RD 1.5a

Re-focusing on Equity:

Questions and answers

UNICEF, NYHQ

November 2010

Table of Contents

1. Introduction ………………………………………………………………………………………………. 4

II. Definitions

* + 1. What does UNICEF mean by ‘equity’? ................................................................. 4
    2. How does UNICEF approach differences in culture and context when talking

about equity? ............................................................................................... 5

* + 1. What aspects of equity are particularly relevant to children? ............................ 5
    2. Who are the most DEPRIVED CHILDREN?............................................................ 5

III. Data and Evidence

* + 1. How can UNICEF sharpen the equity focus of the situation analysis,

with closer attention to the drivers and determinants of inequity?.................... 6

* + 1. How can the equity focus be integrated within existing data collection

efforts, such as MICS? ………………………………………………………………………………….... 8

* + 1. How can we capture and track the multiple forms of deprivation

that children experience at the same time (e.g. poverty and disability,

gender, and ethnic discrimination)?.................................................................. 8

* + 1. How should equity considerations be built into monitoring

and evaluation frameworks and activities, including the equity tracker?............ 9

* + 1. What is an equity-focused country programme?.................................................. 11
    2. How do equity-based programmes differ across country contexts,

such as Middle Income and Least Developed Countries?..................................... 11

* + 1. will UNICEF’s equity focus prioritize one country context over another?.............. 12

IV. Programmes

* + 1. What binds the equity approaches Used by different sectors;

what is the common programmatic thread?...................................................... 12

* + 1. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus

in health and nutrition? …………………………………………………………………………………. 13

* + 1. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in

Water and Sanitation (WASH)? ………………………………………………………………………. 14

* + 1. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Education?............. 15
    2. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in HIV/ AIDS?............. 16
    3. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Child Protection?.... 17
    4. How does UNICEF’s equity agenda relate to its foundation strategy

on human rights?............................................................................................. 18

* + 1. How does UNICEF’s equity agenda relate to its foundation strategy

on gender equality?.......................................................................................... 19

* + 1. What are the implications for UNICEF’s work on Communication for Development? 19

V. Policies and Policy Advocacy

* + 1. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in

Policy Advocacy, social policy, and Partnerships for Children’s Rights? ..….………. 20

* + 1. How are offices advised to deal with sensitive issues

relating to the drivers of inequity?.....................................................................21

* + 1. What corporate support is envisaged to enable offices to tackle sensitive issues?.....22
    2. What are the implications for UNICEF’s position on USER FEES?……………………………..22
    3. How does the equity focus impact UNICEF’s position in the debate

between universal and targeted approaches?.......................................................23

VI. Partnerships

* + 1. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnership with governments?.....24
    2. How does the equity agenda impact UNICEF’s partnerships with UN agencies

and other inter-governmental organizations and

global programme partnerships?........................................................................24

* + 1. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnerships

with National Committees?.................................................................................25

* + 1. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnerships

with the private sector and civil society, including NGOs?.................................... 25

* + 1. What are the implications for UNICEF’s work with communities?............................ 26

VII. Emergencies

* + 1. How does the concept of equity apply to emergency contexts and fragile states?...... 27
    2. What does the equity focus mean for UNICEF's engagement with

‘host communities’ and ‘displaced populations or camp populations,’

in particular when host communities themselves are deprived?..............................27

VIII. Internal Coherence

* + 1. How does the sharpened focus on equity relate to the other major initiatives

we have been working on, such as the Accelerated Child Survival and

Development strategy and follow-up from the All Africa Rep’s Meeting

and Asia Pacific Reps meeting? ……………………………………………………………………………. 28

* + 1. How will UNICEF ensure the timely communication of internal information,

including developments and lessons learned?........................................................28

IX. Human Resources

* + 1. What does the equity focus mean for how UNICEF manages its human resources?......29

X. Roll out

* + 1. Will UNICEF develop specific ‘equity initiatives’?.......................................................30

Re-focusing on Equity: Questions and Answers

I. introduction

To clarify key conceptual and programmatic aspects of UNICEF’s sharpened focus on equity, NYHQ compiled a series of commonly asked questions and answers on equity. The questions were solicited from UNICEF’s seven Regional Offices and the answers prepared by Offices across NYHQ, based on inputs from colleagues across the regions. The 36 questions and answers presented below do not address all of the questions raised to date by colleagues across the organization, but lay the foundation for a common understanding of what equity means to UNICEF’s core programmes, policies, partnerships and work processes. The ‘Q&A’ will continue to evolve in parallel with our ever-increasing knowledge of and experience with equity-focused approaches.

II. Definitions

1. What does UNICEF mean by ‘equity’?

For UNICEF, equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias, or favouritism. This interpretation is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which guarantees the fundamental rights of every child, regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location, or other status.

Inequities generally arise when certain population groups are unfairly deprived of basic resources that are available to other groups. Whether a disparity is ‘unfair’ or ‘unjust’ depends on the context. For example, young adults tend to be healthier than elderly adults, and female newborns generally have lower birth weights than male newborns. These disparities cannot be described as inequities since they are caused by unavoidable biological factors. If, however, girls and boys showed dramatic differences in nutritional status or immunization levels, the disparity would likely be due to social rather than biological factors, and would therefore be considered unnecessary and avoidable. Gender discrimination and other social, political, and economic forces that systematically deny the rights of specific groups - such as girls, children of minority groups, or children with disabilities - are cause for grave concern from an equity perspective.

It is important to emphasize that equity is distinct from equality. Equality requires everyone to have the same resources. Equity requires everyone to have the opportunity to access the same resources. The aim of equity-focused policies is not to eliminate all differences so that everyone has the same level of income, health, and education. Rather, the goal is to eliminate the unfair and avoidable circumstances that deprive children of their rights.

An equity-based approach to UNICEF’s programmes and policies seeks to understand and address the root causes of inequity so that all children, particularly those who suffer the worst deprivations in society, have access to education, health care, sanitation, clean water, protection, and other services necessary for their survival, growth, and development.

2. How does UNICEF approach differences in culture and context when talking about equity?

From UNICEF’s perspective, and from the perspective of the CRC, the concept of equity is universal. However, UNICEF is sensitive to the different cultural and political contexts in which it works, and recognizes that the causes and consequences of inequity vary across cultures, countries, and communities. Inequity is rooted in a complex range of political, social, and economic factors that include but are by no means limited to:

* Gender discrimination;
* Ethnic, linguistic, minority, and religious discrimination;
* Discrimination due to disability status;
* Structural poverty;
* Natural or manmade disasters;
* Geographic isolation;
* Cultural and social norms;
* Weak governance.

UNICEF’s approach to equity must therefore begin with an analysis of the context in which inequity operates. This analysis informs the design of programmes and interventions that are tailored to address the local causes and consequences of inequity. These initiatives must be developed in collaboration with national partners who can help identify culturally appropriate strategies for promoting equity.

3. What aspects of equity are particularly relevant to children?

The concept of equity is applicable to children and adults alike. However, in many circumstances and in many ways, social inequities disproportionately affect children. When a child’s right to education, basic health, or protection is denied, he or she is deprived of the opportunity to survive, grow, and develop. In most cases, children tend to be deprived of multiple rights, reinforcing their marginalization within society. For instance, a girl may be denied education, health, and protection on account of her gender. The consequences of these deprivations span the life cycle, cutting short the child’s potential to develop her full capacities as an adult. This is not to suggest that inequity among adults is unimportant to UNICEF. Rather, by applying an equity lens to child-wellbeing, UNICEF can contribute to broader social processes aimed at addressing and changing inequities among all members of society.

4. Who are the most DEPRIVED CHILDREN?

Deprivation cannot be identified on the basis of income alone. The multidimensional nature of deprivation makes it a challenge to identify the most deprived children with precision. One approach is to look at the attributes that are generally considered to be common among groups that typically experience multiple deprivations. These include:

* Geography and location of residence or lack of permanent residence, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees, and IDPs;
* Income;
* Racial, ethnic, religious, or other cultural affiliations;
* Minority status;
* Disability;
* Gender.

These attributes represent risks, rather than determinants, of inequity and deprivations. Not all children with disabilities are socially excluded, not all orphans lack access to services, and not all ethnic minorities are discriminated against. To identify the most deprived, it is necessary to study the local risks or drivers of inequity. This type of analysis requires qualitative and quantitative data on the distribution of poverty within a particular geographic or social context.

III. Data and Evidence

5. How can UNICEF sharpen the equity focus of the situation analysis, with closer attention to the drivers and determinants of inequity?

An equity-focused situation analysis seeks to understand the patterns of inequities and their causes. An investigation of the causes and consequences of inequities can be a very useful input to the national policy dialogue and programme planning process, with the overall objective of reducing disparities in child rights and well-being. Applying an equity lens to the situation analysis involves mapping divergent trends and outcomes among different population groups and disaggregating the information to the extent possible, including by geographic area. Key questions to be considered within the situation analysis include:

* How do trends and outcomes differ across population groups and regions?
* How large and persistent are the gaps in access to services and in outcomes?
* What are the underlying and structural causes of the disparities and have these ‘drivers’ of inequity changed over time?
* To what extent does the policy environment proactively address disparities through, for example, the allocation of public resources by region? What policies and measures have been implemented to reduce disparities? What was the impact?
* What are the key policy issues and programme interventions that should be considered in the future relative to specific axes of inequity?

One key level of disaggregation in an equity-focused situation analysis is geographic – that is, mapping where disadvantaged populations live. In many countries, disadvantaged populations are often clustered in specific locations and may be invisible to national poverty data. Mapping permits a spatial representation and analysis of people’s well-being and poverty. Once the exclusive domain of economists and social scientists, poverty/disparity maps are now used by policymakers, NGOs, academic institutions, and private businesses to identify where investments in infrastructure, personnel, or services will have the greatest impact. Sub-national maps, particularly those developed through a participatory process, can help to identify the most deprived children and provide a firm evidence base for proactive interventions that address the identified disparities.

Analysing relatively simple indicators may be sufficient to demonstrate the existence of inequities and spur action. For example, using a rate ratio to demonstrate that ill health is dramatically more prevalent among the poorest groups than the richest is a clear mapping of inequity. Identifying the root causes of inequities would, however, require additional and presumably more complex analysis. One method that can be used for such an investigation is the component analysis, which allows disparities in life expectancy among different groups (e.g. educated and non-educated) to be disaggregated by age and cause of death. This type of sophisticated analyses offers insight into the reasons for disparate health outcomes and helps to inform appropriate policy responses.

The growing availability and frequency of population-based surveys that provide data on child health, nutrition, and education represent a key source of information for an equity-focused situation analysis. However, it is important to note that certain population groups may be excluded from population-based surveys, such as MICS and DHS, due to the sampling techniques used for the surveys. These groups generally include ethnic minorities, refugees, orphans, disabled children, street children, institutionalized individuals, and other groups. Another risk associated with sampling techniques relates to the under-sampling of urban areas, especially slums.

It is important to note too that population-based surveys are generally ill-equipped to accurately capture data on issues related to the demand for certain services, such as household behaviours in seeking education and health care. This blind spot in the survey data can impede the analysis of the drivers of inequities. These gaps can be filled with supplementary research tools, such as focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, appreciative enquiries, and rapid assessments with members of the target group. There may be significant barriers to accessing services which will only be captured through qualitative data collection exercises – for example, the perception of children and parents that services are inappropriate, unsafe, or low quality.

Another useful tool for understanding the drivers of inequities is the ‘bottleneck analysis.’ This tool assesses the conditions that need to be in place for a particular population group to access quality services. From the perspective of a bottleneck analysis, the mere availability of a service is not sufficient; usage rates are equally important. The analysis includes a focus on factors that often prevent the poor from accessing services, such as financial costs, including out of pocket expenditures for service fees and indirect costs such as transportation fees, and poor quality services, which may discourage clients from continuing to use the service. Other factors that prevent clients from utilizing existing services can include cultural insensitivities (e.g. language barriers), discriminatory treatment, and a lack of information.

Analysing evidence gathered through the tools and methods described above can provide a comprehensive overview of context-specific patterns of inequity. Furthermore, facilitating a participatory process that integrates diverse perspectives, including those of target groups, contributes to a robust understanding of the root causes of inequity.

6. How can the equity focus be integrated within existing data collection efforts, such as MICS?

Data collected from population-based surveys, such as MICS, are an important source of the disaggregated data that serve as the primary evidence base for the equity focus. The various survey reports available today contain untapped data on disparities. The survey databases and tables presented in the reports represent a wealth of data that can be analyzed to uncover disparities. Multivariate analyses based on MICS data can shed additional light on the identity of vulnerable population groups and the factors that determine vulnerability. Additional analysis can be performed by combining several background characteristics, such as gender disparities across various quintiles of wealth, or by performing a separate analysis of the urban poor.

It is important to note that survey sampling methodologies generally result in data gaps for minority groups, such as ethnic minorities, refugees, orphans, disabled children, street children, and others. To overcome this problem, it may be necessary to oversample these target groups in the survey design.

Where indicators require sub-national estimates, select indicators may be collected from a larger sample using a short questionnaire. Standard MICS questionnaires can be completed with a smaller proportion of the overall sample. This will ensure the availability of select indicators for sub-national areas and produce estimates with lower confidence intervals.

MICS 4 is now underway. Surveys are expected to be conducted in over 45 countries. Emphasis will remain on generating data on disparities across geographic locations, wealth quintiles, gender, urban-rural divides, ethnic groups, educational levels, and similar categories. The Statistics and Monitoring Section (SMS) will work with Regional Offices and select Country Offices to refine ongoing data collection efforts and collect additional data on disparities.

7. How can we capture and track the multiple forms of deprivation that children experience at the same time (e.g. poverty and disability, gender, and ethnic discrimination)?

UNICEF’s analysis must address the multiple dimensions of inequity. The most deprived children typically experience multiple forms of exclusion simultaneously. Identifying and analyzing the multiple forms of deprivation that children experience is difficult. It requires disaggregated data that is captured through an administrative reporting system or carefully designed survey instruments. In many instances, the methodological challenges have less to do with the existence of disaggregated data than the quality of the data. The sample sizes used for the surveys are often too small to permit conclusions about a particular sub-group. For example, in a country with an ethnic minority population, examining household survey data to better understand the situation of ethnic minority girls or ethnic minority children with disabilities may not be permitted by the sample size. Where there are grounds to suspect that particular disparities have not been adequately captured by the national survey, it may be necessary to develop specialized surveys or to over-sample relevant population groups. Qualitative research methodologies and data can also be used to supplement survey data and strengthen the analysis of the extent and underlying causes of inequity.

Causality analysis exercises should emphasize the multiple dimensions of inequity and avoid too narrow a focus on any one form of deprivation. There is a danger that children who experience multiple deprivations will be excluded by the very constituencies that purport to work on and speak against specific types of deprivation. For example, indigenous girls may not be able to participate in women’s groups that focus on gender equality. At the same time, these girls may find that advocacy groups focused on indigenous people’s rights are dominated by men who are insensitive to gender equality issues. In instances where a country’s development partners tend to focus on the individual forms of deprivation, UNICEF can play an important role in convening the various partners to ensure that all dimensions of inequity are addressed comprehensively.

8. How should equity considerations be built into monitoring and evaluation frameworks and activities, including the equity tracker?

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems improve accountability (to Member States, host governments, donors and target groups), learning (within and outside of UNICEF), and the performance of UNICEF Country Programmes. Monitoring provides information to: a) measure change (or lack of change) in a condition or a set of conditions affecting the full realization of the rights of children and women in a country, region, or globally (e.g. MDGs); and b) measure progress in achieving specific results in relation to an implementation plan. Evaluations can be used to determine whether UNICEF’s Country Programmes are responsive to and effectively and efficiently respond to issues that affect the most deprived children. Evaluations can also be used to determine the impact and sustainability of equity-based programmes.

Framework of Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Components** | **Type of M&E** | **Key Issues** | **Uses** |
| **Situational monitoring** | CCA and Situation Analysis (SitAn), DevInfo, MICS among other tools.  National statistical and reporting systems.  Reporting on the MTSP, MDGs, etc. | MICS, other surveys, and research can be used to identify inequities and suggests avenues for deeper analysis/research.  UNICEF and UN System-wide means for monitoring the status of children and women. | Significant potential at the country, regional, and global levels for learning (structural causes), advocacy, and policy formulation to redress inequities.  As per existing guidance on the SitAn, a human-rights and gender quality analysis can highlight gaps in the fulfilment of rights with a focus on equity.  With the addition of specially designed indicators, can be used to track inequities. |
| **Performance monitoring** | Performance management system focusing on programme and management results.  CCC performance monitoring system. | Are interventions meeting relevant performance expectations, including addressing inequities and achieving results?  In humanitarian contexts, are programmes addressing the needs and rights of deprived children and communities and, where appropriate, with an emphasis on sustainability? | Accountability to the host government, donors, Executive Board and target groups (deprived, marginalized, poor, excluded, etc).  Performance is monitored (typically against milestones and/ or indicators of progress); problems identified; and actions taken by management (development or humanitarian context). |
| **Programme reviews and reporting** | Quarterly or annual technical reviews, Mid-Term Review, UNDAF Reviews.  Self-assessments, quality assurance reviews by Regional Offices.  Country Office Annual Report,  UNCT Report. | Disaggregated monitoring data and information from national systems (and programme-specific systems) on the implementation of equity-focused strategies can be included in these reports. | Reviews and reporting serve mainly as tools for accountability and performance.  They provide opportunities for monitoring information to be shared and discussed and for decisions to be taken. |
| **Specialized Tools** | Equity Tracker. | Geared to determine if UNICEF Country Programmes are reaching the most deprived. The main objective of the EQuity Tracker is to identify what UNICEF is doing at different levels to ensure that the most deprived children are being reached, and to monitor organizational shifts towards a more equity-focused approach. | Supports Country Office self-reflection exercises, so as to inform the refinement of programmatic strategies and advocacy efforts; allows monitoring refinements over time; and serves as a platform to facilitate information sharing and cross-fertilization of experiences and knowledge. |
| **Evaluations** | Evaluations can be used at any point in the programme process, from the design phase (appraisal) to the implementation phase and the end of the programme cycle. | Different types of evaluations can answer questions of particular relevance to Country Programmes addressing inequities:   1. formative evaluations; 2. summative evaluations; 3. developmental evaluations. | Evaluations provide opportunities for learning and accountability. Specifically, they:   1. help to determine if a programme is operating as intended and, where problems have been identified, suggest solutions (e.g. operational research);   2. are useful for determining if a programme addressing inequities should be continued, replicated, or brought-to-scale (e.g. conditional and unconditional cash transfer programmes);  3. are especially useful where the environment and or the programme must constantly adapt to changing circumstances (e.g. where advocacy is a key strategy). |

9. What is an equity-focused country programme?

An equity-focused country programme is a programme that identifies children who are deprived, analyzes the patterns and drivers of inequity, and understands the national context and existing policies and programmes that address inequities. It works with partners to help identify, advocate for, and support the implementation of strategies to address the causes of inequity and to reach deprived children with basic services, care, and protection. The equity-focused country programme defines clear targets for improving the lives of deprived children and routinely monitors the impact and results of equity-focused programmes and policy strategies.

Six broad areas of action are critical for building equity considerations into country programmes:

* Where data gaps exist, as they do in most contexts, improving assessments and monitoring exercises to measure, document, analyze, and understand inequities;
* Understanding the national context, particularly the extent to which national/sub-national policies, strategies, and partners are addressing inequities;
* Defining and formulating results for improved outcomes for deprived children;
* Based on UNICEF’s comparative advantages, adopting and refining equity-focused programming strategies that are based on evidence and aligned with the equity profile;
* Support communication and advocacy efforts that promote equity-focused policies, budgeting initiatives, programming priorities, strategic choices, and other issues related to deprived children;
* Pursue strategic partnerships to coordinate and amplify action for the most deprived children, with UN agencies, government, the private, civil society, and communities.

10. How do equity-based programmes differ across country contexts, such as Middle Income and Least Developed Countries?

Patterns of inequity vary within and between countries. At one extreme are countries in which the majority of the population is deprived of access to basic services and only a small minority enjoys access to a range of benefits. This pattern of massive deprivation is generally found in least developed countries (LDCs) characterized by weak and fragile systems. At the other extreme are countries in which the majority of the population enjoys a wide range of benefits while a minority is deprived of access to basic services. This pattern of marginalization is more commonly found in stable middle-income countries (MICs). As countries move from a pattern of massive deprivation towards one of marginalization, experience suggests that the poor-rich gap in coverage and uptake of services grows in size; this gap diminishes only when the coverage curve flattens and universal access is within reach. An equity-focused strategy for the MDGs aims to change these inequitable trends by focusing additional efforts and resources on deprived groups.

Targeting the most deprived children may be appropriate in a situation of marginalization (MICs), while a universal approach may be better suited to a context of massive deprivation (LDCs). It is important to note, however, that experience with universal approaches shows that public subsidies tend to be captured in large proportion by the better-off. Countries that combine a universal approach with a targeted approach report higher rates of success in reducing inequities compared to countries that pursue only one strategy.

11. Will UNICEF’s equity focus prioritize one country context over another?

The equity-based programming approach does not prioritize one country context over another, since equity is a challenge for all countries. In *Staff News*, the Executive Director made this clear, stating that:

***In general, if you are concerned about equity and the rights of all children, then there is no country to which that does not apply – including the MICs and those in the industrialized world. There is a lot of work to be done everywhere. One size does not fit all, so as we build our equity strategy over the coming months, I want to see it built from the countries up, rather than … New York saying this is how you do it. The work on the effectiveness of an equity approach has used a variety of country typologies, with the explicit understanding that this is not going to become a straightjacket.***

IV. Programmes

12. What binds the equity approaches Used by different sectors; what is the common programmatic thread?

The human rights-based approach is instrumental for understanding the immediate and underlying causes of inequity and for developing programmatic responses that bind together different sectoral interventions in a coherent way. For example, child health and nutrition both depend on access to preventive and curative interventions. Access is largely influenced by the socio-economic status, including education, housing, and income, of the child’s household. Socio-economic status is in turn influenced by the economic, social, and political forces that shape societies and influence the environment in which children live and grow.

A common organizing framework for equity approaches may involve examining: (a) societal factors i.e. the social norms, behaviours, and practices that impact access to services or fuel discrimination and deprivations; (b) services and systems, asking why services are not reaching those who are most in need, and identifying the barriers to access and systems constraints; (c) ‘political’ factors, such as governance, accountability, policy, and legislative issues that reinforce patterns of deprivation among children and communities.

Depending on the relative weight of each of these elements and a knowledge of context-specific actions that work, country programmes decide on the mix of strategies to employ and support. Clearly, there are several strategies that cut across sectors, yielding results in multiple areas, such as community empowerment strategies and certain social protection schemes.

13. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in health and nutrition?

A solid body of evidence suggests a number of ways to address health and nutrition inequities: improved education and health/nutrition promotion; better targeting of services to specific groups; prioritizing diseases of the poor; improvements in the quality of care; incentives for health providers; financing mechanisms to make care affordable to those most in need; and community participation to create a sense of ownership and foster accountability to underserved clients. A range of interventions, if carefully designed, can help to reduce inequities in the coverage of services and outcomes for health and nutrition.

A recent review of UNICEF’s country-level experiences with equity-based health programming revealed that UNICEF could make a valuable contribution to health equity by: promoting an explicit equity orientation in programming and policy-making; supporting the redistributive role of health systems; reinforcing participatory processes; focusing on specific health outcomes; and ensuring national leadership in the process of policy formulation and implementation.

The recent UNICEF study on narrowing the gaps to meet the MDGs recommends the following strategies:

* Disaggregate national data to identify children and communities deprived of basic access to health and nutrition and assess the barriers to access. Additional investments in data collection and analysis will strengthen the basis for equity-focused actions at the national and sub-national levels.
* Invest in proven, cost-effective interventions to avert deaths and reduce stunting. Solutions and technologies exist in all sectors and need to be scaled up.
* Overcome bottlenecks and barriers on both the supply and demand sides. Greater attention needs to be given to service utilization barriers, such as social and cultural norms, the time and distance required to reach essential services, the unevenness in the quality of services, and low levels of awareness of appropriate care-seeking behaviours among underserved communities. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as cash transfers, can help overcome direct and indirect financial barriers. Information, education, and communication solutions can be used to surmount cultural and social barriers. Mobile and outreach services and the innovative use of mobile technology, can greatly diminish the time and distance involved in obtaining services. Above all, policymakers must continue to seek practical solutions to entrenched barriers by revisiting the fundamental question: What barriers continue to keep deprived children and families from accessing and utilizing services?
* Partner with communities to build strong systems. Ensure that remote communities have regular access to services through outreach or community-based services, and promote improved health practices and behaviours. Recent experience from several countries suggests that scaling up cost-effective interventions, including social protection initiatives, for deprived groups at the community level has the potential to help build national systems.
* Recognizing that humanitarian situations exacerbate inequities in health and nutrition, UNICEF must continue to collaborate with a range of actors to ensure progress towards the commitments and benchmarks in the CCCs.

14. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Water and Sanitation (WASH)?

The equity focus in WASH has implications at the country and global levels. At the country level, UNICEF’s WASH programming is focused on supporting sanitation and hygiene behaviour change, as well as improving access to water supply. Data show that the poorest are most likely to lack water supply and sanitation, particularly sanitation, which is one of the most inequitably distributed interventions. Inequities in access to water and sanitation are exacerbated by humanitarian and fragile contexts.

Open defecation remains common in developing countries, particularly among the poor. Community Approaches to Total Sanitation (CATS), now becoming the norm for UNICEF programming, are based on the premise that the entire community can collectively abandon open defecation, thus ensuring that the health benefits are enjoyed by all. Experience shows that using the participatory and empowering self-help approaches of CATS can result in everyone achieving basic sanitation, including the poorest. UNICEF programmes need to work with governments and communities to ensure that this universal approach is rolled out at scale, and to target the poorest communities.

In the area of water supply, it is necessary to direct efforts to under-served geographical areas. UNICEF can support efforts to identify and map these areas. Current initiatives to reduce the cost of borehole drilling and promote innovative service delivery mechanisms will help to make funding go further and to reach more people currently unreached by conventional approaches. Sustainability is crucial; a greater emphasis on supporting local supply chains and promoting appropriate technology and management models will result in sustainable water supplies reaching those populations most in need.

The gender equity aspects of water and sanitation are considerable. Improving water supply and reducing the time required to fetch water significantly impacts girls and women, the primary collectors of water in most households. Improving WASH in Schools is key to keeping girls in school, thus ensuring they obtain an education and avoid early marriage and early childbearing.

There is a need to address the inequities between countries, not just in terms of the progress they are making towards the MDG targets, but also in terms of the way investments, both by donors and government budgets, are targeted. As the recent Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) report shows, too much funding in the WASH sector is targeted to large urban systems in middle income countries, while a relatively small amount of funding is allocated to basic services in poor countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report also shows that few governments have the mechanisms needed to target the poorest with water and sanitation investments. The Sanitation for All partnership aims to address these disparities through mutual accountability between governments and citizens, and between donors and developing countries. UNICEF is playing a key role in this new global programme partnership, which was established in 2010, and continues to support efforts to monitor progress through the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation.

Additional effort needs to be invested in examining the financial implications of an equity focus for WASH. There are some crucial differences between the financing of WASH services and services in other sectors, such as health and education. Compared to other sectors, WASH commodities (soap, water treatment products, and household toilets) are more likely to be provided by the market. UNICEF can facilitate a greater understanding of how best to ensure that poor people can afford essential WASH goods and services, whilst maintaining their financial viability.

15. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Education?

UNICEF’s focus on equity highlights the importance of education for any society as a primary tool for empowerment and transformation, and its essential role in breaking inter-generational cycles of poverty and deprivation.  Across the world and over time, it has been apparent that education, and in particular the education of girls, is a prerequisite for improving the lives of all children in multiple aspects, such as reduced child mortality and under-nutrition and improved maternal health.  
  
Equity-based approaches to education involve removing barriers to education, within and outside education systems, to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all.  This requires particular attention to excluded children, for example through removing barriers to girls’ education and expanding the support services available to girls, especially at the secondary level, with particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable girls.   
  
With regard to policy and programmatic intervention, equity based approaches to education require a more nuanced analytical foundation, based on robust data and evidence, that takes account of the multiple and interconnected factors that contribute to disparities in access and attainment.  Such an analytical foundation provides the basis for appropriate evidence-based measures to reduce disparities.  These include: abolishing school fees; scholarships for girls ;providing school meals, subsidies and cash grants to make "9+1 years" of basic education (including one year of early childhood education and lower secondary) available, accessible, and affordable to the most marginalized children.   
  
Educational outcomes for all children, in particular the most disadvantaged, depend on teachers.  Efforts to increase the number and quality of teachers need to address issues of recruitment, retention, professional development, and employment and teaching conditions. These efforts also need to be specifically tailored to the specific challenges of providing quality education access and outcomes to the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Equity considerations must also be incorporated into education responses to humanitarian and post-crisis situations, including efforts at disaster risk reduction (DRR).  
  
Given the circumstances of the most disadvantaged, issues around transition to post-primary, post-basic and secondary education, vocational training, and lifelong learning can become more prominent in the context of an equity-based approach, given the socioeconomic relevance of post-primary education as well as the importance of the transition from post-primary education to the job market.   
  
An increased focused on equity must also be integrated in partnerships for education.  This includes aligning the efforts of non-state providers, including NGOs, communities, volunteers, and the private sector, with those of national systems to encourage a coherent and coordinated approach to equitable gains in education.

16. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in HIV/AIDS?

Through situation analyses and the maxim ‘know your epidemic,’ UNICEF and its partners already focus on identifying those most at risk of HIV, including the hardest-to-reach, socially excluded, and population groups whose vulnerability has increased due to humanitarian situations. Universal access to prevention, treatment, care, and support for those affected by AIDS requires that UNICEF design and support programmes to reach these groups. In each of the Key Results Areas of the current MTSP, UNICEF demonstrates to governments and donors that it is possible to achieve better overall results by reaching those who are deprived of services because of poverty, social exclusion, youth, or gender.

*With regard to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and Paediatric HIV Care and treatment, key equity considerations include:*

* Elimination of mother-to-child transmission by 2015 requires PMTCT access for those currently not making ante-natal visits to clinics or dropping off in the PMTCT continuum. In Botswana, the best performing African country, the 6% of mothers who do not access ante-natal care account for half of the HIV transmissions. Behaviour change initiatives must be developed and designed to reach these marginalized mothers.
* Decentralise the management, monitoring, and delivery of services to bring them closer to those in need. This may include linkages/ piggy-backing with MNCH services, task shifting, or home-based testing, treatment, and outreach. The Mother-Baby Pack and use of cell phone networks are examples which can be scaled up.
* Promote family-based approaches to HIV, e.g. male involvement and sibling HIV testing can bring in those currently missed.

*With regard to care, protection, and support for children affected by AIDS:*

* Target poor, labour constrained households in high HIV-prevalence communities, realizing that the level of household wealth is a better predictor of children’s vulnerability than orphan-hood or AIDS-affectedness.
* Promote and support modest cash transfers and other forms of social protection to tackle poor access to services and social exclusion by linking households and young people most at risk to appropriate services.
* Empower people living with HIV and youth to deliver care and support services, such as counselling, adherence support, and disclosure in their own communities.

*With regard to the prevention of HIV among young people:*

* Ensure that ‘youth-friendly’ services meet the needs of most at risk adolescents, such as those outside of parental supervision or engaging in transactional sex.
* In low and concentrated epidemics, design and promote prevention strategies, including AIDS and sexuality education, that reach the most deprived youth, including drug users, males having sex with males, and out of school youth.
* In generalized epidemics, empower young people, especially young women, to recognize and map their own vulnerability, including analysis of the drivers of the epidemic and cultural ‘scripts’ which inhibit young women from making optimal sexual and reproductive health choices.

17. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Child Protection?

All children are at risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. For many boys and girls, the risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse is heightened by their age, gender, or ethnic, religious, socio-economic, or other status. An equity-based approach to child protection emphasizes child protection systems (laws, policies, and service provision) and societal factors, including social norms, and seeks to understand the how the two intersect. These two complementary ‘pillars’ are applicable in all contexts, including emergencies. By addressing governance and institutional reform, as well as harmful discriminatory social norms, UNICEF’s child protection strategy focuses on the root causes of inequity using context-appropriate strategies that are consistent with a human rights-based approach.

Equity considerations within child protection include:

* *Identifying the characteristics of deprivation*: Evidence draws attention to the need for a nuanced, contextualized understanding of ‘equity.’ While income-related dimensions of poverty are probably the most important indicators of deprivation and risk, evidence and experience in child protection point to other dimensions of inequity (i.e. based on gender, ethnicity, identity/citizenship, religion etc). Hence, the relationship between deprivation and exclusion and violence, exploitation, and abuse is complex. Programming and policy-related work in child protection and across other programme areas need to be systematically linked with this evidence base to help ensure a consistent focus on reaching the most deprived.
* *Addressing the underlying structural dimensions of exclusion and inequity*: The root causes of issues faced in child protection (i.e. sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, child marriage, and other harmful practices, children in institutional care, etc) are also the root causes of inequities (i.e. socio-economic status, discrimination by gender, ethnicity, and religion). Addressing these issues requires long-term, sustained investments.
* *Child-sensitive social protection and services for children and families*: An equity focus draws attention to the need for child-sensitive social protection and, depending on the context, child and family welfare services for the most deprived, possibly in conjunction with other basic services for health and education. Carefully designed, gender and child-sensitive cash transfers may contribute to these efforts. Additional evaluations and research are required to help identify and address inequities in access to services. This approach also requires global advocacy with other partners (i.e. World Bank etc) for child and family welfare services to be included as an essential and integral part of social development and protection.
* *Enhanced attention to child protection in humanitarian action*: An equity approach necessitates that UNICEF and partners prioritize child protection responses to emergencies. Evidence shows the need for work at the level of systems and social change for appropriate preventions and responses.
* *Cross-sectoral collaboration and linkages*: Cross-sectoral collaboration on child protection issues, such as access to education for vulnerable children, school violence, child labour, migration, and child marriage, can help to address the underlying causes and consequences of inequity.
* *Advocacy and partnerships:* A number of global programme partnerships already exist around child protection and equity (i.e. Together for Girls, efforts to bring about an abandonment of FGM/C, etc), but further attention is needed to build child protection systems and address harmful social norms. Other areas for high level advocacy and partnerships include universal birth registration, ending violence, ending child marriage, and justice for children, including ending pre-trial detention for children.

Although evidence is growing (i.*e. Progress for Nati*ons 2009), child protection has long been challenged by a weak evidence base and a lack of aggregated and disaggregated data. Effort must be made to compile indicators and data on the structural causes of deprivation and exclusion, as well as the availability and accessibility of child protection systems, including laws, policies, and services. The promotion and institutionalisation of universal birth registration is an important strategy to improve the overall evidence base on children’s issues and to strengthen evidence-based planning and programming across all sectors of UNICEF’s work.

18. How does UNICEF’s equity agenda relate to its foundation strategy on human rights?

As part of the UN system, and also as part of its commitments to the CRC and MTSP, UNICEF views human rights norms and standards as its primary frame of reference for everything it does. One of the foundational principles of human rights is stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights - ‘*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’* This is reflected not only in the principle of non-discrimination which appears in the CRC (Article 2), but is intrinsic to the very concept of human rights.

UNICEF’s foundation strategy for a human rights-based approach underpins the equity agenda. Equity cannot be effectively pursued outside of a human rights framework, just as human rights cannot be realised so long as inequity persists.

Achieving sustainable progress and results with regard to equity demands a human rights-based approach. The situation of deprived children, and the structural causes of exclusion and poverty, cannot be addressed without providing those children with a voice and space to participate in decisions affecting them. Those with the power to shape lives must be accountable to the most deprived, if inequities are to be overcome. Discrimination must be identified, understood, and challenged to achieve equitable development for all children. If progress towards equity is made without accompanying progress in other areas fundamental to human rights, it is likely that the gains will only be short-term. Investments in services for deprived regions or groups that are not accompanied by, and based upon, structural changes in governance and in the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of communities are at best fragile.

The equity approach also draws upon UNICEF’s long-standing relationship with key human rights mechanisms, most notably the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Discrimination against Women. In particular, UNICEF’s support to the reporting processes for these and other human rights mechanisms provides opportunities for identifying and raising equity issues.

19. How does UNICEF’s equity agenda relate to its foundation strategy on gender equality?

Gender discrimination is a key driver of inequity and inequality. The concepts of gender equality and women’s empowerment are prerequisites for fair and equitable societies. UNICEF, as a part of the UN system and through its mandate, specifically the MTSP and Gender Equality Policy, is committed to a gender equal world where men and women, and girls and boys, are able to develop and express their full potential.

While it varies in form and severity, gender discrimination is among the most pervasive forms of discrimination. It keeps girls from achieving the education they deserve and presses them into early marriage. It subjects girls to female genital mutilation. It affords them second class access to healthcare. Across all parts of the world, boys and girls are constrained by the expectations of how they should behave and what they cannot do, limiting their development and their freedom to live the life they choose. The consequences of the differing forms of discrimination can be small or large, but all contribute to inequitable outcomes.

At the same time, gender discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination. For example, in Latin America, it is often indigenous girls who are the most disadvantaged with regard to educational attainment. Contextualising gender discrimination within the different forms of exclusion and inequities that children can face simultaneously is necessary for informed programme and policy responses.

It is also true that in some circumstances boys are discriminated against in favour of girls. For example, in some countries, and at some levels of education, boys’ educational attainment is poorer than that of girls. Boys are also sometimes at greater risk of physical violence or injury than girls. While such forms of discrimination against boys are numerically smaller than those experienced by girls, they are none the less important with regard to children’s rights and the equity agenda.

20. What are the implications for UNICEF’s work on Communication for Development?

Communication initiatives are central to broader empowerment processes, through which people arrive at their own understanding of issues, consider and discuss ideas, and negotiate and engage in public debates at the community and national levels. This role in empowerment processes helps distinguish Communication for Development (C4D) from other forms of communication and makes it a vital element in achieving the MDGs with equity. To achieve behaviour and social changes that favour the rights of all children, a mix of communication channels that combine short-term, campaign-style actions with long-term and interactive communication is best. For example,

* C4D plays an important role in promoting positive behaviours for health, nutrition, sanitation, and related areas of importance to the rights and wellbeing of children. C4D can help improve the quality of facilities by strengthening the inter-personal skills of care providers. Capacity development is not only about knowledge of disease and well-being, but also about health worker/patient interaction, whether through one-on-one consultations or regular group discussion sessions. ‘Facts for Life’ is an important resource in this regard. C4D methods and materials need to be locally researched, tested, and developed in partnership with local communities. C4D helps ensure that materials are meaningful to their audiences and available on an ongoing basis.
* C4D successfully enables the community to challenge social norms that exploit, abuse, or violate children. For example, C4D addresses issues related to gender-based violence through programmes that challenge the widespread, tacit acceptance - by both males and females - that sexual violence is 'normal.'
* C4D urges the use of appropriate mix of tools and communication channels, including mass media, as well as interpersonal and ‘mid’ media methods. C4D’s methodology encourages participant groups, especially the marginalized, to become engaged in meaningful dialogue. It is important to reach remote communities, children, and women with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic or religious groups, and to ensure that women and girls participate as fully as men and boys do. C4D’s methodology also recognizes that people may want to change but may not be able to act alone, and works with them to mobilize existing networks or create new ones that encourage more individuals and families to adopt and sustain new behaviours.

An equity focus is inherent in C4D principles and methodologies. The equity agenda will increase the role of C4D as an area of practice so that behaviour and social change communication can be integrated across UNICEF’s planning and programming.

V. Policies and Policy Advocacy

21. What are the programmatic implications of an equity focus in Policy Advocacy, Social policy, and Partnerships for Children’s Rights?

Equity has been, and remains, a central tenet to work in Focus Area 5 – Policy Advocacy and Partnerships for Children’s Rights, particularly in the context of accelerating progress towards the MDGs. Focus Area 5 involves a number of cross-cutting strategies and initiatives, including: the promotion of rights-based and participatory policymaking processes; advocacy for child-sensitive laws, budgets, national development plans, and inclusive social and economic policies; and building alliances that support behaviour and social change on behalf of children. The renewed emphasis on equity requires UNICEF to intensify its efforts in a number of these areas, including:

* *Situation Analysis and Child Poverty and Disparities studies:* Enhanced analysis of the patterns, incidence, and drivers of inequities in each society, including the social, economic, political, and systemic determinants of inequity, such as gender discrimination, ethnic, minority and religious discrimination, discrimination due to disability status, structural poverty, geographic isolation, cultural and social norms, and weak governance. This analysis can be the basis of enhanced advocacy for equity.
* *Strengthen UNICEF’s engagement in national policy formulation and implementation*: Inequities in child outcomes often result from public policies that do not address the needs of the most deprived populations. UNICEF must engage and influence macro policies such as PRSP processes, national action plans, and IMF programmes, as well as state, provincial, and municipal development plans and programmes, to ensure that development strategies systematically prioritize pro-equity and pro-poor policies and programmes.
* *Advocate for equitable budgetary allocations and adequate social expenditures to achieve the MDGs*: Intensify work with government partners, UN agencies, international financial institutions, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure that social development financing is sufficient to achieve the MDGs and channelled adequately and effectively, particularly to policies and programmatic interventions that benefit the most deprived groups. This is particularly important in the current context of post-crisis fiscal adjustment.
* *Integrate policy work across UNICEF’s sectoral programmes*: Health, education, water, protection, and other sector-specific areas should be understood as systems that require adequate legislation, policies, budgets, and implementation arrangements to ensure coverage to the most deprived children.
* *Support social protection systems:* Social protection complements sectoral interventions and can help to achieve greater equity by channelling resources to the most deprived areas and population groups. By engaging in strategic social protection interventions, UNICEF can emphasize an equity focus. Various entry points can be used to enter into this dialogue: national planning process; policy development and/or reform; programme design and implementation; evaluation and learning; advocacy; and civil society engagement.
* *Strengthen the emphasis on civic participation and empowerment, especially among the most deprived children and families*: This process requires actively promoting the empowerment of girls and women at the community, district, state, and national levels.

22. How are offices advised to deal with sensitive issues relating to the drivers of inequity?

There are a variety of ways for Country Offices to deal with sensitive issues relating to the drivers of inequity. In stable and humanitarian situations, Country Offices can:

* *Develop a solid evidence base that illustrates the causes and solutions to the problem*: Strong evidence provides the credibility and legitimacy necessary for advocacy. Ensure that the evidence is relevant and that it is compiled by experts who use reliable methodologies. If evidence that is used for advocacy has been collected from pilot projects, it is important to ensure that it is applicable to the context and environment in which advocacy is being conducted. Ensure the evidence can be easily disseminated.
* *Work with and through partners, including civil society, government agencies, the private sector, and international actor:* Developing partnerships not only helps build momentum, but also helps minimize risks associated with sensitive issues. Sometimes partners can stand behind UNICEF on a sensitive issue, making it easier to deal with opposition. Partners can also act as messengers, especially when it might be difficult for UNICEF to say something on a sensitive issue. Partners can also generate the evidence base. Partners with recognized expertise in a particular type of data collection and analysis can lend legitimacy, credibility, and national ownership to the evidence for equity-based approaches, making advocacy around sensitive issues much easier. It is important that partners perceive UNICEF as objective and trustworthy, and not politically partisan.
* *Analyze national power structures and their influence on the policy environment to understand how these power-relationships work, and to identify ‘safe’ channels for policy advocacy:* This can help to minimize risks.
* *Work with Regional Offices:* Regional Offices can support Country Offices by generating evidence and messages, and by echoing equity-focused messages at the regional level.
* *Plan all advocacy activities and initiatives carefully*: A good plan facilitates an efficient allocation of resources, maximizes advocacy opportunities, minimizes threats and risks, and helps to navigate complex political environments by aligning advocacy on sensitive issues with other, less sensitive areas of UNICEF’s work.
* *Carefully consider the long-term and short-term risks and gains*: Short term gains might involve long term risks, and short term risks might yield long term gains. Ultimately, it is important to remember that while it may be risky to advocate on sensitive issues, UNICEF’s silence also carries risks. The protection and well-being of children is our ultimate goal.
* *Ensure that the equity focus is not lost in humanitarian situations:* The CCCs provide a policy framework for humanitarian action and complex emergencies, guided by international human rights law, including the CRC.

23. What corporate support is envisaged to enable offices to tackle sensitive issues?

Headquarters is developing a series of tools to support Country and Regional Offices that tackle sensitive issues. These tools will include: the recently launched Advocacy Toolkit; training and regional workshops on developing and implementing advocacy strategies; guidance on integrating the advocacy tools within programme planning processes; and analysis of good practice and lessons learned in relation to policy advocacy on sensitive issues.

24. What are the implications for UNICEF’s position on USER FEES?

The equity-focused strategy underscores UNICEF’s position on financing policies, which is guided by the principles of CRC. Article IV of the CRC requires public finance policy to advance a child’s right to adequate nutrition, health, housing, education, and other rights by channeling the maximum available resources for children. Children, women, and deprived families should be included in the budgeting process and reflected in budget allocations, receiving the necessary access to quality health care, schools, and other important services.

The recent UNICEF-commissioned multi-country review of user fee removal in low-income countries shows that removing user fees has the potential to improve access to health services, especially for the poor. In the education sector, ccountries that removed fees, such as Cambodia, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, and Timor-Leste, reported substantial increases in enrollment rates. However, fee abolition alone does not remove all of the financial burdens and opportunity costs facing the poorest households. Pro-equity outcomes are only ensured when fee removal is part of a broader package of reforms that includes increased budgets to offset lost fee revenue, maintain quality, and respond to increased demand.

UNICEF’s support to countries will continue to be guided by what is best for children and a careful analysis of the equity implications of alternative financing and delivery strategies. Such analysis should explore how best to dismantle the multiple barriers to access. This may involve removing user fees, when appropriate. To ensure that fee removal translates into pro-equity outcomes, policy work on user fees must be closely linked to work on social budgets and public finance policy. UNICEF will also strengthen the evidence base on user fees by encouraging rigorous assessments of efforts to reduce barriers to access, including user fee abolition, and by supporting operational research and the establishment of communities of practice on this critical policy area.

25. How does the equity focus impact UNICEF’s position in the debate between universal and targeted approaches?

A key strategic choice for policy makers is whether to target resources directly towards the poor or to provide the same resources to all. Targeting involves designing programmes that deliver products, services, vouchers, exemptions, or cash transfers to a particularly poor or underserved sub-set of the population. There are two main approaches to targeting: 1) individual assessment through means testing; and 2) categorization based on an observable characteristic, such as the concentration of poverty in specific parts of a country. Targeting requires significant institutional capacity and considerable resources. As a result, targeted programmes tend to be most effective when addressing situations of marginalization, as is the case in many MICs.

The decision on whether to use a targeted or a universal approach depends on the context. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. A universal exemption, such as fee removal, will benefit groups other than the target group, which can be viewed as leakage if the primary purpose is to target people living in poverty. At the same time, however, universal policies offer three main advantages: they can build political support from the community; they limit administrative costs; and they avoid stigmatizing the target group.

Targeting limits benefits to a specific group, but carries heavy administrative costs. When most of the population is living in poverty (i.e. pattern of massive deprivation), exempting everyone will probably be more cost effective and less prone to corruption than administering a user-fee system that involves screening large numbers of applicants for the waiver. The trade-offs between the two approaches are welfare loss in terms of administrative costs and the loss through leakage to those who are not poor. Evidence suggests that countries that combine universal and targeted approaches, such as Brazil, Mexico, and Thailand, tend to be more successful in reducing inequities than those that rely on only one of the two strategies.

VI. Partnerships

26. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnership with governments?

UNICEF's relationship with national governments, as expressed in the Country Programme of Cooperation, is central to UNICEF’s programmes, policies, and partnerships at country level. Government involvement in and ownership of the equity agenda is therefore crucial to its success and sustainability. UNICEF must continue to mobilize political and social support for equity-related issues, advocating for policies that target the most deprived children and building government capacity for equitable development.

To promote equity for children on a sustainable basis, UNICEF must identify and publicly address the discriminatory attitudes, punitive legal codes, or corrupt practices that deny the rights of certain groups or communities. These drivers of inequity may be politically or socially sensitive in certain contexts. UNICEF is always obliged to use its mandate and voice for the children who are deprived of their rights. However, UNICEF’s approach to these issues must informed by a careful analysis of the prevailing political climate; the organization’s actions and decisions must be based on a sensible and informed balance between our multiple responsibilities, and be motivated by the best interests of all children.

UNICEF also pushes for a focus on equity in its relations with donor country governments, particularly within discussions on development cooperation and aid effectiveness, political engagement with developing countries, and their own domestic policies. No country can boast a perfect track record on equity. UNICEF’s advocacy must therefore speak to low, middle, and high income countries alike.

27. How does the equity agenda impact UNICEF’s partnerships with UN agencies and other inter-governmental organizations and global programme partnerships?

The foundations for an equity approach lie in the human rights framework and the human rights-based approach to programmes, which are common across the UN system. The goal of equitable development is clearly articulated in the mandates of all UN sister agencies and in the work of inter-agency bodies, such as the UN Development Group. UN GA Resolution ‘Keeping the Promise: United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals’ (A/65/L.1) provides a strong basis for common UN action to help countries address inequities (see paragraphs 5, 27, and 28). UN agencies and the Secretariat reaffirmed their support for the theme of equity at the recent 2010 Summit on the MDGs.

At the country level, the UNDAF and the push towards UN coherence represent opportunities for mobilizing UN agencies around a shared agenda for equity. Wherever possible, UNICEF should demonstrate leadership on equity, ensuring that equity-related issues are central to the UNCT’s agenda, and mobilizing agencies and partners around a common, coordinated plan of action.

Beyond the UN, other multilateral and intergovernmental organizations publicly support equity-based approaches to development. For example, the World Bank and the OECD/ DAC both have a long history of promoting pro-poor growth. Within regional bodies, such as the African Union and the Organisation of American States, there are numerous human rights instruments and other mechanisms to protect the rights of deprived groups. These initiatives represent an entry point for further dialogue, coordinated action, and innovative partnerships to address the needs of the worst deprived children and communities. While partners may address equity in different terms or through a different lens, the basic concerns are the same.

In addition, UNICEF is currently engaged in over 80 global programme partnerships, some of the most important ones being the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, GAVI, UNITAID, the Education for All – Fast-track Initiative, UNGEI, REACH, Sanitation for All, and the emerging Together for Girls partnership. Through its engagement in these partnerships, UNICEF leverages the benefits of collective action to achieve equitable development for children, both within and among countries. Concrete examples include ensuring poor children have access to lifesaving new vaccines and commodities, such as the new pneumococcal vaccine and ITNs, and protecting poor children against sexual exploitation through the adoption of a code of conduct by the travel and tourism industries.

28. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnerships with National Committees?

The role of National Committees in supporting UNICEF's equity agenda will be defined through:

* the One Country Approach to be developed by PFP, PARMO, and National Committees to ensure consistent messaging to donor governments around development cooperation;
* the National Committees’ domestic advocacy strategy agreed through the Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) process, to influence domestic policy via contributions to their country's CRC reporting and implementation (PFP advocacy section support will be provided to develop these strategies and key messages);
* the National Committees’ communication of agreed key messages to National Committee donors and partners.

29. What does the equity agenda imply for UNICEF’s partnerships with the private sector and civil society, including NGOs?

Collaboration with the private sector and civil society are critical to the success and sustainability of UNICEF’s efforts to promote the MDGs with equity. Strategic partnerships can support resource mobilization efforts, amplify the impact of equity-focused policy advocacy, and strengthen the reach and impact of services and programmes for the worst deprived children and communities. To leverage the comparative advantages of private sector and civil society actors across different contexts, UNICEF must strengthen its analysis of prospective partners at the national and sub-national levels. This involves mapping the private sector and civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, working in or on behalf of deprived communities. Mapping or survey exercises should be conducted on a sectoral or geographic basis as a standard component of the SitAn.

An equity focus requires UNICEF to place particular emphasis on strengthening collaboration with, and support for, national civil society actors, including national NGOs, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and community-based organizations. A vibrant, energised, and effective civil society is an essential component of equitable national development. It can open up avenues for civic engagement and hold governments accountable for decisions that impact the rights and well-being of children.

UNICEF should make every effort to equip national civil society actors with the knowledge and skills needed to map, track, and address disparities at the sub-national and community levels. Partners should be trained in methodologies and community-based interventions that empower families and children to exercise voice and agency in their own development. Several international NGOs have considerable experience and expertise in community-based approaches to development. Many of these organizations are well-placed to support UNICEF’s efforts to engage and train local civil society partners and officials in community-based approaches to equity programmes.

The equity approach also requires UNICEF to leverage its role as a convener. In recent months, many of UNICEF’s international NGO partners have expressed support for UNICEF’s focus on equity. This groundswell of support for the world’s most deprived children represents a window of opportunity for UNICEF to convene and coordinate civil society partners and their networks.

30. What are the implications for UNICEF’s work with communities?

UNICEF’s ability to reach deprived children largely depends on efforts to identify and engage their communities. In certain contexts, the drivers of inequity are not a function of national policies or laws, but are deeply entrenched in the attitudes and behaviours of particular communities. Reversing discriminatory attitudes that deprive children of access to basic services at the local level is critical to the success of nationally-led efforts at systems strengthening. Community-based approaches to identifying and resolving inequities can help to challenge and transform discriminatory social norms. The process of community-led participation can also empower community members to demand improved services. Evidence from the field of global public health shows a strong correlation between community participation in healthcare and improved health indicators. Studies on community-based approaches to education, HIV/AIDs, and WASH show similar results.

Successful community-based interventions are generally designed and implemented with local agents of change, including community-based organizations, traditional authorities, and other opinion shapers. Most of these actors operate on a small and highly localized scale, with few resources and modest technical capacities. Programming with community-based groups therefore requires considerable time, a detailed knowledge of the local context, and an ability to learn and continuously monitor interventions with the community. Most Country Offices that engage community-based groups tend to do so indirectly, with international and national NGOs acting as intermediaries.

In certain instances, an equity focus may require UNICEF to strengthen its direct engagement with community-based groups. Through the process of building relationships with these groups, UNICEF can gain insight into each community-based organization’s comparative advantage in addressing the causes and consequences of inequity. UNICEF’s Small-Scale Funding Agreement is specifically designed to facilitate relationships between UNICEF Country Offices and community-based organizations, where appropriate.

VII. Emergencies

31. How does the concept of equity apply to emergency contexts and fragile states?

UNICEF’s response to humanitarian action in conflict settings is guided by the CCCs and International Humanitarian Law. Although humanitarian assistance should be impartial and neutral, reaching all those in need, the provision of assistance is often limited by issues related to access and security, as well as resource and funding constraints. Equity-focused strategies for humanitarian assistance are further complicated by the limited space for political dialogue on equity and the absence of a legitimate interlocutor with whom to discuss policy design and implementation. Data collection and analysis pose additional challenges for equity-focused programming in humanitarian and fragile contexts. The unique challenges associated with humanitarian contexts sometimes result in unintended biases in the provision of aid, with adverse consequences for equity.

All programming undertaken in conflict settings should be guided by a sound conflict analysis conducted and regularly updated by UNICEF and/or its humanitarian partners so that the provision of assistance does not reinforce patterns of inequity or the root causes of conflict.

Recovery from conflict offers considerable opportunities to design and leverage equity-focused social policies. Initiating early recovery, even as the humanitarian response to conflict is unfolding, is the best way to identify and exploit the available entry points.

32. What does the equity focus mean for UNICEF's engagement with ‘host communities’ and ‘displaced populations or camp populations,’ in particular when host communities themselves are deprived?

Generally, UNICEF takes an area-based, rights-based, and needs-based approach to the provision of humanitarian assistance. UNICEF does not differentiate between host communities and displaced populations, but rather supports services to areas, based on need. An equity-based approach to humanitarian assistance requires that UNICEF focus on the most vulnerable. In practice, we must look at each sector. In humanitarian interventions, UNICEF relies on internationally agreed standards (SPHERE, INEE) which are translated into the CCCs. This UNICEF policy document states that the CCCs ‘apply to all children affected by humanitarian crisis regardless of the state of economic and social development in which they find themselves.’ Non-discrimination is a key principle of UNICEF's humanitarian action. Thus, in programming, UNICEF does not discriminate between refugees, IDPs, returnees, and communities. Services should be designed to target the most vulnerable populations, rather than allocating resources based on the cause of vulnerability.

That said, UNICEF recognizes that an assessment of the different situation, needs, and capacities of crisis-affected girls, boys, women, and men is critical to informing an equity-focused humanitarian response. Crisis-affected populations may face different risks, have different choices, and possess different skills, knowledge, and coping strategies. As such, humanitarian situation analyses and needs assessments should be informed by a broader socio-cultural analysis, and the findings should inform the design of humanitarian response. In Pakistan, for example, failure to conduct a gender analysis before setting up shelters in some IDP camps resulted in a lack of female-only spaces and severely limited the mobility of women and girls from Purdah communities. Confined to their tents, they did not access health, WASH, or education services, with consequences for their health. At times, targeted actions must be taken to ensure that all sectors of the crisis-affected population have access to essential services. For example, in Ethiopia, mobile health clinics with female health workers were deployed to reach displaced women and girls in remote areas who would not have otherwise accessed health services.

VIII. Internal Coherence

33. How does the sharpened focus on equity relate to the other major initiatives we have been working on, such as the Accelerated Child Survival and Development strategy and follow-up from the All Africa Rep’s Meeting and Asia Pacific Reps meeting?

The sharpened focus on equity reinforces the Accelerated Child Survival and Development Strategy. As highlighted in the paper ‘Narrowing the Gaps to meet the Goals’ and the equity analysis underlying that paper, a sharpened focus on equity is a key strategy in accelerating progress towards the health and nutrition-related MDGs (1c,4,5,6,7). The paper further highlights that equity-focused strategies in YCSD are more cost-effective than those currently employed.

These same thematic areas (health and nutrition-related areas) were also the focus of the All Africa Representatives Meeting (AARM) and the Asia Pacific Representatives Meeting (APRM). Strategies to accelerate and scale-up progress were discussed at these meetings. Both meetings were informed by a ‘bottleneck analyses’ conducted in many African and Asian countries. These analyses aimed to identify groups that are not being reached with evidence-based high impact interventions and the reasons for this situation. This represented an ‘implicit’ equity analysis. In addition, the APRM explicitly identified equity as a major issue in Asia, even in countries that are on track to achieving the YCSD-related MDGs at the national level.

The follow-up to the AARM and APRM has highlighted the importance of working across the organization (Country, Regional, and Headquarters Offices) to ensure that the analysis of unreached groups and reasons for their deprivations translate into shifts in national policies, budgets, and plans in UNICEF country programme strategies. Finally, AARM and APRM triggered the design of tracking mechanisms and joint Country, Regional, and Headquarters reviews of follow-up. This experience has provided the basis for development of the Equity Tracker and the analysis of country inputs.

34. How will UNICEF ensure the timely communication of internal information, including developments and lessons learned?

The Internal Communication (IC) section within the Division of Communication at the New York Headquarters is leading the effort to ensure that staff remain abreast of the latest developments, initiatives, and lessons learned in relation to the equity focus. A range of new electronic platforms will house regular updates to and from the field, as well as equity-focused data and analysis. One immediate example is the newly created micro-site on ICON, ‘On Equity – narrowing the gaps,’ which features the latest thinking and work around the equity focus, as well as key messages, fact sheets, and briefing materials. The site will eventually contain a variety of equity-related resources, including literature from other agencies and relevant academic studies. The IC team will continue to work closely with other Divisions to develop the site’s content. In addition, a micro-site dedicated to the Office of the Executive Director was created in May 2010. Staff can use the site to access the Executive Director’s speeches, statements, and video messages on equity and related issues. The Equity Tracker, a new tool developed by Programmes, was also announced on ICON and is cross linked on several pages of the intranet. Another recent source of information on equity is the ‘In Practice’ newsletter.

Next steps include creating a collection of Best Practices, featuring information from a variety of sources, including the Equity Tracker. This resource will highlight country programmes on ICON, focusing on best practices and lessons learned from equity-based programmes. The IC team will also be supporting the development of a series of WebEx/Videos on equity-based approaches, which will allow staff from around the globe an opportunity to share their knowledge and experience.

IX. Human Resources

35. What does the equity focus mean for how UNICEF manages its human resources?

Human resource practitioners, managers, and staff members all carry the responsibility for incorporating the ‘equity mindset.’ Every staff member can make a contribution towards equity within their respective spheres of influence and through their attitudes, behaviours, and personal advocacy efforts.

Certain core capabilities and competencies will need to be strengthened to ensure the right equity focus. Technical areas and country programmes may need to strengthen specific skill sets to better address the patterns of inequity within their operating contexts, as will teams working in emergency situations. Meeting these needs may require existing staff to update their core competencies. Managers should support individual staff members in this regard as part of the Individual Development Plans embedded in the performance management process. Senior management, in partnership with DHR, should develop the necessary tools to facilitate the increased demand for equity-focused skills training.

The equity focus may also create a demand for profiles that exceed the organization’s existing human resources. This is an opportunity for UNICEF to take a strategic approach to its sourcing and to address needs through Centres of Excellence, partnerships, secondment from other organizations, and recruitment of external talent. A broad range of agile contract modalities will need to be applied. A fresh look at UNICEF’s job descriptions and competencies against which candidates are assessed in selection processes will also be required.

As the organization strives to strengthen the focus on equity in its programmes and policies, it must bear in mind staff wellbeing. Staff may be functioning in increasingly less stable environments, working directly with the most deprived communities. As a result, they may be more likely to experience potentially traumatic events. As a signatory of the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, UNICEF has a commitment to protect the mental health of staff working in emergencies. Managers should be able to identify when and where support for well-being (trauma counselling, stress management, and HIV or other health issues) is required and provide it, as necessary.

UNICEF must ensure that staff in Country, Regional, and Headquarters Offices have the background and vision needed to identify the unfair and avoidable barriers that contribute to inequities. UNICEF’s efforts to reach deprived children, who are often members of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, may require staff with an awareness of the cultural concerns of these minorities and local perceptions of these groups. In addition, staff need to have language skills to communicate with these population groups. Strategies for addressing this recruitment need may involve seeking out candidates who share some of the background characteristics – in terms of ethnic and linguistic groups, or geographic or religious background, or gender or disability – of the groups affected by discrimination. UNICEF can also raise awareness among all staff of the link between background and perceptions of marginalised groups, so that steps are taken to mitigate these preconceptions in programme design.

X. Roll out

36. Will UNICEF develop specific ‘equity initiatives’?

Equity-focused programming is an approach rather than a specific initiative or project. As such, an equity focus is expected in all existing programmes. Every programming milestone, including the CPD, CPAP, MTR, SitAn, UNDAF, and Annual Review, represents an opportunity to examine progress through an equity lens and to ensure that the organization is making every effort to focus on the needs of the most deprived children.

In certain instances, however, UNICEF may need to experiment with new interventions that are specifically designed to target and alleviate inequities within particular contexts. These equity-focused ‘demonstration areas,’ participatory research exercises, and similar initiatives that facilitate a ‘learning by doing’ approach should include in their vision and design the potential for scaling up if proven effective. A rigorous analysis, monitoring, documentation, and evaluation component is required for all such initiatives.

*Every Last Child*