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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on  
their efforts in 2015 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

UNICEF

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# UNICEF

## **Contributions to the report on the outcomes of the world summit of the information society**

### **Executive Summary**

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is a global organisation with a presence in more than 190 countries territories around the world. It is a de-centralised organisation which works through 165 country offices, regional offices and 36 national committees, and with headquarters in New York, Copenhagen and Florence. UNICEF's work is anchored in evidence, knowledge and research generated by the organisation and its partners.

A growing body of evidence reveals that, whatever their cultural and geographic contexts, many children now use information and communication technologies (ICT) as part of their everyday lives. In fact, a recent study from UNICEF Office of Research estimates that 1 in three users of internet is a child. Indeed, as the above quotation makes clear, ICT – especially online and mobile technologies – are no longer an optional add-on to children's lives but, rather, they are becoming infrastructural. Already in high and many middle income countries and increasingly even in low income countries, children's activities and opportunities are underpinned by ICT in one way or another. Indeed, the main driver of technological innovation, along with mass access and use of ICT is the substantial commercial and governmental efforts to roll out technologies so as to compete in the global economy. This economic momentum is also a powerful driver of policy, one that far exceeds the capacity of organisations concerned to optimise children's digital opportunities or embed child protection and child rights into emerging regulatory frameworks.

### The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and WSIS

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) provides a strategic starting point for advancing online protection, provision, and participation within the organising framework of children's rights. Although framed in the pre-digital era, the UNCRC establishes basic standards that apply without discrimination to all children worldwide, with the focus on specifying the minimum entitlements and freedoms that governments are expected to implement.

Online opportunities and risks tend to go hand in hand, for as children tend to encounter more opportunities, they also experience more risk of harm. And, since children are often the pioneers in relation to digital innovations in everyday life, the digital dimension of their activities may particularly lack guidance, protection or even foreknowledge from their parents, teachers and communities. At the same time heightened anxiety about young people's ICT use can result in overly restrictive policies that undermine ways in which the internet could empower children with unprecedented opportunities to learn and participate, including in relation to their identity, privacy, sexuality or health.

### **UNICEF's Research**

As in other areas of UNICEF's engagement research underpins programme and policy efforts in the field of ICT and children. Building on a body of knowledge conducted in previous years [UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti](#) has initiated a new research project

“[Global Kids Online](#)”. This project brings together experts from leading academic institutions, EU Kids Online and UNICEF Country Offices to develop a global research toolkit and roll it out in several countries from different regions. The study will establish the ways in which internet can contribute to children’s experiences and wellbeing and under which conditions their safety can be undermined. UNICEF’s research has also contributed to the internet governance debate through collaboration with the Global Commission on Internet Governance and other IG bodies.

### **Best and effective practices,**

UNICEF has increasingly incorporated ICTs in its programme implementations strategies worldwide. This now spans across ICT public policy advocacy, partnerships, and supporting the implementation of programme innovation / information systems with partners and government counterparts.

### **UNICEF Initiatives in the Field of Child Online Protection**

The protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse enabled by information and communication technologies (ICTs), is a key mandate for UNICEF. UNICEF supports Member States in their efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and other international treaties; as well as the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children (2006) and the Rio de Janeiro Declaration and Call for Action to Prevent and Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (2008), which all call upon States to take all possible measures towards preventing and eliminating violence, abuse and exploitation enabled by ICTs.

In line with the UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, UNICEF supports the strengthening of child protection systems, comprised of legislation, policies and comprehensive services for children and families, and the challenging of social norms, attitudes and practices that harm children. Efforts include advocacy for, and technical support to legal and policy reform to ensure that children are protected from violence and exploitation while using ICTs. This includes criminalization of exploitation of children in child abuse/images and online grooming of children.

UNICEF also supports the strengthening of institutional capacities to implement legislation and policies in a coordinated manner, such as the establishment of specialized police units and capacity building of law enforcement and the justice sector on how to investigate and prosecute these crimes against children, ensuring that children are not victimized in the process. Support is also provided to the establishment of comprehensive services for children who have experienced violence and abuse, involving health, social welfare, justice and education sectors, as well as the setting up of reporting mechanisms where children and families can report violence and seek assistance. Awareness raising and capacity building of children, parents, teachers and carers on the risks of ICTs and protective measures, are also key aspects of the UNICEF response.

In 2015, with the generous support of the UK Government, UNICEF has established a *Global Programme to build capacity to tackle online child sexual exploitation*. The Global programme is being implemented by UNICEF and partners in 17 countries across six regions worldwide. It is accelerating actions by Government, civil society, UN agencies and ICT industry to ensure that 1) children are effectively protected from online sexual

exploitation; 2) perpetrators are apprehended and prosecuted; and 3) children are enjoying the Internet free from danger.

This work is triggering commitments at highest political level for the protection of children from online sexual exploitation, within a broader agenda of child protection.

### **Innovation in UNICEF**

UNICEF Innovation is an interdisciplinary team of individuals around the world tasked with identifying, prototyping, technologies and practices that strengthen UNICEF's work. The implementation of principles for digital development <http://digitalprinciples.org/>, which find their roots in the efforts of individuals, development organizations, and donors alike who have called for a more concerted effort by donors and implementing partners to institutionalize lessons learned in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in development projects. With a strong contribution from UNICEF, the principles were written by and for international development donors and their implementing partners, but are freely available for use by all. The Principles are intended to serve as guidance rather than edict, and to be updated and refined over time.

### **Outreach and Global Partnerships**

The UNICEF executive director is also currently a commissioner of the WSIS related broadband commission. UNICEF see this as important work to bridge the digital divide by influencing private sector telecom actors, and ICT public policy worldwide, to ensure equitable outcomes. An internal four year digital transformation program is also underway in UNICEF, which aim at sharpening UNICEF's digital presence both on the web and in social media. Building on UNICEF's strong brand as a child advocate, this program is in synch with digital agendas of member states and regional bodies to contribute to WSIS goals.

### **Child Data Dissemination, Management and Transparency**

UNICEF supports countries in collecting data related to children and women through Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), an international household survey programme. By 2015, over 280 surveys will have been implemented in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries. Each round of surveys builds upon the last and offers new indicators to monitor trends and current priorities, which are published on-line to contribute to the overall goals of the WSIS.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys generate data on more than 20 indicators used to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making the programme one of the largest single sources of data for SDG monitoring, and related WSIS goals.

UNICEF maintains a series of global databases for tracking the situation of children and women globally. The databases include only statistically sound and nationally representative data from household surveys and other sources. They are updated annually through a process that draws on a wealth of data maintained by UNICEF's network of 140 country offices, and shared with the international community through the web.

UNICEF's work in the area of data analysis highlights trends and emphasizes patterns found within the data. It also suggests how these data can be used strategically to inform

programmatic efforts. Where possible, data are disaggregated by gender, age, residence, household income, education, and other key social and demographic variables to help uncover possible risk factors and inequities. UNICEF also promotes the advancement of research through the development of joint projects and collaboration with academic institutions and other agencies working at the national and international level.

UNICEF has also recently implemented a global ERP system, introducing standardised reporting and accuracy of transactions and financial data worldwide. The aggregation of data from global operations has allowed UNICEF to participate more effectively in the IATI transparency program, to present programme implementation to aid recipients, stakeholders and donors.

### **Informing, engaging and empowering children and youth through digital**

Over the last decade ago, we observed huge shifts in the ways audiences consume, create and engage with UNICEF's content and digital platforms. Continually adjusting to this, UNICEF has grown global social communities significantly, with millennials representing roughly 75% of the audience.

Digital, mobile and population trends across regions reinforce the imperative to strategically and creatively engage these young populations on issues that matter most to them if long-term social change is to be achieved. This guides a tiered approach to engagement - from sharing content that sparks conversations; to mobilizing digital communities like the Voices of Youth bloggers and the UNICEF Digital Volunteers; to promoting empowerment initiatives guided by the premise that children and youth are agents of change.

UNICEF has become the leading nonprofit organization on social media – not only in terms of digital fan-base size, but also in terms of quality and depth of user's engagement. UNICEF global social media fan-base is estimated at over 25 million people worldwide. On a daily basis, UNICEF engages this audience on issues of children's rights and well-being, and seeks to engage them to take action towards improving the lives of children. Social media has become a key avenue for UNICEF in the area of public engagement with a strong focus on millennials.

Through our global social channels, we call on people to take action for children, in any way they can - big or small. We do this by creating empowering content on children's rights, making noise and driving discussion about the persistent inequalities that hold children back; by recognizing change makers who are fighting for children's rights; and engaging our social media community to seek out their ideas for a better world for every child often by using an approach

Voices of Youth [VOY] advocates for increased attention to the paid to the intersection of children's rights and growing digital access, through the following areas of work: 1) Raising awareness on digital citizenship and safety; 2) Advocating for an approach to children's rights in a digital age that is holistic, evidence-based, and empowers children; 3) Bringing children's and young people's voices on issues relating to their rights and digital access to policymakers and practitioners; 4) Demonstrating effective digital tools and approaches to engaging children and young people on issues related to their wellbeing and development and; giving children and young people a safe space online to discuss matters that concern that and impact on their wellbeing and development.

In order to ensure that children and young people stay engaged on issues of online safety, , Voices of Youth makes use of popular global and local digital platforms and media to promote digital citizenship and safety ,and encourage discussion and reflection. In addition to providing youth-friendly tools and resources on digital citizenship and safety and using opportunities such as Safer Internet Day for public advocacy, VOY is a space where young people can share their views on the role that social media plays in their lives through regular debates and user-generated content.

As part of the work to strengthen the capacity of young people to express themselves through digital media and tools, each year, between 80 and 90 young people are selected as VOY Blogging Interns. Through the Voices of Youth Maps initiative, which combines youth advocacy and a digital mapping, young people are empowered to explore the challenges facing their communities and to identify opportunities and advocate for solutions.

Voices of Youth also partners with individual UNICEF offices to explore their digital landscapes and to understand the impact on children's rights – and the opportunities for engagement and empowerment. Since 2010, VOY has partnered with 14 UNICEF offices to undertake exploratory research and to conduct local advocacy. This work, as well as additional advocacy opportunities have been supported by the Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard University. Digitally Connected is a collaborative initiative between UNICEF and the Berkman Center bringing together academics, practitioners, young people, activists, philanthropists, government officials, and representatives of technology companies from around the world who, together, address the challenges and opportunities children and youth encounter in the digital environment.

### **Noteworthy projects and activities**

#### **Primero – Child Protection in Emergencies**

Primero is an open-source software platform that will help partners securely and safely collect, store, manage, and share data on most vulnerable children for protection-related referral, case management and incident monitoring. Primero allows secure and confidential information exchange among diverse partners, across numerous fields of child protection, such psychosocial support, family tracing for unaccompanied and separated children, gender-based violence and children at risk of grave violations. Specifically, UNICEF has been mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) to monitor and report on grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. In order to do this, UNICEF has been tasked with establishing and managing a central monitoring and reporting information database. Primero will eliminate the need for numerous databases of 'siloes' information on child vulnerability. It is also designed to enable exchange of data internally between partners and externally with other information management systems, while maintaining security and confidentiality on sensitive data, to improve child protection response.

Primero is an inter-agency initiative in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the United Nations Office of the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC).  
Primer deployment is now underway. U-Report

### **Open Source SMS based systems and applications**

UNICEF Innovation teams has been working with SMS systems since 2007, when it created an open source platform called RapidSMS with its partners to support ongoing data collection efforts and youth engagement activities. For example, RapidSMS was used to facilitate communication between clinics and community health workers to significantly reduce the amount of time between collecting blood samples for early infant diagnosis for HIV and the return of test results to the originating health facility.

Inspired by RapidSMS's capabilities, UNICEF and partners expand the functions giving birth to RapidPro in 2014. From youth engagement programs like U-Report to education monitoring systems like EduTrac, RapidPro has become UNICEF's common platform for developing and sharing mobile services that can be adapted for different contexts and sectors.

U-Report, in particular, is a text-message based innovation that amplifies the voices and views of young people in developing countries, has reached 1 million active users and won several awards.

U-Report started out as a local innovation to help young Ugandans engage on issues that affect their lives and futures. Today, young U-reporters from 15 countries, mostly in Africa, are using it every day to voice their opinions, connect to their leaders, and help change the conditions in their communities.

### **South – South Collaboration through ICTs**

UNICEF supports the increasing demand for south-south and horizontal cooperation between programme countries, and the strengthening of the UN's support to this type of exchange. It is therefore advisable for the UN system to present options for practical guidance and propose an action plan to strengthen south-south cooperation in programmes including the fostering of improved knowledge sharing and reporting, as well as the piloting of virtual approaches through ICTs. UNICEF has discovered that the best approaches are based on peer interactions with minimal moderation, using open source systems designed with usability in mind.

### **Challenges**

In relation to the recommendations from ECOSOC resolution 2008/3, UNICEF wish to highlight some challenges, both with regards to their own implementation of activities in support of the summit goals, but also coordination with other UN agencies and partners,

Recognising the rights of children within this fast changing picture is all too easily overlooked: many of the emerging legislative and regulatory structures often ignore or barely mention children, assuming that provision for the public in general will suffice when it comes to the needs of child users. Yet these latter can be complex, and require care when meeting them.

Internally, scaling up technical capacity in support UNICEF ICT policy mandates is challenging for the organization where ICT capacity has traditionally been focusing on supporting operations of the institution itself. Transformation programs are needed that are both costly and complicated considering the UN budget, resource and staff frameworks.

The current ICT governance mechanisms within the UN family could be strengthened. Composition of the internal ICT leadership in UN agencies are split between specialized agencies and implementing agencies with significantly different TORs. It is therefore difficult to rally support for UN wide initiatives that address ICT policy in the context of member state and development agendas. The ICT network also does not have its own seed funding, making it difficult to gain traction when implementing cross cutting ICT and WSIS related projects.

There is also unclear overall ownership within the UN family of system wide policies related to information systems security, cyber security, data ownership, sustainability and privacy. The notion that many of the innovations in programme countries are facilitated as a result of limited local ICT regulation also bring forward ethical and privacy challenges.