



The Art of Creating UNICEF Advocacy Narratives

An Infographic and Planning Tool for Developing Clear UNICEF Advocacy Messages

Advocacy for children's rights was woven into the core of UNICEF's mission at its founding more than seventy years ago. A centerpiece of that effective UNICEF advocacy for children is the story it has to tell, its 'advocacy narrative'. UNICEF teams never lack for evidence, data and detail, but none of that has its full power to strengthen the cause of children's rights until it is woven together into a clear, coherent and compelling story about the challenges facing children and what can and must be done.

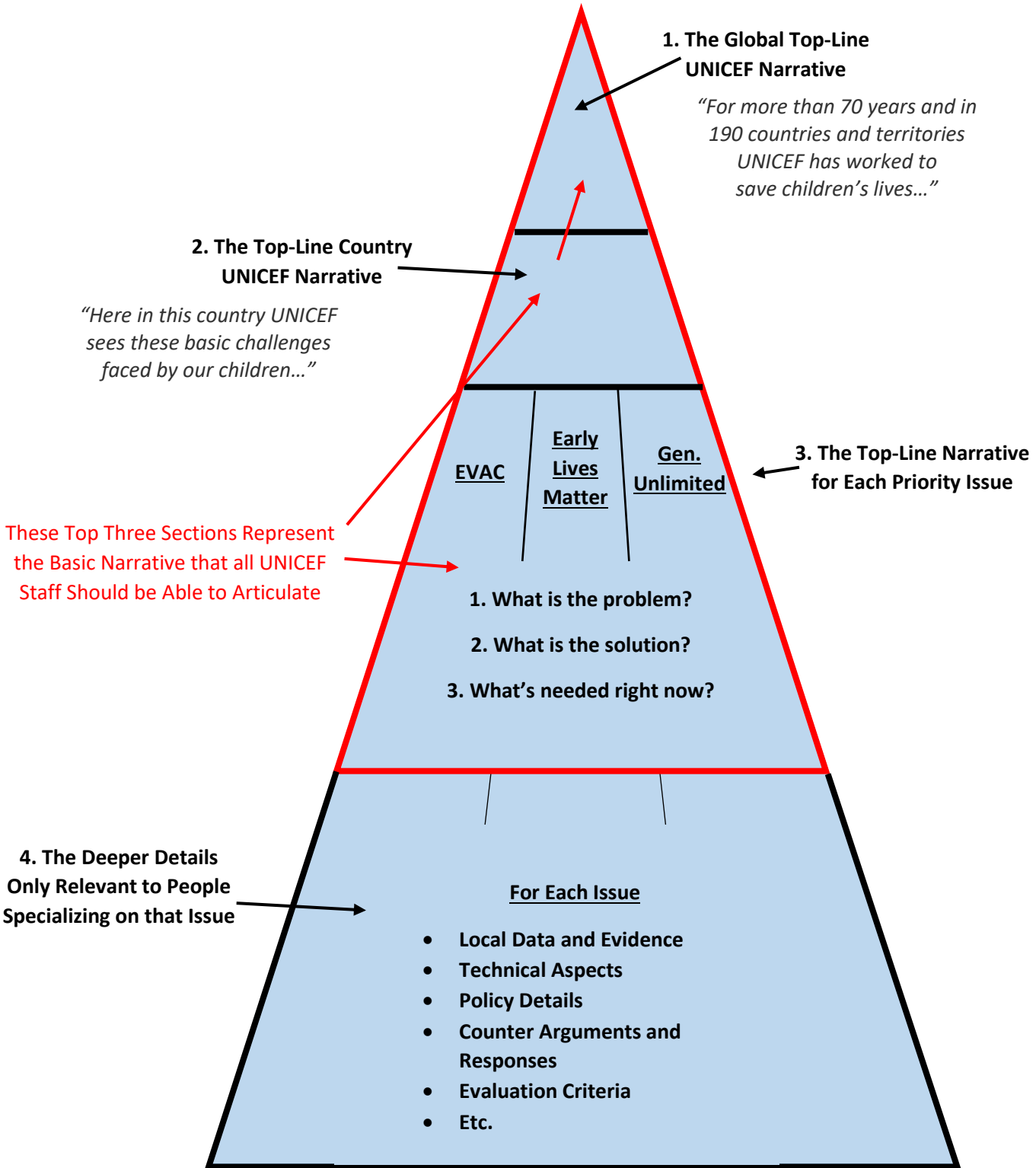
In my work with UNICEF teams all over the world since 2007 (country offices, regional offices, national committees and headquarters) I routinely see UNICEF staff struggling to create clear narratives. This infographic and explanation of it is designed to be a tool for UNICEF staff at all levels, but at the country-level especially. Its aim is to help UNICEF teams see the structure of their narratives in a visual way so that those narratives can become both more clear to external audiences (government officials, the public, civil society partners, the media, etc.) and better understood in a shared way by all members of the UNICEF team.

As modeled in the following infographic, it is helpful to envision UNICEF's narratives in a pyramid structure that flows in sequence from top to bottom. To be clear, not every UNICEF communication or narrative needs to include every element included. For example, with audiences already deeply familiar with UNICEF's work there is no need to start by explaining what UNICEF does. But it is important for all UNICEF staff and teams to have a grasp of the whole narrative along with a solid strategic sense of the right starting point in it for the particular audience and goal of the moment.

Following the infographic is a piece-by-piece explanation of it. I hope you find it of good use and I look forward to your feedback.

Jim Shultz
Founder and Executive Director
The Democracy Center
jimshultz@democracyctr.org

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The Key Elements of UNICEF's Advocacy Narratives

1. The Global Top-Line UNICEF Narrative

Every member of UNICEF, in every region and every level of the organization, should be equipped to share a common global narrative of who UNICEF is and the work it does. Here is how that 'top-line' global narrative is presented on UNICEF's Web site:

For more than seventy years and in 190 countries and territories UNICEF has worked to save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

The Web site then translates that global UNICEF mission into top-line messages about its key issue areas:

- *Child protection and inclusion:* Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and inclusive environment. UNICEF works with partners around the world to promote policies and expand access to services that protect all children.
- *Child survival:* Every child has the right to survive and thrive. UNICEF has helped reduce child mortality all over the world by working to reach the most vulnerable children, everywhere.
- *Education:* Every child has the right to learn. UNICEF works around the world to support quality learning for every girl and boy, especially those in greatest danger of being left behind.
- *UNICEF in emergencies:* UNICEF is on the ground before, during, and after emergencies, working to reach children and families with lifesaving aid and long-term assistance.
- *Gender:* Every girl has the right to fulfil her potential. UNICEF works all over the world to empower girls and women, and to ensure their full participation in political, social, and economic systems.
- *Innovation for children:* UNICEF works with partners in every sector to co-create innovative solutions that accelerate progress for children and young people.

- *Supply and logistics:* UNICEF delivers sustainable access to lifesaving supplies where they are most needed, accelerating results for the most vulnerable children.
- *Research and analysis:* UNICEF's global programmes and initiatives are grounded in rigorous research and thoughtful analysis about the situation of children.

Again, how deep into this global narrative to go depends entirely on the situation, but at minimum every UNICEF staff member and team should be able to articulate that overall global mission in a clear and compelling way.

2. The Top-Line Country UNICEF Narrative

Each UNICEF country team then has its own overall narrative that puts its agenda for children's rights in the thematic context of that country's political and social reality. This varies widely by country.

- In a nation like Bolivia, where widespread poverty still defines its context, that message might be, "UNICEF is working to assure that we eradicate child poverty and assure that all children have the right to have their basic needs fully met, including their right to education, health care and clean water."
- In a nation like Thailand which is seen as economically prosperous that top-line message might be, "UNICEF is working to assure that all children in the country have the opportunity to share in the country's rising economic future."
- In a nation such as Syria where the reality is overshadowed by war and conflict, that top-line message might be, "No one in Syria today is paying a higher price for the nation's armed conflict than the country's children and UNICEF is working to shield them from harm's way and to bring as much normalcy as possible to a generation of children at risk of becoming completely lost."

A country's top-line UNICEF narrative is designed to set its advocacy agenda in the larger local context (poverty, prosperity, conflict, etc.) and to tap into the value language that resonates most in that political culture. For example, 'rights' language works better in Latin America than it does in parts of Asia, where appeals based on the 'business case' for investing in children have more resonance.

Following on that each country's top-line message would include mention of its advocacy priorities and how they flow directly from that broader contextual narrative about the state of children in the country. For example:

"...and that is why UNICEF wants to assure that every child has a birth certificate so they can be eligible for the public services to which they have a right."

“...and that is why UNICEF is advocating for a national child support grant to lift up the lives of children not currently enjoying the benefits of that new prosperity.”

“...and that is why UNICEF is demanding that there be secure zones created where children can be safe from the conflict.”

3. The Top-Line Narrative for Each Priority Issue

Every different UNICEF country office has its own set of advocacy priorities based on its own context: ending violence against children, investment in the first thousand days, ending child marriage, access to pre-primary education etc. Each of these advocacy priorities will have its own top-line narrative that articulates why that issue is important in the context of the country.

In my work with UNICEF offices I have found that this three-part structure works well as a way to draft that narrative:

- What is the problem? *“Today in Thailand we have thousands of children living in homes without even sufficient income to keep on the electricity.”*
- What is the long-term solution? *“UNICEF supports the establishment of a universal child support grant to provide at least a basic stream of support to all families with children.”*
- What is needed right now? *“As a way to begin we are advocating establishment of a basic child support grant to all families living below the poverty line with children under one year of age.”*

An effective UNICEF advocacy narrative will always be more complex than this, joining together data, human stories, policy proposals, and deeper analysis, but this basic narrative is the foundation for all of that and these basic and simple top-line narratives for each advocacy priority should be understood by all the staff in the office, not just those specializing in that area.

4. The Deeper Details Only Relevant to People Specializing on the Issue

A lot of UNICEF advocacy is about a deeper conversation with policy experts, technical people in government, and others for whom detail and data are important. This is the fourth level of the narrative. It is important to develop and to develop well, but it is not important information for people who are not specialists. One challenge that UNICEF teams have is understanding how not to bring that detail into the top-line narratives, where it has the effect of creating more confusion than enlightenment.