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Global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019

Summary**

Summary

   The global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises explores the extent to which UNICEF has been able to meet corporate commitments for this programming and whether tools and approaches designed largely for rapid-onset emergencies have been effective in protracted crises. The evaluation also looks at the experience of UNICEF in implementing the linking of humanitarian and development programming in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in protracted crises and how well placed the organization is to adapt its work to fully achieve its ambitions in this area. It is the first global evaluation looking at protracted crisis settings and thus contains lessons that apply beyond the WASH sector.

   The evaluation draws on evidence from a range of sources as well as four field-based case studies in Cameroon, Lebanon, Somaliland and South Sudan.

   The evaluation finds that UNICEF has been largely successful in meeting water coverage targets, but progress in sanitation and hygiene has lagged behind. It also found that, while service coverage standards were adequate, increased emphasis was needed on equity and quality. Having insufficient outcome data or capability to articulate expected changes in people's lives limits the ability of UNICEF to be accountable to affected populations and to ensure data-informed programming. The findings reflect the fact that protracted crises are among the most challenging operational contexts.

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Recommendations include, among others, that UNICEF ensure an equal focus on water and on sanitation/hygiene, more clearly articulate expected results, improve the collection and use of data, give equal weight to equity and quality alongside coverage and ensure that WASH in protracted crises programmes align with UNICEF commitments to linking humanitarian and development programming.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VI.

I. Introduction

1. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as of 2019, 1.8 billion people were living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and this number is expected to increase to 2.2 billion by 2030.[1] As the number of people in need increases, so does the length of time during which they require international support. The average humanitarian crisis now lasts more than nine years – an increase from an average of 5.2 years in 2014. The implications for hard-pressed donors and agencies are significant, especially given their commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, which cannot be met without progress in these fragile contexts.

2. Currently, more than 800 million children live in 58 fragile contexts. In protracted crises, individual and household vulnerability increases over time, making it more difficult to protect infrastructure and development gains. Compared with those in non-fragile contexts, children in extremely fragile contexts are more than eight times as likely to lack basic drinking water and almost four times as likely to lack basic sanitation.[2]

3. In the WASH sector, UNICEF has a leadership role that is globally recognized. Because of the unprecedented frequency and duration of emergencies, the scale of UNICEF humanitarian action in WASH has expanded both geographically and financially. Between 2014 and 2019, UNICEF WASH programmes responded to Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies in 25 countries, in addition to many Level 1 emergencies. In the 2019 annual results report for WASH, UNICEF reported having engaged in WASH humanitarian action in 94 countries over the period of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017. Since the early 2000s, approximately half of UNICEF total WASH expenditure has been spent on emergencies.

4. UNICEF has led the Global WASH Cluster since its creation in 2005, acting as cluster lead agency when the WASH cluster is activated in a country and also as provider of last resort. As such, UNICEF actions influence a large network of humanitarian actors in the sector.

5. The UNICEF Evaluation Office commissioned the global evaluation of water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises in light of the increased scale of vulnerability and needs in protracted crises, and because the consequent increase in funding to WASH in humanitarian action is being directed towards UNICEF and the sector as a whole. The WASH sector accounts for the largest share of UNICEF expenditure in humanitarian action, and WASH is a part of the organization's response in all protracted crises. This is the first UNICEF global evaluation focusing specifically on protracted crises situations.

II. Evaluation approach

A. Objective, scope and evaluation questions

6. The objective of the evaluation was to determine how UNICEF maintains its WASH commitments over time in protracted crisis contexts, absorbs new shocks and adapts, applies best practice and links humanitarian and development programming

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[1] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *States of Fragility 2018* (Paris, 2018). Available at: www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2018-9789264302075-en.htm.

[2] United Nations Children's Fund, *Water Under Fire – For every child, water and sanitation in complex emergencies, Vol. 1: Emergencies, development and peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts* (New York, 2019). Available at: www.unicef.org/reports/emergencies-development-peace-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-contexts-2019.

in theory and practice. The evaluation had both learning and accountability objectives.

7. The evaluation included all 21 contexts that fit the definition of a protracted crisis during the period 2014–2019. All elements of UNICEF WASH response were included in the assessment.

8. The evaluation was structured around five evaluation questions chosen to align with priority areas of inquiry as identified in the inception period and in the terms of reference for the evaluation. The questions reference key UNICEF strategies (including the WASH Strategic Framework, 2016–2030) and commitments. and cover the criteria of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, connectedness, coverage and coordination.

B. Methodology

9. The evaluation used the following mixed methods:

(a) A global desk review of more than 600 documents at global, regional and country levels and a review of financial and results data;

(b) Four field-based case studies in Cameroon, Lebanon, Somaliland and South Sudan, which were chosen according to pre-determined criteria. The case studies included field visits, direct observation and transect walks, document reviews, key informant interviews with staff and partners and a country office self-assessment;

(c) Two desk-based thematic case studies focused on UNICEF WASH action in response to public health crises and UNICEF support to WASH in urban crisis settings;

(d) A global online survey of UNICEF staff and partners working in protracted-crisis contexts and of members of the Global WASH Cluster, which received 76 responses;

(e) Global key informant interviews with 25 UNICEF staff and external stakeholders.

10. The evidence collected using the methods described above was analysed and then synthesized into the evaluation findings and conclusions. For each type of benchmark, the evaluation gave a rating of red (limited), amber (mixed) or green (strong) performance. Because UNICEF does not have an explicit definition of quality programming in WASH, the evaluation conducted an in-depth review of existing standards and commitments to develop a quality scorecard comprising service level, equity and protection, context-appropriateness and reliability.

Table 1
Methods, data collection and analysis and synthesis of findings

	Evidence collection	Findings for each evidence product	Summary findings compiled in evidence matrix	Sub-evaluation question (SEQ)-level evaluative judgment	Red-amber-green ratings and strength of evidence	Cross-cutting conclusions
Global desk review	− Global document review − UNICEF, partner and sector documentation − UNICEF monitoring data	− Evidence analysed against success criteria − Findings generated by SEQ				
Four field-based case studies	− Country-focused document review − UNICEF country office self-assessment − Key informant interviews (KIIs) − Intervention transect walks	− Evidence analysed against success criteria − Findings generated by SEQ	− Individual summaries for each evidence product and SEQ − 13 x 9 matrix − 107 individual findings summaries	− Evaluative judgment reached by analysing across each summary for relevant SEQ − Analysis undertaken at level of success criteria − Triangulating initial evaluative judgment against evidence from global level KIIs	− Red-amber-green rating provides visual overview of performance against each SEQ Performance definitions developed for each type of benchmark − Strength of evidence based on assessment of extent of consistency across evidence products	Cross-cutting conclusions identified through analysis across SEQ-level evaluative judgments
Two desk-based thematic case studies	− Thematic-focused document review − UNICEF country office self-assessment − Remote KIIs	− Evidence analysed against success criteria − Findings generated by SEQ				
Online survey	− Survey sent to UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) staff − Cascaded to UNICEF WASH partners	− Survey questions aligned with SEQs and success criteria − Analysis presented by SEQ				

III.   Findings of the evaluation

A.   Quality, equity and inclusion

Table 2
Evaluation Question 1 ratings[a]

Evaluation question	Sub-evaluation question	Rating
EQ1: To what extent has UNICEF achieved quality, including equity and inclusion, in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in protracted crises? (against a quality scorecard for WASH in protracted crises)	1.1 To what extent have UNICEF staff and partners been made familiar with and are able to apply the relevant normative frameworks and agency and sectoral standards for WASH in protracted crises?	🟩
	1.2 To what extent has UNICEF achieved adequate provision of WASH services for men, women and children?	🟨
	1.3 To what extent has UNICEF achieved equitable and safe access to WASH services provided?	🟥
	1.4 To what extent has UNICEF achieved responses that were relevant and appropriate?	
	1.5 To what extent were WASH services supported by UNICEF used and reliable?	🟨

[a]For each Evaluation Question, a red-amber-green colour-coding system provides a visual overview of UNICEF performance: red (limited), amber (mixed), green (strong) performance and blank (no rating).

11.   **Subquestion 1.1: To what extent have UNICEF staff and partners been made familiar with and are able to apply the relevant normative frameworks and agency and sectoral standards for WASH programming in protracted crises?** UNICEF has performed strongly (green rating) in terms of applying key norms and sectoral standards in its WASH response. The evaluation found that UNICEF staff were cognizant of the UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and Sphere sectoral standards, which were visible in programme documents, situation reports and in aggregated country-level performance measurements. The Sphere guidelines and standards were less apparent at the global strategic level, although they are featured and captured in WASH programming toolkits and manuals. UNICEF country offices systematically emphasized norms and sectoral standards with implementing partners and provided training in this area. Yet refresher courses were not always systematically provided to long-term partners and government counterparts when staff turnover was high. One positive finding was that benchmarks were initially adapted to individual crises. However, this was not consistently done, nor were these adapted standards revisited as crises became protracted. UNICEF and implementing partners generally focused on standards related to coverage and service levels rather than those related to equity, accountability to affected populations, use and reliability.

12.   **Subquestion 1.2: In its WASH programming in protracted crises, to what extent has UNICEF achieved adequate provision of WASH services for men, women and children?** The evaluation found a mixed performance (amber rating) for the extent to which UNICEF has achieved adequate provision of WASH services. Interventions supported by UNICEF broadly met coverage targets for access to basic drinking water. However, UNICEF performance needs improvement in meeting sanitation, hygiene, menstrual hygiene management and WASH-in-schools targets throughout numerous protracted crises. Promotion of hygiene showed discrepancies in terms of coverage targets and achievements. Moreover, there was a concern that lower coverage targets and achievements for sanitation and hygiene in relation to those for water were not reflective of needs. Like other actors in protracted crises,

UNICEF faced numerous challenges, including access, security, funding and donor priorities. The fact that interventions had varying focuses may reflect specific contexts and programming approaches, but when such discrepancies exist (without a clear rationale), UNICEF cannot deliver an integrated WASH approach.

13. **Subquestion 1.3: In its WASH programming in protracted crises, to what extent has UNICEF achieved safe and equitable access to WASH services and facilities?** UNICEF has had less success (red rating) in ensuring safe and equitable access to WASH services in terms of equity, inclusion and protection. The challenging operational contexts and access barriers in many protracted crises make delivery of even basic services a considerable achievement. Applying sophisticated and nuanced programming approaches to ensure equity, inclusion and dignity is even more challenging. There were isolated positive examples of an equity lens being applied to WASH programming to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized groups could access and benefit equally from WASH interventions. However, to date, UNICEF has not demonstrated sufficiently strong performance against key agreed equity, gender, inclusion and protection commitments.

14. The equity framing of the UNICEF corporate vision and its Strategic Plan was undermined by a weak approach and a lack of clarity on how to measure equity in WASH programming in protracted crises. The vision for equity was also compromised by partial or limited disaggregation of data. The clear progress made towards strengthening sex-disaggregated data was commendable. However, full integration of equity considerations was not yet apparent throughout programming for WASH in protracted crises. Disaggregation of data by disability, age or ethnicity was very limited, and without it UNICEF cannot know at the cluster or sector level who is reached by WASH interventions or understand the extent to which equity targets are addressed and met.

15. There were numerous examples that indicated insufficient attention to (and a lack of appropriate hardware design for) ensuring safe and appropriate WASH access for all users. In particular, specific technical design and management of sanitation access for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups was inconsistently carried out. There was no substantive evidence that UNICEF WASH-supported interventions ensured the safety of users or that programmes took measures to ensure that users felt safe using WASH services.

16. **Subquestion 1.4: To what extent has UNICEF achieved responses that were relevant and appropriate based on user participation in design and feedback mechanisms?** UNICEF demonstrated only limited success (red rating) in achieving WASH responses in protracted crises that are relevant and appropriate and in designing and implementing programmes that were informed and adapted based on user participation. The evaluation found isolated examples of good practice – for example, the participation of users in the siting, management and technical choice of water services and facilities, in some cases. In some of the highly challenging operational environments where UNICEF works, user participation was far from straightforward. UNICEF did not systematically take steps to ensure that users are consulted and participate in the design of WASH facilities, and this gap constrains the potential relevance and appropriateness of WASH services. There was strong evidence that UNICEF failed to ensure the involvement of vulnerable groups in the design, delivery and usability of services. This omission led to poorly designed and, consequently, poorly used WASH services. For example, while the use of contractors from the private sector may have been appropriate (or in some contexts essential), a pattern was detected of such contractors neglecting community participation. User feedback mechanisms were also inadequate and unable to influence the design of WASH services over time. UNICEF did not collect data on the number of complaints

regarding WASH services, and the complaint mechanisms were poorly understood by beneficiaries.

17. **Subquestion 1.5: To what extent have WASH services provided/supported by UNICEF been reliable?** There was mixed performance (amber rating) on reliability. Water services observed during field visits were largely functional, reliable and used over time, although there was a lack of monitoring data to support these observations. This is because UNICEF did not consistently implement post-intervention monitoring of services in countries with WASH programming in protracted crises. The technical quality of UNICEF-supported WASH services was generally good. However, poor technical implementation was noted as a basic issue affecting the robustness and quality of sanitation hardware. Management modalities for operation and maintenance were effective for water but showed shortcomings for sanitation. Overall, maintenance of services is contingent upon regular interventions conducted by UNICEF or partners. At both country and global levels, UNICEF could do more to enact a systems approach to reliability. The organization could also consider institutional, social, environmental and technological factors in its approach as well as the ways in which WASH services can be adapted over time without losing their functionality.

B.   Leadership and coordination

Table 3
Evaluation Question 2 ratings

Evaluation question	Sub-evaluation question	Rating
EQ2: How well has UNICEF exercised its leadership and coordination roles for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in protracted crises?	2.1 At individual crisis level in-country, to what extent has UNICEF provided effective coordination of the WASH cluster, and effective support to nationally led WASH sector coordination mechanisms?	
	2.2 At global level, to what extent has UNICEF demonstrated thought leadership of the humanitarian WASH sector?	

18. **Subquestion 2.1: At individual crisis level in-country, to what extent has UNICEF provided effective coordination of the WASH cluster and effective support to nationally led WASH sector coordination mechanisms?** UNICEF is rated amber for WASH cluster coordination and for support to nationally led coordination mechanisms. UNICEF (as cluster lead agency) demonstrated mixed performance in providing effective coordination in the countries observed (in the case studies and thematic case studies) throughout the evaluation period. The minimum requirements for coordinating partner activities in the WASH sector, including 4W (Who does What, Where and When) reporting, were largely met; however, there were sufficient examples of areas requiring improvement to merit an amber rating in the context of protracted crises. The coordination provided by UNICEF tended to focus on operational issues rather than on providing leadership that encouraged a long-term perspective. The challenges of maintaining consistent investment and staffing strongly affected UNICEF performance, and the need for "double-hatting" in some countries led to a blur of responsibilities and stretched capacities over time. Cluster partners appreciated the role UNICEF played in engaging with governments. There were several positive examples of UNICEF engaging in efforts to help strengthen central governments by supporting the development of policies, strategies and guidance. However, UNICEF encountered challenges in exercising its role as provider of last resort, which was interpreted differently in various contexts. Where

this role was interpreted as a UNICEF commitment to provide basic services, the financial and management burden of doing so hindered the organization's ability to be effective and strategic.

19. **Subquestion 2.2: At the global level, to what extent has UNICEF demonstrated thought leadership of the humanitarian WASH sector?** UNICEF is rated amber for its global thought leadership of the humanitarian WASH sector in protracted crises. While the Global WASH Cluster clearly maintained a position of leadership in the humanitarian WASH sector, as evidenced in recent initiatives and interview feedback, UNICEF did not sufficiently deliver thought leadership on the challenges of carrying out WASH in protracted crises. Interviewees expressed concern about whether UNICEF (and WASH clusters) had achieved the appropriate balance between operational and strategic delivery, especially in protracted crises.

20. Evidence suggests that UNICEF has lost ground on some aspects of leadership and influence within the humanitarian WASH sector at the global level. The UNICEF WASH sector has recognized this and took remedial actions, such as producing the *Water Under Fire* series, that are helping to re-establish the organization's leadership position.

C.   Monitoring and reporting

Table 4
Evaluation Question 3 ratings

Evaluation question	Sub-evaluation question	Rating
EQ3: How well has UNICEF monitored and reported the results of its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming in protracted crises?	3.1 How well has UNICEF monitored and reported WASH outputs and outcomes?	
	3.2 What does available evidence tell us about changes in the lives of affected populations associated with WASH action?	

21. **Subquestion 3.1: How well has UNICEF monitored and reported WASH outputs and outcomes?** UNICEF monitoring and reporting of WASH outputs and activities was variable (amber rating). Systems were in place to collect and report the minimum expected level of data on outputs of WASH programming. However, these systems had significant limitations, including inaccuracy, inconsistent and incomplete data sets and unnecessary complexities in managing multiple monitoring systems. The evaluation did not find enough evidence to express confidence that WASH programmes were equitable. One reason was that UNICEF did not routinely collect and report outcome data or suitably disaggregated data. More critically, there was limited evidence that UNICEF was effectively using data to course-correct or adapt programming. Even when data were available, it was not part of the organizational culture to use these data to understand programme effectiveness beyond coverage. While in their survey responses UNICEF staff said they perceived themselves as using data to inform programming decisions, this was not consistently confirmed by other evidence. The evaluation identified only isolated examples of WASH programming making data-informed decisions in protracted crises.

22. **Subquestion 3.2: What does available evidence tell us about changes in the lives of affected populations associated with WASH action**? This did not receive a rating because the available evidence was not sufficient to provide an understanding of what changes in the lives of the affected populations may be associated with UNICEF WASH programming in protracted crises. There was little clear articulation – at either the country or global levels – of what changes were expected, or how

changes were expected to happen through a theory of change or subtheory for WASH programming in protracted crises. Where examples of expected cross-sectoral impacts did exist in programming, the associated programmes were not designed or monitored specifically to achieve these impacts. One exception to this was programming for the treatment and prevention of cholera: there was a clear articulation of the health outcomes expected as a result of WASH action, and the "shield and sword" approach to addressing cholera clearly defined how aspects of programming would contribute to outcomes.

23. More broadly, UNICEF did not routinely collect and report data on what changes – intended or unintended, positive or negative – resulted from WASH interventions or cluster coordination. Where there were examples of this information, they were typically anecdotal and isolated. It is not possible to make a statement about likely impacts to which WASH may have contributed over time in contexts of protracted crisis. The available academic evidence on WASH impacts is inconsistent and highly context-specific. The limited output data collected by UNICEF to assess likely impacts are not enough to validate this evidence.

D. Capacity

Table 5
Evaluation Question 4 ratings

Evaluation question	Sub-evaluation question	Rating
EQ4: To what extent has UNICEF had the capacity to implement timely and effective water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming in protracted crises response?	4.1 To what extent have UNICEF preparedness, human resources and surge capacity systems been fit-for-purpose in responding to WASH in protracted crises?	
	4.2 To what extent have UNICEF country offices appropriately developed and managed their partnership portfolio so that it remains efficient, effective and context appropriate?	

24. **Subquestion 4.1: To what extent have UNICEF preparedness, human resource and surge capacity systems been fit-for-purpose in responding to WASH in protracted crises?** UNICEF performance on the use of preparedness and surge capacity systems was rated amber, reflecting the positive change resulting from the organization's recognizing and addressing weaknesses in its emergency preparedness procedure systems. In WASH programming in protracted crises, however, evidence of progress was mixed in the country and thematic case studies, and positive changes were not yet institutionalized.

25. Although WASH surge rosters are the fullest of all the sectors, the use of human resource and surge capacity in the countries observed varied. There was a tendency to underutilize these mechanisms for the duration of crises. This was due to several factors, some relating to lack of capacity for, or awareness of, how to use the systems effectively. Occasionally surge staff were not required because country offices already had adequate capacity on the ground.

26. **Subquestion 4.2: To what extent have UNICEF country offices appropriately developed and managed their partnership portfolios so they remain efficient, effective and context-appropriate?** The development and management of partnership portfolios by UNICEF country offices are rated green in terms of being efficient, effective and context-appropriate. The evidence gathered

suggested that, overall, the heads of WASH sections and their staff managed partnerships well and that country offices have, to varying extents, adapted their partnership portfolios in a timely way. However, these efforts were not framed by specific strategies. Collaborations with government entities were at the core of UNICEF WASH partnership networks and were largely positive. Nevertheless, partnership portfolios were not diverse enough or (with some exceptions) sufficiently driven by principles of localization, factors which are likely to negatively affect sustainability. A key guiding factor for private sector partnerships was efficiency rather than effectiveness or context-appropriateness. Aside from contextual country-level factors (security, politics, skills limitations and corruption issues, among others), UNICEF staff considered the main obstacle to more efficient and extensive partnership portfolios to be a lack of financial resources.

E. Linking humanitarian and development programming

Table 6
Evaluation Question 5 ratings

Evaluation question	Sub-evaluation question	Rating
EQ5: To what extent has UNICEF ensured linkages, coherence and mutual reinforcement of its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) action in protracted crises with longer-term development objectives?	5.1 How well has the UNICEF commitment to linking humanitarian and development programming been reflected in its programme planning and design at crisis level?	
	5.2 To what extent has UNICEF followed key elements of linking of humanitarian and development programming when implementing WASH action in protracted crises?	

27. **Subquestion 5.1: How well has the UNICEF commitment to linking humanitarian and development programming been reflected in its programme planning and design at crisis level?** UNICEF performance in incorporating the linking of humanitarian and development programming into programme planning and design at crisis level is rated amber. UNICEF re-emphasized the corporate commitment to this programming, communicating its commitment in a progressively clearer and more consistent way over the period under evaluation. However, this commitment was not yet well reflected in UNICEF programme planning and design at the crisis level or within corporate WASH strategies and guidance. The broad commitment and intent to support this programming in relevant UNICEF papers evolved throughout the evaluation period up to and including the issuance in May 2019 of the UNICEF procedure on linking humanitarian and development programming. However, to date, UNICEF has not defined this linkage, even in the procedure guidance. More recent corporate documents (including the series *Water Under Fire*) have placed greater emphasis on linking humanitarian and development programming but do not provide country offices with operational guidance and tools. Global key informant interviews highlighted a clear commitment to implementing the guidance on this procedure, but data gathered at the country level point to the need to clarify its mandatory nature and to provide practical and operational guidance on how to implement it in WASH programming in protracted crises.

28. **Sub-question 5.2: To what extent has UNICEF followed key elements of linking humanitarian and development programming when implementing WASH action in protracted crises?** The performance of UNICEF on linking humanitarian and development programming when implementing WASH

programming in protracted crises is rated red. The evidence suggests that coherent or systematic adherence to the key pillars of linking humanitarian and development programming in WASH in protracted crises was not apparent in the four country case studies, despite some individual positive elements. These country case studies found that in WASH programming in protracted crises:

(a)   UNICEF applied the concept of risk-informed programming (including relevant conflict analysis) at a tactical level in the field, but the manner in which this was done was neither consistent nor multisectoral, and was not integrated into planning and monitoring;

(b)   There was no consistent pattern of needs assessments and joint resilience programming between humanitarian and development programming;

(c)   There was no systematic evidence of analysis underpinning longer-term strategy or supporting advocacy for predictable financing and programming;

(d)   There was a lack of user engagement and feedback mechanisms;

(e)   Systems strengthening, particularly in urban contexts, is not currently designed to be transformational. UNICEF country offices remained overly focused on infrastructure and capacity-building as opposed to strategic change and localization;

(f)   There was no body of work on WASH-specific and multipurpose cash-based interventions, nor was there analysis to suggest this option was considered and rejected at the country-office level.

IV.   Conclusions

29.   **Conclusion 1: UNICEF does not have an institutional definition of what a "protracted crisis" is**. One result is that UNICEF does not distinguish clearly enough between humanitarian response and response to a protracted crisis. This relates to the fact that UNICEF – like the humanitarian and development sectors more broadly – has not found a way to "normalize" the protracted crisis context and analyse and report on activities and barriers in a way that transcends sectoral silos.

30.   **Conclusion 2: UNICEF has reported considerable success in meeting the targets for water supply in protracted crises. However, the reported coverage of sanitation and hygiene is considerably lower, and there are concerns that the targets for these areas do not reflect actual needs. This presents a risk to the strategic objective of achieving universal and equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 6.** Meanwhile, management targets for WASH in schools and menstrual hygiene management were very modest (compared with those for water and sanitation), and achievement was not reported consistently. This cast doubts on whether the identified needs correctly reflected realities on the ground, and it created the perception that these areas of WASH are not sufficiently prioritized within UNICEF. In the absence of technical and contextual rationales, the discrepancy in coverage targets across water, sanitation, hygiene, WASH in schools and menstrual hygiene management are difficult to justify. In a protracted crisis, such a discrepancy and lack of rationale for it will continue to impede integrated approaches or shifts to ensuring universal access to WASH services.

31.   **Conclusion 3: Country office WASH sections cannot articulate clearly the medium- to long-term intended outcomes of WASH in protracted crises programming and cannot state the change in lives that is expected as a result of UNICEF WASH action.** This, along with a resultant lack of outcome-level data (seeking to understand, for example, actual usage of WASH facilities or changes in behaviour), means that the evaluation was not able to reach a conclusion on what

changes had occurred resulting from UNICEF WASH action in protracted crises. This is significant, particularly when one considers that UNICEF has been working with local populations for almost a decade in some of the contexts reviewed. The inability to talk about the "changes in the lives" of the affected population limits the ability of UNICEF to be truly accountable to this population and may also pose a reputational risk for the organization's relationship with donors.

32.   **Conclusion 4: UNICEF collects and reports extensive output-level data on coverage of WASH services, but there is a lack of robust quality-assurance processes for data in relation to WASH in protracted crises. This limits the extent to which data can be reliably used to understand progress and inform programming decisions. Country offices do not systematically make use of available data to understand and improve programme efficiency.** The evaluation found inaccuracies in data and inconsistencies among various global data sets. This raises significant concerns relating to the reliability of previous global results reporting. Monitoring systems are overly complicated, subject to frequent change and routinely described as not user-friendly. Outcome-level data are not routinely collected, which means there is little understanding of the extent to which interventions achieve their stated aims. There is little evidence of monitoring data being used for course correction and improving programming. Limited data availability is a significant barrier to data use, but there is a trend of WASH programme staff failing to make best use of the data that are available. This is reflective of broader institutional challenges in promoting data-informed programming.

33.   **Conclusion 5: The evaluation found that service provision and coverage are frequently prioritized over equity and quality commitments. Coupled with lack of suitably disaggregated data and low levels of user engagement, this means that UNICEF is unable to demonstrate whether it meets equity and quality standards, and it also limits the ability of UNICEF to be accountable to the affected population.** The low level of user engagement and user feedback is a fundamental concern. Specifically, disability was not sufficiently considered in the design and use of WASH facilities visited during this evaluation. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence that UNICEF-supported WASH interventions ensured the user safety or feelings of safety using WASH services. Operation and maintenance of facilities are largely established and efficient, but in the context of protracted crises, the design mindset is not sufficiently oriented to the long term and does not pay enough attention to long-term reliability of infrastructure.

34.   **Conclusion 6: UNICEF partnerships are a core strength of its traditional programming. UNICEF has strong operational procedures for managing partnerships and typically ensures that partners have appropriate skills and capacities. However, there is no evidence that such partnerships are driven by a long-term vision or localization strategy.** Although relationships with government and local authorities are generally well-managed by UNICEF and cluster leadership, there is a pattern of non-governmental partnerships appearing to be service-led or contract-led in protracted crises. Investments such as training local partners have not been maximized by empowering those partners to have agency over programming. There is also concern that UNICEF is not systematically learning how to improve its work with the private sector in WASH programming in protracted crises. There are recurring examples of private sector partnerships not fully considering user engagement and accountability.

35.   **Conclusion 7: The Global WASH Cluster is seen as the best expression of UNICEF leadership for WASH in protracted crises. However, beyond the Global WASH Cluster, UNICEF is widely considered to have lost ground in terms of**

thought leadership in WASH programming in protracted crises. While UNICEF has taken constructive action in 2019 to regain ground, this has not yet been sufficient. At the global level, key informants appreciated and respected the work of the Global WASH Cluster itself. However, UNICEF globally was not perceived to be fulfilling a thought-leadership role and driving forward key sectoral issues while engaging partners and donors. There is a strong perception that UNICEF WASH has been losing ground at the global and country levels in protracted-crisis contexts. Since early 2019, UNICEF has been working to regain its voice and demonstrate global thought leadership. It is not yet clear how UNICEF WASH wishes to position itself in protracted crises and transition contexts regarding climate change and urbanization, localization and the global humanitarian-development nexus agenda. *Water Under Fire* presented the challenges clearly and competently and made clear recommendations, but UNICEF has not externally communicated its plan to take this research and advocacy forward.

36. **Conclusion 8: At the local level, operational and sector/cluster coordination is typically strong, and, where there are shortcomings, these appear to have been recognized and corrected.** However, there is a perception that coordination was typically focused on operational issues at the expense of providing leadership on developing longer-term approaches and the transition to government leadership. This is, in part, due to inconsistent staffing of coordination positions, including "double-hatting".

37. **Conclusion 9: UNICEF currently lacks sufficient internal expertise and appropriate organizational risk management procedures to confidently manage large-scale infrastructure projects in urban settings. Country offices have undertaken interventions of this type where required, but this has not been systematically accompanied by risk management and oversight measures commensurate with the scale and duration of organizational exposure.** Where there have been positive experiences, these have not yet translated into corporate capacity. Donors lack confidence in the organization's ability to undertake such urban infrastructure work successfully, particularly regarding the support required by municipal and local authorities to ensure sustainability. This type of intervention is not historically common for UNICEF, but as protracted crises are increasingly requiring WASH interventions in urban settings, there will likely be an increasing number of scenarios where construction or rehabilitation of large-scale WASH infrastructure is needed. The UNICEF Global Framework for Urban Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (2019) clearly identifies the preferred programming approaches and core strengths in UNICEF urban WASH programming, focusing on systems strengthening approaches, leveraging strong relationships with governments and their convening power within the WASH sector. Based on the findings of the evaluation, this approach is more appropriate than undertaking large-scale infrastructure work. UNICEF needs additional capacities to ensure that municipal and local authorities receive targeted and appropriate support. While this capacity could be built internally within UNICEF over time, it also requires recruitment in additional specialist areas.

38. **Conclusion 10: UNICEF has set out a transformational agenda in its work on linking humanitarian and development programming, which, if applied in full, requires a step-change in its WASH programming in protracted crises. However, the field is not currently in a position to implement this step-change with the level of detail and documentation required. WASH sections in UNICEF country offices frequently perceive that they are already implementing the linking of humanitarian and development programming, but there is a significant gap between the practice on the ground and what is required by the new procedure on linking humanitarian and development programming.** UNICEF made progress in driving coherence on linking humanitarian and

development programming during the evaluation period. While UNICEF still had no definition for this programming by the end of the period, the procedure and its mandatory elements communicated intent. The revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action[3] and their alignment with the procedure have the potential to place this programming at the centre of the UNICEF conceptual framework. UNICEF has already invested heavily in reinforcing the linking of humanitarian and development programming concepts and terminology. However, this terminology is not commonly accepted across the sector (or within UNICEF country offices) compared with the more commonly accepted "nexus" terminology. As a result, the organization's work in the area may fail to be fully recognized.

39.   UNICEF does not currently mainstream risk-informed programming, integrated needs assessment and analysis and comprehensive user engagement in WASH programming in protracted crises. This means that risks (aside from security risks) are not sufficiently brought to the attention of senior management or aggregated throughout the organization. This is a particular problem for the kinds of sustained commitments occurring in protracted crises. Lack of senior acknowledgement and sign-off may mean that individual staff and teams may not feel they are sufficiently protected should identified risks prevent achievement of results. The absence of any significant examples of the use of cash as a modality by WASH teams in protracted crises, and the inability of UNICEF WASH sections to explain why cash was not considered to be an appropriate programming tool, is symptomatic of this tendency toward risk aversion, with programme staff falling back on familiar intervention approaches.

40.   **Conclusion 11: A significant barrier to the organization's ability to fully adapt to the linking humanitarian and development programming agenda is that WASH sections in country offices are typically stretched simply ensuring ongoing provision of basic WASH services, and do not have the "bandwidth" to implement the necessary changes alongside existing work.** UNICEF WASH staff work tirelessly in challenging contexts with significant constraints to meet the basic needs of the affected population. These stretched capacities impede the ability of UNICEF to innovate and adapt while evolving its WASH role in protracted crises away from (primarily) service delivery. Uniquely to UNICEF, the implications of being provider of last resort during a protracted crisis can be – and have been – a long-term drain on resources. The evaluation did not find evidence that UNICEF fully understood and managed the risks arising from open-ended commitments to providing WASH services.

V.   Recommendations

41.   The evaluation makes the following 11 recommendations. As many of the challenges detailed in the findings cut across UNICEF divisions, several recommendations are targeted to multiple divisions.

Recommendation 1: Definition of protracted crises

42.   Develop an organizational definition of protracted crises that identifies appropriate triggers for considering different ways of working. This should also articulate the different forms protracted crises may take. The drive to integrated programming means that this definition should apply to all programming, not only WASH.

Responsible: Office of Emergency Programmes, Programme Division

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[3] Finalized in 2020 after the completion of the evaluation.

Recommendation 2: Coverage of water, sanitation and hygiene needs

43. Ensure that there is an understanding – at global, regional and country levels – of the reasons for any discrepancy between water and sanitation/hygiene targets. If water and sanitation needs are not planned to be met equally, UNICEF must ensure that there is a robust contextual and technical justification for this. Targets where water and sanitation differ considerably should not be accepted without such a justification. Staff must consider how targets change over time in protracted crises; while the early response may justifiably focus on water supply, this should be rectified as soon as the context allows.

Responsible: Programme Division, WASH Section; Global WASH Cluster; regional offices; country offices

Recommendation 3: Changes in people's lives as a result of WASH programming

44. UNICEF should:

(a) Establish a clear understanding at the programme design stage of the intended outcomes of WASH programming in protracted crises at the country level and how changes in lives will be monitored and measured. Agreed outcomes should be documented and monitored. Country offices should develop a strategic approach to making progress towards these outcomes over time, adjusting programming as needs and context evolve;

(b) At a global level, this should be supported by a clear articulation of the range of outcomes that could reasonably be expected from WASH programming in protracted crisis, guidance on the comprehensive programming approaches likely to be necessary to achieve these outcomes, and advice on design of appropriate monitoring systems.

Responsible: Country offices, with support from regional offices; Programme Division, WASH Section

Recommendation 4: Data-informed programming

45. Ensure that WASH programming in protracted crises is designed and adapted over time based upon robust data and evidence to address the needs of affected populations and be responsive to changes in context and need.

(a) UNICEF should require country offices to put in place robust data quality-assurance processes to ensure that conclusions drawn from data are valid and based on mandated minimum monitoring requirements;

(b) A data-use plan should be included in all country office monitoring and evaluation documentation (whether at the project or programme level) to guide the use of data for reviewing programme effectiveness and making informed decisions on revised or new programming;

(c) Continuous context and risk assessment is required to ensure all operations remain relevant to context and need. Risk assessment should be tabled at country office management meetings and escalated according to agreed triggers;

(d) Review how country offices can effectively harmonize the various monitoring systems used for humanitarian and development programming, including management of risk if programming is moving between humanitarian and development modalities. Monitoring systems must be relevant to the stated programme objectives, including through collecting outcome-level data where these are appropriate;

(e) UNICEF headquarters must help country offices put in place the necessary quality assurance and adaptation tools needed to collect this level of data. UNICEF

should develop a way to prevent country offices from expending resources to develop systems that duplicate existing tools.

Responsible: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring; Office of Emergency Programmes; Programme Division, WASH Section; regional offices; country offices

Recommendation 5: Equity and quality of WASH programming

46.   Ensure that quality and equity considerations are given equal weight to service standards within WASH programming:

(a)   Accountability for quality standards should be equal to that of service standards from design onward;

(b)   Comprehensive data disaggregation is required to ensure that programming meets the needs of marginalized groups. A priority area is people living with disability, which requires immediate attention;

(c)   It is essential that staff and partners commit to implementing user-engagement mechanisms (paying special attention to vulnerable or marginalized groups) from design throughout the life of programming. Qualitative data must be used to ensure that coverage for marginalized groups is demonstrated to meet the identified needs of individuals. Remedial work should immediately be undertaken in current protracted crises. Where possible, user engagement mechanisms should be cross-sectoral;

(d)   The capacity gap that currently exists for implementing the monitoring of quality standards should not be underestimated, and country offices should be adequately supported to address this.

Responsible: Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring; Office of Emergency Programmes; Programme Division, WASH Section; regional offices; country offices

Recommendation 6: Partnerships and supporting local actors

Enhance the current model of contract-based partnerships for WASH programming in protracted crises to ensure that they transcend contractual relationships and embody all aspects of UNICEF commitments to localization. UNICEF should:

(a)   Ensure that WASH sections in country offices understand the UNICEF definition of localization and the implications this has for WASH programming, and include planning on advancing localization within their outcome approach and analysis;

(b)   Capture learning on how successful private sector partnerships work and could be replicated/adapted from existing country office programmes and/or consolidate information at the regional and global levels to support increased knowledge transfer in this area. Particular attention should be paid to the unique risks around accountability to affected populations, equity and sustainability arising from working with private sector providers. Starting with the design phase, future private sector partnerships must include mitigation approaches for failure to monitor user engagement.

Responsible: Programme Division, WASH Section; Supply Division, WASH Unit; WASH Sections in country offices; regional offices

Recommendation 7: Thought leadership for WASH in protracted crises

Consider how UNICEF can best add value in thought leadership for WASH in protracted crises over the next decade by laying out a 10-year plan of action that could be launched at a relevant global sectoral event in 2020. UNICEF should:

(a)   Further the *Water Under Fire* agenda and the linking humanitarian and development programming agenda in urban response and consider investing in appropriate additional capacity at the regional level. Regional offices should be proactive in strengthening knowledge management and identifying priority areas for country office support;

(b)   Look at how WASH clusters/sectors can expand their capacity to address specific issues and challenges related to protracted crises and undertake coordination roles beyond coordination of activities (through the 4Ws) as programming moves beyond initial service delivery in protracted crises. This should include the specific challenges that occur when there is sector rather than cluster coordination.

Responsible: Programme Division, WASH Section; Global WASH Cluster; Programme Division, Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peacebuilding Section; Office of Emergency Programmes; regional offices

Recommendation 8: WASH cluster coordination

47.   Strengthen UNICEF accountability on the role of cluster lead agency for WASH and ensure that national clusters and/or sectors meet all minimum requirements for fulfilling the core functions.

(a)   UNICEF should support training and strengthen guidance for country office leadership teams on the role of UNICEF as cluster lead agency for WASH, highlighting the broader requirements of this role beyond core function;

(b)   Where the WASH Cluster is activated, UNICEF should ensure that country offices understand what the role of provider of last resort entails and in what contexts this might require UNICEF to manage service delivery. Where UNICEF does assume service delivery responsibilities, country offices should be required to conduct a risk analysis to understand the institutional, financial and programmatic implications over the medium and long term.

Responsible: Global WASH Cluster; Programme Division, WASH Section; Office of Emergency Programmes

Recommendation 9: WASH in urban contexts

48.   Where a WASH response in a protracted crisis requires the construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure in an urban setting, UNICEF should carefully consider the feasibility and desirability of entering into long-term, large-scale infrastructure projects that require extensive engineering inputs over a significant period. UNICEF should also assess the risk to delivery of other commitments.

(a)   Wherever feasible, UNICEF should facilitate other actors (including the Government, where appropriate) undertaking such work, with UNICEF adopting programming in line with its core strengths and the approaches identified in the Global Framework for Urban Water, Sanitation and Hygiene;

(b)   Where it is necessary for UNICEF to undertake such work to ensure the provision of services, the organization should undertake an exhaustive risk assessment before entering into the project and implement extensive risk management and oversight processes at the senior country office level.

Responsible: Country offices; Programme Division, WASH Section

Recommendation 10: Linking humanitarian and development programming for WASH programming in protracted crises

49.   Ensure that the outcome strategy is aligned with the linking humanitarian and development programming approach at the country office level (see recommendation 3) and that offices consistently implement all relevant components of linking humanitarian and development programming.

(a)   UNICEF should consider the feasibility of requiring country offices to conduct an internal reflection (led by a dedicated senior staff member) of the WASH country programme at the point when analysis suggests that the context is likely to become a protracted crisis. This could be part of broader multisectoral reflection within the country office. The time to take a medium- to long-term approach must be early in the response (within the first six months) while attention and resources are still available;

(b)   UNICEF should shift from a linear approach and adapt in line with the procedure on linking humanitarian and development programming. Country offices should demonstrate that they are adjusting to the up-to-date context, conflict and risk analysis that crosses silos (both sectoral and humanitarian-development). Preparedness should be integrated and linked to this analysis and mainstreamed within country office planning processes. Programming should include proactive steps to reduce risks and strengthen resilience;

(c)   UNICEF headquarters should communicate to country office WASH sections an expectation that they will consider, as part of context and risk analysis, the feasibility of alternative approaches to delivery, including cash transfers and cross-sectoral work. Where this approach is not relevant, the WASH section must be able to explain why this is the case.

Responsible: Programme Division, Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peacebuilding Section; country offices; Global WASH Cluster; Office of Emergency Programmes; Programme Division, WASH Section

Recommendation 11: Capacity for new ways of working

50.   Ensure timely and appropriate support to country offices to deliver these changes. Currently, the pressure to continue service delivery poses significant resource stresses on country offices. Without additional capacity, these changes will not be possible.

(a)   UNICEF should assess whether the current human resources competencies and surge mechanisms are fit-for-purpose for protracted crises and adapt for additional profiles accordingly. The organization should address identified gaps by recruiting appropriate capacity when additional specializations are required. UNICEF should also accept that support of this nature cannot be short-term, as country offices will require support over time to plan, influence and deliver change.

Responsible: Programme Division; Office of Emergency Programmes; regional offices; Division of Human Resources

VI.   Draft decision

The Executive Board

1.   *Takes note* of the annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2021/18) and its management response (E/ICEF/2021/19);

2.   *Also takes note* of the global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019, its summary (E/ICEF/2021/20) and its management response (E/ICEF/2021/21).

Annex

Global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019

1.   Due to space limitations, the evaluation report of the Global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019 is not contained within the present annex.

2.   The report is available from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: www.unicef.org/evaluation/executive-board.

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