

UNICEF Statement - Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 24- 25th June 2020

The direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 crisis is indeed disproportionately increasing vulnerabilities and risks among the weakest and most marginalized children in the world, at an unprecedented scale and speed. New operational constraints are severely threatening our ability to deliver safely and timely.

While we are making all efforts to stay and deliver, including by accelerating innovation and adaptation measures along the lines of Grand Bargain commitments, the circumstances require a grander bargain based on trust, flexibility and streamlining for simpler, more timely programme implementation, higher tolerance to risk, and driven by a common purpose to address inequalities and protect the weakest.

The Grand Bargain is now more relevant than ever, and it can help guide the international and national community through this period. UNICEF appreciates the leadership role of the Eminent Person during this critical time and re-iterates our commitment to addressing key strategic issues at the highest possible level in order to seize the full potential of the Grand Bargain. The challenge ahead of us will require an even greater level of ambition than the original commitments put forward.

In the past year, UNICEF contributed to stronger engagement towards Grand Bargain's commitments both at organizational and interagency level, including through membership of the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group until October 2019, and as co-convenor for the WS 7-8 on Quality Funding, with Canada, Sweden, ICRC, OCHA and NRC.

At the organizational level, UNICEF mainstreamed Grand Bargain commitments in UNICEF's policies and strategies (Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan, Gender Action Plans, etc). More systematic and strategic approach enabled UNICEF to improve results with regard to commitments on localization, transparency, reporting and quality funding, and increased the number of beneficiaries of Humanitarian Cash Transfer (details provided in the Grand Bargain Annual Report 2019).

UNICEF is increasingly focusing on the linkages between humanitarian response and longer-term sustainable development, strengthening resilience to climate change and disasters, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. In May 2019, UNICEF issued a Procedure to facilitate more consistent and systematic linkages between humanitarian and development programmes. The Procedure details key actions and responsibilities and makes risk-informed and conflict-sensitive programming a requirement when developing a new Country Programme.

UNICEF Localization agenda aimed to improve effectiveness of humanitarian response through strengthening government and local actors, including local government authorities, civil society organizations and communities, to prepare and facilitate faster, more cost-effective and better-quality responses to humanitarian crises to deliver on Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCC's) and achieve better results for children.

As a co-convenor of the WS 7-8 (Quality Funding) UNICEF undertook a scoping exercise on cascading of quality funding to implementing partners/NGOs. The results will contribute to the key discussion on localization and quality/flexibility of financial resources to implementing partners.

More recently, and specifically with reference to UNICEF's work during the COVID-19 response, UNICEF has been able to show flexibility with implementing partnerships for the emergency response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

UNICEF has taken steps towards providing more flexibility to partners, in line with the March 2020 IASC Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing. UNICEF has reviewed existing procedures related to partnership management, including emergency procedures; issued internal and external guidance to further increase simplification and flexibility; and hosted consultations and webinars to reduce information asymmetry and solicit field feedback.

UNICEF also engaged on leading interagency efforts in IASC and at country-level towards a meaningful localization approach, and in seeking system-wide solutions to support risk communication and community engagement with the aim to advance participation and accountability to affected populations.

Looking ahead, in relation to the general priorities for the next twelve months, this crisis gives us an opportunity to further accelerate progress in areas of the Grand Bargain that are most relevant to delivering results more efficiently for affected populations such as Quality Financing, Simplified reporting, Localization, Participation Revolution, Use of Cash and social protection.

Finally, it would be important to build on what has been achieved so far and reduce bureaucracies or "heavy maintenance" processes. Meaningful change will require all (donors and agencies) to take more risk and be more open on discussing ways to manage those risks, with higher tolerance and transparency. Flexibility of funding would also require improved quality reporting.

We should also reflect how the Grand Bargain should fit in the future in more effectively enabling the wider humanitarian aid system effective response (links to IASC, GHD, other fora), mindful that we should build on what we have, not create other reforms or other mechanisms, and better connect outside the current mechanism of select donors and partners, including affected populations and crises-affected countries.

We look forward to this annual meeting as an opportunity to pursue such discussions and collective efforts.