis or a disaster, and UNICEF, including other non-governmental bodies, are there to supplement the state aid delivery efforts.<sup>21</sup> However, in many humanitarian contexts, where governments are party to a conflict, non-governmental actors and communities should be prioritized for response, in an effort to protect humanitarian principles. In the absence of an emergency declaration, most international actors would not have access to the affected population, and it would be the responsibility of the national and local (subnational) governments to support the affected population, including children.<sup>22</sup> Thus, UNICEF should look to local governments as the authority mandated to coordinate stakeholders at the level of subnational jurisdiction, and should support local authorities to perform this function, while working with and through other local actors to enhance preparedness, and when applicable and when conditions are met in terms of response. [UNICEF Risk-Informed Programming Guidance](#) and the [Technical Note on Strengthening Resilience through Risk-informed Decentralization and Local Governance](#) provide information, tools and programming approaches for ensuring subnational and local governance programming is risk sensitive and considers specific roles of all stakeholders for preparedness, and disaster risk reduction. Country offices that are working in humanitarian and fragile settings should refer to this technical note and apply the strategies and programming approaches outlined in it.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF (2018), [Strategic plan 2018–2021](#)

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF (2019), [Procedure on linking humanitarian and development programming](#)

<sup>21</sup> IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms | IASC ([interagencystandingcommittee.org](http://interagencystandingcommittee.org)) outlines the role of local and national nongovernmental humanitarian actors including local civil society organizations

<sup>22</sup> OCHA, [Guide for governments in International Humanitarian Action](#).



# 5

## How to apply subnational and local programming strategies

UNICEF's subnational and local programming follows a number of steps and choices, from the decision of when to engage at the subnational and local levels, to understanding the context, relevant programming choices and strategies for engagement.

The decision to engage with subnational and local programming is based on an understanding of the situation and the implications and opportunities of the subnational and local levels for achieving results for children. This requires a holistic and cohesive understanding of the political economy and the decentralization process including relevant systems and strategies. It also requires an understanding of the way power and authority are exercised and how decisions are made and implemented at the subnational and local/city levels, and how this context supports the realization of children's rights across sectors at the subnational level, along with considerations of UNICEF's and partners' capacities and value add.

Once it is determined that subnational and local programming will be part of a country programme, there are a number of choices, depending on the context, programme priorities, and the roles of other actors and partners. In all subnational and local programming the [Local Governance Approach to Programming](#) should form the basis of the approach.

In addition to the Local Governance Approach, there are also specific considerations that apply in programmatic contexts, for example when programming in urban areas, or when in high-income countries.

And finally, there are a number of potential entry points or engagement platforms for engaging with subnational governments that may add value to subnational and local programming and offer scope to enhance and scale results for children.

### 5.1 Understanding the context for subnational and local programming

#### 5.1.1 The situation analysis

Programming at subnational and local levels should be informed by the consideration of subnational issues in the situation analysis. Conducting a situation analysis prior to programme design and during implementation supports the understanding of the national and local contexts and enables adapting programmes to specific local needs. The situation analysis can help implementing offices identify strategic pathways for local initiatives. It also establishes baseline data for understanding the deprivations faced by children, adolescents and their caregivers, and supports monitoring and evaluation purposes. Applying the territorial lens to the analysis of needs and deprivations of children, adolescents and their caregivers enhances the understanding of assets and opportunities that those territories host. The situation analysis should also explore how to better unlock the development potential to address children's rights through subnational and local programming. The situation analysis

conducted as part of the UNICEF country programme development should follow the approach outlined in the Core Guidance: [New Generation Situation Analysis](#) and the [Toolkit](#) where specific guidance for subnational and an urban-specific contexts are provided.

The country situation analysis should include a comprehensive analysis of the political economy and governance system of the country. This should outline the distribution of power and resources, the governance structures, the degree and type of decentralization, and how fiscal and political decentralization have shifted the responsibility and authority for social services delivery from central ministries to subnational and local governments.

Many other issues may be considered as part of the situation analysis, for example, local economic development, household and child poverty, social and ethnic composition of the population, and local conflict dynamics. Analysis of monetary and multidimensional poverty aggregated at the national level often masks the geography of specific risks to children and young people. When in the situation analysis identifies specific rights' violations and child deprivations, it is important to understand how these are exacerbated given the specific characteristics of different territories. Analysis of geographical disparities of child's rights and well-being can help to better understand the opportunities that exist to address child deprivations and multidimensional child poverty. The situation analysis should also enable the identification of entry points for programmatic engagement at subnational and local levels.

Where implementing offices are involved in working at the subnational level, or in contexts where there is a strong push for decentralization, a stand-alone analysis of the subnational, regional or local situation may be warranted. Country offices may choose to channel country programme resources into the territories where the incidence multidimensional child poverty is deepest and most persistent; or where there is greatest potential for impact, or to address a mix of these objectives. [The New Generation Situation Analysis Toolkit](#) provides advice on when country offices should consider including a subnational situation analysis as part of the Country Programme Document (CPD) development process.

The situation analysis can describe the context within specific priority regions, districts, municipalities, or villages or focus on the local government system within the country more broadly (see Box 3).<sup>23</sup>

UNICEF selects priority territories based on an assessment of child deprivations or vulnerability, which are often locations where local governments have limited capacities and resources. Work in such territories may be crucial in addressing equity issues. Understanding local capacities and the formal roles and functions of the local government are important for reducing programming risk and ensuring local governance interventions are targeting the existing needs and gaps.

### 5.1.2 Governance and decentralization

Decisions on engaging programmatically at the subnational and local levels should also be made through the public administration lens and in the context of understanding the country's governance system. This includes how and where decisions are made; how and by whom policies are developed, how implementation and delivery of social services are undertaken, and what the provisions are for supervision, monitoring and accountability. Implementing offices identification of geographical priorities and levels of governance (national, subnational, local) should be informed by a thorough understanding of the type and level of decentralization and the functional assignments (service delivery and operational accountabilities) of different levels of governance (national, regional, local).

Subnational and local multisectoral programming, focusing on specific subnational territories (regions, districts, cities, or neighbourhoods), is particularly, but not exclusively, appropriate when:

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<sup>23</sup> UNICEF (2019) Local Governance Approach to Programming, Chapter 4 Programming Considerations

### Box 3: Reflecting on decentralization and local governance in the situation analysis for women and children

The situation analysis can focus on several topics, including the following:

**Social and cultural issues** including local needs and priorities; ethnic or religious make-up of communities; existence of migrant or refugee populations; patterns of exclusion; prevailing attitudes towards children, adolescents, youth, women and people with disabilities; and perceptions of state legitimacy

**Economic issues** including poverty levels, such as child, monetary and multidimensional; income inequality; and local economic development

**Governance issues** including an analysis of the local government system, identifying the main actors, their roles and responsibilities as well as their capacities and resources; the role of the private or other non-public service providers; the role or influence of religious, traditional or other community-based structures; political relationships and relations between local and central governments; and inclusiveness of government processes

**Geographical context** including remoteness; exposure to hazards such as floods, droughts and earthquakes; fragility and conflict; population size and density; population growth rate; and territorial links with other areas

It may also be helpful to conduct a political economy analysis, a review of the decentralization process (planned or ongoing), and an analysis of the wider institutional landscape (relevant regional and national stakeholders, development partners); and a review of potential risks (economic, social, political).

While it is often impossible and impractical to address all such aspects in the situation analysis, the country profile can help prioritize areas for analysis. For example, while it is imperative to conduct an analysis of the local government system and a political economy analysis for any type of local programming, a review of the decentralization process might be unnecessary in contexts with a mature decentralized system. In contrast, in countries currently undergoing decentralization reform, UNICEF country offices must develop a thorough understanding of the trajectory of the reform process and build their knowledge of the key decision makers and their incentives. There must also be an understanding of the diverse ways decentralization affects certain sectors.

- regions, states in federal contexts, or local authorities have decision-making authority and at least some financial discretion in one or more sectors that are crucial to achieving results for children;
- the country has undergone decentralization reforms with a transfer of sector responsibilities and related finances to the subnational and local levels;
- where there are region(s), province(s) or district(s) with special status (e.g., semi-autonomous) or that are prioritized in national policy.

Factors influencing the programming choice include the level and form of decentralization in the country. Even the most centrally organized countries apply some decentralization in the form of de-concentration or delegation (see Box 3). Currently, in most countries, a combination of governance systems exist whereby some services are provided by the central government, with a certain degree of delegation or de-concentration, whilst in other countries services are provided by sub-national (devolved) governments, be it federal governments or local governments. The division of service delivery responsibilities between the central government and the subnational governments varies from country to country.

#### Box 4: Different types of decentralization

In the public sector, there are distinctions among the three main types of decentralization:<sup>24</sup>

- **De-concentration** is often considered the weakest form of decentralization. It redistributes decision-making authority, financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It can shift responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces, or districts, or it can create strong field administration or local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries.<sup>25</sup> De-concentrated functions are normally not entrenched in laws and can easily be withdrawn at any time.
- **Delegation** is a more extensive form of decentralization. Through delegation, central governments transfer responsibility for decision making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it. Governments delegate responsibilities when they create public enterprises or corporations, housing authorities, transportation authorities, special service districts, semi-autonomous school districts, regional development corporations, or special project implementation units. Usually, these organizations have a great deal of discretion in decision making. They may be exempt from constraints on regular civil service personnel and may be able to charge users directly for services. Delegation is often legally recognized.
- **Devolution**, the third type of decentralization, is legally entrenched, often in the Constitution. When governments devolve functions, they transfer authority for decision making, finance and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government with corporate status. Devolution usually transfers responsibilities for services to municipalities/district councils, etc. that elect their own mayors and councils, raise their own revenues and have independent authority to make investment decisions. In a devolved system, local governments have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform defined public functions.

A devolved system combines elements of

- (i) political decentralization, whereby locally elected leaders constitute the highest local government body,
- (ii) administrative decentralization, whereby those local governments can 'hire and fire' their own staff, and
- (iii) fiscal decentralization, whereby there are institutionalized arrangements in place for funding of local government operations, usually through a combination of local taxes and sharing of central government revenues through a system of intergovernmental fiscal transfers. In a devolved system, the aspects of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization are closely linked. Based on the foundation of a decentralization policy and an institutional framework to implement the policy, the aspects, together with a legal framework, are the pillars that jointly provide a democratic system at the subnational level that is expected to improve service delivery.

Achieving results for children at subnational and local levels can be pursued under all the three types of decentralization (de-concentration, delegation and devolution) and through engagement with national institutions with de-concentrated structures, with institutions with centrally delegated authorities, and with local governments with fully devolved functions. It is common for more than one of these forms of decentralization to exist within a country, depending on the sector of focus.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank, *Public Sector Governance: Decentralization and Subnational and Regional Economics*

<sup>25</sup> For this reason, de-concentration is sometimes referred to as 'administrative decentralization'

Issues related to children could be a mix of de-concentrated, delegated and devolved functional accountabilities. While the form of decentralization is important for selecting the entry points for engagement with the government and non-government partners, UNICEF programming approaches at the subnational and local levels should be determined based on the territorial perspective, considering different development strategies that best address specific needs of children, adolescents and their caregivers.

Within territories where most services are primarily provided through a **de-concentrated model**, the focus should be placed on working with central government institutions and strengthening their capacities to exercise functions and responsibilities at the subnational and local levels. This means a focus on influencing and supporting national policies, strategies and plans, including budget frameworks, by providing assistance to help make decisions in key social sectors that impact service delivery for children at the local level. As a complement, local stakeholders could be supported with tools and capacity for mastering local planning processes within the framework provided at the national level. As such, the implementing office should 'work' its way down, starting at the national level to generate influence on policies, priorities, plans, budget allocations and accountability processes at the respective territorial levels. Lessons from supporting the process may, in time, feed back into influencing national policies and budget allocations to create sectoral fiscal space for subnational and local levels.

**Box 5: De-concentration: Supporting decentralization and service delivery at subnational and local levels in Congo Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo**

The Republic of Congo is divided into 12 departments (regions), and further divided into 90 districts and 16 municipalities. Regions and municipalities have formally elected councils. Since 2003, mayors of bigger cities are directly elected. The governance model is still centralistic with some limited elements of de-concentration. Most of the public sector budget, including social services, is decided and managed at the central level.

The UNICEF Congo Country Office in Brazzaville mainly works at the national level by supporting the national government to build capacity to develop Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEFs) in key social sector ministries by developing the understanding of the budget process and ensuring coherence between policy, strategy, goals and objectives. It also provides assistance in compiling data and evidence to help make decisions on budget allocations and assists ministries in preparing annual plans and budgets, as much as possible in response to needs as shown by the situation analysis. In addition, the Country Office works on issues of planning and budgeting at regional and district levels, by providing technical support to promote cross-sectoral planning, coordination, resource mobilisation and community ownership through budgeted plans. This approach provides local actors, programme managers and field partners with tools for mastering the planning process. As such, the Country office seeks to 'work' its way down but started at national level to generate influence on budget allocations and create sectoral fiscal space for lower levels.

With **delegation**, the approach should be to assess through the territorial lens any significant services for children that are delegated within the territory (for example water, or social services), and what capacity and interventions the implementing office would need to deploy. This includes working upstream with central government institutions to influence policies, plans and budget allocations for the delegated services, but also working bottom up on costing of subnational expenditure assignments, particularly for service delivery functions relating to children. It also includes working with authorities and other stakeholders that have the responsibility over delegated functions and service delivery that are critical for children's outcomes. UNICEF can support national, subnational and local authorities, and other local stakeholders to generate evidence on local needs that should inform central-level decision making, strengthen local capacity for influencing central-level institutions, and improve implementation of delegated functions, including budget decisions for these functions,

management and expenditure of delegated budgets, service delivery coordination and management, budget administration and reporting. Supporting bottom-up social accountability mechanisms is also a way of improving service delivery at local level within delegated systems.

In the territories where the central government **devolves** functions for decision making, finance, policies, budgeting, and management and delivery of social services to subnational and local governments, subnational and local programming can work at both national and subnational levels. At the level of national government institutions, UNICEF can support decision-making processes for national policies and reform plans for social sector service delivery, and the design and implementation of fiscal decentralization and costing of the expenditure assignments for subnational services. This should be combined with working downstream at subnational and local levels to support systems strengthening in critical ways, including supporting evidence generation on the situation of children at the local level, influencing local policies, improving planning and budgeting approaches and drafting regional and local plans and budgets, strengthening accountability systems, and enabling meaningful participation of children, adolescents and their caregivers in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

### **Box 6: Devolved governance: Subnational and local financing and programming in Malawi**

Malawi has a single tier of local government that is made up of 35 rural and urban councils (for a population of close to 20 million). Local governments serve relatively large populations. In addition to directly elected councillors, the councils have traditional chiefs as non-voting members and members of the national parliament whose constituency is in the district as voting members.

The UNICEF Malawi Country Office engages in supporting local system development by working upstream to support the review of the National Decentralization Policy and prepare stocktaking and a series of reform papers on the functioning of the fiscal decentralization systems and costing expenditure assignments. The Country Office works downstream by supporting two districts in planning and budgeting following government guidelines, notably rolling out programme-based budgeting and drafting district development plans.

It is also important to understand the functioning of other organizations and structures that are not government-led and do not fall under the auspices of public institutions (for example, community-led structures and organizations, and private sector organizations). These organizations often play a critical role in providing key services for children, and it is important to understand their role and how they fit within the governance systems.

## **5.2 Where to start: Programming strategies in context**

Once a decision has been taken to engage at subnational and local levels, a multisectoral subnational and local approach requires a strategic choice of interventions, given the county context and local situation, including local stakeholders. Basic interventions that will lead to four of the five outputs in the Theory of Change are covered in the '**Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance**'.

The **Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance** is the basic approach for UNICEF's subnational and local work in all contexts. It provides guidance on how to support realization of children's rights at subnational and local levels by working with national, subnational and local governments and other local stakeholders, based on an understanding of the decentralization context, governance structures, roles and responsibilities, accountabilities, and resources between actors at different levels.



The Local Governance Approach to Programme Guidance sets out four interlinked action areas and outlines programming considerations supporting the implementation of the action areas for achieving long-term and sustainable results for children at the local level. The guidance takes into account the programming strengths and added value of UNICEF in working with subnational governments and other local stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

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#### Four overarching implementing strategies are defined:

1. Supporting subnational and local governments for strengthening the generation and utilization of geographically disaggregated data and evidence for children in rural and urban settings.
  2. Strengthening capacities at subnational and local levels for the development of equitable and inclusive plans and budgets that meet the needs of children with a focus on the most deprived and marginalized groups.
  3. Enhancing the voice and participation of children, adolescents and their families, by strengthening partnerships with communities and organizations at the local level, and providing children, adolescents and their families with mechanisms for monitoring and improving accountability and performance of subnational and local governance in decision making and service delivery.
  4. Providing technical support and building partnerships to improve access, coordination, and oversight of service delivery to reduce equity gaps in rural and urban settings.
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The **Local Governance Approach to Programming** also includes examples of tools for each of these implementing strategies, and practical guidance on how to operationalize subnational programming including for zonal offices.

Programming in urban areas should be primarily informed by the **Technical Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings** and the **Urban Organizational Procedure**, complemented by the **Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance**. They should be used together to support the achievement of comprehensive and cross-sectoral programming results within urban settings. The Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance complements the Urban Strategic Technical Note and Urban Organizational Procedure in providing more detailed information on tools and approaches for strengthening urban governance systems and outlines good examples from UNICEF local governance programming.

The **Technical Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings** sets out the broad overview of UNICEF's key priorities for children living in urban settings, as well the key pillars for programmatic action and strategy, and how these will contribute to the overarching results set out in this document. It explains how the priority results outlined in the Theory of Change can be achieved specifically within urban areas, including the particular considerations when dealing with slums and informal settlements. It outlines the priority areas for programming in urban areas, **why** should UNICEF be intervening in urban areas, **what** UNICEF programmes should do, and **how** UNICEF should programme in urban settings. The Urban Organizational Procedure (forthcoming) will outline the mandatory programming elements that should be followed by UNICEF Country Offices. The Urban Strategic Technical Note and Urban Organizational Procedure<sup>26</sup> should be followed in conjunction with the **Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance** in any country programme where UNICEF aims to achieve substantial results for children in urban areas, and in particular where UNICEF focuses its programming on urban slums and informal settlements in one or more programme sectors.

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<sup>26</sup> UNICEF 2022, Urban Strategic Technical Note; UNICEF 2022 Urban Organizational Procedure

In **high-income countries (HICs)** where UNICEF has country programmes (**Country Programme Offices**) it is also recommended that subnational and local governance programming is informed by the **Local Governance Approach to Programming**, the Urban Strategic Technical Note and the Urban Organizational Procedure. HIC offices also have the option of pursuing and engaging in subnational and local governance programming through the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) as an engagement platform. Convergence with sectoral programmes at subnational and local levels should be sought to strengthen the effectiveness of programming for achieving sustainable results for children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities.

In HICs where UNICEF is represented by **National Committees**, subnational and local governance programming is primarily guided by the **Programming Guidance for High Income Countries HICs and associated internal guidance**. Depending on the territorial context (urban or rural), there should be an analysis of child deprivations and a prioritization process to identify gaps and define where UNICEF can add value. There should also be an analysis of the capacities and resources available to support the advocacy and programming interventions. National Committees' approaches to working with subnational and local authorities should also be informed by the **Local Governance Approach to Programming Guidance**, the Urban Strategic Technical Note and the Urban Organizational Procedure. National Committees can engage with the implementation of CFCI with a strengthened programmatic focus on local governance action areas, including child participation.

## 5.3 Entry points and engagement platforms

UNICEF Country Offices and National Committees should also consider potential entry points and engagement platforms for subnational and local governance programming that bring additional value for results for children by mobilizing or incentivizing a broader range of partnerships. These engagement platforms are always **in addition to, and not in place of** the Local Governance Approach and context-specific elements outlined previously.

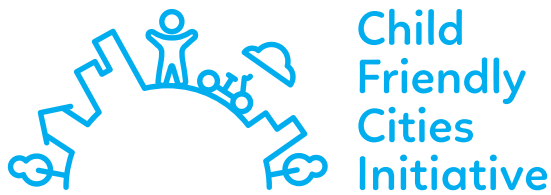
### 5.3.1 National decentralization reform process

The process of national decentralization reform, including fiscal decentralization, may provide an opportunity and an important entry point for engaging in subnational and local governance programming. Decentralization is a way of strengthening democracy by bringing decision-making processes closer to people, and establishing more accountable and transparent public governance. It can reform the public sector by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services.<sup>27</sup> Government-led decentralization processes may provide an entry point or platform for dialogue and influencing on key elements of national policy related to subnational and local governance, such as which functions are to be decentralized, public finance reforms on how to finance services at different levels, inter-governmental fiscal transfers, standard chart of accounts, and many other elements of governance systems including policy frameworks, human resource policies and accountability mechanisms. Engaging in fiscal decentralization reforms could effectively enable policy changes that improve the flow and use of budgeted resources for service delivery at the subnational level. Influencing decentralization policies and strategies for the establishment of systems and institutions that support implementation of children's rights, and support national, subnational, and local capacities to effectively implement decentralization reforms can be a powerful engagement platform for UNICEF at the subnational and local levels.

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<sup>27</sup> OECD (2019), *Making Decentralization Work: A Handbook for Policy-Makers*, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris.

### 5.3.2 The Child Friendly Cities Initiative



The **Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI)** is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports municipal governments and other local stakeholders in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as its foundation. CFCI is a partnerships and programming engagement platform that mobilizes government and multiple other stakeholders to conduct participatory assessment of the situation of children and develop, resource and implement an action plan to address the identified child rights deprivations and disparities. The voices of children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities are essential to determining the priority actions. Provided that progress is demonstrated on implementing the action plan, the respective city or community is 'recognized' for its commitment to child friendliness. While the focus of CFCI varies according to local priorities, it is essential that all support child and youth participation and social inclusion (non-discrimination). CFCI can be applied to urban or rural contexts. It is an optional engagement platform that should be considered only within the overall context of a subnational and local governance approach to programming, where it contributes to the results of the country programme, and where specific mandatory criteria for engagement related to capacity of both local governments and UNICEF offices (including offices of UNICEF National Committees) are fulfilled, and mandatory compliance policies requirements are followed.<sup>28</sup>

Applying CFCI as an engagement platform that supports the Local Governance Approach to Programming requires relevant capacities and urban governance systems to be in place to enable effective implementation. Therefore, it is recommended that in urban centres, CFCI is primarily implemented in countries with significant institutional capacity at the urban level, where CFCI standards and minimum criteria can be met. Evidence on the availability of relevant systems and efficiency of capacities of urban governments to engage with CFCI should stem from the situation analysis.

CFCI as an engagement platform could also be applied in rural areas. Similar to urban programming, the application of CFCI in rural areas should be underpinned by appropriate capacities and systems to guarantee that CFCI standards and minimum criteria are met, therefore making CFCI most appropriate for application in countries with significant institutional capacity at the local level.

Any implementing office that is working through this initiative should follow the specific CFCI Guidance.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Specific mandatory criteria for engagement with the Child Friendly Cities Initiative is listed in the CFCI Guidance Note.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF 2022, Guidance Note, Child Friendly Cities Initiative

### 5.3.3 SDG localization

Subnational and local governments and their associations have been actively supporting the localization of the 2030 Agenda, bringing the SDGs closer to the people they serve and using the framework as a tool for planning and policy implementation. ‘Localizing the SDGs’ is the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress. Localization relates both to how the SDGs can provide a framework for local development policy and to how local and regional governments can support the achievement of the SDGs through action from the bottom up.<sup>30</sup> Local and regional governments are increasingly engaging in sub-national reviews of SDG implementation through the voluntary local reviews (VLRs). VLRs help to reinforce vertical coherence and complement and contribute to the voluntary national reviews of SDG implementation. Localizing the SDGs must extend to strengthening data and evidence, local governance planning and budgeting and co-designing with public and private actors new service delivery models, innovative financing tools and accountability mechanisms. Applying a harmonized approach of local governance programming will further enhance SDG localization efforts and enhance results for children at the local level.

UNICEF is an active member of the Local2030 Coalition, supporting the SDG localization process through its programmes in the field. SDG localization provides the most effective platform for collaboration between all relevant actors in mobilizing knowledge, resources and skills for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.



<sup>30</sup> <https://www.local2030.org/> <https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/e-library/localizing-sdgs-strategies-and-plans>



# 6

## Monitoring

Monitoring of subnational and local programming includes measures to monitor UNICEF's contribution and progress on the key results in the Theory of Change, and monitoring of the situation of children in urban and local levels.

### 6.1 Monitoring UNICEF contribution

Urban and local governance priorities are included in [Goal Area 5](#) of the new [UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#), indicating the clear links towards supporting poverty reduction and implementation of children's rights. Global progress at output level is monitored under Goal Area 5 (local governance) and change strategies (urban). The strategic monitoring indicators follow the results framework outlined in the Theory of Change for subnational and local programming.

- The local governance indicator *"Number of countries, including in humanitarian and fragile context, in which UNICEF has enhanced national and local governance capacities for poverty reduction at local level"*<sup>31</sup> measures both urban and rural programming results as well as relevant results achieved through the CFCEI engagement platform. It aims to assess progress in strengthening local governance systems and capacities by assessing UNICEF support for the development of child-responsive national and local policies, programmes, plans and child-responsive local budgets, and strengthening the voice and agency of children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities to effectively participate in local decision making. Country Offices that are implementing the subnational programming can report UNICEF's contribution to progress.
- The urban indicator *"Number of countries with child-responsive urban policies, spatial-planning standards and programmes that address the unique structural barriers to child well-being in urban settings, with a special focus on those living in slums and informal settlements"* aims to assess progress in UNICEF support for national urban policies, programmes and planning standards that underpin specific urban development.

As a multisectoral approach, urban and local governance results are also monitored through the sectors. There are nine impact indicators, three outcome indicators and eight output indicators with urban/rural disaggregation within the sectors' monitoring framework in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025. These indicators will be captured through sectoral reporting.

Within a country programme, the results chain should include local governance and urban results, translate these results into appropriate and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) indicators, and systematically link these indicators to sector- and country-level results.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF (2021), *Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025*



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Specific guidance for monitoring and evaluation of CFCIs within the overall results framework is under development. This will address two main aspects:

- the monitoring of compliance with the CFCI process criteria and requirements as part of the CFCI cycle, and the progress made by the participating local governments, or
- the monitoring of the local action plans and the results achieved by the local authorities.

## 6.2 Monitoring the global situation of children

The [Global Urban Monitoring Framework](#) was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission. Specific indicators relating to children under this framework are included in the [Urban Strategic Technical Note](#). Going forward this framework will be used by countries and cities for reporting and for voluntary reviews.





## 7

## Roles, capacities and skills for subnational and local programming in UNICEF Headquarters, Regional Offices, Country Offices and National Committees

There are several critical roles and capacities in connection with the application of this framework. It is important to distinguish between UNICEF programme coordination and coordination of programming support to local governance systems. The responsibility for local governance systems strengthening is the core responsibility under Goal Area 5 and usually rests with Social Policy (Social Policy Chiefs or Specialists). Technical sectoral support is the responsibility of programme sectors (Programme specialists). Coordination and convergence of UNICEF overall programming at subnational level sits with the Country Office Management (for example Deputy Representatives, Chiefs of Field Offices).

### 7.1 Capacities and skills for subnational and local programming

Implementing offices engaged in local governance programming have different programming capacities and resources. When programming, they should ensure they have adequate capacity to successfully implement a subnational and local programme approach, including:

**Financial resources:** Sufficient financial resources should be planned and mobilized to ensure effective implementation of subnational and local governance programming and the achievement of sustainable results for children.

**Human resources:** Adequate staff capacity should be allocated towards subnational and local governance programming to support implementation of planned programming interventions.

**Social Policy staff in Country Offices** should have, or be willing to develop, the necessary knowledge and skills on governance and systems (decentralization, social accountability), public financial management and capacity building needs for local governance. Sectoral technical capacity to support specific sectoral results at subnational and local levels should come through the sectors represented within the country programmes. Sectoral programme staff should also have necessary understanding of governance and decentralization, and skills to work within governance structures as established and functioning in the country of operation.

Specific skills that are required include:

#### For local governance

- Understanding of political, fiscal and administrative decentralization and context to address challenges and identify opportunities to maximize results for children
- Understanding of local governance and accountability structures, including mechanisms for participation, to facilitate coordination and links among government levels and other stakeholders

- Knowledge and skills for evidence generation, advocacy and social and behaviour change associated with subnational and local governance
- Expertise in the assessment of the territorial and local governance context to transform knowledge and evidence into policy recommendations and actionable plans
- Skills to work within governance structures as established and functioning in the country
- Understanding of community engagement and participation frameworks, models and tools to identify appropriate, context-dependent levels and modalities
- Political acumen to navigate the political economy (actors and interests) and mitigate possible conflicting interests
- Understanding of subnational planning, financing and expenditure processes and frameworks to identify measures to enhance strategic subnational public finance outcomes related to social sector understanding, sectoral convergence and the multisectoral approach
- Understanding of disaster risk preparedness and risk-informed programming

In addition, **for urban programming**

- Knowledge of urban disaster risk reduction and urban resilience including climate adaptations and shock-responsive planning with a specific focus on children
- Knowledge of inclusive urban programming including key priorities under the UNICEF urban strategy and guidance
- Knowledge of urban diagnostics, tools and frameworks
- Knowledge of specific areas including digital transformation/SMART and climate adaptation technologies for cities;
- Understanding and knowledge of linking physical and financial planning with geo-spatial mapping in cities

In countries that plan to engage through CFCEI, particular attention should be given to the specific capacity requirements for coordination and recognition under the initiative.

## 7.2 Roles and responsibilities

### 7.2.1 Headquarters

The subnational and local governance programming is embedded within the Social Policy and Social Protection Programme group in Headquarters. The Urban Hub is currently anchored in the Social Policy team to better align urban programming with local governance. With urban and local governance cutting across all sectors, other Programme groups also have direct responsibilities for supporting programming at subnational and local levels through the sectoral approaches. Other Headquarters Divisions also play critical roles in respect to disaggregated and urban data, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM); research and analysis, Office of Research – Innocenti; programming in humanitarian contexts, Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS); and liaising with UNICEF National Committees in High-Income Countries, Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP). As such, Headquarters will be responsible for:

- **Providing leadership**, setting strategy and vision, developing policy; ensuring representation setting global goals and coordination with sectors for the subnational and local governance programming agenda
- **Leveraging the importance and visibility** of subnational and local governance programming within UNICEF and externally

- **Global advocacy, developing and fostering partnerships** with other United Nations organizations, international organizations, civil society, and bilateral and multilateral organizations as well as relevant think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other global actors active in subnational and local planning and programming in both urban and rural contexts
- Fostering partnerships for **resource mobilization** with the private sector and bilateral and multilateral donors and other key stakeholders in support of programme implementation
- Strengthening the availability of **data and evidence**, especially at subnational and local levels in ensuring subnational programming is evidence based and achieves the planned results for children
- **Developing and issuing relevant programming guidance and procedures** in consultation with relevant programme groups in Headquarters, Regional Offices, Country Offices and National Committees.
- **Developing standards and guidance** on working through subnational authorities for risk informed programming, emergency preparedness and humanitarian response, in consultation with EMOPS
- **Supporting Regional Offices in the provision of technical assistance to Country Offices** for improving the effectiveness of subnational and local governance programming or providing access to technical expertise through long-term agreements and roster of external experts on urban and local governance, and CFCI, particularly in areas where there are programmatic and capacity gaps within the organization
- **Providing capacity building** to Regional Offices, Country Offices and National Committees for improved subnational and local programming that yields results for children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities
- **Quality assurance** in respect to specific National Committees' work on evidence generation, advocacy, and social and behaviour change associated with subnational and local governance; and **technical assistance for systems strengthening** for specific National Committees' subnational and local governance related work<sup>32</sup>
- **Identifying, promoting and sharing knowledge, including on good models and practices.**

## 7.2.2 Regional Offices

Similar to Headquarters, local governance and urban programming is not the sole responsibility of Social Policy Advisors/Teams at Regional Office level. Support for local governance and urban programming should be a joint responsibility of all sectors and cross-sectoral teams as per their area of technical competence and programming priorities. Social Policy Advisors and teams may lead on elements related to governance and systems (decentralization, social accountability), public financial management and capacity building needs for subnational and local governance. Sectoral technical capacity to support specific sectoral results should come through the sectors represented within the Regional Offices.

The management of Regional Offices may determine the most appropriate lead for work at subnational and local levels or in urban contexts, depending on office capacity and priorities. Recognizing that this work is programmatic in nature, the lead should have a programmatic portfolio.

As such, the Regional Offices are responsible for:

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<sup>32</sup> For details of Headquarters' accountabilities, see UNICEF Programme Guidance for High Income Countries <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD-PHIC/HICs2/Programme%20Guidance/Programme%20Guidance%20for%20HICs.pdf>

### Subnational and local governance and urban regional leads (social policy or other programmatic functions)

- **Ensuring compliance and relevance with existing UNICEF guidance and procedures** for subnational and local governance programming
- **Providing technical assistance to Country Offices on CPDs development and monitoring**, including integrating local governance and urban programming within CPDs and strategy notes where relevant; adequate resource and staff capacity for local governance and urban programming in Country Programme Management Plans (CPMPs); and quality assurance of implementation
- **Quality assurance** in respect of specific National Committees work on evidence generation, advocacy and social and behaviour change associated with subnational and local governance; and **technical assistance for systems strengthening** for specific National Committee subnational and local governance related work<sup>33</sup> in line with staffing capacity in relevant Regional Offices
- **Overseeing quality of subnational and local programmes at the country level**, including adherence to organizational and regional priorities and organizational standards (oversight, support, capacity), ensuring Country Offices' awareness of the guidance documents and when to apply them, and facilitating regional learning on local governance and urban development where appropriate
- **Integrating subnational and local programming, and subnational authorities** into regional disaster risk reduction and preparedness planning and actions, and into humanitarian response where appropriate
- **Developing and fostering regional partnerships and resource mobilization** for subnational and local programming

### Regional Social Policy teams:

- **Technical assistance to Country Offices** on social policy elements of subnational programming including analysis of governance systems, evidence and data on subnational child poverty, social protection and budgets including subnational budget briefs, local planning and budgeting, local social accountability mechanisms where relevant, including community-based monitoring, initiating/supporting implementation of relevant public finance management (PFM) reforms (updating standard charts of accounts, programme-based budgeting, revising inter-fiscal government transfer systems), local resource mobilization strategies, strengthening local parliamentary (local council) capacity on PFM issues, strengthening local PFM systems (generating, analysing, using, reporting financial information), supporting local budget transparency including fiscal transfer platforms, and local budget transparency improvement action plans.
- **Supporting the development** of multi-country analysis and production of analytic and knowledge products about decentralization
- **Providing capacity building** to Country Offices, and Field or Zonal Offices for improved subnational and local programming that yields results for children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities.

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<sup>33</sup> For details of Headquarters' accountabilities see UNICEF Programme Guidance for High Income Countries <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD-PHIC/HICs2/Programme%20Guidance/Programme%20Guidance%20for%20HICs.pdf>

### 7.2.3 Country Offices

Taking into account the multisectoral characteristics of local governance and urban programming, the responsibility for planning, management and implementation of the local governance and urban programming in Country Offices lies within each sector as well as with cross-cutting teams such as Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP), Social and Behaviour Change (SBC), Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peace (CERP), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and others. Social Policy teams should provide the coordination and support implementation of all aspects pertaining to social policy work (e.g., overarching planning and budgeting systems, coordination of services).

Where aligned with office priorities, the responsibilities of country offices are:

#### Country Office management/subnational and local governance or urban lead (Social Policy or other programmatic function):

- **Generating credible evidence on the situation of children** at subnational and local level and translating it to programmatic responses that best meet the identified gaps in child rights implementation
- **Applying existing guidance for subnational and local programming**, translating the existing guidance and urban organizational procedure in effective and efficient country programmes, adapting it to the specific country context, taking into consideration the roles of subnational and local levels for the achievement of results for children as laid down in the CPD, making appropriate determination of programme strategies and reporting on results
- Ensuring local governance and urban programme management and implementation is **effectively embedded within the Country Office structure, including through the selection and appointment of staff with relevant sets of skills and competencies**, and ensuring there is convergence between all sectors working at subnational and local levels
- Where relevant, work with national partners to **make the national urban policies and urban planning standards child responsive**
- **Providing technical assistance and capacity building** to national, regional and local governments, and other stakeholders, including communities, civil society organizations, etc. on all elements of local governance programming, implementation and monitoring of programme interventions
- **Advocating** with national, regional and local governments for improved systems and institutions at all levels that enhance the realization of child rights at the local level
- **Integrating subnational and local programming, and subnational authorities** into regional disaster risk reduction and preparedness planning and actions, and into humanitarian response, where appropriate
- **Overseeing quality of programmes**, including adherence to organizational and regional priorities and organizational standards
- **Establishing and maintaining in-country partnerships** with a range of stakeholders, including with subnational and local stakeholders, such as local governments, civil society organizations and the private sector
- **Mobilizing resources** for subnational and local governance programming
- **Harmonizing and coordinating the implementation** of UNICEF sectoral programmes at the local level, including the role of Field and Zone Offices with the local administration and decentralization structure
- **Defining roles, responsibilities and interventions to promote child participation** at the local level

### Social Policy teams:

- **Leading and co-ordinating UNICEF Country Teams** to analyse and understand subnational governance and finance systems, and governance and public finance bottlenecks to help realize children's rights at the subnational level, navigate the political economy (actors and interests) and mitigate possible conflicting interests
- **Providing technical assistance** to national, regional and local governments, and other stakeholders, including communities, civil society organizations, etc. on social policy elements of local governance programming, strengthening systems and institutional capacity for better data and evidence, financing, planning, budgeting and social accountability.
- **Supporting evidence generation and analysis** on subnational child poverty, social protection and budgets, including subnational budget briefs; local planning and budgeting; local social accountability mechanisms where relevant, including community-based monitoring; implementation of relevant PFM reforms (updating standard charts of accounts, programme-based budgeting, revising inter-fiscal government transfer systems); local resource mobilization strategies; strengthening local parliamentary (local council) capacity on PFM issues; strengthening local PFM systems (generating, analysing, using, reporting financial information); and supporting local budget transparency, including fiscal transfer platforms and local budget transparency improvement action plans.
- **Establishing and maintaining in-country partnerships** with a range of stakeholders to strengthen the governance capacities of local and urban governments and other stakeholders
- **Supporting UNICEF Field or Zone Offices** with dedicated social policy staff when possible, where relevant.

### 7.2.4 National Committees

The implementation of this framework, in the case of National Committees, will be defined within the parameters of their agreed scope of action, as recognized in the Cooperation Agreement. In line with the scope and the Programming Guidance for HICs, National Committees are responsible for:

- **Generating and advocating for the generation of credible evidence of the situation of children** and supporting evidence-based advocacy that best meets the identified gaps in child rights implementation given the levels of decentralization and responsibility of subnational and local governance systems for the realization of child rights,
- **Applying existing guidance and procedures and adapting it to the specific country context**, taking into consideration the role of subnational and local levels for the achievement of results for children, adolescents, their caregivers and communities, and reporting on results
- **Applying programming strategies** within their remit, as reflected in the Programming Guidance for HICs, and in alignment with the Cooperation Agreement, in order to support the realization of children's rights through subnational and local programming, with support from Headquarters and Regional Offices as indicated
- **Advocating with subnational and local governments to advance the realization of child rights** through improving systems changes in legislation, policy, action and budget allocations
- **Establishing and maintaining partnerships** with a range of stakeholders, including with subnational and local stakeholders, such as local governments, civil society organizations and the private sector
- **Mobilizing resources** through non-competitive resources in support of the subnational and local governance work



## 8

## Promoting collaboration across programme sectors and with external partners

### 8.1 Collaboration across programme sectors

UNICEF has extensive programming experience with sector and cross-cutting priorities with local governments and other local stakeholders in a wide range of settings. Subnational and local governance programming involves working across multiple programming sectors within Headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices. Most of the social sectors include strong subnational components, particularly in the context of UNICEF work on systems strengthening and service delivery at the local level. It is therefore important to ensure sectoral convergence at the local level for enhancing programme effectiveness and achieving better results for children.

Subnational and local governance programming is embedded in all sectors and will contribute to the achievement of outcomes across all Goal Areas (GAs) of UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Some of the sectoral results that will be supported through working and programming at subnational and local levels are listed below.

**GA1: Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices, and essential supplies.**

#### Results that are supported through local governance interventions:

- Children and women have access to strengthened primary health care and high-impact interventions to accelerate the end of preventable maternal, neonatal and child deaths and stillbirths in development and humanitarian contexts
- Children benefit from UNICEF-supported integrated management of childhood illness services (integrated community case management and/or integrated management of neonatal and childhood illness)
- Children benefit from UNICEF-supported essential childhood immunization services in an equitable way and to reduce zero dose in urban and peri-urban settings
- Countries with strengthened systems for primary health care
- Children, including adolescents, benefit from programmes that improve their health and development, in development and humanitarian contexts.
- Addressing environmental health risks in primary health care
- Strengthened climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health-care facilities with UNICEF support
- Adolescent girls and women benefit from gender-responsive diets, services, and practices for the prevention of anaemia and other forms of malnutrition, in development and humanitarian contexts.
- Countries with gender-responsive programmes to prevent anaemia in adolescent girls and boys through school- and community-based approaches



**GA2: Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future****Results that are supported through local governance interventions:**

- Countries have a resilient education system that can respond to humanitarian crises
- Out-of-school children and adolescents access education through UNICEF-supported programmes
- Improved learning, skills, participation and engagement for all children and adolescents in development and humanitarian contexts
- Countries have effective student and community participation within the education system
- Countries are institutionalizing holistic skills development to support learning, personal empowerment, environmental sustainability, active citizenship, social cohesion and/or employability and entrepreneurship
- Adolescents and young people participate in or lead civic engagement initiatives through UNICEF-supported programmes

**GA3: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices****Results that are supported through local governance interventions:**

- Children who have experienced violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect reached by health, social work, or justice/law enforcement services
- Children, including those affected by humanitarian crises, benefit from the promotion of care, mental health and psychosocial well-being and justice
- Countries have mature child protection systems
- Free and universal birth registration service within civil registration and vital statistics, in accordance with international standards and best practices
- UNICEF-targeted children, adolescents, parents and caregivers provided with community-based mental health and psychosocial support services
- Children, including those affected by humanitarian crises, benefit from the prevention of harmful practices
- Girls and women receive prevention and protection services on female genital mutilation through UNICEF-supported programme
- People engaged through community platforms in reflective dialogue towards eliminating discriminatory social and gender norms and harmful practices

**GA4: Every child, including adolescents, uses safe and equitable WASH services and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment****Results that are supported through local governance interventions:**

- Sustained access to and use of safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices for all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts
- People reached with at least basic sanitation services through UNICEF-supported programmes
- People reached with at least basic water that is safe and available when needed, through UNICEF-supported programmes
- People reached with at least basic hygiene services through UNICEF-supported programme

- Strengthened and resourced water, sanitation and hygiene systems, and empowered communities for gender-equal, inclusive, affordable and sustainable services to meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts
- Increased and enhanced child-sensitive programmes to address climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation that meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those in humanitarian and fragile contexts
- Children, adolescents and young people are engaged in action and advocacy to address climate change, unsustainable energy use and/or environmental degradation, with UNICEF support
- Updated government frameworks for preparedness and/or early/anticipatory action are child-sensitive at the national and local levels through UNICEF support

## 8.2 External partnerships

Building strong partnerships at global, regional and local levels is an important contribution for better and more effective subnational and local governance programming, and leverages UNICEF's comparative advantage in the local governance–service delivery nexus.

To further accelerate commitments to enhance governance systems at subnational and local levels, there is a need to strengthen decentralization policies and strategies that integrate children's rights, improve governance systems at the local level for child-sensitive planning, budgeting and effective delivery of social services, strengthen urban planning policies and standards to ensure they incorporate the rights and needs of all children and adolescents. UNICEF will partner with the United Nations System at global, regional and country levels, particularly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to help meet these commitments.

Partnerships with global and regional local government associations such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and related regional chapters (e.g., UCLG Asia-Pacific); global coalitions, such as Local2030 Coalition, the Cities4Children Alliance, and development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank will allow UNICEF to benefit from external local governance expertise while contributing a child-, equity- and social-services-focused perspective to partners' work.

UNICEF will also continue to strengthen its strategic partnership with bilateral agencies, the European Commission and global think tanks such as ODI for enhancing evidence, advocacy and effective programming at scale. These partnerships will be promoted in support of strengthening programming approaches and programmatic processes, including in the context of the implementation of SDGs.

UNICEF also works with a variety of domestic stakeholders at the national level. UNICEF counterparts include social sector ministries and agencies and their subnational divisions. Engaging a wide range of national, regional/provincial and local actors ensures better uptake and commitment, and supports sustainability of results. Working with the right partners at all levels is crucial for successfully scaling up and institutionalizing local initiatives.

In fragile and conflict-affected settings partnerships with national and local institutions, and community organizations and local NGOs can be instrumental for reaching out to affected populations. It is important to understand that the local governance dimension is an inherent part of the overall conflict system. A conflict necessarily affects local governance and vice versa. The various interests and motivations of local, regional and national actors (e.g., mayors, local councillors, ministries) are often overlooked during conflict analysis. Conducting a partnership analysis from a conflict-sensitive perspective is essential.<sup>34</sup> In humanitarian contexts, the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality are key in deciding the types of partnerships UNICEF should develop.

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<sup>34</sup> UNICEF, 2019 *Local Governance and Sustaining Peace Guidance Note*, Chapter 4.1

# Annex: Related UNICEF guidance documents and other relevant products

## Main guidance

- UNICEF, 2018. A Local Governance Approach to Programming: Guidance for achieving multisectoral results through working with local governments
- UNICEF, 2022. Technical Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings
- UNICEF, 2022. UNICEF Procedure on Urban Programming
- UNICEF, 2022. Guidance Note on Child Friendly Cities Initiative

## Subject/issue specific guidance

- UNICEF, 2019. Local Governance and Sustaining Peace: Guidance Note
- UNICEF, 2019. Local Governance and Sustaining Peace: Case Studies
- UNICEF, 2021. Strengthening Resilience Through Risk Informed Decentralization and Local Governance
- UNICEF, 2017. Child Participation in Local Governance: A UNICEF Guidance Note
- UNICEF, 2017. Child Participation in Local Governance – UNICEF Country Office Case Studies
- UNICEF, 2021. Subnational Public Finance Programme Briefs
- UNICEF, 2018. Shaping urbanization for children: A handbook on child-responsive urban planning
- UNICEF, 2018. Children Uprooted What Local Governments Can Do
- UNICEF, 2016. Global Stocktake of UNICEF Engagement in Decentralization and Local Governance, 2011–2015





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