ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS AT UNICEF: PROGRESS REPORT 2018-2020

This report highlights key achievements since the adoption of an organization-wide roadmap in 2018 to systematically integrate Accountability to Affected Populations across UNICEF

Scaling up AAP in UNICEF

Since the adoption by HQ and Regional Directors in 2018 of an organization-wide business case and road map to systematically integrate Accountability to Affected Populations across UNICEF, significant progress has been made to ensure that all vulnerable, at-risk and crisis-affected girls, boys, women and men supported by the organization can hold UNICEF accountable for promoting and protecting their rights, generating effective results for them and working in ways that enhance their dignity, capacities and resilience.

UNICEF Country Offices across all regions have been at the forefront of this effort, with consistent and robust engagement of Regional Offices and support from the Office of Emergency Programmes' AAP Unit. Contributions to this agenda have come from all sectors (Child Protection, Education, WASH, Nutrition, Health) and cross-cutting areas of work.

AAP is a precursor to good-quality programming in both humanitarian and development contexts

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UNICEF's programme implementation was constrained in 2020 by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted children and their families in new ways and created new challenges for governments, humanitarian and development organizations. However, at the same time, this complex environment triggered flexible and innovative approaches that made UNICEF's programmes more responsive and adaptable, meeting affected populations' most urgent needs. While strategic use of digital channels made it possible to overcome community engagement challenges posed by social distancing, social listening practices contributed to designing tailored interventions and adapting responses, and the establishment of new two-way communication channels ensured timely access to accurate and relevant information to communities.

Results from an internal survey on AAP, which informed this report, show encouraging advances and consistent progress. Nonetheless, as highlighted in the 2020 review of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action, efforts to put people at the centre of all work conducted by the organization must continue and become more systematic. As a precursor to good-quality programming in both humanitarian and development contexts, AAP needs to be prioritized at all levels. As an organization, UNICEF needs proactive and transformational leadership to ensure it better operationalizes AAP efforts, especially when it comes to engaging children, their families and communities in plans that concern them, actively taking their views into account and responding to their feedback.

In this report we feature some of UNICEF's major achievements on AAP, including best and promising practices implemented by Country Offices.

1 - © UNICEF/Willocq

Operationalizing AAP

Accountability to Affected Populations commitments have been operationalized across all regions and contributed to enhancing participation of communities, better understanding and responding to their needs and concerns, and ensuring that they are at the centre of decision-making.
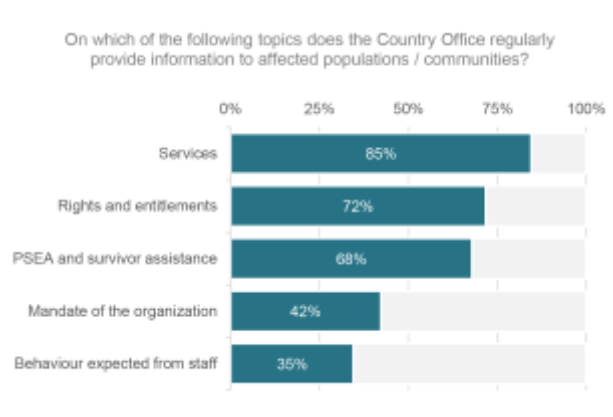
Approaches that contribute to AAP have been established also in collaboration with Governments and in coordination with other local and international partners and UN agencies.
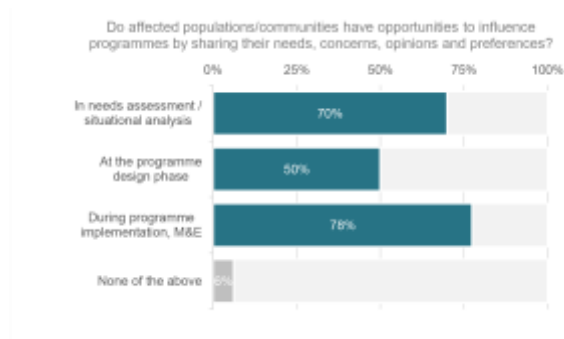
An internal AAP survey responded by 80 Country Offices indicates that UNICEF regularly provides information to affected populations, mostly on services, as well as on rights and entitlements, and leverages a combination of face-to-face and digital communication channels in its programmes, including community meetings and networks, radio, U-Report, social media and printed materials.

Most Country Offices reported making use of participatory approaches and engaging communities during context analysis, implementation, and in monitoring and evaluation, but to a lesser extent in the design phase of programmes.

The majority indicated that they have mechanisms in place to collect feedback from affected populations (90%) and that they systematically analyse and take into account feedback (74%). Mechanisms include information & feedback centres, call centres and hotlines, U-Report, radio, community and youth networks, programme visits and end user monitoring/post distribution monitoring.
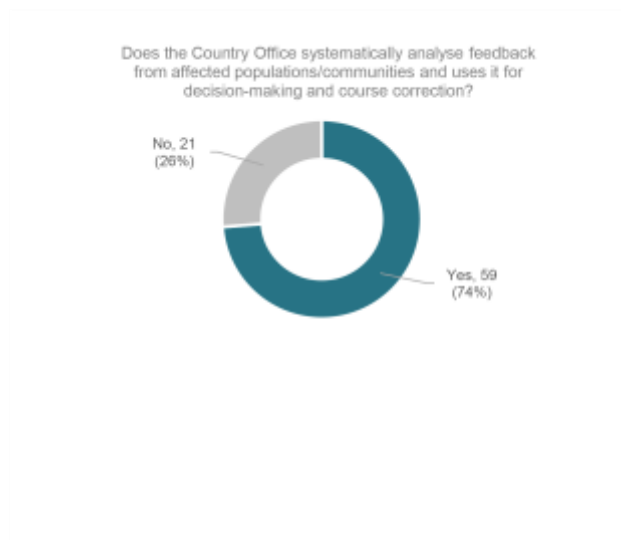
On which of the following topics does the Country Office regularly provide information to affected populations / communities?

Topic	Percentage
Services	85%
Rights and entitlements	72%
PSEA and survivor assistance	68%
Mandate of the organization	42%
Behaviour expected from staff	35%

2 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Do affected populations/communities have opportunities to influence programmes by sharing their needs, concerns, opinions and preferences?

Phase	Percentage
In needs assessment / situational analysis	70%
At the programme design phase	50%
During programme implementation, M&E	78%
None of the above	5%

3 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Which programmes or services have systems to collect complaints and feedback from affected populations/communities?

Programme	Percentage
Child Protection	64%
C4D	50%
Education	49%
WASH	43%
PSEA	41%
Health/HIV	39%
GBV	35%
Nutrition	31%
Cash	29%
Cross-sectoral	24%
No system	10%

4 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Does the Country Office systematically analyse feedback from affected populations/communities and uses it for decision-making and course correction?

No, 21 (26%)

Yes, 59 (74%)

5 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Good practices

Below we highlight some of the good practices reported through the survey (this compilation is not exhaustive nor comprehensive).

Click on the Arrows button in the lower right corner to read in full and browse

6 - © UNICEF/De La Guardia

Communities in India shape post-disaster and recovery plans

The Janakiya Pankalithavum Punarnirmanavum Initiative (JPP-I), established and implemented by the Local Self Government Department, State Government of Kerala, India, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, and operationalised in 2 phases (2018-2020), embeds participation and feedback from

people affected by flooding and landslides into recovery plans. An extensive network of women feedback collectors were skilled on customised mobile applications to engage and facilitate communities to provide feedback and information on post-disaster and development needs through surveys, interviews, dialogues and participatory processes. This feedback and engagement mechanism provides data to key sectoral departments of the government (through a dedicated dashboard) guiding evidence-based decision making, service delivery, development of recovery plans and the implementation of mitigation measures for future disaster events. The skilled resource persons of JPP-I have been engaged in Covid-19 response especially reaching out to vulnerable populations. As this model of AAP through governance mechanisms has proven successful, it is planned to be applied in other states in 2021.

U-Report acts as regional platform for Venezuelan migrants to make their voices and needs heard

U-Report "Uniendo Voces", run collectively by UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM and partners in Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador, acts as a regional platform for young Venezuelan migrants to receive information and make their voices heard. Using social media channels such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, adolescents and youth, as well as their families, can access simple and up-to-date information on a variety of topics ranging from migratory requirements, seeking refuge, safety and security, health and education services. At the same time, they can use chats and pools to express their needs, concerns and share their feedback on services. Organizations use the platform to listen, engage and generate evidence to orient the humanitarian response. For example, increased feedback related to domestic violence received through the platform in 2020 has prompted UNICEF Bolivia and partners to strengthen targeted interventions to address gender-based-violence in 2021.

Community networks in South Sudan elevate information to improve programmes

As interpersonal communication remains the most effective means of engaging with the population in South Sudan, UNICEF has created the Integrated Community Mobilization Network. Over 6000 information provision volunteers and about 200 feedback collectors regularly engage with households across the country, sharing life-saving messages and information on the rights of the population and services available to them, as well as gathering feedback on issues affecting communities or gaps in programmes. Religious leaders, faith-based organizations and other community-based institutions such as youth and mothers' groups are crucial parts of the network as they act as community informants and gatekeepers, tailoring information to the community and facilitating exchange. This face-to-face system is complemented by a network of community-based radio stations broadcasting locally produced and culture-sensitive programs to address information needs and issues highlighted through feedback analysis. In 2020, a hotline and social media were also introduced as part of a pilot with the Ministry of Health to address feedback related to health programmes.

Information & feedback centres in Bangladesh ensure communities' needs are addressed

In Bangladesh, UNICEF operates fourteen Information & Feedback centres in camps and four in host communities. Queries and feedback are received by trained female and male information service providers and are responded to immediately by providing information. Feedback is recorded in logbooks – where it cannot be addressed on site it is referred and elevated to the relevant agency. To improve feedback management, UNICEF developed a real-time data generation system, maintained by information centres staff and accessible to all partners to monitor feedback. As camps host more than ninety centres operated by different agencies, a common protocol has been set up, that includes step-

by-step guidance on operational, technical and ethical issues, ranging from actions to be taken when receiving feedback, to instructions for logging data into the database, to privacy considerations and procedures when dealing with sensitive issues and clear referral pathways. This system facilitates follow-up in response and ensures issues are addressed promptly. The centres also provide "safe spaces", where vulnerable individuals – notably women and adolescent girls – can go for protection and receive accurate information and service referrals related to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual reproductive health services.

Affected populations inquire about services through Jordan's multi-sectoral helpline

UNICEF Jordan's multi-sectoral helpline is a direct communication platform open to all who have inquiries, feedback and complaints regarding UNICEF and its partners' services. Designed with contributions from all Country Office's sections, it operates since 2018 through a partnership established with a local technical university college. Coordinated by the Youth Engagement section, it is staffed with graduates from UNICEF's youth employment call centre project who are trained on UNICEF's programmes and on the helpline's operating procedures, including how to respond to queries from affected populations, deal with sensitive reports and refer feedback. About seven operators at a time run the mechanism daily, responding to requests for information and recording queries needing referral. A tailored database has been built by UNICEF's ICT department to record and manage complaints and feedback, which are regularly transmitted to relevant focal points in each section for response, follow up, and direct action on sensitive cases. The helpline also serves as a two-ways communication channel and outreach mechanism, as sections can run surveys, polls and information campaigns through the operators. This channel is complemented by a dedicated hotline for WASH services in camps, and a SMS system built on [Rapid Pro](#) for Cash and other programming – these act as system for immediate feedback on service delivery, information verification and rapid troubleshooting. Information collected is compiled in monthly reports that are used by sections to adapt programmes and inform planning.

Inter-agency coordination in the Central African Republic strengthens engagement of communities in the response

An [inter-agency Working Group on AAP](#) has been operating since 2019 in the Central African Republic with the aim of establishing collective mechanisms to improve humanitarian response quality, humanitarian access and engagement of affected populations in the response. Co-led by UNICEF and OCHA and positioned at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, it brings together a multitude of local and international partners such as members of Reseau des Journalistes des Droits de l'Homme, the Danish Refugee Council, Finn Church Aid and Ground Truth Solutions. The group started its work by conducting perception surveys to inform the 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), introducing perception questions in the multi-sectoral needs assessments and integrating eight perception indicators in the HRP. Its collective approach is made up of multiple mechanisms run by each partner that provide, collect and analyse information from affected people through one single information management system accessible to all members. Mechanisms include information & feedback centres, a hotline, phone booths, radio programmes, community discussion groups, as well as rumour management and tracking of perceptions**.**

Affected populations in Venezuela report satisfaction with services and sensitive issues

UNICEF Venezuela established mechanisms in different programmes to assess satisfaction with services and gather feedback from the affected populations – these include a channel for teachers and children to give feedback on education kits, and a short survey at migrant centres to improve health, nutrition and protection services based on needs and preferences of the users. In response to increasing concerns about aid instrumentalization, in 2020 the Country Office designed a country-wide mechanism for sensitive feedback, to be launched in 2021. UNICEF 's "Línea de Reporte" builds on communication channels preferred by the population, such as phone, WhatsApp, SMS and emails. Two dedicated staff members received extensive training to run the helpline and manage sensitive issues, including reports of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The helpline operating procedures include feedback management flows, pre-established pathways to refer feedback to focal points in UNICEF, and specific guidance on how to address different types of sensitive reports. Operators have at their disposal a library of key messages to inform and refer callers who do not want to report sensitive issues. This pilot aims to inform the establishment of an inter-agency complaints and feedback mechanism in the county.

Azerbaijani youth influence local plans and programmes

The Azerbaijani Youth Advocate Project aims at strengthening adolescents and young people participation and in decision-making processes at the local level. Youth Advisory Council members are trained on a wide range of skills and community-specific issues and regularly hold consultations with their peers in schools and other spaces.

The Youth Councils identify issues that affect adolescents and young adults in their communities and initiate discussions, formulate recommendations and present small-scale projects to local authorities, influencing local plans and programmes. Based on the success of councils established in three districts, UNICEF has expanded the programme to five additional districts in 2020.

Yemen Cash Transfer project's feedback mechanism prompts programmatic adaptation

Yemen Country Office's Emergency Cash Transfer project, targeting over 1.5 million households, embeds a feedback and grievance mechanism that prompts immediate course correction as well as programmatic adaptation between each project cycle. The mechanism leverages a toll-free phone line, a customized mobile app used by field staff and the messaging platform RapidPro. Affected populations can reach the call-centre staffed with about 70 operators and also engage directly with about 130 field staff deployed during cash distributions, who are able to input feedback offline and online through mobile devices. The mechanism is rooted in a customized and centralized management information system and a team of about 70 staff dedicated to analysing, addressing and direct feedback. Aside from requests for information that are responded directly by phone operators, feedback is organized under six categories (barriers to access assistance, service quality, mistreatment from service providers, suspected fraud, challenges encountered by field staff, need for other services linked to cash assistance) and responded to with tailored protocol, which include immediate referral to service providers and troubleshooting, referral to field-deployed staff for face-to-face response, or investigation. Feedback prompts immediate course-correction and is also used at the end of each cycle for stocktaking and programme adaptation. For example, after receiving many complaints that certain identification documents were not being accepted to receive cash assistance, UNICEF adjusted the design of the project to include other types of IDs and introduced a parallel system for validation of identity with tribal leaders for persons who do not have an ID.

Youth lead community participation and monitoring of programmes in Brazil

UNICEF Brazil has developed an AAP strategic framework and action plan to guide the humanitarian response to the migration crisis and Covid-19 in 2021. A particular focus is on strengthening the participation of the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population in three states through the establishment of community networks a community-based surveillance system in informal settlements and shelters. Youth engagement is a key component of the strategy – community mobilizers between 18 and 24 years old are trained in monitoring, communication and AAP approaches and provided with equipment and resources to lead awareness campaigns, monitor programmes, mobilize peers and collect feedback on the population's needs and issues of concern. In the Roraima state, where the initiative was piloted in Q4 2020, UNICEF reached close to 10,000 people through 42 trained volunteers. Feedback by affected populations collected through this first phase highlighted mental health and conflict management as priority issues and prompted the Country Office to adjust its programming to address these aspects. In 2021, the strategy will be expanded in Roraima and extended to the Amazonas and Para states.

Community engagement through U-Report ensures aid reaches the most in need in Nigeria

In Nigeria, UNICEF uses U-Report as part of community engagement efforts and monitoring systems rooted in different sectors. U-Report 24x7 sends and receives text messages in real-time from and to affected populations throughout the programming cycle, contributing to needs assessments, information provision and soliciting and receiving feedback. One of its uses has been to strengthen Accountability to Affected Population in nutrition programmes by linking it to food distribution interventions. For instance, the Country Office identified setbacks in the use of Ready-to-use Therapeutic Food due to mismanagement and sale of the item by caregivers, distributors and health workers. By engaging the population through U-Report, UNICEF gathered information on the knowledge and practices regarding misuse of the item and was able to address gaps in the programme by sharing information on rights and entitlements of the population and the correct use and distribution of the item, and by promoting use of channels to report its mismanagement or re-sale. This ensured aid reached the most in need and resulted in more effective programming.

Turkey's call centre allows to assess relevance and effectiveness of Cash programme

The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programme, implemented by UNICEF Turkey in collaboration with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social services, the Ministry of Education and the Turkish Red Crescent Society, encourages refugee children to enrol and remain in education through provision of socio-economic and protection support to their families. The programme includes an AAP pillar that leverages a call centre operated by Red Cross volunteers trained by UNICEF. The centre operates in Turkish, English, Arabic, Farsi and Pashtu and provides a channel for affected populations to inquire about the programme and payments, and to share their feedback. By combining reports from the centre with data gathered through outreach activities, UNICEF can assess relevance and effectiveness of the CCTE programme and identify underlining issues that are affecting boys, girls and their families' well-being, including protection risks. As a result of feedback indicating important protection issues hindering enrolment and retention of children in education, the Country Office adapted and expanded its programmes and cooperation agreements to address protection concerns and has been able to better target vulnerable groups. In 2020, the scope of the call centre expanded to

respond to the Covid-19 outbreak by incorporating health messages – showing its added value as a rapid response mechanism.

Inter-agency coordination in Indonesia strengthens engagement of communities in the response

The [Community Engagement Working Group for the Central Sulawesi response](#) was created in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Indonesia in 2018 and used the experiences of UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement to strengthen collective approaches to gathering and responding to community feedback. The Working Group coordinated a suite of actions, including advocating for and integrating people's information needs and preferences into assessments, surveying perceptions of the humanitarian response, tracking rumours and providing appropriate response, and coordinating messaging to address information needs. A key component of this work has been to provide humanitarian and government leadership with the regular trends on affected populations feedback to trigger decisions and adapt programming, not only during the emergency response, but also for programme adaptation in the recovery and rehabilitation phases that continued in 2019. The model oriented the Covid-19 response in 2020, highlighting the effectiveness coordinated approaches to AAP and Community Engagement and the importance of embedding them into emergency preparedness planning.

Minimum actions for AAP ensure education programmes in Chad respond to communities 'needs

Chad Education Cluster has integrated AAP in its way of working by establishing a set of minimum actions for protection, accountability and community engagement. Partners involved in the multi-year programme implemented in collaboration with Education Cannot Wait have for example embedded these actions in programme management. Ahead of starting education projects in different areas, organizations hold consultations with the affected populations to share information about the programme – especially its objectives, timing and target population – and receive their feedback. Different groups of the population are engaged, including adolescent girls, children with disabilities and members of parent's associations. Their inputs guide the design of the programme, shaping for example accessibility and inclusion parameters. During the implementation of the programme, two-way communication with communities is maintained through parents' association and appointed focal points who act as a channel for information-sharing and feedback between the population and UNICEF. Community members are informed on how they can seek information and share their feedback about the programme and the behaviour and conduct of service providers.

State of Palestine Country Office builds local capacity to enhance AAP

UNICEF State of Palestine is strengthening Accountability to Affected Populations in programmes by systematizing related commitments in agreements with all its implementing partners. AAP elements have been introduced in Programme Documents and respective monitoring frameworks, which include a set of mandatory AAP indicators to be reported against quarterly, such as percentage of the population consulted in programme design and number of feedback and complaints addressed. To support partners in strengthening and mainstreaming systems for AAP, UNICEF regularly provides training in this area, particularly on community engagement, complaints and feedback mechanisms and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In partnership with an international NGO, the Country Office has signed an agreement to strengthen the capacity of 12 national NGOs on AAP. The work will

include the development of AAP context analysis (looking at the capacity of each organization, its specific gaps and needs) capacity building and system strengthening.

Improving trust, access and acceptance in Cameroon

In Cameroon's North West/South West crisis, UNICEF is strengthening Accountability to Affected Populations through enhanced partnerships and engagement with communities. Over 80% of the humanitarian partnership agreements include specific AAP interventions in all programme sectors and indicators for regular monitoring. Over 26,000 community members are regularly engaged through local committees and encouraged to provide feedback on quality of interventions and services, gaps and other priorities needs. The Country Office has enhanced the capacity of its partners, including religious organizations such as Caritas and the Methodist Church, to effectively integrate and address accountability issues. This strategy has been combined with efforts in information provision and transparent communication, including explaining services available to population, their rights and entitlements as well as the mandate and values of UNICEF. These efforts have contributed to improved trust, access and acceptance of humanitarian interventions and to better engagement between affected populations and humanitarian actors.
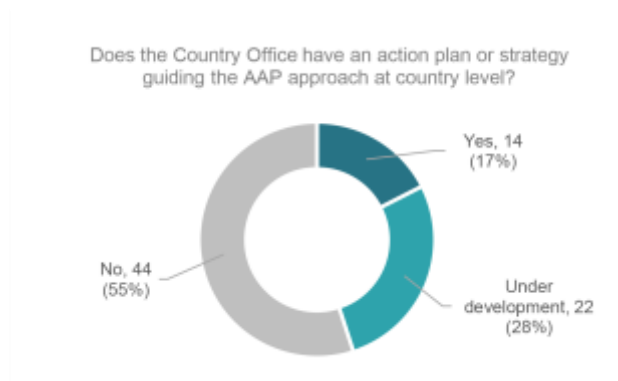
Strategy and resource allocation

Accountability to Affected Populations is increasingly recognized as a priority by UNICEF's Offices and dedicated resources are allocated to it. Several Country Offices, such as Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Turkey, Venezuela and Yemen have developed action plans or strategies to systematize AAP across all their programmes. Human resources have been assigned at the country level to strengthen AAP, as well as at the regional level to support the development of a coherent approach.

Dedicated positions have been established in the East & South Africa and the Middle East & North Africa Regional Offices to support Country Offices in those regions – other regions will receive similar support. These efforts are underpinned by the engagement of regional focal points involved in UNICEF's AAP Working Group.
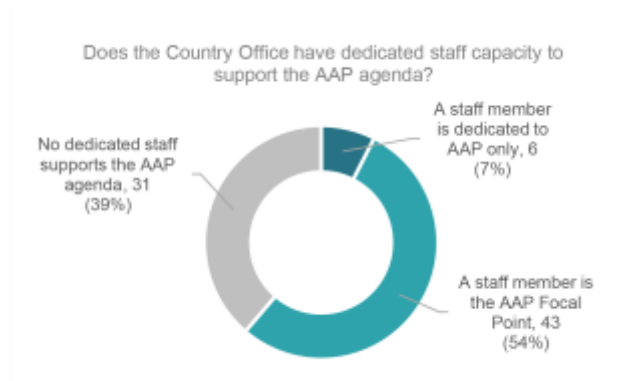
The survey highlighted that almost half of the respondents have an AAP action plan or strategy –or are developing one. Over 60% reported having either a dedicated staff member or a focal point to support this agenda.

Does the Country Office have an action plan or strategy guiding the AAP approach at country level?

Yes, 14 (17%)

No, 44 (55%)

Under development, 22 (28%)

7 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Does the Country Office have dedicated staff capacity to support the AAP agenda?

No dedicated staff supports the AAP agenda, 31 (39%)

A staff member is dedicated to AAP only, 6 (7%)

A staff member is the AAP Focal Point, 43 (54%)

8 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

Strengthening capacity and knowledge

Knowledge of Accountability to Affected Populations principles and capacity to apply them has increased within UNICEF as a result of several initiatives set up at the country, regional and HQ levels.

Since 2019, a variety of capacity building activities have taken place. Presential AAP training sessions were organized by the Latin American & Caribbean (interagency), the South Asia and the West & Central Africa Regional Offices in 2019, while the East & South Africa and the Latin American & Caribbean Regional Offices delivered remote training over the course of several weeks, which included development of country action plans.
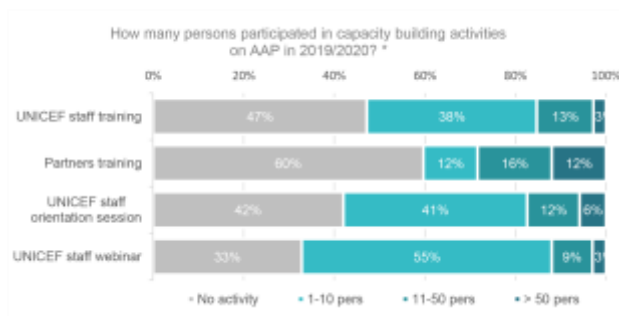
Short orientation sessions and workshops have been organized by various Country Offices, including in Afghanistan for Communication for Development and Emergency staff, in Brazil and Guatemala for all staff, and in Venezuela for the Country Management Team and Humanitarian Country Team.

Regional Offices also organized dedicated AAP orientation sessions for senior management and as part of regional network meetings. Country Offices such as Lebanon, Nicaragua and Venezuela held in-depth training on AAP for staff and partners.

About 80% of the Country Offices that responded to the AAP survey * delivered capacity building activities on AAP over the course of 2020, either through training, orientation sessions or webinars. However, only 40% organized activities to strengthen capacity of local partners around AAP.*

Capacity building activities on AAP in 2019/2020

No activities, 15 (21%)

At least 1, 57 (79%)

9 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

How many persons participated in capacity building activities on AAP in 2019/2020? *

	No activity	1-10 pers	11-50 pers	> 50 pers
UNICEF staff training	47%	38%	13%	3%
Partners training	60%	12%	16%	12%
UNICEF staff orientation session	42%	41%	12%	6%
UNICEF staff webinar	33%	55%	9%	3%
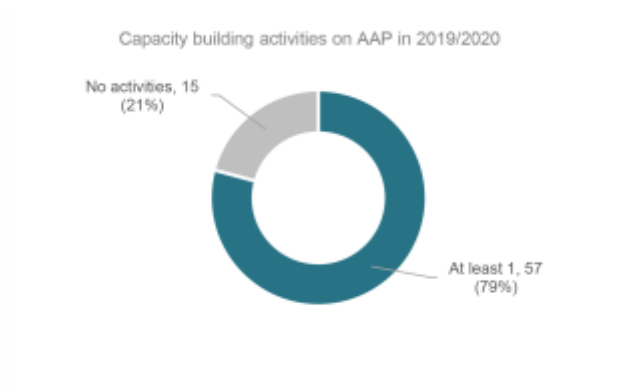
10 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

* Totals do not include "data not available" answers.

The first UNICEF guidance on Accountability to Affected Populations, the AAP Handbook & toolkit, was launched in 2020 with the aim of increasing understanding of AAP across the organization and supporting staff and partners to apply its principles in practical, everyday situations. To complement and contextualize the handbook, the East & South Africa Regional Office produced a set of summary guidelines for mainstreaming AAP into Country Offices' processes.

To facilitate access to training on AAP, an online course comprising 6 modules is to be launched in four languages in the first semester of 2021 on UNICEF's e-learning platform Agora. Additionally, UNICEF's Office of Emergency Programmes is exploring partnership opportunities with qualified learning institutions to develop a practical, on-the-job, training course to improve staff capacity and skills to apply relevant approaches in different contexts.

1. Introduction to Accountability to Affected Populations

2. Integrating AAP in the way we work

3. Strengthening AAP in the programme cycle

4. AAP in action (two-way communication, feedback mechanisms, participation)

5. Partnership and collaboration

6. Key reflections on AAP

To ease access to information, an AAP intranet page has been created for UNICEF staff, together with an external AAP page that can be consulted by partners, donors, and other stakeholders.

Global commitments, policy and guidance

During the period covered by the report, consistent efforts were made to ensure that Accountability to Affected Populations commitments are fully reflected in major programme policy and guidance documents.

First and foremost, the revised Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action set out a firm commitment to AAP and specify benchmarks against which practice in AAP can be monitored, evaluated – and improved.

Ensure that affected children and families participate in the decisions that affect their lives, are properly informed and consulted, and have their views acted upon.

UNICEF's Programme Policy and Procedures gateway, also launched in 2020, includes guidance on how to strengthen AAP in programme development, implementation, management, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation.

A number of other programming procedures, global guidance and tools, including UNICEF's Supply Manual, guidance for Civil Society Organizations on Partnership with UNICEF and UNICEF's Emergency Preparedness Platform, as well as sectoral and cross-cutting guidance (e.g. on adolescent participation, inclusion, and Protection from Sexual Exploitation & Abuse) also make clear reference to what UNICEF

must do to ensure the inclusion, operationalization and monitoring of accountability principles in its programmes.

Progress on AAP is monitored through Strategic Monitoring Questions since 2018. A set of AAP indicators are being piloted by Country Offices for further refining.

Global thematic humanitarian evaluations and country level evaluations of response to Level 3 emergencies now consistently assess UNICEF's efforts to be accountable to affected populations. Recent examples include the Global Evaluation of UNICEF WASH Programming in Protracted Crises, the Evaluation of UNICEF Contribution to Education in Humanitarian Settings, the Real Time Evaluation of UNICEF's Response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, and the Evaluation of the UNICEF Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in South Sudan.

Evaluations conducted ahead of 2020 found more efforts were needed to make programming more accountable to affected populations. Weaknesses include the treatment of AAP in isolation instead of being part of a wider concerted effort to enhance community engagement, a lack of follow-up on feedback from communities and little familiarity with AAP standards.

However, the evaluations also highlighted opportunities, such as considerable interest among staff in improving AAP and the progress made by partners in advancing AAP, from which UNICEF can learn.

An independent assessment completed in 2019 to benchmark UNICEF against the Core Humanitarian Standards served as a baseline to identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to putting people at the centre of its work. The results allowed to identify specific gaps, such as in the area of feedback mechanisms, and finetune the AAP roadmap.

Inter-agency coordination

UNICEF co-leads with UNHCR the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Results Group on Accountability and Inclusion – a service for humanitarian leaders and responders that provides response-wide guidance, tools and technical support on collective approaches to community engagement and accountability. Such approaches have proven very effective in the Central African Republic, Mozambique and the Philippines, and in the regional response to the Venezuela crisis.

Over 40% of Country Offices that participated in the survey are part of an inter-agency AAP or Communication & Community Engagement Working Group. Almost 60% are part of a Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) group, likely established in 2020 as part of the Covid-19 response.

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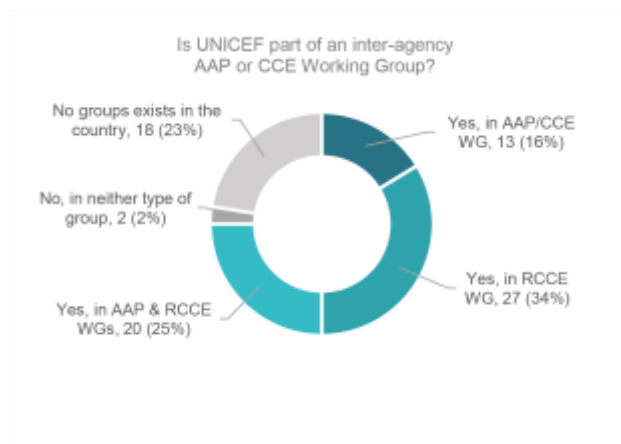
11 - UNICEF AAP survey 2020 (internal)

UNICEF has been a key contributor in facilitating access by practitioners to resources and technical support on accountability and inclusion, by supporting the establishment of the Accountability & Inclusion Portal and commissioning independent operational research that examined experiences of collective approaches and services for communication and community engagement (CCE) in emergency responses.

The research identified seven principles for an effective collective approach to CCE:

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1. *Leadership commits to early and ongoing collective accountability.*

2. *Works with existing coordination structures and to allow cross-sectoral decision-making.*

3. *Builds on and complements individual accountability mechanisms.*

In partnership with WHO and IFRC, UNICEF is leading the implementation of the [Covid-19 Global Risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy](#) and has contributed to the establishment of a Collective Service that supports RCCE coordination at country, regional and global levels. Funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Solidarity Fund, it aims to ensure quality and consistency of RCCE coordination, and to generate, analyse and use evidence on community perspectives to inform decision-making.

Supported by the Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF-lead Clusters and Area of Responsibility (AoR) have advanced in mainstreaming and operationalizing AAP. Notable examples of progress include the [Global WASH Cluster's Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative](#), the [Global Nutrition Cluster's AAP operational framework](#) and the [Localization Initiative led by Child Protection AoR](#) aimed at increasing local actors' power and participation in decision-making. In 2019, the Office of Emergency Programmes commissioned an independent review to identify concrete actions to continue advancing AAP in clusters' work.

12 - © UNICEF/Pirozzi

Moving forward

Moving forward, UNICEF needs to continue ensuring that its programmes are systematically informed by the views of the people it serves. As highlighted by the Core Humanitarian Standard benchmarking exercise conducted 2019 and the review of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action released in 2020, community engagement and feedback mechanisms remain a weakness in both its development and humanitarian programmes. Where UNICEF has systems in place for communities to make their voices heard, often challenges remain in closing the loop and ensure feedback is acted on in a systematic manner.

The 2020 review of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action put forward recommendations on the following areas:

- *An AAP strategy should be mandatory for all humanitarian contexts – and developed with communities and governments where possible. The strategy should include PSEA, link UNICEF's development and humanitarian action, and promote inter-agency coordination, including joint feedback mechanisms.*

- *AAP should be a mandatory part of all Monitoring & Evaluation frameworks in countries with humanitarian programming, notably in the planning phase.*

- *UNICEF needs to develop an appropriate way to measure the quality of its work and how this meets wider needs, not just targets. Greater investment in AAP approaches and effective feedback mechanisms would enable to improve monitoring and accountability at the same time.*

For 2021 and beyond, UNICEF will intensify efforts to address gaps in both humanitarian and development programmes, through the following actions:

- **Boost Country Offices' capacity on Accountability to Affected Populations**, by building knowledge, skills and expertise and providing technical support. To this end, positions established in at least five Regional Offices will support Country Offices and drive progress in at least 20 countries.

- **Ensure AAP is prioritized in programmes**, by maintaining strong leadership engagement and addressing organizational bottlenecks such as resourcing.

- **Strengthen complaints and feedback mechanisms**, by leveraging existing structures in countries and rolling out a toolkit with a menu of digital technologies and innovative ways to tackle challenges, including on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse reporting.

- **Promote peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange between staff**, through the establishment of a Community of Practice and a helpdesk function, and the development of knowledge products.

- **Continue to support inter-agency coordination and collective approaches**, by engaging with Humanitarian Coordinators, Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams, and steering the work of both the IASC Results Group on Accountability & Inclusion and the RCCE Collective Service.

This report was produced by UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes' AAP Unit in collaboration with colleagues from Country Offices, Regional Offices and other HQ sections.

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