



**Best of UNICEF Research Retrospective:
Documenting impact and lessons learned**

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Best of UNICEF Research Retrospective: Documenting impact and lessons learned

UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti

The Office of Research – Innocenti is UNICEF’s dedicated research centre. It undertakes research on emerging or current issues to inform the strategic directions, policies and programmes of UNICEF and its partners, shape global debates on child rights and development, and inform the global research and policy agenda for all children, and particularly for the most vulnerable.

Office of Research – Innocenti publications are contributions to a global debate on children and may not necessarily reflect UNICEF policies or approaches.

The Office of Research – Innocenti receives financial support from the Government of Italy, while funding for specific projects is also provided by other governments, international institutions and private sources, including UNICEF National Committees.

Acknowledgements

The UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti would like to thank the many UNICEF staff who were interviewed or shared information for this retrospective exercise: Grace Agcaoili, Haithar Ahmed, Ali Aulia Ramly, Corentin Bailleul, Robert Bain, Matthieu Brossard, Suying Chang, Aidan Cronin, Anne-Maria Cuković, Mari Denby, Charles Dzradosi, Pia Fagerström, Thuy Ha Bui, David Hipgrave, Afrim Ibrahim, Kumiko Imai, Pravin Khobragade, Beena Kuttiparambil, Arnaud Laillou, Jill Lawler, Borislava Maksimović, Gerrit Maritz, Ross McIntosh, Dragan Nastic, Rémy Pigois, Paul Quarles van Ufford, Chemba Raghavan, Tanja Ranković, Dren Rexha, Geeta Sharma, Adrian Shikwe, Romain Sibille, Tom Slaymaker, Surechimeg Vanchinkhuu, Vincenzo Vinci, Rangsun Wiboonuppatum, Jelena Zajeganović and Nabila Zaka.

Thanks also go to the 410 staff across UNICEF who took the time to participate in the 2017 Best of UNICEF Research survey, the past members of the Best of UNICEF Research external panel, and the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti staff who have, over the years, participated in the internal review exercise, or provided other feedback and recommendations.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the inputs from UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti colleagues: Priscilla Idele, Sarah Marchant and Patricia Arquero Caballero. Many thanks to these individuals for their support, as always.

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FOREWORD

When the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise was first initiated in 2013, no one could have foreseen it evolving into such a central feature of the organization's growing evidence culture. From humble origins, the exercise has grown over the last six years into a widely anticipated annual event, enhancing the visibility and recognition of UNICEF staff involved in commissioning or undertaking research across our more than 190 offices worldwide. As one UNICEF staff member interviewed for this report said, "Within UNICEF, the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise is like a Nobel Prize – it really helps to position a subject."

The idea for this particular report also started small. In an informal conversation, some UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti researchers who are involved in managing the annual *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise wondered aloud what had happened to finalist research in subsequent years – and the concept of the *Best of UNICEF Research Retrospective* was born.

This publication highlights the vast range and depth of UNICEF-funded research and the emerging impacts it is having. Its findings are based on a survey of UNICEF staff and in-depth semi-structured interviews with previous *Best of UNICEF Research* finalists.

The unique relationship that UNICEF has with many governments worldwide means that **instrumental impact** – the demonstration of plausible contributions to changes in policy, practice, programmes and behaviour – is increasingly visible early on, rather than the usual lengthy time frames required to identify research impact. *Best of UNICEF Research* finalists have been successful in supporting governments to enshrine in domestic law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in mobilizing resources in support of children from donors and governments. Finalist research has also had **conceptual impact**, influencing discourse and debate, including in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals and to inform national and international public health guidelines.

UNICEF research is rarely 'blue sky' in nature; it more often focuses on practical action. It therefore has significant **capacity-building impact**. Finalist research is feeding into a review of a national midwifery curriculum, while emerging evidence is being incorporated into guidance materials and training for caregivers and front-line workers in national maternal and child health centres. Elsewhere, communities are being empowered by research to hold governments to account for the effective delivery of child grants, and to evaluate party manifestos for child rights-related policy promises ahead of a general election.

While not its primary aim, UNICEF-funded research increasingly has **academic impact**. It is published in prestigious journals and presented at symposia worldwide to enhance the global scientific evidence base on child rights. Tools developed by UNICEF and highlighted in *Best of UNICEF Research* are helping to make the case that child poverty is multidimensional, rather than simply the result of economic deprivation. Research has also informed the development of new methodologies to estimate environmental impacts and the benefits of long-term, sustainable humanitarian investments.

Finally, this finalist research is having a **collective impact**. Several reports featured in *Best of UNICEF Research* to date have been produced with other United Nations agencies, thus helping to deliver the 'One United Nations' agenda. Others recognize the growing role of the private sector in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in addressing child rights; the importance of collaboration between sectoral government ministries that apply a child rights lens; and the constructive competition that may be inspired between, for example, member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the use of scorecard mechanisms.

While UNICEF is not known primarily as a research agency, UNICEF-funded research is now attracting greater global recognition and international media coverage. The *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise is just one internal mechanism that we use to support the scaling up of promising research findings. Our knowledge and expertise in this area continue to grow year on year as our learning evolves.

I hope you find the impact insights contained within this retrospective of interest and that you learn something new along the way about UNICEF research and its subsequent impact.

Happy reading!



Kerry Albright
Chief, Research Facilitation and
Knowledge Management
UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

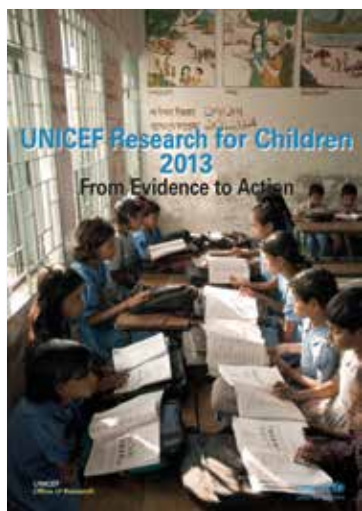
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this retrospective, we look back at finalist research from six years of the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise to gain perspective on its uptake and pathways to longer-term impact. The numerous examples highlighted here, including six case studies, are drawn from the many interviews conducted in 2018 and 2019 with UNICEF staff on 37 finalist projects, supplemented by survey responses collected from 410 UNICEF staff in 2017.

For UNICEF-funded research, the path to impact begins when **important evidence gets noticed**; it then circulates through research and practitioner communities, and reaches the media and government offices. UNICEF State of Palestine achieved widespread attention for its research into the needs of Palestinian children with disabilities, and this visibility inspired multi-sectoral investments to deliver better care for this vulnerable group (*see case study 6*).

In many cases, **findings also inspire further research** to delve deeper into the issues at stake. For instance, an evaluation of a pilot for a social protection intervention in Ethiopia paved the way for further investigation into the nutritional impacts of social protection, while the evaluation's findings also informed a scaled-up food security effort (*see case study 3*).

Research can shape policies and their implementation, on any scale, from the development of the national midwifery curriculum in Mongolia to the global monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals



(see case studies 5 and 2 respectively). **Research can speak to lawmakers**, as shown by one team whose international evidence on the incorporation of children’s rights into domestic law subsequently informed legislative efforts in the various jurisdictions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (see case study 1). **And research can lead to new programmes**, as did an investment analysis of emergency preparedness in Chad, Madagascar and Pakistan when it helped to establish the World Bank Famine Action Mechanism (see case study 4).

The UNICEF staff members we interviewed recognized how the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise has helped them to make greater progress along the pathway to longer-term impact. The exercise has attracted global recognition for the finalists and global visibility for their findings. It has opened up new channels of knowledge exchange, boosted the quality of subsequent research and strengthened the partnerships that allow UNICEF offices to enhance research impact.

Evidence is becoming more and more central to how UNICEF achieves impact as an organization. This retrospective exercise was therefore an ideal opportunity to imagine more possibilities for the future. The final section of the report shares participants’ ideas and recommendations on how to develop the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise in years to come – always with the aim of helping our research to have the greatest possible impact.





REWARDING QUALITY RESEARCH

With programmes in more than 190 countries, territories and areas, UNICEF undertakes an enormous variety of research every year. It is carried out or commissioned by all country offices, by regional offices, by Headquarters and, increasingly, by UNICEF National Committees.¹ In 2013, the Office of Research – Innocenti kicked off an initiative to showcase the best of this research.

Our aim was not only to celebrate the greatest successes, but also to validate and enhance the role of all UNICEF staff who take part in generating evidence to benefit children. We called on UNICEF offices worldwide to submit their best examples of recent research outputs. We decided that all UNICEF offices would be eligible to enter the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise, except for the Office of Research – Innocenti itself, which would coordinate the exercise.

Our plan was to undertake an internal peer review to select 10 to 12 finalist research reports each year to feature in a new annual publication. We would also share this shortlist with an external review panel of international experts with significant academic and policy experience, whom we would ask to select the top three finalists for special recognition.

Six years on from the first report, staff across the organization eagerly await the yearly *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise – both the competition itself, as a chance to put forward their best research outputs, and the publication of the report, as an opportunity to learn from what others in UNICEF are achieving. We evaluate some 100 new submissions every year, each of which presents evidence to answer diverse questions about children’s lives. We look forward to this internal review, and to welcoming the top three finalists annually to the UNICEF Data, Research, Evaluation, Analytics and Monitoring (DREAM) meeting, or another international event, at which they can share their research practices with their peers.

Just as we had hoped from the start, the annual publication and awards have become an important part of UNICEF’s research culture. But there are greater hopes for the finalist research: that the evidence will be picked up by the wider research, policy and practitioner communities, and that it will help to make the world a better place for children. We chart the progress of these hopes in the case studies and analysis that follow.

“This volume represents the first systematic attempt to showcase the breadth and depth of the organization’s research work.”

Gordon Alexander, [former] Director, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, in the foreword to *UNICEF Research for Children 2013: From evidence to action*²



ReliefWeb
@reliefweb

The Best of UNICEF Research (BOUR) showcases some of the best and most innovative pieces of research coming out of @UNICEF



Lindsay Harris
@_LindsayAHarris

Love @UNICEF! Their research will help bring a brighter future for children’s health. Here’s a recap of their 2017 research. [#UNICEFbit.ly/2C99XCN](https://bit.ly/2C99XCN)



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The Guardian

“The report, which won a UN prize, includes measures ranging from restricting Fortaleza’s excessive, lurid TV coverage of murders to more education about drugs. A finding that 60% of victims had dropped out of school, for example, has led the committee to pressure successfully for better monitoring of attendance.”

A Guardian article discusses Lives Interrupted: Adolescent homicides in Fortaleza and in six municipalities in the state of Ceará, a Best of UNICEF Research 2018 finalist.³

Vital Strategies

“Though limited data exist in low- or middle-income countries, preliminary research on water quality suggests that we might not be doing as well as we would like. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis assessing several hundred studies found that while odds of contamination were considerably lower for improved sources than unimproved sources, 38% of available samples from improved sources still contained fecal contamination.”

A Medium Vital Strategies article imparts top-level findings from ‘Fecal Contamination of Drinking-water in Low- and Middle-income Countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis’, a Best of UNICEF Research 2015 finalist.⁴

HNN | HEALTHY NEWBORN NETWORK

“Presenting the award, Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director UNICEF, described the study as an outstanding participatory and innovative research methodology that supported country-led programme implementation and enhanced collaboration between partners.”

Healthy Newborn Network highlights the impact of ‘Every Newborn: Health-systems Bottlenecks and Strategies to Accelerate Scale-up in Countries’, a Best of UNICEF Research 2015 finalist.⁵

- 1 The UNICEF National Committees are 33 independent, local non-governmental organizations that serve as the public face and dedicated voice of UNICEF in industrialized countries. They raise funds from the private sector, promote children’s rights and secure worldwide visibility for children threatened by poverty, disasters, armed conflict, abuse and exploitation.
- 2 United Nations Children’s Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti, *UNICEF Research for Children 2013: From evidence to action*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, July 2013. Available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/unicef%20research-gb-web.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 3 Griffin, Jo, “‘A child is killed daily’: saving lives in Brazil’s deadliest city for adolescents”, The

- Guardian, 14 December 2018, <www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/dec/14/saving-lives-brazil-deadliest-city-for-adolescents-fortaleza>, accessed 14 September 2019; United Nations Children’s Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti, *Best of UNICEF Research 2018*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2018, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1002-best-of-unicef-research-2018.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 4 Dowling, Russell, Carisse Hamlet and Thomas Matte, ‘Improved but unchecked: The growing need for water quality surveillance’, Vital Strategies, Medium, 22 March 2018, <<https://medium.com/vital-strategies/improved-but-unchecked-the-growing-need-for-water-quality-surveillance-69220361aeff>> accessed 14 September 2019; United Nations Children’s Fund, Office of Research –

- Innocenti, *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2015, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 5 Rotmil, Xi, ‘Every newborn bottleneck analysis wins UNICEF’s Best of Research Award 2015’, Healthy Newborn Network, 6 July 2015, New York, <www.healthynewbornnetwork.org/blog/every-newborn-bottleneck-analysis-wins-unicefs-best-of-research-award-2015>, accessed 14 September 2019; *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.



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CASE STUDY 1:
GATHERING EVIDENCE FROM 12 COUNTRIES
TO ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A study of legal implementation in 12 countries¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*²

This piece of UNICEF research, carried out in collaboration with researchers at Queen's University Belfast, examined strategies used by 12 countries to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in their domestic legislation. It aimed to **determine effective, practical and impactful strategies that the United Kingdom could use to embed children's rights into its laws.**

THE FINDINGS

There is no perfect 'one-size-fits-all' model for implementation. Instead, adopting a range of strategies has proven to be the most successful approach. Some of the 12 countries had fully incorporated the Convention into domestic law, while others were integrating its principles through strategies such as establishing national plans for children, monitoring (and building a culture of respect for) children's rights and gathering comprehensive data on children. Other strategies included making child impact assessments part of the process of drafting new legislation, analysing child-specific budgets and recognizing the importance of children's participation in decision-making.

Training and awareness-raising at every level were shown to be vital in helping

to improve the understanding that children have rights and are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect, and to exert influence over their own lives. It was also found that ensuring a consistent approach across internal jurisdictions is key.

The researchers concluded that efforts to incorporate the Convention have had a significant positive effect on protecting children's rights in the countries studied.

THE IMPACT: AN ADVOCACY JOURNEY

The publication of the research report marked the start of an advocacy journey that continues today. Dragan Nastic, Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor for Child Rights at UNICEF UK, described the work as "the best research on the Convention that has ever been produced under UNICEF UK."

The findings provide exactly the sort of data needed for advocacy work with governments. The data are being used by UNICEF UK as well as by UNICEF Denmark and other country offices in some of the 12 nations studied in the research. UNICEF UK has produced briefing documents for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with

THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- informed recommendations for the Government of the United Kingdom, and for England and the devolved jurisdictions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, on incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law
- had spillover effects, with the research now being used by UNICEF in advocacy work with other governments
- led to a public consultation and working group being set up by the Scottish Government to examine models for incorporating the Convention into Scottish law
- led to the establishment of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey.

LIST OF INCLUDED
COUNTRIES:

Australia

Belgium

Canada

Denmark

Germany

Iceland

Ireland

New Zealand

Norway

South Africa

Spain

Sweden

specific recommendations for each. The research report received excellent media coverage and has been cited in numerous academic papers.

The report continues to make an impact. In October 2018, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon announced that Scotland intended to incorporate the Convention into domestic law. This was followed in 2019 by a public consultation in Scotland to gather views on how this could be achieved. Dragan Nastic is part of a working group set up by the Scottish Government to examine potential strategies for incorporating the Convention into Scottish law, a process that the research report is helping to inform.

UNICEF UK is also supporting the Government of Jersey (a Crown Dependency), which ratified the Convention

five years ago and is working to fully incorporate it into domestic law. The first step was to set up the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey, which is now active as a statutory body. The next step is to begin transposing the Convention in its entirety into Jersey's domestic law.

The research has also become a living project. Queen's University Belfast has continued to update the work and has published many additional papers, most recently two contributions to the *International Journal of Human Rights special issue on Human Rights Monitoring and Implementation, No.3*. Queen's University Belfast also obtained funding to update the original report to reflect ongoing developments in the 12 countries. The intention is to launch this update in December 2019 at the Rights of the Child UK conference.

- 1 Lundy, Laura, at al., *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A study of legal implementation in 12 countries*, United Nations Children's Fund United Kingdom, November 2012. Available at: <www.unicef.org.uk/publications/child-rights-convention-2012-report>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 2 United Nations Children's Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti, *Best of UNICEF Research*

- 2014, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2014. Available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 3 Kilkelly, Ursula, 'The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Incremental and transformative approaches to legal implementation', *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 23, no 3, 16 January 2019, available at:

<www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2018.1558974>, accessed 15 September 2019; Byrne, Bronagh, and Laura Lundy, 'Children's rights-based childhood policy: A six-P framework', *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 23, no. 3, 22 January 2019, available at: <www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2018.1558977>, accessed 15 September 2019.



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CASE STUDY 2:
FOR DRINKING WATER, IMPROVED DOES
NOT ALWAYS MEAN SAFE



LOW- AND MIDDLE- INCOME COUNTRIES

Faecal Contamination of Drinking Water in Low- and Middle- Income Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- contributed to the inclusion of a target and indicators for drinking water quality in Sustainable Development Goal 6
- informed a new approach to assessing drinking water quality in household surveys conducted as part of the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – an approach that has now been rolled out in more than 30 countries
- inspired further research on drinking water quality in various settings across Asia, Africa and the Middle East
- inspired a global innovation challenge to develop a simple test that can be used in the field to rapidly detect *E. coli* in water samples.

Faecal Contamination of Drinking-water in Low- and Middle-income Countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*²

This systematic review, summarizing evidence from 319 studies covering 96,737 water samples, aimed to help a joint World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF working group to **evaluate evidence linking improved sources of water and health-related indicators of water quality**. The working group's objective was to assess progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals and develop targets and indicators for the enhanced global monitoring of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

THE FINDINGS

The analysis, which focused mainly on countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, suggests that, **compared with water from unimproved sources, drinking water from improved sources** – such as piped water into a household or yard, or from a stand-pipe, borehole or protected dug well – **is less likely to be contaminated with *Escherichia coli* or thermotolerant coliforms** (the recommended indicators of faecal contamination).

The analysis also found that in 38 per cent of 191 studies, **more than one quarter of water samples from im-**

proved sources showed evidence of faecal contamination. This included samples taken from sources typically considered higher quality and lower risk, such as boreholes and piped water.

The review determined that water sources in low-income countries and rural areas are more likely to be contaminated.

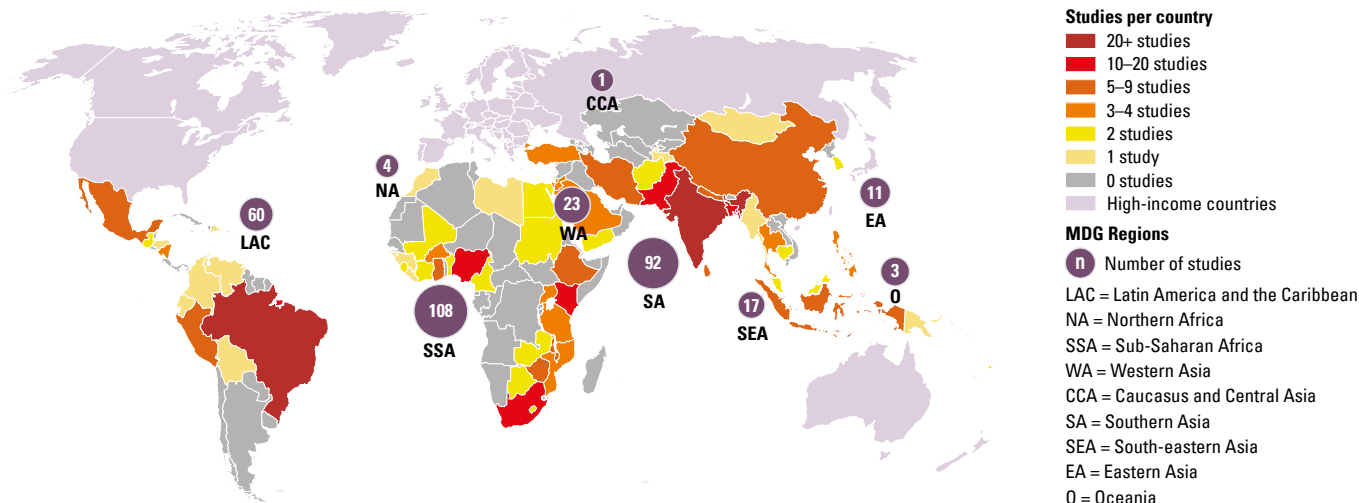
The researchers concluded that new indicators are needed to monitor access to safe drinking water. They suggested that an enhanced monitoring strategy should combine periodic measurement of water quality with assessment of the sanitary status of a water source.

THE IMPACT: A SHIFT TO WATER QUALITY

“Water safety would have been included in the new SDG targets anyway, but it is reasonable to say that this research contributed to the inclusion of indicators for drinking water quality in SDG 6,” said the research team.

The systematic review also informed the development of a new approach to assessing drinking water quality in the household surveys that are conducted as part of the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. This approach

FIGURE 2. COUNTRIES AND REGIONS INCLUDED IN THE META-ANALYSIS



Source: Bain et al. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001644.g003

has now been rolled out in more than 30 countries.

Water quality testing is being included in other surveys too. Many countries are keen to act on water quality since it is related to the SDG targets, and UNICEF has recently supported the governments of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania to embed water quality testing in national poverty surveys.

The uptake of the systematic review has also been significant, with many

follow-up studies drawing on its findings and exploring other aspects of water quality and safety in detail. For instance, published studies have assessed the quality of sachet water, water quality in institutions such as health care centres and schools, and differences in the quality of water at source and water stored in homes.

The ongoing influence of the systematic review is evident in an innovation challenge led by UNICEF's Product Innovation Center at Supply Division to develop a simple test that can be

used in the field to rapidly detect *E. coli* in water samples. Current methods of testing are complex and require trained staff and the overnight incubation of samples. Being able to generate results quickly and accurately on site would support new approaches to water quality assessment and could help individuals and communities to monitor their own water supplies and encourage behaviour change. Data gathered from such testing could also inform government-level actions to improve and treat contaminated water supplies.

1 Bain, Robert, et al., 'Fecal Contamination of Drinking-water in Low- and Middle-income Countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis', PLOS Medicine, vol. 11, no. 15, 2014,

e1001644. Available at: <<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001644>>, accessed 15 September 2019.

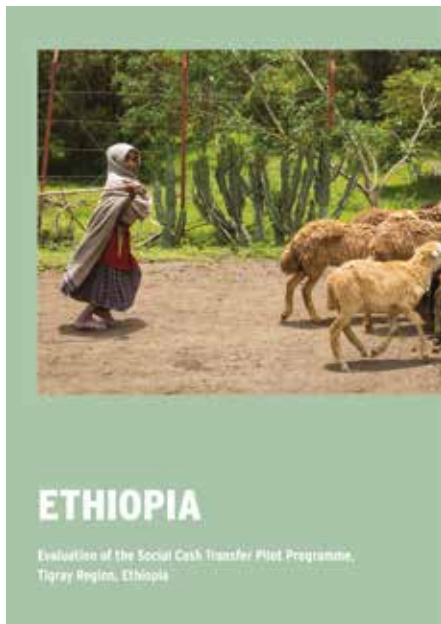
2 *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.



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CASE STUDY 3:
BUILDING ON A SOCIAL PROTECTION
SUCCESS IN ETHIOPIA



Evaluation of the Social Cash Transfer Pilot Programme, Tigray Region, Ethiopia¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2016*²

This piece of research was the final evaluation of a social cash transfer pilot programme (SCTPP) introduced in 2011 by the Regional Government of Tigray, Ethiopia, with support from UNICEF. **The objective of the SCTPP was to improve the quality of life of vulnerable children, older people and people with disabilities** in two *woredas* (districts) in Tigray.

The impact evaluation aimed to assess the contribution of the SCTPP to improvements in household welfare; summarize the operational aspects of the programme; and provide basic descriptive statistics on the well-being, livelihoods, schooling and health of those individuals and households involved (and also not involved) in the SCTPP.

THE FINDINGS

The evaluation team concluded that the regional Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs had demonstrated that it could effectively implement an ongoing cash transfer programme and that the SCTPP had communicated well with those whom it had benefited. The SCTPP had reached its target groups and provided full transfers on a timely and consistent basis. It had improved household food security and reduced

hunger and shown modest effects on schooling and asset formation.

The researchers concluded their report by discussing some of the important lessons learned from the SCTPP: Pay points need to be numerous and accessible to all beneficiaries; payment levels need to be adjustable and sensitive to rising prices; and cash transfer programmes need to budget for impact, particularly those intended to prioritize the elderly while also providing social protection for children.

THE IMPACT: RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

According to Rémy Pigois, who was responsible for the quality assurance of the final phase of the research, “The findings were there at the right place and time.”

The research was used to inform the design of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) run by the Government of Ethiopia to support food insecure households. UNICEF presented the SCTPP impact evaluation findings to the PSNP donors working group and was subsequently invited to join the working group and participate in the planning and implementation of the fourth phase of the PSNP. Many

THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- informed an ongoing, large-scale social protection effort implemented by the Government of Ethiopia
- increased collaboration between two government ministries, leading to improved synergies and better impacts for children living in the poorest households
- helped to secure funding for follow-up research on nutritional impacts
- inspired greater cross-sectoral collaboration within UNICEF Ethiopia.



UNICEF Ethiopia
@UNICEFethiopia

Our Cash Transfers in #Ethiopia publication with @Irish_Aid is one of the Best of UNICEF Research 2016



IFPRI
@IFPRI

IFPRI research on cash transfer program in #Ethiopia named winner of Best of UNICEF Research 2016 @UNICEFInnocenti

recommendations from the UNICEF impact evaluation have since been applied to the PSNP, which began in 2015 and will run to 2020, reaching about 8 million beneficiaries nationwide over five years.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which first partnered with UNICEF on cash transfer programmes in 2011, shared the report evidence with the Ministry of Agriculture. This resulted in increased collaboration between the two ministries and a clear division of responsibilities in implementing the PSNP. This integrated approach to social protection is leading to improved synergies and better impacts for children living in the poorest households.

The quality of the research report and its impact also helped UNICEF to secure four more years of funding from Irish Aid, which had funded the initial SCTPP. This additional funding was used for follow-up research on the uptake of social services and on the impacts of the nutrition features in the PSNP.

Further recognition came when the report was featured in a book. **From Evidence to Action: The story of cash transfers and impact evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa**, published in 2016, has attracted widespread interest.³

Two years after its publication, the report also helped to secure additional funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, for UNICEF to support the social protection sector with the introduction of innovative approaches in different settings of Ethiopia, in the form of the Rural PSNP and the Urban PSNP.

The research results were presented internally at UNICEF Ethiopia, helping to encourage better collaboration and cooperation between departments and colleagues. Externally, the findings informed workshops held at the regional level, in Tigray, and nationally. The findings were also translated for inclusion in a policy brief written in the Tigrinya language.

1 Berhane, Guush, et al., 'Evaluation of the Social Cash Transfer Pilot Programme, Tigray Region, Ethiopia', United Nations Children's Fund, 28 April 2015 (updated 15 June 2015). Available at: <www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF_Tigray_Endline_Report_FINAL_Ethiopia_2015-051.pdf>, accessed 15 September 2019.

2 United Nations Children's Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti, *Best of UNICEF Research 2016*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2016. Available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/854-best-of-unicef-research-2016.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.

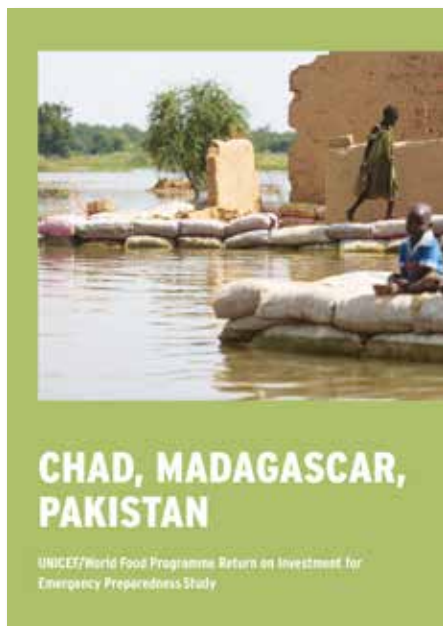
3 Davis, Benjamin, et al. (Eds.), *From Evidence to Action: The story of cash transfers and impact evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Children's Fund and Oxford University Press, 2016.





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CASE STUDY 4:
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN CHAD, MADAGASCAR
AND PAKISTAN – WELL WORTH THE INVESTMENT



UNICEF/WFP Return on Investment for Emergency Preparedness Study¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*²

This analysis, commissioned by UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) and carried out by Boston Consulting Group, aimed to examine the cost and time benefits of investing in measures to prepare for emergencies resulting from natural and human-related disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones, droughts, financial crises and conflict. The researchers constructed a return on investment (ROI) model and applied it to 49 emergency preparedness investments made by UNICEF and WFP in Chad, Madagascar and Pakistan.

THE FINDINGS

The analysis demonstrated that every single investment assessed would save significant time and/or money in the event of an emergency. In fact, 64 per cent of the investments would save both time *and* money. No investment had slowed down a humanitarian response and 93 per cent of the investments had sped up responses by 2 to 50 days (with an average time saving of 7 days). Also, while \$5.6 million had been invested in the emergency preparedness activities, the researchers calculated that these activities would collectively save \$12 million in responding to humanitarian crises – a net saving of \$6.4 million and an ROI of 2.1 (an ROI of 1.0 indicates that future costs would

be reduced by the same amount as the initial investment).³

While emphasizing the importance of context in determining the type of emergency preparedness investments made, the researchers also noted some trends in the data they analysed. For instance, pre-positioning internationally sourced emergency supplies yielded an ROI of 1.6 to 2.0, while investing in infrastructure yielded the highest absolute money savings. **The highest financial ROI – between 1.3 and 18.7 – came from investing in emergency preparedness training** (depending on the quality of the training and on the staff being retained).

THE IMPACT: ADVOCATING FOR INVESTMENT

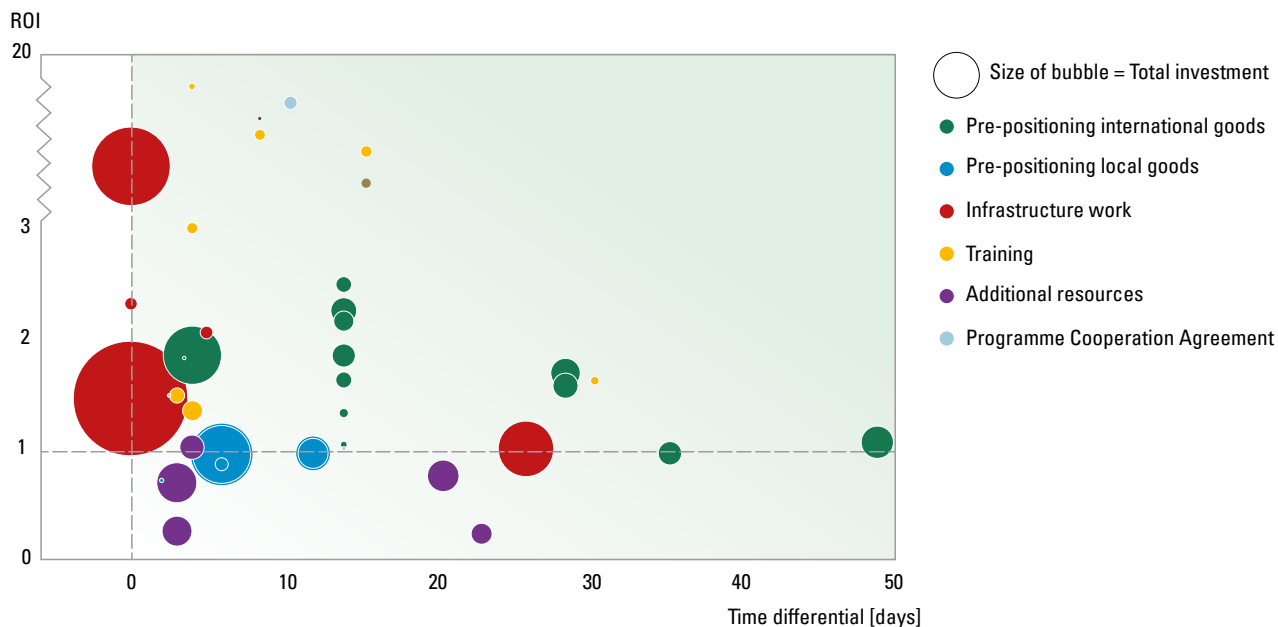
Mari Denby, who managed the inter-agency research project, says that **the ROI model has helped to make the case for early investment in emergency preparedness**, “The results have been used in advocacy towards multi-year, predictable humanitarian funding as well as advocacy for blended finance mechanisms to drive greater efficiency and effectiveness.”

Significantly, by highlighting the value of investing in emergency preparedness,

THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- proved the cost savings that are generated by early investment in emergency preparedness measures
- been used in advocacy for predictable, multi-year humanitarian funding and for new blended finance mechanisms
- helped establish the World Bank Famine Action Mechanism, the first global mechanism dedicated to supporting upstream interventions in famine prevention, preparedness and early action
- informed the development of new methodologies to calculate the environmental impacts and benefits of more sustainable long-term humanitarian investments
- strengthened United Nations inter-agency cooperation in emergency preparedness and humanitarian response.

FIGURE 3. RETURN ON INVESTMENT AND TIME SAVINGS OF THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INVESTMENTS STUDIED IN CHAD, MADAGASCAR AND PAKISTAN



Source: UNICEF/WFP with Boston Consulting Group

the research stimulated the UNICEF First Action Initiative, a pilot project, to allocate \$2 million of humanitarian thematic funding towards high-risk contexts for emergency preparedness. To date, the First Action Initiative has provided allocations to Haiti, the State of Palestine and the Pacific Islands in response to elevated risk levels.

The research has been presented to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and to the WFP Executive Board. It contributed to the Grand Bargain discussions at the World Hu-

manitarian Summit 2016.⁴ And it also fed into the development of the World Bank Famine Action Mechanism, the first global mechanism dedicated to supporting upstream interventions in famine prevention, preparedness and early action.

There have been ongoing benefits too. An analysis of emergency preparedness investments made in three further countries (Myanmar, the Niger and Uganda) confirmed the findings of the first analysis and led to the inclusion of the results in global policy work streams.

The second analysis also developed a methodology for measuring the environmental impact of emergency preparedness investments by calculating the carbon footprint savings. This approach has been taken up by UNICEF Supply Division and now helps UNICEF to advocate for earlier and more predictable humanitarian funding.

Collaboration with the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Section of UNICEF Programme Division has produced a Microsoft Excel-based tool that can be used to calculate the potential

financial and carbon savings of more sustainable long-term investment strategies for water and sanitation. The same investment argument is

being used to advocate for bridge funding for and increased pre-positioning of nutrition supplies to improve the timeliness, flexibility and efficiency

of UNICEF supply chains and financial transactions related to life-saving nutrition commodities.



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1 Meerkatt, Heino, Philipp Kolo and Quentin Renson, *UNICEF/WFP Return on Investment for Emergency Preparedness Study – Final report*, United Nations Children’s Fund and World Food Programme, January 2015. Available at: <www.unicef.org/publications/index_81164.html>, accessed 16 September 2019.

2 *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.

3 Unless otherwise stated, all amounts shown in this report are in US dollars.

4 For more on the Grand Bargain, see: Inter-Agency Standing Committee, ‘The Grand Bargain’, <<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc>>, accessed 16 September 2019.



CASE STUDY 5:
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO BETTER
CHILD HEALTH IN MONGOLIA



THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- influenced a public expenditure review on measures to reduce the negative impact of air pollution on child health
- motivated the Mongolian Ministry of Health and WHO to commission further research into the availability, affordability and quality of medicines in the country
- fed into a review of the national midwifery curriculum in Mongolia
- launched a collaboration between UNICEF and the National Center for Maternal and Child Health of Mongolia to create new guidance materials for caregivers and professionals on child health complications
- empowered local communities to take action to improve child health.

Reducing Preventable Child Deaths from Pneumonia, Diarrhoea and Newborn Complication in Mongolia¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*²

This research, commissioned by the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and carried out in two of the most disadvantaged regions of Mongolia, set out to identify how and from whom care is sought for children and pregnant women; women's experiences during pregnancy and childbirth; and some of the barriers to care-seeking and treatment. The aim was to inform action to reduce the number of preventable deaths in early childhood.

THE FINDINGS

The data gathered from primary caregivers, local healers, religious leaders, community health workers, nurses and midwives highlighted gaps in knowledge about the causes, recognition, treatment and prevention of pneumonia and diarrhoea in children under 5 years of age. For instance, caregivers did not raise sanitation as an issue connected with diarrhoea.

Furthermore, caregivers were found to face financial, geographical, cultural and informational obstacles that prevented them from bringing children to health care facilities. To overcome such barriers, the researchers pointed to the potential of communication, health education and mobile health interventions, with roles for private sector

actors such as mobile phone companies, broadcasters and pharmacies.

THE IMPACT: EVIDENCE PROMPTS ACTION

"This research has increased the understanding of limited health services and shortages in the knowledge of caregivers in Mongolia," said Sureenchimeg Vanchinkhuu, Health Specialist with UNICEF Mongolia at the time of the research. "The results have been very useful to UNICEF, especially with regard to implementing the findings to improve health services for children. The research has also provided insights on how to conduct qualitative research in the health sector."

The reporting of the research findings prompted significant activity in Mongolia. It stimulated further investigations into some of the issues raised, particularly the need for evidence on the impact of air pollution and the availability of medicines on childhood illnesses, and it led to other efforts to fill the knowledge gaps identified.

For instance, the research influenced a public expenditure review on measures to reduce the negative impact of air pollution and a related research project on air pollution in Mongolia.

FIGURE 4. FACEBOOK POST TO PROMOTE GUIDANCE VIDEOS FOR CAREGIVERS ABOUT HOW TO AVOID CHILD HEALTH COMPLICATIONS

МОНГОЛЫН ЭСЭГЭЙН ХАТГАЛГАА
ЭХ ХҮҮХДИЙН ЭРГҮЛ МЭНДИЙН ҮНДЭСНИЙ ТӨВ

LIKE & SHARE

**ЭХ ХҮҮХДИЙН ЭРҮҮЛ МЭНД - ЭХ ОРНЫ ЭРХЭМ БАЯЛАГ
ЦУВРАА НЭВТРҮҮЛЭГ**

- 1-р дугаар "АНХНЫ ТЭВРЭЛТ"
- 2-р дугаар "НЯРАЙН ЭРҮҮЛ МЭНДИЙН ЗААГ ҮЕ БА ШАРЛАЛТ"
- 3-р дугаар "УУШГИНЫ ХАТГАЛГАА ӨВЧНӨӨС СЭРГИЙЛБЭ"
- 4-р дугаар "АГААРЫН БОХИРДОЛ БА ХҮҮХДИЙН ӨВЧЛӨЛ"
- 5-р дугаар "ОСОЛ ГЭМТЛЭЭС СЭРГИЙЛБЭ"/ТҮЛЭГДЭЛТ/
- 6-р дугаар "АХУЙН ОСОЛ ГЭМТЛЭЭС СЭРГИЙЛБЭ"
- 7-р дугаар "НҮДНИЙ ХУГАРЛЫН ГАЖИГ"
- 8-р дугаар "НҮДНИЙ ХЯЛАР" ГЭЖ ЮУ ВЭ?"
- 9-р дугаар "ВАКЦИНД ЭРГЭЛЗЭХ БАЙДАЛ"
- 10-р дугаар "ТОВЛОЛТ ВАКЦИНЫ АЧ ХОЛБОГДОЛ"
- 11-р дугаар "НЯРАЙН ТҮНХНИЙ ДУТУУ ХӨГЖЛИЙН АСАРГАА, СУВИЛГАА"
- 12-р дугаар "ЖИРЭМСНИЙ ХЯНАЛТ"
- 13-р дугаар "ЖИРЭМСНИЙ АЮУЛТАЙ ШИНЖ"
- 14-р дугаар "ГЭР БҮЛ ТӨЛӨВЛӨЛТ"
- 15-р дугаар "ДУТУУ ТӨРӨЛТ"

**ТА ДЭЭРХ НЭВТРҮҮЛГҮҮДИЙГ
ДАРААХ ФЭЙСБҮҮК ХУДАС БОЛОН YOUTUBE
СУВГУУДААС ХҮЛЭЭН АВЧ ҮЗЭХ БОЛОМЖТОЙ**

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/ehemut/videos/>

<https://www.facebook.com/C4D>

<https://ehemut.mn/news/doctors-advice/video-news>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCasEEp6RD0m8kRgHTo5JQbA>

Subscribe товч дараад шинэ нэвтрүүлгийг цаг алдалгүй үзээрэй.

Both the Mongolian Ministry of Health and WHO commissioned research on the availability, affordability and quality of medicines in the country. Furthermore, a funding proposal for a UNICEF Mongolia programme to improve the availability of medicines for disadvantaged populations and reduce air pollution attracted a grant of \$4.8 million.

The research findings were shared with many national and international partners, including the United Nations Population Fund and the French non-governmental organization (NGO) Santé Sud for their joint review of the national midwifery curriculum in Mongolia. Case studies on the impact of newborn care in Mongolia featured in the global UNICEF Every Child Alive campaign in 2018.

By providing insight into caregivers' understanding of the causes of childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, the research has helped to inform clear guidance for caregivers on matters such as how to prevent illness and protect and treat a sick child at home. UNICEF, the National Center for Maternal and Child Health of Mongolia and the Public Health Institute of Mongolia worked to design evidence-informed Communication for Development (C4D) interventions at the community level. Suggestions for high-impact interventions were communicated to the Mongolian newborn care programme, including early initi-

Source: Facebook page of the National Center for Maternal and Child Health of Mongolia. Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/ehemut/photos/a.672040092820222/2257155277642021/?type=3&theater>>

ation of breastfeeding, longer skin to skin contact, and keeping newborn babies warm.

Meanwhile, UNICEF and the National Center for Maternal and Child Health worked together to create new guidance materials for caregivers on preventive and protective actions to avoid child health complications. These materials include pamphlets, posters and Facebook posts, which have been widely liked and shared to date. Learning materials for professionals such as primary health care workers and clinical health workers have also been developed and are in circulation.

Importantly, the communities that took part in the surveys directly benefited too. “Because the data for this research were collected by local teams at the community level, stakeholders felt a sense of ownership of the findings and were empowered to improve the situation,” said Surenchimeg Vanchinkhuu. “After two years, the original survey was repeated, and the findings showed improvement.”



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1 Johnson, Ginger, and Juliet Bedford, 'Reducing Preventable Child Deaths from Pneumonia, Diarrhoea and Newborn Complication in Mongolia', United Nations Children's Fund, 2014.

2 *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.



CASE STUDY 6:
LISTENING TO UNHEARD VOICES IN
THE STATE OF PALESTINE



THIS RESEARCH HAS:

- influenced the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development to commence a national review of the Palestinian Disability Law and practices around its implementation
- sparked widespread interest in the Palestinian media, receiving coverage on national television news channels and in newspapers
- mobilized additional investment in a multi-sectoral programme to improve neonatal home care and hospital services, strengthen the capacity of early child development professionals, and build disability-friendly water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in health centres
- projected benefits for 14,000 children, 20,000 parents and 1,000 health and education professionals and social workers.

Every Child Counts: Understanding the needs and perspectives of children with disabilities in the State of Palestine¹

As featured in: *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*²

Researchers from UNICEF State of Palestine and the Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom) collected qualitative and quantitative data with the aim of **improving understanding of how Palestinian children with disabilities are marginalized and excluded, the obstacles they face in fulfilling their rights, and what mechanisms can be put in place to better support their development and rights.** Uniquely, the researchers listened directly to the children and their caregivers, recording the diversity of their experiences and needs.

THE FINDINGS

The report identified multiple barriers to the fulfilment of rights for Palestinian children with disabilities, including a weak legal framework; limited access to services, support, equipment, health care and education; stigma; poor awareness of the rights of children with disabilities and the services to which they are entitled; the lack of a comprehensive system for registering children with disabilities and coordinating and tracking their needs and available services; poor infrastructure; and a lack of training for primary care providers, doctors and other medical staff.

The findings were used to inform recommendations for both quick wins and medium-term goals for improving the lives of Palestinian children with disabilities.

THE IMPACT: A SHARED AGENDA

“This comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research about Palestinian children with disabilities was the first of its kind,” said Kumiko Imai, Chief of Social Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation at UNICEF State of Palestine at the time of the research. “The report’s findings provided a great opportunity to speak up for and support children with disabilities. The uptake of the findings was very large. There was a successful dissemination strategy and there were both quantitative data to share and qualitative stories to tell.”

The report was launched at national and sub-national events attended by the Palestinian Minister of Social Development, the Deputy Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister of Health. Because UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Social Development in this research, this helped to build ownership and buy-in for the recommendations. Following the launch of the report, **UNICEF continued to work with**

TABLE 1. HOW TO BETTER ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THE FAMILIES WHO CARE FOR THEM

Quick wins	Medium-term goals
Revised disability law and national strategy	Service provider mapping and alignment
Data collection	More and better trained social workers
Stronger government mandate	Improved, tailored social protection
Fiscal space for disability-related needs	Inclusive education approach reconsidered
Greater efforts to prevent disabilities	Tailored education for youngest and oldest children
Early detection and intervention	Expanded health insurance
Parental education	Increased capacity of disability organizations and social work network
Family- and community-based early intervention	Accessible physical and information infrastructure
Support for pre-primary and primary school teachers	Support for families
Community education against stigma	Gender dimensions addressed

the Ministry of Social Development to discuss the recommendations and opportunities for collaboration in taking them forward. The research findings sparked interest in the Palestinian media, receiving wide coverage on national television news channels and in the press.

A key recommendation was to revise the Palestinian Disability Law (1999). UNICEF advocated for the law to be better aligned with international conventions, such as the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and for its improved implementation. The Minister of Social Development embraced this recommendation and established a participatory process to improve the legal framework generally and update the disability law in particular.

UNICEF State of Palestine has also taken action itself, focusing on the early detection of disabilities and developmental delays. A multi-sectoral programme to improve neonatal home care and

hospital services, strengthen the capacity of early child development professionals, and build disability-friendly water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in health centres has been made possible by a \$4.5 million donation from the Government of Japan. This UNICEF programme will benefit more than 14,000 children and over 20,000 parents and community members, and up to 1,000 health and education professionals and social workers.

1 Jones, Nicola, et al., *Every Child Counts: Understanding the needs and perspectives of children with disabilities in the State of Palestine*, United Nations Children's Fund State of Palestine, Shuffat, E. Jerusalem, December 2016. Available

at: <www.unicef.org/oPt/ODI_Report_01-06-2017_FINAL.pdf>, accessed 16 September 2019.

2 United Nations Children's Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti, *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti,

Florence, 2017. Available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.



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RESEARCH UPTAKE:
GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

There is no doubt that the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise showcases evidence with huge potential to inform change for children's benefit. But to translate this evidence into action the research findings, conclusions and recommendations must be put in front of those who can influence and achieve change. Better still if the research is developed in partnership with key stakeholders from the outset. As well as providing a rigorous evidence base, research can also lead to new avenues to explore or opportunities to fill remaining evidence gaps.

RESEARCH COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Finalist research has often been widely disseminated before and after its recognition in the annual publication, *Best of UNICEF Research*, including to governments, national media, practitioners such as teachers and doctors, and academic institutions, as well as more widely within UNICEF. In some cases, the research has been discussed in other publications such as books and journals. In many instances, a dedicated communications strategy has been developed to promote the research. Various approaches have proved successful, including the use of press releases, websites and social media.

Making research findings more accessible to a wider audience has been a positive approach. Summaries of key findings and advocacy points, as well as briefing documents, have helped stakeholders to grasp the implications of research, while translating findings and recommendations into other languages has opened them up to new audiences.

UNICEF offices usually actively engage in distributing their research and in bringing it to the attention of national government officials and politicians. For instance, to mark the launch of research into the impact of repatriation on children's psychosocial health (*Best of UNICEF Research 2013*) UNICEF Kosovo organized a high-level forum with ministry officials and representatives of various institutions.³

UNICEF has often successfully used research findings to reach out to stakeholders and bring them together in round-table discussions. Following the publication of research examining the impact of the hotel industry on child rights in Mexico (*Best of UNICEF Research 2017*), UNICEF organized a round table with the Mexican Ministry of Tourism and approximately 10 large hotel chains to discuss recommendations and good practices in support of child rights.⁴

“The research uptake for this study was very high. The report was widely read and also referred to in the Parliament of Namibia.”

Gerrit Maritz on the Study of Positive Deviant Schools in Namibia, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2017* finalist¹

“Zambia's Ministry of Community Development [and Social Services] played a key role in the research and was involved with the drafting process. The research was one of the first of its kind and received a lot of attention.”

Paul Quarles van Ufford on Social Cash Transfer Scheme: 24-month impact report for the Child Grant Programme, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2014* finalist²



Romain Sibille
@RomSibille

Congratulations to my co-researchers @FrancisWest1 @samahabbasi !!! @UNICEFMexico

“ We just received a request to present the methodology to a South East Asia civil society coalition. There seems to be growing interest in the methodology and findings.”

Ali Aulia Ramly on behalf of the research team for A Financial Benchmark for Child Protection, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2017* finalist⁶





GAGE programme
@GAGE_programme

Delighted to see that @ODIdev and @UNICEFpalestine’s report on understanding the needs and perspectives of #children with #disabilities, has been selected as one of the 12 best research reports from the last year by @UNICEFInnocenti:

Research findings have also been presented in schools, national parliaments and at national and international academic and practitioner conferences. The findings of an investigation into violence in schools in Serbia (*Best of UNICEF Research 2015*) were of interest to academic researchers as well as teachers, and so presentations were made to the government, in Serbian schools and at universities, including at the University of Belgrade’s Institute of Psychology.⁵

In many cases, being selected as a *Best of UNICEF Research* finalist was found to improve the uptake of research findings. Many finalist teams reported significantly greater awareness of their research within UNICEF and externally, as well as more opportunities to advocate for their programme. Research findings may also attract new publicity in the mainstream media as a result of their inclusion in *Best of UNICEF Research*.

TABLE 2. SHOW OF HANDS: HAS THE *BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH* EXERCISE HELPED TO STRENGTHEN THE UPTAKE OF YOUR RESEARCH?

It has given more visibility to my research within UNICEF		16
It has helped me advocate for my programme internally		12
It has given more external visibility to my research		10
It has helped my engagement with other UNICEF sections		9
The research has received more mentions on social media, at conferences and in other communications and events		6
It has strengthened the internal impact/uptake of my research		5
It has helped in raising further internal funding		2

Source: Results from a survey of 20 past finalists conducted in 2017.
Note: Respondents were able to select more than one option.

EDUCATION, EQUITY AND EVIDENCE ON A GLOBAL STAGE

“Rich Kids In Low-Income Countries Get Most Of The Public Education Money: UN,” reported the *International Business Times* in January 2015. “Students Not Learning Basics,” declared *Voice of America News*.

The source of the headlines was a UNICEF report launched at the World Economic Forum in 2015, by a panel featuring United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown, musician and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Angélique Kidjo, and the then Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF Yoka Brandt.

The launch was a key event at Davos, Switzerland, that year – not only because of the high-profile panel members, but also because they delivered a substantial piece of global analysis. Produced by the UNICEF Education Section, *The Investment Case for Education and Equity (Best of UNICEF Research 2016)* is a comprehensive survey of the global research on investments in education since the 1990s.⁷ Informed by more than 800 surveys in 139 countries, the research shows how an additional year of education leads to a 10 per cent increase in income on average for an individual – and more if that individual lives in a low- or middle-income country, or is female. The report also provides evidence-based recommendations for

more equitable and efficient public education spending.

Evidence like this has been used extensively ever since. “Many country offices have read and used the report findings for their programming and policy and advocacy work with governments,” said Matthieu Brossard, who supervised the research project. “Some have replicated similar investment case work at country level, for example, Romania.”

The findings and recommendations also provided a foundation for a subsequent research piece, *The Learning Generation* report by the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, which is chaired by Gordon Brown.⁸ This too was instrumental in raising the alarm about the need to increase investment in education, and in setting up appropriate mechanisms to do so, including the International Finance Facility for Education.



“The journal publications have been frequently used and cited by national and international researchers, and related papers are being prepared for publication.”

Suying Chang on “The Effect of Iron Deficiency Anaemia in Pregnancy on Child Mental Development in Rural China’, a Best of UNICEF Research 2014 finalist”



Louis Vigneault-D.
@louis_vigneault

Congratulations to @UnicefAsiaPac for the excellent multi-country research on alternatives to child detention in East Asia with insight on #Vietnam. The research has been selected as Best of UNICEF Research 2017 by @UNICEFInnocenti. Read the report bit.ly/2C8dEbR



EthiopiaOnline
@EthiopiaOnline

#Ethiopia

Does drought in Ethiopia leave a lasting mark on children’s lives? – Best of UNICEF Research 2018 |

FURTHER RESEARCH

Several finalist teams said that their project led to more work being commissioned by UNICEF or to new projects involving other researchers. Such projects may aim to confirm the results of original investigations or to examine whether a successful methodology can be scaled up or transferred to new countries or regions. This is what happened when a cost-benefit analysis of early investments for emergency preparedness in Chad, Madagascar and Pakistan was subsequently extended to include Myanmar, the Niger and Uganda (see case study 4). Another piece of research, into hospital care for small and sick newborns (*Best of UNICEF Research 2018*), has had its uptake strengthened through ‘scaling down’: What began as a worldwide meta-analysis has led to a series of country-level assessments of small and sick newborn care in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India and Pakistan.¹⁰

Further research may aim to fill gaps in the evidence base identified in the initial findings, investigate ways to address the original issue examined, or expand the scope of an investigation into new areas. The research into child rights in the hotel industry in Mexico led to similar research into child rights issues in the country’s manufacturing and import sectors. Likewise, the investigation of violence in schools in Serbia led to efforts to address digital violence (cyberbullying in Serbia).

“The results also fed into the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. For this, we shared findings specifically relevant to East Asia and the Pacific region.”

Grace Agcaoili on *Diversion Not Detention: A study on diversion and other alternative measures for children in conflict with the law in East Asia and the Pacific*, a Best of UNICEF Research 2017 finalist¹¹

FURTHER RESEARCH BREAKS DOWN TABOOS ABOUT MENSTRUATION IN INDONESIA

An investigation into menstrual hygiene management in Indonesia (*Best of UNICEF Research 2016*) identified insufficient knowledge, taboos and misconceptions about menstruation, along with inadequate sanitation facilities at schools, as key issues negatively affecting adolescent girls' school attendance.¹² The effectiveness of various interventions to tackle these issues was studied in a subsequent research project that was informed by the original work. Innovative communication materials – specifically, a menstrual hygiene management comic book – were developed

to help increase the level of knowledge among girls, and a YouTube video was created to encourage boys to stop bullying menstruating girls. A comparison of results from surveys conducted before and after the interventions pointed to their success: Levels of knowledge and openness about menstruation increased among adolescent girls, while the number of boys who believed it was acceptable to bully menstruating girls declined.

“The findings build upon those gathered from the formative research,” the research team reported in a presentation

of their follow-up work. “The encouraging results show positive impact and have helped, via evidence-based advocacy, to convince the government of the importance of this issue.... The menstrual hygiene management tools have already been scaled up by UKS [Usaha Kesehatan Sekolah, the Indonesian national school health programme] into 340 schools in 2017 ... reaching over 30,000 adolescents – the learnings from this intervention at scale will help to further improve menstrual hygiene management programming.”



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- 1 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 2 *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 3 *UNICEF Research for Children 2013*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/unicef%20research-gb-web.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2019. All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
- 4 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 5 *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 6 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 7 *Best of UNICEF Research 2016*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/854-best-of-unicef-research-2016.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 8 International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, *The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world*, n.d. Available at: <<https://report.educationcommission.org/report/>>, accessed 17 September 2019.
- 9 *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 10 *Best of UNICEF Research 2018*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1002-best-of-unicef-research-2018.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 11 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 12 *Best of UNICEF Research 2016*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/854-best-of-unicef-research-2016.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.



PATHWAYS TO LONGER-TERM RESEARCH IMPACT



Saskia Osendarp
@OsendpNutrition

Such a treat to read @UNICEF Innocenti best #research reports, including how triple #fortified rice can help to reduce #HiddenHunger in children in Cambodia.

“Another example of impact is that India’s Mother and Child Protection Card, which is used to track the health of mother and child, has for the first time included a section on children with disabilities and the importance of early detection. The card currently reaches 89 per cent of mothers in India.”

Pravin Khobragade on the ‘Formative Research Report on Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Caregivers of Children with Birth Defects and Developmental Delays’, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2017* finalist³

Every UNICEF office that conducts or commissions research wants its work to have a positive impact on the world. It can be a long road from publishing results to seeing lasting change – but quite a few finalist teams can now see their research well on its way to making a difference for children, whether through policy, law or the direct efforts of teachers and care workers. The ongoing advances underline what makes these reports the best of UNICEF research.

INFORMING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

One clear added value of UNICEF research comes from the operating model of working closely with governments. This means that the time taken for research to influence policy can often be shortened and impacts enhanced.

Such policy impacts may be on a worldwide scale – as with one experimental inquiry into the effectiveness of various methods of fortifying rice with vitamin A, iron and zinc (*Best of UNICEF Research 2017*).¹ Despite its narrow focus on Cambodia alone and its highly technical findings, the report’s robust evidence went on to be used in WHO public health guidance for a global audience.² In this way, the research is helping other low- and middle-income countries to make informed investments in this emerging strategy for better child nutrition.

Research design is key to generating this type of impact. Research that was conducted from the outset with the aim of developing recommendations for a particular purpose was often reported to have influenced specific policies or programmes. Indeed, a 2015 finalist report on water quality and faecal contamination went as far as informing the monitoring targets for the SDGs (*see case study 2*). And correctly designed, a research project’s data collection approach could also be scaled up for monitoring purposes.

On a single-country scale, research findings can bring about rapid shifts and lasting benefits. Finalist research has led to changes in legislation, to public expenditure reviews and to reviews of national curricula – as happened for professional midwifery education in Mongolia (*see case study 5*).

In Namibia, an investigation into the problems facing schools in the most remote areas, where less than 1 per cent of children finish secondary school (*Best of UNICEF Research 2015*), provided the government with insights about the uneven ‘teacher landscape’.⁴ It influenced a public expenditure review of core government funding in regard to the financial incentive scheme for teachers working in remote schools.

FIGURE 5. ILLUSTRATION FROM THE MOTHER AND CHILD PROTECTION CARD USED IN INDIA



Source: © Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

Other research has informed advocacy and awareness-raising efforts among governments, NGOs and other partners. This may happen through meetings and training sessions – or simply through attention-grabbing analysis. In this vein, a regional analysis of laws on preventing violence against children (*Best of UNICEF Research 2015*) has fostered constructive competition between member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁶ The report employed a visual scheme of traffic lights, with red indicating a lacking legal framework: With annual updates on progress in legislation, lawmakers are motivated to turn their country's red lights green.

INFORMING PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN

Research can help practitioners to better serve the needs of children. By working together with practitioners in schools, health services and elsewhere, UNICEF offices and partners have incorporated research findings into, among other things, public health messages; education for teachers, nurses and midwives; C4D strategies; and community interventions.

Sometimes, findings and follow-up stakeholder discussions help to identify, achieve recognition for and scale up existing good practices. In France, based on pivotal research into the experiences of unaccompanied children in migrant camps (*Best of UNICEF Research 2017*), UNICEF was able to develop awareness-raising

“It was one of the first reports about this topic and helped to put climate change on the radar within UNICEF. For example, UNICEF Mongolia now has a stronger focus on climate change in programming. Globally, UNICEF is now more engaged with work on climate change and the environment.”

Jill Lawler on Children's Vulnerability to Climate Change and Disaster Impacts in East Asia and the Pacific, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2013* finalist⁵

“An internal impact assessment has shown that the research influenced the Zambian Government’s decision to increase its budget allocation for the CGP [Child Grant Programme] from US\$3.5 million in 2013 to US\$30 million in 2014, raising the number of people reached by the programme from 60,000 to 190,000.”

Paul Quarles van Ufford on Social Cash Transfer Scheme: 24-month impact report for the Child Grant Programme, a *Best of UNICEF Research 2014* finalist⁷



UNICEF Afghanistan
@UNICEFAfg

@UNICEFAfg is proud to be one of the winners in the #2018 Best of @unicef research through its report on #polio. The report uncovers core issues influencing #parents / #caregivers decision making process incl. role of community support . #ForEveryChild #EndPolio

THE IMPACT OF CITIZENS’ VOICES

Some research is influential not only because of its results, but also because of who contributes those results. In Ghana, the 2014 Citizens’ Assessment Report on the Capitation Grant Scheme (*Best of UNICEF Research 2016*) was a pioneering policy evaluation that invited the perspectives of ordinary community members through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.⁵

Citizens shared their experiences with and views on a decade-old grant scheme that had been set up to relieve the burden of schooling costs on poor families. The researchers distilled these inputs into a clear set of recommendations – and since these had come direct from citizens, the country listened.

A national launch with Ghana’s Minister of Education and 10 regional

launches attracted widespread media attention. Groups such as the National Association of Graduate Teachers used the report for advocacy, and one civil society organization applied it to evaluate party manifestos for child rights-related policy promises ahead of Ghana’s 2016 general election.

“For three consecutive years after the launch of the report, UNICEF Ghana’s key messages called for significant increases in the amount of capitation grant per child,” said UNICEF Social Policy Specialist Charles Dzradosi. “Then, in the 2017 Budget, the government increased the capitation grant to public basic schools from the then prevailing amount of GH¢4.50 to GH¢9.00, representing a 100 per cent increase.”



© UNICEF/UND267116/Dejongh

sessions on the best interests principle for children on the move.¹⁰ The French National Committee for UNICEF provides training to both front-line workers and senior managers in NGOs and the public sector and the research findings attracted widespread media attention and public interest.

Meanwhile, the results of a survey of caregivers reluctant to let children receive polio drops (*Best of UNICEF Research 2018*) are transforming the vaccination programme in Afghanistan.¹¹ Numerous refinements include making greater use of local radio in the national communication strategy, using more female and local front-line workers to administer polio drops, and building trust through community influencers and consistency of staff. As part of an ongoing series of polls to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, this research has made a contribution to addressing the social barriers that hinder eradication.



Uppsala University
@UU_University

This makes us very proud: An #UppsalaUniversity study is among the top 12 Best of UNICEF Research 2017. (And it could help save many, many newborns.) [unicef-irc.org/article/1714/](https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1714/)

“The health services in China have since worked on improving public health messages on proper infant nutrition and a national standard for micronutrient supplementation for infants and young children was developed. Pre-packaged soybean powder mixed with multiple micronutrients is being distributed in poorer areas for home fortification of meals.”

David Hipgrave on 'Poor Complementary Feeding Practices and High Anaemia Prevalence among Infants and Young Children in Rural Central and Western China', a *Best of UNICEF Research 2014* finalist⁹

TABLE 3: SHOW OF HANDS: HAS THE <i>BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH EXERCISE</i> HELPED TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPACT OF YOUR RESEARCH?		
It has helped my engagement with government, NGOs and other United Nations agencies		9
Key stakeholders and partners have been more likely to act on the findings		9
It has helped to support UNICEF programmes and/or policy		7
The benefit of the findings to the lives of children has increased		4
It has helped in raising further external funding		2

Source: Results from a survey of 20 past finalists conducted in 2017. Note: Respondents were able to select more than one option.

COMPREHENSIVE CHANGES TO SEXUALITY EDUCATION

With young people in Thailand demonstrating high rates of adolescent pregnancy and HIV infection, a team of researchers worked with teachers and students to understand why comprehensive sexuality education was failing young people and how it could do better (*Best of UNICEF Research 2018*).¹² The team's findings have rapidly resulted in national action.

The research was timed perfectly to inform the implementation of the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention and Alleviation Act (2016). "The Act states that the Ministry of Education has the legal mandate to offer sexual education, so this was one of the enablers for sure, for the Ministry to act on the recommendations of the research," said Beena Kuttiparambil, Chief of Adolescent Development and Participation at UNICEF Thailand.

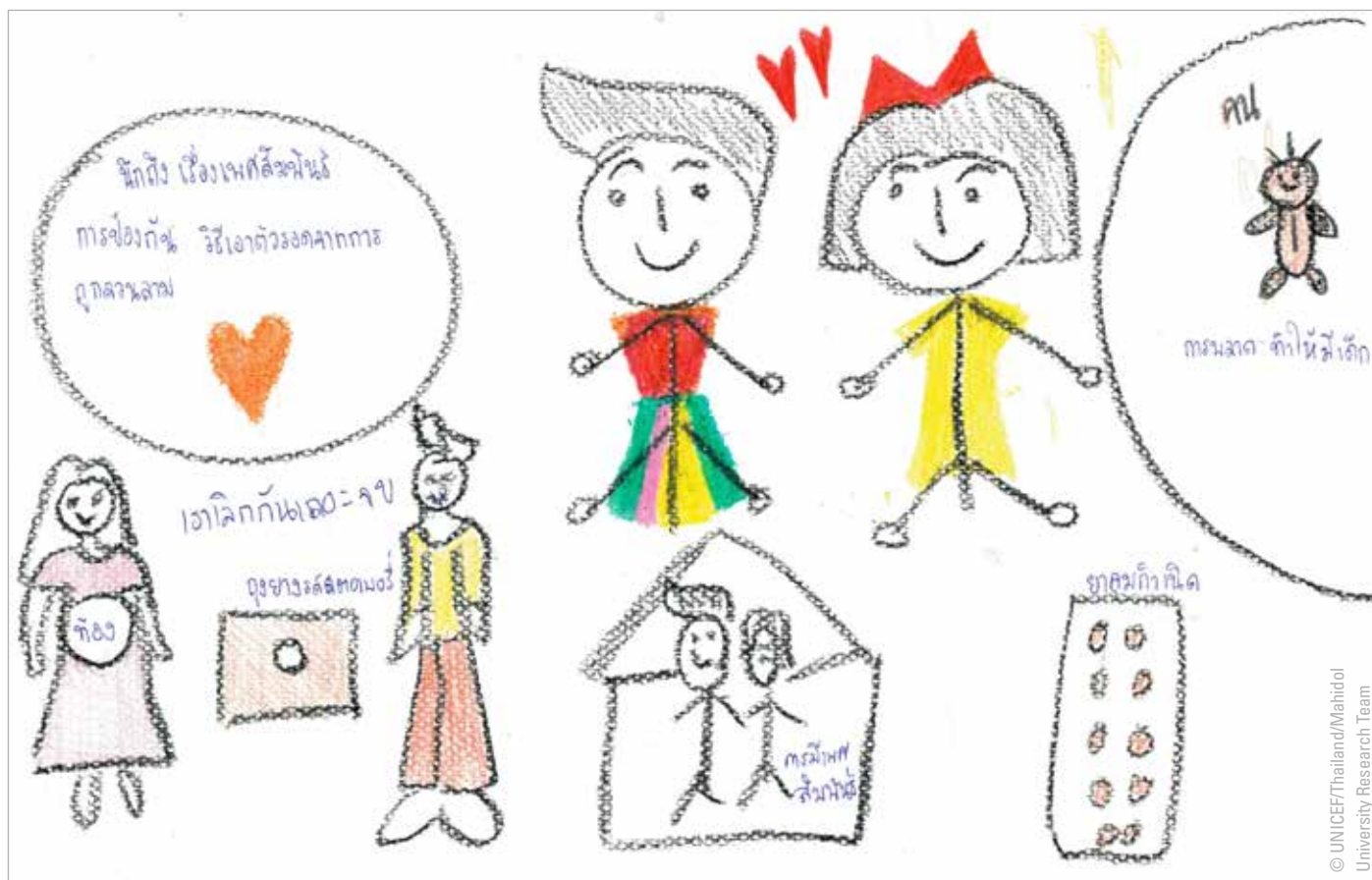
One development under the Act is an e-learning platform for educators, which the research helped to shape. It incorporates modules on learning management, behaviour change and communicating with children and parents within Thai culture. More than 22,000 teachers, supervisors and administrators have enrolled so far, and the next



phase will be the launch of a similar platform for students, as mentioned by Rangsun Wiboonupattum, Education Officer at UNICEF Thailand.

Based on the findings, UNICEF has given financial and technical advice to a partner NGO, P2H, in support of its online health platform LovecareStation.com. Supported by its many young volunteers who run the platform and conduct outreach at schools, more than 750,000 young people accessed information, referral or counselling services through the website in 2018.

Most importantly, the research has been an instrument by which to convene stakeholders and together examine the practice of comprehensive sexuality education. Beena Kuttiparambil now notices its impact in many stakeholders' narratives: "For example, the Ministry of Public Health as well as other key stakeholders have mentioned 'the need to reach adolescents in different ways'. This discourse has definitely been influenced by the research."



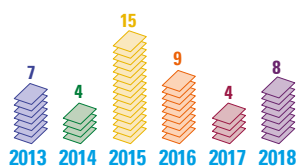
© UNICEF/Thailand/Mahidol University Research Team

- 1 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 2 World Health Organization, *Guideline: Fortification of Rice with Vitamins and Minerals as a Public Health Strategy*, WHO, 2018. Available at: <<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272535>>, accessed 17 September 2019.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 5 *UNICEF Research for Children 2013*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/unicef%20research-gb-web.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 6 *Best of UNICEF Research 2015*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/783-best-of-unicef-research-2015.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 7 *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 8 *Best of UNICEF Research 2016*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/854-best-of-unicef-research-2016.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 9 *Best of UNICEF Research 2014*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/742-best-of-unicef-research-2014.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 10 *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/927-best-of-unicef-research-2017.html>, accessed 15 September 2019.
- 11 *Best of UNICEF Research 2018*, available at: <www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1002-best-of-unicef-research-2018.html>, accessed 14 September 2019.
- 12 Ibid.

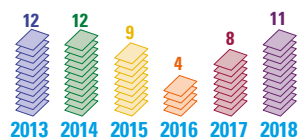
SUBMISSIONS 2013–2018

FIGURE 6. ORIGIN OF *BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH* SUBMISSIONS

- **478** submissions
- **70** finalists
- **432** pages of *Best of UNICEF Research*
- **29,732** downloads from the UNICEF Innocenti website



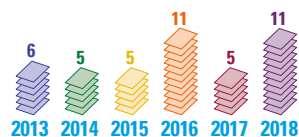
UNICEF Headquarters



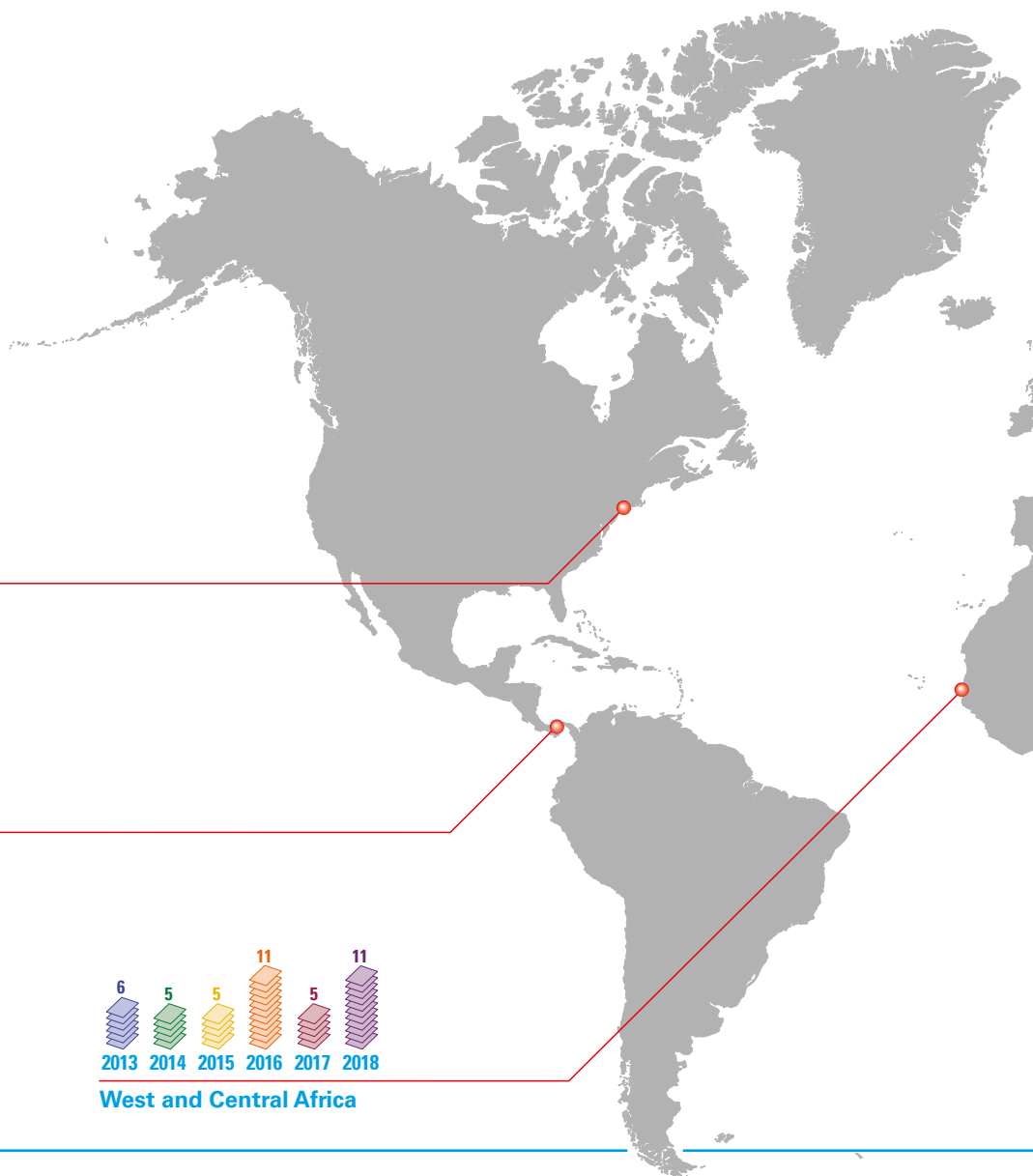
Latin America and Caribbean

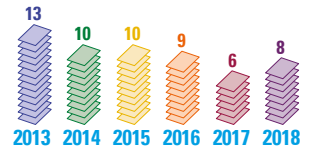
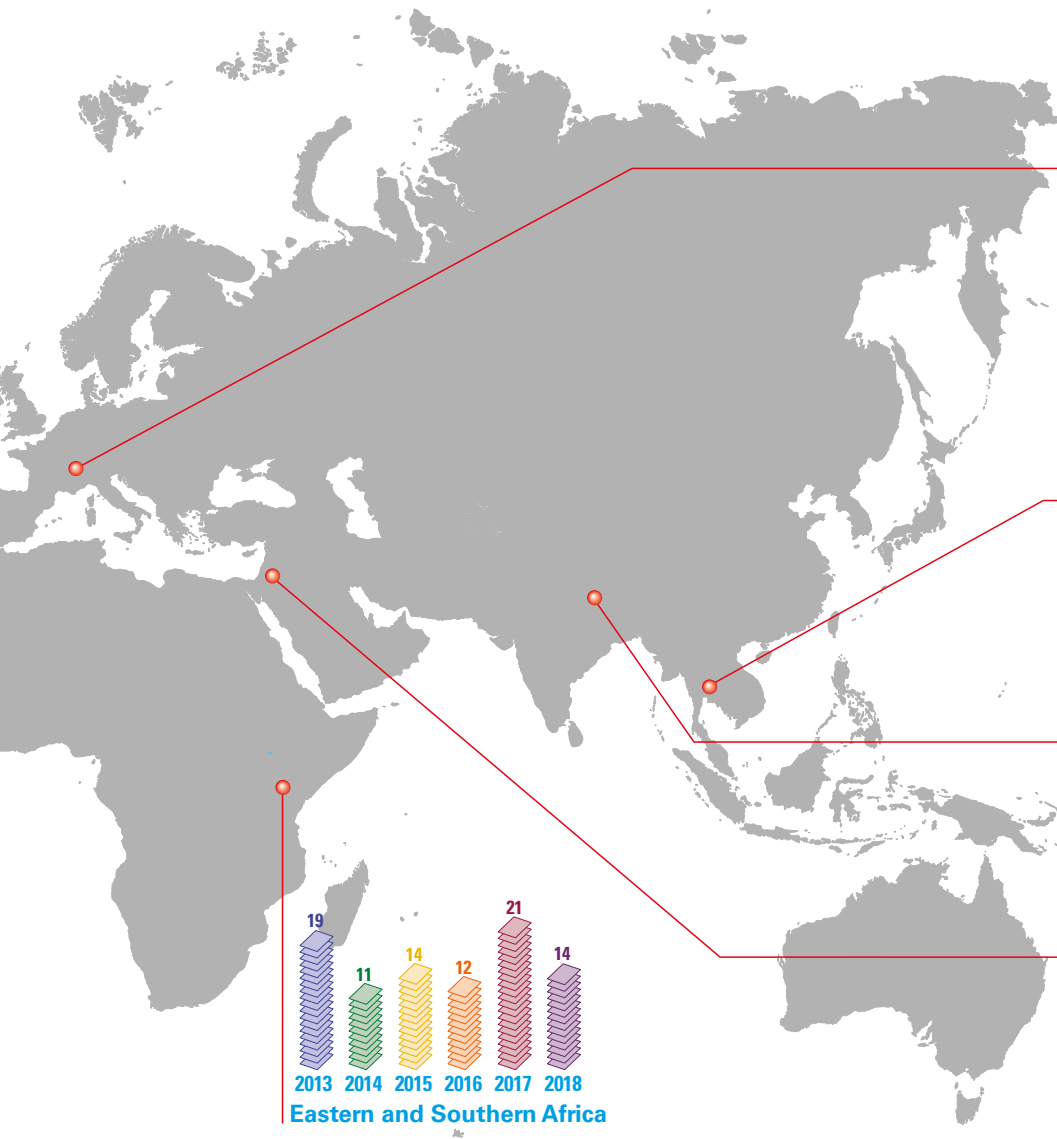


National Committees

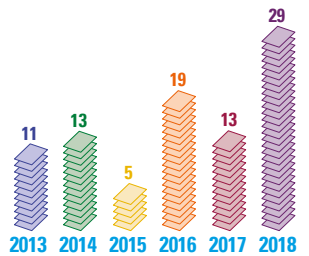


West and Central Africa

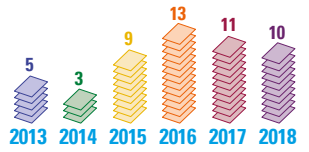




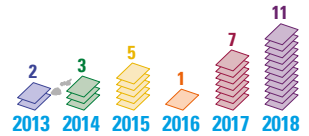
Europe and Central Asia



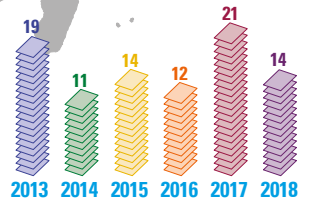
East Asia and the Pacific



South Asia



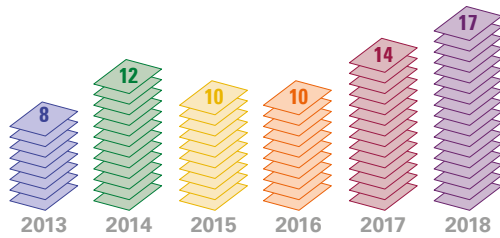
Middle East and North Africa



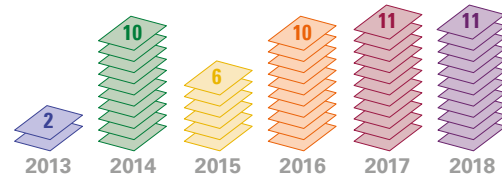
Eastern and Southern Africa

FIGURE 7. BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH SUBMISSIONS BY THEME

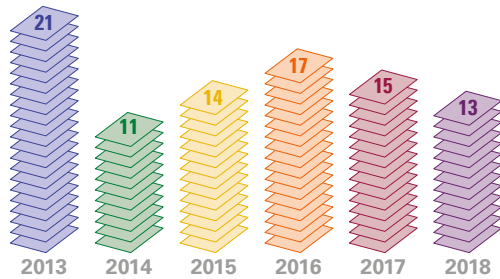
Child protection



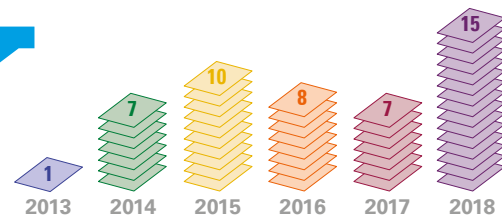
Nutrition



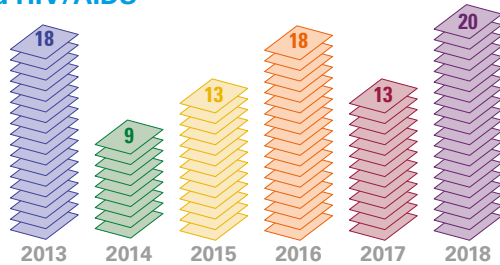
Social inclusion



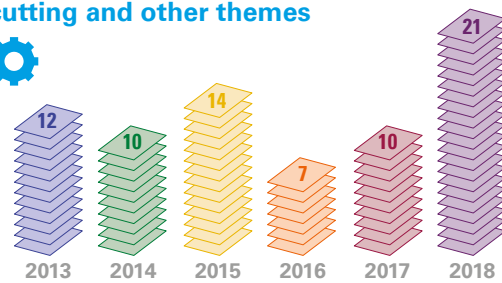
Water, sanitation and hygiene



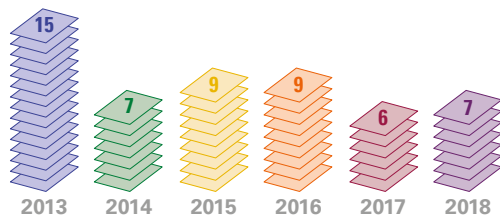
Health and HIV/AIDS



Cross-cutting and other themes



Education





© UNICEF/UN0276437/Amahbashi

THE VALUE OF THE *BEST OF UNICEF*
RESEARCH EXERCISE: REFLECTIONS
FROM UNICEF STAFF

The benefits of the exercise have become clear over the years to those who submit their research for consideration, to those selected as finalists each year and to everyone who reads and uses *Best of UNICEF Research*. The value of the exercise is described here in quotes taken from interviews with finalists and from a survey of other UNICEF staff.

RECOGNITION AND VISIBILITY

“It motivated us to work on quality research to submit each year. So, when we were undertaking these research projects, we were mindful of the fact that **the work would not stay on the shelf**, but that it could be visible in the competition.”

“It is a demonstration of how **serious research is important for evidence-based programming**.”



HEARD Research
@HEARD_UKZN

Our study on the economic vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities is featured in the Best of @UNICEF Research [👉 bit.ly/2aE5Th0](https://bit.ly/2aE5Th0)

“*Best of UNICEF Research* made a **difference in helping us to sell the research findings**. Previously, the government did not want the findings to be published, but we were able to advocate to publish it because of the recognition.”

“Within UNICEF, it is like a **Nobel Prize** – it really helps to position a subject.”

“**It has enhanced visibility for child rights in the business sector**. This is a new line of work and the programme colleagues do not recognize it so much yet. They were not expecting that this type of work would be recognized in *Best of UNICEF Research*. Therefore, this has been positive for those working on child rights and business all over UNICEF.”

“The way **the summaries were produced was especially useful and efficient**. The Country Office of Mexico was very proud of the recognition in *Best of UNICEF Research* as it was the first time that Mexico was among the finalists. Colleagues were very impressed. The Representative of UNICEF Mexico was keen on the research findings and the research received regional attention.”

“**It’s important at a personal level and at a professional level**. To the Representatives and the people who I personally meet outside at conferences, I always mention this and they always recognize that this is an important achievement.”

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

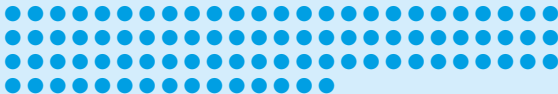



“Being a *Best of UNICEF Research* finalist has made a difference for the impact of the research, as this has given the report status and **led to contact with other country offices and thereby increased knowledge exchange**.”

“*Best of UNICEF Research* is a **powerful knowledge exchange mechanism**. It’s great that three winners are able to present at the DREAM conference. Communication about the importance of high quality research and, consequently, the applicability of the evidence in practice, is very important.”

“**The summaries developed for layman understanding were super**.”

“For our own research work, it is very helpful to learn from selected high quality research with well-designed methodologies. *Best of UNICEF Research* highlights research findings that are directly applicable in UNICEF’s work, which is often different from less practical research that is published in journals.”

TABLE 4. SHOW OF HANDS: HAS THE *BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH* EXERCISE HELPED TO INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT UNICEF ACTIVITIES IN OTHER SECTORS/REGIONS?

I have learned about work carried out somewhere else at UNICEF		90
Information gained has been directly or indirectly applied to my work		26
I have found opportunities to scale up existing work		26
I have explored collaboration on research with other offices		23

Source: Results from a survey of 124 readers within UNICEF conducted in 2017.

Note: Respondents were able to select more than one option.

“I have learned about UNICEF research projects carried out in the field and used them **to inform reviews and documents for my work.**”

“It **contributed to knowledge management** and existence of credible information, which can facilitate planning and decision-making.”

CAPACITY BUILDING TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH QUALITY

“The **feedback** regarding both submissions was **accurate, quick and constructive.** The comments have helped in terms of planning next studies and provided guidance on which pitfalls to avoid.”

“The **exercise does foster an internal drive to generate high quality evidence,** and, of course, reliable research that demonstrates clear results is much more likely to be used.”

“After *Best of UNICEF Research*, **colleagues reached out to me for advice** on the quality of their research projects.”

“The team at Innocenti has been very responsive, efficient, proactive and easy to work with. They always responded in time and the feedback on the research was helpful. It’s also good that **ethics has now become a prime consideration** in the assessment.”

“The research disseminated through *Best of UNICEF Research* has inspired some ideas that I implemented in our work. It gives me **ideas on how to better shape research (methodology)** and how to better shape our interventions (effectiveness and efficiency).”

“I have used **examples from *Best of UNICEF Research*** in research management training.”









@EducationEquity
@Equity2030

So pleased to have @equity2030 research featured in BEST OF @UNICEF RESEARCH 2018! Tune in Mon 12/24 for more abt our study on the effect of female #teachers on girls enrollment & retention in #Nigeria. #gender #equity @fhi360 @UNICEF Innocenti @FHI360EPDC unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/BOUR_%202018_WEB_Rev.pdf...



© UNICEF/UN0148747/Noipe

TABLE 5. SHOW OF HANDS: IN WHICH AREAS DID THE *BEST OF UNICEF RESEARCH* EXERCISE IMPACT ON YOUR AWARENESS OF RESEARCH QUALITY?

Methodology		14
Writing and presentation		12
Potential for impact		10
Innovation and originality		8
Conceptualization		7
Ethics		7

Source: Results from a survey of 46 past submitters conducted in 2017.

Note: Respondents were able to select more than one option.

“The exercise encouraged and helped keep morale high with a team that works in very harsh conditions and is not used to doing research.”

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

“*Best of UNICEF Research* helped to build co-ownership among colleagues. Regional research involves a lot of effort from many country office colleagues. They were very proud to be recognized as a finalist and shared the news with stakeholders. Acknowledgement from supervisors led to further empowerment.”

“When engaging with the Ministry of Education, we would mention the fact that the report was in competition for the *Best of UNICEF Research*, to present the work and showcase its strength (even before it was selected as a finalist). The Ministry of Education was very happy to hear the research was being disseminated widely.”

“The University of North Carolina, a research partner, was enthusiastic about the exercise. And, in any case, the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise is useful for internal advocacy.”

“The citation inspires us, especially our colleagues in the country offices, to continue working for children in conflict with the law and find alternatives to detention despite the challenges we are facing with some governments.”

“Just to be able to say that it was viewed, reviewed and vetted by more people is a good validation for the research, and that’s also good for the future. This further established a positive relationship with the National Statistical Bureau. They have better cooperation and UNICEF gets access to data.”

“It has also created funding opportunities, for example, the Swiss [National] Committee for UNICEF offered to contribute towards follow-up steps. However, at the local level it has proven most effective to promote the findings with the governments and work on public advocacy to raise the dialogue (for example, in national media).”



Mary Kinney
@maryvkinney

#EveryNewborn bottleneck analysis paper in @TheLancet wins @UNICEF research award [everynewborn.org/every- ...](http://everynewborn.org/every-...)



RECOMMENDATIONS AND IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

The first six years of the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise were only the beginning. Throughout the retrospective process, we collected thoughts on how the exercise can continue to evolve and grow. These came from multiple perspectives: from finalist teams, other submitters of research and readers within UNICEF; from past experts on the external review panel convened to help us pick the ‘best of the best’ every year; from UNICEF regional directors; and from our dedicated review team within the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti itself. Their answers point to exciting possibilities for achieving even greater impact in the years ahead.

FROM FINALISTS AND OTHER UNICEF STAFF

Make the insights available to a broader audience. Innocenti should aim for wider exposure by working with well-known media partners and pursuing social media attention. This could also include producing online videos about the finalists or setting up webinars to guide UNICEF country offices on how to make the most of the research after its publication.

Offer support to produce academic publications following the selection of finalists. While some UNICEF research is published in academic journals, much of it is not, and support in this area would serve as an incentive to teams who are new to the process. Innocenti could direct teams to opportunities for publication, for example, or find ways to support the translation of research into English.

Present the research within the UNICEF New York Headquarters. Finalists valued the opportunity to attend the UNICEF DREAM meeting. They also wished that their work could be shared with higher management and colleagues involved in programming, such as at the Global Management Team meeting or other events held at the UNICEF New York Headquarters.

Seek a wider view on how research is subsequently used and its results for children. Information on pathways to impact helps researchers to become more aware of how research findings can be applied. Ideas for how to do this included conducting: a quantitative survey of impact; a review of past research organized by shared methodologies; and collation of the lessons learned into a structured training course for research capacity building.

Consider a thematic focus for coming years. Some participants thought it might be interesting to design the *Best of UNICEF Research* around a broad theme such as water or nutrition, which would be different each year. This would help offices

“Once a good piece of research has been produced and recognized, office staff have generally shown interest to publish in academic journals. It would be useful to receive guidance from Innocenti on how to best go about this.”

Respondent in interviews with UNICEF staff

“After a number of editions, I would recommend a summary and overall review of similar methodologies and themes with a focus on what we can learn from those methodologies (and findings). For example, financial benchmarking is a methodology that I would like to learn more about from other contexts.”

Respondent in interviews with UNICEF staff

“Include an honourable mention for other submissions and teams to also be encouraged to do research.”

Respondent in interviews with UNICEF staff

“It’s important to involve research partners when the research is recognized in *Best of UNICEF Research*. This fosters more ownership of the success and also increases external attention to UNICEF’s research. More external communication outside UNICEF is key.”

Respondent in interviews with UNICEF staff

to know where to focus efforts in the submission process and allow for in-depth knowledge sharing with specific audiences. Others, however, felt that such an approach would exclude too many valuable submissions in any given year.

Involve more partners and more teams. Research partners, including national research centres and government partners, should be included in the feedback process and recognized too, to encourage their ownership of the success. And means should be sought to showcase other research beyond the year’s top 10 or 12 reports – particularly emerging initiatives that have not yet been recognized.

Expand quality review throughout UNICEF research. Building a robust and academically sound research culture at UNICEF is a big job. Participants saw potential ways of doing this that would be inspired by *Best of UNICEF Research*, but go further. The ideas ranged from providing a larger online compendium of *all* good UNICEF research; to help in raising the quality of research from the outset, including qualitative and national survey research; to systematic research quality assurance similar to the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) for evaluation.

FROM PAST MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL

Give more weight to research that aligns with policies, partners and global goals. Research gains greater potential for impact when it links with national policies and is carried out with government agencies and other stakeholders. And it gains strategic perspective when it links strongly with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sustainable Development Goals, the global climate agenda or the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

Look for research that brings together UNICEF country offices – and university quality. Learning processes involving multiple country offices support UNICEF internally to be a knowledge organization. Having university-affiliated researchers on a team, where cost-effective, strongly enhances scientific quality.

Explicitly encourage mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches. In so doing, reviewers should ensure that qualitative approaches respect all components of the methodology: interviews; observations; and presence in the field.

Embrace learning about ethics. Many *Best of UNICEF Research* submissions reflect on research ethics and practical aspects that could help to enhance learning. These reflections could be developed and shared more widely, including



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through external channels like the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) project website.

Use photos that communicate. The panel noted a frequent disconnect throughout research reports between images of smiling children and the often serious nature of findings. Imagery in *Best of UNICEF Research* should give due regard to the text and speak to readers in a consistent manner.

Target recommendations for impact. *Best of UNICEF Research* publications should clearly classify research recommendations according to who has the authority and accountability to address them.

Monitor impact after research is complete. If possible, UNICEF country offices should be monitored or held accountable to ensure that the findings of key research reports are acted upon. Offices could provide annual reports for three years following the completion of research on progress made in incorporating improvements to research processes as well as in how the findings have been used.

FROM INNOCENTI STAFF

Develop a theory of change. The concept of *Best of UNICEF Research* and its implementation will benefit from a theory of change exercise to see if its original objectives are still being met and determine how it can evolve in the years ahead.

Ensure sufficient technical expertise for internal reviews of submissions. We should seek to identify a preestablished pool of additional internal reviewers from across UNICEF to supplement Innocenti expertise when needed (while taking account of potential conflicts of interest).

Make individual finalists – and all UNICEF research – easier to discover. An interactive online platform could allow users to filter finalists by theme, region or country and access single research summaries as an alternative to downloading an entire *Best of UNICEF Research* publication. A dedicated ‘Best of UNICEF Research’ tag on systems like the Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI) platform would help internal UNICEF users to locate all past submissions. In the longer term, a centralized public repository could help to make all research conducted or commissioned by UNICEF more easily discoverable by external audiences, enhancing its impact.

“The panel gave special attention to ethics in research, which was a part of our review criteria, noting that while some projects provided detailed descriptions of ethics, others moved straight into describing their results and findings.”

External panel for *Best of UNICEF Research 2018*

“Given the investments in research in terms of time and funding, and given the potential impact of many research findings, it would be useful if there was a way whereby country offices could be monitored to implement the findings of key research pieces.”

External panel for *Best of UNICEF Research 2017*



FHI 360
@fhi360

What could determine girls' enrollment & success in #school in northeast #Nigeria?

The answer – female teachers – says our very own @anniecmiley & @WaelM10 in their research cited in @UNICEF's "Best Research of 2018!" Read the report: bit.ly/2LuRUwH #gloaleducation



Rich Mallett
@rich_mallett

Woo! Yeh! Our @ODIdv report on Nepal's Child Grant selected as one of the best pieces of @UNICEF research of 2016

Bring researchers together to share their perspectives and experiences. Convening past finalists for a Future of Research round table event at Innocenti could allow for 'horizon-scanning' to determine future research issues, for better alignment of Innocenti and organization-wide research agendas, and for the identification of promising practices to be scaled up. Another possibility is hosting UNICEF-wide webinars with finalists, focusing on particular themes to enhance lessons learned.

Build in global peer review and mentoring. Finalists could support one another, and future finalists, in accelerating research uptake activities. Insights from the *Best of UNICEF Research* exercise could also feature more prominently in Innocenti's research management training, giving past finalists a voice with which to share their research to peers.

Explore the potential for a retrospective impact case study fund or research impact accelerator scheme. A pooled case study fund could make it possible to independently assess the impact of past finalists. And, as a linked idea, another fund modelled on the Impact Accelerator Scheme run by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council could be made available to finalists who have specific ideas of additional activities they could pursue to enhance the impact of their research, given small-scale supplementary funding.

“A suggestion would be to make insights on *Best of UNICEF Research* impact available to a broader audience. For example, it would be useful to set up a platform or produce webinars showing best practices or providing guidance for country offices on how to make the best of the research after publication.”

Respondent in interviews with
UNICEF staff



for every child, answers

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