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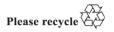8–11 February 2022
Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda[*]

Update on UNICEF humanitarian action

Summary

The present report provides an update on UNICEF humanitarian action, with a focus on the follow-up to recommendations of the Humanitarian Review.[**] The Review, finalized in October 2020, looked at the humanitarian operations of UNICEF in the context of the global challenges of the twenty-first century. It assessed how the core humanitarian responsibilities of UNICEF could be carried out more effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of children and families in this new era.

The present report is the first of the regular updates on the Humanitarian Review requested by the Executive Board at its annual session in June 2020. It provides an indicative, rather than exhaustive, picture of progress to date as well as key challenges.

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[*] E/ICEF/2022/1.

[**] UNICEF, "Strengthening UNICEF's Humanitarian Action, The Humanitarian Review: Progress and Implementation" (2020).

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I. Overview

1.   In 2019 and 2020, UNICEF undertook an ambitious inquiry, the Humanitarian Review, seeking to understand how UNICEF work in emergencies was fit for the current humanitarian landscape and to determine what changes the organization might make to strengthen the way it fulfils its mission to children and families experiencing humanitarian crises.

2.   The Humanitarian Review found a high appreciation overall for UNICEF humanitarian action, yet it also identified 70 recommendations that could enhance this work. UNICEF has committed to implementing these recommendations by 2026.

3.   The Review and its follow-up are now the primary tools for change management to enhance UNICEF humanitarian efforts. As of November 2021, implementation was under way for nearly 50 per cent of the Review's recommendations. The process of enacting the Review's vision is not without challenges, notably the need to change an organizational mindset around humanitarian action and the need for investments, at a time of constrained funding, in some recommendation areas that go beyond the typical remit of the organization.

4.   There has been progress in many areas covered by the Humanitarian Review. UNICEF is moving towards being a more predictable humanitarian actor and improving the overall quality of its humanitarian action by investing in the roll-out of the new Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, embedding humanitarian action firmly in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and incorporating pandemic-related learning into new Emergency Procedures. The development of these corporate guideposts on humanitarian action was under way when the Review was carried out; their development also benefited from lessons learned during the response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Other areas of progress include tackling challenges related to humanitarian access; linking humanitarian and development work at the field level; humanitarian advocacy; cash transfer programming; and serving children on the move.

5.   Twenty-three of the seventy recommendations are focused on the overarching goal of having the right people at the right place at the right time. These recommendations cover leadership, career management, capacity, scaling operations up (and down) and surge mechanisms. UNICEF is engaged in new human resources efforts to strengthen capacity-building among staff and attract internal candidates to humanitarian positions globally.

6.   Preparedness, risk analysis and risk management and anticipatory action together comprise a key area of the Humanitarian Review and figure prominently in its recommendations. In addition to advancing preparedness through the updated UNICEF Emergency Procedures, which now include mandatory simplifications and new requirements, UNICEF has moved forward on developing a risk appetite statement and improving risk analysis.

7.   The first recommendation of the Humanitarian Review was for UNICEF to define its role in public health emergencies. A specialized public health emergencies team has, over the past several years, spearheaded the incorporation of important public health commitments into foundational UNICEF policy documents and is providing increasing levels of support to regional and country offices. The team works closely with key partners, including the World Health Organization (WHO).

8.   UNICEF has begun the implementation of recommendations that address accountability to affected populations, following a finding that such accountability was not central enough to the organization's humanitarian action. UNICEF continues

to support growing inter-agency efforts to increase coordinated accountability to affected populations in humanitarian action and to promote the localization of aid.

9.   Fully implementing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review will cost an estimated $32 million over four years. UNICEF expects to use at least $12 million in core resources and existing funding streams. Full implementation, however, will require resources that go beyond core capacities. Therefore, UNICEF is preparing an investment case for attracting $20 million in additional funding for key areas. All these investments will enhance the impact of the approximately $3 billion the organization currently spends annually for humanitarian action.

II.   Introduction

10.   In 2019, UNICEF embarked on the Humanitarian Review, a comprehensive look at its humanitarian operations in the context of the substantial global challenges of the twenty-first century: the rapid growth in the number, scale, duration and complexity of humanitarian crises; climate change and the impact of extreme weather events; the challenges and effects of operating within and responding to a global pandemic; and the widespread obstacles to humanitarian access and principled humanitarian action.

11.   The Review was not an evaluation of UNICEF programming. Instead, it sought to identify ways in which the UNICEF core responsibilities in humanitarian action could be carried out more efficiently and effectively to meet evolving challenges.

12.   The Review yielded positive feedback on the ability of UNICEF to deliver results for children through its humanitarian action. Members of the External Advisory Group that contributed to the Review regarded UNICEF as a valued partner and, without exception, held the organization's humanitarian work in high esteem. The Review found that the global reach of UNICEF positioned the organization well to adapt to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Areas receiving particular praise included communication and cluster leadership.

13.   However, the Review identified areas in which UNICEF could change its processes and approaches to better fulfil its mission. By providing specific, actionable recommendations, which have been endorsed by UNICEF senior management, the Humanitarian Review and its follow-up work have become the primary change management tool of UNICEF for its humanitarian action.

14.   In February 2021, UNICEF presented the executive summary of the Humanitarian Review to Member States in a special briefing. During the annual session of the Executive Board in June 2021, the Board requested that UNICEF enact the recommendations of the Review as soon as possible and provide regular updates on progress towards such implementation.[1]

15.   The present report is the first regular update of this progress; it also lays out areas in which UNICEF requires additional support in the coming years to catalyse the changes needed for the full implementation of the recommendations.

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[1] UNICEF Executive Board decision 2021/7, paragraph 3.

III. Implementation process and timing

A. Implementation process and timeline

16.   The Humanitarian Review produced a total of 70 recommendations covering 18 areas. The full implementation of these recommendations involves nearly every division in UNICEF. Twenty-four of the seventy recommendations require input from agencies and organizations beyond UNICEF. Of these, 12 are related to UNICEF partners that support implementation, including 8 recommendations referencing local partners. Eleven recommendations are inter-agency, and five involve the private sector.

17.   The Humanitarian Review secretariat is responsible for tracking the overall work of the organization as it follows through on the Review. The secretariat is housed in the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, is led by its Deputy Director and is accountable to its Director and, ultimately, to the Office of the Executive Director. Although housed in the Office of Emergency Programmes, the Review is a cross-divisional document requiring an organization-wide response.

18.   UNICEF has set an ambitious timeline for completing the implementation of the recommendations by the onset of the next Strategic Plan in 2026.

B. Overall implementation progress and key challenges

19.   UNICEF began implementing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review in October 2020 and, as of November 2021, implementation was under way for nearly 50 per cent of the recommendations. Yet fully realizing the potential of the Review is not without key challenges.

20.   First, because the Humanitarian Review called for deep change in numerous functional areas, implementing its recommendations requires shifts in the organizational mindset – essentially a cultural shift in how UNICEF and its staff see humanitarian action – and in habit, including changes in typical ways of doing things at the operational and programmatic levels. This is not easy in any organization, and UNICEF is no exception. For this reason, the Humanitarian Review secretariat spent time in 2021 familiarizing staff at all levels at headquarters and in regional and country offices with the elements of the Review and its key recommendations, helping them to think through how to plan their work differently.

21.   Second, implementation of the recommendations is occurring against the backdrop of constrained global funding. Yet resources to enact the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review need to be up front and flexible to ensure that they can be used in areas highlighted by the Review as needing them the most. Furthermore, while some recommendations can be implemented in a standardized manner across regions and crisis situations, some cannot and will need tailoring. UNICEF has already committed some current resources to implementing the Review's recommendations. This investment in capacities and systems for making the necessary changes is being carried out in a sustainable manner so that shifts in spending on key Review areas can be absorbed into core resource allocations gradually.

22.   Enhancing UNICEF humanitarian work must be seen across the board at UNICEF as a priority. The External Advisory Group members commended UNICEF on its courage in conducting the Humanitarian Review honestly and transparently. UNICEF is committed to applying this attitude and approach to the implementation of the Review as well and will continue to look to the members of the Executive Board to hold the organization to account as it goes through this process.

IV.   Key progress areas of the Humanitarian Review

23.   With implementation of nearly 50 per cent of the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review well under way, there are several key areas of progress to share. The accomplishments noted here are indicative, not exhaustive.

24.   Two areas of progress, preparedness and accountability to affected populations, are covered separately and in greater detail in sections V and VI.

A.   Improving humanitarian action

25.   The Humanitarian Review found that, despite the influence of UNICEF globally, and its strong and sustained pre-emergency presence, the organization is not always seen by other stakeholders as predictable in humanitarian action. Factors affecting this that are cited in the Review include lack of clarity on the role of UNICEF in humanitarian emergencies; the uneven quality of its humanitarian programming; performance targets and quality assurance mechanisms that are not emergency-focused; and bureaucratic processes that distract staff from the humanitarian response. In general, the Review found that UNICEF needed to become more predictable in its humanitarian response.

26.   Three recommendations are aimed at fostering the greater predictability of UNICEF as a humanitarian partner and an overall improvement in the organization's humanitarian action: investing in the roll-out of the new Core Commitments, embedding humanitarian action into the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and incorporating pandemic-related learning into the updated Emergency Procedures. There has been progress in each of these areas.

27.   Since their release in October 2020, the Core Commitments have been a powerful driver for the organizational change called for in the Humanitarian Review. Using an organization-wide dissemination and capacity-building effort targeting all UNICEF personnel and partners, the Core Commitments are being promoted as a planning, programming, partnership, management and accountability tool for every country office. They have also been entirely integrated into the analysis, theory of change and Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Their roll-out is fostering greater leadership engagement and strengthened accountabilities for UNICEF personnel and leaders. The Core Commitments are also informing the review of UNICEF planning, monitoring, reporting, human resources and performance management systems to bring stronger accountability to humanitarian action as well as systematic links between humanitarian and development programmes, in all contexts. The Core Commitments are a transformational tool that equips UNICEF to be a more agile, responsive, predictable and reliable humanitarian leader and partner.

28.   There has also been significant progress on the recommendation that learning from the organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as learning from the Humanitarian Review itself, be incorporated into the updated Emergency Procedures. These Procedures, already in development at the time of the Review, are simplified and stipulate minimum actions required for all offices responding to humanitarian situations.

29.   Several lessons drawn from real-time learning during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic have been incorporated into the Emergency Procedures: the simplification process for lifting the ceiling for reprogramming regular resources funding; defining Level 1 crises and recognizing that these also need simplification; the importance of orientation webinars to support effective implementation; and the need to further clarify what "no regrets" means in practice.

30.   In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Emergency Procedures were rolled out in draft form to all new Level 2 and Level 3 emergency responses to ensure that ongoing crises would benefit immediately from the simplifications they offered. Since April 2021, UNICEF has trained more than 500 individuals operating in Level 2 and Level 3 emergency responses in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti and Myanmar to use the Procedures. The Review calls for the extension of the Emergency Procedures to Level 1 emergencies. An organization-wide strategy for dissemination and capacity-building around the Emergency Procedures is ready to enact once the Procedures are finalized, expected by the end of 2021.

31.   The update to the Emergency Procedures also reflects learning and recommendations in the areas of risk management, partnerships with civil society organizations, humanitarian advocacy, humanitarian cash transfers, humanitarian access and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

B.   Leadership, career management and surge mechanisms

32.   The Humanitarian Review found that UNICEF required a more coherent human resources strategy to develop the necessary staff capacities for humanitarian work. The Review identified the perception among staff members, donors and partners that emergency work "lacked prestige", resulting in a shortfall in staff (including humanitarian leaders) with the requisite skills and experience for complex humanitarian work.

33.   Seven recommendations of the Humanitarian Review deal with supporting strong leadership for UNICEF humanitarian action and improving career management for humanitarian leaders. As a result, a talent management strategy for leaders in emergencies will be rolled out. The strategy will include enhanced induction, handover mechanisms, training packages and succession planning. Since October 2020, UNICEF has made several key investments in humanitarian leadership, including the development of the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop, which targets up to 100 senior field-based personnel per year. The Workshop is a UNICEF education programme designed to improve humanitarian leadership capacity for individuals and teams. The curriculum includes a learning pathway on humanitarian principles and approaches, and on the procedures and skills required to manage emergency work in complex and high-threat environments. There has also been an increase in multilingual digital training packages covering core humanitarian sectors and skills available to UNICEF staff.

34.   UNICEF has piloted on-the-job coaching and well-being support for senior leaders to enhance support systems for those leading the organization in some of the toughest environments. Additionally, the organization is investing in its cluster leadership role, aiming to commit core resources annually to ensure the presence of dedicated cluster teams where necessary, as well as ensuring that staff have core coordination competencies as well as technical knowledge.

35.   Five recommendations of the Humanitarian Review centred on enhancing the capacity of UNICEF to supply staff for its humanitarian work. Building on earlier initiatives that mapped the skills and experience of UNICEF personnel interested in responding to emergencies, this work has been expanded and enhanced outreach conducted. The Frontlines platform has received more than 2,600 applications from interested staff and other personnel. Frontlines is a key enabler for improving and sustaining UNICEF internal surge capacity and for making work in emergencies attractive to all UNICEF personnel. Nonetheless, further investments in surge capacity and management are needed, including a common surge platform to simplify requests, enhanced monitoring and reporting, simplified surge processes

and more flexibility to release staff. Priorities for Frontlines are to keep the listed programmatic areas of expertise up to date, refresh competency/skills gap analysis and bring new and diverse talent, including more national staff and colleagues without emergencies experience.

36. To advance skills-building and learning for humanitarian action, in its Competency Framework for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF has already identified key competencies that must be nurtured to improve the ability of UNICEF and its partners to respond to humanitarian needs with consistently high quality. The Framework is aligned with similar efforts from other entities, including the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The Framework provides a consistent, targeted and measurable framework to set the standards for the development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to implement the Core Commitments. The roll-out of an e-learning programme on the revised Core Commitments is ongoing, with more than 1,500 staff and partners trained to date. In 2020, a humanitarian response fundamentals course focused on national team members and improving local capacity.

C. Access

37. The Humanitarian Review found that UNICEF leaders did not do enough to press for access to crisis-affected populations and that perceptions of access difficulties, not only realities, were also limiting the organization's reach. Overall, there was not enough focus on access, the subject of five recommendations.

38. UNICEF is in the process of developing a humanitarian access framework that outlines a UNICEF vision for and approach to humanitarian access, including a transformative agenda to organize access across the organization.

39. The organization's Humanitarian Access Field Manual was finalized in October 2021 together with a set of humanitarian access tools for use by UNICEF country and field offices and partners. The Guidelines for UNICEF on Engagement with Armed Non-State Actors were finalized in November 2021 and include core guidance for leadership and guidance and considerations for field practitioners. The year-long Humanitarian Access Learning Pathways project, to be completed by the end of 2021, defines the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by various functional areas to effectively contribute to humanitarian access. It maps out the various capacity-building opportunities available, internally and externally, for staff and partners to achieve competency. Additionally, the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop on complex and high-threat environments had a virtual dry run in June 2021, with in-person delivery expected to begin in December 2021.

40. UNICEF continues to work in a systematic manner on risk-informed decision-making around red flags in relation to dilemmas concerning humanitarian principles; public advocacy on grave violations against children; civil-military coordination and the use of armed escorts; the impact of sanctions and counterterrorism measures on humanitarian space; donor conditionalities; and programme criticality in environments with high security risks. This work informs country support, Humanitarian Leadership Workshops and other trainings.

41. UNICEF is also recruiting an Access Emergency Response Team member; this person will complement the existing headquarters support team by being available for medium- to longer-term deployments to country and field offices with acute needs for organizing and building capacity in teams to stay and deliver on the ground.

D. Linking humanitarian and development work

42. The Humanitarian Review found that UNICEF needed to better integrate its development and humanitarian programming (especially during the programme planning stages) and build organization-wide capacity for stronger complementarity, coherence and coordination between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work.

43. Two recommendations of the Review covered this area. To date, UNICEF has integrated commitments and benchmarks for a risk-informed humanitarian-development nexus and contributions to peacebuilding into the Core Commitments and the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. To increase the organization-wide capacity for "triple-nexus" programming, UNICEF has launched an e-learning course for UNICEF and partners focusing on building skills around risk-informed, conflict-sensitive programming and contributions to peacebuilding. UNICEF has updated its in-person/blended capacity-building package on conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, supported United Nations-wide and country-specific trainings in nine countries and contributed to multi-partner capacity-building under the umbrella of various working groups. UNICEF has also begun to develop f a multisectoral programme framework for its contribution to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

44. Efforts to improve the harmonization of humanitarian and development situation analysis and planning are also under way. The simplification and digitization of the situation analysis of children and of the country programme document development processes promote the inclusion of humanitarian concerns and preparedness from an early stage. Frequent reviews and adaptation of analytical and planning tools will allow integration into regular programming of sudden emergencies and improved responses to protracted crises.

45. The forthcoming digital workplanning solution harmonizes emergency and ongoing workplanning systems, while highlighting specific considerations and setting requirements for emergency planning (e.g., cluster targets, contingency planning). Agile approaches will be further emphasized in the current revision of the implementation partnership procedures. The digital platform allows collaborative development and the revision of plans with internal and external partners and improves accountably. The system is ready for field testing and is expected to be rolled out progressively in 2022.

E. Advocacy

46. On the basis of the Humanitarian Review observation that UNICEF humanitarian advocacy should be more proactive and strategic, the organization is working to dramatically scale up capacity-building around humanitarian advocacy and communication. As part of this, teams have developed two training modules for senior leaders, one covering the basics of humanitarian advocacy and the other focused on speaking up on grave violations in complex and high-threat environments. These are being rolled out at the leadership level and as part of a series of Humanitarian Leadership Workshops.

47. UNICEF headquarters and regional and country offices are significantly expanding collaboration on humanitarian advocacy and communications, as recommended by the Review. This has resulted in new tools and templates that are integrated into updated Emergency Procedures. Advocacy teams at all levels have also worked to standardize their engagement with Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies.

F. Children on the move

48. In 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF agreed on an ambitious Blueprint for Joint Action across 10 countries to work together towards the inclusion of refugee children and their families in national systems and services. This focuses on the three priority areas of education; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and child protection. The Blueprint is aimed at fostering transformational change and sustainable solutions for refugees in line with the humanitarian-development nexus and UNICEF pledges under the Global Refugee Forum by leveraging the capacities of the two agencies to bring about change in policy and practice to achieve more inclusive systems and services. Following the pilot phase, the Blueprint collaboration will serve as the basis for a global partnership agreement from 2023 onwards.

49. One year into implementation, progress is well under way in each of the 10 Blueprint countries: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Rwanda – together home to 2 million refugee children. In the first year, more than 517,000 children and young people in Blueprint countries were enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Additionally, 1.1 million refugees, returnees and host community members in these countries now have access to basic water services. In the area of child protection, more than 172,000 children, adolescents and caregivers received community-based mental health and psychosocial support services and child protection services.

50. UNICEF has also reinforced its commitment to delivering for children in the context of large-scale population movements with a dedicated Core Commitment and is investing in its own capacities by rolling out a global capacity-building initiative on children on the move, as called for by the Humanitarian Review.

G. Cash transfer programming

51. One area where the Humanitarian Review sees UNICEF preparing better for emergencies is in mainstreaming and expanding its humanitarian cash transfers. UNICEF technical support and direct implementation of humanitarian cash transfers in 2020 reached 48 million households covering 81 million children in 71 countries (up from 17 countries in 2016). This included the direct delivery of $245 million in humanitarian cash to 2.5 million households in 50 of those countries. A section on this delivery modality was included in the revised Core Commitments as well as in the updated Emergency Procedures, requiring offices responding to emergencies to systematically consider cash as a programme modality.

52. UNICEF is part of the United Nations Common Cash Statement, together with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This collaboration is being implemented in seven focus countries. UNICEF is also committed to working with these key partners in three additional areas: a joint payment mechanism for greater efficiency (used in 25 countries to date); preventing beneficiary duplication and exclusion, which has proven complex given data protection policies and legal accountabilities; and improving the quality of cash programmes through joint work with WFP and UNHCR to establish a legal framework to speed up cash transfer-related data sharing requests.

53. To support the scale-up of humanitarian cash transfers in 2021 and beyond, UNICEF has invested in adjusting its business model to better deliver humanitarian cash transfers. The organization has developed a multidisciplinary team approach to provide programmatic and operational support to country offices and allow the

systematic consideration of humanitarian cash transfers at the onset of an emergency. One such team was deployed to Afghanistan in October 2021 to strengthen the operational delivery capacity of that country office, looking specifically at setting up a risk-informed payment system to transfer funds to non-governmental organizations, individual civil servants and vulnerable families.

54. UNICEF has also completed the development of the Humanitarian Cash Operation and Programme Ecosystem, which provides quality assurance and risk mitigation measures for all UNICEF programmes with a humanitarian cash transfer component. It also safely stores and exchanges data with other United Nations agencies. This system has been integrated with the UNICEF-sponsored real-time monitoring solution RapidPro, enabling direct communications with cash programme beneficiaries to confirm receipt of the timely and correct amount of cash transfers.

V. Preparedness, anticipatory action, risk and public health emergencies

55. There is great potential loss of lives in failing to invest in analysing and managing risk and in being prepared, which are cornerstones of delivering humanitarian assistance in the twenty-first century. For example, once the Ebola virus results in a certain number of disease cases, it can be too late to quickly stem its spread. On a global level, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed vulnerabilities in international supply chains and coordination, and preparedness is critical to reducing these weaknesses.

56. Rapid response to public health threats so they do not develop into public health emergencies is critical and is possible only with public health and emergency systems in place, alongside a prepared workforce. In a direction called for by the Humanitarian Review, but begun before it, UNICEF is pivoting its posture on preparedness and actively engaging and coordinating in this area with other agencies, implementing partners and donors. Moving towards preparedness involves deep changes in organizational and operational mindset, and these changes are not always easy.

57. The resource envelope to help Governments to address humanitarian needs has not, and perhaps cannot, keep pace with the high – and growing – number of people in need of humanitarian assistance globally. There is therefore a strong ethical and practical case for better risk management and making preparedness a collective priority: investments in this will reduce suffering and save lives and allow limited resources to go farther. For example, a joint 2017 study by UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA and WFP found that every $1 invested in preparedness reduced response cost by $2. Another analysis by UNICEF and WFP in 2014 showed that investing this money in preparedness also makes responses faster by an average of 14 days.

58. Being prepared requires anticipatory action and a "no-regrets" approach, which means the organization will err on the side of investing in, securing, pre-positioning and deploying more capacity and mobilizing more resources in support of the response, even if this proves to have been unnecessary after the fact.

59. Preparedness also resonates strongly with the climate agenda. It is a critical way to help communities cope with climate shocks and can also benefit the climate. For example, in South Sudan, UNICEF has put in place a dry season supply plan to pre-position lifesaving supplies across the country during the November–April dry season. This addresses the logistical challenges of reaching children and families during the rainy season, when 60 per cent of the country's roads are inaccessible. Pre-positioning 32,000 tons of emergency supplies, including therapeutic food,

health supplies, education kits and WASH equipment year-round makes it possible to provide rapid assistance to children in need. Not only has timely access to essential items improved, but in the period 2017–2018 UNICEF also saved $12 million and reduced its CO^2 emissions by 3,500 tons by using surface transport in the dry season, instead of air transport in the rainy season.

60.   Because of its wide and decentralized presence, multisector mandate and cluster leadership role, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to detect early warning signs and lead on preparedness. The Humanitarian Review offered multiple concrete recommendations to guide UNICEF in building on this and reinforcing efforts to expand the organization's preparedness, anticipatory action and risk analysis work. A dedicated team that provides direct technical support to country and regional offices is working to catalyse preparedness action not only within UNICEF, but in the wider United Nations and humanitarian communities.

61.   UNICEF preparedness systems have undergone improvements and expansion since 2020, partly in response to the Humanitarian Review finding that these systems tended to encourage more reactive than proactive and agile emergency responses. In late 2020, UNICEF launched an upgraded version of its Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP), which enables offices to better implement risk analysis, minimum preparedness standards and preparedness planning; the organization rolled out additional features to the platform in March 2021. The new version offers more impactful preparedness plans that can enhance the delivery of high-quality responses, especially at the onset of emergencies. For example, heavy rains in Timor-Leste from 29 March to 4 April 2021 created urgent needs for assistance among more than 15,000 people temporarily relocated to evacuation centres and for families in affected communities. With the remoteness of the country, restricted flights into Timor-Leste due to the pandemic and the small size of the domestic market, procuring relief supplies could have taken weeks or months. However, pre-positioned relief supplies, preparedness planning and actions taken (all using the EPP platform) to meet minimum preparedness standards enabled UNICEF to provide immediate assistance, which helped to alleviate suffering in the first days and weeks following the floods.

62.   The UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes has also strengthened the organization's global preparedness architecture by issuing specific guidance for emergency preparedness in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and by sharing good practices.

63.   There are currently two funding streams available to country offices to scale up preparedness efforts, and interest in and uptake of these funds has been high. The First Action Initiative, which helps country offices to rapidly increase their standing capacity to deliver an initial lifesaving response to a likely humanitarian emergency due to an imminent/high risk, has allocated $3.9 million to 14 country offices. The Co-Funding Initiative, seed funding that supports investments by country offices and regional offices that enhance the preparedness of UNICEF, partners and Governments over the short, medium and long term, has allocated $6.8 million to date to 21 country offices. The Co-Funding Initiative also helps to link development and humanitarian programming through preparedness and strengthens cooperation and coordination with government and other operational partners.

Risk management and risk analysis

64.   Understanding risk and formalizing approaches to risk are necessary for successfully and swiftly responding to the humanitarian challenges of today, and tomorrow.

65. The Humanitarian Review found that UNICEF had not yet developed a formalized risk appetite, which led to an unpredictable humanitarian response and one in which operational procedures did not facilitate the measured risk-taking that was required. Overall, this meant that UNICEF humanitarian action was risk-averse and therefore missing opportunities for action. The Review also noted that UNICEF required risk assessment mechanisms that encouraged more proactive and agile emergency responses, and it offered several recommendations.

66. Led by the Division of Financial and Administrative Management, UNICEF has moved forward on developing a formal risk appetite statement, a first for the organization and a key recommendation of the Review. This statement is an umbrella for developing risk-informed programming, and it includes the risk of inaction. As of November 2021, the risk appetite statement had been drafted and was in the process of review by senior management. The development of an organization-wide risk compact linked to risk types and containing accountabilities, another recommendation of the Review, had not yet begun.

67. Work to enhance the risk analysis capacity of UNICEF country offices, another area included in the recommendations, is ongoing. The UNICEF Horizon Scan, a monthly inter-divisional process to identify situations where high levels of foreseeable risk require heightened preparedness, is the organization's core mechanism for mobilizing global resources to prepare for imminent risks. The UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes is strengthening the whole-of-organization approach of the Horizon Scan by widening contributions to the process, improving its ability to identify imminent risk and coordinate direct technical and financial support to country offices. This will enhance common perceptions of contextual risk priorities throughout UNICEF and should lead to more efficient risk management efforts, resulting in better preparedness and stronger humanitarian responses to emergencies.

68. UNICEF divisions are collaborating to ensure that risk analysis is child-centred and helps to join up humanitarian and development programming in countries. Some of this work includes developing common risk analysis methods for risk-informed preparedness and response. UNICEF headquarters divisions provide direct support to country offices on risk analysis.

69. The UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes is collaborating with the Programme Group to develop the organization's capacity for geospatial risk analysis. This type of analysis brings together geospatial data on population vulnerability by sector, natural and human-induced hazard exposure and coping capacities and maps these data subnationally to identify where in a country UNICEF should focus preparedness efforts and risk-informed programming. The approach helps country offices to reinforce development efforts by fostering preparedness in case of shocks.

70. One recent pilot programme shows how such analysis translates into concrete changes that can impact children. In Nigeria, pilot subnational geospatial risk analysis work carried out in September 2021 focused on natural hazards, conflict and disease and their overlaps with child vulnerabilities. The Nigeria Country Office is in its planning stages for 2022, and this analysis has already informed discussions on development of the next country programme document; it has been used to develop the Nigeria Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, especially emphasizing the inclusion of the country's northwest because of combined hazard exposure and vulnerability. The analysis has also been submitted to OCHA to provide risk severity data for the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Importantly, these geospatial risk analysis data will be a baseline for UNICEF field offices in Nigeria to overlay against locations of current and proposed work.

71. Building on such pilot programmes, the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes is developing a global dashboard that visually maps data on population vulnerability, natural hazard alerts, conflict trends, humanitarian access and programme coverage. The goal is to provide decision makers with a real-time common operating picture that supports adaptive programming.

Anticipatory action

72. Anticipatory action is a pre-set action or set of actions taken prior to the onset of a crisis and based on pre-defined triggers. UNICEF is currently scaling up its capacity to contribute to anticipatory action in a wide variety of contexts. Carrying out anticipatory action is closely linked to using a "no-regrets" approach to acting.

73. Strong preparedness can ensure that anticipatory action programmes are ready to launch at scale when trigger conditions are met. At the same time, anticipatory action can be a bridge between disaster risk reduction work and humanitarian action.

74. Currently, there is much momentum around a global anticipatory action agenda. UNICEF is active globally in anticipatory action programmes carried out by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which is managed by OCHA. In 2020, OCHA facilitated collective pilot work on anticipatory action in five countries: Bangladesh (monsoons), Ethiopia (drought), Malawi (dry spells/floods) and Somalia (drought), with preliminary work in Chad. In 2021, OCHA expanded this work to six additional countries.

75. Using CERF anticipatory action funds, UNICEF has stepped up preparedness efforts across the sectors it leads, in anticipation of droughts in Ethiopia and Somalia. Supplies have been pre-positioned, partner capacity strengthened and triggers defined to allow for rapid action as soon as a drought alert occurs. This supports the continuity of essential services in a region which suffers from regular climate shocks, and ultimately such action helps to save lives and reduce suffering. Such anticipatory action requires resources to "pre-finance" responses to crises that can be predicted. These resources encompass adequate funding but also include the organizational will and procedures to enable action. And they need to be complemented with quality funding dedicated to humanitarian-development nexus interventions that reach earlier into the timetable of risk escalation.

Public health emergencies

76. Upholding the health of children and families, and responding to public health emergencies, has always been central to the work of UNICEF. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of preparedness for these specific kinds of emergencies, and the Humanitarian Review has called on UNICEF to further define its role in relation to them. This is critical because each year UNICEF responds to more than 100 public health threats/outbreaks, which are increasing in frequency and severity globally. Success in addressing such public health emergencies is measured in the ability to prevent outbreaks and to respond to them before they generate high mortality and societal disruption.

77. The recommendations of the Review come even as UNICEF is engaged in a multi-year effort to formalize and strengthen its work in public health in emergencies. On the heels of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in the period 2014–2016, UNICEF began to formalize its institutional commitment to a timely and adequate response to public health emergencies: first, in 2015, with the launch of the Health Emergencies Preparedness Initiative to strengthen response to priority diseases, and then in 2019 with the institutionalization of this Initiative as the Public

Health Emergencies programme, which provides strategic leadership and coordination for preparedness and response to epidemics. In 2020, the Core Commitments were revised to include, for the first time, specific commitments to work in public health emergencies.

78.   Today, the Public Health Emergencies Section provides strategic direction, technical guidance and capacity support at the global and country levels. The section has led the whole-of-organization response to the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020; it defined the strategic response and promptly identified addressing the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic as a key area of work for UNICEF to protect children. UNICEF worked closely with WHO to build a science-based, data-driven response to the pandemic that included the needs of children and women in all settings.

79.   The work of UNICEF in public health emergencies complements that of agencies and organizations that are focused on the medical aspects of disease and is in line with a renewed global health architecture that takes into consideration a comprehensive approach to the needs of communities. UNICEF supports States, Governments and communities to develop, strengthen and maintain their core capacities to prevent, prepare, detect and respond to public health events, as called for in their obligations under the International Health Regulations (2005). The unique expertise and global leadership of UNICEF include integrated outbreak analytics, infection prevention and control, WASH, risk communication and community engagement, behavioural change, child protection (including psychological support), immunization and gender-responsive programming, as well as a leadership role in the procurement and supply of medical countermeasures. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has further institutionalized the comprehensive and multisectoral approach to epidemics, and the strategy continues to evolve based on needs and lessons learned.

80.   UNICEF is a leader in integrated outbreak analytics, an innovative approach to analysis that was developed during the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the period 2018–2020. Integrated outbreak analytics brings together various actors and data for a transdisciplinary approach, with the goal of more holistically understanding outbreak dynamics and informing real-time, evidence-based responses. The use of integrated outbreak analytics in the period 2018–2020 has been successfully replicated in other outbreaks (cholera, plague, COVID-19) and in public health emergencies in other countries.

81.   Preparation for and response to recurrent, multiple and simultaneous public health threats is crucial, as seen in Guinea in the period 2020–2021, where four major public health emergencies were declared in a 17-month period (COVID-19, Ebola, Lassa fever and Marburg virus), alongside ongoing polio and measles outbreaks. The Public Health Emergencies Section rapidly deployed additional expertise to support the UNICEF multisectoral response as well as in-country capacity-building. This timely support at the outset of the Ebola outbreak facilitated the responses to the Marburg virus and Lassa fever outbreaks that followed.

82.   To influence global debate and support adequate technical expertise and quality response to public health emergencies, UNICEF is actively engaged in global partnerships such as the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), the Global Task Force on Cholera Control and the International Coordination Group on Vaccine Provision. UNICEF has also embedded a team of public health emergency experts at WHO headquarters in Geneva to work directly with WHO to provide integrated preparedness and response to public health emergencies.

83.   Public health emergencies can exacerbate preexisting gender inequalities and may lead to increased risk of violence for women and girls. UNICEF is strengthening its preparedness and response capacity to mitigate and address gender-based violence in public health emergencies and to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse within affected communities.

84.   UNICEF plans to finalize an evaluation of its work in public health emergencies in 2022 to assess how it is "fit for purpose" for this work and to provide evidence to guide future decision-making.

VI.   Accountability to affected populations and localization

85.   The Humanitarian Review found that accountability to affected populations is not systematically central enough to UNICEF work in humanitarian contexts, despite recent improvements in that regard. Moreover, where complaints and feedback mechanisms exist, systems are not in place to act upon the feedback received.

86.   To address this, the Review offered two recommendations. One is to develop a strategy on accountability to affected populations that makes the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse mandatory in all humanitarian contexts (under way). The other is to make such accountability a mandatory part of monitoring and evaluation frameworks in countries with humanitarian programming, especially during the planning phase; such accountability needs strengthening. Overall, however, there has been a clear shift towards treating accountability to affected populations as a necessity that must be embedded in planning requirements for humanitarian programmes.

87.   The revised Core Commitments also contain specific benchmarks for accountability to affected populations, which is a first for UNICEF. One of these calls for country offices to receive feedback from people and adapt programmes accordingly, one of the central aims of accountability to affected populations. UNICEF expects to learn from and build upon the good practices that exist in this regard, such as in Yemen, where the Emergency Cash Transfer project, which reaches more than 1.5 million households, has an embedded feedback and grievance mechanism that prompts immediate course correction as well as programmatic adaptation between each project cycle. Affected populations can contact a call centre that is staffed by 70 operators and engages directly with about 130 field staff deployed during cash distributions.

88.   Commitments on accountability to affected populations have been integrated into the COVID-19 pandemic response, leveraging the Public Health Emergency Section collaboration with GOARN. UNICEF co-leads the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Collective Service for COVID-19, together with WHO and IFRC. The Service provides a platform for coordinating the approach to community engagement and accountability at the country level. It focuses on ensuring that the public health response is informed by data and analysis coming from communities, drawing from social sciences, community feedback mechanisms and other channels, such as social listening, to ensure that the voices of communities are heard and acted upon. In South Africa, for example, the National Department of Health produces weekly reports on COVID-19 and vaccine conversation informed by social listening as well as offline activities conducted by multiple partners, including UNICEF. Key insights and recommendations from the report are regularly used by the National Department of Health to inform communication strategies, policy streams and vaccine demand promotion.

89. In November 2021, UNICEF held a workshop on adaptive programming for staff from country and regional offices and headquarters, as well as some external partners. The goal of the workshop was to define key elements of a road map for adaptive programming and to inform the creation and eventual roll-out of an adaptive programming action plan to support the implementation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan.

90. UNICEF actively promotes cooperation around accountability to affected populations at the inter-agency level. One topic of the IASC Principals meeting of October 2021 was accountability to affected populations, and there was agreement to move forward with several key follow-up actions, including developing a statement of commitment to collective accountability to affected populations and communicating its importance to humanitarian country teams, among others.

91. IASC has noted that engaging with local actors is fundamental to achieving better accountability to affected populations. In this light, strengthening partnerships and collaboration with local civil society organizations (CSOs), which typically are more consistently connected with local communities, is crucial. This is closely linked to the emerging localization agenda. In line with Humanitarian Review recommendations on localization, UNICEF has developed a draft organizational strategy for a comprehensive approach to localization. This involves (a) investing in the institutional and technical capacity of local actors (national authorities, CSOs, communities and the private sector); (b) respecting and strengthening the leadership and coordination of humanitarian action by national and local authorities, CSOs and communities; (c) engaging in principled partnerships; (d) adopting comprehensive risk management; (e) supporting multi-year agreements and funding, where possible; and (f) capacity-sharing with local actors, including communities.

92. Enhanced accountability to affected populations and a greater focus on the localization agenda are together part of the much broader discussion about the decolonization of aid. This is embedded in the IASC Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination Action Plan and is also a priority for UNICEF, as presented in its action plan on the topic.

VII. Looking ahead: Areas requiring additional support to achieve the full implementation of the recommendations

93. UNICEF has already made a "down payment" to securing visionary change for its humanitarian action, for which the Humanitarian Review offers a road map. This down payment comprises organizational will, as evidenced by the endorsement of UNICEF senior management of all the recommendations of the Review; the way the Review has already been incorporated into key corporate guideposts for humanitarian action, including the Core Commitments, the new Strategic Plan and the Emergency Procedures; how the work and recommendations of the Review are being reflected in annual workplans for 2022 at headquarters and in regional and country offices; in efforts to mainstream the Review into existing monitoring and planning processes to ensure stronger commitment and integral organizational change; and in the allocation of funds to enact the Review.

94. Overall, the cost associated with implementing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review is estimated at roughly $32 million over four years. This $32 million can effectively render the approximately $3 billion UNICEF spends annually on humanitarian action more impactful in meeting the needs of children experiencing humanitarian crises.

95. UNICEF expects to commit at least $12 million in existing resources, including core funds. The Office of Emergency Programmes allocated $1 million in global

humanitarian thematic funding in 2021 to kickstart the implementation of the recommendations. Of this, $800,000 had been raised and committed as of November 2021 for recommendation areas including senior leadership talent management and capacity-building for the improved top-level management of humanitarian action, including cluster leadership; localization, to ensure clear organizational guidance to prioritize local approaches and partners; increasing UNICEF access and advocacy capacities; working towards a joint results framework between development and humanitarian action for more holistic programming; investing in public health emergencies, including preparedness; and, finally, programming modalities, such as cash-based programming.

96.   Realizing the visionary shift in UNICEF humanitarian action called for by the Review requires significant additional investments in key areas. UNICEF is preparing an investment case to request additional support for some of the longer-term, more far-reaching changes needed in four areas:

(a) Humanitarian leadership: there are two focuses of investment that can support UNICEF in ensuring that its humanitarian leaders have the necessary skills and competencies to lead proactive, agile and effective humanitarian responses and that the organization's systems are well equipped to support such responses. The first, a humanitarian resource hub, would bring together a virtual core team of human resources staff and specialized consultants globally. This core team would foster the organizational shift needed to better support the human element of humanitarian responses. The second focus is a young humanitarian leadership programme, because to prepare for the emergencies of tomorrow it is important to invest in the leaders of tomorrow;

(b) Humanitarian learning platform: UNICEF is looking for investment in a humanitarian learning platform, to be built and updated around available tools that can support skill-building in key areas of growth identified by the Review. This can ensure the development of a strong cadre of humanitarian professionals. The learning platform will utilize a competency framework to map competencies to the Core Commitments and the Strategic Plan to equip staff with technical skills for agile, effective and quality humanitarian action;

(c) Preparedness: Additional support is needed to ensure the appropriate investment in preparedness and enable better anticipatory action and stronger humanitarian and development programming. This includes investing in tools and partnerships for contextual risk monitoring; strengthening systems to always ensure conflict sensitivity and to scale up programmes and strategies for conflict prevention, social cohesion and peacebuilding; and improving multisectoral risk-informed programming;

(d) Technical capacity and programming modalities: UNICEF requires investment in technical capacity to address rising crises trends and in key programming modalities to ensure efficient and effective work across all emergency contexts. This includes developing policy guidance for migrant-inclusive child protection systems; strengthening programming for public health in emergencies; scaling up humanitarian cash transfer programmes; piloting additional programmes via the humanitarian innovations portfolio; looking at new ways of working in challenging environments; strengthening remote programming; and establishing tools for direct implementation.

VIII.   Conclusion

97.   The Humanitarian Review has presented UNICEF with a timely opportunity to enhance its humanitarian action globally. A whole-of-organization approach is required as well as a willingness to shift organizational culture and mindset to fulfil the promise of the Review. This work has already begun, but there is still much to be done to ensure that UNICEF and its partners can continue to lead in response to the emergencies of tomorrow and deliver results for children and their families.

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