UNICEF Advocacy in Resource-Rich And Fragile Context Countries

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Introduction

"UNICEF is mandated by the UN General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential."

– UNICEF Mission Statement

At the start of this four-day conference in Dakar, UNICEF's chief of Policy Advocacy, David Anthony, asked participants to define 'advocacy.'

It is a process to influence change over time.

It is campaigning.

How we influence government to get positive results.

Converting people to come along with you to do the things you'd like them to do.

Changing behaviors and attitudes.

The process used by UNICEF to create enabling environments for children's rights.

Advocacy is influencing decisions by government and other actors to do things they might have done without that advocacy.

Advocacy for children's rights across the world has been a fundamental part of UNICEF's mission since its founding in 1946. What it means, from very public campaigning to very quiet inside policy dialogue, varies greatly from country to country and context to context.

In July 2015 more than two dozen diverse UNICEF staff, from country offices, regional offices and UNICEF headquarters joined together in Dakar to discuss UNICEF advocacy in two of the most complicated contexts in which it operates – resource-rich countries and nations with fragile political contexts. From nations plunged into violent conflict to those faced with sudden and unstable wealth – participants looked together at what it takes for UNICEF to carry out its advocacy for children's rights in some of the hardest spots to do so in the world.

What follows is a report of what participants discussed and the insights that they discovered and shared. Following the flow of the conference itself, the report covers three main topics:

1. The Context for Children's Advocacy in Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

The meeting looked at the panorama of political and advocacy contexts in these nations. This includes the social and economic contexts, the primary issues facing children and youth, and the political environments in which UNICEF advocacy must be carried out.

2. Engaging Governments in Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

Front and center in UNICEF policy advocacy and dialogue is engagement with government, and the landscape for that in these two contexts is extremely complex. The conference look at how to engage with governments not in alignment with UNICEF priorities, how to deal with governments with weak implementation capacity, and how to operate in conflict zones where there may not be any effective government at all.

3. Engaging Other Important Political Actors in Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

Another key topic for discussion dealt with how to effectively engage the diversity of actors in these contexts that have an impact on children's rights. These include many diverse forms: civil society groups, religious leaders, youth, and others.

4. Institutional Issues Related to UNICEF Advocacy

Because UNICEF advocacy is so shaped by UNICEF institutional dynamics, the workshop also examined some of these issues. This included building UNICEF capacity for policy dialogue and advocacy, a look at how to appropriately plan, monitor and evaluate UNICEF advocacy, and an examination of risk management and advocacy for UNICEF.

It is hard for a single report to do justice to four days of intense UNICEF conversations. The product of those discussions is a collective insight into a set of very complex political environments, insights captured in the hopes of making UNICEF's advocacy work in those contexts and others as effective as it can be.

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I. The Context for Children's Advocacy in Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

Effective advocacy for children's rights is not driven by any one strategy or approach. Effective policy dialogue and advocacy is context driven, shaped by the particulars of the situation. For purpose of synthesis, these contextual factors fall into two broad categories: economic and social factors and the key challenges posed for children's rights; and the political landscape in which UNICEF advocacy for children must take place. The Dakar workshop began with a presentation by David Anthony of the DRP, with reaction and the sharing of experiences by others. Each of these factors, often deeply complex, must be taken closely into account in the shaping of UNICEF advocacy for children's rights.

1. Economic and Social Contexts and the Key Challenges Facing Children and Youth

The political fortunes of children's rights are closely tied to the economic fortunes in a country and the social fabric within it. In resource-rich countries, one might expect that new national wealth would also translate into more general economic prosperity and in turn a better social and economic environment for children's rights. In fact, according to David Anthony and the DRP, more often the result is just the opposite.

One key reason for this is what the DRP describes as "highly variable and externally dependent government revenues." This means that governments in these situations become highly dependent for state revenue on just one industry (oil and fossil fuels, for example) and fluxuations in those revenues create wild instabilities in those public economic resources. "One year you may be talking about $100-per-barrel oil and the next year you may be talking about $25-a-barrel oil," explained Anthony. This, in turn, has a profound impact on children's rights in the country because as commodity prices plummet, so do funds in the public treasury and, in turn, funding for essential children's services, from primary health care to primary education. "This makes it extremely difficult to expand safety net protections when they are most needed, explains the DRP analysis.

Similarly, resource-rich countries tend to be driven by the extractive industry sector, which often crowds out other private sector actors and leaves little political momentum for broadening the economy. Referred to as 'Dutch disease' by economists, this scenario also creates an unstable economic foundation with an impact on children's rights. Writes the DRP, "This narrow tax base also means there are fewer options to tap when advocating increased social spending for children." That 'disease' also translates into high rates of unemployment and underemployment, as a single sector of the economy fails to provide large numbers of jobs.

The overall result is that, while resource wealth may benefit a small layer of society positioned to reap its rewards, often through endemic political corruption, the majority of the people aren't benefiting at all, and in fact may be even worse off. David Anthony used the example of a country not far from the Dakar meeting, Equatorial Guinea, a nation that quickly went from being one of the poorest nations in the world to having a per capita income of almost $25,000 per year. "Yet the reality on the ground for most people has been unchanged. The resources aren't being shared in any shape or form with this generation [of children] or future generations."

While the social and economic context for children's rights in resource-rich countries is instability and missed opportunity, the backdrop in fragile states is something more dire still. That begins with high rates of child poverty and the deep problems that poverty creates in the lives of the children who live there. As the DRP notes in its analysis, most fragile states are both notoriously low-income and as the result of crisis after crisis have seen reversals in previous gains in child wellbeing. Weak economies and weak government revenues make future progress difficult. "You have more and more people living in absolute poverty," explained Anthony. "Halting the intergenerational transmission of poverty is essential to the equity agenda and key to building more stable societies, but can be particularly difficult in countries with both low performance and limited domestic resources."

And in these fragile contexts, poverty is not the only threat to children and their well-being. Another is displacement. Nearly every fragile state has or is currently suffering violent conflict or internal strife. The result is a wave of child refugees and migrants. "One percent of the world's population is facing displacement," warned Arthur van Diesen, regional social policy adviser for the MENA regional office. "Displacement hasn't been this high since the end of the Second World War and this is going to be with us for quite a while." Refugee and migrant children face a toxic mix of violence, destroyed families, health issues, and long interruptions in their education. All these issues go to the core of UNICEF's defense of children's most essential rights.

Jaques Boyer, UNICEF's area representative for Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, described how these troubled environments impact children in Western and Central Africa. "This region has the highest under-five mortality in the world, often caused by malnutrition. It has the lowest education rates in the world." Other participants described the challenge of widespread child marriage and the widespread recruitment of child soldiers. Few UNICEF environments face such a daunting collection of threats to child safety and well-being.

Many participants noted that it is not only young children who have a huge stake in policy and political action in these countries. Youth issues such as unemployment and political

empowerment are also urgent. "Young people are struggling to find their place in society," observed Arthur van Diesen from the MENA regional office, "and UNICEF doesn't have a program to meet their concerns."

These perilous environments for children and youth are the result of a host of endemic factors in fragile states, observes the DRP analysis. Fault lines, often based on ethnic, tribal, and religious distinctions, for example, divide fragile countries, making UNICEF advocacy on behalf of 'disfavored' and marginalized children all the more urgent. Weak civil societies and private sectors lead to both instability and a lack of a diversity of voices and powers in these contexts. Finally, even though the role of international donors is even more urgent in fragile contexts, many donors are reluctant to enter the fray, citing concerns about corruption, weak delivery capacity, and the potential for material aid to make its way into the hands of competing groups vying for power some armed.

All these factors have a huge impact on UNICEF advocacy for children in these contexts, with UNICEF often finding itself one of the few, solid institutional voices with a chance of making a real difference – in contrast to the scenario in many middle and high income countries where there can be a plethora of child advocacy voices.

2. The Political Contexts in which UNICEF Advocacy for Children's Rights Must Take Place

In many of these countries, the depth of the need for action is matched by the difficulties of getting that action from the governments involved. In countries both fragile and resource-rich, democracy is weak and this impacts UNICEF's advocacy for children in very clear ways.

Civil society is often weak, sometimes non-existent, and frequently under political attack of some kind. This weakens democracy overall. It diminishes the potential voice for children's rights in a nation and for marginalized groups such as women, the poor, indigenous groups and others. It also deprives UNICEF of one of its most important allies. In place of vibrant democracy UNICEF frequently operates in political environments dominated by entrenched vested interests that do not have children's rights at the top of their priority list. Corruption is sadly commonplace.

Writing about the experience of resource-rich nations, the DRP analysis notes, "Large, and often largely unsupervised, revenues from natural resources and weakened power of citizen oversight can create a breeding ground for political corruption and outright theft of public resources." Fragile contexts are subject even more to political corruption. Jaques Boyer described one African case this way. "All the decisions are taken by the head of state and his family. The head of state is the son of the previous one who stayed in power for twenty years."

The result is a cloud of thefts, from dishonestly negotiated contracts to government coffers robbed of revenue needed for children's services, all of which has a deep effect on the children in the nation and UNICEF's advocacy on their behalf.

In both non-democratic countries and democratic ones, there is also often a huge problem with implementation. Governments often lack the ability to make reality of the child's rights laws they approve and the child rights promises they make.

"We have a number of countries in the region right now that are essentially falling apart, where the government only has nominal control of certain territory within its borders," observed Arthur van Diesen, "yet all our tools are about engaging the nation state." Securing services and normalcy for children in these areas is a wholly other kind of activity than standard policy dialogue and advocacy, and yet it is essential [more on strategies for dealing with this is discussed in the section below on dealing with government].

Even under circumstances where governments do have political control of their territory, many still lack basic service delivery capacity. Gustav Nébié, the regional social policy advisor for the WACRO, said, "You can speak with the government and they may listen to you politely. They may even make laws, but in fact they aren't implementing."

Sometimes that is about insufficient funding in the treasury to get the job done, the product of either insufficient revenue or too much of it siphoned off for war, for election campaigns, or other priorities. Nébié told the story of meeting the President of Mali. "I went to see the President and he told me, 'I agree with you that education should be free, and the day that UNICEF gives me the money I will sign a law for that." In other cases it is about administrative capacity, the ability to organize a complex undertaking – creating schools, registering births, etc. – and to mobilize the resources to make it happen.

Who governments listen to most is also an important context issue for advocacy. In some countries huge numbers of people, sometimes the majority of the population, is outside the political power system, disenfranchised, not listened to, and therefore their children are woefully underserved. In countries dependent on a handful of foreign investors, mining interests, for example, those investors will often have an enormous influence over political decisions. That influence can affect matters such as children's health (through environmental contamination) and the availability of children's services (from declining business tax revenues in the public treasury).

Weak political systems also make for short-term action at the expense of longer-term progress. Political candidates at all level of governments stand a much better chance of victory by

speaking to the immediate needs of people with many immediate needs, as opposed to talking about building toward the farther future. During election time spending on public works may abound and then, as David Anthony observed, "After the election there is no money." For UNICEF however, and the advancement of children's rights, longer-term thinking, planning and governing is crucial.

Given the ways in which effective UNICEF advocacy is so deeply tied to the political contexts in which it is carried out, these characteristics of resource-rich and fragile states are the fundamental backdrop for UNICEF advocacy strategy.

II. Engaging Governments in
Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

By definition, 'policy dialogue and advocacy' has at its principle focus the government in any given country. It is the government that is the primary duty-bearer for advancing the rights of children embedded in the CRC; it is the government that must organize and finance essential children's services and protection, and it is the authorities in that government that are the main target of UNICEF advocacy. Government policy and programs create 'the enabling environment' for children's rights and UNICEF helps create the enabling environment for child-centered policy through its advocacy.

Participants in Dakar spent an entire afternoon looking together at how best to strategically engage governments in three specific scenarios:

1. The Government is not in Alignment with UNICEF's priorities

Not all governments share UNICEF's commitment to children's rights and many are being pulled by a set of pressures away from UNICEF's goals. This scenario runs the gambit from conflict situations where governments can think of little else than the execution of warfare, to countries that view children's rights as a low priority among a set of competing interests for attention and resources. Participants in Dakar identified several valuable strategies for operating in this context.

One is to fully understand why government leaders seem insufficiently interested in UNICEF's child rights agenda. Do they not fully understand the nature of the problem? Have they not been presented with a viable solution? Does the case for action need a different messenger, in addition to UNICEF, that has more political clout with those leaders? Are there other competing priorities or even competing interests in direct opposition (on child marriage, for example)? What strategy to use depends greatly on the answers to those questions.

Participants identified a set of potential strategies to break through. One is to use elections as a time to raise the importance of children's rights in the national debate. "What UNICEF has been able to do is use that moment [election season] when the government is coming up to be re-elected to push that agenda for children," noted David Anthony. In some contexts this can work well as a strategy, but in others not so well, where UNICEF might be viewed as meddling in domestic politics. When and how to use an elections approach is a judgment call country by country.

In many countries there is a complex web of potential allies that can be approached for support and collaboration. These include civil society groups, parent organizations, religious leaders, private sector interests, organized youth and others. Who these actors are varies widely by country [more on engagement with these other influencing actors is discussed in the following section below].

In nations that operate under major influence from one of more international actors, getting those actors to use their leverage in alignment with child rights can be a very powerful tool. "If it's not on the EU agenda it's a low priority," observed Laila Omar Gad, the UNICEF representative in Kosovo. "Our targets are twofold, the EU and the government." Powerful influencers from outside the country include international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and other strong governments in the region. Where outside power like this exists and influences country governments, UNICEF must also influence these actors with its advocacy efforts.

It is also important, participants noted, to find allies within the government. These are officials in various positions who are sympathetic to UNICEF's aims on child rights and willing to help advance them. Inside allies like these can help UNICEF better understand the dynamics operating within the government, can make UNICEF's case privately and in key meetings, and generally can be helpful with strategy and presentation. Jeanette Wijnants, the head of child protection in UNICEF's Kenya office, told of one inside ally that made a huge difference. "In one country we had a very strong chief of police as an ally. That really helps."

Finally, there are key choices to be made about how UNICEF frames its advocacy case. Evidence is the usual backbone for UNICEF policy arguments, for example, the long-term educational benefits for children of pre-primary education. One effective use of data, when it is available, it to make cross-country comparisons. Jaques Boyer observed, "If they [public officials] see that the neighboring country is doing better, then they will take action."

In some cases UNICEF's advocacy approach focuses on the political self-interest of the officials on the other side of the convincing process. This could be about potential savings from

prevention efforts or making observations about the number of people (i.e. voters) who will benefit from what UNICEF is proposing.

Many participants also, however, observed the value of UNICEF making its case for children's rights to both the head and heart. While data and statistics are valuable, so are stories that make issues like access to school, provision of health services and other matters human issues and not just technical ones.

2. The Government Lacks the Capacity to Fulfill Commitments to Children's Rights

As noted earlier, in many resource-rich and fragile state nations, even if the government says it is committed to elements of UNICEF's child rights agenda and even if it passes laws in alignment with that agenda, there remains a long distance between that and actual implementation. Participants in the Dakar meeting first identified a set of 'symptoms' of this type of low-capacity environment. These political contexts are marked by a lack of transparency in government programs along with a lack of accountability for who's responsible for getting things done. There tends to be strong centralization of both power and public purse in the hands of a few, usually at the national level and far from the ground where issues like child access to basic services are present. In addition, the policies and systems in these political contexts tend to be both inefficient and often plagued by various forms of corruption.

Participants in the meeting said that one concrete step in addressing problems like these is to get government officials to acknowledge them and recognize the capacity gaps that exist and how they impact children's lives. This might include documenting the local failures in implementation of a government-approved public health effort, for example. Participants in Dakar also said that it is important to recognize that capacity gaps are multi-faceted and multi-layered, ranging from governance (corruption, lack of political will) to technical capacity and service delivery problems. In these situations it is also important for UNICEF to be engaged in the budgeting process, using budgets as a tool for tracking whether the resources have been both allocated and spent in alignment with the government's commitments on children's rights.

For UNICEF, these weak implementation environments often mean going farther than just pointing out administrative problems but also getting involved in a hands-on way in helping solve those bottlenecks. Based on a solid analysis of these bottlenecks UNICEF might take on a role in the program planning process with the government; it might develop relationships with local-level agencies to help troubleshoot at that level; it might provide training in certain project areas (pre-primary teachers, for example) where skills are the key stumbling block.

When problems like this exist, UNICEF can't afford to just sit on the sidelines. As the DRP writes, "For UNICEF advocacy this [implementation] matters as a core policy issue and a question of the efficacy of advocacy. Weak service delivery capacity has clear impacts on children."

3. Where, Effectively, there is No Government

UNICEF also finds itself, especially in countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq that are torn by years of warfare, dealing in situations where in many parts of the country there effectively is no government. With so much at stake for the children in these zones of conflict, UNICEF has no option but to deal simultaneously with both government officials and with organizations, frequently armed, that control key areas.

Two respected veterans of UNICEF work in such contexts, Hamish Young, chief of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action and Transition program (HATIS) and Sikander Khan, deputy director of UNICEF's Office of Emergency Programs (EMOPS), spoke at length of the approaches UNICEF has to use in these difficult contexts.

One is to reinforce the point that International Humanitarian Law still applies in such conflict situations, to both governments and non-state entities as well. They suggested that, with both governments and non-state actors, to establish agreements based on humanitarian principles as a framework within which to advocate for access to conflict zones and to the children living within them.

While these formalities may frame UNICEF's overall approach in these contexts, those with experience in the field noted that there is no escaping the need to do most transactions via careful and complex negotiations. Both governments and non-state actors may seek to deny access of assistance to areas controlled by their adversaries. In these situations UNICEF needs to argue its way in, pledging, for example, to only go in at certain times and only with certain kinds of vehicles, escorts or equipment not deemed to be a threat. Similarly, those same governments and groups may seek to control UNICEF assistance entering areas that they control, as an instrument of credit taking, for example.

In these situations it is the fundamental rights of children that are paramount to UNICEF's mission, and the process of serving that aim can be very politically complex. As the DRP has noted, "If the government can't deliver then you may need to find another party who can deliver and that may cause tensions with the government." As UNICEF gains increased legitimacy in these situations, staff with experience observed that legitimacy becomes a basis for a much more comprehensive engagement on a broader set of issues children's rights issues.

Participants also identified a set of tactics that can be of use in any of these government scenarios. UNICEF staff noted the value of working through informal channels and not just established formal ones. Laurent Duvillier, a communications specialist in the WCARO shared a story from Chad and UNICEF's efforts there to end child marriage, enlisting support from the President's wife. "We tend to forgot how influential first ladies are on their husbands, especially in Africa." Sikander Khan shared a similar story of enlisting the support of well-

known grandmothers in a similar campaign against child marriage during his time in the UNICEF office in Afghanistan.

Finally, the participants in Dakar wrestled with one challenge that they found widespread across contexts, how to balance UNICEF's close relationships with government on the one hand and its need for a clear and independent voice on the other. As one Dakar participant questioned, "We position ourselves as the government's best partners, but at what point do we stand as advocates for children, which sometimes can oppose the government's position?" Participants acknowledged that tension and observed that there was no one simple answer that fits every country. "We are all diplomats in the way that we maneuver that particular political context," said Jeanette Wijnants from the Kenya office.

III. Engaging Other Important Political Actors in Resource-Rich and Fragile Context Countries

In all country contexts UNICEF policy dialogue and advocacy takes place in a complex multi-actor environment, and those complexities are even deeper in many resource-rich and fragile state countries. Some of these other actors may be allies, others adversaries, but UNICEF's long and short-term relationships with all of them need to be taken into account in the formation of its advocacy strategy. Participants in the Dakar workshop looked at four categories of 'actors':

1. Civil Society Actors

Civil society is a broad term that includes everything from well-established NGOs to grassroots citizen movements. When UNICEF looks at its relationships and potential relationships with civil society actors in resource-rich and fragile country contexts, it sees an important set of partners that often compliment the advocacy resources that UNICEF brings to the table, with other skills and connections that UNICEF does not bring.

Participants in Dakar noted that sometimes civil society groups are able to undertake advocacy work that advances children's rights that UNICEF is not able to do. This includes advocacy on individual cases and work on certain issues that fall outside of UNICEF's protocol or mission. These groups also often have outreach capacities within targeted communities that UNICEF lacks, to parents, adolescents, particular ethnic minorities, and others. Those that work on the ground may also have a much better sense of direct realities faced by children in conflict zones, distant regions and other difficult-to-access contexts. This diversity of experience can help UNICEF assure that it is forming an agenda of advocacy priorities that speaks most directly to the sharpest needs of children in the country.

Similarly, participants also noted that diversity in its advocacy partnerships can help UNICEF make important advocacy connections. This can be with particular officials or agencies in the government (for example, civil society groups working explicitly on health issues might enjoy a more direct relationship with officials in the Health Ministry) or with elements of the media or other major sources of influence over policy and UNICEF child rights goals.

Given the potential importance of these relationships, participants identified a set of approaches that UNICEF can take to strengthen those connections. One is to invest in the general capacity of allied civil society groups to be engaged effectively in advocacy. In many countries UNICEF uses its more solid positioning to serve as a convener of child rights organizations and movements, serving as a catalyst for joint analysis, planning and action. It sometimes provides training related to issues and advocacy to its partners, enhancing their long-term effectiveness. UNICEF has also provided funding support to partners for collaborative efforts (for research, meetings, reports, etc.), simultaneously advancing UNICEF's own goals and strengthening key partners at the same time.

Another factor that is too commonplace in resource-rich and fragile state contexts is the challenge to civil society space in the country. NGOs and others are threatened with having their registrations revoked and in some cases their leaders expelled or jailed for raising an independent voice that challenges government policies, including on children's rights. Participants noted that in many of these countries UNICEF enjoys a privileged position where it is not subject to the same threat or challenge and is able, if it chooses, to give added legitimacy to its partners and act as a general defender of civil society space for advocacy and political engagement.

2. Faith-based actors

In many countries represented in the Dakar workshop, faith-based communities and faith leaders play a powerful role in the political culture of the country. Participants discussed the ways in which UNICEF can link with those communities as powerful advocates for children, and also the ways in which, on some issues, those communities pose a challenge to fundamental children's rights.

Participants in the workshop noted that partnerships with UNICEF can empower and enable faith-based actors to champion positive change for children, in their communities and the nation as a whole. Faith leaders are able to get child rights message out to the public in a way that people understand and that mobilizes people for broader change. UNICEF can enable religious groups or organizations to become part of broader civil society, including in contexts where there is limited space for civil society participation.

For UNICEF, creating and sustaining those relationships requires what participants called 'a credible interface,' - someone within UNICEF who speaks the community's language, appreciates its nature, and who can garner respect. This requires a deep knowledge of their religion, of how the different groups within it operate and relate to one another, and the right channels of entry. One point of entry is to underscore commonalities between those faiths and UNICEF, for example, on the high value placed on children and family.

Among the challenges identified in the workshop is the reality that not all UNICEF country offices have someone on staff with that kind of knowledge of the faiths and who can garner that respect. Not all religious groups share UNICEF's goals, particularly on issues such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Faith groups that are allied with UNICEF's goals may also lack any serious motivation to play a role in advocacy or may lack the basic capacity required to do so. "Sometimes they listen to us only when we bring money to the table," remarked one participant.

Laying out a set of factors for success in establishing good partnerships between UNICEF and faith communities and leaders, workshop participants identified three main elements. First, again, establishing a relationship based on respect and credibility. Second, identify a clear set of common goals around child rights that establish a partnership based on shared vision. Finally, it is important that both sides recognize that, while there may be substantial overlap between UNICEF's mission and the vision of the faith community, UNICEF's values and vision is not a religious one, it is a humanistic one, and there needs to be a mutual comfort with that on both sides.

3. The Private sector

UNICEF, especially in these two challenging political contexts, has a complex and multi-faceted relationship with the private sector. These relationships include relying on corporations and other private sector actors for funding support. In some countries and on certain issues UNICEF engages business leaders as an ally in its advocacy, taking advantage of the close relationships that many enjoy with key government and political actors. Especially in emergency situations, the private sector also assists UNICEF with certain kinds of infrastructure needs such as transport and telecommunication.

On the other hand, UNICEF also has an agenda that sometimes challenges corporate practices, on environmental issues, child labor, and child health concerns, for example. Particular in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) there is as much opportunity for conflict as there is alliance.

In their discussion of this area of UNICEF advocacy partnership, participants in Dakar noted a similar scenario to its partnerships with religious communities. It is important to base those

relationships on a clear and unvarnished understanding of where UNICEF's agenda for children's rights overlap with the interests of a corporate or private sector partner, and where UNICEF's agenda and interests do not overlap. Participants expressed a lack of guidance from UNICEF headquarters on the dos and don'ts of private sector engagement. For example, they expressed that the general obligation of country offices and country representatives to engage with private sector actors, and how to do that, remained unclear. Participants called for an institution-wide conversation on the topic.

4. Children and Youth

At various points in the Dakar discussions UNICEF staff underscored the importance of directly engaging children and youth in the organization's advocacy work. Participants offered many reasons for this engagement, "to appeal to the heart…to put a human face on the issue,"etc. But participants also noted that this kind of participation can't just be window dressing or for show. Empowering young people is, in itself, a key priority for UNICEF. This happens by helping children and young people identify and articulate their own agendas and priorities, by helping them engage with public officials, the media and other actors of influence.

Despite these suggestions and commitments from all corners of the organization represented in Dakar, there was also the observation that often UNICEF's words and deeds on such participation do not match up. "Child participation is supposed to be an important component of our work, but we're not consistent in it," said Jeanette Wijnants from UNICEF's Kenya office.

IV. Institutional Issues Related to UNICEF Advocacy

UNICEF policy dialogue and advocacy is shaped greatly by the institutional environment within UNICEF. Participants discussed a whole set of ways in which UNICEF is a powerfully supportive institutional environment for advocacy, with a globally respected reputation, a depth of capacity and expertise, powerful contacts and connections, and other resources that make its advocacy strong. That said, Dakar participants also identified a series of issues about the UNICEF institutional environment that impact its advocacy work and that require a deeper discussion and institutional thinking.

1. Capacity Building for Advocacy

While UNICEF does engage in important and effective advocacy efforts all over the world, participants in Dakar commented that the organization would benefit greatly from a more systematic approach that takes full advantage of UNICEF's advocacy potential and builds its long-term institutional capacities.

In the area of evidence generation, participants noted that capacity is mixed. They suggested certain issues where UNICEF's moral and rights argument could be backed up by more data, for example the impact of child marriage on girls' education and health. Participants also commented that UNICEF policy-related evidence should be strategic and targeted – answers to "specific questions with strategic value," and not simply "finding out everything we can."

To be clear, in some cases, in resource-rich and fragile state contexts in particular, the lack of evidence can be traced back to the inability or unwillingness of the government to collect it. Gabon was identified of one example of a country where the government is resistant to gather certain kinds of data for political reasons, presumably because evidence of poor outcomes for children would make the government look bad and damage it politically. But still, participants observed that in some contexts UNICEF could increase its ability to generate strategic evidence for advocacy. "We lack data and we lack capacity, said Gustav Nébié from the WCARO.

Related to the use of that data and evidence, UNICEF staff could also benefit from capacity building in strategic advocacy communication. In their communications with the media, with allies and actors, and with public officials UNICEF staff must be able, as one participant put it, "to translate two hundred pages into three key messages."

The use of evidence, strategic communication, alliance strategies, and effective dealings with governments are some of the important advocacy-related skills that workshop participants suggested need to be integrated into UNICEF in a more institutional way throughout the organization, from country offices to headquarters. Participants suggested trainings, the building of advocacy skills into job descriptions and TORs and other hiring mechanisms, and making those skills a mandatory element of all key functions that have an impact on policy change.

2. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating UNICEF Advocacy

George Laryea-Adjei, deputy director of UNICEF's Division of Data, Research and Policy, made a presentation to the staff in Dakar about UNICEF planning and monitoring, and emphasized the importance of building planning for advocacy into a range of UNICEF planning mechanisms and processes.

He noted that policy dialogue and advocacy is one of UNICEF's key implementation strategies, alongside others such as capacity development, service delivery, innovation, etc., and that more than 75 UNICEF country offices already identify policy dialogue and advocacy as a key area of their work, across national income categories. Despite that, he observed, there is considerable difficulty in accounting for results from policy advocacy work.

He provoked participants in the workshop with a series of questions about why that gap exists between policy dialogue and advocacy as a UNICEF work priority and the notable lack of evidence about results. "Is it a problem of poor planning, lack of systematic planning, results-focused planning for policy advocacy work? Are there severe implementation problems? Is there no deliberate approach to monitoring? Is there a blur in accountability for results around such issues? Do CO plans sufficiently cover expected results and steps from policy advocacy work? Do we envisage what success will look like at the start of advocacy efforts? Do we know how to measure success? Are there sufficient tools to report on results?"

He then laid out an analysis about what to monitor in UNICEF policy advocacy: Does that advocacy operate from a clear theory of change? Are the assumptions that link that advocacy to results sufficiently clear? Are expected results clearly defined? Are actions for implementation clearly defined?

For example, he noted, advocacy-related outputs or intermediate outcomes might include whether something in UNICEF's advocacy agenda for child rights has been included and prioritized in national planning instruments, or whether government spending on something such as basic education has increased and by how much.

In the conference discussion that followed, workshop participants also discussed two key challenges for monitoring and evaluating advocacy. One is the dilemma of how to measure progress. In a child-vaccination program, for example, it is relatively simple to calculate the number of vaccines, staff, and other inputs required to obtain a projected set of outputs (the number of children vaccinated). Policy advocacy does not offer such clear measures of progress and causality. Events such as supportive statements by public officials, the introduction of legislation, and others are measurable milestones toward policy enactment and implementation, but none are guarantees. In addition, sudden progress may come out of nowhere, the result of a high profile news story, etc.

Similarly, it is difficult to measure with accuracy how to attribute credit for progress forward to UNICEF's role in a multi-actor environment. How does one conclude, for example, that UNICEF's lobbying efforts had more impact that Save the Children's media campaign on the same issue? All of these are challenges as UNICEF seeks to move toward a more systematic and clear methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluating its policy dialogue and advocacy.

3. Managing Organizational and Individual Risk in UNICEF Advocacy for Children

For UNICEF, the practice of policy dialogue and advocacy carries an inherent organizational risk, sticking its nose into policy issues where many governments would prefer to face no interference. Few governments react with delight when challenged on politically charged issues such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, or access to education for refugees and migrants. In the context of resource-rich nations and fragile states, the risk of potential conflict with governments is even higher than in high income or more stable political contexts.

In the discussion around these sensitive issues in Dakar, several participants observed a trend towards taking less and less risk with governments and worrying about the potential implications of conflict with government. This translates into a tendency, participants noted, toward 'soft advocacy' (carefully stripped of any public critique) and a focus on undisputable issues that skirt some of the more controversial ones mentioned earlier.

One useful way forward, participants commented, was to adopt a more institutional approach to organizational risk. This includes carefully integrating solid political analysis into UNICEF's advocacy work, having UNICEF officials at the regional or global level step in to speak when the risk is too high for staff based in the country, and having clear institutional conversations about high risk situations and how to deal with them.

Hamish Young, chief of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action and Transition program and a veteran of many high-risk situations with UNICEF, observed, "Because we don't have a systematic approach to risk-based decision making we often don't consider the consequences of not taking action." Some of those consequences are institutional including damage to UNICEF's reputation when it does not speak out at critical moments. But the sharper consequences are for children, who may need UNICEF's advocacy on their behalf more than ever, just at the moment where cautious calculations about risk lead UNICEF to be silent.

Conclusion

Across the spectrum of nations and political contexts in which UNICEF carries out its advocacy for children's rights, few poise the kind of complex and difficult challenges that are at hand in resource-rich nations and fragile states. How does one effectively advocate for children's rights in war zones, in nations with embedded corruption, and against economic and fiscal backdrops that fluctuate with the winds of commodity prices?

In Dakar an able collection of UNICEF staff looked at those questions and came up with a collective wisdom that can provide worthwhile guidance. Looking at context, this report offers some insight into the practicalities of countries where instability is often the norm. Examining the key actors, the report illuminates the ways in which civil society might be made a stronger partner, how religious leaders might become allies, and at the opportunities and cautions involved in engaging with the private sector. Casting an eye on the diverse government contexts that UNICEF is dealing with, participants offered genuine insight about how to get in the door and how to be convincing and strategic once there. Finally, this report offers some important observations and guidance to UNICEF leadership about the institutional environment and the ways in which it impacts, in ways helpful and not, the potential for UNICEF advocacy.

In the nations represented in Dakar, children desperately need the kind of advocacy and support that UNICEF can offer. The Dakar workshop, as with its sister conference held in Panama the month before (looking at UNICEF policy and dialogue in upper and high middle income countries) represents an important moment of reflection for UNICEF about its advocacy work. UNICEF's challenge now is to take the collective wisdom expressed in both these sessions, and captured in the two reports derived from them, into a more insightful and strategic way forward.

Annexes

1. Meeting agenda

2. List of meeting participants

3. "The Universe of Resource Rich and Fragile Contexts": Analysis from the UNICEF DRP

Glossary

COs: Country offices

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

DRP: UNICEF Division of Data, Research and Policy

EMOPS: UNICEF's Office of Emergency Programs

HATIS: UNICEF's Humanitarian Action and Transition Program

IFIs: International Financial Institutions

IMF: International Monetary Fund

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

WACRO: UNICEF Western and Central Africa Regional Office