



**Engaging Business for
Nutrition Outcomes**

A Compendium of UNICEF's Experience

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF recognizes the importance of engaging business to achieve nutrition results for children. As outlined in the *UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030*, some business sectors are uniquely positioned to support UNICEF’s programming priorities and have the potential to reinforce the organization’s impact by sharing responsibilities, optimizing expertise, increasing programme coverage and maximizing resources.

To explore the potential contributions of business to achieving nutrition objectives, UNICEF carried out a review of its past and current business engagements in Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America. Ten case studies were developed from this review using an analytical framework to explore the context and rationale for the engagement; perceived risks and opportunities; the management structure; the actual programme implemented; achievements and challenges; and lessons learned. These findings are presented together in this in this Compendium of UNICEF’s Experience, with the aim of sharing practical insights to guide UNICEF staff in their efforts to engage business in delivering nutrition results for children.

Section 1 describes UNICEF’s organizational vision for engaging business, including rules for engagement intended to safeguard the organization against risks. This section also describes five business focus areas that offer strategic entry points for UNICEF programming, including: business as provider of goods and services for children; business as an employer; business impact on communities and the environment; business technology and innovation; and business as a positive influence in society.

Section 2 provides a summary of UNICEF’s past experiences engaging business on nutrition programmes and highlights strategies relevant to each of the five business focus areas.

Section 3 presents the ten case studies on engaging business for nutrition outcomes. These include:

- Success in reducing iodine deficiency: Engaging with the salt industry in Europe and Central Asia
- Increasing access to vital nutrients for children: UNICEF and DSM’s shared-value partnership for improved nutrition in Nigeria
- Life-saving treatment for children with severe wasting: Shaping the global market to scale up ready-to-use therapeutic food
- Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the agricultural sector: Supporting mothers to breastfeed in Kenya’s commercial tea estates

- Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the ready-made garment sector: Building the Mothers@Work programme in Bangladesh
- UNICEF and IMPAct4Nutrition: Engaging business through an innovative platform to support India’s national nutrition programme
- Engaging on better business practices to prevent childhood obesity: New approaches to business engagement in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico
- Preventing childhood obesity and protecting child rights: Ending direct engagement with food and beverage companies in Argentina and Mexico
- #Eat Like A Pro: How UNICEF and Beko, a global appliance giant, combined forces to combat childhood obesity
- Advocating for salt iodization: Partnering with a private real estate company in Thailand to beat iodine deficiency

Section 4 of the Compendium explores overarching insights and lessons learned from the case studies. Some of these include the importance of capturing the attention of business by positioning nutrition as a good business investment and using effective programme branding. The experiences also underscore the immense value that business partners gain from their association with UNICEF – and as such, the need for UNICEF to carefully consider whether each engagement truly offers an added value and how best to maximize it. The case studies also shed light on the complex relationship between business and government in different contexts, including the need to understand any previous conflict or distrust, which may play a role in shaping the potential for engagement. Other lessons learned include the importance of working with government to adopt regulatory measures and mandatory legislation to improve business practices – rather than advocating for the industry to self-regulate.

More important than providing funding for UNICEF programmes, private sector partners can add immense value to UNICEF programming, particularly when UNICEF clearly identifies the strategic role that business is uniquely able to play in achieving nutrition outcomes. As underscored throughout this Compendium, the benefits that business engagement offers to UNICEF may evolve and change over time and thus need to be continuously evaluated. UNICEF takes great care to ensure that engaging business poses no risks to the organization’s mission and reputation – and instead, contributes to promoting and protecting children’s rights. The practical insights explored in this Compendium make an important contribution to UNICEF’s growing evidence base on what it means to effectively engage a range of business entities to deliver nutrition results for children.

INTRODUCTION

Major progress has been made in the past decade to improve the nutrition of women and children. Yet malnutrition rates still remain unacceptably high and current achievements are insufficient to reach the nutrition targets of the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development, undermining children's rights and hampering the development of economies and nations.¹

Today the global situation of child nutrition is characterized by a triple burden of malnutrition. The first burden is **undernutrition** in the form of stunting and wasting, which threatens the survival, growth and development of millions of children. The second burden comprises **micronutrient deficiencies**, a hidden form of malnutrition in which children lack the vitamins and minerals that are essential for optimal growth, development, and in some cases, survival. The third is the growing prevalence of childhood **overweight and obesity**, increasingly affecting children in low-, middle- and high-income countries. With only 10 years remaining in the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, renewed commitment and action are needed to end child malnutrition in all its forms, everywhere.

UNICEF developed its *Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030: Nutrition, for Every Child*,² to achieve the organization's vision of a world where all children, adolescents and women realize their right to nutrition. To respond to the multidimensional nature of malnutrition, the Nutrition Strategy calls for a systems approach to deliver *diets, services and practices* that support good nutrition at every stage of life, while sustaining nutrition-responsive development for all children, adolescents and women. Guided by the Nutrition Strategy, UNICEF supports governments – the primary duty-bearers of children's nutrition – and their many partners in scaling up policies, strategies and programmes that end malnutrition.

Within the *Nutrition Strategy*, business is recognized as an important sector to engage in order scale efforts; tap into its know-how, influence, and innovate; and improve practices that have an impact on children. The effective and timely engagement of business can help UNICEF achieve nutrition objectives that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to obtain. Some business sectors are uniquely positioned to support UNICEF's priority nutrition outcomes and have the potential to reinforce the organization's programming through shared responsibilities, optimized expertise, increased coverage and maximized resources.

To explore the potential contributions of business to achieving the programmatic priorities set out in the *Nutrition Strategy*, a review of UNICEF's past and current business engagements on nutrition programmes was carried out with

field teams in Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America. Ten case studies were developed from the review and serve to illustrate how engaging business has been an integral part of UNICEF's nutrition programming for decades. A detailed description of how the review was carried out and the analytical framework on which the case studies were developed is provided in the endnotes.

These ten case studies have generated useful lessons and insights that can inform future business engagement for nutrition outcomes. In addition to lessons learned that pertain to UNICEF's traditional nutrition programme areas such as infant and young child nutrition, micronutrient supplementation and fortification and the treatment of children with severe wasting, specific lessons were also generated around engaging the food and beverage sector. Deciding if, when and how best to engage food and beverage companies in a manner that respects children's rights is critically important for UNICEF under the *Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030*. This is a particularly compelling necessity given the increasing share of ultra-processed foods found in the diets of children and women in most countries and the proven links between these foods and rising levels of overweight and obesity in childhood and across the life course.

Section 1 describes UNICEF's organizational vision for engaging business, which embodies the general approach to be taken across all technical programme areas. The section describes UNICEF's 'rules of engagement', developed to safeguard the organization against risks and adverse impacts when involving business, and highlights the importance of conducting UNICEF's due diligence process on all potential engagements. The five business focus areas, articulated in UNICEF's 2019 *Programme Guidance on Engagement with Business for Country Offices*, are also presented, providing UNICEF teams with practical entry points to begin exploring the potential of engaging business.

Section 2 provides a brief summary of UNICEF's past experiences engaging business on nutrition programmes. This includes specific examples of the types of nutrition strategies used by field teams in the past that are relevant to each of the five business focus areas.

Section 3 contains the summaries of the ten case studies, including the major lessons learned for each. **Section 4** provides a synthesis of key insights generated that relate to each of the business focus areas, in addition to a set of overarching insights that cut across a number of the case studies.

Intended audience and purpose of the compendium of UNICEF's experience engaging business for nutrition outcomes

The primary audience for this compendium is UNICEF staff, particularly those from Programme Division (PD) and Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP) Division working jointly on maternal, adolescent and child nutrition programmes in development and humanitarian contexts, as well as those working on nutrition-relevant programmes such as health, water and sanitation, education, protection and social policy.

It is recommended that this compendium be consulted alongside UNICEF's Programme Guidance on Engaging Business for Nutrition Outcomes, (2021) which provides UNICEF field teams with practical 'stepwise' guidance on how to engage business for nutrition programming.

This compendium reflects on the ten case studies developed as part of an extensive review of UNICEF's experiences engaging business for nutrition outcomes. Specific lessons learned from each case study are highlighted, along with insights that may be valuable to inform UNICEF's future efforts in engaging business to improve nutrition outcomes under the Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030. The 2019 Country Programme Guidance on Engagement with Business underpinned the review process.

The review was jointly undertaken by a team comprising PD-Nutrition and PFP staff, along with regional and country office teams. After an informal stock-taking of past experiences

engaging business for nutrition outcomes was completed, specific criteria were used to select ten case studies for further development. The inclusion criteria were that the case study: had adequate background information and data; illustrated a major line of nutrition programming for UNICEF; and highlighted a nutrition programme with the potential for scale-up.

An extensive desk review supported the development of the case studies and relied on a consistent analytical framework that was applied to each. This framework focused on the context and rationale behind the ten engagements. In addition to the perceived opportunities and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity, characteristics of the management structure of the engagement, details of the actual programme implemented, what was achieved, challenges faced, and key lessons learned were reviewed. More than 70 individuals were interviewed from UNICEF country, regional and headquarters offices. Key informants from the business and government were also interviewed when relevant and feasible.

Drafts of the case studies underwent a detailed and iterative review process with UNICEF HQ teams (e.g., PD-nutrition, PFP and in some cases, Supply Division) along with country and regional staff members who had been involved in the engagements and the development of the case studies.

SECTION ONE

UNICEF'S APPROACH TO ENGAGING BUSINESS FOR PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

In 2019, UNICEF released its *Programme Guidance on Engagement with Business for Country Offices*³ to guide field teams on how to strategically engage business for improved outcomes across all programme areas of the organization. While looking for ways to dramatically expand strategic business engagement as part of UNICEF programming, wherever it makes sense for children, a key tenet of the guidance is ensuring that children's rights are protected and promoted throughout all UNICEF's programmatic engagements with business.

1.1. From transactional to transformational.

UNICEF increasingly recognizes that promoting organization-wide business engagement strategies has the potential to accelerate results for children and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. However, to achieve this, the relevance and importance of UNICEF's work with the business sector must be fully integrated into programme planning and directly linked to specific outcomes; it cannot be considered a siloed or add-on approach.

Resource mobilization – particularly of unrestricted funds – will always be an important component of UNICEF's engagement with business to support the delivery of programmes. Yet the *Programme Guidance on Engagement with Business for Country Offices* underscores that fundraising should not be pursued as the main or only form of business engagement. Other approaches can also contribute to impactful and long-lasting outcomes for children.

One of UNICEF's core **'how'** strategies for the future needs to be focused on understanding the relevance of business to programme goals and engaging business – beyond fundraising and transactional partnerships – to achieve them. A new transformational approach to business engagement has the potential to both achieve priority programme outcomes for children and, in some cases, address business practices that do harm and fail to respect children's rights.

“Transformational changes to and by business actors can scale up and accelerate UNICEF's programme outcomes. As such, the possible impact of business should be considered in all programme planning.”



The business ecosystem is recognized as diverse and consisting of many different private sector actors and entities, some of which may provide a good match to help UNICEF achieve programming objectives. All sorts of businesses can directly and indirectly impact children's lives as consumers, young workers, the family members of employees, and as future employees and business leaders. These impacts can be either positive or negative depending on the type of business and how their core business practices affect children's rights.

Under the right circumstances, strategically leveraging the reach of a business, its communications technologies, capacities and innovative solutions, may support UNICEF to significantly enhance the reach of its programmes. This can include facilitating access to the most vulnerable communities through the scaling of interventions and delivery of related services to hard-to-reach groups. For example, in its role as employer, the business sector has the potential to reach hundreds of millions of workers and their families, including infants and young children. Business can also be a critical provider or partner to government in delivering vital services and products; this can include shaping global markets for vital supplies and influencing consumer demand for them.

Businesses can also be effective advocates for children's rights and play an active role in political processes that impact children – for example, through direct advocacy to encourage governments to adopt key policies and by raising awareness on critical issues and helping to shift caregiver practices. At the same time, negative outcomes can equally occur if businesses choose to exert undue influence over policy processes that benefit them commercially at the expense of children. Some of these issues are touched on in the case studies.

1.2 UNICEF's rules of engagement with business.

Recognizing the great potential that transformational engagements with business represent, but equally sensitive to the risks that such engagements might represent for UNICEF and children's rights more broadly, UNICEF applies a principle-based approach to working with the business sector across all activities. Private sector actors are bound by international standards that outline the actions they should take to protect and support children's rights. All businesses have a responsibility to adhere to the United Nations *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*⁴, the *Children's Rights and Business Principles*⁵, and to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*'s⁶ provision to uphold children's right to adequate nutrition.

Related to this, UNICEF has established 'rules of engagement' to ensure that engaging business embodies processes and outcomes that are always in the best interests of children. **Box 1** contains a summary of these rules of engagement.

Box 1: Rules of Engagement

1. Rights-based approach
2. Non-exclusivity, non-endorsement, fair competition, transparency
3. Children's rights cannot be offset
4. Open-source solutions
5. Sustainability
6. Sustainable procurement

Source: *United Nations Children's Fund (2016). UNICEF Engagement with Business – Programme Guidance for Country Offices, August 2019, Programme Division, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division*

Prior to engaging business partners, UNICEF HQ must also review each potential engagement using an extensive due diligence process⁷ to ensure that the proposed engagement does not violate UNICEF's exclusionary criteria and that there are no risks that may harm the organization's reputation or its ability to fulfil its mission to protect children. In particular, the issue of conflict of interest – either real or perceived – is one that UNICEF takes great care to guard against; this is highlighted in several of the case studies presented in this compendium.

1.3 Five business focus areas as potential programme entry points. UNICEF's 2019 Programme Guidance articulates five business focus areas (*see Box 2*) that provide thematic entry points for UNICEF teams to consider when exploring business engagement to achieve programme outcomes for children.

Box 2 – Five business areas that offer strategic entry points for UNICEF programming

1. Business as a provider of essential goods and services for children and families
2. Business as an employer
3. Business impact on communities and the environment
4. Business technology and innovation
5. Business as a positive influence in society

Source: *United Nations Children's Fund (2016). UNICEF Engagement with Business – Programme Guidance for Country Offices, August 2019, Programme Division, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division*

SECTION TWO

UNICEF'S EXPERIENCE ENGAGING BUSINESS FOR NUTRITION OUTCOMES

UNICEF's experiences engaging business on nutrition topics have not only been diverse and decades-long but have involved all regions of the world. They have also covered a broad array of business sectors, including commercial agricultural enterprises, clothing manufacturers, banking entities, household appliance companies, telecommunication firms, pharmaceutical companies, real estate developers, food retailers, and various types and sizes of food and beverage companies.

The types of engagements undertaken have sometimes included direct funding from business, while other times, resources are provided in-kind to UNICEF from business.

Other engagements have involved co-planning of field programmes, undertaking joint advocacy on nutrition issues, and carrying out dialogues around business practices. Related to the latter, some of UNICEF's engagements with business have been specifically focused on reducing the harmful impact of core business practices on children's right to good nutrition.

Table 1 contains illustrative examples of some of the nutrition programme strategies, organized by the five focus areas, which can be considered when engaging business in nutrition programming.

Table 1: Consider the relevance of business for improved nutrition outcomes: Examples of nutrition programme strategies by the five business areas

Business focus areas	Examples of programming that consider the relevance of business to nutrition outcomes
<p>1. Business as a provider of essential goods and services for children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for public procurement processes to influence or shape markets by improving access, availability, quality, affordability, and sustainability of healthy foods • Strengthen incentives for private providers to engage in expanding access to affordable and nutritious foods for excluded populations • Undertake assessments on core business policies and policies around food and nutrition • Develop specialized nutrition products, such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) to treat severe wasting in children • Scale up the delivery of nutrition products for children and women such as micronutrient powders, iodized salt and RUTF • Support governments to develop and implement standards around large-scale food fortification • Provide guidance to national food companies on how to fortify staple foods (e.g., cooking oil and flour) with essential micronutrients
<p>2. Business as an employer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase nutrition literacy among workers and their families (e.g., children, adolescents and mothers) on good nutrition practices • Encourage business investments in nutrition education resources to address workforce needs and promote employee-led innovations in design and delivery • Encourage business to adopt and enforce policies and regulations to protect maternity rights in the workplace • Support optimal infant feeding for mothers with infants (e.g., exclusive breastfeeding) both in the workplace as well as outside in the communities where these mothers reside, linking with government health and nutrition services whenever possible • Promote healthy and safe food at work through increased employee access in the workplace • Integrate nutrition support into workplace health services provided to employees

Table 1: Consider the relevance of business for improved nutrition outcomes: Examples of nutrition programme strategies by the five business areas (Continued)

Business focus areas	Examples of programming that consider the relevance of business to nutrition outcomes
<p>3. Business impact on community and the food environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage local sourcing of ingredients for new RUTF recipes and strengthen local production capacity • Support women’s businesses and female entrepreneurs in the food supply chain • Partner with research and consumer rights groups to build the evidence around causes and solutions to childhood obesity and carry out advocacy to address these • Support governments to develop and enforce regulations on harmful business practices linked to malnutrition (e.g., inappropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes and complementary foods for children under age 2; and aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages targeting children including in school settings) • Work with producers/manufacturers of nutritious foods and essential nutrition supplies to create an environment that is conducive to improving nutrition outcomes and healthier behaviours • Partner with financial institutions to address economic barriers to upgrade systems, reformulate products or other initiatives that would help improve the supply of healthy foods
<p>4. Business technology and innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address business impact on biodiversity loss and ecosystem instability and the possible implications for nutrition • Convene industry and partner forums for dialogue with businesses on strategic direction to convey nutrition product development needs, understand business challenges and communicate strategies for accelerating development and addressing market entry challenges • Develop and deploy special contracting and innovative financing tools to incentivize accelerated research and development related to improved nutrition outcomes and a path to a viable market • Connect investors and lenders with business providers to facilitate access to commercial loans to support improved nutrition outcomes • Leverage the power of leading technology companies to access and use big data for insights and forecasting related to nutrition, and to efficiently and accurately identify and act on global trends around malnutrition
<p>5. Business as a positive influence in society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with government and other appropriate stakeholders to forge a more sustainable vision for the communities where business operates and develop regulations that will shape markets by creating an equal playing field for all actors of the food system • Partner to influence public policy and further engage in public advocacy and communications • Leverage the social media and marketing expertise of business to reach vast audiences (e.g., customer base, employees, parents and caregivers) to raise awareness on the importance of good nutrition on child health and survival outcomes, but also on the proven productivity gains that investing in nutrition generates

While UNICEF has a long and diverse history engaging business in nutrition programmes, apart from the 2019 *Programme Guidance on Engagement with Business for Country Offices* there has been limited technical guidance for field teams on effective engagement in the area of nutrition.

Many of the lessons learned and insights gleaned from the ten case studies presented in the Section below were used to shape the forthcoming 2021 *Programme Guidance on Engaging Business for Nutrition Outcomes*, which is a recommended companion to this compendium.

SECTION THREE

CASE STUDIES ON ENGAGING BUSINESS FOR NUTRITION OUTCOMES

Table 2 lists the ten case studies, organized by business focus area, that were developed as part of the review of UNICEF’s nutrition experiences in engaging business for improved outcomes. In some instances, case studies cross over several business focus areas. The case studies also represent a good cross-section of UNICEF’s six

results areas in the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030: Early childhood nutrition, nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence, maternal nutrition, nutrition and care for children with wasting, maternal and child nutrition in humanitarian action, and partnerships and governance for nutrition

Table 2: List of ten case studies by the five business focus areas

<p>Business as a provider of essential goods and services for children and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success in reducing iodine deficiency: Engaging with the salt industry in Europe and Central Asia (Case Study #1) • Increasing access to vital nutrients for children: UNICEF and DSM’s shared-value partnership for improved nutrition in Nigeria (Case Study #2) • Life-saving treatment for children with severe wasting: Shaping the global market to scale up ready-to-use therapeutic food (Case Study #3)
<p>Business as an employer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the agricultural sector: Supporting mothers to breastfeed in Kenya’s commercial tea estates (Case Study #4) • Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the ready-made garment sector: Building the Mothers@Work programme in Bangladesh (Case Study #5) • UNICEF and IMPAct4Nutrition: Engaging business through an innovative platform to support India’s national nutrition programme (Case Study # 6)
<p>Business impact on community and the food environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging on better business practices to prevent childhood obesity: New approaches to business engagement in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico (Case Study #7) • Preventing childhood obesity and protecting child rights: Ending direct engagement with food and beverage companies in Argentina and Mexico (Case Study #8)
<p>Business technology and innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #Eat Like A Pro: How UNICEF and Beko, a global appliance giant, combined forces to combat childhood obesity (Case Study #9) • Life-saving treatment for children with severe wasting: Shaping the global market to scale up ready-to-use therapeutic food (Case Study #3)
<p>Business as a positive influence in society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF and IMPAct4Nutrition: Engaging business through an innovative platform to support India’s national nutrition programme (Case Study # 6) • #Eat Like A Pro: How UNICEF and Beko, a global appliance giant, combined forces to combat childhood obesity (Case Study #9) • Advocating for salt iodization: Partnering with a private real estate company in Thailand to beat iodine deficiency (Case Study #10)

CASE STUDY 1

Business as a provider of essential goods and services for children

Success in reducing iodine deficiency: Engaging with the salt industry in Europe and Central Asia

This case study¹ focuses on engaging with business to produce iodized salt and encourage its use to tackle iodine deficiency. The story highlights UNICEF's engagement with the salt sector in Europe and Central Asia – a region that has faced serious iodine deficiency over the past two decades. The salt industry became a key player in national salt iodization efforts and helped significantly improve access to iodized salt in the region. This case study shares lessons learned in engaging with the business sector as a provider of essential goods and services for children.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In 2000, UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia region (ECAR) – comprising 20 countries at that time⁸ – faced high levels of iodine deficiency and had one of the lowest levels of salt iodization in the world.⁹ UNICEF's focused salt iodization strategy in the region resulted in impressive progress: Household coverage with iodized salt more than doubled in ECAR, from 26 per cent in 2000 to 55 per cent in 2009.¹⁰

UNICEF's engagement with the salt industry in this region illustrates the essential role that business can play as a provider of key nutrition products that are vital to achieve desired nutrition outcomes. In this case, mandatory government legislation on salt iodization was crucial for the successes achieved in addressing iodine deficiency. However, without the salt industry's central engagement and cooperation in these efforts, national governments – even with the support of UNICEF and other partners – would have faced an uphill battle to eliminate iodine deficiency.

Global achievements in reducing iodine deficiency

Globally, iodine deficiency is the most common cause of preventable brain damage in children. When populations are deficient, pregnant women and newborns are disproportionately affected, leading to cognitive and developmental impairment, as well as miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant mortality.

Since UNICEF's first salt iodization efforts in the early 1990s, progress on the issue has been immense.¹¹ During the period from 1993 to 2019, the number of countries with iodine deficiency dropped from 110 to 25, a reflection of the major progress made.¹² The 1990 World Summit for Children was an important global event for UNICEF in securing the attention of world leaders to iodine deficiency and other issues related to child survival and development. In 1994, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly recommended universal salt iodization (USI) as the means through which iodine deficiency would be best addressed. Terminology used in salt iodization efforts has evolved over time; in this case study, the USI acronym is used when providing a historical account of discussions and publications from the 1990–2009 period.

Once USI was agreed upon as the first global strategy to eliminate iodine deficiency, efforts began to take off across the globe, with UNICEF increasing its financial and technical support to affected regions and countries.¹³ A range of partners worked alongside UNICEF, including WHO and many non-governmental groups, such as the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Nutrition International¹⁴ and the Program Against Micronutrient Malnutrition. Numerous international and bilateral agencies contributed financially to global efforts, including the Canadian International Development Agency and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), along with Kiwanis International and donors such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.¹⁵

During these early years, there was growing recognition that effective USI programmes would require strong government oversight; legislation mandating all edible salt be iodized; regular monitoring of iodized salt supplies to

¹ The full length version of this case study is available for internal use by UNICEF staff and can be accessed at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EflqJb6JthZFIHj4fKi7ZGMBatcDIOWWQ9hj97XyfKA30g?e=vGgP9o> and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

ensure compliance with legislation, along with enforcement measures; as well as multi-stakeholder platforms with strong participation from private sector salt companies and related processed food industries. Rather than relying on the industry to self-regulate, UNICEF realized that leaders in the salt industry would need to support the mandatory iodization of all salt for human consumption to truly achieve USI.

It was also becoming clear that USI would not succeed if ministries of health were viewed as the primary stakeholders and the salt sector as a secondary player – ensuring compliance with mandatory legislation also required engagement and cooperation with the owners of the companies that imported, produced, sold or used salt, since they controlled the quantity and quality of iodized salt within a country, which was, after all, the critical ingredient for a successful USI strategy.¹⁶

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

While UNICEF and its USI partners realized the necessity of engaging the salt industry, they had limited experience in this type of collaboration and little understanding of what it should look like.¹⁷ UNICEF played a key role in bringing together multi-stakeholder platforms through support provided to government ministries, which strongly encouraged the central role of the salt industry, civil society, academia and research institutions.

UNICEF's engagement with the salt industry often began with targeted advocacy and communication to increase industry knowledge on the role of iodine in brain development. The intention was to convince salt leaders to work alongside governments to scale up and sustain USI. In addition, advocacy also was directed at convincing them that their production costs would be minimal and that salt iodization was highly cost-effective, amounting to less than US\$0.10 per person per year. This was critical because salt iodization faced significant resistance from the processed food industry (for example, in the Republic of Moldova), which was concerned the process would increase production costs, reduce their market share and reduce profits. To address these concerns, UNICEF conducted studies on the effects of iodized salt in food processing, shared testimonials from food producers who had successfully used iodized salt and exposed the industry to successes from industry members in other countries.

It has been noted that the salt industry gained much from the global attention given to USI efforts during the early years, as this triggered a massive upgrading and modernizing of the salt industry across the world (in terms of good manufacturing practices related to quality, hygiene, packaging and presentation of the product to the consumer) compared with the traditional way it had operated for decades.¹⁸ It is estimated that during the 1990s, "the combined public sector investment in eliminating iodine deficiency was US\$100 million while private investment was over US \$1 billion."¹⁹





In 2002, a global commitment to eliminate iodine deficiency by 2005 was included in the *World Fit for Children* action plan emanating from the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Children.²⁰ The same year, the Global Network on Sustained Elimination of Iodine Deficiency Disorders was founded to reinforce activities on eliminating iodine deficiency worldwide, including strengthening engagement with the salt industry.²¹ Members of the Global Network included UNICEF, WHO, ICCIDD, and other expert groups, as well as representatives from the salt industry including the Salt Institute and EuSalt.

Slow progress in the Europe and Central Asia region

Several years into global USI programming, UNICEF carried out a strategic review of the progress made since 1990. The results revealed major successes across the world with the overall proportion of households consuming adequately iodized salt increasing from 20 to 70 per cent from the early 1990s to the year 2000.²² However, the review also noted slow progress towards USI in ECAR. In 2000, only 26 per cent of households in the region had access to adequately iodized salt.²³

To address this worrying situation, UNICEF significantly increased its investment and support to USI in the region over the next decade.²⁴ Using a multi-pronged strategy, UNICEF ensured that priority was given to positioning companies from the salt industry – both salt producers and processed food companies – as central players in national iodization efforts. By 2009, these intensive efforts led to 55 per cent of households in the region having access to adequately iodized salt, more than double the coverage at the start of the decade.²⁵

A shift in political-economic realities and a new start to salt iodization efforts

To understand the story of salt iodization in ECAR, one must appreciate its eventful sociopolitical history during the decade that followed the 1991 break-up of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. This led to the formation of newly independent states, many of which faced challenging transitions.²⁶ The type of participatory multi-stakeholder platforms needed for USI to succeed – involving both the public and private sectors working together – was a foreign concept to these newly independent countries. As such, it would take time for governments, the private sector and civil society partners to embrace working together.²⁷ Indeed, UNICEF helped overcome the mutual distrust between the private salt industry and government officials that had developed given their lack of experience working together under Soviet rule.

Decades earlier, iodine deficiency had been recognized as a public health problem in the Yugoslav Republic and the Soviet Union.²⁸ Salt iodization had been established as early as the 1950s, and in some instances, restrictions had been put into place to prevent the trade of non-iodized salt. This early success in reducing iodine deficiency led to a relaxation of monitoring measures during the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in a decline in the production of iodized salt. After the Soviet Union split, the production and supply of salt also fell apart, leaving the new countries on their own to organize their iodized salt supply. During this time, UNICEF began establishing offices throughout the ECA region.²⁹ By 1993, UNICEF was initiating regional advocacy efforts for USI legislation through specially-organized meetings of national governments and salt industry partners.³⁰ In most ECA countries, however, significant USI efforts would not begin until the late 1990s.

One of the first concerted initiatives was in 1997 when UNICEF, WHO and the ICCIDD organized a meeting in Munich to address the elimination of iodine deficiency across the ECA region. The UNICEF spokesperson's address noted that a fundamental challenge to USI in the region was that "salt producers – the very people responsible for adding the iodine to the salt – [had] been excluded from the dialogue, as have the distributors, and other key sectors of trade and commerce."³¹

In 1999, as a result of these earlier discussions, UNICEF, Nutrition International and Kiwanis International sponsored a regional salt producer's meeting in Kiev. This meeting was attended by producers, importers and traders of edible salt from across the region in addition to government and development agency representatives. The main aim was to highlight the role, responsibilities and successes of the salt industry in achieving and sustaining USI. Participants drafted a resolution, which led to various follow-up actions being identified by the participants.

Intensifying salt iodization efforts from 2001 onwards

Following the Munich and Kiev meetings, an analysis of the status of households in the region using adequately iodized salt confirmed levels to be among the lowest in the world.³² The deadline of the 2005 elimination goal for iodine deficiency, contained in the World Fit for Children action plan, was also fast approaching. Thus, it was imperative to intensify USI efforts if the household coverage goal of 90 per cent was to be achieved.

This lack of USI progress motivated UNICEF to take several important decisions in the ECA region. A review of early UNICEF experiences in the region during 1997 led to greater emphasis being given to USI through the development of a regional agenda that would support the development of national capacity.³³ In 2001, the elimination of iodine deficiency through USI was designated a regional priority for UNICEF.³⁴ That same year, a new Regional Nutrition Specialist position was created to strengthen UNICEF's internal technical and management capacity to move USI forward in ECA countries.³⁵ This marked the beginning of an exciting period in the ECA region during which major progress was achieved in advancing USI through close collaboration between the Regional Office and Country Office teams.

A key aspect of the ECA regional strategy was to foster partnerships with other technical groups, as well as to build a solid donor funding base.³⁶ Much work during these early years was through partnerships with the Asian Development Bank, USAID (through the MOST project), ICCIDD, WHO, the Global Network on Sustained Elimination of Iodine Deficiency Disorders and EU Salt. The funding received by UNICEF for USI in the ECA region between 2000 and 2007 is estimated at approximately US\$13.9 million.^{37, 38}

In supporting USI across ECAR, UNICEF's central message was that salt iodization had to be supported by mandatory legislation and apply to both the salt used by both households and the processed food industry; voluntary iodization was not an effective option.³⁹ UNICEF also realized that the success of USI strategies required political support from the highest levels of government,

along with regional cooperation and a harmonized approach to iodizing salt, including its trade, across the region. To this end, targeted advocacy and communication efforts were designed to secure the support of politicians and salt business leaders.

After conducting an assessment and analysis of the status of USI at the regional and country levels, UNICEF's ECA team produced a regional strategy note in 2005, which formed the basis of a USI workplan, including activities under four key USI components: iodization; communication and advocacy; monitoring; and strategic oversight by multi-partner platforms. How UNICEF supported each of these four USI components in the ECA region is summarized below, with special emphasis on UNICEF's engagement with the business sector.

a) Iodization

Depending on each country's situation, UNICEF engaged with various segments of the salt industry from producers, importers, wholesalers, retailers to processed food companies to massively increase the overall supply of iodized salt, including its use in processed food industries. UNICEF also provided material support to major salt producers in some countries of the region to help re-establish the practice of quality iodization of the salt supplies after the sociopolitical disruptions of prior years.⁴⁰ Depending on the needs, this included the provision of salt iodization equipment, potassium iodate fortificant, laboratory equipment and other supplies needed for factory quality control measures.⁴¹ UNICEF also focused on supporting systemic capacity development, for example, to develop monitoring systems including the timely collection of data on product quality during the production process.

To achieve true USI across the region, more information was needed on the processed food industry to design appropriate strategies that could be used to secure their commitment to USI. To this end, UNICEF carried out a literature review and landscape assessment on the processed food sector in the region, followed by interviews with food producers in various countries.⁴² Based on this feedback, UNICEF designed strategies to address their concerns about using iodized salt including their fears of its potential negative impact on taste, price (as described above, in the Republic of Moldova) and ability to export processed foods made with iodized salt to neighbouring countries.⁴³

b) Communication and advocacy

UNICEF's communication support to governments included an array of strategies to raise political will, strengthen policy support, stimulate stakeholder cooperation, and increase demand for iodized salt by families and consumers. Multiple communication channels were used to reach a variety of target groups, including owners of salt companies, food

manufacturers, industry leaders, merchants, public opinion leaders, health and educational professionals, and the general public.⁴⁴

UNICEF also worked with its partners in ECAR to reframe iodine deficiency as a threat to newborn babies' brains. This was a significant change from previous communication campaigns that had highlighted the visible signs of goitre and cretinism, which mostly affected adults. UNICEF's communications and advocacy helped raise demand for iodized salt. For example, in the Republic of Moldova, UNICEF supported its partners in the Ministry of Health to carry out an intensive three-month communications campaign focusing on how iodine deficiency damaged brain development in newborns. The campaign was successful in raising public awareness to near universal level and convinced half of mothers in the country that the use of iodized salt in their households was a necessity.⁴⁵

c) Monitoring

UNICEF provided technical support to develop monitoring and evaluation systems related to salt iodization. Having constant oversight of levels of iodized salt produced was considered critical to ensure USI efforts were sustainable and did not falter as they had several decades before. The information generated from the monitoring systems of salt companies was also used to estimate household coverage.⁴⁶ At the country level, assistance was tailored to national needs and included training food inspectors and salt importers on how to monitor levels of iodine in salt.

UNICEF supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys in countries across the region, which often included assessing the availability of iodized salt in households using salt testing kits.⁴⁷ In some countries, support was also provided to undertake iodine nutrition surveys to assess urinary iodine concentration in school-aged children and women.⁴⁸

d) Strategic oversight by multi-partner collaboration

To help foster the concept of multi-stakeholder platforms as being necessary to achieve USI, UNICEF organized a set of three high-level Food Fortification Forums in Almaty between 2001 and 2007, which targeted salt industry leaders, government representatives and civil society. These forums provided "important opportunities for sharing new insights, information, and experience among officials of government, captains of the salt industry, and leaders of society, with support from international experts and agencies."⁴⁹ Over time, political will increased among stakeholders attending the forums to pursue USI through mandatory iodization laws. Participants at the Forums assigned some responsibility for implementation to the salt-producing industry, which led to an increased political will among all the stakeholders to accept mandatory laws and collaborate in multisector coalitions.⁵⁰

At the country level, UNICEF also took care to win over the leaders of salt and food processing companies. Whenever possible, their role and contributions to USI were publicly acknowledged. UNICEF realized that the success of USI strategies also required high-level political support, collaboration, and harmonized conduct across the region.⁵¹ A significant step towards achieving this was the adoption in 2001 of an agreement between the leaders of the twelve Commonwealth of Independent States on the 'Prevention of Iodine Deficiency Disorders', which "signaled the political determination on the use of a unified iodization standard, agreement on practical enforcement by the Sanitary-Epidemiologic Services, and mutual acceptance of conformity certificates in the trade of iodized salt across borders".⁵² This helped harmonize USI approaches and develop cooperation and coordination in trade across countries.

Adopting salt iodization legislation

Impressive progress was made in ECAR on the adoption of salt iodization legislation over the 2000–2009 period. For example, out of the 20 countries comprising the ECA region at that time, the number with a principle statutory law that mandated salt iodization more than tripled from 5 to 18 countries.⁵³ In 14 of these countries, the law covered both household and commercial salt.

In terms of national partnerships, starting from only a few ECA countries in 2000, successful and near-successful national multi-partner platforms were formed in 75 per cent of countries by 2009.⁵⁴ The salt industry was recognized as central to the gains made during these years due to "the conscientious quality assurance practices in the salt factories and the due diligence in salt industry regulations".⁵⁵

3. LESSONS LEARNED ON ENGAGING BUSINESS AS A PROVIDER OF ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES

The legislative situation for salt iodization has continued to improve.⁵⁶ Today in 2020, out of the 21 countries within UNICEF's current ECA region, a total of 18 have legislation on the mandatory fortification of salt, two countries (Russian Federation and Ukraine) have no salt fortification requirements, and one country (Montenegro) has no information available from which to make an assessment. Lessons learned from the region are summarized below.

Legislation for mandatory salt iodization was critical for success. Without a regulatory environment that calls for mandatory salt iodization, much less progress would have been made towards the virtual elimination of iodine deficiency. This is similar to what others have observed in that legislation on mandatory fortification achieves greater impact on reducing micronutrient deficiencies – such as iodine deficiency – compared with voluntary fortification.⁵⁷ Mandatory legislation creates a level playing field that

facilitates industry compliance and is the best way to ensure more vulnerable segments of the population are reached. To help governments enact such laws, UNICEF also provided support to other vital areas, such as the establishment of monitoring systems to regularly assess compliance around iodized salt as well as helping company owners improve their factory processes and quality control measures. Without this additional support from UNICEF, the success of salt legislation may have been more limited.

Plan with sustainability in mind. In the rush to increase the production of iodized salt in countries of the region during the 1990s, UNICEF was more willing to give away iodization equipment and supplies (at no cost) to the owners of private companies in the salt industry, some of whom may have had the means to pay for these items themselves. This could have led to dependency and prevented the private sector from assuming the ownership and responsibility needed to ensure long-term sustainability.

Study the business and its operations prior to engaging. Engagement with the business sector should be informed by research on what they do, with whom, how and at what cost. What factors drive their decision-making? Which actors are in their networks commercially and politically? What technical ‘business language’ do they use? Do they lobby governments? What is their relationship with

the national government, and do they interact differently across sectors?

Consider the bigger regional and international trade context. It is important to consider national, regional, and even international trade regulations, especially for the countries where salt is mainly imported. Sometimes the regulations related to regional trade agreements can create challenges for monitoring the importation of fortified food and salt by the private sector. Addressing these types of issues may require high-level advocacy to ensure that leaders involved in economic unions are supportive of food fortification programmes and agreements on technical standards are secured to facilitate cross-border trade.

The ‘bottom line’ is never far away. Owners of private companies will always consider how engagement with UNICEF or the government will affect their profits. While some companies may place higher priority on doing good for altruistic reasons, others will view their participation within budgetary limits to prevent them from incurring costs or facing losses.

Understand how the government and the private company engage and interact. While much focus is often placed on how UNICEF and the business sector interact, it is equally important to consider how the government



views the particular business sector or entity and vice versa. In many ECA countries during the post-Soviet era, there was still mistrust between the government and the salt industry, and it took time for them to learn to work together. Understanding these dynamics is important in any engagement with private sector companies for nutrition programming outcomes. Consulting the private sector in a transparent way, especially concerning implementation, can also foster a sense of ownership and compliance.

Finding balance for a healthy future

UNICEF's engagement with the salt industry illustrates the essential role business can play as a provider of key nutrition products vital to achieve desired nutrition outcomes, such as the adequate quantity and quality of iodized salt needed to sustainably eliminate iodine deficiency. Mandatory government legislation was crucial for the successes achieved in addressing iodine deficiency. But without the engagement of the private salt sector, governments alone – even with the help of civil society and UNICEF – would have faced an impossible task.

With UNICEF's support, the salt industry in countries across the world, including in the ECA region, has for the most part stepped up and owned its responsibility to produce iodized salt. It is hoped that the commitment of governments, along with salt and related processed food sectors, will remain strong in the future, particularly for high-risk countries across the region.

Significant dietary transitions have been observed recently, including an increased consumption of processed foods

high in salt, sugar and fats.⁵⁸ The increased dietary salt intake has been associated with a rise in non-communicable diseases, including increased blood pressure, a leading risk for death worldwide.⁵⁹ To address this serious situation, WHO issued recommendations in 2012 to reduce salt intake among adults and children.⁶⁰

Today, public health planners must harmonize salt iodization efforts with the need to reduce overall salt intake. Programmes to reduce salt intakes to <5 g/day and to ensure that all food grade salt is iodized are compatible. Should iodine intakes drop as a result of decreases in (iodized) salt consumption, then iodine fortification levels should be increased.⁶¹ This underscores the importance of integrating USI efforts within a country's overall nutrition strategy so that such interconnections are recognized and built upon to achieve public health targets. In addition, pharmaceutical companies in the ECA region have promoted iodine tablets as an alternative to iodized salt, and UNICEF will need to track how this evolves in the future.

The second challenge is recognizing that while big salt producers were being encouraged by UNICEF to join iodization efforts decades ago, today some of these salt groups and processed food companies are actively lobbying against public health efforts to reduce salt intake.⁶² Therefore, a final lesson is that UNICEF must continuously assess its engagements with the business sector, considering the array of benefits and risks of engagement and how they may change dramatically over time.

CASE STUDY 2

Business as an influencer and provider of goods and services

Increasing access to vital nutrients for children: UNICEF and DSM's shared value partnership for improved nutrition in Nigeria

The case study² describes the six-year engagement between UNICEF and DSM, a multinational corporation known for its nutrition products and expertise in addressing micronutrient deficiencies. Through this partnership, UNICEF leveraged DSM's core business assets to support the Government of Nigeria in scaling up access to micronutrient powders to improve children's diets, while mobilizing commitment from the business sector to tackle malnutrition. This case study examines lessons learned in partnering with business as a nutrition influencer and provider of goods and services, as well as the strategies put in place by UNICEF to mitigate potential conflicts of interest.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

A shared-value partnership intends to create a win-win arrangement that is of value for both society and business. While these types of engagements are driven by the overriding goal of improving the lives of children, it is also accepted that the business partner is likely to benefit over time from its partnership with UNICEF.⁶³ This case study examines the 'shared-value' partnership established in Nigeria between UNICEF and Royal DSM (a multinational company known for its nutritional products) to scale up the use of micronutrient powders (MNPs) to address micronutrient deficiencies in children.

DSM is based in the Netherlands and manufactures food and dietary supplements, including micronutrient

fortificants. The company also produces products related to personal care, animal feed, medical devices, automotive, paints, electrical and electronics, life protection, alternative energy and bio-based materials. In 2013, DSM had 24,500 employees globally and annual net sales of around € 10 billion.[1] DSM has been an important supplier of specialized nutrition products to UNICEF's Supply Division. From 2008–2017, DSM supplied two thirds of UNICEF's country programme needs for MNPs amounting to a total cost of US\$57 million.[2] DSM also supplies other products to UNICEF, including ready-to-use-therapeutic foods and vitamin A (retinol) used in the manufacturing of vitamin A capsules procured by UNICEF.

United by a shared cause: Scaling Up Nutrition

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, is a global multi-sectoral nutrition platform that includes the business sector. A key tenet of the SUN Movement has been to engage actors from all relevant sectors – governments, donors, civil society and the business community – to combine expertise and resources to scale up proven interventions to improve nutrition. UNICEF and DSM had been involved with the SUN Movement from its inception, and as a result, their executive and senior staff were well-known to each other. UNICEF and DSM had also been interacting with each other on a commercial basis since DSM was (and remains) the major supplier of MNPs to UNICEF's Supply Division.

Given their past relationship, DSM's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) reached out UNICEF's Executive Director in 2013 to explore how their respective organizations might join forces to combat malnutrition as part of their contributions to the SUN Movement. This led to the eventual identification of mutual programme objectives focused on eliminating micronutrient deficiencies in children. Discussions moved ahead, and by September 2013 a two-year global memorandum of understanding (MOU) had been developed and signed by both leaders.⁶⁴

Leveraging the power of MNPs to improve children's diets in Nigeria

The programme was selected to take place in Nigeria, given the country's suboptimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices and high rates of child

² The full length version of this case study is available for internal use by UNICEF staff and can be accessed at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EXV3f7R0wwNOqodv6SSl0lUB8026-gmltdl7114xZZ3vvA?e=7levJZ> and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

undernutrition.⁶⁵ Data from 2013 show that less than half of children in Nigeria aged 6–23 months of age were regularly consuming iron-rich foods,⁶⁶ which placed them at high risk for iron deficiency anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies known to impact negatively on child health and survival.

Child malnutrition levels at the time were also high in the country, with 41 per cent of children under 5 years suffering from stunting and 23 per cent from wasting.⁶⁷ Given that Nigeria was the most populous country in Africa at the time,⁶⁸ it had among the highest numbers of undernourished children in the world. UNICEF and DSM realized that to help move the nutrition needle in Africa, it would be strategic to join forces in Nigeria.

UNICEF believed that MNPs would be a key intervention for filling nutrient gaps in children’s diets in Nigeria.⁶⁹ MNPs contain essential vitamins and minerals and have been proven to be effective in reducing micronutrient deficiencies in children, especially iron deficiency anaemia. They can be sprinkled onto foods consumed at home, school or any other point of use to increase the micronutrient content of a child’s diet without changing their usual dietary habits.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Within this context of child malnutrition in Nigeria, UNICEF and DSM supported the Government to develop and implement a national MNP programme, with the intent of integrating the delivery of MNPs into existing programme platforms, particularly those related to IYCF.

Aligning objectives and approaches

Given the global interest within the SUN Movement to leverage the resources and know-how of the private sector to address malnutrition, the interactions between UNICEF and DSM were timely. Right from the beginning, UNICEF and DSM were in good alignment with each other in terms of their shared objective to reduce micronutrient malnutrition.

UNICEF felt that DSM could help achieve the objective of reducing micronutrient deficiencies in young children at both the global and country levels. An engagement with DSM would also allow UNICEF to contribute to the SUN Movement in terms of partnering with the private sector to design and implement solutions addressing child malnutrition. UNICEF also recognized the benefits that might accrue from DSM’s respected technical expertise on MNPs as well as the company’s strong standing within the global business community.



When the engagement between UNICEF and DSM was codified in the 2013 MOU, the intent of the collaboration was aligned with nutrition outcomes in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 and the nutrition and child survival-related objectives of the UNICEF Nigeria Country Programme Document 2014–2017.

For DSM, the engagement was viewed as an opportunity for the company to learn about nutrition field programmes and gain exposure to UNICEF’s extensive networks with governments and development partners. DSM could also learn from UNICEF’s experience about the need for nutrition products among vulnerable families – knowledge that was essential to realize the company’s vision of being ‘purpose-led and performance driven’. In addition, DSM would be able to showcase its field partnership with UNICEF as part of their private sector commitment to the SUN Movement. The engagement with UNICEF was also a good fit for the company’s stated humanitarian goals.⁷⁰

The phased evolution of a partnership

The engagement between UNICEF and DSM evolved over time as two related but distinct phases.

During Phase 1 (2013–2015), UNICEF and DSM identified five shared objectives towards a common vision to reduce micronutrient deficiencies. These formed the cornerstones of the global MOU. The global MOU for Phase 1 embodied the principles of a shared-value partnership⁷¹ and explicitly recognized that the engagement would not entail funding; rather, UNICEF and DSM were expected to cover their own costs.⁷²

Once Nigeria was selected as a focus country, the development of the first year workplan was led by Programme Division’s Nutrition team (PD-Nutrition) at headquarters in collaboration with senior technical staff from DSM. The main objective of Phase 1 was developing a national MNP programme, which would be scaled through its integration into broader IYCF programming, with an early focus on northern Nigeria given the protracted nutrition emergency at the time.

Although DSM did not provide any funding to UNICEF during Phase 1, the company recruited and seconded two national experts to UNICEF Nigeria’s nutrition team for a period of 12 months and covered all the costs associated with doing so. While UNICEF took the lead to design the overall MNP programme with the Ministry of Health, especially its integration into the IYCF programme, DSM took the lead in the technical design related to the use and uptake of MNPs.

DSM’s two experts worked with UNICEF Nigeria to undertake formative research, which informed the design of the social and behaviour change communication strategy

that focused on the appropriate use of MNPs within optimal IYCF practices within the field programmes. UNICEF was supporting the Ministry of Health to implement. All remaining field costs related to developing and scaling up the MNP programme were covered by UNICEF Nigeria’s regular donor funding for nutrition.

Related to the funds needed to purchase the supply of MNPs needed for the engagement, UNICEF Nigeria tapped into other funding sources to cover costs. At that time the only MNPs acceptable to UNICEF’s Supply Division were from imported sources. While UNICEF was free to select from any MNP vendor able to meet the organization’s criteria related to quality, delivery and pricing among other factors, DSM was ultimately selected as the MNP supplier for this engagement in Nigeria.

After the MOU expired in December 2015, UNICEF and DSM met several times during 2016 to brainstorm how to continue their work together in the country.⁷³ After a key partnership meeting with the various stakeholders, a concept note was drafted outlining the basis for Phase 2.

In Phase 2 (2017–2019), UNICEF and DSM developed a written agreement that built on the provisions developed under the original MOU.⁷⁴ A key difference to Phase 1 was that UNICEF Nigeria now played a more substantial role in developing the workplan, creating a sense of country ownership.⁷⁵ The Phase 2 agreement also included UNICEF Netherlands and Sight and Life Foundation (an independent ‘nutrition think-tank’ entity slated to contribute to global advocacy on micronutrients).

As in Phase 1, there was concern to guard against conflict of interest; while the original provisions of the global MOU still applied, the new agreement included new text that stated: *“neither DSM nor Sight and Life will describe or present this Collaboration in terms that suggest UNICEF... has endorsed DSM or Sight and Life’s business, operations, or products (as applicable), or is recommending DSM or Sight and Life to third parties (such as potential customers).”*⁷⁶

In addition, the Phase 2 agreement included reference to expanding the collaboration into India – a priority country for DSM – with a focus on mobilizing the business sector around nutrition issues, including the promotion on nutrition literacy within the workforces of companies. The collaboration with DSM in India is the focus of case study 6 in this series.

Under Phase 2, the primary objective continued to focus on the SUN Movement but also included addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2 related to achieving zero hunger. Efforts focused on two⁷⁷ interrelated work pillars:⁷⁸ (1) the continued scaling up of

MNPs (through IYCF programming) across the country, with activities to support leadership training for nutrition officers at the state level to equip them to advocate effectively for actions aimed at combating micronutrient deficiencies; and (2) increasing the level of awareness of and commitment to nutrition in the country, including through better access to nutritious foods for children 6–23 months of age, increasing nutrition investment within the country, and greater private sector engagement in combating malnutrition.

UNICEF and DSM considered this second pillar essential to move the nutrition needle in Nigeria. Over the years, the public, donor, and civil society sectors had all been active in addressing malnutrition in the country – especially under the umbrella of Nigeria’s SUN Movement – but the private sector was much less engaged. UNICEF and DSM believed that with the right type of advocacy support, Nigerian business leaders (through the SUN’s Business Network) could be motivated to become effective champions for nutrition.

DSM hired and seconded a technical expert to UNICEF Nigeria during Phase 2 to focus on engaging with Nigeria’s private sector leaders to secure their commitment to combating malnutrition in the country.⁷⁹ DSM also provided funding totaling US\$388,000 to UNICEF to cover specific activities in Phase 2, while UNICEF Nigeria continued to use existing donor funds for nutrition to cover the balance of expenses.

Phase 3 began at the end of 2020 – but with a slightly different commitment than was first anticipated. A

discussion between UNICEF and DSM in 2019 had led to the development of a joint concept note at a significant level of funding, which included continued support to Nigeria. However, after several proposal iterations over subsequent months, DSM decided it could only commit a much smaller amount for all these initiatives.⁸⁰ Ultimately a decision was finally made to continue the work in Nigeria only with the final paperwork being signed in the last part of 2020.

Mitigating potential conflicts of interest

The potential for conflict of interest was identified right at the beginning during the due diligence process and primarily centred on the existing ‘procurer-supplier’ relationship between UNICEF and DSM. To address this, a firewall was created to separate DSM’s *commercial relationship* with UNICEF as a supplier of MNPs and other nutrient products from DSM’s *programmatic collaboration* with UNICEF to support the development of Nigeria’s national MNP programme, with clear language to this effect included in the 2013 global MOU.⁸¹

The reference to DSM not gaining any commercial advantage pertained to whether DSM would be considered a favoured supplier to UNICEF. To guard against this, explicit text was included in the global MOU that stipulated the ‘non-exclusive’ nature of the engagement UNICEF had with DSM.⁸² In other words, UNICEF was not limited to procuring MNPs exclusively from DSM.

Considering DSM’s role working with UNICEF to expand MNPs in the country, UNICEF Nigeria needed to be cautious not to provide (or seem to be providing) any unfair



advantage to DSM. UNICEF therefore ensured that only Supply Division (rather than nutrition staff) were involved in the procurement of MNPs. In addition, strict procurement rules were carefully followed to ensure a level playing field in the procurement of the MNP supply. In the end DSM was ultimately selected as the supplier of MNPs for this engagement with UNICEF. DSM also ensured that its global staff involved in the management of the engagement with UNICEF did not have any links with the company's sales of MNPs to UNICEF.⁸³ Another potential conflict of interest that UNICEF took care to avoid was facilitating access for DSM to the Ministry of Health or other policymakers in Nigeria, which could in theory allow them to influence policy decisions for which they had a vested commercial interest (i.e., a preference for MNP over other interventions).

A roadmap for scale-up of the national MNP programme

The figure below provides a general roadmap of how UNICEF and DSM supported the Government to scale up MNPs through the Ministry of Health at federal and state levels.⁸⁴

The scale-up of the MNP programme was achieved primarily through the integration of MNPs into the IYCF counselling activities of a humanitarian response UNICEF was supporting in the north-east of the country. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, in 2017, a number of social and behaviour change communication materials (posters, leaflets and jingles in local languages) were developed to increase demand for MNPs among caregivers, community leaders and health workers. Over 2018–2019, the focus was on scaling up in five northern states. In doing so, the following factors were considered key by UNICEF and DSM:

- Ensuring national ownership at federal and state levels;
- Building strong and coordinated efforts between all stakeholders;
- Focusing on the preventive aspects of MNPs to keep children healthy;

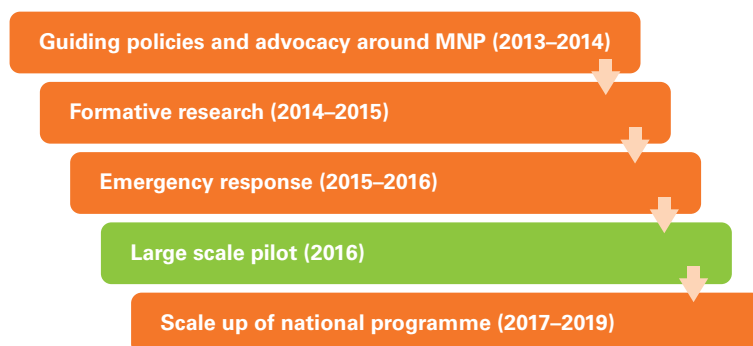
- Integrating MNPs into existing programme platforms such as IYCF;
- Ensuring efficient and effective supply chains; and
- Incentivizing private sector and business to become involved in combating malnutrition including promoting MNPs.⁸⁵

When the scale-up of the programme began in earnest in 2015, only about 11,000 children were being regularly reached with MNPs. By the end of 2019, this figure had increased to just over 1.5 million children, located mainly in the five northern states.⁸⁶ However, considering that in Nigeria there are upwards to 12 million children within this age group,⁸⁷ much work remains to cover all children in need.

Reaching more children with MNPs will require vastly more resources. To this end, UNICEF and DSM's efforts have helped to leverage new funding to support the expansion of MNPs across the country. This has included, for example, the Federal Government's decision to earmark US\$864,000 to procure MNPs for implementation in additional states. A decision was also taken to include MNPs as part of the World Bank's nutrition initiative (amounting to US \$232 million), which will be implemented across 12 states, and it has been reported that a portion of this total amount will be used to purchase MNPs. Another achievement has been the development of a costing tool to be used by state government teams to calculate programme costs to scale up MNPs, which can thereafter be included in budget discussions at the state level.⁸⁸

Another noteworthy accomplishment of UNICEF's engagement with DSM was the decision taken by the Government of Nigeria to include MNPs with the 2018 revision of the Federal Ministry of Health's *Essential Medicines List*.

Road Map for MNP programme in Nigeria



Source: UNICEF Nigeria, 'Background of DSM-UNICEF Partnership with MNP in Nigeria', September 2018, p. 1...

Mobilizing Nigeria's private sector for action on nutrition

The partnership between UNICEF Nigeria and DSM encouraged the country's business sector to engage more deeply on efforts to reduce malnutrition.⁸⁹ Key accomplishments include:

- A national multi-sectoral, multi-partnership conference called 'Nourishing Nigeria: Micronutrients for Equitable and Sustainable Development' which resulted in renewed commitment, awareness and understanding of micronutrients in addressing malnutrition in Nigeria and highlighted the essential role of Nigeria's business sector in these efforts.
- A scoping exercise carried out on business platforms in the food and nutrition sectors which identified 132 businesses for future engagement.
- Potential businesses and private sector players identified and enrolled as possible candidates for inclusion in the leading nutrition support coalition.
- Nutrition manual produced for small and medium-size enterprises in Nigeria on why nutrition matters for their workforces and their families.
- Engagement of media and civil society organizations on nutrition advocacy and accountability within Nigeria.



Negotiating the challenges of private sector engagement

While the engagement between UNICEF and DSM was considered a positive experience, there were also a number of challenges. Both DSM and UNICEF Netherlands found project management challenging given that their respective offices were based in Europe and not in Nigeria, which at times hampered the sense of a 'team'.^{90,91}

Potential conflicts of interest was also a persistent concern throughout the engagement between UNICEF and DSM. Although explicit language had been included in the global MOU and related agreement to guard against conflict of interest, this did not prevent outside groups from publicly questioning whether DSM had an unfair commercial advantage with UNICEF. For example, some Nigerian companies complained or questioned why they were not being considered as MNP suppliers.⁹² To address these issues, UNICEF Nigeria explained the strict quality control requirements and competitive tendering process used by UNICEF for products such as MNPs. Partnering with DSM often required a careful balancing act in order to maintain the separation between programme and commercial objectives.^{93,94} In addition, despite significant added value, UNICEF did note a tendency for DSM team members to focus mostly only on the distribution of MNPs rather



than integrating the distribution of MNPs as one part of comprehensive IYCF programme to ensure the broader goal of improving children's overall nutrition and wellbeing.⁹⁵ There was also disappointment when funding from DSM for Phase 3 was reduced to a much smaller amount than had been initially proposed.⁹⁶

3. LESSONS LEARNED FROM A SIX-YEAR SHARED-VALUE PARTNERSHIP

In spite of some challenges encountered, UNICEF's multi-year partnership with DSM in Nigeria was valuable for the organization, with a number of important lessons learned.

A common vision and objective breeds success.

UNICEF and DSM easily found common ground for their work together in Nigeria. The fact that the partnership was discussed and developed under the global umbrella of the SUN Movement at the highest level – through UNICEF's Executive Director and DSM's CEO – was a driving force behind the engagement.

Shared-value partnerships can cause discomfort.

Mixing development and commercial objectives can raise conflict of interest concerns and UNICEF staff may have a sense of unease in working with the private sector when potential commercial gains are an acceptable partnership outcome. Having a broader programme scope that extends beyond a company's product line may help offset these concerns and ensure tangible non-financial programme benefits are achieved alongside any financial gains for the company.

Private sector companies can offer specific technical skills – but UNICEF may be able to secure these skills elsewhere.

While the staff hired by DSM to work with UNICEF did contribute to the partnership, UNICEF could also have hired its own technical experts, obviating the need to rely on DSM. Therefore, when engaging in a shared-value partnership it is important for UNICEF to consider whether there is a unique characteristic or added value that UNICEF can only get from a private company under a shared-value partnership. This ensures that UNICEF maximizes the value-add of these types of engagements.

Safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest are critical – but may not be enough.

Even when explicit text is included in a MOU, this might not prevent a perceived conflict of interest, or in the case of Nigeria, a perceived unfair advantage with UNICEF. How best to address this challenge with shared-value partnerships will need to be a priority for UNICEF moving forwards. Providing UNICEF field teams with a scripted communication plan to address these types of situations should be considered to guard against potential damage to UNICEF's reputation and mission.

Consider the return on investment in a shared-value partnership.

If the private sector partner does not contribute any seconded staff or funding to the programme, UNICEF may find its existing team and available budget becomes too thinly stretched to meet the demands of the new programme. UNICEF staff time and budgets thus need to be carefully assessed in advance of agreeing to such a partnership to ensure what is a good return on investment.

Catalysing change with a 'big vision'

UNICEF Nigeria's team valued the partnership with DSM as it helped to catalyse the national MNP programme and begin its scale-up across the country. DSM brought expertise in MNPs and engaging with the private sector, while UNICEF provided expertise in designing field programmes to reach young children in vulnerable communities and convening power with the public sector and a wide array of development stakeholders.

Together, UNICEF and DSM were able to bring together multisector stakeholders, including Nigeria's business community under the SUN Movement and its Business Network, to develop a 'big vision' and concrete actions to address malnutrition. UNICEF engaged and partnered with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition to identify businesses and private sector companies for enrolment into the Nigeria SUN Business Network. As of December 2019, just over 120 private sector companies had been successfully enrolled as Network members. With the support of the SUN Civil Society Network in Nigeria, media and civil society organizations were also supported to undertake nutrition advocacy and mobilize partners and community members on nutrition.

Taking this 'big vision' stance is in stark contrast to the traditional private sector philanthropic approach, which often only focuses on providing small grants on narrow topics with modest goals within a short 1–3-year time frame. The partnership between UNICEF and DSM was different in that it was created as an inspirational partnership of shared-value, with significant scale to achieve both programmatic and business goals. The fact that UNICEF and DSM partnered together on this effort over an extended six-year period is noteworthy. Too often, development partnerships are limited by very short timeframes; longer stretches allow such partnerships to achieve more meaningful results.⁹⁷

CASE STUDY 3

Business as a provider of essential goods and a source of technology and innovation

Life-saving treatment for children with severe wasting: Shaping the global market to scale up ready-to-use therapeutic food

This case study³ describes how UNICEF's Supply Division shaped the market to scale up ready-to-use therapeutic food, a highly effective product designed to treat children with severe wasting. It explores the development of RUTF in the 1990s how UNICEF's engagement over the next decades, with the support of local suppliers in Africa and Asia, led to scaled up production and improved quality standards for this life-saving product. The story offers lessons learned for working with business as a provider of essential goods and a source of technology and innovation.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

UNICEF has leveraged the expertise and innovation of the private sector to develop and produce specialized nutrition products. One of these products is ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) to treat children with severe wasting – a life-threatening form of malnutrition that places a child at 12 times higher risk of dying compared to a well-nourished child.⁹⁸

UNICEF recognized the imperative to scale up production of RUTF, and through its Supply Division, developed a market engagement strategy to shape the global RUTF market. When UNICEF's engagement with RUTF production began in 2000, the supply of this essential nutrition product could often not keep up with demand, especially during acute nutrition emergencies. Today, UNICEF is the world's biggest procurer of RUTF, buying an estimated 75–80 per cent⁹⁹ of the worldwide supply to support treatment programmes in more than 60 countries.¹⁰⁰

Current global production capacity for RUTF is estimated at approximately 208,000 metric tons (MT), which is more than sufficient to meet any increase in programme demand due to emergencies.¹⁰¹

Revolutionizing the treatment of severe wasting: Ready-to-use therapeutic foods

Prior to the development of RUTF, most children with severe wasting were treated in a clinical inpatient setting using therapeutic milks (e.g., F-100) that need to be reconstituted with clean boiled water and administered by trained staff. Inpatient treatment can place a heavy burden on already stretched health systems in many low-income countries, and the burden is even greater for caregivers who have to travel – sometimes many miles – with their affected child to hospital. RUTF revolutionized the treatment of uncomplicated forms of severe wasting among children by allowing treatment to take place at home rather than in hospitals.

In the 1990s, a group of nutrition experts in France began to formulate and test new nutrition products to rehabilitate children suffering from severe wasting.¹⁰² In 1996, a collaborative effort between two French groups – Nutriset, a small food company, and L'Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)¹⁰³ – led to the development of a product they named Plumpy'Nut: an energy dense, micronutrient-enhanced paste with the consistency of thick peanut butter.¹⁰⁴ The generic name for Plumpy'Nut is RUTF.

The primary ingredients for RUTF typically include peanuts, oil, sugar, milk powder and vitamin and mineral supplements. However, new compositions are being developed that are equally efficacious, less expensive and more in line with local food tastes.

RUTF comes in a compact one-dose foil sachet, has a good shelf life (two years) and does not spoil easily even after opening. In addition, since RUTF is a low-moisture product, the risk of bacterial growth is limited, unlike the therapeutic milks used in the past. Consequently, RUTF is safe and easy for caregivers to provide to children at home and children like the taste.¹⁰⁵

³ The full length version of this case study can be accessed at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EQzjxNMt_DdHmt3ITfFt14c-BzmPidqgiBV1QhVnKTMvEMg?e=RFnpUm and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

Growing interest in a community approach to treat wasting

Around the end of the 1990s, international organizations including UNICEF began to realize the life-saving potential of RUTF, as it would allow many more children with severe wasting to be treated at home as out-patients.^{106,107} The use of RUTF within a community approach to screening and treatment became known as the ‘community-management of acute malnutrition’ (CMAM) and was soon accepted as the preferred model for treating children with wasting in all contexts. Using this approach, children aged 6–59 months are screened for wasting using a mid-upper arm circumference measuring tape. Children identified with uncomplicated severe wasting are typically provided with a 1–2-week supply of RUTF and are requested to return in 1 to 2 weeks to monitor the child’s progress and receive a new supply of RUTF.

Today, an eight-week treatment of RUTF for one child with severe wasting costs around US\$40–45¹⁰⁸ for the product only, though price can vary depending on where the product is sourced.¹⁰⁹ Countries with high numbers of children with wasting are typically unable to absorb these costs through their national budgets. CMAM programmes therefore remain heavily dependent on donor funding; however, an increasing number of countries are including RUTF in their list of essential medicines and commodities.¹¹⁰

In 2007, WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition and the World Food Programme released a *Joint Statement* endorsing the CMAM and RUTF model as the preferred approach for detecting and treating uncomplicated severe wasting in children.¹¹¹ This Joint Statement reflected a significant change in how United Nations agencies and development partners implemented the screening and treatment of severe wasting in children. It also sparked an escalation in the demand for RUTF, as the CMAM approach was adopted widely across the world, including in UNICEF programme countries.

UNICEF’s achievements in scaling RUTF production over the last 20 years focused on reducing its price, improving quality assurance aspects, and making it available in programme countries where and when it was needed. From 2005 to 2017, RUTF procurement increased nearly thirty-fold, from approximately 1,800 MT to a peak of 53,000 MT in 2017.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

In the early 2000s, UNICEF began supporting partners to implement the CMAM model.¹¹² In 2001, Supply Division issued its first long-term agreement (LTA) for RUTF, which was with Nutriset, the only supplier for the product at



that time. Under an LTA, estimates for the amount of RUTF needed are based on forecasts provided by country offices. Supply Division then procures this amount of RUTF which includes an agreed specification at a fixed price in addition to delivery to the nearest seaport for shipment by sea freight or, in urgent cases, to an agreed airport for air shipment.

UNICEF's purchase of RUTF in 2001 was for 84 MT.¹¹³ By 2005 as more development groups began to adopt the CMAM approach, the demand increased to nearly 1,800 MT. After the release of the 2007 United Nations Joint Statement endorsing CMAM, demand more than doubled to 4,600 MT that year. CMAM programme demand for RUTF soon outpaced global supply levels since production capacity remained limited.¹¹⁴ UNICEF thus recognized the need to rapidly expand the RUTF supplier base to keep up with a sharp rise in demand.

A shared patent leads to increased production

Between 2000 and 2008, Nutriset also began increasing its own production of Plumpy'Nut to meet the increasing demand. In addition to increasing the production of its French operations, Nutriset began to produce RUTF in the countries affected by severe wasting through the creation of the PlumpyField network in 2005 – a group of local food producers agreeing to manufacture ready-to-use foods that adhere to common ethics and standards (see box). In 2020, the network comprised nine private companies and NGOs in Africa, America and Asia. By 2017, Nutriset and the PlumpyField network were producing about 70 per cent of the global RUTF supply with UNICEF purchasing the majority of this volume.¹¹⁵

Scaling up RUTF production in Ethiopia

One of the first PlumpyField members was a local company in Ethiopia called Hilina Enriched Foods. UNICEF had approached Hilina to explore its interest and capacity to produce RUTF in the country. The biggest obstacle to such an engagement for Hilina was arranging funds to purchase the special equipment and supplies for RUTF. However, a private donor (introduced to Hilina by UNICEF) agreed to provide the necessary funds (with the understanding that Hilina would later repay the amount to UNICEF via an in-kind donation of RUTF). The arrangement worked well: Hilina purchased the equipment and supplies needed to develop its manufacturing capacity and joined the PlumpyField network in 2007.^{116,117,118} Today, Hilina is the sole local producer of RUTF supplying Ethiopia and has also been approved as a global export supplier for shipments to Djibouti, Somalia, the Sudan, and Yemen.¹¹⁹

Nutriset and the IRD hold patents for the RUTF product marketed as Plumpy'Nut. Prior to 2010, Nutriset was criticized for strongly guarding its RUTF patent, and

eventually agreed to release it online (through a simplified licensing agreement), opening production to independent producers in developing countries not covered by the PlumpyField network. This patent usage agreement allows a company or organization established in a developing country where Nutriset holds a patent to manufacture, market and distribute its own products (e.g., under its own brand, without assistance from Nutriset). The only cost for organizations is to donate 1 per cent of product sales to the IRD to support further research in this area.¹²⁰

From the beginning, Nutriset played a significant role in providing support to local suppliers to produce RUTF. The relationship between UNICEF and the RUTF companies, including with Nutriset, has consistently been maintained as one of purchaser and supplier, to which the organization's procurement rules and processes are strictly adhered. The story of how these relationships began – and why – is explored further below.

Shifting strategy after the 2008 famine crisis

In 2008, a severe food security crisis struck the Horn of Africa, affecting 8.4 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. This led to more than a doubling in RUTF demand for CMAM programmes from 4,600 MT in the previous year to almost 11,000 MT in 2008.¹²¹

Supply Division struggled to meet this significant increase, especially since at that time it depended solely on Nutriset in France, along with a second smaller global supplier.¹²² As a result, during the 2008 food crisis only 27 per cent of orders arrived on time, while the remaining 73 per cent arrived with an average delay of 37 days. The stress within the RUTF supply system also meant that deliveries to country programmes outside the Horn of Africa had to be postponed. Due to the urgent need to treat children with severe wasting, two thirds of the RUTF ordered to the Horn had to be airfreighted during the summer of 2008, at a cost of US\$8.2 million – about eight times more expensive than the sea shipment rate of \$4.58 per carton.¹²³

Immediately following the 2008 crisis, Supply Division conducted an in-depth review to identify lessons from the experience, which informed three decisive actions:¹²⁴ (1) To initiate a procurement strategy based on a competitive bidding process for RUTF in order to open the market up for new suppliers, especially in programme countries, to ensure that supplies would be readily available where most needed; (2) to work with country offices to forecast annual RUTF needs to prevent shortfalls; and (3) to establish a research consortium (i.e., the Nutrition Articulation Project) through which the University of North Carolina and Duke University conducted a study of UNICEF's RUTF supply chain to identify key weaknesses and propose solutions to address them.^{125,126}

Opening the market through a competitive bidding process

In 2008, Supply Division launched its first competitive bidding exercise. This entailed an anticipated forecasted RUTF supply of 20,000 MT to cover the period of 2009–2010.

Supply Division established three categories for RUTF suppliers: (1) *offshore suppliers*: companies that only export the product with no consumption of RUTF within their country; (2) *local and export suppliers*: companies located in programme countries that produce both RUTF for local use and export to other countries, and (3) *local suppliers*: companies located in programme countries that only produce RUTF for local use.¹²⁷

As a result of this first bidding process, Supply Division approved seven global suppliers (e.g., ‘offshore suppliers’ and ‘local and export suppliers’) and seven local suppliers, reaching a total of 14 suppliers in 2010. This greatly increased the RUTF supplier base, which before had comprised only five companies: Nutriset, based in France, and four local PlumpyField suppliers, in Ethiopia (e.g., Hilina), Malawi (two companies) and the Niger.¹²⁸

At the end of 2010, a second competitive bidding exercise was held for 2011–2012 for a forecasted amount of 54,000 MT.¹²⁹ A total of 27 proposals were received from prospective companies, and Supply Division awarded 12 companies with LTAs to be global suppliers.

On the local supplier side, Supply Division approved five other companies in Africa, bringing the total to seven companies issued with LTAs. In 2011, there were 19 global/local RUTF suppliers, compared to 14 in 2010. By 2012, the PlumpyField franchisees in Ethiopia and the Niger were both approved to become global RUTF suppliers in addition to being local suppliers.¹³⁰

Findings from the supply chain study

A detailed analysis of the RUTF supply chain was initiated by Supply Division in conjunction with the Nutrition Articulation Project, with the findings published in 2009.¹³¹ Issues identified as in need of attention included: a lack of information-sharing among supply chain entities; a lack of data on RUTF forecasts and consumption to inform production needs and planning; long order-to-delivery times; and uncertainty about donor funding and the timely release of funds.¹³²

To improve UNICEF’s RUTF supply chain, the study recommended the following actions:

- Continue to diversify the supplier base through a competitive process in which Supply Division establishes LTAs with companies that meet technical requirements.
- Develop a global demand-forecasting tool that makes more accurate predictions based on monthly admissions of children into feeding programmes, provided by country offices.



- Pre-position buffer stock in strategic locations to increase the responsiveness and flexibility of procurement in response to sudden spikes in demand.¹³³

The recommendations also stipulated that each of these areas should have key performance indicators to allow progress to be tracked over time. To ensure a sustainable and affordable supply of quality RUTF, four procurement objectives were established (that still exist today):

1. Sustain a diverse supplier base with capacity to respond to demand, including during emergency response.
2. Increase market competition to improve value for money.
3. Produce quality RUTF, in line with international standards.
4. Support sourcing of RUTF from manufacturers located in programme countries to achieve a level of 50 per cent by 2016.¹³⁴

In 2018, UNICEF Supply Division refined the second objective on pricing to include a target to reduce the cost of RUTF.¹³⁵ A fifth objective was also added, which focused on procuring RUTF with alternative ingredients (e.g., cheaper and equivalent local ingredients) to reduce costs.

Assuring a quality product and supporting local suppliers

When UNICEF first became involved with scaling up RUTF production it was a novel ‘specialized’ food product with no official regulatory standards guiding the product’s content or manufacturing process. There was no guidance for using RUTF to treat severe wasting, no definitive guidance for producers on its ingredients and its formulation, no basis

from which to establish parameters around trade and import requirements, and nothing on which to base a quality framework for sustainable procurement.¹³⁶

Supply Division therefore gave significant attention to issues of quality assurance (to meet good manufacturing practices) and advocacy to develop global RUTF standards¹³⁷ to help take RUTF to scale.¹³⁸ Since 2014, UNICEF has also worked to have a global RUTF standard approved by the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses. After several years and various challenges to the process, a Codex guideline for RUTF is scheduled to be completed in 2021.¹³⁹

As a condition of producing RUTF for UNICEF, the product and the manufacturing sites of suppliers must first be ‘approved’ by the staff from the Supply Division’s Medicines and Nutrition Centre and Quality Assurance Centre. UNICEF has also worked closely with Médecins Sans Frontières, the World Food Programme and the Government of the United States (which procures RUTF from United States-based manufacturers for donation to UNICEF) to approve products, share specifications and collaborate in supplier inspections, including validating each other’s inspection results.

Understanding how government legislation affects the production and export of RUTF, as well as the importation of its ingredients (e.g., in terms of import restrictions, taxes, etc.) was critically important to building the capacities of local suppliers (see figure, below). Local suppliers face multiple challenges, including poor infrastructure, poor quality of locally grown peanuts, high costs, prohibitive government taxes and delays with securing imported

Advantages of locally procured product



Cost efficiency

Supply chain management cost efficiency gained due to close proximity to the source



Lead time

Reduced lead time from the time an order is submitted to the time it is delivered



Acceptability

Better acceptability and/or government endorsement of locally produced product



Development

Local production of RUTF contributes to development objectives (e.g., creating jobs)

Challenges with locally procured product



Increased cost

Importation of ingredients (e.g., milk powder, peanuts, vitamin-mineral mix) and materials (e.g., packaging) more expensive



Tax exemptions

Imported finished RUTF products are tax exempt due to their programmatic purpose



Production capacity

Challenges attracting investment capital to expand production; high interest rates on capital loans



Regulations

National standards may not be sufficient; access to quality testing labs for quality assurance may be limited

inputs, issues in maintaining product quality, securing working capital including foreign exchange, as well as being able to deliver RUTF on time. Tailoring UNICEF's engagement to the context is thus critical: In Ethiopia, for example, UNICEF began paying Hilina in US dollars instead of Ethiopian birr, which enabled Hilina's owner to expand production by purchasing machines and materials with no foreign exchange obstacles.¹⁴⁰

Supply chain performance in emergencies is tested again

In 2011, another severe drought hit the Horn of Africa, causing a famine in Somalia and a severe food security crisis in Ethiopia and Kenya that led to a spike in demand for RUTF – and tested UNICEF's improved supply chain.¹⁴¹

Even with twice as much delivery volume ordered in 2011 compared with 2008, the availability of RUTF from local and regional suppliers had greatly improved. Better planning allowed for longer allocated times for deliveries and the need for airfreight delivery from Nutriset decreased substantially, from 71 per cent in the 2008 emergency to 13 per cent in 2011. This was the result of improved forecasting of country programme needs, increased production capacity of local and regional suppliers, and faster fund mobilization by donors. As a consequence, UNICEF was able to reduce the landed cost of the therapeutic food by 27 per cent, saving US\$14.2 million during the 2011 response to the famine crisis in the Horn of Africa.¹⁴² While the response was not perfect (about 30 per cent of offshore orders arrived late), the overall response was strong.

Another food emergency hit the Horn of Africa in 2017, which allowed Supply Division to assess its performance compared to the 2011 emergency. This revealed that further improvements had been made, especially in expanding the local supplier base in programme countries and in estimating increased demand. For example, in 2017 a total of 48 per cent of procurement volume was sourced from suppliers within the Horn of Africa, while in 2011, all the RUTF had to be sourced from outside of Africa. This eliminated the need for air freight during the 2017 emergency and resulted in a sizeable cost reduction of 21 per cent.¹⁴³

Expanding access to RUTF to reach more children in need

Today, UNICEF is the main buyer of RUTF, procuring an estimated three quarters of the global programme demand.¹⁴⁴ UNICEF's global purchases of RUTF have grown dramatically from around 1,800 MTs^{145, 146} in 2005 to a peak of 53,000 MTs in 2017, an amount suitable to treat 3.8 million children with severe wasting.¹⁴⁷

A number of key achievements are worth noting that relate to production capacity, cost, suppliers, and numbers of children affected by severe wasting reached with treatment:

- **Increased production capacity** – Overall global production capacity of approved RUTF manufacturing sites has increased significantly over the years, and today there is a more than sufficient supply to cover demand.
- **Reduced costs** – The weighted average price of RUTF has steadily decreased over time due to increased procurement volumes, competition, and supplier diversity.¹⁴⁸
- **Numbers of local suppliers** – The number of local suppliers has increased substantially, resulting in a diverse and reliable supply base of 21 different suppliers, of which 17 are located in countries with high levels of malnutrition.¹⁴⁹
- **More children treated** – globally about 5.2 million children are now being reached with RUTF treatment for severe wasting¹⁵⁰ – five times the number reached in 2009.

3. LESSONS LEARNED ON BUSINESS AS A PROVIDER OF ESSENTIAL GOODS AND A SOURCE OF INNOVATION

A number of lessons can be drawn from this case study on how UNICEF scaled up RUTF by engaging with business in a manner which allowed local food producers to innovate, and in time, become producers of specialized nutrition products to treat children with severe wasting. One key take-away has been the value of continuous learning through evaluations and studies initiated by UNICEF to assess and analyse what works and where adjustments might need to be made. Other learnings are outlined below.

Be prepared to handle political dynamics. In 2008, at the beginning of the scale-up process during the food security crisis in the Horn of Africa, the initial focus was on ramping up the supply of RUTF – and the main push was to get the product to where it was needed for use in emergency CMAM programmes. Over time, however, rather than focusing solely on procuring and delivering a product, the scope of UNICEF's programmatic work with RUTF has become broader and more complex. This reflects the changing nature of the global dialogue around RUTF as a specialized commercial nutrition product for children. UNICEF staff should be prepared for some degree of controversy to emerge within the community of global nutrition players around engagements with the private food sector that involve the commercial production of processed nutritional products for malnourished children.

Seek out partners that can complement UNICEF's role. Having appropriate partners who can serve in a type of intermediary technical assistance role (such as Nutriset) to support local suppliers of nutrition products is important since this falls outside what UNICEF is able to provide under its procurement rules and regulations.

Look for flexibility within the rules. While recognizing the importance of UNICEF's formal procurement policies and procedures, there is often some flexibility that UNICEF can use to support suppliers, especially local companies, in an acceptable manner, to increase their knowledge and improve their nutrition products and manufacturing capacity while also preventing conflicts of interest.

Achieving sustainable scale-up
UNICEF will continue to be the main global buyer of RUTF for the foreseeable future, as it is an essential and core product in the treatment of child wasting at the community level. However, the price of RUTF continues to limit additional demand, even though the market has sufficient suppliers. This underscores the importance of focusing on efforts to further reduce production costs, for example, through innovative strategies that include new, less expensive but effective RUTF recipes that are also more suitable for local dietary preferences.

While UNICEF's procurement volume of RUTF is sufficient at this time to cover the needs of CMAM programmes globally, further scale-up of field programmes is necessary to reach the estimated 9.2 million^{151, 152} children with severe wasting not yet receiving the nutrition support they need to survive and recover. Along with the issue of expanding coverage, is the critical question of sustainability, which is integral to UNICEF's mandate as a development agency. Achieving sustainability must include encouraging governments to begin co-financing these treatment efforts; however, RUTF's high costs make this a continuing challenge.

While identifying and treating children with severe wasting using RUTF is vital to saving lives, we must prioritize efforts to prevent children from becoming undernourished in the first place. Prevention remains a great challenge and tackling it will require commitments and investment across many different levels, sectors and systems. The new *2020 Global Action Plan on Child Wasting* will help focus attention to the crisis of child wasting and lead to greater investment by national governments and donors in its prevention and treatment.

CASE STUDY 4

Business as employer

Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the agricultural sector: Supporting mothers to breastfeed in Kenya's commercial tea estates

This case study⁴ describes the results of a programme to reach working mothers with breastfeeding support in a private tea plantation in Kericho, Kenya. The programme improved exclusive breastfeeding and strengthened mothers' nutrition knowledge, while maintaining business productivity. In highlighting the nutrition contributions of business as an employer, the story shares valuable lessons for embedding breastfeeding accommodations into business practices in ways that uphold child rights and support business objectives.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Within the business sector the environment created by employers for their workforce often serves as a key driver of family well-being, including in terms of nutrition outcomes for working mothers and their young children. To achieve programme goals for nutrition, particularly in the area of infant feeding, UNICEF engages with businesses on their workplace policies and practices. This can include, for example, protecting maternity rights, establishing family-friendly policies that promote breastfeeding spaces in the workplace, ensuring paid breastfeeding breaks for nursing mothers, and offering affordable, accessible and quality childcare services in the workplace.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Kenya, UNICEF designed a rural baby-friendly workplace model to support working mothers to optimally feed their infants. In partnership with a tea-estate company, a pilot was run from 2016 to 2019 at their private tea estate in Kericho County. Cost-effective baby-friendly policies, such as creating breastfeeding corners, ensuring paid breastfeeding breaks for nursing mothers, and establishing staffed childcare areas on-site, were put in place.

The ultimate intention was to encourage other export crop businesses in Kenya who employ large numbers of women to adopt the model to support mothers in their workforce.

Protecting the breastfeeding rights of the most vulnerable

Kenya can be considered a model in Africa for protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding through the passing of significant policy and legislative frameworks for which UNICEF has provided broad support over the years.¹⁵³ According to national surveys, exclusive breastfeeding rates improved from 32 per cent in 2008 to 61 per cent in 2014.¹⁵⁴ These successes are the result of concerted efforts by the MOH and its national and international development partners, including UNICEF.

Despite the great successes achieved, some vulnerable groups have been overlooked in the country, such as mothers working in the informal sector as agricultural labourers. These women, including those working in the export crop sector, typically come from deprived rural communities and face obstacles that prevent them from optimally breastfeeding their infants. Mothers working outside their home face particular challenges since workplace environments in Kenya tend not to be conducive for infant feeding.¹⁵⁵ Breastfeeding breaks are often inadequate, there are no quiet places where mothers can breastfeed, no safe places to put their babies, and no facilities for these women to express and store their breast milk safely.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

For many years, UNICEF Kenya had been supporting the Ministry of Health to develop policies and programmes to help working mothers optimally breastfeed in the workplace. This history meant that UNICEF was already well versed in breastfeeding policy environment in Kenya prior to engaging with the tea estate to improve breastfeeding in the workplace.

Over the last decade, UNICEF also supported a network of private businesses to support breastfeeding mothers through an innovative partnership forged with the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) and the Ministry of Health.

⁴ The full length version of this case study is available to UNICEF staff and can be accessed at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/ETOilw6Ea3IEhLko965nmMBGMxvjs16rti33T69GRsrkw?e=AD9P75> and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

Set up in 2003, KEPSA strives to bring together the country's business community into a single voice to engage and influence public policy to create an enabling business environment. It has proven to be a valuable private sector partner to UNICEF in energizing the dialogue around infant feeding issues across the business community.

Building support through business

Starting in 2010, UNICEF began working with KEPSA and the MOH on the Better Business Practices for Children (BBPC) initiative in partnership with UNICEF and the MOH.^{156, 157} Rather than engaging with KEPSA directly, UNICEF provided funding through the KEPSA Foundation, the network's philanthropic arm.¹⁵⁸ The initiative was launched in 2010, with KEPSA signing a statement of commitment on behalf of 200 private sector entities within its membership network to promote workplace policies that create a supportive environment for breastfeeding employees.¹⁵⁹ UNICEF partnered with KEPSA to carry out the first and second phases of the BBPC initiative over the periods from 2012–2013 and 2016–2018 respectively and is continuing for the period of 2018–2021.¹⁶⁰

Through its strong convening power, KEPSA has been able to promote the BBPC initiative to over 1,000 private sector companies, either directly or indirectly. The organization's clout and support for the MOH was also helpful in nudging infant feeding policies forward within the government – such as the Breastmilk Substitute Bill and the Health Act 2017, which provides the legal framework for the establishment of lactation stations and requires breastfeeding breaks in the workplace.

This type of close collaboration across three such different entities – government, business and the United Nations – to promote breastfeeding is not only unusual but also effective in achieving tangible results.

The Kericho tea estate: A vast tea-picking workforce powered by women

With KEPSA's input, the decision was made to focus on tea plantations for a number of reasons. First, tea is the largest export crop commodity for Kenya, amounting to over US\$1 billion annually, and second, women comprise more than 60 per cent of the tea labour force in the country. Tea workers also provided an excellent group for research since they are a stable population within a definable intervention zone, with most living with their families in nearby villages. Very little is known about the nutritional conditions and challenges facing these women, especially mothers with infants. As most come from poor rural communities, it can be assumed these workers likely face serious obstacles to adequately feeding their children.

It took six months to identify a tea-estate company that would agree to participate in the engagement. One tea estate was identified but later backed out even after some preliminary fieldwork had been conducted. While the exact reasons for this withdrawal are unknown, it may have been related to concerns that UNICEF or the Ministry of Health would discover child labour or other employee welfare issues. Other tea estates also initially showed interest but later withdrew and did not return UNICEF's calls.



At the end of 2015 UNICEF approached a large tea-estate company based in Kericho County. From the head office in Nairobi it was discovered there was already a regional memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the same company and UNICEF that covered several countries for collaboration on water and sanitation. By April 2016, a partnership had been formed. The Kericho tea estate happened to be one of Kenya's oldest and largest (8,700 hectares) with a workforce of over 16,000 permanent workers and about 5,000 seasonal workers. Over a third of the workforce were women.¹⁶¹

Even before the UNICEF opportunity presented itself, the Managing Director of the estate was known to be interested in exploring how to better support the health and nutrition of female employees and their children. The topic of childcare for mothers working on the estate was often brought up during monthly employee meetings and during management meetings at both middle and senior levels.¹⁶² A small study had also been conducted by the estate management which showed that mothers with children under 2 years were missing about two days of work each month to care for their sick children. In light of this, the engagement with UNICEF was timely for this company and provided them with a chance to address health- and nutrition-related issues for its workers.

Mobilizing resources and laying the groundwork for action

The programme was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation,¹⁶³ with funds amounting to US\$1.06 million, the majority of which were used to develop and test the baby-friendly workplace initiative on the Kericho tea estate. However, a small portion from this total was directed to both the MOH to support national policies around breastfeeding in the workplace and to KEPSA to support the second phase of the BBPC initiative.

The specific objectives of the partnership were to:

- (1) Strengthen workplace support for breastfeeding through a public-private partnership, development of guidelines, job-aids and tools, and advocacy materials;
- (2) Test a model for enhancing workplace support for breastfeeding in the context of a tea estate that can be scaled widely across the country; and
- (3) Measure and learn from the model workplace support for breast feeding initiative.¹⁶⁴

Related to the third objective, the budget included ample funds to ensure that a robust monitoring and evaluation system was put into place that could assess cost-effectiveness. This information was considered essential to inform the MOH's plans for future scale-up. No money was provided from UNICEF to the company or the tea estate, or vice versa.

Strengthening national ownership and accountability

The baby-friendly workplace initiative was launched through a meeting of stakeholders held at company's International Training Centre in Kericho. Along with UNICEF staff from headquarters, the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office and the Kenya Country Office, other attendees included MOH nutrition staff from Kericho Country and Nairobi, company management staff based in Kenya, the Governor of Kericho County, other County officials, as well as representatives from KEPSA, the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and several Kenyan universities.

At the launch meeting, a multi-stakeholder Steering Group was established to design, implement and monitor the fieldwork. The Steering Group comprised staff from the MOH in Kericho and Nairobi, UNICEF, as well as management staff from the company's tea plantation including the Welfare Manager.

While UNICEF provided technical and financial support, the MOH played a central role and felt strong ownership,¹⁶⁵ expressing its appreciation for the design of the partnership. Partners took on the following roles during the pilot:

- UNICEF provided technical leadership and oversight of the pilot and was responsible for dispersing budget and reporting. UNICEF Kenya's Chief of Nutrition managed the overall partnership with the MOH, KEPSA, APHRC and the tea estate, while day-to-day management came from the Country Office's Nutrition Specialist who also supervised a nutrition project officer stationed on the ground in Kericho.



- MOH provided the policy environment and the technical guidance based on the national maternal, infant and young child nutrition policies and standards. The MOH's nutrition teams at headquarters in Nairobi and in Kericho Country were both involved in partnership design and implementation. The Kericho County Government, especially the Governor's Office was also included in key events to ensure their political support.
- The leadership and senior management of the tea estate, especially the Welfare Managers, ensured that their tea estate field staff were supportive of the activities. The tea estate provided breastmilk pumping machines, fridges (to store the pumped milk), storage containers, cupboards, chairs and beds.¹⁶⁶
- The APHRC was contracted to undertake the baseline and endline surveys, impact assessment, and cost-effectiveness analysis.
- A short-term service agreement was issued to the University of Oslo to develop a set of animated educational videos on infant and young child feeding, which were used to communicate with mothers using the breastfeeding rooms on the tea estate.¹⁶⁷
- KEPSA, although not directly involved in field implementation, helped in selecting the export crop sector as the most appropriate entry point and fostered

a positive policy environment for the development of a rural baby-friendly workplace model.

- UNICEF headquarters in New York was the first point of contact with the donor and deeply involved during initial stages including programme design.

Channelling support to work, home, health centres and communities

Recognizing that breastfeeding mothers needed an enabling environment and support from families, health workers, community members and workplace colleagues and managers, the programme was based on environmental changes at the workplace (e.g., breastfeeding rooms) combined with a strong social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) foundation, which leveraged global evidence on effective workplace and community-level promotion of exclusive breastfeeding^{168,169} to shift behaviours and practices.

As shown in Figure 1,¹⁷⁰ the field activities were implemented through four distinct channels, with messages delivered to mothers and other key influencers. The four channels included: the workplace, day-care centres, health facilities, and villages. Specific activities undertaken for each of these four channels are also shown in the diagram above. In addition to supporting breastfeeding, the messages covered related aspects of optimal complementary



Figure 1. Components of the baby-friendly workplace initiative

KENYA Baby-friendly Initiatives . from Field Notes book—CASTLE

Source: UNICEF Implementing a Baby-Friendly Workplace Initiative in Kenya: Lessons learned from supporting exclusive breastfeeding in a private tea plantation in Kericho. New York. UNICEF. 2019. Page 5.

feeding, continued breastfeeding up to 2 years and beyond, along with other basic maternal and young child nutrition messages.

Tracking the impact of a baby-friendly workplace

The pilot was designed to have a strong monitoring and evaluation approach. With this in mind, the APHRC developed a mixed method, pre-post study design.¹⁷¹ A baseline survey was carried out between September and November 2016 to inform the intervention design (e.g., the SBCC strategy mentioned above), while the endline survey was carried out between May-June 2018.

At both baseline and endline, the research team carried out a consecutive mass recruitment of all mothers with infants under age 1 to be included in the surveys.¹⁷² Data on infant feeding practices, child anthropometry and health along with mothers' work information including absenteeism and other relevant information was collected. While these mothers were either employed permanently by the tea estate, casually working or not working, all of them lived on the tea estate property.

Due to the sampling approach, 556 mother-infant pairs were surveyed at baseline and 295 at endline. The two samples of mothers with infants under age 1 were independent of each other, with only very slight coincidental overlap. In addition, a total of 121 managers and supervisors were interviewed at baseline and 102 at endline.¹⁷³ Qualitative studies were carried out on a selected sub-sample of women and their family members, managers and supervisors, and plantation health care providers.

The baseline survey carried out in 2016 revealed that only 20 per cent of infants living on the Kericho tea estate were being exclusively breastfed.¹⁷⁴ Women had to work long hours in the fields picking tea leaves, often all day long, in order to meet their daily 'harvest' quota. As a result, mothers with infants typically left their babies at home from sunrise to sunset with untrained caretakers.¹⁷⁵ This resulted in suboptimal infant feeding as these infants were given water, cow's milk, diluted porridge and/or other unhealthy gruels to appease their hunger until their mothers returned home in the evening. Under such conditions, these infants faced high risk of sickness, undernutrition and infant mortality.

Delivering results for mothers, babies and business

The evaluation conducted after two years of implementation showed the baby-friendly workplace model to be effective in increasing optimal breastfeeding practices, retaining female tea estate workers and improving overall worker satisfaction. The results also demonstrated the model's feasibility, cost-effectiveness and potential for replicability to other agricultural businesses employing large numbers of female workers with young children.

The results of the endline survey showed that timely initiation of breastfeeding increased from 77 per cent at baseline to 86 per cent at endline ($p < 0.05$) and the exclusive breastfeeding rate in infants under 6 months of age increased four-fold, from 20 per cent to 81 per cent ($p < 0.05$).

Regarding the implementation of workplace policies, a significant improvement was documented in mothers' awareness of their rights, including their entitlement to breastfeeding breaks and other workplace accommodations; in addition, they were receiving more support from their plantation managers ($p < 0.05$). For the communities in which the women employees worked, there were stronger support systems as community members benefited from an improved understanding of maternal, infant and young child nutrition through the establishment of community mother support groups as part of the initiative.

The evaluation also revealed important results for business. There was no decline in worker productivity in terms of the number of hours worked or the amount of tea picked. The APHRC team reported that the cost-benefit ratio was 2.11 and the return on investment was 111 per cent. A key conclusion was that *"the intervention [was] labour intensive given that about 60 per cent of costs [were] for personnel, but not capital intensive, with capital taking less than 2 per cent of the costs, suggesting potential flexibility in scaling"*.¹⁷⁶

After the pilot ended, the tea estate used its internal resources to expand the baby-friendly workplace to more areas within the original Kericho tea plantation site, establishing four more day-care centres on top of the two centres created during the engagement. To help sustain these additions and expand further across the estate, the company was contemplating having mothers pay a small amount each month to help cover internal costs. The company's management team at the tea estate also incorporated elements of the work into its maternity policy, management functions, social welfare duties and 'worker well-being' training programmes in addition to its community peer education systems and village committee activities.

In terms of broader impact beyond the tea estate itself, lessons learned helped to inform new national policies related to breastfeeding in the workplace. According to the MOH nutrition team in Nairobi, experiences gained were incorporated into the new *National Guidelines on Securing a Breastfeeding Friendly Environment at the Workplace-2018*, an initiative that UNICEF has been supporting over a number of years.¹⁷⁷

From the start, the intention was to develop a model that, if successful, could be replicated elsewhere in the country and even beyond to other countries. Since the engagement

came to an end in late 2018, a number of tea companies have approached the MOH and UNICEF for help to implement the baby-friendly workplace model on their own estates. As of December 2019, UNICEF Kenya reported that 11 tea companies had approached them for support.¹⁷⁸ UNICEF has been able to support the MOH in Nandi county, which in turn is supporting three tea estates that have embraced workplace support for breastfeeding.¹⁷⁹

As the MOH considers this type of breastfeeding support model a pressing priority, it intends to continue working with UNICEF and KEPSA to develop a feasible scale-up strategy which could proceed with minimal resources and could in future be funded by the companies themselves.

3. LESSONS LEARNED IN ENGAGING BUSINESS AS AN EMPLOYER

UNICEF's experience of implementing a baby-friendly workplace initiative in the Kericho tea plantation demonstrates how key accommodations for breastfeeding mothers can improve infant and young child nutrition and increase mothers' satisfaction in the workplace, while maintaining business objectives. The following lessons can be helpful for others wishing to develop a similar programme:

Research any prior work UNICEF may have had with the company. It is important to learn if the potential business partner has already engaged with UNICEF in the past (global, regional or country level), and whether there are lessons learned from working with that partner or if prior MOUs exist on which new engagements could be based.

Explore if business networks exist that could help with future scale-up. To amplify the potential for scaling up a baby-friendly workplace model, existing networks of private companies – both rural and urban based – should be identified and explored to determine if they have the potential to serve as an 'umbrella' partner, as was the case with KEPSA in Kenya.

Study the private sector partner and speak their language. Pitching the effort solely in technical nutrition terms and outcomes (e.g., increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates) may not catch the attention or commitment of business leaders. Research the company first, understand its priorities, identify decision-makers, and then use this background to develop key messages that resonate. Messages on increased productivity and returns on investment and marginal costs are likely to pique the interest of business decision-makers, along with data on how investing in improved corporate practices and reputation make good economic sense.

Costs are paramount to the private sector. Whenever possible, carry out a cost-benefit analysis as part of the intervention. Costing results can serve as a powerful advocacy tool for future scale-up to other companies.

Risks can exist for all partners. Business partners assess their own risks about working with UNICEF and the MOH – for example, if opening their workplaces up to scrutiny might reveal poor business practices, especially those related to child rights (e.g., child labour), or employee health and safety. UNICEF needs to be aware of these potential concerns on the side of businesses and be prepared to manage such apprehensions should they arise.

Do not underestimate the value of advocacy – or how long it takes. It takes time and effort to get companies to understand the economic value of investing in a baby-friendly workplace (e.g., reduced absenteeism) in addition to reputational benefits. The time and resources invested to win trust through effective advocacy should be factored into the overall planning.

Identify champions within the private company and forge strong ties. Having a champion within the private company, such as the Welfare Manager in the company's Kericho estate, is invaluable. Working closely with this individual and cultivating this relationship is helpful to ensure the programme's success and sustainability once outside assistance ends.

Strengthening 'business as an employer' initiatives This baby-friendly workplace initiative represented a unique opportunity for UNICEF to work with business as an employer to improve infant feeding and address related challenges facing the infants and young children of disadvantaged women working on Kenya's agricultural estates.

Today, the MOH – at both the county and national levels – is exploring opportunities to adapt and expand the model to other agricultural settings within the county to maximize the reach and positive results of the initiative. However, as of the end of 2020, resource constraints on the side of the MOH, in terms of staffing and funding, were hindering their ability to support agricultural businesses to expand the model. Further work is needed to overcome these challenges and should include actively exploring how willing businesses themselves can contribute financially, especially as the tendency may be to pass costs on to their employees. This also underscores the importance of developing a costed plan for scale-up early on to ascertain the feasibility and future sustainability of such an approach.

CASE STUDY 5

Business as employer

Promoting baby-friendly workplaces in the ready-made garment sector: Building the Mothers@Work programme in Bangladesh

This case study⁵ explores the development of the Mothers@Work programme in Bangladesh. The programme aims to tackle the exclusive breastfeeding levels by supporting mothers working in Bangladesh's ready-made garment factories through maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion in the workplace. This case highlights how working with business as an employer strengthened the national initiative to improve breastfeeding and shares valuable lessons in building and scaling up such a nationwide programme.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Within the business sector, the environment created by employers for their workforce can serve as a key driver of family well-being, including in terms of nutrition outcomes for working mothers and their young children. In Bangladesh, ready-made garment (RMG) factories employ millions of young women. Given this reach, UNICEF identified a strategic opportunity to use the RMG sector as a key platform for supporting improved breastfeeding in the country.

In close partnership with the Government of Bangladesh, UNICEF engaged with RMG companies to design and test a cost-effective programme model – Mothers@Work – to support maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion for women workers with infants and young children. By early 2020, 90 RMG factories in the country had adopted the Mothers@Work programme. UNICEF's intention is to continue to support the scaling up of this approach across the RMG sector through the development of new partnerships with industry networks and associations.

Partnering with the ready-made garment industry to boost breastfeeding support at work

The RMG sector in Bangladesh is second after China and accounts for over 83 per cent of the country's exports, worth around US\$32 billion in 2018.¹⁸⁰ The sector employs over 4 million workers, many of them migrants from the countryside who move to urban centres to take advantage of job opportunities. Women make up to 54 per cent of the garment workforce.¹⁸¹

Given its huge economic influence in the country, the RMG sector has great potential to reduce poverty and contribute to the well-being of children and women through the earned wages and services afforded to working mothers, including maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion and support.¹⁸² UNICEF also realized that a large number of women were spending their childbearing years in active employment in the RMG industry. For example, studies showed that about 15 per cent of all Bangladeshi women between 16–30 years of age have worked in the garment industry at some point in their lives, illustrating how common such employment is for young mothers.¹⁸³

UNICEF's experiences from a small pilot conducted in two RMG factories in 2012 suggested that breastfeeding practices among RMG workers with infants and young children were suboptimal. As part of the two-year pilot, UNICEF developed an RMG workplace model to support maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion. Though quite short, the experience demonstrated *"innovative, effective approaches to increase access to services for working mothers, many of whom [worked] long hours and [were] unreached by regular clinic-based services."* Further, in 2016, research revealed that only 17 per cent of infants aged 2–5 months of RMG factory workers were being exclusively breastfed compared with the national average of 48 per cent among infants of the same age.¹⁸⁴ UNICEF saw that these low levels could be a contributing factor to declining national levels of exclusive breastfeeding.¹⁸⁵

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

In light of the vast numbers of mothers with infants working in the RMG sector and considering that improving national breastfeeding rates was a priority, UNICEF Bangladesh saw an opportunity to work with the industry to improve breastfeeding practices in a significant way.¹⁸⁶

⁵ The full length version of this case study can be accessed at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w/s/PD-Nutrition/EfB12tWZmiNNrPKxKJ5lLusB-b1uBmiBXpR6zS3Z_U2nhlw?e=INLlvD and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

Mobilizing resources to re-energize a tested programme

In 2014, funding became available through a multi-country partnership with UNICEF headquarters on maternal and newborn health and nutrition.¹⁸⁷ After consultation, UNICEF Bangladesh was selected to receive funding to support quality improvement for nutrition services with a strong focus on infant and young child feeding, especially breastfeeding.¹⁸⁸

Out of this funding, about US\$1 million was allocated to test and scale up a private sector workplace model to support maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion among women in the RMG sector.¹⁸⁹ This was the first time that UNICEF Bangladesh had secured further funding to pursue this workplace model since the initial 2012 pilot. The design of the Mothers@Work programme was shaped by the pilot experiences. An implementation plan was developed as part of the partnership, with a focus on actions that could be sustained once external support had ended. To achieve this objective, specific text within the plan emphasized working with large networks or associations *versus individual companies to shape and influence industry policies on maternity provision.*¹⁹⁰ The *Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)* – one of the country’s largest trade associations with a membership of 4,500 RMG factories – was therefore identified as a desired partner to bring on board.¹⁹¹

Building the programme foundation

Starting in mid-2015, the first phase of work commenced with the establishment of project demonstration sites in five

factories belonging to two RMG companies; Dulal Brothers Limited (DBL), situated in the Jinnat Complex of Gazipur, a peri-urban area of Dhaka, and Vision Apparels, situated in the Mirpur area of Dhaka city.¹⁹²

The project activities focused on strengthening the capacity of the company owners and their factory management and supervisory staff to ensure their workplaces were compliant with relevant Bangladesh labour laws. This encompassed knowing and implementing the many provisions related to protecting maternity rights and breastfeeding support, including: paid maternity leave; allowing breastfeeding mothers with children under 24 months two 30 minute breaks each working day along with a lunch break; establishing nursing corners for these workers to breastfeed or express their milk; providing health facilities with free or discounted medical care; and establishing and staffing a day-care facility for female workers’ children who were under 6 years old.¹⁹³

In addition to these efforts to improve the enabling workplace environment, the project was grounded in two main social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) approaches: (1) supporting pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers using SBCC techniques suitable for the workplace; and (2) creating a positive workplace culture to support these women by building the knowledge and capacity of factory-based managers and supervisors, healthcare workers, social welfare officers and human resource officers, and child-care providers around breastfeeding support and maternity protection.¹⁹⁴ In regard to the latter, RMG company and factory leadership were



viewed as workplace champions to promote maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion on their own premises. They were also supported to become national champions to encourage them to promote this approach with the owners of other RMG companies.

In November 2016, UNICEF assisted the Government of Bangladesh to host a national consultation to discuss what should comprise the workplace model. During this seminal event, participants from the Government, UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), RMG company owners, and NGOs considered the work at the five demonstration sites along with other experiences. Participants agreed on a set of seven minimum standards that would form the package of support provided for maternity protection and breastfeeding in the workplace, starting in the RMG sector but also spreading to other sectors. The seven minimum standards were: breastfeeding spaces, breastfeeding breaks, child-care provision, paid maternity leave, cash and medical benefits, employment protection and non-discrimination, and safe-work provision. These standards led to the finalization of the workplace model, and its eventual branding as Mothers@Work.



Bringing the brand to life

UNICEF and its partners believed that an attractive and high-quality professional look would raise the status of the workplace initiative in the eyes of the RMG company owners and would encourage them to enrol their factories. This led to UNICEF contracting an international marketing group to develop a distinctive look and logo, which was branded and established as the Mothers@Work programme in May 2017.

A toolkit for Mothers@Work, which includes a resource guide and a set of communication materials, was developed in 2018. The resource guide contains a full set of training and supporting advocacy materials developed around the seven minimum standards. The toolkit was originally intended to be used to approach and sensitize new RMG company owners to adopt the approach; however, it also provides them with comprehensive guidance on establishing and maintaining the Mothers@Work approach. It is also flexible enough to be used by other types of organizations, including NGOs, who may wish to promote and adopt the Mothers@Work model in their own workplace settings.

A formal communications framework was released in February 2020 that guides all partners on the principles for communication and information sharing around the Mothers@Work programme. It also describes partners' roles, text for citation, as well as parameters around the use of logos, including related review processes.¹⁹⁵

Working in partnership for sustainable success

UNICEF partnered with ILO to begin scaling up the Mothers@Work model within the RMG sector. This partnership occurred as part of the ILO's existing BetterWork Bangladesh (BWB) programme that focuses on improving labour laws in the country and encouraging their adoption by factories. The BWB programme consists of a network of 248 RMG factories and focuses on improving the health and safety conditions within the workplace and, as such, provided an excellent fit and starting point for scaling up Mothers@Work.

In August 2017, Mothers@Work was officially launched as a national programme by the Government. To move forward with the process of scaling up, the ILO used a variety of outreach strategies under the BWB programme to identify interested RMG factories. The Mothers@Work toolkit and materials were used as a central part of this process. The original five RMG factories continued to serve as demonstration sites for newly enrolled BWB RMG factory staff to visit and learn about the programme.

UNICEF covered programme development costs and took the lead for all aspects of technical support and management, from implementing the demonstration sites

to scaling up the workplace model. Starting at the very beginning, a Nutrition Specialist oversaw the project with support from the Chief of Nutrition. Outside technical support was provided by the nutrition team at UNICEF headquarters and from the Regional Office for South Asia. Strong support was provided by the Geneva Private Fundraising and Partnerships team to the Country Office's Better Business for Children initiative which overlaps and complements the Mothers@Work programme. In mid-2018, UNICEF hired a consultant to help coordinate all the partners to foster scale-up and to liaise with the Government. The nutrition team in UNICEF Bangladesh worked with UNICEF's SBCC experts to develop the overall strategy for the project, drawing on the existing global SBCC framework and adapting its messaging for Mothers@Work.¹⁹⁶

While UNICEF provided strong support in its design, implementation and scale-up, the Mothers@Work programme is fully owned by the Government of Bangladesh. Various other national partners were also involved.

On the Government side, the two key ministries involved were the National Nutrition Services and the Institute of Public Health Nutrition (NNS-IPHN) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) along with the Ministry of Labour and Economics (MoLE). These Government bodies provide guidance and technical expertise around the policy environment, national strategies and laws. While UNICEF had a long history of working with the MoHFW, this was

the first time that UNICEF worked with the MoLE. Forging this new partnership can be considered a significant milestone for UNICEF Bangladesh.¹⁹⁷

RMG company owners provided staff time and paid for resources (e.g., renovation and furniture) to create breastfeeding corners and childcare spaces. They also agreed to adopt the maternity protection standards embodied by the Mothers@Work programme. For the work pertaining to the demonstration sites, the owners of the two RMG companies, DBL and Vision Apparel, served as active partners, as they were expected to adopt and promote the workplace model and its standards. Companies were expected to use their own financial resources to pay for the establishment and maintenance of breastfeeding corners and child day-care centres on the factory premises; both of these spaces are provisions mandated by Bangladesh labour law.

Following a due diligence vetting process of DBL and Vision Apparel, which allowed their five factories to serve as the project's demonstration sites, memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between UNICEF and the two RMG companies were prepared starting in 2015 on shared objectives for the engagement, guidelines related to UNICEF branding, expectations for regular consultation and reporting back to UNICEF, and expected contributions of each partner. They also included explicit text about the commitment of these RMG companies to international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the



Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹⁹⁸

The ILO was brought on board to help scale up the programme. Two Enterprise Officers from the ILO national team were assigned to work with the RMG factories within the BWB network to encourage them to adopt the Mothers@Work model. Every BWB factory enrolled in the Mothers@Work programme is visited by one of these Enterprise Advisors to monitor the implementation of the seven minimum standards.

Two NGO's were contracted by UNICEF: BRAC, an international NGO based in Bangladesh, provided technical assistance on programme design in the area of infant and young child feeding; and Phulki, a national NGO, provided technical assistance in the area of childcare during the scale-up phase. BRAC also provided counselling to breastfeeding RMG workers and helped to build the capacity of factory owners and their staff to create an enabling environment for breastfeeding within their workforce.

The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh (icddr,b) was contracted by UNICEF to undertake baseline and follow-up surveys to assess the progress of the demonstration sites. The icddr,b team also assessed the status of the RMG companies' policies and practices to ensure compliance with national maternity protection and breastfeeding laws and the new workplace standards proposed by UNICEF and the Government.

Every three months, UNICEF assisted the Government to host project meetings that included the key technical and implementation partners. Every six months, representatives from the NNS-IPHN and MoLE were also included in the meetings. Representatives from the RMG factories under the BWB programme were also invited to share monitoring results with them and discuss any issues which may need be addressed.

Tracking the impact of Mothers@Work

The icddr,b conducted a baseline survey from July to November 2016, which was followed by a progress assessment after two years of implementation, from November 2018 to January 2019.¹⁹⁹ Five factories from the two companies (four from DBL and one from Vision Apparel) were included in the pre-post design study, with the same factories sampled each time. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, including structured interviews, structured observations, and key informant interviews with factory staff. In-depth interviews were also conducted with all pregnant and lactating women employed by the factory at the time of the baseline survey and progress assessment.

The findings of the progress assessment showed important improvements:²⁰⁰

- More breastfeeding women (39 per cent) were using the breastfeeding corner at the time of the progress assessment than at baseline (4 per cent).²⁰¹ In addition, 82 per cent of women reported they had expressed breastmilk for feeding their child compared with 57 per cent at baseline ($p < 0.001$).
- A generally higher level of knowledge about optimal infant feeding practices was found among mothers with children under 2 years, including on the timely initiation of breastfeeding, importance of colostrum, duration of exclusive breastfeeding, benefits of breastfeeding, and basic information on complementary feeding.
- Women were more aware of their maternity rights, including the entitlement to paid maternity leave and regular breastfeeding breaks.²⁰² More women used these breastfeeding breaks during the working day, compared with the baseline.
- Physical improvements in breastfeeding spaces were also noted during the progress assessment.²⁰³ However, while one of the factories was doing very well in this regard, the other needed improvements to enlarge and upgrade the breastfeeding space.
- The productivity levels of breastfeeding RMG workers increased from 73 per cent at baseline to 79 per cent at the time of the progress assessment. While this difference is not statistically significant, it does suggest that productivity levels for breastfeeding workers did not appear to decrease after the introduction of the workplace model.
- There was no significant improvement seen in exclusive breastfeeding levels, which increased only slightly from 17.1 per cent at baseline to 18.8 per cent at the time of the progress assessment.²⁰⁴ This result warrants further study to identify reasons for this lack of improvement. To improve the levels of exclusive breastfeeding, the icddr,b team noted that community support on infant feeding using outreach peer counsellors would provide additional support to mothers and their families, reaching them directly in the neighbourhoods where they live and not just inside the factory gates.²⁰⁵
- Very few mothers were using the day-care centres within the factories.

The progress assessment undertaken in the demonstration sites showed that the project was successful overall in testing and developing a workplace model to promote maternity protection and breastfeeding support in the RMG industry. Most importantly, the assessment revealed areas where more attention is needed in the future – such as the need to add a community support component to the workplace model to provide women with the support they

need to sustain breastfeeding in their lives beyond the workplace.

Achievements and challenges on the path to scale-up

By 2020, ninety RMG factories (representing 160,000 female workers) had been reached through the ILO's existing programme network and a few additional factories were reached by Phulki. Further scale-up has been constrained by limited funding resources, both on the side of UNICEF and the ILO. Even if funding were available, the ultimate reach of the ILO is limited to the total factory numbers in the BWB network, currently 248 RMG factories which represents approximately 300,000 female workers.²⁰⁶

Today, Mothers@Work is considered a national programme in Bangladesh – a significant accomplishment. While the lead government ministry in the development of the programme was NNS-IPHN of the MoHFW, the MoLE reported feeling ownership of the programme, a promising sign given that this ministry will be a key driver for scale-up.

The programme has also faced challenges that will require consideration before further expanding the reach of the programme. UNICEF had originally planned to partner with the BGMEA to scale up the Mothers@Work model, which has an enormous reach of female workers across the country through its membership of 4,500 factories, but this partnership never materialized as the BGMEA decided against participating in the project.²⁰⁷ This significantly hindered scale-up, as such a partnership would have improved the uptake of the programme by more garment factories”.

UNICEF Bangladesh and the MoLE continue to dialogue with the BGMEA, which has shown some positive signs and may lead to UNICEF funding a full-time position to be posted inside the Association to help integrate the Mothers@Work model into the BGMEA's factory membership.

Due to its importance for scaling up, UNICEF is placing priority on strengthening the relationship with the BGMEA, as well as creating strong relationships with the Bangladesh Employers Federation and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association. In addition, UNICEF is undertaking advocacy to expand the Mothers@Work programme with global buyers to get their support for the approach. There are also plans to expand the Mothers@Work model to an agricultural setting in the country's tea plantation sector.²⁰⁸

Another challenge has been in scaling up the programme while maintaining the quality of the breastfeeding promotion and support to mothers working in the RMG sector. This is

particularly important as supporting mothers to optimally breastfeed is labour intensive and requires meeting with individual women or in small groups using inter-personal counselling techniques.

3. LESSONS LEARNED IN ENGAGING WITH BUSINESS AS AN EMPLOYER

Developing and scaling up the Mothers@Work programme allowed UNICEF to engage directly with business as an employer to provide maternity protection and breastfeeding support to a large number of mothers working within the country's vast RMG sector. The following lessons can be helpful for others wishing to develop a similar programme:

Ensure that programme platforms and finances for scale-up and sustainability are in place from the start. It is important that programmes aimed at scaling up workplace models for maternity protection and breastfeeding support are designed with scale in mind. This should include a robust business plan that secures, in advance, the necessary partners, programme platforms and financing needed, as well as alternative scenarios should the situation change unexpectedly.

Risk runs both ways. UNICEF vets the business partners with whom it aspires to work. Business partners also assess their own risks in working with UNICEF. If companies open up their factories to UNICEF there is the risk that problems may be exposed related to children's rights, especially around child labour, safety or health conditions. UNICEF teams should be aware of these potential concerns and be prepared to manage them should they arise.

Know your business audience and pitch in a language they understand. It is important to get the messaging correct from the start to catch the attention of business owners. Frame the messaging from the business point of view. Use business terms, such as how supporting maternity rights and optimal breastfeeding leads to increased productivity and economic returns for company owners. This language will resonate more with business owners and staff.

Professionally package and brand your product. Since RMG factory owners were accustomed to professional merchandise branding and identifiable logos as part of the garment business, it was important for UNICEF to also create a professional brand look for the Mothers@Work programme.

Different UNICEF teams may approach the same issue from very different perspectives. It may be challenging to get UNICEF's nutrition experts and private sector experts on the same page to engage with business for nutrition

outcomes. Varying views should be expected, for example, on the programme focus and how to pitch the programme to resonate with different audiences. While it is crucial that all perspectives are recognized as valuable, it may take time for these different teams to agree on which approach the programme should take.

Continuing the dialogue for nationwide impact

UNICEF Bangladesh and its partners have set themselves the goal of reaching 1 million female RMG workers by 2025, and two million by 2030. Doing so will require new partner platforms and perhaps even different scaling up modalities. Thus, while UNICEF has a ‘workplace model’ in the form of the Mothers@Work programme, a broad-based public-private partnership is still needed to take this model to national scale.

Though there are some options for new partnerships with large RMG associations, international buyers and other sectors to adopt the approach, it may be necessary to explore new modalities for scale-up. For example, could financial contributions from the RMG factories be considered to cover the costs of scaling up? Could RMG factories pay an independent body or NGO group for technical support, and in return receive some form of certification when requirements are met? Or perhaps

factories could receive a ‘star rating’ depending whether some or all requirements of the Mothers@Work model are provided by the RMG. Another strategy might be to explore whether online training could be provided to transfer knowledge to a large number of factory owners on the basic requirements under Bangladesh labour laws.

While having strong government ownership of a workplace model is vital for long-term sustainability, so is having the right types of private sector partners who both embrace the approach and have the broad reach needed for scale-up. Identifying these partners early on in the process is strategically important, as is the development of a realistic scaling plan – including how costs will be covered – to introduce the programme more broadly across the RMG sector and ensure it is financially sustainable.

The Bangladesh experience also suggests that improving levels of exclusive breastfeeding among mothers working in RMG factories requires a community support component alongside the workplace model. This would ensure a continuum of care is provided to mothers and their infants both inside and outside the factory gates.

CASE STUDY 6

Business as an employer and a positive influence on society

UNICEF and IMPAct4Nutrition: Engaging business through an innovative platform to support India's national nutrition programme

This case study⁶ focuses on an innovative nutrition initiative known as IMPAct4Nutrition, which engages private sector companies in India via a virtual platform that enables them to contribute to the Government's National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan). These contributions include improving workforce nutrition and enhancing corporate social responsibility investments in nutrition programmes. I4N was developed through incubation funds provided by DSM – a multinational company involved in nutrition products. This case study provides lessons on engaging business as an employer and as an influencer and voice in society.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Faced with pervasively high levels of maternal and child malnutrition across the country, the Government of India launched an ambitious National Nutrition Mission in 2018 known as POSHAN Abhiyaan, which aims to achieve a "malnutrition-free India" by 2022.

The Government identified an array of stakeholders across all aspects of Indian life to join the movement. This included the country's vast private sector, which was singled out explicitly considering its role as a major employer in the country and its unique position to improve the nutrition of hundreds of millions of workers within the country.²⁰⁹

Engaging the private sector for a malnutrition-free future in India

At that same time, UNICEF India had been brainstorming with nutrition experts from DSM, a multinational corporation

known for its nutrition products, on innovative ways to address malnutrition in the country by engaging India's private sector. This led to the company providing UNICEF with incubation funding to team up with Sight and Life (SAL) – a Swiss-based not-for-profit nutrition think-tank previously linked to DSM – to design and test the IMPAct4Nutrition (I4N) initiative. I4N provides technical support to private companies to enable them to contribute to the Government's nutrition efforts.

The I4N platform is a unique public-private engagement that focuses on contributing to the POSHAN Abhiyaan through two streams of activities: improving workforce nutrition (both blue and white-collar) and improving Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) investments in nutrition relevant programmes.²¹⁰ To participate in the I4N platform, companies make a non-financial pledge to support the Government's POSHAN Abhiyaan. Companies also agree that their participation in I4N will be 'brand agnostic' thus putting aside any promotion of their commercial enterprise or products.

This case study provides several examples of the global focus²¹¹ areas in which UNICEF engages with business for nutrition outcomes. First, the engagement between DSM and UNICEF illustrates how a large multinational company can serve as a positive societal influence for nutrition by donating its resources to test new models for improving nutrition at scale, such as the case of I4N in India. Second, the case study illustrates how UNICEF India and its partners developed I4N to serve as a technical support platform to assist pledged companies in two business focus areas for nutrition: (1) using I4N to support pledged companies in their role as employers, since they were assisted to establish workforce nutrition education activities for their employees; and (2) using I4N to support pledged companies in their role as positive nutrition influencers in society via their CSR investments in programmes to improve nutrition.

Starting with an impressively rapid launch and still not yet two years old, the I4N initiative is in full swing at the start of 2021 and has made solid achievements despite the serious challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today there are a total of 14 private development and private sector initiative

⁶ The full length version of this case study can be accessed at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EVVGbIHvJN5PoaTydqLsrBY-BqIHzyQdtAA8j1VVRha0wYA?e=1dEirP> and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

partners supporting the effort through the highly functional multi-stakeholder platform that operates almost completely virtually. By the end of 2020, 187 private companies (representing a coverage of 2.3 million employees) had pledged their commitment to the Government's POSHAN Abhiyaan through the I4N platform.

This case study has been undertaken as an early learning exercise to document what has taken place so far in UNICEF's engagement with the private sector in India in its role as both an employer and as an influencer for nutrition in society. The case study views I4N as a start-up initiative that has evolved via a 'learning-by-doing' strategy, since no rulebook existed.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

During 2018 and 2019, several factors aligned and provided the opportunity for UNICEF India to develop the I4N initiative:

India's compelling nutrition needs. Being the second most populated country in the world (with an estimated population of 1.325 billion²¹² in early 2021), India's nutrition needs are immense and compelling. While India's economy has been growing at an impressive rate, 38 per cent of children under 5 are stunted,²¹³ which represents the

highest number of stunted children in the world (40.6 million children).²¹⁴ In addition, more than half of women are anaemic.²¹⁵ Malnutrition also affects adults with 23 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men aged 15-49 years being underweight. Nearly the same proportion, 21 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men, have either overweight or obesity.

The Government's response. The Government of India launched POSHAN Abhiyaan in 2018 with an aim to rid the country of malnutrition by 2022. This massive national programme focuses on reducing child stunting, child underweight and low birthweight, anaemia in women and anaemia in adolescent girls.^{216, 217}

To tackle this immense challenge, the Government aimed to build an expansive "people's movement" (e.g., Jan Andolan in Hindi) based on the mass mobilization of society to ensure the level of multi-sectoral participation needed. Within this social mobilization approach, advocacy is viewed as a key lever to convince leaders at all levels and across all sectors to participate and contribute to achieving the POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Leveraging India's CSR law for nutrition. The creation of I4N initiative was also informed by India's 2013 law requiring 2 per cent of the profits of private companies to be



invested in philanthropic CSR,²¹⁸ along its value chain or at the community level. While few resources to date had been directed towards nutrition, UNICEF saw an opportunity to use the I4N platform to sensitize companies about the importance of nutrition in hopes of directing more CSR resources towards nutrition programming.

Alignment with UNICEF India's nutrition priorities.

Around that time, UNICEF India was keen to work with the country's private sector on nutrition programming especially in areas that supported UNICEF nutrition objectives and closely aligned with the POSHAN Abhiyaan.²¹⁹ UNICEF India also realized that the Government's results would not be achieved unless the private sector joined the effort. Globally, UNICEF was also refining its programmatic approach to engaging business,²²⁰ and the I4N effort would allow the Country Office to work at scale with business as an employer and as a positive influence in society.

Past relationship with DSM and SAL to test the idea.

Nutrition experts at UNICEF India, DSM and SAL had previously worked together in Nigeria on a UNICEF and DSM shared-value partnership (case study 2), which included mobilizing the private sector for nutrition.

In early 2019 DSM offered an incubation grant of US\$450k to UNICEF India for a period of three years to develop the concept of I4N as a public-private engagement focusing on supporting the private sector to help the Government deliver on its ambitious POSHAN Abhiyaan. While a relatively modest sum, this amount was invaluable in setting into motion what evolved into a very dynamic nutrition engagement with India's business sector.

Even though DSM was pivotal in creating the I4N platform with its financial support and early brainstorming input, the company did not participate actively in the I4N initiative beyond the early brainstorming phase. This type of engagement for DSM was somewhat unusual as there no specific focus on micronutrient fortificants (the central focus of its engagements with UNICEF in Madagascar and Nigeria), which reflects a shared interest between the company's leadership and the UNICEF to combat malnutrition globally.²²¹

The third partner in this brainstorming phase, SAL, however, did play a central role on the ground in India through its staff based in its India country office (referred to as SAL India henceforth). Along with UNICEF India, the SAL team brought strong thought leadership and technical expertise to bear on developing I4N's professional branding and look, advocacy plan and nutrition content. SAL also played a key role as a member of the I4N Secretariat and Steering Committee.

Weighing the risks and leveraging opportunities to influence the food and beverage sector

I4N offered UNICEF a range of opportunities – and one serious risk, pertaining to the food and beverage sector. UNICEF realized the risks involved in having any links with the food and beverage sector and appearing to be associated with promoting commercial foods. This included concerns around conflict of interest and whether these companies would take advantage of the I4N nutrition agenda to benefit commercially. The Government informally relayed these concerns to UNICEF along with its preference for the initiative to only directly involve companies outside the realm of food and beverage.²²²



Building the structure and shape of I4N

The I4N initiative was designed to identify and engage appropriate private sector companies, outside the food and beverage sector, to support them technically on workforce nutrition as part of their contribution to the Government's POSHAN Abhiyaan.

At the start, a **Secretariat** was created comprising staff from UNICEF, SAL India and CSRBox (a national civil society group known for its past CSR work with the private sector) to serve as the administrative and technical hub of the I4N platform initiative.²²³ It is the technical team of the Secretariat that design, develop and implement the I4N initiative, including providing technical guidance on workforce nutrition activation, mobilization of core assets of companies, and steering the CSR investments of pledged companies towards effective nutrition relevant programmes.

In the two years since the platform was launched, UNICEF India has deployed the incubation funds to cover the majority of the Secretariat's costs related to design and roll-out.²²⁴ This has included UNICEF funding both Secretariat partners through formal contractual arrangements to carry out their technical support roles shown in Table 1 above. From the beginning, UNICEF has intended for all the costs of the I4N platform to eventually be covered by the private sector, either via the initiative partners or the pledged private companies.²²⁵

Apart from the DSM incubation funding, UNICEF has only had to contribute minimal financial support; however, UNICEF India staff have provided technical support to the Secretariat and I4N platform. This also holds true for SAL which has provided staff time to I4N through its SAL India affiliate. A number of other companies (referred to as "initiative partners") have contributed *pro bono* support to the Secretariat. For example, the NASSCOM Foundation provided *pro bono* support to create and manage the I4N's digital space (discussed further below).

Since it was first established, the Secretariat has operated based on quarterly workplans and established governance guidelines, which the team developed right from the start of the initiative. This included developing principles of engagement; standard operating procedures; and branding guidelines including use of logos. The Secretariat also uses a due diligence screening process to help screen prospective companies prior to CSRBox actively reaching out to them out.

An **I4N Steering Committee** comprising senior staff from the three core partners (e.g., UNICEF/India, SAL, and DSM) provides high-level guidance to the Secretariat, for example, on issues related to funding or overall strategic directions. UNICEF and SAL play an important role in the Steering Committee, an involvement which has ensured strong

communication and cohesion and kept I4N moving forward at an energetic pace.

In early March 2019, just three months after receiving the incubation funds from DSM, the I4N initiative was officially launched on the first anniversary of the start of POSHAN Abhiyaan. The launch of I4N took place with the attendance and support of the Policy Commission of the Government of India and I4N's convening initiative partners including UNICEF, DSM, SAL and CSRBox along with CII, IPE Global²²⁶, the NASSCOM Foundation²²⁷ and Tata Trusts. Early in 2020, the World Bank Group, FSSAI and IIT Delhi Alumni Association also joined as initiative partners.

Embracing three pillars and six building blocks to put the platform in motion

A detailed Theory of Change was developed for the I4N platform, which aims to improve both nutritional status and align with the country's POSHAN Abhiyaan objectives. Based on this, a number of pillars and strategies have evolved that have underpinned the roll-out and shaping of the I4N platform.

The **first** pillar entails the business case argument that the private sector will benefit from the excellent return on investments it makes in the nutrition of their workforce. The Secretariat emphasized that "*investing in nutrition is the best public health investment one can make, with every \$1 of investment bearing a return of \$16 due to employee retention, dip in absenteeism and increased productivity*".²²⁸ In other words, good nutrition is good for business. Using this argument helped to pique the interest of companies in the I4N platform.

The **second** pillar embraces a vision of creating a multi-partner and multi-stakeholder platform for private companies that is non-financial, brand agnostic, and clear in expecting companies to pledge their support to the Government's POSHAN Abhiyaan efforts.

The **third** pillar of I4N encourages companies to they play their ACE card for good nutrition, a motto developed by UNICEF India. This means that companies should use their:

- **Assets** and core business for nutrition based on the company's business model (note that assets in this case does not mean cash but rather the investment of other means the companies have to promote nutrition, such as using their voice and societal influence in a positive way with their customers for better nutrition);
- **Cash/CSR** to invest financially in nutrition, for example, to promote behaviour change and support optimal nutrition practices within the company's ecosystem and links to communities; and
- **Employee engagement** and employee education to promote effective workforce nutrition.

Along with the three pillars described above, the I4N platform is operationalized and supported through six strategic building blocks: partnerships, outreach and engagement, advocacy, social media communication and amplification, nutrition content, and knowledge management.

Partnerships. The I4N platform is all about partnerships and the creation of a massive public-private engagement as part of the social movement to bring the potential of the private sector to bear for POSHAN Abhiyaan. Not only is business a major driver for economic growth in India, as reflected in the Government’s social mobilization guidelines for POSHAN Abhiyaan, but the vast reach and scale of the private sector were considered essential to achieve impactful change for nutrition.²²⁹

Outreach and engagement. Identifying eligible companies and getting them to pledge to I4N is a central plank of how the platform functions. Given its long-standing experience in working with India’s private sector on CSR issues, CSRBox was assigned all outreach and engagement aspects for I4N. Its strategy is to identify companies that offer large workforce coverage and are thus a good ‘return on investment’ for I4N. Once companies are identified as having potential for I4N, CSRBox screens each company using a simplified due diligence process adapted from UNICEF’s guidelines.²³⁰

If a company ‘passes’ the due diligence vetting process and has good ACE card potential, a member of the CSRBox team contacts these companies and starts a phone conversation aiming to make them aware of how good

nutrition is good for business, thus elevating nutrition at the board-room level. Two lines of messaging are used to encourage the company to pledge to the I4N platform. The first is that improving the nutrition of the company’s employees and families would lead to increased productivity and better economic returns for the company. The second is that I4N would help companies ensure a better ‘social’ return on investment for their required CSR investments.

Companies that are interested are asked to make a pledge involving no financial commitment to I4N. Pledged companies receive customized technical support from the I4N Secretariat to develop and carry out workplace nutrition interventions and to prepare quality proposals for their CSR nutrition investments.

Advocacy to raise the profile of I4N. A central objective of I4N’s strategy is for the platform to become well-known and accepted by private sector, public sector and Government as the premier ‘go-to’ nutrition platform for private sector engagement to support Jan Andolan under POSHAN Abhiyaan. To this end, the Secretariat along with initiative and pledged partners, implement ongoing advocacy activities to raise the profile and communicate the vision of I4N through key events, ministry meetings and media opportunities. Recently, SAL India has appointed two senior-level ambassadors to serve as spokespersons for I4N within circles of senior policymakers, corporate leaders and decision-makers.

Social media – communication and amplification. The Secretariat employs social media to raise the image of the I4N platform within the country and communicate



its goals and accomplishments. Information about I4N is widely disseminated and easily available through its website (<https://www.impact4nutrition.in>). There has also been a steady presence of I4N and relevant nutrition issues within India's traditional media (<https://impact4nutrition.in/in-the-news/>) and a similar steady presence at influential private sector events relevant for nutrition.

Technical nutrition content.²³¹ The I4N Secretariat team along with the pledged companies, have co-created, designed, and developed prototypes of products, tools, and content around promoting nutrition literacy in the workforce.

When first assessing the status of nutrition in the workforce, the I4N Secretariat identified two key challenges to creating a healthy nutrition environment for workers in India: awareness and access.²³² As most of the workers in the country did not have a basic understanding of nutrition, it was fundamentally important to address **awareness** as an initial step in building employee knowledge on good nutrition for good health. To address the second issue related to **access**, the I4N Secretariat developed a strategy to develop a physical space within the workplace setting known as a *Nutrition Kiosk* which serves as a one-stop nutrition gateway for employees to have easy access to nutrition literacy materials.²³³

Knowledge management hub. The I4N Secretariat recognized the importance of creating an extensive knowledge management hub to serve as a repository to store relevant information on pledged companies including the workforce nutrition and CSR activities that they are undertaking through I4N. The Secretariat's vision is that in time, the I4N knowledge management hub will become the central repository in the country on all matters concerning the private sector's support to nutrition efforts in the country.

More demand, greater reach – and a boost in investments for nutrition

In the two years since the I4N platform initiative was first launched, a number of noteworthy accomplishments have been achieved.

Proof of concept and numbers of pledged companies.

The proof of concept of the I4N platform has been definitively proven as evidenced by the high demand of companies wanting to pledge. By the end of December 2020, 187 companies had formally pledged with the I4N, representing an employee base of 2.3 million. This rate of growth greatly exceeded initial expectations especially considering that in March 2019, I4N began with only 3 companies and jumped to 70 pledged partners 18 months later in September 2020. In addition, over 9,000 companies in the FACE network have been indirectly reached through information shared with them via FACE.

I4N events and technical support provided to pledged companies. Regarding nutrition in the workforce, nearly 20 workshops, webinars, virtual sessions and 4 mega forum events covering more than 5,000 representatives from pledged companies have been conducted by the Secretariat as of December 2020. In addition to the suite of proprietary I4N nutrition education tools and resources developed (as described above), 35 learning sessions on good nutrition and healthy diets have reached over 2,000 employees.

Upward trends in CSR allocation to nutrition relevant programmes.

CSRBox noted that trends across India suggest that prior to the launch of I4N, the allocation of the overall CSR pool in the country to nutrition activities was 4 per cent, and that today this has increased to 5.3 per cent. Although impossible to prove definitively, this may well be due to the proactive efforts of I4N to encourage pledged partners to invest more of their CSR into nutrition.²³⁴

Government nod to I4N. Additionally, I4N received a ministerial-level nod when the Ministry of Women and Child Development recommended the implementation of I4N's workplace nutrition tools to more than 9,000 member companies through the CII. Moreover, the Director of Nutrition at NITI Aayog (the Policy Commission of the Government) suggested the creation of case studies that would be jointly released by NITI in multi-stakeholder meetings, which illustrates the Government's continuing support to I4N.

Recipient of UNICEF global award. In June 2020, I4N was recognized with a UNICEF global *INSPIRE* Award in the category 'Best Multi-stakeholder Engagement'. I4N was considered out of nearly 100 other campaigns from 50 countries voted on by UNICEF staff worldwide.

Challenges – present and future

Along with successes there have also been a number of important challenges arising during the first two years. Some of the leading challenges include:

Upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. While the pandemic presented some opportunities – such as developing a fully functional web-based platform – there is also concern that any economic downturn from the pandemic could result in a substantial loss for the private sector in terms of company profits,²³⁵ which would in turn reduce absolute levels of CSR funding available in a few years, thus leaving less money to invest in CSR nutrition programmes.

Ensuring future financial sustainability. To date, I4N has been financed from the incubation grant DSM provided to UNICEF. Before these funds are fully expended, a focused and concerted effort is needed by members of the Secretariat and initiative partners along with pledged partners to identify feasible options for future funding.

Ensuring nutrition content is relevant for diverse workforce groups. The diversity of the workforce across all the different companies, which spans both men and women as well as blue- and white-collar workers of all ages, education, and language groups has made it impossible to use one version of technical nutrition references for all audiences. Further, adapting the materials to specific audiences has been challenging due to resource constraints.

3. LESSONS LEARNED IN ENGAGING BUSINESS AS AN EMPLOYER AND INFLUENCER IN SOCIETY

A number of useful lessons have been learned during the first two years of I4N.

Identifying the right partners is critical. Having the right partners on board allowed the I4N platform to be conceptualized and evolve. In addition to the funding and thought leadership provided by DSM, along with the technical expertise from UNICEF and SAL, the role played by CSRBox in the I4N initiative was particularly important due to its niche knowledge and expertise around CSR and the private sector in India.

Having the Government of India and UNICEF linked to the I4N platform is a big tipping factor to get companies to engage. A strong selling point that encouraged companies to pledge to the I4N platform has been its association with both the Government of India and UNICEF, as well as other development partners; this was a strong draw for companies in deciding to participate.

Companies were not turned off by the platform being brand agnostic. The experience to date has shown that pledged companies have not had issues with the requirement that their involvement in I4N must be brand agnostic.

Companies preferred a non-financial pledging requirement. Companies like the fact that there is no financial obligation in pledging to I4N. It is not known whether the on-boarding would have been as successful had there been a fee involved for participation. This should be considered when options for future financing of the I4N platform are discussed, as the reluctance of companies to pay may prove to be a limiting factor. This reluctance might subside over time, as companies see how investments in nutrition lead to increased productivity.

Having peer testimonies from companies pledged to I4N was effective in getting more companies on join. Testimonials from pledged companies were a powerful draw for new companies to consider pledging I4N. In the year ahead, emphasis should be given to developing robust proofs of concept that showcase how companies have used their ACE card to assist the Government in the fight against malnutrition.

It is important to understand the history, especially sensitivities, between the Government and the private sector. In designing the I4N platform, it was important for UNICEF India to understand the past relationship between the Government and the private sector, including the contentious history and strong distrust between some civil society groups and the food and beverage industry in nutrition programming.

Defining success and charting a path to scale

The I4N platform initiative is unique in many ways, starting with its conception through UNICEF, DSM and SAL brainstorming on how best to engage India's vast business sector to help the Government address the country's daunting malnutrition situation. Thereafter, the I4N platform quickly took the shape of an innovative virtual platform and has impressively expanded in a relatively short period of time. Among the Steering Group and Secretariat there is also a high level of enthusiasm and excitement around the initiative, especially its potential to leverage the country's business sector to support the Government's POSHAN Abhiyaan. This level of energy has also been reported to be shared by initiative and pledged partners.²³⁶

Despite these early impressive wins, a clear need at this stage of the I4N's evolution is directing focus to its programmatic strategy and technical content, especially defining what nutrition impact is sought. A global lesson learned across all field programmes, including those in nutrition, is that success breeds success, therefore, showing positive impact on nutrition outcomes is key for I4N's future success. Attention now needs to be turned to defining what I4N's nutrition success should specifically look like, the programme activities needed to achieve this, and how to robustly monitor and evaluate tangible nutrition achievements. UNICEF will also need to consider how to define and quantify the nutrition impact of I4N and how it should be scaled across India's vast private sector.

The nutritional health of children and women in India has been and will be extensively impacted with the engagement and support of the country's immense private sector. Already over 2 million employees are being reached by the I4N platform initiative. The I4N Secretariat is determined to push through to a new scale to cover tens of millions more. If the model is effective in improving nutrition outcomes, the focus could be broadened to cover other nutrition areas proven effective in the context of workforce nutrition, such as healthy food at work, nutrition-focused health checks as well as support to breastfeeding for working mothers.

CASE STUDY 7

Impacts of business on children's food environments

Engaging on better business practices to prevent childhood obesity: New approaches to business engagement in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico

This case study⁷ highlights the impact of business on the food environment in three Latin American countries. Rather than engaging 'with' food and beverage companies directly to address rising levels of overweight and obesity, this case study describes how UNICEF Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico worked with national governments and other bilateral, academic and civil society partners to influence business practices through upstream policy and regulatory measures. The case study shares some valuable lessons learned from experiences across all three countries.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The changing face of malnutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), including the rapid rise of childhood overweight and obesity, led to UNICEF to consider new strategies and approaches to address this pressing problem beginning around 2014. Obesogenic environments are a key driver of overweight and obesity in the region and globally, fuelled by the aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods to children by food and beverage (F&B) companies.²³⁷ Today, the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity in some LAC countries is nearing 40 per cent among 5–19-year-olds.²³⁸

As a central component of efforts to address rising levels of overweight and obesity, UNICEF teams in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico have a major focus on 'engaging on' harmful F&B company practices. As highlighted in the experiences of these three countries, this approach often includes working with partners to advocate for governmental policy and law changes.

A new strategy and new way of looking at child rights and business

UNICEF has supported the Governments of Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico to adopt multi-pronged strategies to prevent childhood overweight and obesity through: (1) promoting breastfeeding and healthy eating; (2) improving the food and physical activity environment in and around schools; (3) establishing regulatory measures to control aggressive marketing practices by the F&B sector; and (4) undertaking research, surveillance and evaluation. Forming strong partnerships with respected consumer rights and civil society organizations, academic and research groups, as well as other United Nations organizations, especially the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), was considered a priority to amplify these efforts.

UNICEF recognized that government regulatory measures were necessary to improve the nutritional quality of foods that children eat and create healthy food environments. In particular, it was considered important to curtail companies' aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages. Not only were F&B companies' core products and marketing a direct cause of the problem, but these companies were actively working against regulatory efforts. Given this context, and the inherent potential for conflict of interest, it was clear that UNICEF could not engage with F&B companies as partners in this work. It also became clear that even engaging with F&B companies in an effort to influence them to change their policies and practices on a voluntary basis would not be effective.

Being free from any vested interests with F&B companies was crucial in enabling UNICEF to work effectively with government and other partners on this topic. Affiliation with F&B companies, especially via funding, would have undermined UNICEF's ability to partner and carry out its work to protect child rights, including the right to good nutrition.

Mobilizing action on overweight and obesity across the region

There are similarities across Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, both in terms of the situation of child overweight and obesity and the obesogenic drivers. As such, the UNICEF teams in these countries have used similar

⁷ The full length version of this case study are available to UNICEF staff and can be accessed at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/ERsZPkWv41NLn3tbTic2bKEBqMjgST9cZmgI8omUqLzhMw?e=74UqjP> and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

strategies to address the situation. UNICEF's LAC Regional Office (LACRO) has played an essential role in driving the burgeoning agenda and supporting country teams develop their strategies on these issues, promoting cross-country and regional learning, as well as multi-country reviews and studies. Some of these research initiatives also received support from the Private Funding Partnerships Division at UNICEF headquarters.

In all three countries, UNICEF and PAHO have collaborated closely, as they have been doing across the region for years. UNICEF teams drew extensively from PAHO's 2015 *Plan of Action for the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Adolescents* for LAC, many aspects of which formed the basis for UNICEF's strategic approach to address the problem of child obesity in each country.²³⁹

2. ADDRESSING HARMFUL BUSINESS PRACTICES

In Argentina – building an agenda and the end of a longstanding private partnership

UNICEF Argentina first began to support the Government in its efforts to prevent overweight and obesity in children and adolescents in 2015. UNICEF has since provided technical support for the development of the country's 2018 'Plan for Healthy Eating in Children'. Under the new Plan, the Government is working to put policy measures in place to address overweight and obesity, including developing a FOP food labelling system, establishing marketing restrictions and addressing the food environment within the school system.

A major barrier to progress has been the opposition from the F&B sector, which has a lot of political influence in Argentina and is organized into a Coordination Body for Food and Beverage Industries (COPAL). COPAL is the principal mechanism through which companies interact with the Government, for example, on policies such as front-of-package (FOP) food labelling. In its communications and policy position statements, COPAL recognizes the problem of child and adolescent overweight and obesity in the country, yet largely places blame for the problem on individual behaviours. It has used this narrative to deflect attention away from companies' own unhealthy products and practices, which are key drivers of overweight and obesity, and lobby against regulations that would enforce changes to the composition, packaging and marketing of their products.²⁴⁰

Recognizing the need to scale up its work on childhood overweight and obesity as a child rights issue, but noting the strong link between the actions of F&B companies (such as inappropriate marketing and food labelling) and childhood obesity, UNICEF Argentina determined that accepting funding from these companies posed a reputational risk and was not aligned with nutrition programming objectives. This

prompted UNICEF Argentina to reconsider its relationship with the F&B sector, and the decision was taken to stop accepting funding from F&B companies. This meant an end to a longstanding 10-year funding relationship with a candy company. UNICEF then began to work instead with the Government and other partners to 'engage on' the F&B industry, including supporting the design of policies and laws to regulate its behaviours and marketing practices.

To implement Argentina's country programme document 2016–2020, which contained significant content on the overweight and obesity problem, UNICEF Argentina developed a strategy to *'Tackle the Epidemic of Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents: 2016–2020'*. The Strategy was informed by a mapping exercise to better understand the landscape of key actors – including F&B companies – their various relationships with different parts of Government, and their support or opposition for planned policy and regulatory measures. The Strategy framed overweight and obesity as a child rights issue, which resonated with the Government and was later reflected in its pre-policy documents pertaining to FOP nutrition labelling, marketing, and the school health environment.²⁴¹

In mid-2018, a consultant was hired to assist UNICEF on upstream policy and legislative work supporting Congress, which often entailed complex processes. This individual was a lawyer whose legal training proved to be invaluable in navigating regulatory and legislative procedures, as well as the complex governmental review and approval processes related to regulations around FOP labelling, marketing restrictions and the school environment.

UNICEF Argentina has since provided support to all levels of the Government (e.g., sectoral ministries, legislative and executive branches) to design policies intended to protect children from overweight and obesity. The work has been challenging given the enormity of the issue, the strength of the food and beverage industry lobby, the complexity of the policymaking process, and other economic and political challenges, but much has been accomplished. For example, UNICEF and the Inter-American Heart Association of Argentina joined forces in 2017 to create the National Coalition for the Prevention of Childhood Obesity in Children and Adolescents, a network of 44 civil society groups from across the country with an aim to influence national discussions around policies to improve the obesogenic environment for children. UNICEF also supported the *National Coalition* to conduct a study between 2017–2018 that focused on the food and beverage situation within the country's school system.

UNICEF participated in a series of Round Tables in 2017 and 2018, established by the National Commission on Healthy Food and Obesity Prevention, which brought together government and non-government actors to review the

literature around FOP food labelling, marketing restrictions and the school environment. The Commission, thereafter, recommended regulatory and legislative actions for the Congress and executive branches of Government to approve.

UNICEF has recently engaged with a local cooperative supermarket chain in Argentina to encourage better nutrition retail marketing practices. While UNICEF Argentina does not engage with F&B manufacturers nor accept funding from the F&B sector more broadly, working with some smaller food retail businesses to improve their in-store practices is possible if companies are first vetted and approved using global due diligence processes.

In Ecuador – fighting resistance to food labelling

UNICEF Ecuador’s efforts in overweight and obesity prevention took off in 2014, with the arrival of a new Health and Nutrition Officer. From the start it was clear that the strategy would need to have a focus on strong prevention policies and laws. As such, the office considered that it would be ineffective to engage with F&B companies, as the industry’s position was diametrically opposed to what the Government and UNICEF were advocating. UNICEF therefore made the strategic decision not to engage directly with these companies.

Instead, UNICEF Ecuador worked alongside the Ministry of Health and PAHO to ‘engage on’ the F&B industry by supporting government efforts to introduce effective

policies, regulations and laws around labelling and marketing practices. A central element of UNICEF Ecuador’s plan was advocacy focused on members of the National Assembly to encourage these decision-makers to pass current regulations into law.

Prior to 2014, UNICEF Ecuador’s country programme document had three programme priorities, one of which was health and nutrition in early childhood and adolescence. However, the focus had been entirely on undernutrition due to the continuing high stunting levels found in many parts of the country; no mention was made of the rapidly increasing levels of childhood overweight and obesity. In contrast, UNICEF Ecuador’s country programme document 2015–2018 highlighted the high rates of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents alongside the high rates of child stunting. However, the actions suggested to address the problem were rather general and focused on awareness-raising and promotion of healthy nutritional practices.

Finally, within the 2019–2022 country programme document, explicit mention is made that UNICEF will provide support for “*advocacy to legislate for the labelling of food products and a ban on the sale of non-nutritious foods in schools,*” reflecting UNICEF Ecuador’s recognition of the priority to work on preventive policy measures.²⁴² The document also frames UNICEF’s approach to addressing malnutrition in all its forms. In 2019, UNICEF Ecuador completed a multi-sectoral strategy to address overweight



and obesity in children and adolescents. UNICEF's strategy directly supports the Government's own nutrition plan,²⁴³ *Intersectoral Plan for Food and Nutrition*, which was developed in 2018 with support from UNICEF, PAHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization.²⁴⁴

The Government has acted on several fronts to address the problem of overweight and obesity. In 2014, the Government enacted a regulation for a food labelling system based on 'traffic lights' which uses colours to inform and warn consumers if processed foods or beverages contain high, medium or low levels of total fat, sugar and sodium. Evaluations of Ecuador's food labelling system, which is not yet law and has faced resistance from the F&B industry, have shown it to be successful in guiding consumers to make healthier food choices.^{245,246} UNICEF also advocated for other in the National Assembly to become law, including those related to marketing regulations and the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

Many achievements came out of UNICEF Ecuador's work on this issue prior to the release of the new strategy and strong relationships were built that enabled the foundation for action. For example, UNICEF and PAHO provided technical support to implement two research studies carried out by respected national academic researchers to help them develop and refine their policies and regulations and convey the seriousness of the overweight and obesity situation.

During 2019, UNICEF Ecuador's efforts with the Ministry of Health and PAHO continued to focus on advocacy and upstream policy efforts, especially advocating with the National Assembly to pass food labelling into law. Research was also conducted in 2020 for a study on the obesogenic school environment focused on F&B vendors, and plans are under way to conduct a follow-up study to a qualitative assessment of the food labelling system done in 2015.

Ecuador is also one of six countries in the LAC region receiving funding from the global *Eat Like A Pro* effort via UNICEF's engagement with BEKO, a private business, and the Barcelona Football Club (described in case study 9). The *Eat Like A Pro* initiative has funded much of UNICEF Ecuador's overnutrition work during 2018–2019, including the 'Healthy Habits' programme.

In Mexico – stronger regulations with collective and sustained advocacy

Beginning in 2014, UNICEF began addressing the problem of childhood overweight and obesity in Mexico. A midterm review conducted by UNICEF in 2016 triggered more attention to overweight and obesity at the same time as the Government declared it a national epidemiological emergency.

UNICEF Mexico's situation analysis in 2018 positioned overweight and obesity in school-age children as a top priority and included an in-depth analysis of causes and remedial actions, including various regulatory options. The results directly informed the Mexico country programme document 2020–2025, which supports the prevention of "all forms of malnutrition in children and adolescents, with special attention to overweight and obesity" as one of the top four programme outcomes.²⁴⁷ Alongside the new country programme document, UNICEF Mexico developed a programme Strategy Note on Maternal, Child and Adolescent Nutrition,²⁴⁸ which framed UNICEF's approach to addressing malnutrition in all its forms. In a relatively short period of time, child nutrition was transformed from being a small area of work to one of central importance for UNICEF Mexico.

In late 2016, UNICEF began advocating for changes to the country's FOP food labelling system, based on the findings of a study on *Labelling Regulations and Practices for Food and Beverage Targeting Children and Adolescents in Latin America Countries*.²⁴⁹ UNICEF commissioned the highly respected National Institute of Public Health (INSP), to conduct this study which entailed research in four countries, including Mexico, raising awareness on child obesity and the role of the F&B sector. In 2017, UNICEF again commissioned the INSP to conduct additional studies on various important topics, including FOP food labelling, food availability and marketing in retail settings, breastfeeding promotion, in addition to studies on the country's school feeding programme as well as student consumption of F&B products within schools.²⁵⁰

In 2018, a new government was elected that appeared committed to removing the influence of business from government decision-making – and with it, new opportunities emerged for work on overweight and obesity prevention and a closer partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health. In mid-2018, UNICEF partnered with allies PAHO and FAO to coordinate a *Joint Initiative to Tackle Malnutrition in All its Forms*, which aimed to develop and present specific recommendations to the Government. UNICEF commissioned the INSP to assist with internal government consultations to ensure that key recommendations were based on evidence and ultimately adopted. This partnership has created a close working relationship between UNICEF, PAHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the INSP, and has strengthened the partnership with government authorities, especially the Ministry of Health.²⁵¹ In late 2018, UNICEF and INSP decided to co-organize the *Latin American Society of Nutrition Congress*. UNICEF's support to INSP allowed for the first-ever congress free of F&B industry support.

During the middle of 2018, UNICEF approached the Ministry of Health to discuss the pressing need to develop a more effective FOP labelling system. In July 2019, UNICEF and the INSP were able to take this issue further by co-organizing a workshop for Mexican decision-makers and legislators on best practices around FOP food labelling. UNICEF also supported legislators to revise the Health Law as this was a necessary early step in the overall process to revise the FOP system. Together UNICEF and PAHO developed and published a *Technical Note* on FOP labelling systems as a background document for these deliberations. This was shared with all members of the House of Representatives and Senators from the Congress. The Health Law easily passed both chambers of Congress.

Once the Health Law was approved, the Government initiated a formal working group to develop the operational norm for the FOP food labelling. UNICEF Mexico put forth substantive technical recommendations that were underpinned by evidence and informed by the best interest of the child principle; the strong child rights focus resonated with policymakers. The working group finalized the proposal in November 2019, a public consultation ensued until January 2020. Based on its recommendations, a revised labelling system norm was approved later that month.

The F&B industry continued to actively lobby against the new norm. In early March 2020, a highly influential industrial conglomerate that supports F&B companies requested a judge to suspend the proposed FOP labelling, claiming the process of its development lacked transparency and did not consider sufficient evidence. The latter claim by the F&B industry was far from reality as more than 150 scientific articles had been consulted during the Government's formal working group process.²⁵²

The pressure from the industrial conglomerate resulted in the judge temporarily suspending the recommended FOP labelling system in favour of F&B companies. This sparked widespread frustration among the various groups involved in its development. Following strong advocacy from these groups, along with heavy social media pressure, a week later the judge revoked the decision and removed the temporary suspension.

Like in Argentina, UNICEF Mexico is highly aware of the sensitivities of F&B sector to its work on overweight and obesity prevention, as there is ample evidence that companies actively work against government and UNICEF's efforts to strengthen marketing regulations and promote a more effective FOP labelling system. Linked to this, it was determined that any partnerships with F&B companies



could pose significant conflicts of interest and risk harming UNICEF's credibility among partners on nutrition.

3. LESSONS LEARNED ON THE IMPACTS OF BUSINESS ON CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTS AND UNICEF'S ROLE IN ADVOCATING FOR GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

A number of overarching lessons can be derived from UNICEF's experiences working on the prevention of overweight and obesity, including through 'engaging on' F&B company practices:

Focus on upstream policies and regulations. Greater returns are achieved by supporting government and partner networks to enact new policies and legislation that effectively regulate F&B companies to improve their obesogenic practices and products.

Strategies must be grounded in political realities. Strategies to combat child overweight and obesity must be informed by an in-depth assessment and analysis of a country's political landscape and decision-making processes. Of critical importance is knowing where F&B companies have links to different parts of the Government to know where to expect support or opposition for policies, regulations and laws.

Hire staff with the right skills. UNICEF's support to preventing overweight and obesity is often mired in complex policy and regulatory processes and requires advocacy with senior government officials and elected legislators, which may require staff with an expanded skill set in these specialized domains.

Invest in research and building the evidence base using a child rights perspective. Having robust data to underpin assessments of the situation (including around the role of the F&B sector and its practices) or the effectiveness of policies and regulations put into place, will strengthen the advocacy messages and policy recommendations UNICEF puts forth with governments, partners and the F&B sector itself. Building the evidence for a stronger child rights approach within the context of child and adolescent overweight and obesity reflects UNICEF's core values while also resonating with governments.

Work with like-minded partners to amplify advocacy and increase collective strength. Close strategic alliances comprising partners from the United Nations (e.g., PAHO), academic and research institutions and civil society organizations, including consumer rights groups, is critical to success. In all three countries, partnering with research institutions was particularly critical to building the evidence base that later informed advocacy and policy strategies.

Support governments to monitor and enforce policy and legislative measures. While an important step is getting the right policies and regulations enacted to control the obesogenic practices of F&B companies, it is also as important to ensure that enforcement measures are put into place, including penalties for violators, and to monitor their impact.

UNICEF's reputation, credibility and mission can be at risk by engaging with F&B companies. To protect UNICEF's reputation and credibility as an organization working towards improved nutrition and child rights, each of the countries considered it was important to avoid direct engagements with F&B companies, especially declining any funding from them. This prevented any conflict of interest and preserved UNICEF's integrity and mission.

Exchanging best practices and working together for results

In Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, UNICEF's decision to focus on upstream interventions and working with government, rather than directly with businesses, was made for similar reasons. These included the adversarial behaviour of food and beverage companies and realization that they would not change their behaviour voluntarily or commit to meaningful self-regulation, as shown by numerous research studies.^{253, 254}

The types of upstream policy and legislative actions these UNICEF country teams employed to 'engage on' the F&B industry all entailed variations around restricting child-directed marketing, improving FOP labelling systems and removing the sale of unhealthy F&B products from the school environment. Whereas these approaches can work, getting such legislation in place can often take many months and even years to achieve, especially in face of the relentless push back from F&B companies.

Persistence and a steady focus on the 'long-game' is essential to success. It is also important for UNICEF to collaborate with partners from the United Nations, academia, research and civil society communities, as these collective efforts have the power to lead real change in legislation that prevents obesity and protects children.

CASE STUDY 8

Impacts of business on children's food environments

Preventing childhood obesity and protecting child rights: Ending direct engagement with food & beverage companies in Argentina and Mexico

This case study⁸ describes how UNICEF teams in Argentina and Mexico prioritized the promotion of healthy diets and prevention of child obesity in their country plans in face of a growing epidemic. As part of these efforts, both countries made the decision to disengage from food and beverage companies, including those that historically financed UNICEF programmes. The decision to cease direct or bilateral engagement with these partners was strategic and aimed to protect and promote child rights and safeguard UNICEF's mission and reputation. Lessons learned from both countries are shared.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Aggressive marketing by food and beverage (F&B) companies is a major driver of obesogenic environments and growing levels of child and adolescent overweight and obesity globally.²⁵⁵ Children are increasingly subjected to marketing strategies that have a powerful effect on their behaviour, and the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region has been particularly impacted by the childhood obesity epidemic.²⁵⁶ In 2014, to respond to this worrying situation in the LAC region, UNICEF began to develop country programmes to prevent child obesity (see case study 7).

Prior to the recognition of the child overweight and obesity issue, UNICEF had been engaging with F&B companies in both countries, including accepting their financial support.

However, UNICEF Argentina and Mexico subsequently ended their relationships with F&B companies given that this business sector had been identified as a major contributor to the problem of childhood overweight and obesity. Further, it became clear that parts of the F&B sector were actively working against the policy efforts being made to regulate their marketing practices. Two significant partnerships were terminated based on this decision.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

In Argentina – The role of F&B companies in the problem of child obesity

Over the years, F&B companies in Argentina have not taken any meaningful actions to change marketing practices known to contribute to child overweight and obesity. In fact, these companies have actively worked against the Government's efforts to regulate their unhealthy business practices.²⁵⁷

In Argentina, F&B companies are organized into a *Coordination Body for Food and Beverage Industries* known as COPAL. COPAL is the national mechanism through which the F&B industry interacts and lobbies the Government – for example, to resist regulatory measures related to marketing policies including front-of-package (FOP) food labelling systems. While COPAL had publicly recognized that obesity is a problem in the country through a publication they co-produced with the Argentina Nutrition Society, the publication focused on actions to prevent child obesity, but limited these to *individual* behaviours and actions (e.g., promoting healthy eating, increasing exercise and controlling portion sizes), with no mention of the F&B industry's role and need to change marketing strategies and product lines.²⁵⁸

More than a decade of funding and collaboration

UNICEF Argentina has a long history of supporting corporate social responsibility efforts with a number of private companies to promote child rights in the business sector. UNICEF Argentina was considered an 'early riser', working on these issues even before the global launch of UNICEF's *Children's Rights and Business Principles* in 2012.²⁵⁹

⁸ The full length version of this case study can be accessed at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EaM-3J_FQoBII3YOVf8xX-18By-ush6dW6i-ckcyp4OnBIO?e=v24gDO and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.



One of the F&B businesses UNICEF Argentina had been engaging with was a confectionary company. For many years this company had been recognized for its work supporting child rights in business, both inside and outside of Argentina. The company and UNICEF first began collaborating in the mid-1990s when the company sponsored UNICEF Argentina's fundraising events. During the early years, UNICEF Argentina's programme team and the company's philanthropic arm also worked together to compile statistics describing the situation of children in the country.²⁶⁰

From 2006 to 2015, UNICEF engaged with both the Company and the Foundation on three programmatic fronts. The first and most substantive was a ten-year programme (2006–2015) with the Foundation known as Companies for Children, which promoted child rights across Argentina's business sector.²⁶¹ The second engagement was a two-year cause-related marketing initiative (2008–2010) that UNICEF and the company embarked upon to raise funds for sports within schools. The third was a 'community soccer for participation' programme that lasted two years (2013–2015), involving both the company and the Foundation, which supported community groups to use sports to advocate for child rights and protection issues. All three programmes brought substantial positive outcomes for UNICEF, the company and the protection of child's rights in Argentina.

The end of a long-term partnership

With growing recognition of the link between the business practices and products of F&B companies and the rising levels of child obesity, UNICEF began to realize that receiving funding from these companies did not align with its new priorities, especially around child overweight and obesity prevention.

It was felt that continuing to receive funding from F&B companies would put UNICEF's mission, reputation and credibility at risk. At the same time, the companies stood to gain from their association with UNICEF, which risked "bluewashing" some of their activities and practices (i.e. by showcasing their support for children's sport, it might detract from their harmful marketing practices). In addition, through their work supporting the Government on regulatory measures, UNICEF Argentina was also gaining experience on how F&B companies appeared more interested in circumventing or blocking measures by the Government to regulate F&B marketing practices. UNICEF Argentina realized that it would be a conflict of interest if UNICEF was both working with the Government on policy measures to control F&B marketing practices while at the same time collaborating closely with these F&B companies.

During 2015, UNICEF Argentina undertook internal consultations which led to a decision to stop most direct

engagement with and funding from F&B companies. This decision meant no funding, no co-sponsoring, no joint programming and no joint communication links with any F&B company.²⁶²

While UNICEF Argentina no longer allows co-funding, co-sponsoring or any type of direct programme links with F&B companies, these companies can participate in multi-stakeholder platforms that UNICEF leads – for example, those that promote family-friendly policies in the workplace. However, no direct link is allowed with UNICEF.

Fortunately, there were no negative repercussions associated with UNICEF Argentina’s decision. No funding shortfalls occurred, as other funding sources were easily found to support to child rights in the business sector. UNICEF’s decision to cut all funding ties with F&B companies also resulted in positive reactions from partners in the country (e.g., local NGOs).²⁶³

In Mexico – Pushing back against industry influence

Mexico ranks as one of the countries with the highest burden of overweight in the world, with recent data showing that about 35 per cent of 5 to 19-year-olds are affected.²⁶⁴ As with other Latin American countries, key drivers relate to the rapid growth in the availability of inexpensive and unhealthy processed food and sugar-sweetened beverages, as well as pervasive and aggressive marketing by F&B companies, especially towards children. In addition, Mexico’s school system is a very obesogenic environment, where ultra-processed and unhealthy foods are widely available.

To reduce the high burden of overweight and obesity in Mexico, the *National Strategy to Prevent and Control Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes* was launched by the Government in October 2013.²⁶⁵ The strategy introduced some regulatory measures around the marketing of F&B products. However, some of these measures, such as the FOP labelling system introduced in 2014, were proven to be ineffective and misleading. Outside experts²⁶⁶ have concluded that this was due to the influence of F&B companies, which were extensively involved in the process and lobbied successfully to protect their own interests rather than the health of consumers.

In November 2016, the Mexican Government formally declared an epidemiological emergency to address the growing problem of obesity and diabetes across the country and in all age groups. However, at this time UNICEF still had not developed a close working relationship on nutrition issues with the Ministry of Health.

Once the 2018 elections were held and a new party took power, UNICEF’s work with the Government on overweight and obesity began to take off. Compared with the outgoing Administration, the new Government was more inclined to explore regulating F&B company practices and welcomed the technical support from groups.

To this end, from 2018 onwards UNICEF began supporting the Government – alongside other partners from civil society and the United Nations – to develop upstream policy and legislative measures to regulate the unhealthy marketing practices of F&B companies. A key focus of UNICEF Mexico’s energies has been on helping to develop



a more effective FOP labelling system that is easier for consumers to use than the previous (largely ineffective) 2014 FOP labelling system. UNICEF's key partners in these efforts included the National Institute of Public Health, academia, civil society organizations such as *El Poder del Consumidor and Contrapeso*, and UN partners such PAHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Through this policy work, UNICEF Mexico was highly aware of the sensitive nature of its interactions with the F&B sector, given that many companies were actively working against national efforts to strengthen marketing regulations and the development of a more effective FOP labelling system. This caused UNICEF Mexico to reconsider its funding engagement with F&B companies.

Reconsidering a key F&B partnership

UNICEF's historic partnerships with F&B companies in Mexico were established at a time when UNICEF Mexico's nutrition portfolio was still very small and focused mainly on the protection and promotion of breastfeeding.²⁶⁷

One F&B company in particular provided partly flexible funding to UNICEF over three years for a "*Partnership to Improve Health and Nutrition During Early Childhood in Mexico*". The main activities funded through the flexible funding included: (1) promoting breastfeeding and healthy nutrition behaviours; (2) evaluating the school feeding programme in certain areas of the country; and (3) developing a socioeconomic profile of childhood overweight and obesity using existing national survey data.²⁶⁸

The remainder of the funding from the F&B company to UNICEF was also used to conduct a small pilot to test the integration of a social and behaviour change communication strategy into the home sales structure for the purpose of providing health and nutrition education support to mothers and their families (in the form of recipes and healthy diets messaging).²⁶⁹ A key strategy of the company's marketing approach is their massive 'home sales' system, where company representatives visit communities to meet mothers in their homes to introduce and sell company products.

UNICEF's health and nutrition team considered the funding from from the company for breastfeeding, school feeding and analysing data on child obesity to be useful for supporting UNICEF's expanding nutrition portfolio. However, they came to see that some of the activities were problematic, since they focused on supporting sales entrepreneurs affiliated with a F&B company selling products containing added sugars.²⁷⁰

After the election in 2018, UNICEF's work on overweight and obesity prevention was rapidly scaling up, including new staff members with specific expertise and experience.

UNICEF became increasingly concerned about how the existing partnership with the F&B company could undermine its objectives and cause reputational and credibility issues for UNICEF Mexico, such as those highlighted in the 2018 publication by *El Poder del Consumidor* (Consumer Power), entitled '*The Hidden Plot of the Epidemic: Obesity, food industry and conflict of interest*'.²⁷¹

To this end, by mid-2019, UNICEF Mexico decided to end all financial engagements F&B companies. This was not an easy decision and various views existed, with the Health and Nutrition team most convinced that it was important to sever such ties. At this time, UNICEF had also become one of the most visible actors in Mexico working in the child obesity space (especially on the new FOP labelling system). Therefore, any connection with a F&B company had the potential to undermine UNICEF's objectivity and leadership in this area, including threatening the working relationship with the government on nutrition.

3. LESSONS LEARNED ON THE IMPACTS OF BUSINESS ON CHILDREN'S FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

A number of lessons can be learned from the experiences of UNICEF Argentina and UNICEF Mexico in their work supporting government and partners to prevent child obesity. This includes UNICEF's interactions with the F&B sector in both countries.

Work with like-minded partners to amplify advocacy and increase collective strength. In both countries, in addition to working closely with government offices, UNICEF formed strategic alliances with partners from the United Nations, academia and research institutions and civil society organizations, including consumer rights groups.

Support governments to develop and enforce effective upstream policy and legislative measures. This includes working with partners to support government to reduce the obesogenic environment through upstream legislative and regulatory actions. An important step is getting the 'right' policies and regulations enacted to control the unhealthy practices of F&B companies.

Direct engagement with F&B companies results in little or no return on investment for prevention of overweight and obesity. Direct engagement 'with' F&B companies is unlikely to result in any significant return on investment with respect to nutrition outcomes, especially preventing child overweight and obesity. Instead, supporting government and partners to indirectly engage 'on' F&B companies through policy and regulatory measures to regulate their marketing and business practices is more effective in reducing the obesogenic environment.

UNICEF's reputation, credibility and mission are at risk if it receives funding from F&B companies. It is important for UNICEF to act in a principled, transparent and coherent manner and avoid conflict of interest and any risks to the organization's reputation, credibility and mission. A priority for UNICEF is to be considered a partner free from any vested interests.

Cutting off funding from F&B companies does not necessarily have a negative impact on UNICEF's funding situation at the country level. According to UNICEF Mexico's Programme team, there is nothing special about the funding that UNICEF could obtain from F&B companies that could not be found outside the sector.²⁷² Similar sentiments were echoed in Argentina, where there were no funding shortfalls as a consequence of the decision.

Changing the global approach to business engagement

In Argentina and Mexico, the decision to end direct engagement with F&B companies was strategic for UNICEF as it protected the organization's credibility and reputation. Any formal affiliation with F&B companies, including funding or partnerships, could have seriously compromised UNICEF's ability to carry out its mission to

protect child rights.

In addition to the UNICEF's experiences in Argentina and Mexico, UNICEF's global experience has shown that working directly and bilaterally with F&B companies to change their core business practices and policies has not yet yielded promising results for children. Deeper reflection is needed by the organization on how best to engage with companies whose core business involves the production, distribution and promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages.

One approach is for UNICEF to consider employing a multi-pronged strategy that helps the organization effectively influence the policies, processes and products of F&B companies at a sector level. Actions to consider include: tailoring support to governments to formulate, adopt and enforce regulations that protect children and also create a level-playing field for business; mobilizing civil society, media, and trendsetters and conducting behind-the-scenes activism to call out priority areas for improvement by F&B; and ensuring greater public accountability through, for example, meaningful independent annual rankings on F&B company performance or leveraging the role of investors through shareholder action.

CASE STUDY 9

Business as positive influence in society and a source of innovative fundraising to address childhood obesity

#Eat Like A Pro: How UNICEF and Beko, a global appliance giant, combined forces to combat childhood obesity

This case study⁹ explores UNICEF's engagement with a leading European home appliance company, Beko, in an innovative partnership with Football Club Barcelona, to implement a massive social media fundraising campaign. The campaign was successful in both raising funds and awareness about preventing childhood obesity and fostering healthy eating habits in children, with funding invested in improving policies and programming to prevent overweight and obesity in six countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region. At the same time, the experience may provide valuable lessons for future partnerships in terms of focusing resources and ensuring adequate return on investment for UNICEF. This story provides some important insights on engaging with business as a source of innovative funding for nutrition.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

As part of UNICEF's strategy to engage business for results, the organization increasingly explores ways to leverage the marketing expertise of business partners to mobilize funds and raise awareness around important nutrition issues. One such issue is the rising levels of childhood overweight and obesity across many regions of the world.¹⁰

This case study highlights UNICEF's partnership with Beko PLC, Europe's biggest home appliance brand, around the problem of childhood overweight and obesity. It describes how the company's influence helped raise global awareness and generate funding to address this pressing problem.

Beko PLC is one of the top 10 home appliance brands in Europe and is known for its refrigerators and other kitchen appliances used for food storage and cooking. The company operates in over 130 countries and employs 30,000²⁷³ staff. Beko's brand aspiration is to be authentic and purpose-driven; its stated mission is "*ensuring a healthy life for the new generation*".²⁷⁴ Beko's parent company is Arçelik A.S. which reported sales of €4.76 billion²⁷⁵ in 2018, with Beko accounting for roughly 80 per cent of these sales.²⁷⁶

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Four years before the start of its partnership with UNICEF, Beko began its relationship with the Football Club Barcelona (FCB) as a major corporate sponsor "because both the business and the football club share the same values and philosophy – the spirit of play, fun and freedom combined with the goal to consistently be the best in the world."²⁷⁷ In 2014, the first formal sponsorship agreement was signed, which entailed Beko paying FCB €10 million per year to secure the prominent positioning of their company logo on the shirt sleeves of the players' uniforms. Under this agreement, Beko became a Premium Partner with the FCB.²⁷⁸ In early 2018, Beko's sponsorship agreement was renewed for three more years, with Beko providing €19 million per year to FCB, with Beko being elevated to Main Partner status.

Shared objectives and an innovative partnership

In early 2017, Beko's Global Partnership Manager (GPM) was actively exploring how to use its sponsorship of FCB to elevate Beko's commercial image as a more meaningful, purpose-driven brand of the future. The GPM was aware of global marketing research that indicated that the new

9 The full length version of this case study can be accessed at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EQcQtVb9TgRLI-m_DgfxVS0B-2PflWmC-Ly2jv2D3RPsF2A?e=AUoiO6 and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

10 In this Case Study, to simplify terminology, the term 'childhood obesity' is used to imply 'child and adolescent overweight and obesity'.

generation of consumers wanted products with genuine authenticity from companies that had a social purpose. Within this context, the GPM approached a marketing company to develop some pitches to build Beko's brand around the general area of food and cooking (as this related to Beko's line of kitchen appliances) which could also be linked to Beko's partnership with FCB.

Thus, *Eat Like a Pro* was developed, which focused on preventing childhood overweight and obesity and getting children to eat healthy diets. The marketing company proposed using FCB soccer heroes as role models for children on healthy eating. The GPM liked this idea as it represented his and the company's vision of the purpose-driven company that Beko could become in the future.

During the first presentation of the idea to Beko's executive team, the GPM suggested inviting UNICEF into the partnership as there was already a longstanding partnership between UNICEF and FCB, and it would greatly elevate Beko's image due to UNICEF's global brand recognition and reputation of making a difference in the lives of children. Beko's executive team were very supportive of this suggestion, and in March 2017, Beko's GPM contacted UNICEF's Private Fundraising and Partnerships team in Geneva. As discussions were progressing with UNICEF, Beko and FCB continued to develop the concept of *Eat Like a Pro*. In August 2017, Beko and FCB launched the initiative's manifesto in the form of a video released around a Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)

Champions League match.²⁷⁹

UNICEF saw the link with FCB as a common denominator with Beko that boded well for a good partnership fit. As shown in Figure 1 below, there was substantial overlap between UNICEF and Beko's objectives. Further, Beko had a proven corporate social responsibility track record. Throughout 2017, UNICEF and Beko continued to explore what a partnership could entail around the themes of childhood overweight and obesity and *Eat Like a Pro*.

Originally, Beko wanted the partnership to be based on cause-related marketing (e.g., providing a percentage of all sales to UNICEF), which would be a new strategy for the company.²⁸⁰ However, after various simulations projecting product sales, Beko and UNICEF realized this would be too slow to generate funds for UNICEF because Beko's merchandise items are not fast-moving consumer goods compared with daily consumable products, which are better suited for such an approach.

UNICEF instead suggested a massive 'call to action' social media fundraising campaign around the theme of *Eat Like a Pro* to be launched at the time of the *El Clásico* match in May 2018.²⁸¹ The rationale was that this would create energy around the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity, have immense outreach considering FCB's vast fan base and social media footprint, and rapidly secure funding for UNICEF. Beko agreed and plans were put in motion.

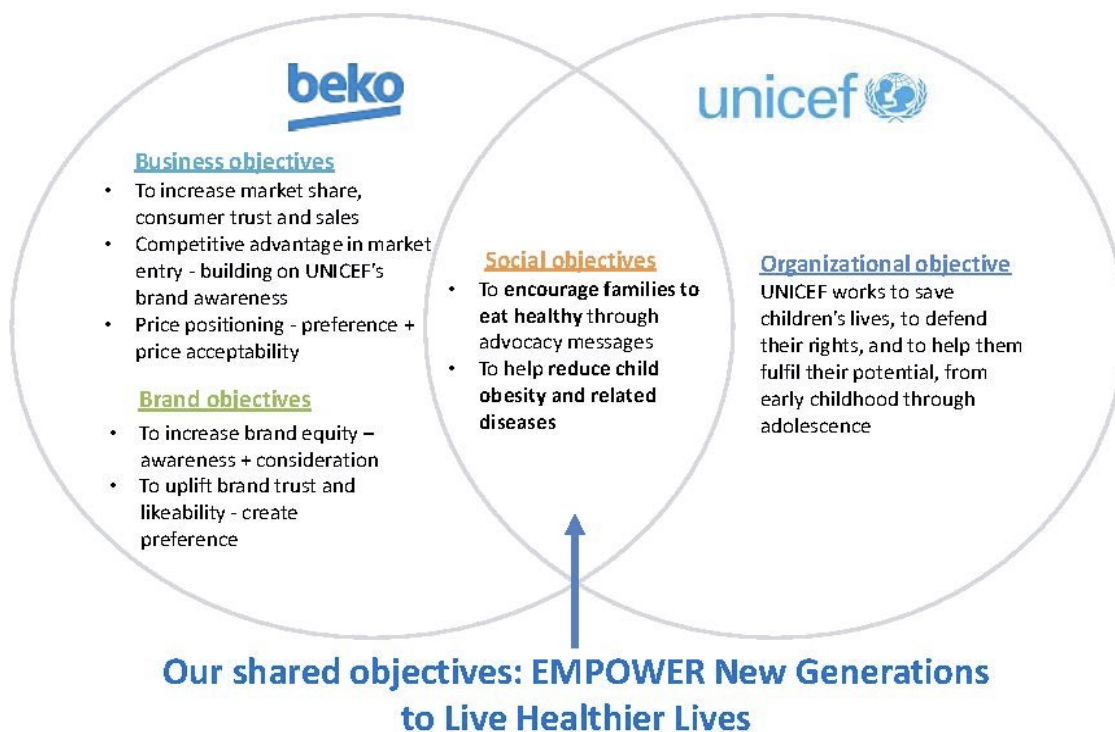


Figure 1: Shared objectives between Beko and UNICEF

To keep track of the many communication activities, the PFP team developed a Partners Communications Framework²⁸² that (a) showed how Beko and UNICEF were working together to combat childhood overweight and obesity and contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 2; (b) provides products that illustrated Beko's support to UNICEF – showing where and how funds had been spent, and their impact; and (c) shared programme results, data and good practices that would inspire others to act and get involved.

As part of the partnership formation process, UNICEF and Beko prepared a joint question and answer guidance document in the event their respective staff were asked questions, including by journalists, on why such outwardly different organizations decided to work together and why they were focusing their efforts on childhood overweight, obesity and healthy eating.²⁸³ For example, one section described how UNICEF can work with business entities such as Beko, but would not endorse any brand, product or service of any company or partners with which it collaborates.

Choosing to tackle childhood overweight obesity in Latin America

UNICEF and Beko settled on a €1 million partnership. It should be noted that UNICEF agreed to move ahead with the €1 million since it was understood this would be “the first million of a series” and would lead to a much larger future partnership with Beko in terms of ambition, investment and time.²⁸⁴

The funds were to be invested in tackling the problem of childhood overweight and obesity around the world. Since the first programmes to prevent childhood obesity were initiated in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region back in 2015, UNICEF's LAC Regional Office (LACRO) and country offices had begun to ramp up their support to governments in preventing childhood obesity and Beko funds were directed to these efforts in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador and Mexico. The countries were selected based on their high childhood overweight and obesity rates, the probability of achieving results and the extent to which funding gaps were preventing action on the issue.

The focus of UNICEF's support to these countries is helping governments develop and strengthen relevant national policies and legislation; improve school standards related to food, nutrition and physical activity; and support educational interventions to raise awareness about the benefits of a healthy diet for school-age children. Policy and programme activities would be implemented over a 12–18-month time frame and reach about 600,000 children in total.

A social media call to action

The engagement between UNICEF and Beko can be viewed as two phases. The first phase entailed designing and launching the intensive *Eat Like a Pro* social media campaign, which aimed to raise awareness around the problem of childhood overweight and obesity and to encourage children to eat healthy foods (e.g., fruits and vegetables), and to generate funding for UNICEF's childhood obesity prevention programmes. The second phase of the engagement entailed rolling out the regional and country level activities in the LAC region funded by Beko's €1 million grant.

UNICEF benefited from the massive social media footprint of both Beko and FCB, which had the potential to shine a global spotlight on the neglected issue of child overweight and obesity, providing critical publicity. It is unlikely that UNICEF could have achieved this level of social media exposure on its own without significant internal funding. Activities conducted as part of the social media campaign can be grouped into three areas: raising funds and awareness on healthy eating, undertaking an informal study to see what children know about healthy eating across the world and implementing programmes to prevent childhood obesity in six LAC countries using the funds donated by Beko.

Raising funds and promoting awareness of healthy eating

The fundraising campaign was based on Beko donating €1 to UNICEF for every #EatLikeAPro hashtag shared, up to a maximum amount of €1 million. The #EatLikeAPro hashtag sharing went viral and reached more than 1 million shares in 11 days, which triggered Beko donating the full funding amount to UNICEF.



Fans were encouraged to share the #EatLikeAPro hashtag on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with each post earning €1 for UNICEF. It was agreed that the *Eat Like a Pro* social media campaign would only be pushed out through the social media and communication channels of Beko and FCB, and not from UNICEF's channels. UNICEF did, however, re-tweet and share messages that originated through Beko and FCB's channels. Influencers – especially the FCB star players themselves -- were actively involved in sharing the hashtag #EatLikeAPro with their vast social media followings.

During the El Clásico football match, the FCB players' jerseys had #EatLikeAPro on the sleeves, replacing the usual Beko logo, and the advertising strip surrounding the football pitch advertised the #Eat Like a Pro campaign throughout the match. An incentive was also included in the social media blitz to encourage FCB followers to share the #EatLikeAPro hashtag. Beko's innovative strategy to have FCB's star players tell children about the meals they eat to perform their best on the football pitch made healthy eating more exciting for children.

The development of the nutrition approach, content and messages of the *Eat Like A Pro* initiative was fully managed by Beko and benefited from the technical input of the nutrition experts of FCB. UNICEF reviewed the nutrition practices being promoted by Beko to ensure the content was aligned with nutrition objectives. Beko also developed a web-based platform for Eat Like a Pro²⁸⁵ where videos and interactive methods focusing on healthy eating could be accessed by children and parents. Much of the content focused on the favourite recipes of star FCB players, with Beko's kitchen appliances often used to prepare these dishes. About 100 recipe videos were produced, which were fun and sometimes included video messages from the FCB players themselves.^{286, 287}

In addition to the funding, UNICEF recognized the value gained from the social media exposure provided by Beko and the FCB. For example, fans from 167 countries joined the hashtag #EatLikeAPro conversation, which is estimated to have reached more than 1 billion people in total.²⁸⁸ The campaign also generated over 28 million online views. In terms of media coverage stemming from the #EatLikeAPro campaign, there were 1485 articles in 28 countries with a return of earned media of more than €3.4 million.²⁸⁹

UNICEF also viewed the partnership as unique in showing how a "partner of a partner can become a partner". UNICEF has also used the Beko experience as an example in discussions with other prospective companies on how a digital campaign can serve as a strategy to support UNICEF.²⁹⁰ UNICEF also believed that the partnership with Beko helped to pave the way for other corporate donors to fund emerging programmes to prevent childhood overweight and obesity.

Likewise, Beko also benefited from the same massive social media exposure, described above. In addition, the Eat Like a Pro campaign with UNICEF led to a ten per cent growth in sales for the company.²⁹¹ Beko reported to UNICEF that the campaign increased traffic to their website by 348 per cent and that they obtained 2.9 million influencer content 'likes'.²⁹² Another major benefit for Beko was being awarded the 'Best Brand Activation Involving A Club' prize at the Football Business Awards 2018 in London, which was widely reported in sports news outlets.²⁹³

Regarding awareness-raising around healthy eating, it is not known whether the Eat Like a Pro initiative, either via the intensive hashtag campaign or through the online web-platform, has increased awareness in children. Considering the massive exposure of the hashtag campaign, it is plausible that some increase in awareness may have happened at least in the short-term. However, changing the eating behaviours of children – a step beyond raising awareness – would require a more concerted, resource intensive approach entailing aspects of one-on-one counselling along with actions to address systemic barriers preventing children and their families from accessing healthy foods. In any future engagements, UNICEF and Beko may consider co-creating the nutrition approach and establishing a system to assess impact.²⁹⁴

UNICEF also expressed concerns about the partnership's limited return on investment. While the €1 million in funding secured from Beko was significant and provided useful seed funding to countries, UNICEF later reflected that the engagement was perhaps not as cost-effective as had been hoped, given the significant staff time involved in preparing proposals and the heavy reporting requirements.

Understanding what influences children's food choices

In April 2019, nearly a year after the #EatLikeAPro social media campaign, Beko conducted a simple but large survey, although not statistically designed, to explore 'who' children actually listened to when it came to what they ate. The survey involved interviewing over 13,500 children between the ages of 6 to 10 years across 18 countries.²⁹⁵ Beko led on the design and content of the survey with UNICEF providing feedback on how some questions were asked.

Beko reported that when it comes to making healthy food choices, children indeed are influenced by their heroes. For example, when asked why they eat healthy food, 66 per cent of the children said they do so because they understand that it is good for them. A further 80 per cent of all children surveyed said they would be more interested in eating healthy food if they knew their football hero or role model took healthy eating seriously too. While over 70 per cent of children could identify the number of players

in a professional football team, only 20 per cent knew the recommended portions of fruit or vegetables that they should eat each day.

Beko also used the information generated from the survey to shape their online *Eat Like a Pro* web-based platform. This included developing an advocacy video based on the themes covered in the survey to encourage children to eat healthy food which starred the famous FCB player, Gerard Pique, which was later posted on the social media platforms of Beko, UNICEF, FCB and Pique, and has received over 12 million views to date.

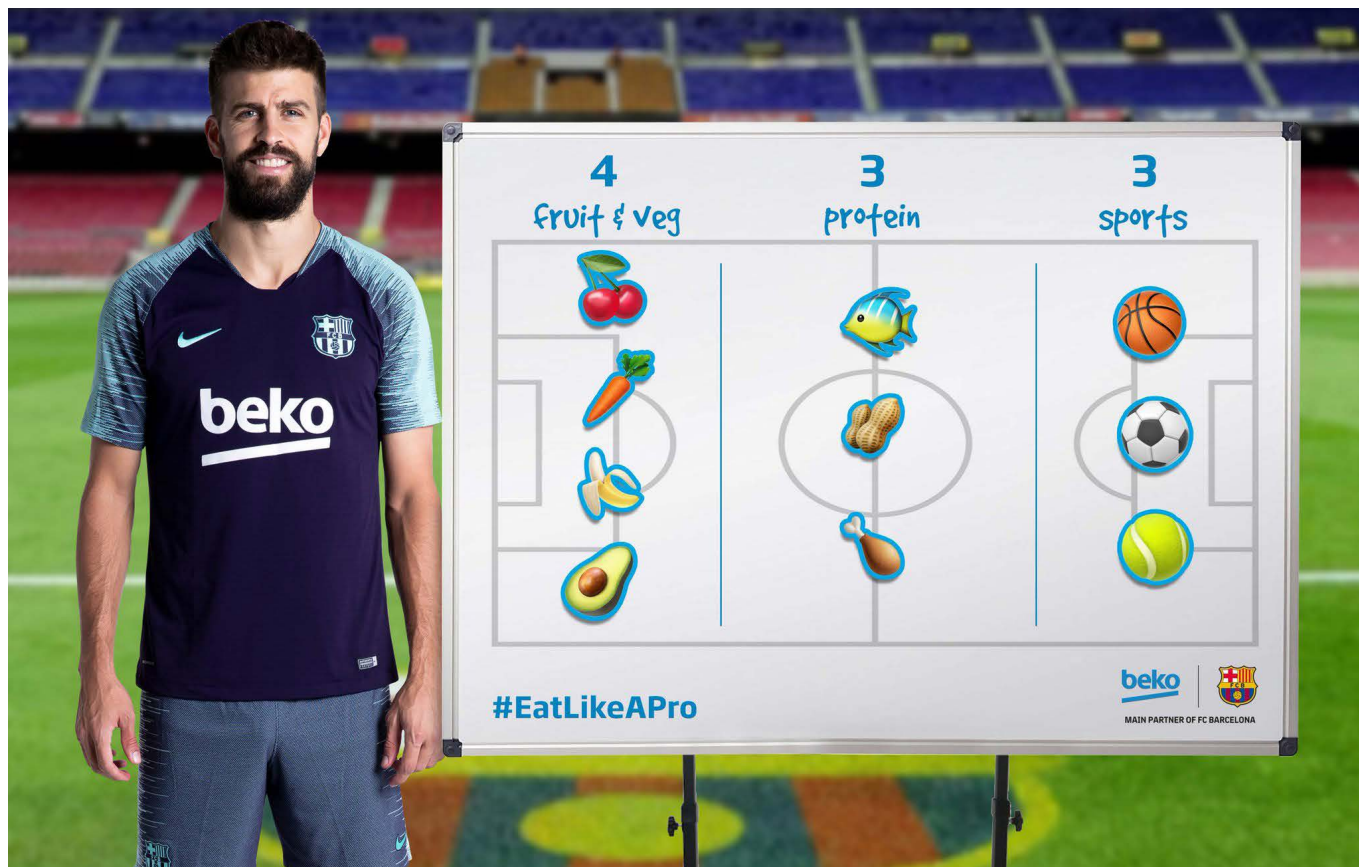
Implementing programmes to prevent childhood obesity in six LAC countries

Beko's €1 million grant supported a multi-country policy-focused effort to improve the food environments and prevent obesity among primary school children in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador and Mexico. The effort intends to reach at least 600,000 children over the period from May 2018 until December 2019. One key objective was to build the evidence base in the LAC region around the adoption and replication of improved policies, strategies and programmes to prevent obesity among school-age children.

Depending on the specific circumstances and needs found in each country, UNICEF country teams provided support to upstream policies and legislative actions and, when possible, supported the development of appropriate primary school standards for food and beverages. The funds also supported actions to improve family feeding practices and children's dietary behaviours. At the school level, priority was given to carrying out educational and awareness campaigns on healthy food habits and physical activity, as well as supporting the provision of locally sourced and culturally appropriate nutritious foods in schools.

The Beko funding also supported regional efforts to document and disseminate improved national legislation, policies and strategies to promote healthy diets and prevent obesity in primary school children across the LAC region. Globally, funds also supported programme management, development of programme guidelines, monitoring, learning and reporting.

By July 2019, UNICEF had reached 185,000 children and parents through programme activities put into place in the six countries.²⁹⁶ At the regional level, UNICEF led the development of a recipe book developed with the input of 19 chefs from Latin America's best restaurants and spearheaded a regional review of school-based interventions across LAC countries.



3. LESSONS LEARNED ON BUSINESS AS A POSITIVE INFLUENCE AND A SOURCE OF FUNDRAISING

This case study focuses on UNICEF's engagement with Beko to use an innovative social media strategy to raise both awareness and funding around the prevention of childhood obesity.

A number of lessons learned can be drawn from this case study.

Find common ground to maximize partnership and reach. 'Partnering with the partner of a partner' – as was the case with Beko and FCB – can bring benefits when there are shared goals. Synergies can be created that leverage the visibility, reach, special skills and resources of each partner. This was especially true in employing the vast social media reach of Beko and FCB to fundraise and increase awareness around issues important to UNICEF.

Create a win-win situation. While a business partner may wish to engage with UNICEF to improve its brand value and recognition, it is also possible for UNICEF to use the partnership to increase its own brand exposure. This type of win-win situation is possible under certain circumstances – for example, when the prospective business partner has a proven track record of supporting causes to improve the well-being of children.

Recognize what drives the private sector. Businesses are motivated by what is good for their image and what is good for their bottom line. These factors often guide their actions more than purely altruistic motives. It is important not to underestimate the immense benefits that business partners gain from their association with UNICEF due to its high value brand recognition. Understanding the premium value of UNICEF's brand should be considered when engaging with the private sector to leverage to the extent possible all benefits UNICEF can gain from such engagements.

Ensure alignment of nutrition-related messages with UNICEF's approach. When engaging with business partners that are themselves promoting nutrition messages, it is important that the appropriate UNICEF team review the business entity's approach and materials to ensure alignment with UNICEF programme objectives and priorities. Possibilities to work together to co-create approaches and tools on maternal and child nutrition, including communication materials, should be explored, whenever possible, to add further value to the engagement.

Establish realistic targets and reporting requirements. A balance needs to be reached between what the business entity needs or wants in terms of regular reporting (type of report and periodicity) and what is feasible for

UNICEF country, regional and global teams. On the side of business, there may be pressure to provide information on the partnership both internally to its executive team and company workforce as well as externally to its customer base around impact. Prudence should be exercised in deciding the types of programme targets to be achieved through the funding made available. For example, the number of children benefiting from policy development and enforcement efforts may be more difficult to quantify. Innovative reporting formats, such as the use of videos, may be well received by business entities, although they can be more time-consuming and costly to prepare than regular reports.

A unique partnership lays the foundation for future opportunities

This case study highlights UNICEF's partnership with Beko PLC, Europe's biggest home appliance brand, focusing on the company's positive influence in raising global awareness of the pressing issue of childhood obesity in the LAC region while generating funding to address it.

The engagement between UNICEF and Beko resulted in positive outcomes for both organizations. Beko gained in terms of enhanced publicity, sales, and reputation as a purpose-driven company. UNICEF benefited from the significant increased visibility the organization gained through the hashtag campaign and the funding it secured, albeit a modest amount, to support its field programmes preventing childhood obesity in LAC countries. From UNICEF perspective, the engagement would have been even more successful if it had led to sustained and expanded funding for countries, after the initial intensive first phase. A critical aspect of the success achieved was the involvement of the FCB and its celebrity football players who added excitement around the issue of healthy eating and amplified the social media reach far beyond what UNICEF and Beko could have achieved on their own.

UNICEF's formal programming engagement with Beko on overweight and obesity concluded in June 2020. From UNICEF's side, it is hoped that engagement will continue considering the immense efforts by both UNICEF and Beko in learning how to work together and build trust.

CASE STUDY 10

Business as voice and influence

Advocating for salt iodization: Partnering with a private real estate company in Thailand to beat iodine deficiency

This case study¹¹ examines how UNICEF Thailand partnered with one of the country's leading real estate developers, Sansiri PLC, to advocate for the Thai Government to take action on strengthening legislation on salt iodization. The objective of the partnership was to jointly design and implement an intensive multimedia communication campaign around iodine deficiency and salt iodization to trigger government legislative action. The campaign, branded as Iodine Please, was a success, and demonstrates the major contributions that a business entity can bring to a cause for children, beyond financial support. This case study shares lessons learned from the experience in Thailand.

1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Where children's rights and corporate purpose and resources align, businesses can be an important positive voice, using their influence and leverage to advance children's rights. This was the case in 2010, when UNICEF engaged with a private real estate company in Thailand – Sansiri PLC – to secure the Government of Thailand's support for promoting effective regulation on salt iodization to address the country's serious iodine deficiency problem.

When Sansiri first approached UNICEF Thailand looking for an opportunity to fund programmes to help children, UNICEF saw an opportunity to leverage Sansiri's marketing expertise. At the time, UNICEF Thailand lacked the expertise to design and implement the type of mass media campaign needed to secure government action, and Sansiri provided a good programme fit.

While no longer focused on nutrition, UNICEF's engagement with Sansiri has continued. Through its leadership over the past decade, the company has served as a strong advocate promoting child rights Thailand. In 2019, after many years of commitment and in light of the financial support provided to UNICEF – \$10 million between 2011–2020 – Sansiri was recognized as UNICEF Thailand's Selected Partner in 2018.²⁹⁷

A call to action: Reducing iodine deficiency disorders in Thailand

Although Thailand's national programme to combat iodine deficiency had been in place for decades, in the early 2000s the problem remained serious. In 2004, a global team of experts visiting the country confirmed this worrying situation with their finding that only 50 per cent of households used adequately iodized salt, a very low level compared to the global target of at least 90 per cent usage.²⁹⁸ As the lead development agency supporting the Ministry of Public Health's efforts to eliminate iodine deficiency, UNICEF became deeply concerned. Data from 2000–2007 showed that iodine intakes remained below recommended levels for many school-aged children and pregnant women in Thailand.^{299, 300} In 2007, Thailand ranked tenth among 11 countries in South-East Asia in terms of household access to adequately iodized salt.³⁰¹

With concern building, UNICEF organized an external review to be undertaken by the International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD) in early 2009.³⁰² Experts confirmed the seriousness of iodine deficiency across the country and noted that pregnant women in many provinces had suboptimal iodine nutrition status. In the team's opinion, this level of iodine deficiency could result in up to 100,000 newborns suffering brain damage and intellectual losses each year.³⁰³ The experts concluded that despite a high level of commitment to eliminating iodine deficiency, very little tangible progress had been made.

The ICCIDD team also noted that a major impediment to achieving adequate salt iodization in Thailand was the Government's regulations on iodization (embodied by the 1994 Health Ministerial Notification No. 153), which only pertained to edible salt. This meant that other important sources of dietary salt used for human consumption (e.g., soya sauce, fish sauce and cooking brine) were excluded, as well as salt bound for animal feed.³⁰⁴ The ICCIDD team

¹¹ The full length version of this case study is available to UNICEF staff and can be accessed at https://unicef.sharepoint.com/w:/s/PD-Nutrition/EQJBmuaFgeFOoTRjKHFLaxkBj9aB_XQw87On3C8n0k_K0A?e=hgzsZa and contains details on: the overall context and programme rationale for the engagement; the perceived benefits and risks for both UNICEF and the business entity; how the engagement took shape (including contractual mechanisms); what was accomplished; what were the main challenges; and lessons learned.

therefore recommended that the Government's regulations be broadened to include the iodization of all salt bound for both human consumption (including the common sauces and cooking brine mentioned above) and animal consumption, or it would be "unlikely that iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) will ever be eliminated in Thailand".³⁰⁵

In addition, the expert team underscored the importance of designing and scaling up an evidenced-based advocacy and communication strategy³⁰⁶ to trigger the necessary legislative actions by the Government. To this end, the team recommended engaging professional communication and social mobilization experts to develop and execute an evidence-based national advocacy strategy for IDD elimination.³⁰⁷

Targeting advocacy and building momentum

As a direct follow-up to these findings, UNICEF Thailand focused its advocacy strategy in 2010 around iodine deficiency and salt iodization.³⁰⁸ The central messaging shifted from preventing goitre, a dramatically visible sign of iodine deficiency, to addressing the invisible and detrimental impacts of IDD on children's intelligence and the country's social and economic development. UNICEF carried out a national stakeholder analysis related to iodine deficiency

and salt iodization. Based on the findings, UNICEF Thailand refined its iodine deficiency communication strategy to sharpen its messages, especially those targeting high-level policymakers.

The UNICEF Thailand team realized the importance of bringing on board other strong allies from the United Nations community, in addition to scientific partners, child right advocates, academics and the media. UNICEF engaged the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator as a key advocate for strengthening salt iodization, along with the country leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In January 2010, the UN Resident Coordinator wrote to the Prime Minister highlighting the impact of iodine deficiency on the intellectual development of Thailand's children.³⁰⁹ In response, the Prime Minister welcomed the initiative and several follow-up meetings were organized between the Minister of Public Health and the Country Representatives from UNICEF and WHO. UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador in Thailand, who had been one of Thailand's former Prime Ministers, also wrote to the Prime Minister expressing concern that salt iodization efforts needed strengthening.



An unexpected corporate partner

During this same time period, the President of Sansiri PLC Ltd, one of Thailand's largest real estate developers, was interested in donating to UNICEF Thailand because of his long-standing interest in helping the country's children.³¹⁰ In May 2010, he met with UNICEF's Country Representative.³¹¹

At that time, the UNICEF Representative had been wanting to identify a partner from Thailand's business community with whom UNICEF could work together on issues of child rights. Working with the private sector was a priority highlighted in Thailand's Country Programme Document 2007–2011. While many companies had been reaching out to UNICEF during this time, including well-known brands, none seemed to offer the same potential for a long-term and serious engagement on child rights issues as Sansiri.

2. THE STORY OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

After discussing with Sansiri's President and hearing about their desire to make a big difference for children in Thailand, the UNICEF Representative sensed a good fit. While the broader context for their discussions focused on



support to child rights, UNICEF's Representative realized an opportunity existed to focus this initial engagement on eliminating iodine deficiency, since this could serve as a quick win with an immensely positive impact on children. He also realized the potential value of Sansiri's President being an influential and well-known figure within the country – valuable attributes for amplifying UNICEF's advocacy messages with key decision-makers in the Government to help nudge forward the legislation around salt iodization.

Rather than accepting Sansiri's offer of a financial donation, the UNICEF Representative instead explored whether the company would be interested in designing and implementing an intensive multimedia communication campaign around iodine deficiency and salt iodization, focusing on triggering the sought-after Government legislative action. As a leading real estate developer, the company was highly skilled in public relations and mass advertising campaigns, with the ability to contribute a more vibrant and professional set of communication strategies to UNICEF's existing advocacy efforts with the United Nations Country Team.

This appealed to the President of Sansiri and both organizations agreed to work together to launch an intensive multimedia campaign. While the technical focus of Sansiri's relationship with UNICEF was initially focused on iodine deficiency and salt iodization, UNICEF also engaged Sansiri as a strong voice supporting child rights within Thailand's business community.

The campaign comes to life

While UNICEF and Sansiri were beginning to plan the multimedia campaign, UNICEF was also working in parallel with the United Nations Country Team and Ministry of Public Health to host a high-level seminar entitled, "Addressing Iodine Deficiency Disorders: A Development Challenge for Thailand"³¹² in July 2010. The seminar was attended by senior representatives from government, private sector, salt associations, academia and staff from United Nations agencies, among others. A set of policy measures were proposed, including the recommendation to adopt universal salt iodization (USI),³¹³ with enforceable legislation that would make it "...legally compulsory for all salt for human and animal consumption including salt used in processed food industries to be fortified with iodine".³¹⁴ The proposed policy recommendations were immediately shared with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Health for their consideration.

Sansiri and UNICEF launched an extensive multimedia advocacy campaign in August 2010. It was branded simply as Iodine Please, with no logos from either Sansiri or UNICEF. Messages focused on the devastating effects of iodine deficiency on the brain development and IQ of tens of thousands of Thai children each year, along with

the massive costs to social and economic development. The campaign included advertisements in 16 leading newspapers and magazines, and billboards and posters were created advocating for the consumption of iodized salt, while pop concerts were organized to promote the campaign. T-shirts, tote bags and pamphlets were branded with Iodine Please and key messages were produced and distributed along with iodine testing kits.

Sansiri also organized eight large exhibitions to promote the campaign at shopping malls and office buildings, as well as at a Bangkok hotel during a major government conference related to children and development issues. Three of the exhibitions resulted in substantial television news coverage, with on-air interviews on the importance of salt iodization to prevent iodine deficiency disorders. An Iodine Please website was constructed along with social media platforms to broadcast key messages. The website featured videos of local Thai celebrities promoting iodized salt, as well as an animated video incorporating the campaign's key messages concerning IDD and salt iodization.³¹⁵

To design and launch the Iodine Please campaign, UNICEF met several times a week with Sansiri's President and its internal communication team. As was its usual practice in undertaking advertising campaigns, Sansiri hired a private public relations firm to design the Iodine Please campaign. UNICEF provided technical support on iodine deficiency and USI, including identifying the target audiences. It should be noted that the Government of Thailand was not a co-partner with UNICEF and Sansiri on the Iodine Please effort; rather, it was considered the most important stakeholder group to which the Iodine Please campaign was directly targeting its messages.

While the only cost to UNICEF was staff time, Sansiri devoted about US\$700,000 of its own money, along with staff time, to media coverage and promotional activities.³¹⁶ UNICEF Thailand was primarily responsible for the work with Sansiri related to the Iodine Please campaign, however, technical support was also provided on iodine deficiency and salt iodization by the UNICEF Regional Office. As UNICEF Thailand had no technical nutrition staff, a member of the communications team was assigned to spearhead the work on iodine deficiency and salt iodization, including for the Sansiri collaboration.

The Iodine Please campaign, which continued until the end of 2010, effectively built upon and super-charged UNICEF's existing advocacy strategy with United Nations Country Team and was far beyond anything UNICEF could have mustered on its own at that time. During this period the President of Sansiri also met with the Prime Minister to advocate for more robust USI legislation.

A combined advocacy push finally triggers salt iodization action

Success was achieved in September 2010, not long after the launch of the Iodine Please campaign, when the Ministry of Public Health announced its decision to endorse a salt iodization strategy aligned with global recommendations that would come into effect on 31 December 2010. This included establishing a multisector salt iodization oversight body, along with new legislation mandating the iodization of all salt for human consumption (including fish sauce, soy sauce and brine) and animal consumption. Strict monitoring and legal enforcement measures were also introduced. Not only did the Thai Minister of Public Health actively promote salt iodization legislation, but the Prime Minister of Thailand discussed iodine deficiency and the need to use iodized salt during several weekly national television broadcasts.³¹⁷

Today, the most recent data on salt iodization in Thailand³¹⁸ shows that nearly 80 per cent of households have access to iodized salt, compared with less than 50 per cent a decade earlier. Since the adoption of the more comprehensive national legislation for salt iodization, the magnitude of iodine deficiency across the country has decreased considerably.³¹⁹ Indeed, the action to adopt rigorous USI legislation may be considered the greatest public health victory for Thailand's children up to that point in time.³²⁰

At the policy level, this experience shows that business leaders can serve as a powerful voice in public policy and positively influence policy and programme outcomes for children. At the practice level, business can provide critical programme inputs that fall beyond UNICEF's core competencies – such as multimedia communication campaign support – to scale up of proven interventions for children.

Unanticipated benefits for the business

Sansiri accrued a number of unexpected benefits which are worth noting. One relates to the focused technical support Sansiri received from UNICEF to build the company's internal capacity to promote child rights and prevent child labour violations. Early on, UNICEF staff began working with Sansiri's Board to increase awareness around child rights and child labour issues. UNICEF continued to invest significant staff time to sensitize and train Sansiri employees around these issues, including conducting training sessions during the massive Sansiri 'town hall' meetings that were attended by thousands of sub-contractor staff. Sansiri eventually developed a "No Child Labour Policy"³²¹ based on a zero-tolerance approach legally bound to the building contracts with their numerous sub-contractors. This meant that all Sansiri's construction partners had to sign an agreement to end child labour within their business operations.³²²

Sansiri also benefited from being publicly praised for its efforts to eliminate iodine deficiency. In December 2010, the Prime Minister of Thailand recognized both Sansiri and UNICEF with an award for their work together on salt iodization. In May 2011, Sansiri was chosen as the winner of Enterprise Asia's Asia Responsible Entrepreneurship Awards programme in the South Asia sub-region, which recognizes Asian businesses that champion sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship.³²³

Sansiri's president was also selected for the ICCIDD's 2013 Basil Hetzel Award,³²⁴ which is bestowed on individuals who make exceptional contributions to combating IDD. The ICCIDD explicitly stated that Sansiri's president had created a new model of corporate responsibility and that the president had been an extraordinary advocate for protecting children in Thailand from iodine deficiency, serving as an example of effective communication efforts to fight IDD.

Formalizing the partnership

During the first phase³²⁵ of engaging with Sansiri (May through December 2010), when the Iodine Please campaign was first designed and launched, no formal agreement codifying the relationship appears to have been developed. Although it is hard to confirm, this could be because no resources were exchanged between the two organizations as Sansiri completely funded the Iodine Please campaign. In addition, no logos were used from either of the two organizations.

At the end of 2010, UNICEF and Sansiri decided to continue their engagement by supporting the new legislation on salt iodization and promoting child rights within Thailand's business community. Both UNICEF's Regional and Country Offices vetted Sansiri as a partner before the decision was made, with key issues noted in a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which covered the three-year period from 2011–2013.³²⁶ The MOU explicitly addressed the two major concerns UNICEF had with Sansiri, namely guarding against child labour and any unfair business advantages accrued by virtue of their relationship with UNICEF. It should be noted that this was at a time prior to the establishment of UNICEF's formal due diligence process, now carried out by the UNICEF Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division in Geneva.

After this first MOU expired at the end of 2013, UNICEF and Sansiri continued to prepare new three-year MOUs thereafter, with the last covering the period from 2017–2019. Nutrition was included in the first MOU through support to the second phase of the Iodine Please campaign, and in the second MOU through support given to early childhood development. In recent years, the focus has been on Sansiri's role as a corporate champion for child rights in Thailand.

A second nutrition focused campaign

After the successes of the Iodine Please campaign, in 2015 UNICEF and Sansiri turned their attention to early childhood development (ECD) – another nutrition-related area identified as a priority in the UNICEF Country Programme Document 2012–2016. The Best Start campaign advocated for greater government investment to ensure full implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Policy targeting children from 0–6 years of age with a package of interventions supporting optimum child nutrition and development.

As with Iodine Please, there were celebrity campaign ambassadors, as well as a Best Start campaign website, extensive social media and mass media support (e.g., television, magazines, newspaper interviews). There was also a petition-signing event and a final Best Start seminar. Similar to the work on iodine deficiency and salt iodization, Sansiri's President maintained a good relationship with the Prime Minister's Office (now comprising a different team due to a change in government), which allowed UNICEF to meet with the new Prime Minister's advisory team. Thailand eventually emerged as an ECD leader in the region and beyond, with UNICEF as the Government's primary partner.³²⁷

However, unlike the clear end-goal that the salt legislative action offered, there was no distinct endpoint for the ECD work that signified success. Instead the ECD initiative was expected to continue for months, and perhaps even years, and would require continued nurturing and support. It became clear that a long-term objective, such as ECD, was far less attractive to a business entity such as Sansiri than a visible achievement like the new salt iodization.

After the Best Start campaign ended, Sansiri did not continue supporting nutrition projects with UNICEF and instead turned its attention towards adopting child-friendly business practices and implementing initiatives to promote child rights within the workplace. In addition, apart from supporting UNICEF's work in Thailand, Sansiri began contributing about US\$1 million each year to UNICEF's global emergency fund, reaching a total of US\$10 million by 2020.³²⁸

3. LESSONS LEARNED IN ENGAGING BUSINESS FOR VOICE AND ADVOCACY

Lessons learned from this experience may be useful to UNICEF country programmes contemplating similar engagements with business entities that have the potential to leverage their voice and influence to advance nutrition and child rights.

Corporate partners can add tremendous value beyond money.³²⁹ The Iodine Please campaign demonstrated the immense value that a business entity can bring to a cause for children, beyond a donation of money. Sansiri's expertise in mass media and advertising filled a gap in UNICEF Thailand's competencies, and the company's access to senior Government decision-makers improved the targeting and impact of UNICEF's advocacy.

Strategically framing the issue can hook business partners. Highlighting the issue of malnutrition in the larger context of national human development (e.g., lost IQ in children) helped to attract the attention of Sansiri, compared with framing it solely as a technical or medical problem (e.g., eradicating goitre). Sansiri's support was relatively easy to gain once UNICEF presented a robust and evidence-based business case for the elimination of IDD through USI. Simple issues are more likely to resonate. For example, iodine deficiency is fairly straightforward to explain to corporate partners, has a clear solution (i.e., iodize all salt through government legislation) and provides high return on investment (i.e., protecting children's brain development and future productivity).

Corporate entities are more likely to engage if there is a clear programme endpoint. More complex issues, such as those represented by ECD, social protection or poverty, which do not have a definite end point or clear programming 'ask', may not attract the same business interest as those where there is more clarity on when the objective will be achieved. When seeking to engage businesses, is it important to have a clear success goal or end state, and clearly defined role for the business and its leaders to play. Otherwise potential partners may struggle to identify their value-add, value to them and ways they can support

UNICEF staff can learn new skills from business. Engaging with business entities can also build new skills within UNICEF country teams. Both the Iodine Please and Best Start campaigns exposed UNICEF's communication team in Thailand to designing and managing large multimedia campaigns. Back in 2010, social media was still relatively new and cutting edge, hence the UNICEF's team in Thailand had not yet acquired much experience in this emerging area. Staff from UNICEF Thailand were able to learn valuable skills from their engagement, which

they subsequently applied to other multimedia campaigns outside of their work with Sansiri.

Business can learn new skills from UNICEF. Business staff can also gain new skills and technical depth from UNICEF (e.g., in iodine deficiency and ECD), while achieving a sense of purpose around supporting children and protecting child rights. UNICEF provided support to Sansiri on how to protect child rights within the workplace, especially around issues of child labour, which led to the company enacting their "No Child Labour Policy". In time, Sansiri assumed a leadership role, advocating for the protection of children's rights within Thailand's business community. Having both business and UNICEF learn from each other helps to create the balance that is needed in such engagements. Demonstrating willingness and capacity to absorb and act upon feedback from business partners is important to strengthening cooperation.

Getting up to the same speed. At times, there were frustrations among the partners during campaign development, since as a private sector entity, Sansiri could move much more quickly in terms of decision-making than UNICEF. These organizational realities are important to understand when developing partnerships to help manage expectations, especially those related to timelines. Countries considering engaging companies in this way should clearly explain to UNICEF our national role, how we must manage our operations as a UN agency, and implications for collaboration structure and speed. Gaining common understanding on this, and demonstrating flexibility to meet partner meets where possible, is critical to long term success.

Moving beyond monetary support This case study demonstrates the major contributions that a business entity can bring to a cause for children. The key added value of Sansiri was its expertise in designing and implementing multimedia advocacy campaigns. This type of expertise boosted UNICEF Thailand's efforts to promote salt iodization to eliminate iodine deficiency and save future generations of Thailand's children from permanent brain damage.

Sansiri's support for salt iodization specifically, and to UNICEF's programming more generally, serves as a good example of business using its influence and leverage to advance children's rights with governments. Indeed, the President of Sansiri was able to help advance child-friendly policies in the country, spanning from salt iodization to early childhood development to promoting and protecting children's rights across the country's private sector, and its engagement with UNICEF continues today.

SECTION 4

INSIGHTS GAINED FROM UNICEF'S EXPERIENCES ENGAGING BUSINESS FOR NUTRITION OUTCOMES

This section highlights the major insights emanating from the ten case studies. First, those pertaining specifically to the business focus areas are presented. Thereafter, overarching insights that cut across a number of the case studies are discussed.

4.1 SPECIFIC INSIGHTS RELATED TO BUSINESS FOCUS AREAS

Key insights related to four of the focus areas where UNICEF has engaged business in nutrition programming are summarized below. The fifth business focus area relating to the private sector as a source of technology and innovation is not included as the case studies developed did not lend themselves to identifiable insights that were uniquely linked to technology and innovations *per se*.

Five business areas that offer strategic entry points for UNICEF programming

1. Business as a provider of essential goods and services for children and families
2. Business as an employer
3. Business impact on communities and the environment
4. Business technology and innovation
5. Business as a positive influence in society

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (2019). *Engagement with Business – Programme Guidance for Country Offices. Programme Division and Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division.*

a) Business as a provider of essential nutrition goods.

A number of practical insights can be drawn from the three case studies representing business as a provider of nutrition products.

The experiences around scaling up the iodization of salt in ECAR and shaping the global RUTF market by ramping up the capacity of local food producers are reviewed first. Thereafter, insights related to the case study on scaling up micronutrient powders (MNPs) in Nigeria are highlighted.

Regarding salt iodization and the production of RUTF, UNICEF was proactive in recognizing that specific nutrition products were needed to achieve its programme objectives. As a result, UNICEF reached out to companies in these sectors to ascertain their interest and potential to produce the quantity and quality of product needed to meet programme goals.

In order to work with these companies at the required sector-wide level, UNICEF understood that its teams needed to have the technical know-how related to the commercial and manufacturing aspects of these sectors – including both supply and demand dimensions. This was critical to support the development of successful and sustainable programmes. UNICEF also recognized the importance of building the national capacity of companies in both these sectors to increase their manufacturing volume and strengthen their ability to meet global standards around good manufacturing practices, particularly those related to food quality and safety. In both these case studies, success was achieved as evidenced by the viable salt iodization and RUTF production systems established, which still exist in these regions today.

Additional insights were also learned. For example, in terms of salt iodization in ECAR just after independence from the Soviet Union, due to the local food sector's lack of production capacity at that time, UNICEF often started the engagement by providing basic iodization equipment



and supplies to selected companies to quickly ramp up overall national production levels. This practice, however, was discontinued when it led to dependency on UNICEF. Thereafter, support focused on strengthening processes related to internal manufacturing capacity, especially around monitoring and ensuring quality assurance. A key take-away for UNICEF was that salt producers had to completely 'own' and take responsibility for producing iodized salt if the sustainable elimination of iodine deficiency was to be achieved.

UNICEF also realized that it was not simply a matter of producing *more* of the nutrition product, but rather, that consumers (especially families) needed to *want* to purchase and use it. Therefore, along with supporting salt companies to increase their production levels, UNICEF also supported the governments in the ECA region to introduce legislation that would ensure mandatory and universal salt iodization and helped them to design targeted advocacy and communications campaigns with the public aimed at increasing the demand for and acceptability of iodized salt. The most effective messaging focused on how iodized salt would save tens of thousands of the country's newborns from permanent brain damage, whereas in earlier years, messages had tended to focus on the less compelling clinical signs of iodine deficiency.

In terms of RUTF, the imperative UNICEF faced because of the food crises in the Horn of Africa, was radically scaling up its production and availability in countries most affected by severe wasting in children. To achieve this, UNICEF's Supply Division used a strategic tendering process that aimed to increase the numbers of local food companies able to produce RUTF, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. A key insight was gained through this process: while UNICEF Supply Division could not provide direct support to local food companies to strengthen the capacity of local food companies (due to strict procurement guidelines), the product and good manufacturing practice assessments undertaken by Supply Division as part of the tendering process effectively served as indirect technical support to prospective tenders. Ultimately, these local food producers were able to develop their internal capacities and successfully compete in UNICEF's rigorous RUTF procurement cycles to the point that, up until today, global RUTF supplies are still able to meet global programme demands.

The third case study, which describes UNICEF's engagement with DSM under a shared-value partnership to support the scale-up of MNPs in Nigeria, also offers important insights. Since DSM was also one of UNICEF's main global suppliers of MNPs, including in Nigeria, great



care was needed to prevent any real or perceived conflict of interest in procuring MNPs for the engagement. This issue was extensively addressed in the memorandum of understanding, which codified the engagement between UNICEF and DSM. In addition, UNICEF's procurement process for MNPs in Nigeria was rigorously maintained to ensure the tendering process was competitive and transparent. Despite these safeguards, field staff remained uneasy that the company might someday make commercial gains from the engagement. Going forward, in engaging companies that are suppliers of key nutrition products that UNICEF uses in field programmes, it may be prudent to ensure that the scope of work with the company under the engagement is broad enough to ensure that the product is only a small aspect of the overall programme being implemented.

b) Business as an employer.

UNICEF's experience engaging business as an employer has touched on two different types of models, with both generating insights that will be useful to inform future efforts. The first was the approach taken by UNICEF in Bangladesh and Kenya to design and test a baby-friendly workplace model to support exclusive breastfeeding and promote maternity protection for working mothers. The second was the approach taken by UNICEF in India to



improve nutrition literacy in the workforce via a virtual membership platform through which companies received technical support.

In Bangladesh and Kenya, UNICEF showed that baby-friendly workplace models can be cost-effective and do not reduce worker productivity – two attributes that were important to demonstrate to business owners. In both countries, company owners were open to implementing national policies within their businesses to promote maternity rights and protection and to support breastfeeding among working mothers with infants and young children. To do so, owners agreed to establish physical spaces in the workplace so that working mothers could breastfeed their infants in a quiet setting. In addition, owners were willing to cover minimal related expenses, such as costs for simple renovations of the existing space and basic furniture.

However, in both countries, progress in scaling up has fallen short of initial expectations. In Kenya, there has been limited expansion outside of the original tea estate. Likewise, in Bangladesh, some scaling has taken place through a partner's platform of ready-made garment companies (e.g., the International Labour Organization); however, in light of the vast size of that country's garment sector (which employs immense numbers of women), significantly more coverage is needed to have a sector-wide impact on improving exclusive breastfeeding levels. Efforts to scale up these promising models in Kenya and Bangladesh have been constrained by insufficient funding and limited partnership options through which expansion can occur.

In both countries, UNICEF's engagements with the companies benefited from adequate funding provided from a philanthropic donor (the same for both projects) which financed the design, pilot and implementation costs during the early phases. However, beyond this initial funding, additional resources for further scaling have been lacking. In addition, the companies themselves have not shown much appetite to pay for costs even though they outwardly acknowledge their appreciation for the programme and how it has benefited their workers and reduced absenteeism of working mothers. While the tea estate in Kenya expressed an interest in expanding the programme to other areas in their catchment area, they were considering charging a small monthly fee to participating employees to cover these costs – a strategy which may not be a feasible in light of the severe income constraints these mothers already face.

A key take-away from both these case studies on business as an employer is that an essential step during the early planning phase must be the development of a costed business plan. This plan must clearly identify not only committed partners for scaling but also feasible financing mechanisms, including from companies themselves, to support future expansion in a sustainable manner. The role

of the government must also be considered both in terms of implementation and financing. Such funding strategies also need to consider how to pay for the heavier start-up costs (e.g., to conduct the formative research during the design phase and carry out capacity building of staff, including via training, etc.) along with future recurrent costs.

Looking forward, workforce nutrition programmes that aim to improve breastfeeding practices might be better framed as needing to be considered as part of the package of employee support provided by company owners rather than as a special activity that a donor initiates and pays for. This would require UNICEF to consider what it would take to achieve this, especially as significant upstream policy work would be required in areas outside of UNICEF's typical expertise and skill set (e.g., knowledge of national labour laws).

Insights were also generated in terms of programme design. Learnings from both these case studies suggest that to improve levels of exclusive breastfeeding through workplace programmes, a community component is also likely needed to support mothers to breastfeed outside the factory gates. The Kenya baby-friendly workplace model achieved impressive improvements in exclusive breastfeeding. This may be because that programme had a community component utilizing local ministry of health staff and leveraging the same social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategy and messaging on infant and young child feeding (IYCF) used in the workplace activities. In comparison, the Bangladesh model did not have a community component and levels of exclusive breastfeeding were unchanged from their very low initial levels. Adding a community component would increase the costs of a baby-friendly workplace programme, unless, for example, there is coordination with government services that support IYCF in the communities where working mothers reside, as was the case in Kenya.

Considering the goal is to scale up these models sector-wide to reach large numbers of mothers with young infants, the costs implications will likely be significant. It will be natural for programme managers to explore where to find cost savings during future expansion phases. Given this, it should be emphasized that the counselling support given to nursing mothers should not be shaved back in terms of cost reductions, as counselling is an essential intervention for encouraging mothers to adopt optimal IYCF practices. Reducing support to counselling activities will compromise the ability of the programme to improve exclusive breastfeeding levels, a key outcome indicator for this programme model. Any strategy to scale up the baby-friendly workplace model should thus carefully consider how to maintain the quality of counselling support needed to improve levels of exclusive breastfeeding.

A number of insights were also gained from UNICEF India's experiences developing a strategy to strengthen nutrition education in the workforce through a virtual platform 'Impact for Nutrition' (I4N), which companies pledged to at no cost, and for which they obtained technical support. A key insight learned during the start-up phase was that having the Government of India and UNICEF linked to the I4N platform proved to be an important tipping factor to get companies to engage. Another insight was that companies agreed to participate even if the platform was 'brand agnostic' which meant that they put aside any promotion of their commercial enterprise or products. Two years after inception, more than 100 companies have pledged to the platform, supporting the proof of concept that it is possible to collectively harness the resources and influence of the private sector to support national nutrition efforts.

From a programme design perspective, a number of practical insights were generated. The first was that UNICEF realized the importance of reducing the risk related to the types of companies that could pledge to the platform. From the start, UNICEF took the decision to prohibit any food and beverage company from pledging and being directly involved. In India, historically there have been political sensitivities among civil society and the Government in having the food and beverage sector active in the nutrition space. As a result, UNICEF was keen to avoid these types of challenges and made the decision to reduce this risk by not directly involving any food and beverage companies in the I4N platform.

Another practical insight was the immensity of the challenge to design a nutrition literacy programme that was relevant to the very diverse nutrition needs represented by these companies' varied workforces (e.g., representing both men and women as well as blue- and white-collar workers of all ages, education, and language groups). As a 'one-size-fits-all' nutrition education strategy is not an effective approach for this type of programme, significant effort will be needed to adapt the nutrition education materials to the different audiences being targeted. How this will be accomplished and who will be responsible is not yet clear.

A fundamental question relating to programme design concerns impact and defining what success looks like for such a massive nutrition education programme as the one being supported through I4N. Similarly, UNICEF will need to consider how impact will be measured (e.g., what specific results are sought) and what indicators will be used to track this (e.g., related to knowledge, behaviour, capacity building, etc.). In addition, and not unlike what was found in the Bangladesh and Kenya case studies, how best to maintain the quality of the nutrition education provided to companies through the platform during scaling up will need to be considered.



Another critical insight from the I4N experience is the imperative to identify sustainable funding sources, an issue shared with Bangladesh and Kenya. While the platform is still operating with the initial incubation funds, its future financial sustainability needs to be addressed, including identifying feasible funding options through the pledged companies themselves.

c) Business impact on communities and the food environment.

UNICEF’s experiences engaging on business practices and its impact on the food environment are described in the two case studies from the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region, with the first focusing on the prevention of childhood obesity in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, and the second focusing on UNICEF’s decisions in Argentina and Mexico to disengage from food and beverage companies, which had previously funded the organization. These two case studies have generated significant insights and learnings on what it means to effectively engage on the food and beverage sector – and how to do this in a way that respects and promotes children’s rights – especially given the dynamic context of today’s globalized food systems and the increasing share of the ultra-processed foods in the diet.

A main take-away from UNICEF’s experiences preventing childhood obesity in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico is

that it may be most effective to design a multi-pronged strategy that helps the organization effectively *engage on* and influence the core business practices (e.g., policies and processes) and products of food and beverage companies at a sectoral level. Approaches that UNICEF teams can consider include:

1. Tailoring support to governments to formulate, adopt and enforce regulations that protect children and create a level-playing field for business
2. Forming and mobilizing partnerships with civil society, research and academic groups, the media, trendsetters and conducting behind-the-scenes activism to call out priority areas for improvement by food and beverage companies
3. Ensuring greater public accountability (e.g., meaningful annual rankings on food and beverage company performance; leveraging the role of investors through shareholder action)

Additional insights were also gleaned that relate to bilaterally engaging one-on-one with a food and beverage company. To this end, UNICEF’s experiences suggest that *engaging with* a single food and beverage company to change its core business practices and policies is resource intensive, has yet to yield promising results for children, and involves

significant reputational risks. Such engagements therefore have a low return on investment.

Further reflection will be needed by UNICEF around engaging companies whose core business involves the production, distribution and promotion of unhealthy foods. In such cases, UNICEF should /must consider:

1. Focusing on regulation of harmful practices rather than business self-regulation
2. Not accepting money
3. Avoiding any formal partnerships

Related to the third option, for example, in the case of UNICEF's engagement with F&B companies in Argentina and Mexico – both multinational funders of UNICEF's programmes – field teams in these countries reached the same conclusion that to protect the organization's reputation, credibility and ability to fulfil its mission to protect children's right to adequate nutrition, it was best to end all direct ties with all food and beverage companies. In both countries, UNICEF considered it important to be a neutral entity supporting its key partner – the government – in fulfilling this fundamental right. Thus, to prevent any potential conflict of interest, it was essential that UNICEF not receive any funding from, or have any relationship with, food and beverage companies that were producing the same unhealthy products linked to childhood obesity that UNICEF was supporting the government to regulate.

d) Business as a positive influence in society.

Valuable insights were also obtained from the case studies focusing on business as a positive influence in society (e.g., from the Iodine Please campaign in Thailand and the #EatLikeAPro campaign with Beko). In both experiences, UNICEF greatly benefited from the communication expertise and massive reach of these private sector groups to elevate, energize and influence national policy dialogues to raise awareness around important nutrition issues. What Sansiri and Beko brought to these two engagements was massively greater than what UNICEF could have mustered on its own.

Another aspect related to business using its influence or voice to the benefit of nutrition outcomes is provided by the example of UNICEF India with the I4N platform. In this scenario, UNICEF supported over one hundred companies to develop their capacity to increase their corporate social responsibility investments in nutrition. Thus, in essence, UNICEF India was taking a novel approach in supporting the business sector in the country to become a stronger voice and an influencer for nutrition programme priorities.

In considering when business can serve as a positive voice for nutrition in society, especially when this involves a specific business leader or personality using their

bilateral connections with top government offices, it is important for UNICEF to avoid situations that could lead to the appearance of undue influence. This may sound obvious, but there is an art to managing such relationships; understanding the local context is important to safeguard UNICEF's neutrality and avoid potential complications should political administrations change over time.

An insight gained from the case studies is that businesses can also obstruct progress on nutrition if they believe it will put them at a commercial disadvantage. This is the case when companies, especially in the food and beverage industry, actively lobby against regulations – such as food labelling or restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy food – that would protect children's right to nutrition but could lead to lost profits. As illustrated in the case study on Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, these companies have been known to actively push back on the regulatory measures that UNICEF and its partners were supporting governments to put into place. It is for this reason that due diligence is critical in any business engagement.

4.2 OVERARCHING INSIGHTS

In addition to the specific learnings generated under each business focus area, there are a number of overarching insights that cut across several case studies. These are presented below and start with a review of characteristics of engagements that were initiated by UNICEF and those in which business reached out first. Thereafter, reflections are provided on cross-cutting areas, including achieving scale through regulatory measures; how UNICEF and business can learn from each other; how business and governments view each other; the need to continuously evaluate risks; and the different approaches taken by programme and corporate liaison teams.

a) When UNICEF initiates engaging business.

In some cases, UNICEF took the first steps to strategically reach out to specific sectors or companies to address nutrition programme outcomes that these companies were uniquely placed to help achieve. When UNICEF first contacted a business entity, it often took time to find those willing to engage, such as in the case of ready-made garment companies in Bangladesh, tea estates in Kenya, and food processing companies in Moldova. It was not unusual for UNICEF's initial approaches to companies to be ignored.

Using public health nutrition arguments was not effective in catching the interest of these companies. Instead, it was necessary to speak and use the language of business to get companies to join. What seemed to work best was making the business case using examples of cost-effectiveness and increased productivity (e.g., through reduced absenteeism). UNICEF teams were most successful in enrolling

companies when they used messaging that stressed that nutrition was a good business investment, using evidence-based statements (e.g., from the Copenhagen Consensus) that showed actual expected returns on investment in monetary amounts.

Another insight gained from these experiences was the wariness that many companies had in undertaking an engagement with UNICEF in case it uncovered problems related to child labour, which could quickly ruin their reputation. This was a concern of the tea estates in Kenya, the ready-made garment companies in Bangladesh and the Sansiri property development company in Thailand. To respond to these concerns, UNICEF explained to business owners that the organization would not name and shame, but rather, would work with them to better detect, address and prevent child labour issues to uphold UNICEF's commitments to child rights.

Another insight generated was that having professional branding was helpful in getting businesses to engage in UNICEF's programme initiatives. This was the case with the Mothers@Work initiative in Bangladesh and the I4N platform in India. Having a professional programme package including an attractive logo seemed to pique the interest of business entities and secure their buy-in .

b) When business initiates engaging UNICEF.

In other cases, it was business that initiated the first contact with UNICEF (e.g., Beko, DSM in Nigeria and Sansiri in Thailand). When these businesses approached UNICEF, it was often through the offer of support (e.g., funding or in-kind) to the organization.

An overarching insight generated from this scenario was that in most cases, the rationale behind the company's approach to UNICEF was its desire to secure a formal engagement to enhance its public image and reputation within its own business sector and with its consumers. A close affiliation with UNICEF was considered valuable and "good for business". Given this, it is important for UNICEF not to underestimate the immense value that business partners gain from their association with the organization due to its global brand recognition and sterling reputation. As such, UNICEF must maximize to the full extent possible what it can gain from such business engagements for the benefit of children. In other words, such engagements should not allow the benefits to skew more heavily to the business entity, as has happened in the past. For example, the amount of funding that UNICEF received from Beko was comparatively modest at €1 million relative to the immense resources of Beko and its parent company and considering the significant commercial and publicity benefits that Beko gained from the #EatLikeAPro campaign.

When companies approach UNICEF, these factors should be borne in mind and UNICEF should remain steadfast that any engagements formed only focus on those activities that directly relate to the organization's programmes and which are worth doing from the perspective of needing business to achieve priority nutrition outcomes.

Other lessons were learned around how these types of engagements came to be. In some situations, the executive leadership in a company (e.g., DSM in Nigeria) approached UNICEF's top leadership when it was known that UNICEF was open to engaging with the business sector on nutrition programming. It was sometimes challenging to translate these high-level agreements into field programmes that addressed the most pressing nutrition priorities on the ground. For example, when these first encounters and connections were first made at the country level (such as Sansiri in Thailand or during the second phase of the DSM engagement in Nigeria), the process to co-develop field programmes tended to proceed more smoothly as the planning took place closer to the field.

c) Understanding how the government and business engage and interact.

While much of the focus has been on how UNICEF and the business sector interact, the case studies also highlight the importance of understanding how the government views a particular business sector or company, and vice versa. This includes understanding any history that might exist (especially distrust or other conflicts), since being aware of these dynamics is essential when deciding to engage with a particular business sector or company.

As described in the I4N case study, UNICEF India needed to carefully gauge how to develop the platform to bring on board hundreds of companies to support the development of workforce nutrition programmes. However, to keep in coherence with the government, UNICEF had to proceed cautiously to exclude any direct contact with the food and beverage sector given past sensitivities between this sector, the government and civil society groups.

Another example can be drawn from the case study on Mexico, which showed it was impossible for UNICEF to find space to work with the Ministry of Health on nutrition issues during the early years due to the close relationship between the Government and the food and beverage industry at that time. After a new Administration took office and reduced the influence of business within the government, there was space for UNICEF Mexico to become more involved in nutrition in general and in preventing childhood obesity in particular.

d) Regulatory measures: Achieving impact at scale by looking at business engagement from a different perspective.

Several of the case studies illustrate how UNICEF has also employed various approaches to address the impact of business on children – not through *engagements with* companies but by *engaging on* their practices through regulatory efforts. Some elements of this work are mentioned earlier in the Section 4.1 describing business impact on communities and the food environment. Using regulatory measures has allowed the organization to have massive reach and impact.

Drawing from the case studies on salt iodization in ECAR and in Thailand, UNICEF provided technical support to a number of governments to *engage on* the entire salt sector by promoting mandatory legislation that specified that all salt bound for human consumption must be iodized. Self-regulation to achieve salt iodization often did not work, therefore, working via regulatory measures was UNICEF's preferred strategy.³³⁰ UNICEF also realized how mandatory salt iodization could level the playing field for all companies in the sector, helping to coalesce the sector as a whole to support government programmes to eliminate iodine deficiency.

Similar insights can also be drawn from UNICEF's experiences working to prevent childhood obesity in Latin America. In Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, UNICEF realized that to protect the rights of children to adequate nutrition, the most strategic approach was supporting national governments to *engage on* the unhealthy business practices of the food and beverage sector via specified regulatory measures. These measures included mandatory legislation to end the aggressive marketing of unhealthy food to children and introduce front-of-package labelling systems or mandatory standards governing foods available in schools. As with salt iodization, research has shown that allowing the food and beverage sector to self-regulate its marketing practices is not effective in making the desired changes to protect and improve nutrition.^{331,332}

In reflecting on UNICEF's experiences in the LAC region, the most effective strategy for building UNICEF's contribution to the prevention of childhood obesity has been to provide support to governments through partnerships with like-minded groups, including civil society, research and academic institutions, as well as other United Nations organizations experienced in this space, such as the Pan American Health Organization.

e) UNICEF and business can learn from each other.

UNICEF's decades of engaging business for nutrition outcomes has also made clear that UNICEF staff can learn new skills from business. For example, staff from UNICEF Thailand were able to learn valuable multimedia campaign skills from their work with Sansiri on the Iodine First and

Best Start campaigns and apply these new skills to other programmes requiring multimedia communications support.

Likewise, business can learn new skills and gain technical depth from UNICEF, including in the case of Sansiri, which developed a zero-tolerance policy on child labour across all its sub-contractors. Business can also gain a sense of purpose around supporting children and protecting child rights. Having both business and UNICEF learn from each other helps to create the balance that is needed in UNICEF's engagements with business.

f) Opportunities and risks with businesses continually evolve and thus need to be reassessed regularly.

In engaging with business, UNICEF's experiences illustrate how important it is to continually re-assess risks and concerns, since business, political, social and public health landscapes are not static and instead change over time. This was the case in engaging with salt companies in ECAR during the 1990s and early 2000s to achieve salt iodization for human consumption. Today, in face of high dietary salt intakes and the link to non-communicable diseases, these same companies with which UNICEF once sought to engage are now actively lobbying against global recommendations on salt intakes.

Another example is that when UNICEF first engaged with a confectionery company in Argentina, it had a solid reputation at both the regional and global levels as a company giving high priority to promoting and protecting children's rights. However, in today's climate of growing childhood obesity levels, considering the company's product line of sweets, confectionaries, and unhealthy foods, it is impossible for UNICEF and the company to have a direct relationship for reasons described in earlier sections.

These examples underscore that the array of benefits and risks related to engaging with the same business partner may change dramatically over time. As a result, UNICEF needs to be proactive and vigilant in continuously assessing and analysing these changing dynamics.

g) UNICEF's programme teams and corporate liaison teams may approach the same nutrition issue from different perspectives.

Another insight arising from the case studies is the recognition that it is sometimes challenging to get UNICEF's nutrition experts and private sector experts on the same page to engage with business for nutrition outcomes. Varying views should be expected, for example, on the programme focus and how to pitch the programme to business partners in a way that resonates with their different audiences. While it is crucial that all perspectives be recognized as valuable, it may take time for these different teams to coalesce on the programme approach to take. It is important that these teams work together throughout the programme cycle (e.g., situation analysis,

strategic planning) so that there is common understanding around the relevance of business to achieving programme objectives and around the best way to engage business in programming. The outcome – improved nutrition for children and women – should always be at the forefront, and the engagement must make strategic sense for nutrition programming to avoid being ineffective or harmful.

CONCLUSIONS

Private sector partners can add tremendous value beyond the donation of money for nutrition outcomes and have a role to play in implementing the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030. This value added has been demonstrated in a number of the case studies presented in this compendium, especially when UNICEF clearly identified the strategic role that business was uniquely able to play in achieving important nutrition goals.

Unsurprisingly, nutritional impact was amplified when the engagement involved an entire business sector (e.g., salt producers or RUTF producers) compared to engaging solely with a single company. Successful engagements also seem to be those that do not lead to increased costs or reduced profits for a company. The sector-wide engagements most likely to be sustainable are those related to producing nutrition goods that resulted in increased sales, profits and/or business viability for the company.

That said, when engaging business, it is also important for UNICEF teams to carefully consider whether the engagement truly offers an added value for its nutrition field programmes, especially after accounting for the investment of UNICEF staff time and effort. As such, a business engagement must not be an objective in and of itself, but rather, must strategically position UNICEF to achieve nutrition programme outcomes for children and women that otherwise would not be possible.

As underscored throughout this compendium, UNICEF takes great care to ensure that engaging business poses no risks to the organization’s reputation, credibility, and ability to carry out its mission to protect children’s rights, including the right to adequate nutrition. Rather these engagements should serve to promote and protect children’s rights.

The lessons learned from the ten case studies reviewed in this compendium and the practical insights they have generated provide an important contribution to UNICEF’s growing evidence base on what it means to effectively engage with a wide array of business entities in a way that helps the organization achieve priority nutrition outcomes.

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