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# 2020 CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP SURVEY

UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring  
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# Executive Summary

## Background

Every year, UNICEF partners with 4,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) to implement programmes and deliver results for children and communities. In late 2019, UNICEF administered a survey to CSO partners to obtain feedback on their partnership experiences with UNICEF, and better understand CSO perceptions of the ways in which partnership with UNICEF is working well, and the ways in which it could be further improved. In total, the survey received 408 CSO respondents from regions and countries all around the world.

## Key Findings

Nearly all CSO respondents reported that they had received cash transfers from UNICEF, and nearly half of all CSO respondents reported that they had received programme supplies and technical support/capacity-building from UNICEF. CSOs reported that through the receipt of these inputs to the partnership, and through collaboration with UNICEF, notable results were achieved in a wide range of programme sectors and country contexts. When asked to assess how UNICEF's partnership practices compare with those of other UN/bilateral/multilateral agencies, half of CSO respondents (51%) reported that UNICEF was better, while another 43% reported that UNICEF was about the same. A small percent of CSO respondents reported that UNICEF's partnership practices were worse than others.

The survey asked CSO respondents to identify strengths and weaknesses of current UNICEF partnership. The strengths most commonly identified by CSOs were communication, commitment and spirit of partnership; technical assistance and capacity building; financial support; and transparency in partner selection. The weaknesses most commonly identified by CSOs were insufficient timeliness; unclear or irregular communication; budget and financial reporting challenges; and short-term and discontinuous partnership. In reviewing the full list of strengths and weaknesses identified by CSOs, it is notable that several of the elements identified by some CSOs as strengths were the very same

elements cited by other CSOs as weaknesses. One explanation for this phenomenon is that different CSOs have different standards as to what constitutes a desirable level of communication or financial support. Another explanation is that different UNICEF offices may have implemented global guidelines in different ways. Either way, this survey suggests that there is a broad consensus among CSOs on the key elements of good partnership.

The key elements of good partnership were further underscored by CSOs in their recommendations to UNICEF on how to improve civil society partnership. The top 10 most common recommendations from CSOs were: (1) Improved timeliness, (2) Enhanced communication and information sharing, (3) Increased transparency in partner selection, (4) Strengthened localization, (5) Improved capacity-building, (6) Longer-term partnership, (7) Enhanced financial support, (8) Strengthened programme collaboration, (9) Lighter and more streamlined processes, and (10) Bolder advocacy.

## Conclusion

UNICEF thanks the many CSO partners who provided honest and constructive feedback on how the culture of partnership can be further enhanced. Moving forward, UNICEF commits to treating the survey findings as a key resource as it revises partnership procedures and further develops both internal and partner-facing systems, capitalizing on strengths and tackling weaknesses. UNICEF also commits to continuing to seek opportunities for meaningful exchange with CSO partners at both national and global levels. Since the time when this survey was conducted, UNICEF and its partners around the world have been working tirelessly to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the COVID-19 response—and the many years of successful collaboration on humanitarian and development programmes—underscore the importance of principled partnership between UNICEF and CSOs, and the impact of the programmes that we jointly deliver for children and their families.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Purpose

Every year, UNICEF partners with nearly 4,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) in countries all around the world to implement programmes and deliver results for children, women and communities.

In November 2019, UNICEF held an NGO Consultation for Partnership in Humanitarian Settings. The consultation, which was attended by more than 50 CSO practitioners, was the first such formal partner gathering held by UNICEF at the global level in recent years. The consultation aimed to create an open space for UNICEF's humanitarian CSO partners to share their observations and reflections on partnership with UNICEF in emergencies.

As a follow-up to the consultation, and with the purpose of providing an additional engagement

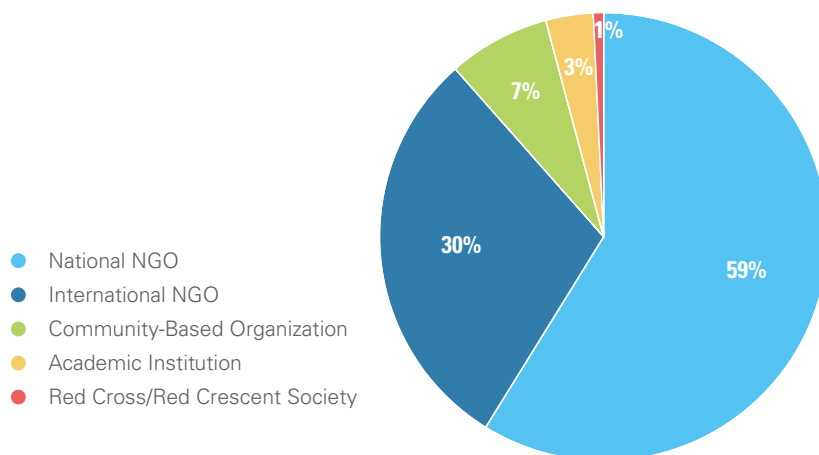
opportunity for the many CSOs that partner with UNICEF in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings, the UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM) administered an online partner survey in late 2019. This report provides an overview of the survey findings.

### Survey Respondents

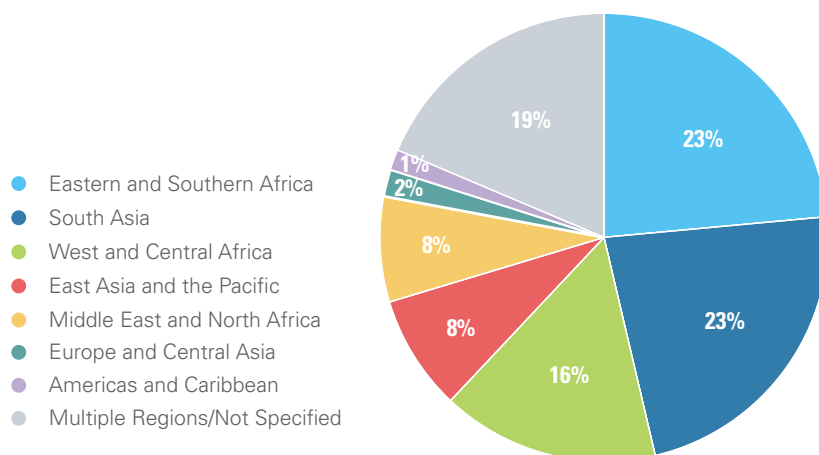
The survey was sent on 21 November 2019 to 2,760 CSO e-mail addresses associated with Programme Documents signed on or after 1 January 2018 and recorded in UNICEF's eTools system. In the 1.5-month period between 21 November 2019 and 5 January 2020, a total of 408 CSO responses were received.

**Figure 1** provides an overview of the organizational affiliation of the CSO respondents.

**Figure 1:** Survey Respondents, by CSO Typology (n=408)



**Figure 2:** Survey Respondents, by Region



Survey respondents were asked to indicate the country or countries in which their organizations work. Among the 408 respondents, 81% indicated one specific country, while the remaining 19% indicated multiple countries (e.g. respondents from INGO headquarters offices) or declined to indicate a specific country. The survey respondents represent at least 60 unique countries from all geographic regions.

**Figure 2** presents a regional breakdown of the CSO respondents.

### Methodological Limitations

The following methodological limitations should be noted in analysing the findings of the survey. First, the survey was shared with CSOs registered as having active Programme Documents in UNICEF’s eTools system, a digital platform to support partnership management. At the time that the survey was

administered in late 2019, UNICEF prioritized eTools adoption by large and medium UNICEF offices. Thus, the survey did not reach CSO partners in countries where UNICEF has small offices. This explains the relative paucity of responses from CSOs partnering with UNICEF offices in Europe and Central Asia, as well as the Americas and Caribbean. Second, the survey had a response rate of 15%. The survey was shared with partners shortly after the November 2019 NGO Consultation, and the end of the year is a traditionally busy time period. It is possible that those CSOs who responded to the survey were not a representative subset of all survey recipients. Third, the survey questionnaire was administered only in English. However, responses were received in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Non-English responses were translated and included in the analysis.



## Chapter 2: Overview of UNICEF Partnership and Key Results Achieved

### UNICEF Contributions to CSO Partners

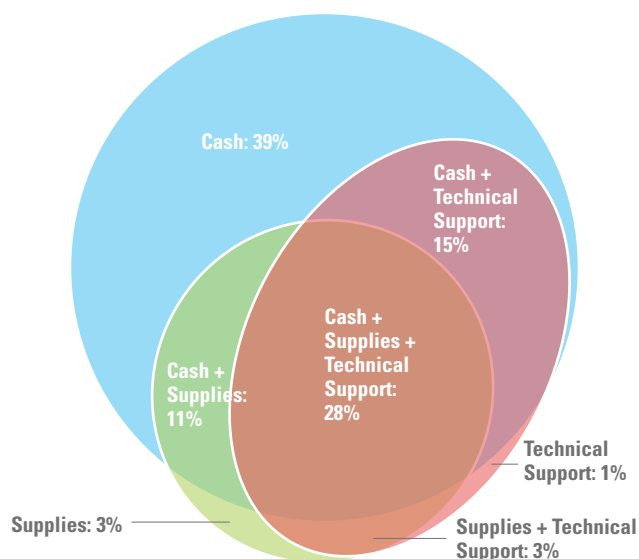
CSOs were asked to describe the nature of their organization's partnership with UNICEF by indicating whether UNICEF had transferred cash, programme supplies, technical support/capacity-building, or some combination of these three inputs to their organization.

**Figure 3** presents a Venn diagram of CSO responses. Nearly all CSO respondents (93%) reported having received cash alone or in conjunction with another input from UNICEF. Nearly half of all CSO respondents (45%) reported having received programme supplies alone or in conjunction with another input from UNICEF. Similarly, nearly half of all CSO respondents (47%) reported having received technical support/

capacity-building alone or in conjunction with another input from UNICEF.

The receipt of cash alone was the single most commonly reported response (39%). In contrast, relatively few CSOs reported receiving programme supplies in isolation (3%) or technical support/capacity-building in isolation (1%). The survey found that 28% of all CSO respondents reported receiving all three inputs from UNICEF, while an additional 29% recognized the receipt of two types of support from UNICEF. Beyond cash, programme supplies and technical support, several CSO respondents recognized that UNICEF had also made contributions in the areas of joint advocacy, policy work and research.

**Figure 3:** CSO Characterization of UNICEF Contributions to Partnership



Several CSOs noted in their responses that there is not a one-way transfer of resources from UNICEF to CSO partners. Rather, partnerships often feature joint pooling of resources, with CSOs also transferring cash, programme supplies and technical support to the partnership and to UNICEF. It is likely that where cash, programme supplies and technical support/capacity-building are provided in tandem by UNICEF—and are supplemented by contributions from CSOs and other stakeholders—the quality of programming and partnership is best assured.

## UNICEF Role in Overall Partnership Portfolio

As part of the survey, CSOs were asked to self-assess the relative importance of UNICEF in their organization’s overall partnership portfolio. CSOs were asked to describe whether UNICEF was a (1) small, (2) moderate, (3) large, or (4) primary source of cash, programme supplies and technical support/capacity-building for their organization. On a scale of 1 to 4, CSOs assigned to UNICEF an average rating of 2.33 on cash, 2.23 on programme supplies and 2.24 on technical support/capacity-building. Thus, according to the survey, UNICEF’s contributions of these three inputs each account for a “moderate” or slightly larger than “moderate” role in CSOs’ overall partnership portfolios.

**Figure 4** disaggregates CSO responses, revealing a notable difference between national NGOs and international NGOs. Whereas UNICEF was cited as the “primary” source of cash by 23% of national NGOs and a “large” source of cash by 28% of national NGOs, the corresponding figures for international NGOs were just 3% and 12% respectively.

UNICEF’s global guidance states that in a partnership, both parties must make meaningful contributions to the joint endeavour, and that such contributions may be financial or non-financial. This survey suggests that among half (51%) of its national NGO partners,

**Figure 4:** CSO Assessment of UNICEF’s Role in Their Overall Partnership Portfolio

	National NGOs			International NGOs		
	Cash	Programme Supplies	Technical Support	Cash	Programme Supplies	Technical Support
Small	14%	21%	23%	41%	53%	51%
Moderate	35%	31%	31%	44%	32%	22%
Large	28%	28%	31%	12%	11%	20%
Primary	23%	20%	15%	3%	4%	7%

UNICEF is the primary or a large source of cash, and a financial contribution may not always be feasible. In contrast, international NGOs may have access to a wider and more diverse base of funding sources.

## Comparison of UNICEF and Other Partners

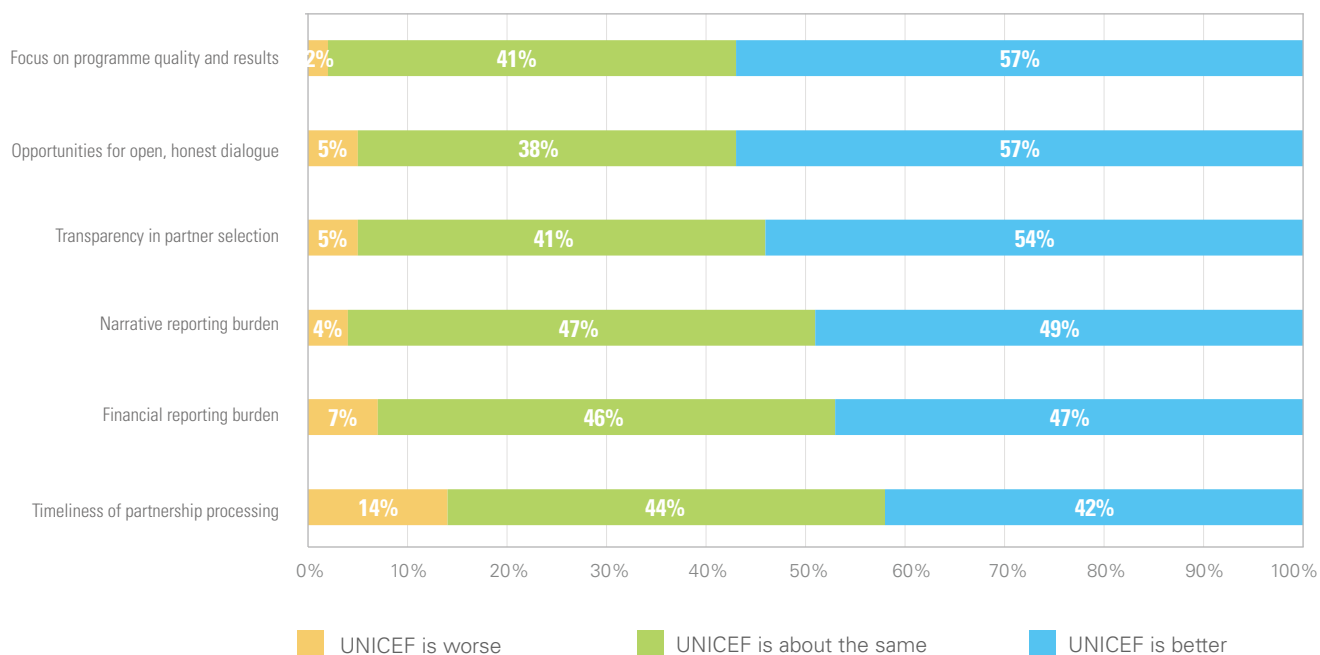
UNICEF strives to be a partner of choice for CSOs, while also aiming to align its partnership policies and procedures with those of other UN agencies, so that best practices may be more widely adopted. As part of the survey, CSOs were asked to assess whether UNICEF was worse than, about the same as, or better than other UN/bilateral/multilateral agencies along certain key dimensions. **Figure 5** below provides an overview of CSO responses.

Along each of the key dimensions—with the exception of the timeliness dimension—the most common response was that “UNICEF is better” and the second most common response was “UNICEF is about the same.” On average, slightly more than half of CSO respondents (51%) reported that UNICEF was better, while another 43% reported that UNICEF was about the same as other UN/bilateral/multilateral agencies.

Along each of the key dimensions—with the exception of the timeliness dimension—the most common response was that “UNICEF is better” and the second most common response was “UNICEF is about the same.” On average, slightly more than half of CSO respondents (51%) reported that UNICEF was better, while another 43% reported that UNICEF was about the same as other UN/bilateral/multilateral agencies. UNICEF performed best along the dimension of “focus on programme quality and results,” with 57% of CSOs assessing UNICEF as better, 41% assessing UNICEF as about the same, and only 2% assessing UNICEF as worse. The dimension on which UNICEF was assessed least favourably was in the area of “timeliness of partnership processing,” with the single most common response (44%) being “UNICEF is about the same.” A slightly smaller 41% of CSOs assessed UNICEF as better and the remaining 14% of CSOs assessed UNICEF as worse.

Overall, the findings suggest that on a comparative basis, UNICEF’s approach to partnership is perceived relatively favourably by its CSO partners. However, CSOs also identified many recommendations for how UNICEF could further improve, as detailed in Chapter 6 of this report.

**Figure 5:** CSO Assessment of UNICEF in Comparison to Other Partners





## Reflections on Key Partnership Results

As part of the survey, CSOs were asked to reflect on their organization’s recent partnership experiences with UNICEF and share the UNICEF-supported programme results of which their organization was most proud.

**Figure 6** below provides excerpts of partner responses. Based on the survey responses, it is apparent that through partnership, UNICEF and CSOs have been able to achieve notable results in diverse countries, programme sectors, and implementation contexts. Moving forward, UNICEF and CSOs must further improve partnership, driven by the notable programme results that have already been delivered and continue to be delivered for children and communities.



**Figure 6:** CSO Reflections on Results Achieved Through UNICEF Partnership

Type of CSO	Country	Key Programme Results
National NGO	Bangladesh	“UNICEF has been one of our most supportive partners in implementing humanitarian response to the Rohingya community at Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh since 2017. Our partnership results contributed significantly to overall wellbeing of Rohingya refugees and affected Bangladeshi communities through providing life-saving assistance for education, nutrition, hygiene promotion, disaster preparedness, etc.”
National NGO	Cambodia	“From August 2017 to October 2019 approximately 400 children in conflict with the law received legal aid [through our partnership] and 100 children in conflict with the law received mitigating circumstances after trial.”
International NGO	Democratic Republic of Congo	“We have benefited from UNICEF support to both emergency and long-term WASH projects over the past couple of years. However, if I should point to one particular result, I would mention our capacity to react rapidly in response to emergencies like the cholera and Ebola epidemic.”
International NGO	Ethiopia	“We are proud of the strategic partnership with UNICEF—not only the funding but also the technical support and partnership relation. Through our joint programme, we improved the lives of more than 78,000 girls and boys through a comprehensive and holistic child protection service including creation of a safe environment, provision of psychosocial support, case management and strengthening of community-based child protection systems.”
National NGO	India	“The education programmes [implemented in partnership with UNICEF] have been scaled across tens of thousands of schools by state governments.”

*(Continued on next page)*

Type of CSO	Country	Key Programme Results
National NGO	Iraq	"Supported by our partnership with UNICEF, we have been able to have a tremendous impact on responding to the child protection and GBV prevention and response needs of thousands of extremely vulnerable children, women and IDP families. The UNICEF team has had a profound effect in supporting local civil society, thus building our capacity so we can meet greater needs."
National NGO	Kyrgyzstan	"As a result of recent partnership, it has been possible to find allies among religious leaders/structures who support vaccination and will [advocate among] the religious community."
International NGO	Malawi	"Through partnership with UNICEF, we have managed to reach over 60,000 adolescent girls and boys in various districts in Malawi and empowered and equipped them with skills to protect themselves and against sexual and gender-based violence. Publication by [a university] showed 39.5% reduction in incidence of sexual violence experienced by schoolgirls in our intervention schools vs. other non-programme schools."
National NGO	Nepal	"Formation of a consortium of INGOs and NGOs in assisting the National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal, in the development of National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2019-2030."
National NGO	Pakistan	"Enrolment of more than 7,000 out of school children and adolescents in marginalized rural communities and urban slums."
National NGO	Somalia	"The nutrition programme in our district benefited more than 76,000 under-five children and 30,000 pregnant and lactating women. The programme made significant progress in reduction of malnutrition status of people in our district and also contributed to survival of vulnerable children and women."
National NGO	South Sudan	"53,118 people benefited directly from activities implemented through health facilities and Child Health Day outreach during the last reporting period. This includes 12,417 under-five children fully immunized, 6,325 under-five children treated for malaria, 3,415 households received mosquito nets and 2,678 pregnant women served with antenatal care services."
National NGO	Thailand	"UNICEF has had a critical role in providing support to our organization for the preparation, launch and scale-up of one of our major [social enterprise] projects. UNICEF was the first organization to see the value of our innovative project, and to support us, all the way from its very first steps."
International NGO	Zambia	"The cholera response in schools which was coordinated through the cholera preparedness and response coordination mechanism led by UNICEF with the participation of Ministry of Health, Ministry of General Education, NGOs and other stakeholders."
International NGO	Multiple Countries	"Over the past 20 years, our organization and UNICEF have fostered a multidimensional relationship instituting high-impact, evidence-based interventions to save the lives of mothers, newborns and children. We have formed strategic collaborations in countries all over the globe, including 12 in which our organization has received grants from UNICEF. We have strengthened the clinical workforce, prevented the spread of HIV through medical male circumcision, and improved services for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support within maternal care."



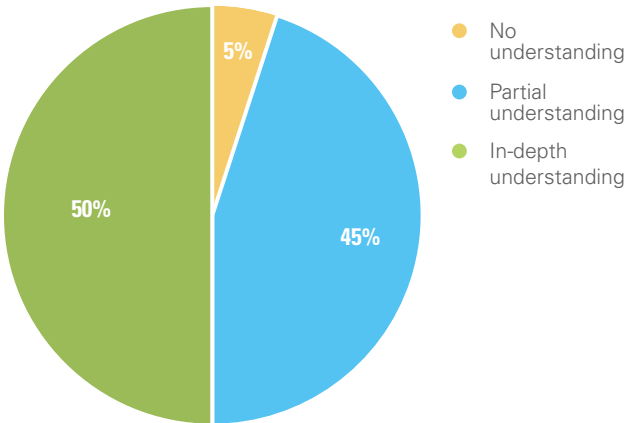
# Chapter 3: Familiarity with UNICEF and Communication Preferences

## Self-Assessment of UNICEF Understanding

CSO respondents were asked to self-assess their level of understanding of UNICEF’s civil society partnership processes. **Figure 7** provides an overview of CSO responses.

The overwhelming majority of CSO respondents professed to have some level of understanding of UNICEF partnership, with only 5% claiming to have “no understanding.” However, only half of respondents reported in-depth understanding, suggesting that more efforts are needed to increase knowledge and reduce information asymmetry, therefore supporting more productive partnership dialogue. **Figure 8**

**Figure 7:** CSO Self-Assessment of UNICEF Understanding



disaggregates CSO self-assessment of UNICEF understanding, by CSO type. Interestingly, more national NGOs than INGOs self-reported “in-depth” understanding of UNICEF’s partnership processes. This may perhaps be attributed to the fact that some of the INGO respondents worked at the headquarters level and potentially had less hands-on knowledge of partnership processes at the field level. It could also be attributed to the fact that INGOs generally have multiple funding and partnership streams of which UNICEF is only one, while national NGOs may have fewer partners with which to familiarize themselves.

It should be noted that since the time the survey was conducted, UNICEF has issued [Guidance for Civil Society Organizations on Partnership with UNICEF](#) as well as an [e-learning course on UNICEF and Civil Society Organizations](#).

**Figure 8:** Self-Assessment of UNICEF Understanding, by CSO Type

	National NGOs	International NGOs
No understanding	3%	8%
Partial understanding	41%	55%
In-depth understanding	56%	37%

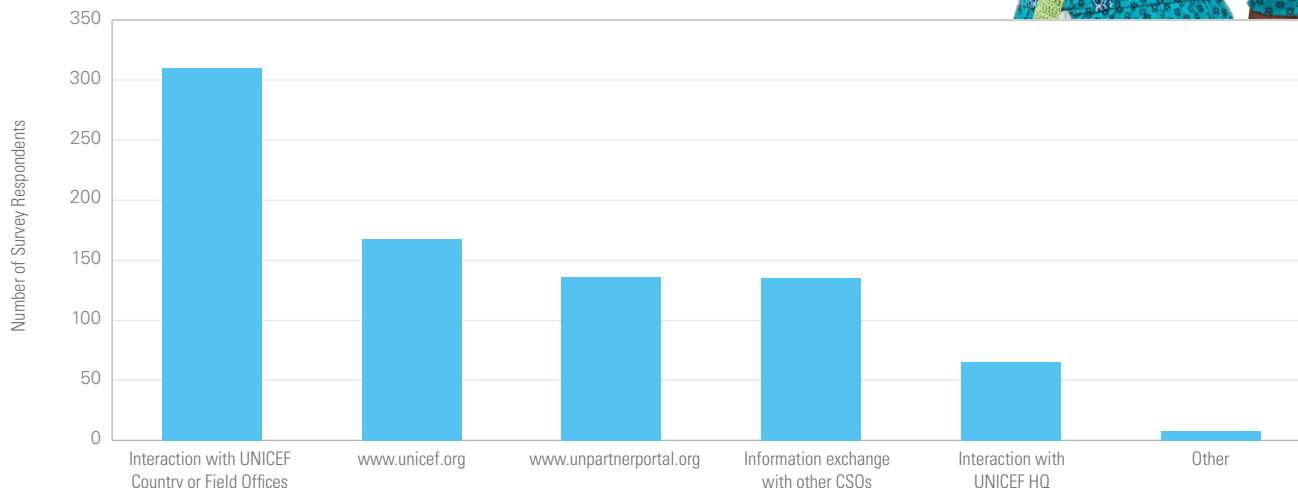
## Information Sources on UNICEF Partnership

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to select all the ways in which they had learned about UNICEF’s civil society partnership processes, with multiple responses permitted. **Figure 9** below presents a breakdown of the information sources cited by respondents.

The most commonly cited source for learning about UNICEF partnership processes was direct interaction with UNICEF Country or Field Offices, followed by two different web platforms: the UNICEF website ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)) and the UN Partner Portal ([www.unpartnerportal.org](http://www.unpartnerportal.org)). The fourth most commonly cited source was information exchange with other CSOs, suggesting the importance of formal and informal networking and experience sharing among CSOs themselves. The fifth most commonly cited source of information on UNICEF partnership processes was interaction with UNICEF Headquarters. Some CSO respondents also cited “other” modalities/platforms, including cluster meetings, internal trainings, and sectoral meetings/workshops organized by UNICEF for partners.



**Figure 9:** How have you learned about UNICEF’s civil society partnership processes?





## Preferred Communication Modalities

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate how they would like to receive partnership-related communication from UNICEF, moving forward. Respondents were allowed to select multiple modalities. **Figure 10** below provides a breakdown of CSO responses.

The single most requested modality for receiving communication about partnership was via the UNICEF Country Office, with 72% of CSO respondents selecting this modality. The second most popular modality was via an online platform like the UNICEF global website or the UN Partner Portal. Other communication modalities that were selected by more than half of CSO respondents were “periodic in-person meetings/workshops” and “periodic online

newsletters.” Slightly less than half of respondents (48%) noted that they would like to receive partnership-related information from “periodic virtual meetings/workshops.” It should be noted that survey responses were collected before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From looking at survey responses, it is apparent that most CSOs want to receive communication about UNICEF partnership from multiple sources. Only 13% of respondents requested just one modality for receiving partnership communication from UNICEF, while 19% requested two modalities, 28% requested three modalities, and the remaining 40% requested four or more modalities. It seems there is a good deal of interest in and appetite among CSOs for greater information and communication from UNICEF.

**Figure 10:** Communication Preferences for UNICEF Partnership

Modality	% of Respondents who Selected This Modality
Through UNICEF Country Offices	72%
On an online platform like <a href="http://www.unicef.org">www.unicef.org</a> or the UN Partner Portal ( <a href="http://www.unpartnerportal.org">www.unpartnerportal.org</a> )	67%
Through periodic in-person meetings/workshops	58%
Through periodic online newsletters	57%
Through periodic virtual meetings/workshops	48%
Through civil society networks like ICVA, InterAction and VOICE	22%



## Chapter 4: Current Partnership Strengths

### Overview

CSOs were asked to identify aspects of UNICEF partnership that are currently working well. Respondents were given an open text field and asked to be as specific as possible. All partner responses

were analyzed and categorized. **Figure 11** below provides an overview of the partnership dimensions most commonly identified by CSO respondents as UNICEF strengths.

**Figure 11:** Most Commonly Identified Partnership Strengths

Partnership Dimension	% of Respondents
Communication, commitment and spirit of partnership	32%
Technical assistance and capacity-building	29%
Financial support	13%
Transparency in partner selection	13%
Advocacy and coordination	11%
Clear and simple partnership processes	11%
Programme design and focus on results	10%
Financial and narrative reporting requirements	7%
Programmatic and financial assurance	6%

## Communication, commitment and spirit of partnership

The single most commonly identified strength in UNICEF partnership was communication, commitment and spirit of partnership, cited by nearly one-third of CSOs (32%). Respondents pointed to UNICEF's "openness and close communication," "responsiveness and support" and "effective dialogue." CSOs appreciated UNICEF's "integrity in the partnership," "professionalism, faith and support" and "mutual understanding of how to work in the field and respond to challenges." Several CSOs commented on the open and constructive dialogue between UNICEF and partners.

**"UNICEF is open to listening to our concerns and working together to ensure the best possible, highest quality implementation is maximized."**

Another CSO noted that "communication flow between us and UNICEF during the project preparation and implementation phase is quite fast and constructive." Yet another CSO commented that "UNICEF is supportive throughout which eases the communication and also builds trust." According to one CSO respondent, "UNICEF also highly valued local wisdom in running our programme together so that it did not seem to dictate its local partner." Several CSO respondents emphasized that a "commitment to child rights" and "mutual interest and shared commitment to support sustainable development and reduction of poverty" underpin partnership.

## Technical assistance and capacity-building

The quality of technical assistance and capacity-building was the second most commonly identified strength, cited by 29% of CSOs. Respondents noted UNICEF's "competence," "high quality technical support and guidance in project implementation," and "prompt sharing of feedback to improve programme quality and learning." CSOs noted "fruitful technical exchanges," "on-time support and regular visits," and "support for M&E systems" as being highlights. One CSO commented, "We have benefited from training in the area of education, PSEA and finance procedures.

UNICEF staff are respectful in relationships with local organizations and supportive in the cases that we need to improve." Another CSO noted that "capacity building of partners, including trainings in relevant programme areas, is going well."

## Financial support

Financial support from UNICEF and the processes associated with this financial support was the third most commonly identified strength, cited by 13% of CSOs. Respondents pointed to UNICEF's "clarity in budget preparation and the timely release of project funds," "ease of transfer of funds," "prompt transfer of funds (DCT) following our submission and [UNICEF] review of our reports and requests," and "the process of disbursement and advance liquidation" as being examples of what is working well in partnership. One CSO noted, "UNICEF is ahead of the curve in terms of supporting interventions that other donors will not support, and this is highly valuable." Another CSO commented, "The cash transfer from UNICEF to CSOs is relatively smooth/flexible compared to other UN agencies."

## Transparency in partner selection

The fourth most commonly identified strength in UNICEF partnership was "a very transparent partnership process focused on quality and results," which was cited by 13% of CSOs. Respondents noted, "The process of partner selection is open and transparent and performance/result based." Another CSO commented, "We appreciate the way UNICEF chooses its partners. Being a partner with UNICEF depends mainly on the key objectives [of the programme intervention] and trustworthy qualities of each organization. We have been really impressed by this fairness level."

In their comments on UNICEF transparency, several CSOs cited the benefits introduced by the UN Partner Portal, noting that "the UN Partner Portal was a great step forward for transparency and accountability."

**"The UN Partner Portal has greatly increased transparency, and we really welcome the increased volume of [partnership opportunities]."**



Another CSO noted, “The new UN Partner Portal is a great idea, and if more UN agencies join, it will be much more useful than all agencies having their own separate ways of making grants to partners.”

### Advocacy and coordination

The fifth most commonly identified strength was UNICEF advocacy with government and other stakeholders, and was cited by 11% of CSO respondents. CSOs pointed to UNICEF’s “strong linkages with government ministries,” “ability to get the attention of governments” and “very useful advocacy support with government counterparts for the success of the project.” Other CSOs noted that the advocacy role played by UNICEF extends beyond government alone and praised UNICEF’s “coordination mechanisms with all stakeholders.” One CSO noted, “Working with UNICEF gives us a larger platform to showcase our work”.

Another CSO noted that “the scientific data, evidence and tools provided by UNICEF helps overcome

**“When we work together, we achieve significant impact, bringing the NGO and UN voice to donors, government and non-state actors.”**

challenges to rally diverse actors behind common goals for the wellbeing of children.”

### Clear and simple partnership processes

Another strength was UNICEF’s relatively clear and simple partnership processes, which was cited by 11% of CSO respondents. Several CSOs noted in particular the new CSO Procedure issued in 2019 and praised the “clear new Programme Document guidelines,” “clarity of Programme Document preparation,” and “simplified process on reporting and monitoring.” One CSO noted that “the new 2019 CSO guidelines provide much more clarity on how to reduce back-and-forth on budget negotiations,” while another commented that “contractual processes are not complicated.”

Several CSOs specifically noted strong partnership practices in emergencies. One CSO noted “The elements of the current UNICEF partnership processes that work well, according to our experience in the field, are the ability to intervene quickly and effectively in humanitarian emergencies.” Other CSOs praised specific features for rapid emergency response like “activation of PCA for emergency intervention” and “immediate activation of the standby agreement.”

### Programme design and focus on results

The programme design process was cited by 10% of CSO respondents as a strength of UNICEF partnership. Several CSOs remarked on “great programme design,” “clearly defined objectives for the implementation of





projects,” “clear programme activities, outputs and expected results” and “focus on programme quality and results.” One CSO commented that “programmes are developed based on the needs/priorities” while another similarly noted that “UNICEF truly supports a needs-based approach, and not top-down directives.

**“UNICEF is open to listening to our concerns and working together to ensure the best possible, highest quality implementation is maximized.”**

Several CSOs commented on UNICEF’s support to innovation, with one noting that “UNICEF looks at new/innovative approaches to achieving the anticipated results.” Other CSOs commented on UNICEF’s readiness to adapt programme design to achieve the best results, with one noting that “UNICEF is very open to discuss project modifications, especially when this is communicated in advance and supported with evidence that it would be in the best interest of beneficiaries.”

### **Financial and narrative reporting requirements**

UNICEF’s relatively simple and straightforward financial and narrative reporting requirements were cited by 7% of CSO respondents as a particular strength. CSOs noted that UNICEF has “clear reporting templates” and a “simple reporting process.” CSOs cited good

practices in “reporting on programme status” and shared the perception that “financial reporting is easy and not complicated.” One CSO noted that “The reporting model requested by UNICEF was simple and easy to do even though it was our first time to partner with UNICEF”

### **Programmatic and financial assurance**

Finally, UNICEF’s programmatic and financial assurance regime was cited by 6% of CSOs as a strength in partnership. CSOs recognized “joint monitoring visits involving Government and all programme partners” and “continuous field visits for monitoring” as being beneficial to the partnership. They also recognized “sound financial management” and “timely finance and risk management check-ups” as partnership strengths, with several respondents pointing to the strategic nature and utility of such assurance activities. One CSO noted that “spot checks are regular but not too often to interrupt programme activities” while another commented that “spot check and audit [is completed] routinely by UNICEF and is very useful to improvements.”



## Chapter 5: Current Partnership Weaknesses

### Overview

Just as CSOs were given an opportunity to identify those aspects of UNICEF partnership that are working well, they were asked about elements that could benefit from improvement. All partner responses

were analyzed and categorized. Respondents were given an open text field and asked to be as specific as possible. **Figure 12** below provides an overview of the partnership dimensions most commonly identified by CSO respondents as UNICEF weaknesses.

**Figure 12:** Most Commonly Identified Partnership Weaknesses

Partnership Dimension	% of Respondents
Insufficient timeliness	20%
Unclear or irregular communication	14%
Budget and financial reporting challenges	11%
Short-term and discontinuous partnership	10%
Insufficient partner selection transparency	9%
Inadequate financial support	8%
Inadequate spirit of partnership	5%
Insufficient capacity development and programme support	4%
Heavy administrative processes	4%

## Insufficient timeliness

The single most commonly identified weakness in UNICEF partnership was insufficient timeliness, which was cited by 20% of CSO respondents. CSOs pointed out that “some of the procedures take a long time” and “timeliness of contract processing is a major challenge.” One CSO noted, “The partnership processes appear to be rather slow and bureaucratic which can be a challenge. While the [UNICEF] Country Office expects quick feedback from partners, it seems that they are struggling with giving quick feedback themselves.” In their feedback, CSOs attempted to troubleshoot some of the possible causes for partnership delays, with one noting, “The Programme Document review process is not well coordinated and takes a lot of time and this causes delay in project implementation.” Another CSO noted, “Our UNICEF Country Office interlocutors don’t always seem to be able to anticipate the [UNICEF Partnership Review Committee’s] concerns, which leads to documents being sent back for revision and further delays in project approval.”

In their comments, CSOs noted that delays are not only encountered during the review and approval of partnerships, but also in the subsequent disbursement of cash. Several CSOs commented on “delays in approving FACE forms,” “delays in releasing funds” and “[inability] to meet commitment in timely transfer of cash as per schedule.” Some CSOs diagnosed the reasons for delays in cash disbursement, pointing to “long bureaucratic processes in the liquidation clearances” or “multiple layers of approval [within UNICEF].” Citing “delays in disbursement of funds even when requests from the partner were put in place in good time,” one CSO noted that “this significantly affects activity implementation and timelines and it has negative implication for the whole programme.”

Other CSOs noted delays in receipt of supplies, pointing to “[UNICEF] procurement and supply of in-kind assistance” as an area requiring improvement. One CSO noted “programme supplies from UNICEF is the area which needs improvement as it is [frequently] behind, such that at times it delays delivery of results.”

## Unclear or irregular communication

Insufficient communication was the second most commonly identified weakness, cited by 14% of CSOs. Several CSOs pointed to “weak communication between UNICEF and its partners.” According to one CSO, “We are not always able to have the prompt response we need to be clear on the project or decisions that enable us to move forward confidently with implementation.” Several CSOs noted that communication is not non-existent, but rather, inconsistent or irregular. One CSO noted, “There is irregular provision of feedback, which keeps the partner in limbo, unaware of the date of the next stage.”

**“Feedback time from UNICEF varies. Sometimes feedback is prompt, sometimes it takes a while to receive feedback.”**

Yet another CSO noted, “Contacting and communication with partners are [at times] good, but at some points, there was a delay in responding from UNICEF.” In their comments, some CSOs pointed to communication gaps within a UNICEF office that can create confusion for partners. According to one CSO, “the decentralization of UNICEF offices led to communication gaps between the central office [in the capital city] and local offices. There is often unclarity of level of responsibilities [within the UNICEF Country Office] and the decision-making processes.”

## Budget and financial reporting challenges

Budget and financial reporting challenges were the third most commonly identified weakness, cited by 11% of CSOs. CSOs pointed to the inflexibility or restricted use of financial support from UNICEF, with one CSO remarking, “Funding received [from UNICEF] includes some restrictions in how it can be used, specifically restrictions regarding areas where support can be invested. This presents some conflicting challenges at the articulation of grant management responsibilities and operational needs.” Other CSOs noted that during the programme development stage, there appears to be a disproportionate emphasis on budget, with one CSO commenting that “evaluating the technical part of proposals [sometimes] seems less important than the financial part.”

Several CSOs pointed to challenges associated with being provided funds for three months of programme implementation at a time, and the obligation to liquidate these funds within six months. One CSO noted that “the three months duration of the tranche does not help [partners] always to focus on programme quality,” while another CSO noted that “strict binding of project activities to tranches causes problems if project activities are delayed by external impact.” Several CSOs complained about the pressure to fully liquidate funds within six months. One CSO commented, “The liquidations and financial reporting is not working very well due to programme delays outside our control yet it’s a requirement to liquidate fully by the sixth month.” Several CSOs pointed to the contrast between the dynamic nature of programming and the nature of UNICEF funding, with one CSO complaining of “rigid financial requirements – not flexible with changes informed by the field/context.”

Some CSOs requested additional guidance on financial reporting, with one CSO noting that “financial documentation in terms of liquidation, reporting and so on is still a challenge to catch up.” This issue was, in some ways, magnified for INGOs who noted differences across different UNICEF offices: “The applicable rules and procedures are different per country while there is a common HACT policy and guidelines. The lack of clarity—especially on the financial reporting—makes the process very heavy and time consuming.” CSOs also pointed to the need for better coordination within UNICEF: “Coordination between UNICEF programme manager and UNICEF

admin/finance can be improved, particularly if programme manager cannot provide clarification to some questions from partners on financial/reporting procedures.”



## Short-term and discontinuous partnership

The fourth most commonly identified weakness in UNICEF partnership was around programme length and continuity, which was cited by 10% of respondents. Several CSOs commented on “short and intermittent” project duration, “difficulty of funding predictability” and “inadequate continuity of programmes.”

**“The grant cycles are short term, whereas the projects often demand a long-term approach.”**

In a similar vein, another CSO noted, “The current partnership is not long-term and strategic. It is based on emergency project. It would have been good if the partnership is designed for development and sustainability.” Yet another CSO noted, “UNICEF works with us in a short-term agreement basis. This does not allow us to consolidate some achievements and outcomes. We started a programme and we did not have time to properly follow up and to ensure the sustainability.”

Several CSOs pointed to challenges introduced by gaps between one Programme Document and another. One CSO noted that “the prolonged negotiation times for new Programme Documents often mean that our offices are faced with having to spend to keep life-saving services going between the expiration of the previous agreement and the signature of the new one.” Another CSO noted that “[due to] delays in renewing [Programme Documents], the organization is left with the burden to pay project staff salaries in between the end of PD and renewal of PD.” Noting the staffing challenges associated with the transition from one PD to another, one CSO noted that this situation can “create staff turnover,” while another noted, “We do our best to coordinate with the UNICEF team to ensure some coverage during these transition periods through no-cost extensions of volunteers.”

## Insufficient partner selection transparency

The fifth most commonly identified weakness was insufficient transparency in partner selection, and was cited by 9% of CSOs. Several respondents requested that UNICEF provide greater transparency

on partnership opportunities, citing “unclear or fragmented approach to partnership opportunities” and “not sharing partnership opportunities on a public domain” as an area for improvement. Several respondents shared the perception that not all CSOs have equal access to partnership opportunities. One CSO commented, “Funding opportunities are not well advertised with national partners, which prioritizes the access by large INGOs.” Another CSO noted insufficient access for “grassroot NGOs working in remote areas.” Yet another CSO remarked that “some requirements [for partner selection] like years of experience can easily be a handicap to young organizations whereas being young does not necessarily imply ineffectiveness.”

In late 2018, UNICEF introduced the UN Partner Portal to improve transparency in partner selection. However, some respondents noted that UN Partner Portal has not fully addressed transparency concerns. One CSO noted, “The deadline for responding to a [partnership opportunity] was too short, which didn’t leave partners enough time to work on a quality response.” Other respondents noted that while the UN Partner Portal was useful, there is still “lack of feedback for unsuccessful organizations,” with one CSO noting “we asked for feedback on our application but to date have not received any.”

### **Inadequate financial support**

Inadequate financial support was cited by 8% of CSO respondents as a weakness of UNICEF partnership. Several CSOs noted a gap between UNICEF’s financial contribution and the results expected of the partnership. One CSO commented, “Financially, the budgets can be very squeezed, but the expectations are often to go beyond what has been originally planned. To add activities, the funds have to be found which is often very difficult.” In a similar vein, another CSO noted challenges with “additional requests for changes in the project design without providing additional resources. Even if the requests were understandable given the context, the contract [budget] wasn’t amended to incorporate the changes.”

Several CSOs referred specifically to insufficient financial support in the area of effective and efficient programme management costs. One CSO complained



of “unreasonably low allowable indirect costs” while another commented, “UNICEF contribution to operational costs is so limited currently in several countries that it makes project-level cooperation extremely challenging. If we cannot cover all costs of the project, we are unable to implement quality projects.” Another CSO noted, “UNICEF needs to be more flexible on resource allocation, covering the cost of essential staff, operational and overhead cost.” One CSO suggested that this “failure to recognize real and justifiable costs for partners to maintain a healthy organization [...] creates an obstacle for us to be a strong and sustainable partner for UNICEF into the future.”

Some CSOs pointed to challenges associated with UNICEF requesting partners to also contribute financial resources to the partnership. One CSO noted, “UNICEF requires organizations to contribute staff time and other resources which not all organizations are able to do.” Another CSO commented, “The requirement for NGOs to provide financial contribution can be unrealistically high. This is not realistically achievable to NGOs who have a very minimal amount of unrestricted (core) funds and are unable to cover these costs.”



### **Inadequate spirit of partnership**

Inadequate spirit of partnership was cited by 5% of CSO respondents as an area for improvement. Some CSOs cited UNICEF's "top-down direction," "lack of equality" and "micro-management" as detrimental to the spirit of partnership and mutual respect. Some CSOs pointed to how inadequate partnership spirit is manifested in specific behaviours. According to one CSO, "field visits are often announced with very little (sometimes no) time for preparation. This is not productive and does not take into consideration the partner's planning." Another CSO noted, "In some cases, UNICEF requested partner contribution that is higher than the UNICEF contribution, yet UNICEF takes the credit, without acknowledging in detail the contribution of the partner and the partner's donors." CSOs noted that to further improve partnership, "strategic planning on shared goals" and "true respect to each other" are required.

### **Insufficient capacity development and programme support**

The lack of consistent, dedicated capacity-building was cited by 4% of CSO respondents as an area for improvement. One CSO noted that "capacity building needs to be strengthened," while another remarked that there are "no dedicated funds for capacity development." Some CSOs requested additional capacity development to deliver high quality programmes, with one CSO suggesting, "maybe we could work better on quality aspects of the intervention together, as UNICEF has high technical expertise that it can share." Other CSOs requested additional programme monitoring from UNICEF, with one complaining of "limited field visits" and another suggesting that UNICEF "increase

monitoring/evaluation and advocacy for UNICEF programmes at the community level." Several CSOs suggested the need to expand the focus of capacity development from specific programme interventions to the organizational level. One CSO complained, "[UNICEF] is only interested in the staff working on their project but not investing in the capacity of the organization for sustainability." Another CSO noted, "It's highly recommended to support in organizational development aspects and strengthening for sustainability."

### **Heavy administrative processes**

Finally, bureaucracy and administrative bottlenecks were cited by 4% of CSO respondents as a partnership weakness. Some CSOs raised concern about "heavy bureaucracy for the negotiation of the PCAs" and "huge administration, delay for signatures of formal documents." Other CSOs noted heavy processes for the amendment of Programme Documents, with one stating the "project change procedure for budget or activities takes a lot of time" and another noting "when we have needed a modification, the process was long and tedious." Yet another CSO remarked, "The process of budget modification is complicated. It causes problems with optimization of the project costs and ability to adapt project activities to changing environment." Some INGO respondents noted that administrative processes are complicated by inconsistencies from one country to another. According to one CSO, "While we have always appreciated the clarity and precision of UNICEF's CSO guidelines, the irregularity with which they have been implemented at country and field level (and sometimes within country offices) continues to pose a significant challenge to our country offices when negotiating new agreements."



## Chapter 6: Top 10 CSO Recommendations

### Overview

The preceding two chapters summarize the CSO-identified strengths and weaknesses of current UNICEF partnership practices. In analysing the strengths and weaknesses, it is striking to see the elements of overlap between the two lists. For example, the single most commonly cited strength of UNICEF partnership was “communication, commitment and spirit of partnership,” which was cited by 32% of CSO respondents as a UNICEF strength. At the same time, “unclear or irregular communication” was the second most commonly identified weakness, cited by 14% of CSO respondents as a key area for improvement. As another example, “transparency in partner selection” was the fourth most commonly identified strength, cited by 13% of CSO respondents. At the same time, “insufficient partner selection transparency” was the fifth most commonly identified

weakness and was cited by 9% of CSO respondents as an area for improvement.

The fact that certain partnership dimensions were cited by some CSO respondents as notable strengths, yet cited by others as key weaknesses, suggests that these dimensions are unanimously perceived by CSOs to be important elements of successful partnership. Furthermore, the fact that some CSOs were satisfied while others were dissatisfied with the very same partnership dimensions suggests that global generalizations may not be possible, given the very real differences across the 128 country offices in which UNICEF works, and the realities of UNICEF’s decentralized approach. For example, while “financial support” was the third most commonly cited strength, “inadequate financial support” was the sixth most commonly cited weakness. This could be due to

differing baseline levels of understanding among CSOs as to what is considered “reasonable” financial support, or it could be due to the fact that some UNICEF offices are simply better funded than others.

In the final part of the survey, respondents were asked to issue “one key recommendation for UNICEF to further improve its civil society partnership processes.” Unsurprisingly, the recommendations touch on the issues identified by CSO respondents as strengths and weaknesses. **Figure 13** below provides an overview of the top 10 recommendations from CSO respondents.



**Figure 13:** Top 10 CSO Recommendations

Recommendation	% of Respondents
1. Improved timeliness	15%
2. Enhanced communication and information sharing	15%
3. Increased transparency in partner selection	12%
4. Strengthened localization	12%
5. Improved capacity-building	11%
6. Longer-term partnership	10%
7. Enhanced financial support	7%
8. Strengthened programme collaboration	7%
9. Lighter and more streamlined processes	7%
10. Bolder advocacy	4%



### Recommendation #1: Improved timeliness

The single most common recommendation from CSO respondents was improved timeliness, accounting for 15% of all recommendations. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “speed up decisions about the Programme Document and budget and share with partner on time.”

**“UNICEF has to improve the approval mechanism from Country Office. Sometimes it takes so much time.”**

Yet another CSO recommended, “UNICEF should kindly accelerate the process of processing new Programme Documents. This is because the waiting period sometimes negatively impacts the progress made.”

The feedback on timeliness in emergencies was somewhat mixed. Some CSOs noted that processing of partnerships was relatively fast in emergencies: “Sealing of PCAs takes a while to conclude in some cases, but response under emergency has been quite good.” In contrast, other CSOs noted that “it is in the interest of the beneficiaries, the partners and UNICEF if the emergency response processes/mechanisms would be faster.”

In their recommendations, several CSOs commented on the issue of “timely disbursement of funds into bank accounts.” One CSO stated simply, “We request the funds transfer to be sped up. There is a delay in transferring the funds.” Similarly, another CSO recommended, “UNICEF should work towards improving the area of funds disbursement so that partners receive the funds in good time to avoid the undesired effects of late funds disbursement.” Yet



another CSO recommended, “We would request to bring improvements in delayed timelines for funds release as this affects not only project staff but at the same time it makes programme efficiency poor on ground level.”

Several CSOs made recommendations regarding the timeliness of supplies in partnership. One CSO noted that UNICEF should “accelerate the procurement and supply of in-kind assistance.” Another noted “supply deliveries should be aligned with project activities.” A third CSO wrote, “We recommend the respect of the timeline in the procurement process [for programme supplies transferred as part of the partnership].”



### **Recommendation #2: Enhanced communication and information sharing**

The second most common recommendation from CSO respondents was for “continued dialogue with partner organizations,” accounting for 15% of the total. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “organize frequent meetings with partners to get their views on the partnership,” while another reminded of the importance of “keeping smooth communication with partners through consultation at country office level.” One CSO recommended “a closer and more frequent collaboration, not only when needed but also to update our situation and our partnership, in order to understand the reality of each other.” CSOs noted that enhanced communication and information sharing would improve both partnership processes and programme quality. One CSO wrote, “I would like to inform you that arrangement of country-level workshops and information sharing may improve civil society partnership processes.” Another CSO recommended UNICEF “to have regular consultation meetings with NGOs to fill information gaps in programme service delivery and partnership.”

Several CSOs proposed the idea of an annual “consultation.” One CSO noted that “It would be good to have a regular face-to-face meeting (it could be an annual meeting) to get relevant updates from UNICEF.” Another CSO recommended for “annual partner meetings organized in respective country, which would provide a forum where challenges can be discussed and give space for exchange between

UNICEF partners.” Other partners noted—even before the COVID-19 pandemic—that such consultations could be virtual, with one CSO recommending that UNICEF “provide more opportunities for online meetings and workshops for partnership.”

**“The more dialogue at the national and global level, the better our partnerships and impact will be. More shared workshops (online and in person) would be a great way to identify and capitalize our synergies between our organizations.”**

At the same time that some CSOs recommended large-scale platforms, others emphasized the importance of bilateral communication. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “increase opportunities for open, honest dialogue. Possibly with bilateral meetings and not with plenary meetings with 100+ partners. Small ones will never have a voice. And listen to the partners, not just hear them. Usually, partners strive for improvement.”



### **Recommendation #3: Increased transparency in partner selection**

Several CSOs noted that there was a need for greater “transparency in how country offices select civil society partners,” accounting for 12% of all recommendations. One CSO commented, “We have no idea how to engage with UNICEF in a more substantial way; UNICEF selects which organizations they invite to work with them and there’s never any opportunity for others, like us, to provide input.” Several CSOs noted the importance of diversification of the partner portfolio and recommended that UNICEF “broaden the partners the country offices work with.”

One CSO noted, “I would recommend UNICEF to include a variety of partners in countries, including faith-based partners,” while another recommended for UNICEF to “be open to learning about new potential partner organizations (instead of sticking with the organizations previously partnered with).” Another CSO recommended that UNICEF “review its civil society partnership database every year to omit non-performing organizations and give opportunities to new ones.” Several CSO recommendations alluded to

the UN Partner Portal, with one CSO recommending that UNICEF “publish the partnership and area-specific opportunities in public domain.” Another CSO noted that “UNICEF should activate the new platform (UN Partner Portal) to provide opportunities for all humanitarian actors.”



#### **Recommendation #4: Strengthened localization**

Feedback on strengthened localization in partnership practices accounted for 12% of all recommendations, with many CSOs calling on UNICEF to “reach out to national and smaller organizations” and “include small local organizations that often impact the community more.” Several CSOs suggested in their recommendations that greater localization could be linked to better results or increased sustainability. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “build local ownership and strengthen the local NGOs to ensure the sustainability of development.” Another CSO recommended UNICEF to “focus more collaboration with national NGOs as a means to achieve quicker results and reduced costs and for sustainability and localization of interventions.” A third CSO noted that “if UNICEF partnered with grassroots organizations directly, we think its impact would be very positive.”

In their recommendations, some CSOs made specific reference to UNICEF’s practice of providing headquarters support costs for INGOs but not national NGOs. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “add organizational administrative overheads in the budget, which is present for international organizations. This should also be applied for national-level partners.” Another similarly stated, “I recommend that UNICEF considers allocating institutional support to national NGOs on a quarterly basis of at least 7% as opposed to only allocating this to international organizations who are doing similar work in the field.”

Several CSO respondents linked the issue of localization to capacity-building,



recommending that UNICEF “support national NGOs financially and in advocacy to have more leadership role in coordination mechanism such as clusters.” One CSO recommended that UNICEF support “dissemination of work/progress/findings through national technical working groups.”



#### **Recommendation #5: Improved capacity-building**

Several CSOs requested “training and capacity building for civil society,” and this accounted for 11% of all recommendations. Some CSOs requested capacity building on UNICEF partnership processes, with one suggesting, “UNICEF can provide periodical training for its partners to better understand the reporting mechanisms, due diligence processes and partnership opportunities.” In a similar vein, another CSO noted, “My recommendation for UNICEF is to conduct capacity building after every six months to its partners regarding guidelines.” One CSO noted that there was a need for “greater clarity of contractual provisions: revisiting contractual conditions so that there is no chance of misunderstanding and different interpretations.”

Some CSOs recommended that rather than adopting a narrow focus on building the capacity of CSOs to be better partners for UNICEF, the emphasis should be broader. According to one CSO, “investing in CSO capacity is very key to sustain interventions. UNICEF should holistically assess capacity needs of CSOs to invest in them.” Some CSOs requested capacity-building in programmatic areas, noting that other UN agencies provide regular training to partners on sectoral areas. Other CSOs suggested a slightly different approach and recommended “long-term capacity building to organizations and not just looking at the programmes to be implemented by the partner. [UNICEF] should build capacity in the overall weak areas of the organization, e.g ability to generate undesignated funds.”



#### **Recommendation #6: Longer-term partnership**

Some 10% of CSO recommendations centred on longer-term partnership, with several CSOs noting that “long-term partnership is required” and calling for UNICEF to “ensure multi-year financing.” Several



CSOs made recommendations for the ideal duration of partnership, with one CSO recommending to “increase the partnership period from 12 months to at least 24 months for effective delivery, follow-up and scaling up to other districts.” Another CSO felt that there should be “partnership for at least three years with annual agreement.” Yet others called for even longer horizons, with one noting that “UNICEF should think for long-term partnerships. A 2-3 year project does not provide sustainability to the programmes.”

Several CSOs noted the linkage between longer-term partnership and longer-lasting results.

**“It’s highly recommended to have long-term partnership for significant results and lasting changes to the targeted group.”**

Another recommended, “There’s a need for exit strategies from the onset of projects, and lower-cost continuity projects should be officially reviewed. The absence of continuity can affect overall access and impact.” Some CSOs also noted the importance of linking extension of partnership with results achieved, with one CSO suggesting, “UNICEF should partner with a selected partner (if it performs well) in a given area for a given theme for comparatively longer time.”



## **Recommendation #7: Enhanced financial support**

Several CSOs expressed appreciation for financial support received from UNICEF, but also suggested opportunities for improvement. Recommendations on enhanced financial support accounted for 7% of the total. Some CSOs requested greater overall financial support, recommending that UNICEF “increase the funding budget to allow for a more comprehensive action.” Other CSOs requested greater financial support in certain targeted areas. One CSO, for example, recommended that UNICEF “increase the threshold for the support costs.” Another CSO noted that UNICEF should “have a specific fund within the budget for security and safety.” CSOs also requested standardization of budgets to allow for greater predictability, with recommendations that UNICEF “review standard rates like operating costs based on the nature and size of the project.”

Some CSOs seemed satisfied with the overall levels of funding support but requested “less rigidity in the use” of those funds, with one CSO recommending that “it would be good if UNICEF allows [more] budget flexibility.”



Do not do too rigid per activity level but maybe on higher level.” Other CSOs seemed to accept detailed budgeting at the initial planning stage but requested less rigidity at amendment stage, recommending that UNICEF “allow for easy reallocation of funds (within the project scope), since we are all working towards the same goals as partners.”



### **Recommendation #8: Strengthened programme collaboration**

Recommendations for strengthened programme collaboration—including increased interaction with UNICEF on programme implementation, monitoring and adaptation—accounted for 7% of responses. Several CSOs requested closer technical exchange at programme implementation sites, calling on UNICEF to “perform more field visits by participating in programme activities.” One CSO requested that UNICEF “engage in moral support to the partner by physically participating in selected [programme] activities.” Another CSO suggested that additional monitoring from UNICEF would be especially useful in projects with multiple partners or stakeholders: “UNICEF needs to have close monitoring with the partners if more than one partner is working on the same project.” In their recommendations, several CSOs noted the importance of close collaboration and programmatic exchange to realize adaptive

programming. One CSO commented, “There is a need to have CSO consultation about partnership to agree and develop an adaptive programme based on the context.” Similarly, another CSO wrote, “We recommend that there are quarterly project and partnership review meetings which afford the opportunity to decide together between the partner and UNICEF on how activities may need to be adjusted.”



### **Recommendation #9: Lighter and more streamlined processes**

Recommendations from CSOs to “reduce the bureaucracy” accounted for 7% of responses, with several CSOs calling on UNICEF to streamline partnership processes by “reconsider[ing] some administrative procedures that appear not consistent with effectiveness and efficiency.”

**“The current partnership policies and processes are very much clear. However, the processing sometimes takes longer. UNICEF needs to simplify the process and completion in a timely fashion.”**

CSOs made specific recommendations around streamlining of processes in due diligence, programme development, and financial reporting. In the area of

due diligence, one CSO recommended that “[existing] due diligence reports by any UN agency should be accepted by UNICEF in proceeding with partnership. This process will lower the burden of the work and will remove the duplication of same procedures.” In the area of programme development, CSOs recommended that UNICEF “streamline co-design processes” and “focus on results-based programming/ implementation and less administrative compliance and micro-management.” Several CSOs cited financial reporting as a specific challenge, with one CSO calling for “simplified paperwork to process payments,” another noting that UNICEF should “simplify financial reporting processes” and a third remarking that “financial reporting can be constraining considering the environments we work in.”

Several CSOs requested the streamlining or reduction of processes for certain programme interventions or categories of partners. For example, one CSO recommended that UNICEF “reduce procedures concerning the processing of the [partnership], especially in the case of emergencies, in order to obtain cash and input supplies as quickly as possible.” Another CSO called for UNICEF to have “different administrative rules according to the budget amounts.” Some CSOs called for UNICEF to “provide small grants to grassroots CSOs and [introduce a] simplified process for such calls.”

Finally, some CSOs suggested that the current challenges around swift partnership processing may be rooted in the numbers and layers of UNICEF colleagues involved, and their differing perspectives. One CSO recommended, “UNICEF focal persons for partnership development should dedicate more time in person with the potential partner to allow faster process. It would also help to have fewer focal persons and fewer layers of approval (e.g. Zonal Office, Country Office) to reduce time and allow programmes to start more quickly. All the focal persons at different layers should have the same information in terms of process, criteria, requirements.”



### **Recommendation #10: Bolder advocacy**

Finally, CSO recommendations that UNICEF engage in bolder and more frequent advocacy on behalf

of CSOs accounted for 4% of responses. In their recommendations, CSOs called upon UNICEF to advocate for greater civil society inclusion generally, as well as more child-friendly programmatic interventions specifically. One CSO recommended that UNICEF “continue its already valuable transparent and supportive partnership process and be a strong advocate for local civil society [who] face many struggles and challenges.” Another CSO noted that while the emphasis on service delivery is important, “UNICEF should also focus on advocacy and lobby to create civil-society-friendly environment.” One CSO commented that UNICEF should “support local CSOs to have a strong voice with the national government,” while another noted that “UNICEF has to recognize that CSO partners may require their support in coordinating with the state governments.”

Several CSOs called on UNICEF to undertake “more routine top-level dialogue on areas for joint partnership and advocacy with government.” One CSO noted that “if [UNICEF] wants to see equity in coverage, then they need to bring the government into discussion about how to work with the marginalized remote communities.” Another CSO suggested that UNICEF should “have strong strategy in advocacy campaigns and involve government to be more committed to support good [programming] practices.” Yet another CSO recommended that UNICEF “make the children’s rights movement the basis of partnerships with CSOs and explicitly reflect this in UNICEF’s partnership policies and practice. To make a real difference in children’s lives, UNICEF must provide stronger leadership in the coordination of global partnership efforts.”





## Chapter 7: Conclusion

UNICEF believes that partnerships are critical to deliver results for and realize the rights of children. UNICEF values its partnerships with civil society, which have been instrumental to the implementation of humanitarian and development programmes, joint advocacy for children, and the promotion of technical knowledge and innovative practices. In closing, UNICEF would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the many partners who shared their thoughts and provided honest and constructive feedback on how the culture of partnership can be further enhanced. Moving forward, UNICEF commits to treating the survey findings as a key resource as it revises procedures and further develops both internal and partner-facing systems, building on strengths and tackling weaknesses. UNICEF also commits to continuing to seek opportunities for meaningful exchange with CSO partners at both national and global levels. UNICEF values the feedback that it receives from its partners, not only through periodic surveys, but indeed, through the day-to-day interaction that is the backbone of our joint work for children.







UNICEF  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA

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