

Foreword

Why do people do what they do? This has become the single most important question throughout my career.

A health centre with electricity, a top-of-the-line delivery room and training for midwives – this was UNICEF’s answer to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality in Kano, northern Nigeria. While registers at the local health centres reported a remarkable 80% of women completing their prenatal care visits, barely 25% returned to deliver their children. Dialogue with local nurses revealed that women in this area had a strong desire, a need even, to deliver on their own. It was common practice for midwives to stand outside a mother’s room in her home and only enter upon hearing a cry pierce the air. This was how mothers demonstrated their strength and earned prestige and social validation.

Supplying the ‘right’ thing and placarding posters with the ‘right’ information will never be enough.

During my trip to Kano, it became very clear that we had done everything to ensure that the best infrastructure was in place, but very little to consider the actual mothers who would be using it. This experience and the many that followed have proven time and again that supplying the ‘right’ thing and

placarding posters with the ‘right’ information will never be enough. It is impossible to solve a problem without partnering with the people you aim to serve, asking them questions and understanding their behaviours in the context of their wider lives.

In 2020, UNICEF launched an organizational change process to support a new way of tackling development and humanitarian challenges, one that relies on science-driven change programmes and embraces the complexity of human decision-making. This required expanding the Communication for Development ‘C4D’ foundation that we had built over the last thirty-five years with modernized approaches to community engagement and increased expertise in behavioural and social sciences. Our timing couldn’t have been better. In 2020, we were responding to urgent and new challenges at an unprecedented scale. The Covid-19 pandemic brought the importance of quality, people-focused approaches front and centre. Our corporate effort to redefine a Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) function within UNICEF was met with support from the executive office and core funding to make it a reality.

The pages that follow tell the story of the organizational transformation that has defined the last few years. UNICEF staff and SBC experts have not been shy, pouring into these pages the early triumphs, the bumps along the way and the challenges that lie ahead. Their reflections and perspectives paint a portrait of the past, present and future of SBC at UNICEF and beyond. With the largest institutional workforce in this field, UNICEF has the potential to influence SBC policy and practice. We can support

governments and operational stakeholders to reshape national systems to leverage behavioural innovations and community-driven solutions. We can pave the path towards social and relief services that align with the needs, values, dynamics and norms of communities. Most of all, we can do this while building trust to better prepare us for the crises to come.

Social and Behaviour Change is integral to achieving nearly all of UNICEF’s core objectives.

Social and Behaviour Change is integral to achieving nearly all of UNICEF’s core objectives. The efforts described in this publication illustrate the dedication of our staff: to innovating relentlessly, challenging ourselves endlessly and striving for technical excellence in the fight for children’s rights. I hope these pages inspire partners and spark investments that recognize SBC’s critical role in accelerating progress and closing the gaps towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – securing a better future for children and families all over the world.



Omar Abdi,
Deputy Executive
Director,
Programmes,
UNICEF HQ



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Hear SBC practitioners across the globe break down the limits and possibilities of three letters that are oft-misunderstood, hotly contested and greatly underestimated.



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Wake up! We Need to Change the World

By **Vincent Petit**
Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

Illustration by **Katya Murysina**



35 years ago, I watched a crowd use sledgehammers to smash a colourful wall on TV. Confused but excited, the true magnitude of German reunification, an event that would redefine geopolitical landscapes, eluded me. Still, even as a 10-year-old, the change in the air was palpable.

Soon after, a muppet with the face of Sylvester Stallone and the garb of an army general came on French TV every day to brag about American power and its role in exporting democracy. Then came the phrase 'launching a scud' as a cool way to deliver the most devastating of insults.

I remember adoring the silly character on the screen, completely oblivious to the irony. I remember being on the receiving end of a few scuds in the schoolyard. I even remember Baghdad's skies glowing green. These moments obviously look very different now, in the rear-view mirror.

As adults, we're expected to understand the gravity of what's going on in the world today. And while we may have the language and context to understand and discuss current events, do we actually feel the weight of them? Does it move us? Do we rise to the challenges or do we scroll past them?

Last summer, all I had to do was look out my window to watch the Big Apple turn orange as Canada burned. The media struggled to keep pace with the onslaught of environmental catastrophe: acute malnutrition in Somalia, floods in Libya and Pakistan, cyclones ravaging dozens of countries. How many more lives need to be lost to freakish and ever-more frequent crises to finally make us frogs leap from the boiling seawater?

The rise of far-right political parties across Europe is closing in on civic spaces and driving neighbouring cities, even neighbouring houses,

further and further apart. Policies that discriminate on the basis of race, origin, gender and sexuality have ignited social justice movements marching in radical opposition. Artificial intelligence is quickly headed into unknown territory, raising concerns over its impact on job markets and wealth inequality.

The polycrisis unfolding before us is a complex tapestry woven from the decisions made by individuals in power and the collective choices of the many. A treaty is signed, a policy is implemented, a society demands change – the ebb and flow of history is not a predetermined script but a narrative evolving from countless decisions, both large and small, made by world leaders and ordinary citizens alike. Choices are the only things that separate a better future from a frightening one.

We need to open our eyes to the flocks of swans wading in the water. They are not as black as they seem.¹

I often wonder how the Covid-19 pandemic garnered such a global reaction when the ongoing crisis of our dying planet fails to be acknowledged with appropriate policy measures. Was it the sudden and sweeping nature of the pandemic? No. A microbe bringing the world to its knees was hardly a black swan event¹. The continued destruction of ecosystems and conquest for natural resources only makes nightmares like Covid more and more frequent. We need to open our eyes to the flocks of swans wading in the water. They are not as black as they seem.

A few years ago, I bought a small book entitled *Letters to My Daughter* that provided templates for me to write her letters that she would read in the future. To this day, I have yet to write a single word. It feels impossible to write something useful for a child that might meet the middle or end of the challenges we are only at the beginning of. I was afraid, and still am, to ask myself if I could genuinely tell her I had done enough, not only as a citizen but as a professional.

It is not hyperbole to say that as I write this, a 13-year-old is forcing my hand. My daughter is constantly pushing me to be better, to not sit idly by and let injustice unfold. The horrors of today and the current and future generations impacted by them should be forcing everybody's hand, especially the hands of those working to defend their rights.

Though we may belong to institutions that have but a small influence on the world, we engage decision-makers (high-level government officials, financial institutions, powerful philanthropists, private stakeholders) who have a much greater one. If you are reading this magazine, it probably means you can change conversations, influence the way people behave and support collective action to secure a better future for children. Or perhaps you want to, but don't yet know how.

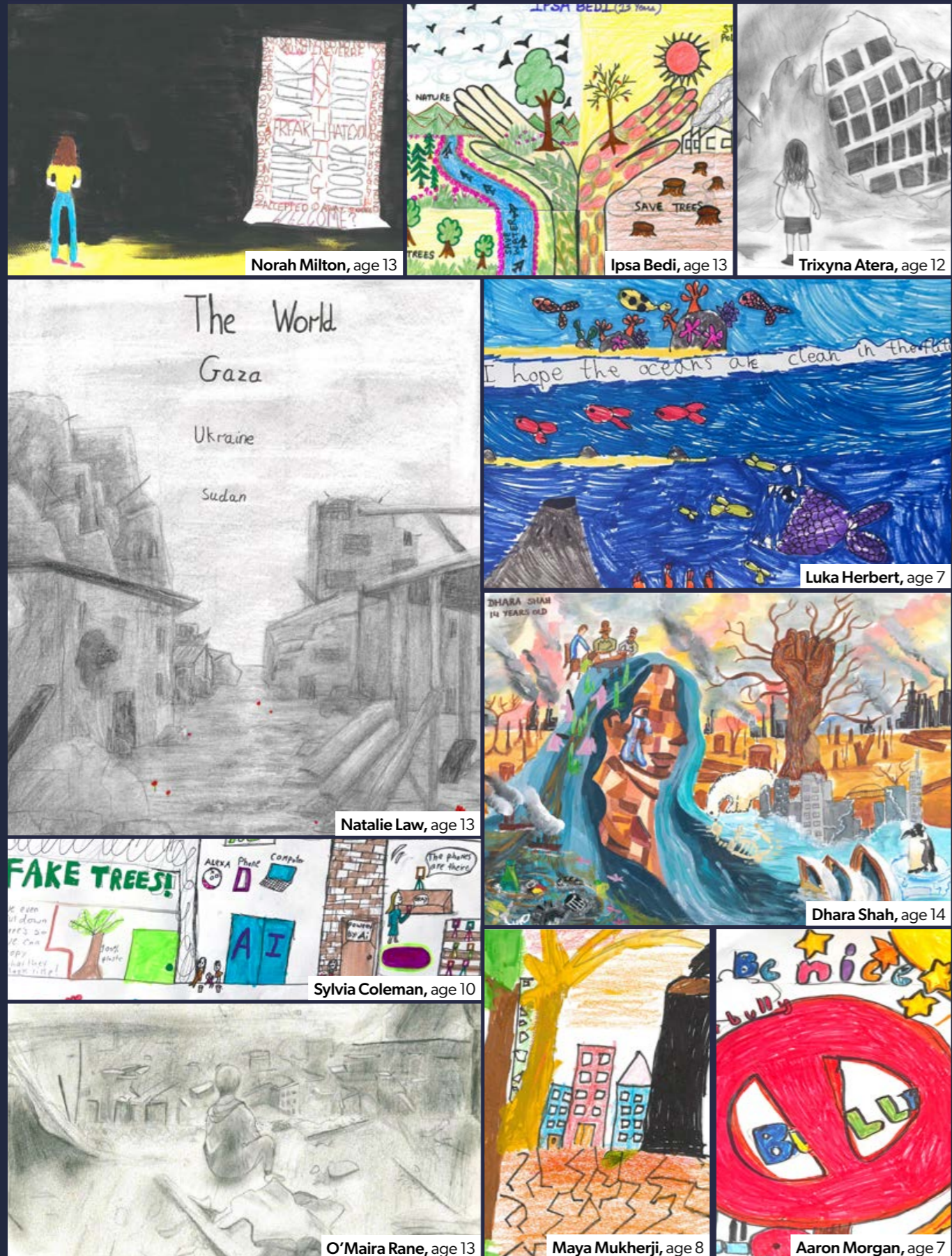
If there is one thing to take away from this publication altogether, let it be that you have the power to influence what's coming. You don't have to take these challenges lying down. You don't have to take them on alone, either.

We can support duty bearers and make equity and social justice their guiding principles. Together, we can achieve the ambitions that international agreements and conventions have set out to accomplish.

Our individual agency is our privilege. Let's use it.

¹ A black swan event refers to a rare, unpredictable event with severe impact.

When Kids Worry about **the** Future...



...They Can't Think about Their Futures



The Road to 2030

What if *we did things differently?*



50% of SDGs are not on track to meet their targets... 30% have stalled or reversed

WHAT IF we could fully harness the power of SBC to accelerate and get Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track?

Source: UN, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*.

1 billion

children are considered to be at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of the climate crisis

WHAT IF all children had a real say in the decisions being made about their future?

Source: UNICEF UK, news release, August 20, 2021.

1 in 5

children globally are unvaccinated or undervaccinated

WHAT IF underserved populations could set the priorities for global health policies?

Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2023*, iii.

91 million

of the world's 164 million unregistered children live in Africa

WHAT IF we had systems that accounted for every child everywhere?

Source: UNICEF, *A Statistical Update on Birth Registration in Africa, 2022*.



41% of young children did not consume any vegetables or fruit during the previous day

WHAT IF food systems prioritized people over profit?

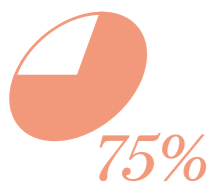
Source: "Infant and young child feeding", UNICEF Global Databases, 2022.

460 million

children live in conflict zones

WHAT IF we invested in community preparedness and resilience as much as we do in emergency response?

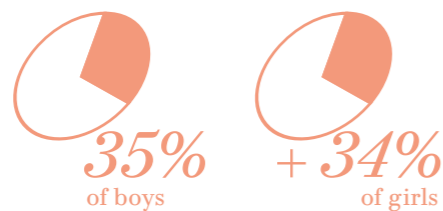
Source: UNICEF, *Humanitarian Action for Children 2024 Overview*.



75% of girls & women in Sub-Saharan Africa oppose the continuation of female genital mutilation

WHAT IF norms could be leveraged to help instead of harm?

Source: "Female Genital Mutilation", UNICEF Global Databases, 2024.



35% of boys + 34% of girls justify men beating their wives

WHAT IF children were exposed to non-violent forms of conflict resolution?

Source: "Violence Against Children", UNICEF Global Databases, 2023.

1.5 million

children in Ukraine are at risk of depression, anxiety and PTSD

WHAT IF mental health and psychosocial services were considered basic services?

Source: UNICEF, news release, February 21, 2023.



85% of people are worried about the impact of online disinformation

WHAT IF people could trust public institutions for guidance?

Source: UNESCO and Ipsos, *Study on the impact of online disinformation during election campaigns (2023)*.

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A Dispatch from Down the Line pt.I

What will change now mean for our future?

EMERG-MAIL LITE APP

23 AUG, 2058

< 42 UNREAD

! NEW MAIL

FROM: Kaye <kaye@UNresponse.org>

TO: Linh <linh8901@zmail.com>

Dear Linh,

Today was the hardest day since the flood. Every other person who comes up to me asks if they can go home. I hate saying no, but it's just not safe yet. But it doesn't matter what I say. Rumours spread like wildfire here. People fear their homes are being looted, or worse, being searched by the government.

There is so much mistrust. People have been lying on our intake forms about their race, making up health conditions and faking relationships because they believe it will get them better sleeping arrangements and medical attention, and prevent them from getting separated from their loved ones. We are constantly battling the legacy of trauma from emergency shelters like these. I can't tell you how many times I have been bribed with cryptocurrency.

This is the fourth devastation in three years. Can you imagine? Just when this place starts to get back on its feet, lightning strikes again. Each bolt stronger than the last.

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TODAY: 43°C



Fated to Fall, *Fighting to Rise*

By **Ola Alhaj** CEO and founder of Reco project, age 23, Syrian Arab Republic

Photo: On 1 March 2023 in A'zaz, north-west Syria, UNICEF Family Hygiene Kits are distributed to families at a camp for families displaced by the earthquakes. © UNICEF/UN0795153/English

By the time I was 23, I had experienced war, displacement, national financial crises, even earthquakes. I had witnessed the destruction of homes, the loss of loved ones, the migration of hundreds of people I know. I had endured unimaginable pain and suffering. My dreams? Shattered. My chance of leading a normal life? Stolen by the conflicts and the effect of climate change in my region.

But I wasn't going to let my circumstances dictate my future. I may not have grown up in an environment that enabled me to thrive, but I worked hard. I may not have had the same educational opportunities and resources as founders from other parts of the world, yet I founded an environmental NGO, one of the first in Syria. In spite of the odds against me, I remained fiercely determined to make a difference. In a single year I provided mentorship to over 500 young people in circular economies and climate action. I'm proud to report that I am on track to graduate this year with a degree in Natural Science.

We cannot let the fear of making a wrong step stop us from taking it.

Still, my dreams are much larger. As a teenager surrounded by crisis, I dreamed of a world without war and violence. A world where everyone lives with dignity. A world where I feel safe, where my voice is heard, where I have the right to live outside of survival mode.

The ongoing conflicts and the hopelessness that has pervaded my region have made this dream harder and harder to hold on to. The current global landscape has left me and many young people feeling disillusioned and uncertain about our

futures. The problems that face our world are daunting in their depth and complexity. It often seems hard to know where to start. But we cannot let the fear of making a wrong step stop us from taking it.

The United Nations must make concerted efforts to rebuild trust with young people, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region. There is a perception that the UN is unable to effectively address the challenges that young people face, which has further eroded their confidence in the organization. To repair this, the UN must redouble efforts to highlight the real threats facing children and youth in the region. It is not enough to make recommendations. It is not enough to address basic human needs. The challenges we face go far beyond that. There is no amount of food that will save people from being rained on with explosives. Responsibilities to follow international humanitarian law and reduce the use of fossil fuels are consistently ignored. This comes at a grave cost: mass destruction and loss of human life.

The youth of the world – myself and your children – are desperate for a system that condemns violence in all its forms. How can we possibly give hope to future generations with the same ineffective system that has failed our parents, our grandparents, and now us?

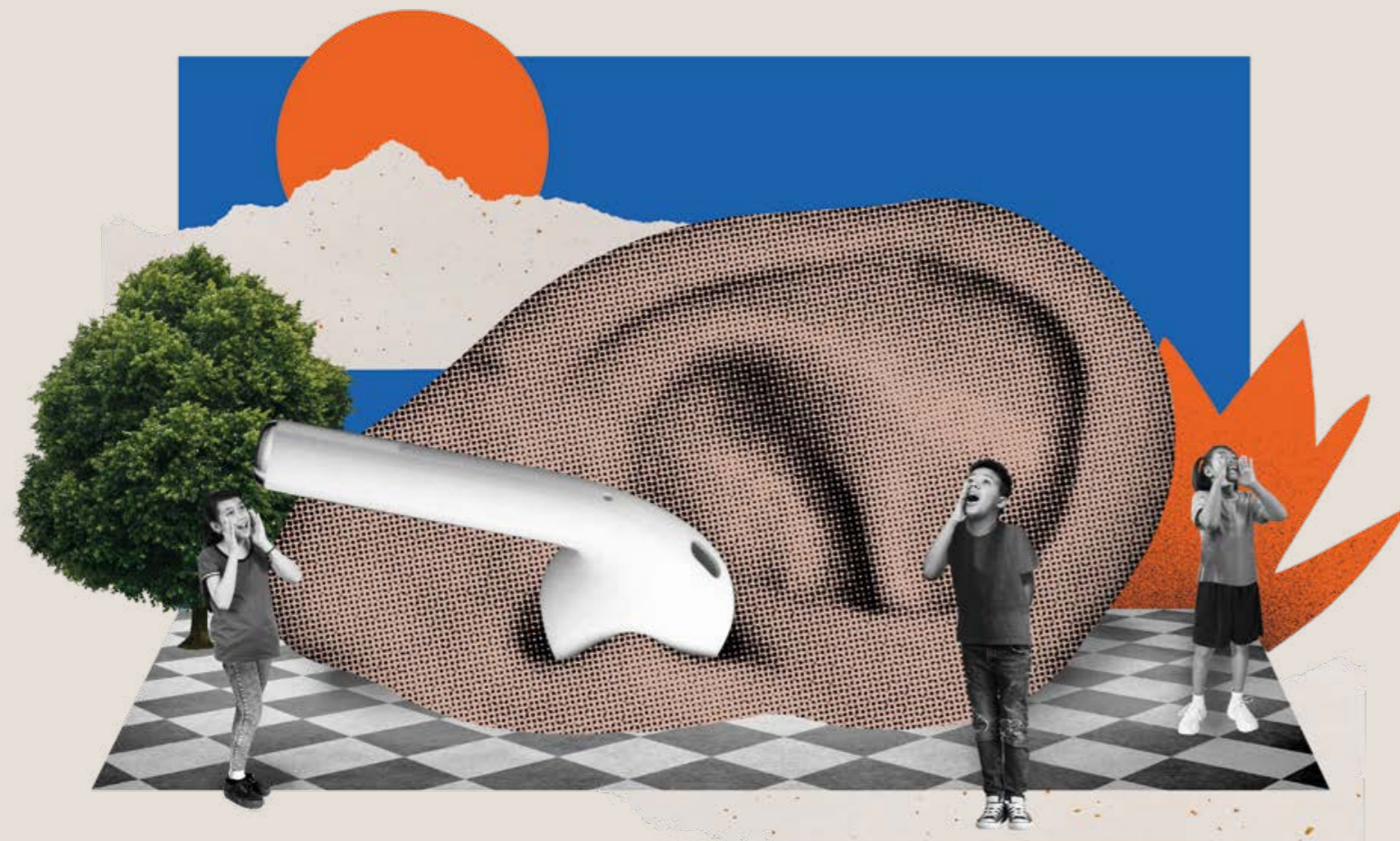
We must keep the voices in power accountable to the voices that are rarely heard. We must forge a future where communities, especially young people, get to make decisions about their futures. We need unwavering commitment and focused efforts from UN agencies to listen, protect and centre us. Through this, we can bring about real change.



Is UNICEF Really Listening to Children?

By **Audrey Franchi**, SBC Officer, Knowledge Management, UNICEF HQ, and **Regina Madanguit**, Storyteller, Common Thread

Illustration by **Oleg Borodin/Tillanelli**



We hear your words. But we listen to your actions.

UNICEF is listening. But are its actions loud enough? How can UNICEF and partner organizations support more meaningful participation from children and youth?

LISTEN TO YOUTH VOICES, REGARDLESS OF WHAT THEY SAY

Throughout history, young people have had to challenge and disrupt the status quo to build a better future for themselves. The same is true today. Their views may not always align with UNICEF's, which accounts for many political considerations. But if UNICEF and its partners are committed to cultivating meaningful youth engagement, they must engage in uncomfortable conversations. Even if – and especially when – youth are critical of policies and actions.



MAKE YOUTH INTEGRAL TO DECISION-MAKING

“I aspire to live in a world with inclusion where children, regardless of their different abilities, are involved in decisions about their present and future lives.”

Catherine Mantwe, UNICEF Botswana's first Youth Advocate

Images of children easily take the spotlight. Shouldn't their voices and opinions be just as visible, especially when it comes to decisions that impact their future? What will it take to empower UNICEF's Child Advisory Boards to exert real influence? Realizing Catherine's wishes will realize the wishes of children all over the globe.

EXPAND INITIATIVES TO LET CHILDREN AND YOUNGER ADOLESCENTS PARTICIPATE

Important progress has been made to engage adolescents and young people between the ages of 15 and 24, but what about those under the age of 15?

Initiatives like Child-Friendly Cities and Child Rights Clubs should be expanded to the Global South, where they are currently under-represented. Additional platforms should be created to challenge the notion that there is a minimum age to participate in politics. Engaging children early, through diverse platforms, allows them to input meaningfully into decision-making processes throughout their lives.

SUPPORT INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS BEYOND UNICEF

UNICEF has invested in platforms to receive feedback from children, but it is just one of the many institutions that influence children's lives. UNICEF should consider how it can support large institutions, in both government and the private sector, to engage and learn from children.

Kids in Crisis Means Kids in Charge

By **Mogesh Sababathy**
UNICEF Youth Climate
Champions Consultant,
age 25, Malaysia



Two boys from Sabah, Malaysia, play on the dockside.
Photo: © UNICEF / Shehzad Noorani

Even though I left at the age of ten, I can vividly remember my commute to school in Labuan, an island in East Malaysia. My 20-minute journey on a military truck was perfumed by fish guts, sea air and burning plastic from nearby fishing boats. Our route cut through the shore roads, the wind carrying stories of a community shaped by the ebb and flow of the tides. Every morning my senses met the toll of environmental negligence on my community, only I didn't know it yet.

In Labuan, the fishing and tourism industries are deeply ingrained in our way of life. I had a classmate named Megat whose father often lamented the changing dynamics of fishing. A seasoned fisherman, he grew concerned about the dwindling catches compared to the days of his youth. The once-thriving fishing industry that had sustained generations was now grappling with the impact of the planetary crisis. What was once a sustainable practice was rapidly descending into a difficult and uncertain livelihood, as challenges posed by the changing climate altered traditional ways of life. Megat's father encouraged him to study hard and pursue a different path than that of his forefathers.

As the child of parents in the Royal Malaysian Air Force, I was exposed to life beyond the island. Our frequent transfers broadened my cultural understanding, heightened my ability to adapt and instilled in me a deep appreciation for the connection between communities and their environments. When my parents retired, we settled in the bustling, modern city of Kuala Lumpur. This transition sensitized me to the complexity of environmental issues and the different levels of environmental awareness in the two places I call home.

Kuala Lumpur feels markedly different from Labuan, where dependence on nature defines the experiences of fishermen like Megat's father. But that doesn't make the environmental challenges in Kuala Lumpur any less urgent. If anything, it highlights the need for a tailored approach to fostering environmental awareness, especially among young people who may not see or feel the effects in their urban surroundings.

These experiences led me to pursue a degree in Marine Biology and co-found an organization dedicated to enhancing ocean literacy among Malaysians. I became a UNICEF Youth Climate Champions Consultant to advocate for universal environmental education. While UNICEF's commitment to involving young people in climate action is commendable, it must continue to put forward solutions customized to meet their unique needs today.

To create a personalized approach, we must take time to understand the stories woven into the fabric of com-

global policy is designed. Recognizing the plurality of youth experiences is essential to shaping effective, inclusive solutions that resonate with a global audience.

In the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, we are facing the "era of global boiling". No one entity can single-handedly navigate the complex challenges presented by climate change. The interconnected and multifaceted nature of environmental issues demands a collective effort. There is only one organization that is committed to children's welfare and is uniquely positioned to foster collaboration among governments, NGOs, communities and young people. UNICEF can bring these stakeholders together to go beyond short-term relief and achieve impactful, scalable solutions that contribute to building a sustainable and resilient future for all.

By bringing together the wisdom of the past, the urgency of the present and the hope for a sustainable future, we can catalyze a holistic, inclusive movement. Our collective resilience

We are facing the "era of global boiling". No one entity can single-handedly navigate the complex challenges presented by climate change.

munities. Remember my classmate, Megat? Whose livelihood and family tradition began to disappear with the fish? UNICEF can create more impact by tailoring solutions that resonate with lived experiences like his. Amplifying the narratives of youth who have been impacted by climate change can help make these challenges more salient to young people who feel far away from these issues. This is crucial to building environmental awareness in urban contexts.

But it shouldn't stop there. The stories of young people in Kuala Lumpur deserve as much attention as those from Labuan. Diverse perspectives, when woven together, help us foster a nuanced understanding of the environmental crisis. From coastal villages to metropolitan centres, the lived experiences of young people need to be brought into the rooms where

depends on this harmonious collaboration, irrespective of our livelihoods or the landscapes we call home.



Please Proceed to the Gate

Towards more empathetic Social and Behaviour Change

By **Sherine Guirguis**
Director, *Common Thread*

Illustration by **Katya Murysina**

DO YOU MAKE GOOD DECISIONS UNDER PRESSURE?

Last week, I was rushing to get myself and my two young kids to the airport when the front gate to my house refused to open. I had devised a meticulous plan to arrive at the airport precisely two hours before our flight, and my stuck gate brought that plan to a screeching halt. This wasn't the first time this had happened, but I was still derailed by its timing.

Living on a small, remote island, I had zero hope that a timely repairman or my landlord could fix my gate in a reasonable amount of time. But what I did have was a strong social network. I called my heroic neighbour and slid a pack of wrenches to him. He managed to circumvent the electrical wiring and lodge the gate open just enough for three people and bags to squeeze through.

The scene at the airport wasn't my finest. My son, T-shirt on backwards, was tugging at my arm, begging for a doughnut as I frantically searched my purse for house keys that had vanished amidst the chaos. I was visibly tense, distracted and stressed over the security of my house. My open gate and missing house keys were an open invitation into my living room. The stress of living with a chronically unreliable gate was getting to me. Would I have to factor in time to deal with it every time I left the house? Would I forever be at the mercy of two iron doors?

Luckily, getting on a flight requires very little complex problem-solving. All I had to do was follow the signs and loud announcements to get to my destination; and I was successful in this scenario.

However, a few things had come together all at once to impact my mindset and my judgement when it came to anything beyond my immediate needs:

- * Time scarcity;
- * Exacerbated by the 'shock' of an infrastructure failure;
- * Layered atop a foundation of low trust in the resources available to solve my problems, leading to;
- * Insecurity about my future state.

Ultimately, I made my flight. Seated next to me were my kids, glued to their iPads and downing doughnuts for dinner, with clothes on backwards.

In the grand scheme of things, my broken gate was a very minor inconvenience. But imagine infrastructure or services failing someone in more dire straits, someone in desperate need of medical attention or on their way to provide it. Imagine this failure happening to millions of people, all over the world, on a regular basis. Imagine if they didn't have a trustworthy neighbour to swoop in and save the day. How might it shift our understanding of their behaviour in one aspect of their lives (their parenting strategies, diet or health choices), or at a singular moment (at a health clinic, for example)? How might an appreciation for what they'd experienced a few hours, days, months or years beforehand change our perception of their present-day decisions?

What if we deeply understood the systemic scarcities that burden the people we're trying to serve? Now imagine if we could predict the various shocks that might compound this scarcity. We might come to find that seemingly irrational behaviour is actually completely rational once wrapped in context. We might find that the path to healthier behaviour is much more complex than simply offering better information.

In their groundbreaking 2007 research, Princeton economist Sendhil Mullainathan and psychologist Eldar

Sharif found that scarcity of time, money, social support and access to services consumes such a significant portion of an individual's mental bandwidth that they are left with fewer cognitive resources available for other tasks. The narrowing of attention, known as 'tunnelling', that results from a focus on immediate concerns inhibits people from considering equally important, but less urgent, aspects of their life. In other words, when we are burdened with a high 'bandwidth tax', we are less successful at navigating complex decision-making, resisting impulses and planning for the future.

I can't help but wonder what different settings and scenarios might gain from adopting the wayfinding mechanism of airports². Why can't we design systems for other aspects of life that take people skilfully by the hand and steer them towards the best choices possible, using elegant design, well-researched science and more empathetic support systems?

With a mindset like this, we might never again design a vaccination poster for war-torn Syria or Somalia, under the naive assumption that people can absorb its information and even change their behaviour because of it. When we truly understand how parents fear for their children's futures and the pressure they face to feed their families, we might think twice before simply 'raising awareness' about the harmful effects of child marriage or education inequality. This deeper understanding might also shift how we engage with people. We might begin to consider that people suffering from trauma and scarcity may be unable to effectively articulate their needs in a neatly-packaged survey response.

Identifying and removing the factors that place a high bandwidth tax on cognitive resources is just one of the many behavioural strategies proven to guide people to make healthier choices. There are many others. Programmatic strategies have much to gain from an understanding of the power of social norms and social networks that can support and motivate the people around them to make healthier choices and achieve their objectives – networks and people like my helpful neighbour.

Imagine what we can achieve when we understand how much people value social belonging and social identity, how trust is built and broken, how systems can be designed to encourage or discourage inequity or harmful practices. Decoding all of this can help us to anticipate and design for the complexity of human behaviour rather than be surprised, derailed and frustrated by it.

When a mother decides to vaccinate her vulnerable children, or a father to send his girls to school, it is easy to conclude that the ends justify whatever means directed them towards that positive choice. However, it's important that we see the means as an equal measure of our success. How we go about motivating people determines whether a decision becomes a habit, whether a law becomes part of a cohesive system. Our methods decide whether trust is built or broken, which greatly influences the sustainability of a result. Our process is where we get to embody organizational values and ethical integrity – it's where we build a foundation that supports collaboration and adaptability to future challenges.

So no, good decisions are hardly ever made under pressure. But as practitioners, we can make an effort to understand those pressures. With that understanding, we can work towards designing systems that are more equitable and empowering, offering people the space to choose better for themselves and their families. When we are proud of both what we've achieved and how we've achieved it, we'll have succeeded at implementing empathetic, collaborative and transformational Social and Behaviour Change.

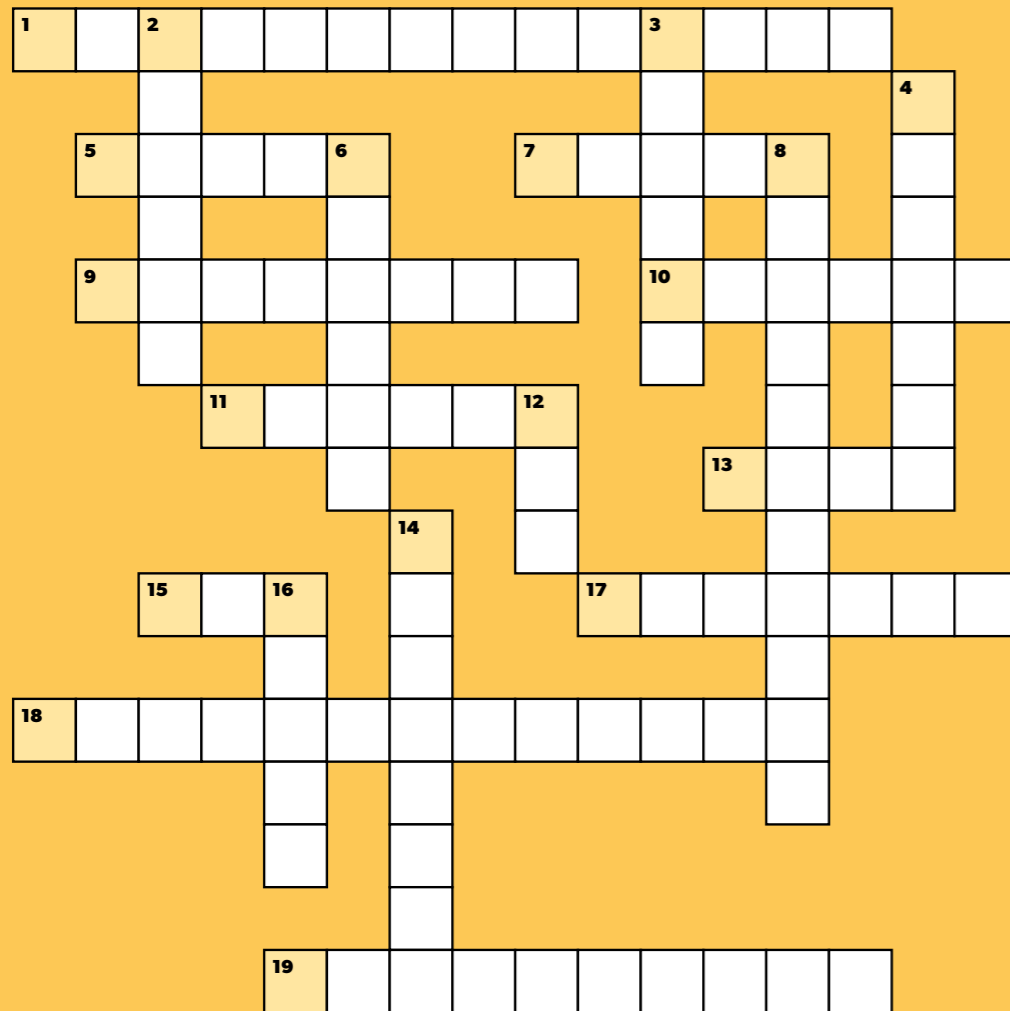
2 It's important to remember that airport wayfinding isn't only for the benefit of the traveller. It directs us to Duty Free shops, security lines and to queues that keep business class travellers separate from the rest of us. This is the critique of choice architecture. Who determines the ideal pathway, and are the choices always benevolent? Wayfinding for social impact needs to account for these considerations.

Think You Know SBC Backwards and Forwards?

What about **across** and **down**? Test your knowledge of sectoral slang, acronyms and general pretentiousness.

New to Social and Behaviour Change (SBC)? Give it a try and show off at your next party.

By **Michael Coleman**
Director, Common Thread



ACROSS

- 1** UNICEF's commitment to taking responsibility for its actions.
- 5** A society's unwritten guide to being accepted by others.
- 7** A way to influence people's choices to lead them to make specific decisions. Rhymes with sludge.
- 9** Economist Sendhil Mullainathan's theory about the cognitive effects of limited resources on decision-making.
- 10** Often confused with equality, it is the backbone of UNICEF's programmes.
- 11** The term Paolo Freire uses to describe the process of reflection and action upon the world to transform it. Rhymes with taxes.
- 13** The brain's unconscious filter, constantly messing with our decisions.
- 15** The odd one out of the '5 Whys', and critical to the long-term success of SBC programmes. It's not just about what we do, but about _____ we do it.
- 17** The effect of remembering (and usually preferring) things presented first.
- 18** To better align public action with people's needs, we need _____ from rights holders in duty bearers' processes and decisions.

DOWN

- 2** This architecture shapes the context to encourage healthy decisions.
- 3** Arnstein's theory of community engagement, often called the _____ of Citizen Participation. It also comes in handy when your cat is stuck in a tree.
- 4** A way of thinking that breaks down how things work together to understand complex issues.
- 6** A network that influences our decisions both online and offline.
- 8** A portmanteau for education and entertainment.
- 12** The acronym for a framework that suggests that behaviour can be analyzed by rings of influence. It's a little bit social, a little bit ecological and a whole lot used at UNICEF.
- 14** Self-_____ is the belief in one's ability to achieve a particular goal or complete a task.
- 16** Fill in the blank: It's _____ that no one but Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic people were involved in writing this paper.

**ANSWERS:
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Where are They Now? *SBC's missing 'C'*

While communication is still at the heart of SBC activities, the days of old-school campaigns are long gone. Leaflets and posters are... doing their best to move on.

We enlisted the creative genius of UNICEF's SBC Network to submit captions for what this poster is saying to its therapist.

The winning submission, as voted by our Editorial Board, was submitted by **Christopher Brooks**, SBC Specialist, Digital Engagement, UNICEF HQ.



View the runners-up online.

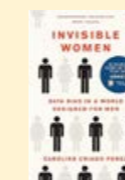
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"I had the dream again last night – the one where I'm a text message."

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**

Recommended Reads and Listens from SBC Experts



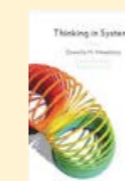
BOOK
Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men
Caroline Criado Perez



BOOK
Sway: Unravelling Unconscious Bias
Pragya Agarwal



BOOK
Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary
Edited by Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta



BOOK
Thinking in Systems: A Primer
Donella H. Meadows



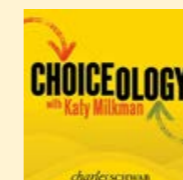
BLOG
AI to BI: Using artificial intelligence in qualitative research in the Middle East
Tim Ramsey, Chiara Cappellini



REPORT
Applying behavioural insights to intimate partner violence
Marta Garnelo, Chloe Bustin, Suzanne Duryea, Andrew Morrison



PODCAST
A Slight Change of Plans
Maya Shankar



PODCAST
Choiceology
Katy Milkman



BOOK
Cultural Agents Reloaded: The Legacy of Antanas Mockus
Carlo Tognato



BLOG
Frontline Behavioural Science



BOOK
Against Decolonisation
Olufemi O. Taiwo



BOOK
Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition
Paulo Freire



BOOK
Orientalism
Edward Said

Married off in Mozambique

Why do over half of girls in Mozambique get married before they're 18? SBC has some answers.

By **Ruben Cossa**, SBC Specialist, **Ketan Chitnis**, Chief of SBC, and **Angelo Ghelardi**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF Mozambique



Celebration of the International Menstrual Hygiene Day with the students of the complete Primary School Unit 13 of Chamanculo (Maputo), 28 May 2018. ©UNICEF/Claudio Favreille

Getting pregnant in primary school was not part of Lavela Manuela's life plan. Lavela started attending school at age 10. From the moment she stepped foot in a classroom, she knew she wanted to become a teacher.

For many girls, this isn't such a far-fetched dream. In Mozambique, however, it is a fragile ambition. More than half (53%) of girls under 18 are married³. In the northern province of Nampula, where Lavela is from, child marriage rates are even higher and occur even earlier, with most girls marrying before 18, and many as soon as they hit puberty. Among the 90% of girls who enter primary school in Mozambique, only 15% will enter secondary school.

How does this compare to Lavela's school in Nampula? There are 273 girls to 253 boys enrolled in Grade 1. By Grade 7, the year just above Lavela's, 18 boys and 5 girls remain.

Lavela worried about showing up to class once her pregnancy began to show. "I thought the other children would tease me," she admitted. She would be the only visibly pregnant girl at school. Amidst the social pressure, dropping out of school seemed like her only viable option.

But Lavela was surrounded by 'positive deviants' – people willing to resist the social norms that pressure girls to drop out of school. The president of her school council, Paulinho Macalla, was on a mission to reverse the cycle of poverty for girls in his school. He came to Lavela's house and begged her not to drop out. He even mobilized others to motivate her. Her aunt, Delfina Paissa, wanted

Lavela to pursue an education. "I put her in school as I had hoped she could get a job later." But when Lavela got pregnant, Delfina became torn between progressive and traditional values. She encouraged Lavela to get married, advising that "the man responsible for the pregnancy needs to take responsibility".

Support from positive deviants kept Lavela in school a bit longer, but eventually social and traditional pressures prevailed. Five months pregnant, Lavela moved to Napai, a remote village 64km from the provincial capital of Nampula, to live with her husband, 23-year-old Celestinho. The fate of her baby rested upon her ability to find safe and immediate transportation to the nearest health clinic, 12km away. Lavela went into labour prematurely and couldn't make it to the clinic on time. She lost her baby.

Even without the demands of motherhood, Lavela's dream of one day becoming a teacher continues to feel out of reach. Schools are few and far between in Napai. So Lavela spends her days farming and fetching wood and water.

THE DECK IS SEEMINGLY STACKED AGAINST GIRLS LIKE LAVELA.

In Mozambique, girls face poor access to school and healthcare. Even girls with an education struggle to secure job opportunities. Gender norms push women to carry the brunt of child-rearing. Traditional initiation rites inadvertently usher girls towards sexual activity as soon as they start menstruating. For caregivers and extended family, there is much to be gained socially and economically from marrying their daughters off early.

In 2017, social and behavioural research conducted by UNICEF Mozambique was able to identify what made child marriage such a prevalent and unrelenting choice. Their qualitative study sampled approximately 400 people across four provinces, offering valuable insight into what drives child marriage: inequitable health and educational systems, social pressure fuelled by poverty, misinformation about fertility, and inter-generational gender norms. While many child marriage strategies often focus on logical, evidence-based interventions, they omit one vital catalyst for human decision-making: emotions. The study revealed how powerful emotions like shame, honour, blessings and prestige can be for girls and their families. By

It'll take 300 years to wipe out child marriage at the current pace of global progress.⁴

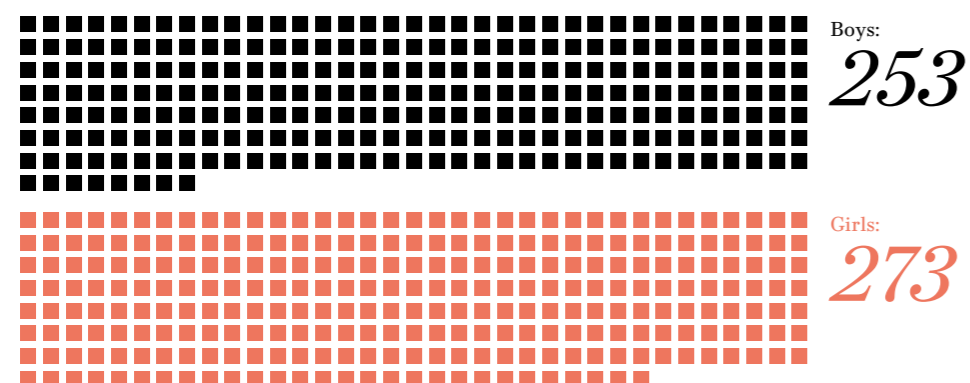
harnessing the emotions that trigger decisions, could girls in Mozambique meet different fates?

The research also revealed the power of people like Paulinho, the school council president. Positive deviants like him and Aunt Delfina can set new norms that empower girls to marry later in life. These influencers are critical to preventing life-threatening complications for girls and their babies, and can increase the potential for greater social and economic capital in the process.

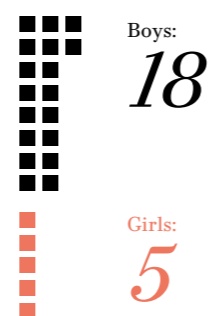
By 2018, these research findings had led to a National SBC strategy to eliminate child marriage. Girls and their circle of influencers came together to co-design interventions that could help flip the script. Instead of treating puberty as a rite of passage to sexuality, it was framed as a time for young women to grow in mind and body. Instead of viewing fertility as a race against the clock, it was explored

School attendance at Lavela's school in Nampula

Attending classes in Grade 1:



By Grade 7:



as something with a longer, more elastic time frame.

This reframing gave way to interventions that burst from the child protection mould, offering girls and their families viable alternatives to early marriage through reimagined health and education services. For example: if sexual and reproductive health services could counsel girls on their fertility and the implications of early sexual activity, girls might be empowered to delay sexual activity. Other interventions focused on supporting girls with skills to earn their own income, allowing them to see alternative paths towards economic freedom.

N'weti, UNICEF's non-governmental partner, facilitated community dialogues with religious leaders, school administrators, girls, boys and their parents. Over the course of six weeks, participants were supported to develop plans to realize their role in delaying child marriage. Before attending the community dialogues, only 28% of participating

Girls aged 15–19 in Nampula province believing they could negotiate their age of marriage:



Community leaders in Nampula and Zambezia willing to report child marriage:



girls aged 15-19 in Nampula province believed that they could negotiate their age of marriage. At the end of the six-week course, 99% believed they could. Before taking the course, 79% of community leaders in Nampula and Zambezia reported that they would be willing to collaborate with authorities to report and sanction individuals practising child marriage. Upon completing the course, that figure jumped to 96%.

In 2019, a new law against child marriage was passed, delaying the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18. As part of this law, schools were equipped with mechanisms to report cases of violence and child marriage and offer girls legal and protection services.

In 2021, a follow-up quantitative behavioural study on child marriage was undertaken in the same two districts as part of a larger global study. The results were impressive:

74% of respondents understood the negative consequences of child marriage, and believed that education provides more protection to a girl than marriage. 89% of respondents supported ending early marriage in their communities. Yet despite heightened awareness of the harms of child marriage, caregivers continued to succumb to social pressures to marry girls off early. Parents who stand against child marriage lose confidence in the face of others who disapprove and call them impious or bad parents. Complying with a perceived norm while silently disapproving of it is a phenomenon known as 'pluralistic ignorance'. When it comes to deeply entrenched customs and social norms like child marriage, this phenomenon is quite common.

Shifts in individual attitudes and agency are important milestones on the road to ending early marriage, but will not be enough to meet global or national goals. The next phase of this effort must place further emphasis on shifting social expectations of girls, boys and their caregivers. Safe spaces

for people to express their ideas on child marriage, modelled by positive deviants and influential gatekeepers (e.g., those in charge of initiation rites or marriage ceremonies), will be vital.

Ending early marriage is no simple task. It brushes against deep-seated norms that hold sacred history and traditions, norms that set gender roles and determine how power is distributed. Equipping girls and their families with the tools to break these cycles requires collaboration with many sectors: health, education, social policy and child protection. For girls like Lavela to reach their full potential, the alternatives to child marriage must prevail. SBC can help communities and caregivers leverage emotions for good.

Our teams and partners have proven that when we engage people in community dialogue, they can realize their power to change the status quo. This is a superpower that can change the lives of girls everywhere.

- 3 "Child marriage atlas", Girls Not Brides.
- 4 UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects 2023 update* (New York: UNICEF, 2023).
- 5 For a full account of key achievements, see UNICEF Ethiopia (2020). Endline KAP survey on menstrual hygiene management among schoolgirls and boys in 6 regions of Ethiopia (Afar, Gambella, Somali, Oromia, Amhara, and SNNP): Evaluation report. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: DAB Development Research and Training PLC.



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Teacher Fedila Beyan watches while Urji Abdusemed demonstrates how to properly wear sanitary pads to adolescent girls in Serkema Primary school. 22 March 2022, Serkema village, Kombolcha woreda, Oromia region. ©UNICEF Ethiopia/2022/Nahom Tesfaye

Empowering young men to support menstruation

An SBC study on menstruation in Ethiopia revealed that puberty and menstruation conjured strong feelings of shame in Ethiopian girls. Similarly to Mozambique, in Ethiopia menstruation is seen as a gateway to sexual activity and soon after, marriage.

Menstruating girls are often harassed by male classmates, resulting in girls not just missing school during their periods, but dropping out entirely. Before this study, there had never been a dedicated national survey on menstruation in Ethiopia or an effort to understand the attitudes and beliefs about menstruation among Ethiopian boys. Because menstruation is so closely

linked to the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector (WASH), UNICEF also conducted a national WASH Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey in parallel. This study uncovered significant service barriers limiting school attendance for menstruating girls. Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM) centres, designed to serve as safe spaces for menstruating girls, often went unused. For girls, entering a space designed only for menstruation was a humiliating, public announcement that she was on her period. Even more, girls often had to ask a male teacher for the key.

Armed with insights from these two studies, the UNICEF Ethiopia Country office got to work creating more accessible and female-friendly MHM facilities in schools. Alongside the redesign of these spaces were efforts to build capacity for local production and distribution of sanitary pads in schools and communities and initiatives to engage girls and boys in dialogue about the misperceptions around

menstruation. Through media, role-modelling and peer support, boys were educated about menstruation and empowered to support girls during their menstrual cycle.

WERE THESE INTERVENTIONS IMPACTFUL?

In 2016, 19% of girls reported having access to free sanitary pads at school. By 2020, that figure had jumped to at least 90%. From 2016 to 2020, the use of disposable sanitary pads increased from 50% to 80%. Female respondents reported that boys had stopped teasing them about menstruation at school. This was confirmed by male respondents, who also reported being more supportive of menstruating girls, through sharing notes with girls who missed classes, offering their clothes to girls with menstrual stains on their clothes, and helping them reach a safe space.

This represents a major step shift in behaviour for boys and an important step towards equity for girls in Ethiopia.

Talking in Circles

In Egypt, girls are coming of age in the company of community

By **Dina Heikal**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF Egypt, and **Gaia Chiti Strigelli**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF ESARO

Foreword written by **Sherine Guirguis**, Director, Common Thread

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Foreword

So you've made it through baby boot camp and the terrible twos. Your child is alive, healthy and emotionally well-adjusted. A quiet confidence creeps in. Perhaps you've got this whole parent thing figured out. You've metamorphosed from a well of desperation into a fountain of advice, eagerly doling it out to fresh-faced parents, unprompted. Let's be honest, there's something satisfying about dimming the clueless enthusiasm of new parents. "Say goodbye to sleep! I hope you like a mess!"

If you find yourself in the confident parenting stage – savour it. It doesn't last long. Soon enough, that confidence will make room for new fears. While you might have leaned on baby groups, familial advice or best-selling books for guidance and solace in the early childhood years, there is little transferable knowledge on parenting tweens and teens. Neither parent nor child can draw from the wisdom of generations who have traversed today's unique challenges. There is no manual that will teach parents how to prepare children to navigate violence, social media and the vast array of mental health challenges that adolescents face.

Navigating the tween and teenage years can be isolating and overwhelming for parents and children alike. Children often feel enormous pressure to carve out an identity

The unspoken pressure on girls and their parents in Egypt can often feel like a silent, skulking third caregiver in a family dynamic.

that satisfies both their parents and their own emerging needs as a young adult. On the journey to adulthood, children tend to pull away while parents fight to maintain control. In this process, a well-intentioned parent could make decisions that negatively impact their children – especially their girls.

In Egypt, even parents with the best intentions can wind up making decisions that lead to child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), gendered unemployment,



mental health challenges, and risks to safety and security online. These decisions can severely rupture or even destroy the relationship between girls and their families⁶, and women and their communities.

Egyptian parents make bad decisions for their children for the same reasons parents across the world do: they want to protect them from danger. They don't trust their children to make their own choices. In this unforgiving cycle of fear, one danger is traded for another.

In Egypt, the intense pressure and social expectations placed on girls keeps this wheel of well-intentioned, dangerous decisions spinning. The unspoken pressure on girls and their parents can often feel like

a silent, skulking third caregiver in a family dynamic. Even when parents themselves can intellectualize the harmful effects that child marriage or FGM can have on girls, they can still succumb to social and inter-generational expectations.

What if girls and parents facing critical decisions were thrown a lifeline? Could it support them to break the cycle of gender inequality? Could it support generations of women to become more confident, happy and successful? Could it help parents feel confident in raising their girls to succeed and uphold important family values?

Sounds too good to be true, right? Thanks to an initiative called Dawwie, this fantasy has become a reality in Egypt.

⁶ Sara P. Brennan, "Parenting practices in teen years set the stage for closeness, warmth later on", Penn State University, October 4, 2022.



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Girl talk goes nationwide

“Who is the family member that supports you the most?” a facilitator asks a group of girls, while wrapping her wrist with yarn. The facilitator passes a ball of yarn to one of the girls. She shares what support looks and feels like to her, while wrapping her wrist with yarn. Each girl gets a turn, sharing and wrapping their wrists until they are tied up in a web — physically and emotionally connected to one another.

This is a Dawwie storytelling circle, a safe space for girls to share their experiences growing up in Egypt. In these circles, girls get to learn about practical, girl-friendly and parent-approved services and resources for child protection and sexual and reproductive health. ‘Dawwie’ translates to a voice that ‘resonates and reverberates’, which is exactly what Dawwie has done.

What began as one of UNICEF Egypt’s flagship SBC programmes has blossomed into Egypt’s first fully-integrated, government-led empowerment initiative for girls. Dawwie equips young girls and their wider circle of support with skills to thrive. Storytelling circles and other engagements give mothers a window into the needs and fears of their daughters and other young girls in their community, and a space in which they can draw support and learn from other parents who are navigating this challenging journey alongside them. Even more, Dawwie is working to bridge the digital divide by equipping girls to safely engage with community-based information and communications technology.



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Dawwie is a multi-layered cake, with every layer contributing to the journey to empower girls and communities.

As part of Dawwie’s programming, frontline and social workers are trained to facilitate challenging discussions and create opportunities for girls to interact with decision-makers at national and local levels. The combination of these efforts has the potential to transform societal perceptions of girls. However, the magic of Dawwie truly lies in its simplicity. Breaking social barriers for girls can mean helping them claim their right to play, ride a bike, check facts online and negotiate with their fathers. These small but important victories can give girls the confidence to pursue greater heights and smash higher ceilings.

Partners that recognize the potential Dawwie holds for young people and their parents have been instrumental to scaling it. Since 2018, Dawwie activities have become increasingly integrated into the work plans of national institutions including the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), the Ministry of Health Promotion (MoHP) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS). Under the leadership of the First Lady of Egypt, Dawwie is now functional in 27 governorates and will soon be

linked to the national cash transfer programme. Progress is monitored and coordinated by a National Positive Parenting Coordination Mechanism established by Presidential Decree, which unites ministries, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

With over 10,000 trained social workers and indicators integrated into national systems, Dawwie is a glowing example of a comprehensive, fully-institutionalized approach to Social and Behaviour Change. Dawwie’s success has led to the founding of the National Investment Framework on Girls in Egypt, which was launched at the 2023 Commission on the Status of Women in New York to serve as a coordination mechanism for different stakeholders to contribute to the empowerment journey. Importantly, Dawwie has highlighted the need to enhance girls’ access to quality skills development opportunities, protection and sexual and reproductive health services, and community-based information and communications technology.

Dawwie is a multi-layered cake, with every layer contributing to the journey to empower girls and ultimately, communities. Through intergenerational dialogue and community forums, tradition meets modern conceptions of gender, support networks grow stronger and local priorities shape policy design. This is the recipe for social norms that support gender equality, leading to a better quality of life for everyone. That’s a cake that calls for celebration.



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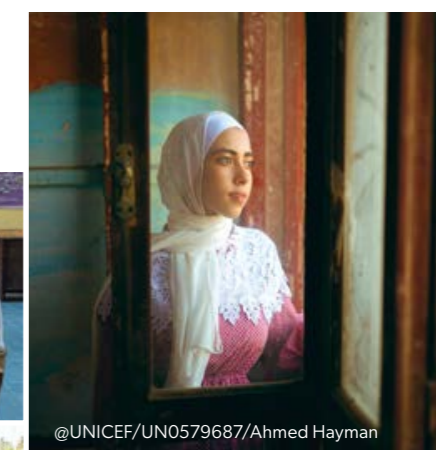
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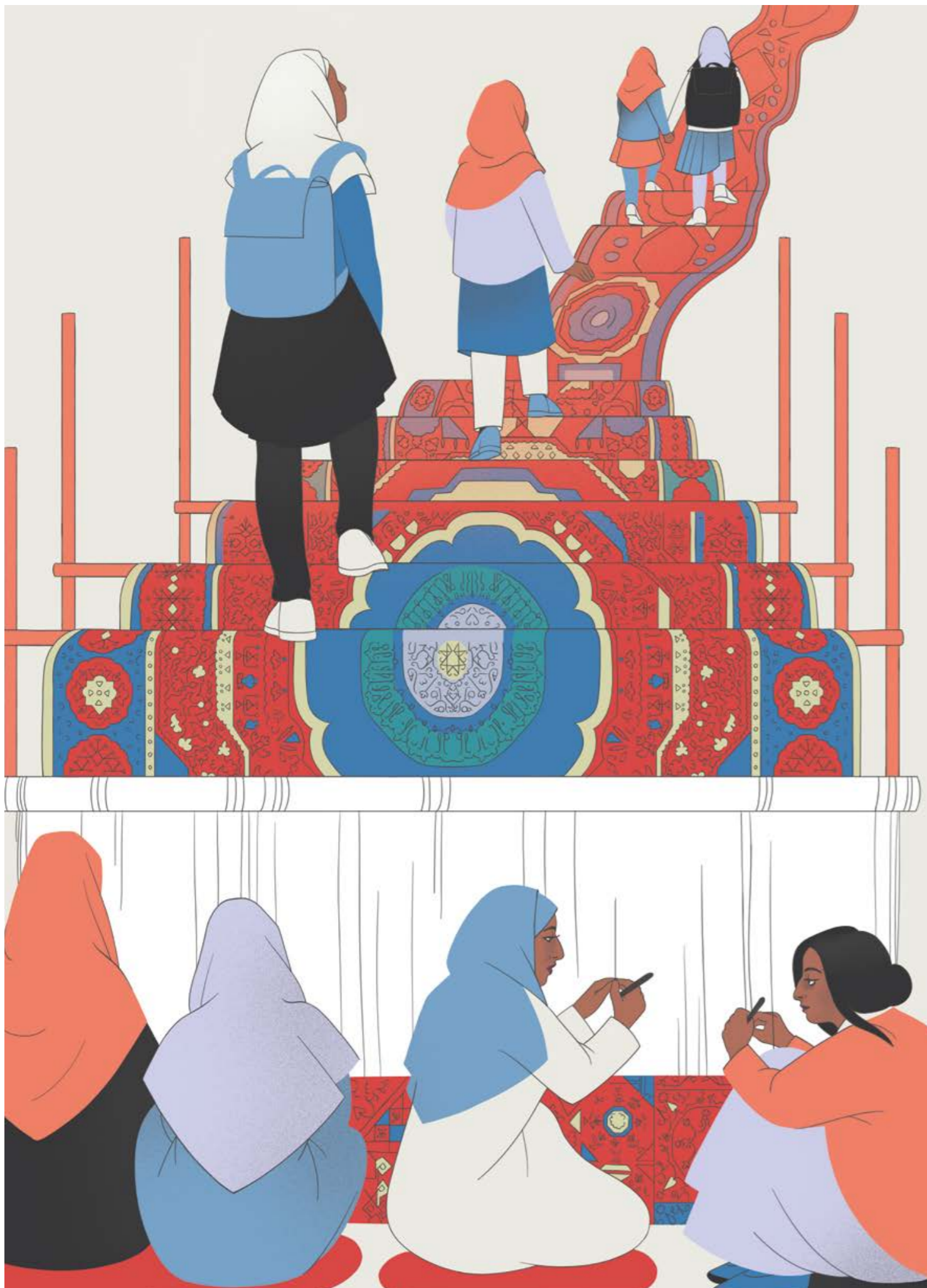
Photo courtesy/Dawwie.net

Dawwie’s results

- ✦ 10,000 social workers and service providers have been trained, engaging over 1 million people face-to-face and over 60 million people online
- ✦ The girls’ empowerment programme is driving engagement with the National Investment Framework on Girls in Egypt, an accountability framework led by the National Council for Women (NCW) and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM)
- ✦ Dawwie was placed under the auspices of the First Lady of Egypt in 2022 and has earned some of the highest political leadership support
- ✦ SBC indicators on parenting and girls’ empowerment have been mainstreamed within the national M&E framework with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Planning and Economic development
- ✦ 46% of adolescents and youths engaged demonstrated improved acceptance of gender equality and more equitable views on gender



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Pulling Threads

Dawwie's lessons for SBC

By **Sherine Guirguis**,
 Director, Common Thread,
 and **Vincent Petit**,
 Global Lead, UNICEF HQ

The potential for SBC to tackle harmful behaviours and social norms may have you swooning. But finding the time and resources to apply it may have you sweating.

Where is an SBC hopeful to begin? Dawwie might have some answers.

Dawwie is a programme that has expertly woven together different SBC tools at just the right moments to achieve something audacious. The initiative has stunning potential, but its execution might be even more impressive. Dawwie has sprouted a movement that has built trust and grown well beyond any one programme, sector, result or singular leader at the helm.

Here are some key lessons from Dawwie to bring you inspiration and, hopefully, stop your perspiration.

Lesson 1: What's in it for me?

How do you get men in a deeply patriarchal society to sign up for a girls' empowerment programme? To answer this, Dawwie borrowed a critical insight from behavioural science: gain-frame messaging and positioning.

For each advocate they sought to bring on board, whether it was a religious leader, government minister or community member, they were deliberate about showing value. For male influencers and family members, it was an opportunity to be a role model and ally. For government ministers, it was an opportunity to leverage Dawwie's reach to improve and promote their own services. Girls' empowerment is not a zero-sum game. Dawwie benefits from the participation of many and benefits them too. This approach was vital to growing Dawwie's reach and its institutionalization within many parts of the government.

Lesson 2: Go to the root

The Egypt Country Office had clear goals to reduce child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Instead of addressing those practices head-on, the SBC team approached them as symptoms of deeper social and structural issues. They chose to focus on the underlying behavioural drivers of parenting and girls' empowerment. This root-cause approach had many benefits beyond its programmatic integrity, granting the SBC team autonomy rather than leaving them beholden to sectoral or project-based funding requirements. It also allowed SBC to build a positive platform to engage with communities on topics that mattered to them, rather than bringing SBC in as a reaction to what people outside of the community determined to be an issue. Tackling FGM or child marriage directly might have felt like a punch to the gut, but leveraging positive values in Egyptian society – such as care, love and protecting children – was like a warm embrace, inviting people at every level of society to participate.

The road wasn't always smooth. Some programme colleagues were frustrated with the indirect approach and felt that results would be slow or intangible. At one point the two approaches ran in parallel, with traditional programming supplying direct messages (FGM is harmful – don't do it!) while the Dawwie team nurtured open dialogue.

Like the tortoise racing the hare, Dawwie took longer to gain momentum; but once it did, its reach and sustainability eclipsed the direct approach: hundreds of thousands of families a year compared to just a few thousand, and ownership at many different levels.



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Illustration by **Katya Murysina**

Lesson 3: Designed by, not with, not for

Dawwie did not waste time trying to preach or define what empowerment meant for girls. Instead, it created a safe space for girls to shape empowerment for themselves. Facilitators were trained to ask simple, generic questions to get the conversation started, and girls fuelled the discussion from there.

The girls would describe the barriers they face in their families or communities: from playing outside and riding a bicycle, to gaining access to information technology (IT). These would become the priorities of the Dawwie circles.

Tools to support girls to overcome their barriers were open-source and designed for adaptation and iteration. This gave girls a say in the content, look and feel. The end result was a vision of empowerment that looked different in every community, and for each girl. This made it possible for positive parenting and girls' empowerment to be authentic, local and sustainable.

Lesson 4: Eye on the prize: Institutionalize

Dawwie was not born the rock star it is today. Its inception was slow, and at times painful. It took a year to establish coordination mechanisms. Government champions came and went, ministries joined piecemeal and communities were not exactly lining up to pilot the approach in the beginning.

While SBC colleagues were on the look-out for new partners to bring on board, they prioritized building trust and providing services to girls. With a firm focus on the field, grassroots success eventually led to high-level political support.

When Egypt's First Lady was searching for an initiative to

spearhead, UNICEF put Dawwie forward. After nearly a year of advocacy, she finally accepted the role, ultimately swayed by Dawwie's positive approach and popularity with communities. Once she became the national face of Dawwie, ministries and coalitions rushed to join the effort.

Lesson 5: Small steps, big returns

To architect Dawwie, former Chief of SBC Gaia Chiti Strigelli had to put aside mindsets that she had developed working in the entertainment industry. To scale and design programmes that resonated with young people, the former MTV Communications Manager had been trained to go big or go home. However, there were no pulsating throngs of people clamouring to empower girls in Egypt. The programme had to start with small, achievable goals and build from the bottom up. The SBC team started with a line in a programmatic logical framework. This offered space for a pilot, which invited programme colleagues to come and see how it could work. Altering the Egyptian school curriculum was a non-starter, so they worked in the extra-curricular realm. As different sectors began to see how the concept could contribute to their own goals, support for the programme grew.

CSO partners helped the Egypt office identify communities to model the approach, offering insight into the communities that Dawwie aimed to support but were also willing to try something new. In each community, SBC colleagues listened diligently to what people found most valuable from Dawwie's model. One mother said that Dawwie was the first time in a long time that she felt a connection between her and her daughter. Other parents shared that it allowed them to reflect on their own upbringing and the

harmful patterns they were unconsciously repeating with their children. These insights revealed motivators that could encourage more participation. Every parent wanted the best for their children, they just didn't always know how to get there. By tapping into that sentiment, Dawwie opened doors.

Lesson 6: Tell a good story

Stories have a particularly strong influence over our attitudes and behaviours. When we tell and hear stories, our brains make connections that increase empathy and can alter how we think and what we do⁷. As a tool for shifting social norms, storytelling has few rivals. Credited with inventing the earliest form of writing, Egyptians are natural storytellers, and stories are a highly resonant medium for them. By sharing real stories, girls and communities are able to see themselves taking part in Dawwie. This alignment between the brand promise and the reality on the ground strengthens trust, credibility and resource mobilization.

Lesson 7: Make space for local leadership

Donor-branded materials can trigger fears of outsiders arriving with a predetermined agenda – especially when it comes to topics as sensitive as gender. To keep Dawwie local, grassroots and without external definitions of empowerment or good parenting, UNICEF and donors needed to step aside. But when? And how? It is important to negotiate acceptable trade-offs, explain the importance of local ownership to donors, and accept that some partnerships may not be aligned with these principles.

Internally, UNICEF made efforts to foster a collaborative mindset – one that understands the value that senior leadership and

international staff bring and where national staff should lead. This allowed local leadership to shine across all levels of Dawwie.

Lesson 8: Frontal vision, backbone support

On the journey to institutionalize Dawwie, Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Egypt's Country Representative, stands out for his dedicated leadership in scaling it up within the UNICEF Country Programme and across government institutions. A strong champion of the transformative power of SBC, he continually went to bat for Dawwie, preaching its potential when scepticism was high and results were low. His philosophy? SBC needs to be positioned both as a means to an end, contributing to programme-specific outcomes, as well as an end in itself, producing cross-cutting transformational results that go beyond any singular programme or goal area.

Jeremy created space for the programme's resources and for the SBC team to grow, while simultaneously lending his credibility and trust to the team and the programme to win support from all levels of government, including the First Lady. This offers a model for how strong SBC teams, programmes and leadership can work together to transform the lives of children and young people.

Lesson 9: Keep it simple

Dawwie's formula is simple:

- ✓ Create a safe space for girls
- ✓ Foster an environment where the girls can be seen and heard by their support network, and vice versa
- ✓ Facilitate peer-to-peer and intergenerational dialogue
- ✓ Connect girls to services that they need and want
- ✓ Make those services appropriate and useful for the girls
- ✓ Repeat

The simplicity of the approach allows community members, donors and partners to quickly and easily get on board and continue building on it.

Lesson 10: Let it go

UNICEF Egypt has worked tirelessly over the years to build an exceptional programme – but the key to its continued success is letting go and making space for the visions of others. This lesson may be the toughest to implement, but Dawwie's open-source logic offers digital tools and training in a proposed mindset, then leaves the rest for adaptation.

Nobody likes a breakup, but it's usually for the best. We urge you to approach all programming with the goal of seeing it walk on without you.



⁷ Elena Renkin, "How Stories Connect And Persuade Us: Unleashing The Brain Power Of Narrative", NPR, April 11, 2020.

Illustration by Tatiana Komarova



Maya Bezhanishvili, a doctor at the Bazaleti village clinic, connects with her patient, 5-month-old Saba, and his mother Ana via video call. | © UNICEF/UNI500326/

Reserved for Health

How SMS could boost HPV vaccination in Georgia

First introduced in 2017, it took two years for the HPV vaccine to be included in Georgia's national vaccination schedule. At that point, HPV vaccination coverage in the country was notably scant. Now in the wake of Covid, the situation only seemed to be getting worse.

By **Nino Lortkipanidze**
SBC Officer,
UNICEF Georgia

From 2019 to 2021, it is estimated that coverage of the first dose of the HPV vaccine plummeted from 38% to 24% among 10-14-year-old girls in Georgia.⁸ In 2021, 327 new cases of cervical cancer were reported along with 204 deaths from the disease.⁹

With hopes of turning the tide for the 1.7 million Georgian females over 15 at risk of developing cervical cancer, UNICEF Georgia partnered with the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC)

in Georgia and the UK-based Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to see what behavioural science could bring to the table. Designed in the growing digital reality of Covid-19 lockdowns, their experiment tested whether text messages could spark physical action.

Using a randomized controlled trial, they tested how four behaviourally-informed SMS messages sent to caregivers would perform against no SMS reminder in getting girls to receive their first dose of the HPV vaccine. In September 2022, SMS reminders were sent to 55,176 caregivers of eligible Georgian girls¹⁰ aged 10-12, continuing on to a 62-day trial period.¹¹

The next page shows the unique behavioural tactics employed by each text message.

* The minimalist

Short SMS with no additional information:

Your daughter is due for her free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine which will protect her against cervical cancer. Contact your polyclinic today to arrange an appointment.

With the brevity of a telegram, this message is a no-frills, straight-forward call to action.

Applicable concepts from behavioural science

Timely prompt:

Behavioural nudge — this is an intervention designed to influence behaviour without restricting choice. The use of SMS reminders as 'timely prompt' nudges has grown in the last decade in particular, as demonstrated for instance by Orr and King (2015).

Defaults:

The use of the language "Your daughter is due..." assumes that the daughter in question will receive the vaccine, and positions receiving the vaccine as the default option. This follows research on 'presumptive announcements', such as that by Brewer et al. (2017).

* The link whisperer

Short SMS + NCDC link to more information:

Your daughter is due for her free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine which will protect her against cervical cancer. Contact your polyclinic today to arrange an appointment. More information on the official NCDC website: [LINK]

Adding a touch of modernity, this message not only urges action but also provides a link to the NCDC website that invites parents to learn more.

Applicable concepts from behavioural science

Timely prompt:

per "The minimalist".

Defaults:

per "The minimalist".

Messenger effects:

Source credibility — people are often more receptive to messages from sources they believe to be authoritative and credible. This message leverages this effect by referencing the NCDC and its website. 'Source effects' in communications have been researched for at least three decades, as in Wilson and Sherrell (1993).

* The reservation

SMS with "reserved for her" framing + NCDC link:

Your daughter is due for her free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine which will protect her against cervical cancer. Her vaccine is reserved for her at the polyclinic. Contact them today to arrange an appointment. More information on the official NCDC website: [LINK]

By informing the caregiver that the vaccine is "reserved" for their daughter, this text seeks to leverage the endowment effect — a human tendency to value items that we own more highly than those that do not belong to us.¹²

Applicable concepts from behavioural science

Timely prompt:

per "The minimalist".

Defaults:

per "The minimalist".

Messenger effects:

per "The link whisperer".

Loss aversion:

People tend to dislike loss more strongly than they like gains of equal value. When presented with information that a vaccine has been reserved for their daughter specifically, parents may feel encouraged to avoid missing a specific activity or limited opportunity. The effects of 'loss-framing' within public health specifically have been well researched over several decades, for instance in Gallagher and Updegraff (2012).

* The safety net

SMS with safety information + NCDC link:

Your daughter is due for her free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine which will protect her against cervical cancer. The vaccine has been given safely to more than 118 million girls worldwide. Contact your polyclinic today to arrange an appointment. More information on the official NCDC website: [LINK]

In a world dominated by misinformation and social pressure, this message offers worldly wisdom. By highlighting the safety and uptake record on a grand scale, it aims to instil confidence in the vaccine and present it as popular among other people.

Applicable concepts from behavioural science

Timely prompt:

per "The minimalist".

Defaults:

per "The minimalist".

Messenger effects:

per "The link whisperer".

Social norm/social proof:

By providing social evidence that more than 118 million girls globally have safely received the vaccine, this message uses the principle of social norms. Parents may be influenced by the idea that many others have had the vaccination, making it a socially accepted and recommended behaviour. The effects and applications of social norms have been extensively researched over many years. See Deutsch & Gerard (1955), for example.

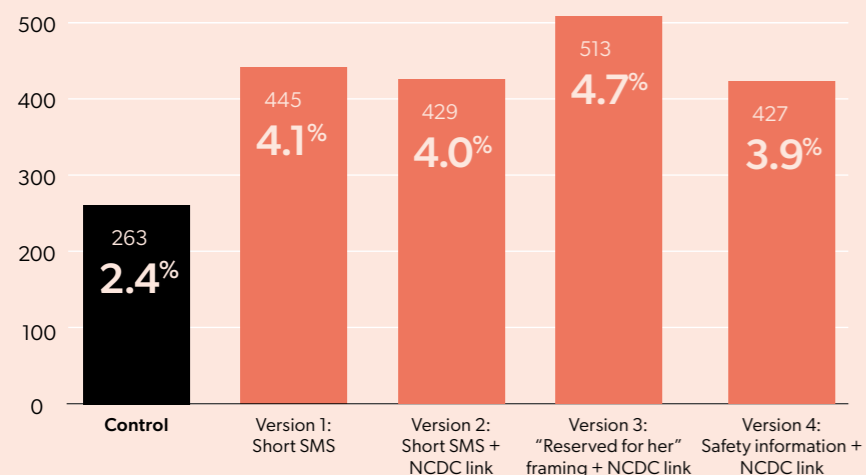
ONE TEXT TAKES THE CAKE

During the trial, 2,032 girls received the vaccine — a vaccination rate of 3.76%. This figure averages uptake from each group that received the SMS reminders — who together had a vaccination rate of 4.1% — and the control group that received no SMS reminders, which had a vaccination rate of 2.4%. The analysis reveals that every version of the SMS reminder was more effective at increasing uptake of the HPV vaccine than receiving no message at all.¹³



SCAN TO VIEW
ONLINE VERSION
PDF with Hyperlinks,
Extra content

Girls who received SMS reminders were more likely to receive the HPV vaccine



A total of **2,077 girls** in our trial received the HPV vaccine. **The vaccination rate in our trial sample was 3.84%** after 60 days, ranging from 2.4% (control) to 4.7% (SMS version 3).

Girls in each of the treatment arms were more likely to have received the vaccine than girls in the control group (no SMS).

One message emerged as the winner, demonstrating the highest positive impact on eligible girls receiving their first dose of the HPV vaccine. The group of girls whose caregivers received "the reservation" framing had the highest vaccination rate at 4.7% – almost double the vaccination rate of those who didn't receive a message (2.4%). These figures are not to be compared or confused with a yearly coverage: what matters here is that in this small sample over 60 days, the best message increased the uptake twofold, showing potential to do the same at a larger scale. A statistical analysis to account for different regions and characteristics

among recipients also revealed that the girls whose caregivers received "the reservation" message were 65% more likely to get the vaccine than those who didn't receive an SMS at all. Even more, this SMS cost only \$0.15 per additional vaccination.^{14, 15}

THE POTENTIAL OF PINGS

The girls and caregivers who participated in this study were among the priority group to receive the vaccination. Following these results, the NCDC and Ministry of Health in Georgia have opted to employ the "reserved for her" SMS for all upcoming cohorts of 10-12-year-old girls eligible for vaccination and have integrated it

within the national e-health system. They also plan to extend the use of this SMS to their national catch-up campaign, targeting unvaccinated 13-18-year-olds, potentially leading to thousands of HPV vaccinations that might otherwise be overlooked. In 2023, the "reserved for her" framing could be found across reminder campaigns for routine immunization and screenings for cancer and hepatitis C, underscoring the immediate and widespread impact of the trial.

In the era of pings, SMS messages have proven to be a powerful tool for reminding caregivers about their child's HPV vaccination in Georgia. However, additional interventions that address other critical barriers to immunization should be implemented to raise HPV vaccination coverage to target levels.

- 8 "Immunization data", UNICEF Global Databases, 2023.
- 9 HPV Information Centre, *Georgia: Human Papilloma-virus and Related Cancers Fact Sheet 2023*.
- 10 Girls eligible to participate in the study were girls who had not yet received their first dose of the HPV vaccine and whose caregivers did not have a phone number registered in the national e-health system.
- 11 UNICEF & Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), *Effectiveness of SMS reminders to increase demand for HPV immunisation: a randomised control trial in Georgia, 2023*.
- 12 Katy Milkman, Angela Duckworth and Mitesh Patel, "These are the text messages that get people to take vaccines", *Washington Post*, May 24, 2021.
- 13 UNICEF & BIT, *Effectiveness of SMS reminders, 2023*.
- 14 The total cost of sending 97,057 SMS reminders across all treatment arms was approximately US\$146, a marginal cost of less than US\$0.01 per SMS sent. The cost of sending SMS reminders to each treatment arm was US\$36.50.
- 15 Michelle W. Berger, "Behavior Change for Good unveils effective strategies to boost vaccination rates", *Penn Today*, February 18, 2021 and UNICEF & BIT, *Effectiveness of SMS reminders, 2023*.



Masha, Dasha and Jenya walk around Kutaisi, Georgia, where they have lived as refugees since the war in Ukraine started. © UNICEF/UN0767456/Turabelidze

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How to

- how to understand what SBC is about
- how to find a research method
- how to make sense of my data
- how to prepare a technical proposal
- how to use HCD
- how to find behavioural evidence
- how to build a budget
- how to address social norms
- how to improve services
- how to build a ToC
- how to strengthen this Programme Guidance
- how to partner with entertainment media
- how to measure change in times of crisis
- how to track public opinion

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Your homebase for tools that help teams practice, advocate for, and explain SBC for children. Available in multiple languages and updated regularly.

Explore the programme guidance here.



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Tuning into Parenthood

Nepal's *Rope Guna Fal* takes on the toughest parenting issues through radio

By **Swechhya Shrestha**
Social Science and Research Specialist, UNICEF Nepal

Nepalis believe that from the moment they enter the womb, children deserve equal measures of love, attention and nurturing. Parents see children as precious seedlings, in need of nourishment to reach their full potential.

This cultural foundation is supported with positive education campaigns. In the district of Surkhet, parenting education programmes talk about raising kids 'right'. In the district of Kailali, the focus is on childcare basics, and in the district of Kalikot, teens are steered clear of wrong turns. While parenting education can touch on child growth and 'proper' care, it overlooks the grittier realities facing families and children.

Untouchability, chhaupadi¹⁶, child abuse and rape are ignored or treated with a whisper. But parents agree these are issues that demand attention, loud voices – even radio waves.

'Rope guna fal' means 'You reap what you sow'.

This Nepalese phrase was adopted as the title for a radio series designed to shift Nepal's parenting landscape towards nurturing minds, not just bodies. The product of a partnership between UNICEF, the Antenna Foundation Nepal (AFN), Population Media Center (PMC) and VIAMO, *Rope Guna Fal* (RoGF) has proven to be a powerful tool to disseminate vital information, foster dialogue and inspire behavioural shifts among parents and caregivers.

Over 104 episodes, the series explores parenting education, child marriage, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health. These themes are treated candidly to help shift attitudes around cultural norms and traditional practices that can threaten efforts to provide sexual education in school, increase access to family planning services and information, and reduce stigma and discrimination.

115 radio stations were selected to air the programme, which was also made available on Facebook, YouTube, the Hamro Patro app (which has 10 million users) and an offline platform that callers access by dialling 32100. These free, on-demand broadcasts present relatable

characters as role models intended to resonate with young people, parents, grandparents and other caregivers. Each episode concludes with a quiz, offering prizes such as cell phone credit. These small incentives motivate listeners to tune in and pay attention to the topics discussed.

THE LISTENERS BEHIND THE NUMBERS REPORT REAL IMPACT.

Between college and farming, Bishal Baral doesn't have much downtime. Still, he manages to catch up on episodes while riding the bus. He admires characters like Utsav for his caring nature and Nimkali for her fiery dialogue. But it's not just entertainment for him; the show has helped him become more attentive to his niece, positively influencing his entire family.

Deepak Regmi, a grandfather from Kathmandu, has been listening to *Rope Guna Fal* since it first aired in November 2019. He enjoys how the characters are authentic and relatable. But most of all, he listens for the valuable parenting insights. He shares them with his family and encourages his neighbours to tune in, promoting shared learning within his community.

¹⁶ A menstrual taboo that stops women and girls from doing regular family activities during their period because they are seen as impure.

DID LISTENING TO RADIO STORIES HAVE ANY IMPACT? THE NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.

Between 2021 and 2022:

The programme engaged an estimated

325,000 

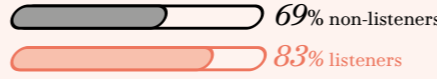
Nepalis every week, at a cost of only US\$0.91 per listener

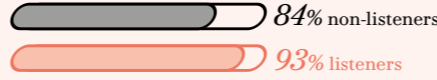
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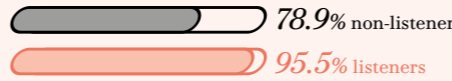
of listeners surveyed agreed or somewhat agreed that listening to the radio drama had increased their knowledge on issues important to them

 89% reported a behaviour change or maintenance of a recently changed behaviour

54.5%  told their friends and family about the show and discussed the issues it raised with them

 69% non-listeners
83% listeners actively worked on child development at home

 84% non-listeners
93% listeners believed husbands should play a role in caring for pregnant women

 78.9% non-listeners
95.5% listeners intended to stop child marriage in their family and community

Want your edutainment to encourage change? Listen up!

Behind the success of the series lie core principles and actions that should be considered before using this approach:

- * **Storytelling is crucial** for engaging audiences, the formative research must also factor in these methods
- * **Maximize outreach** through comprehensive promotion and local partnerships
- * **Engage local radio stations** to sustain community outreach
- * **Monitor and evaluate diligently:** integrate Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning to track progress and performance against pre-determined indicators and targets; and identify and correct any issues early on
- * **Produce authentic content** by recruiting local writers and sending them on strategic field visits
- * **Build anticipation** by engaging early and having a multimedia strategy before broadcasting
- * **Have a robust feedback system** for continuous improvement and audience engagement



Photo courtesy/AFN

See the full impact report which includes reflections on the evaluation, with recommendations and lessons learned.

SCAN TO VIEW ONLINE VERSION PDF with Hyperlinks, Extra content

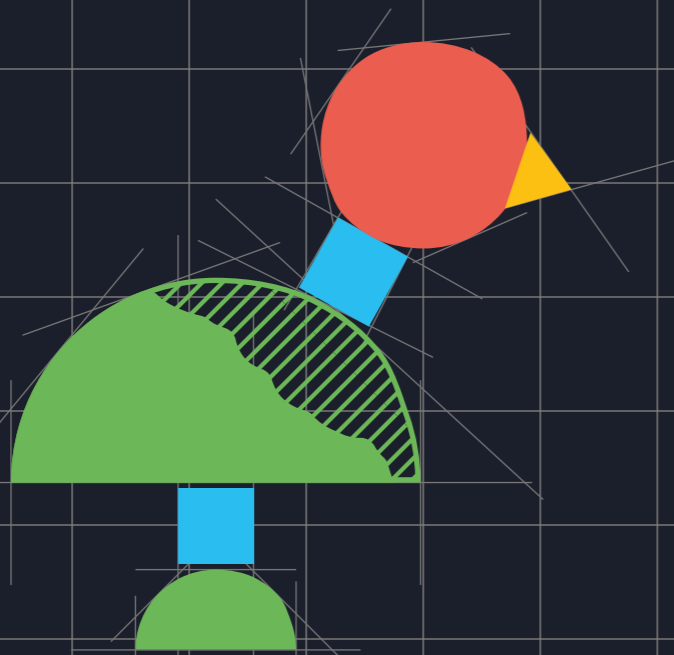


If you need to

Design

Something

Effective



BUILD WITH BIRD

Understanding how humans think, decide, and act is essential to inform the design of effective initiatives. It's also really hard. That's why we created the Behavioural Insights Research and Design Laboratory: the BIRD Lab.



If you need a collaborator to help you bring a behavioural lens to your project, partner with us! Together, let's secure a better future for all children, everywhere.

unicefbirdlab.org



We Need More than Hammers to Rebuild the World!

By **Vincent Petit**
Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

My dad has always been a handyman. The workbench in our basement was something out of a do-it-yourself dream. When his collection became the butt of a joke, he would always counter with “you always need the right tool for the job”.

Decades later, I started renovating an old house in the countryside. I never could have imagined the incredible array of issues that could arise from such a small project every day. After a year, I had amassed enough tools to fill a shed. I finally felt equipped to take on any problem.

Updating the Social and Behaviour Change function at UNICEF was much like renovating a home in the countryside. We needed the right set of tools to fully understand and effectively solve problems. To help UNICEF achieve its corporate goals, my SBC colleagues spend their days working to shift a myriad of behaviours: helping parents feed their kids better, motivating teenagers to seek help when they need it, encouraging husbands to allow their wives to deliver in a medical facility. These requests for support traditionally come with a strong expectation that we employ one specific tool: a communication campaign.

To start with communication is to assume that the gap in behaviour is due to a lack of knowledge. This approach often responds with very specific activities like developing messages and public service

announcements, preparing posters, briefing the media and mobilizing influencers to spread the word – to essentially tell people what's good for them. And for a long time, that's what we did. Because if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Don't get me wrong: communication is foundational to most social change. Awareness is often the first step. But telling people what their problems are does not make them go away. Dialogue can help but is not a guarantee when it comes to complex, deeply entrenched practices. Yet practitioners and programme staff were being given hammers to renovate

Telling people what their problems are does not make them go away

a castle. They needed a more complete toolbox. They needed to take a step back from the communication defaults to research and listen to what people want for themselves. They needed to apply social and behavioural science to better understand the challenges communities faced.

To improve immunization, we are consistently being asked to help build demand for vaccines. The logic is: if we build the service, they will come. Through promoting services and making people understand their value, they will change their minds and visit their health centre.

But several analyses on vaccine uptake reveal that most barriers to demand are actually on the supply and delivery side. The health centre may be too far, closed after working hours, or out of the medicine or vaccines in demand. Patients may have been treated poorly, or by a practitioner who doesn't match their ethnicity, gender or religion.

In these scenarios, can a communication campaign be as impactful as a service redesign, where duty-bearers and underserved populations work

At the core of each approach is increasing collaboration to generate more effective ways to solve complex challenges.

collaborate effectively with sectoral experts. We want sectoral colleagues and managers to see how they can contribute to and promote this work. Many decision-makers and custodians of programmatic approaches still remain sceptical. In order to achieve corporate change and complex results, we need all hands on deck.

Behavioural science has shown us the extent to which views and behaviours

equality, empowering local communities, and reducing stigma and marginalization are all crucial to improving the health, education and security of children and their families. But these social transformations don't fit so neatly in sectoral boxes. They are inadequately captured and addressed. We need to expand our coalition of social change supporters. We need institutional recognition that social justice should be a core area for results.

To support such an ambitious project, we may not need a whole shed of tools, but we do need more than a hammer. I'd settle for a tool belt to start with.

... social change is such a critical part of behaviour change strategies. However, it remains a major blind spot for UNICEF and other sector-driven organizations

together to improve the service? The field thinks not. There is an active movement to further introduce inclusive techniques such as community-led policy formulation, participatory microplanning, social accountability mechanisms, human-centred service design, and active listening and engagement training for health workers. At the core of each approach is increasing collaboration to generate more effective ways to solve complex problems.

By now I hope the rationale behind our technical transition to SBC is clear. To move an organization like UNICEF, we had to shift every gear inside the system: governance, policies, strategies, human resources, partnerships and more. We are still working to shift them. A lot remains to be done, especially to create operational conditions in which SBC colleagues can thrive and

are shaped by context, environment and social identity – that's why social change is such a critical part of behaviour change strategies. However, it remains a major blind spot for UNICEF and other sector-driven organizations. Shifting power dynamics, improving gender



Illustration by Tatiana Komarova

Tell Me, What's Changed?

SBC is everywhere

The mainstream

- "Community Engagement, Social and Behaviour Change" featured as a core Change Strategy in UNICEF's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan
- SBC mainstreamed as a core programme approach across sectors & contexts (see: UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action)
- Global corporate indicators created for offices to report on readiness to deliver the change strategy

New spaces & decision-making bodies

- SBC global governance, which shapes the global vision & direction of SBC within UNICEF, expanded to include regional & country offices
- Dedicated SBC capacity embedded in UNICEF HQ's sectors
- SBC Specialist embedded in the Office of the Executive Director's 'Culture and Diversity' team
- SBC sessions integrated in key governance forums & management gatherings

Resources for programmatic excellence

- 25 Early Adopting countries funded by core resources to pave the way for systemic SBC improvements
- 80 case studies released that showcase the best of UNICEF SBC across regions & countries
- UNICEF also launched:
 - Its first-ever SBC Programme Guidance
 - An Operational Guidance to accompany the SBC Programme Guidance and help managers identify the best models of work to deliver excellence in SBC in their offices
 - The Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action Toolkit (CHAT)
- A complete results framework capturing SBC contributions & indicators for each sector & sub-sector
- A complete learning channel with fundamental training, new capacity building products, & learning pathways tailored to roles & objectives
- A set of resources to leverage Social Science for Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action (SS4CE)
- Ethical considerations for Applied Behavioural Science and Children
- A comprehensive SBC impact evidence map

Making strides in behavioural science

- The Behavioural Insight Research and Design (BIRD) Lab created with Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight
- 15 Long Term Arrangements for Applied Behavioural Science Services created with leading organizations across the world
- Positions for Senior Behavioural Scientists introduced at UNICEF HQ & some regional offices
- 44 countries have ongoing initiatives for Applied Behavioral Science & Human-Centred Design
- The Culture and Diversity Team used behavioural science to understand microaggressions in the workplace & identify ways to promote an open and honest feedback culture
- The Organisational Design & Improvement Lab used behavioural science to reduce administrative burdens at UNICEF

SBC is shaking hands and breaking ground

Innovations

- The Internet of Good Things developed with SBC leadership, used as a strategic platform in 40 countries and in multiple emergencies to bridge the digital divide (e.g., Ukraine crisis)
- A collaboration with Supply Division established to collect feedback on humanitarian products (deployed in the Türkiye Earthquake response)
- SBC data included in global core systems (e.g., Nutridash for nutrition)

UNICEF leadership and influence

- The 2022 Global SBCC Summit co-organized by UNICEF
- UNICEF featured in The World Bank's Behavioural Science around the World, volume 2
- The top 10 Best of UNICEF Research 2022 featured 2 UNICEF SBC evidence generation initiatives with associated published papers
- UNICEF led authorship of the 'Community-led response' chapter of the United Nations COVID framework
- A report on trust for the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board co-authored by UNICEF

Partnerships

- Safe To Learn global interagency partnership led by SBC, dedicated to ending violence in & around schools
- UNICEF teamed up with WHO & IFRC to create the Collective Service for community-led responses & help desk for emergency response
- SBC colleagues joined the UN Innovation Network
- Work with Business for Child Rights established for private sector mapping & business engagement for SBC
- 70+ partner network created for advancing Social Sciences in Humanitarian Action
- SBC led Faith for Positive Change for Children Initiative and is a member of the Global Alliance for Social and Behaviour Change

Pandemic Response

- UNICEF co-leads Interagency governance for RCCE & Vaccine Demand globally
- Community workstream of the international initiative co-chaired by UNICEF, accelerating the development, production and equitable access to Covid-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines (ACT Accelerator)
- US\$165m mobilized for RCCE in the Humanitarian Appeals for Children during the first year of COVID
- Behavioural Change Communication for Global Epidemics course with NYU co-designed by UNICEF

SBC's Paper Trail

The evolution of SBC at UNICEF — a timeline of milestones and memorabilia that proves SBC didn't happen overnight

JAMES GRANT:

“We know how difficult it is to have people adopt new practices, and this is particularly true of families from low-income and often illiterate backgrounds. ...the new frontiers for progress... derive from educating, empowering and motivating individuals to do more to help themselves.”

James Grant Lecture (1986) 'The Child Survival and the Development Revolution: Consider the Possibilities'

1986



AN ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY OF DECISION-MAKERS

concludes C4D is not properly understood and implemented.

Fraser, C (1994) — How decision makers see 'Communication for Development': Report of a survey

1994

AN ASSESSMENT

finds that over 90% of field officers request training in behaviour development communication.

UNICEF (1996) Field Office Survey on Information/Communication and Social Mobilization Officers Training Needs

1996



THE C4D STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2008-2011

identifies gaps in C4D's organizational function, including “Uneven status and positioning, understanding and appreciation of C4D at all levels” and “the need to re-establish UNICEF's leadership role, niche and comparative advantage”.

UNICEF (2007) Concept Note: C4D Advocacy and Behaviour Change

2008



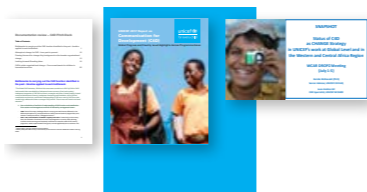
A C4D ORGANIZATIONAL STOCK-TAKE

recommends to “Clarify the role of C4D... in ways that are easy to comprehend for non-specialists”.

Waisbord, S. (2014) Communication For Development at UNICEF. Stock-take and Strategic Recommendations

2013

2017



A NEW NAME AND BRAND ARE PROPOSED,

to make the C4D function more clearly understood. It is rejected by a select group of practitioners inside and outside of UNICEF. Without a larger process guiding the rebranding, it fails.

THE C4D GLOBAL TEAM IS CREATED

bringing all regions and Headquarters together, as a governing body to shepherd new changes into the field.

2019

2020

January: A second try to move from a C4D function towards a more diversified SBC function is made.

An assessment of the C4D function is launched, evaluating four decades of change attempts.

September: Senior leadership approves a transformative change process to elevate the C4D function in the organization.

DECEMBER: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BRINGS UNPRECEDENTED INVESTMENT AND ATTENTION TO C4D:

UNICEF raises US\$165m for risk communication and community engagement.



February: The vision and value proposition for SBC is finalized, emphasizing social and behavioural science and people-centred programming.

July: The Office of the Executive Director allocates a US\$6m core funding envelope to support the new SBC business model.

October: UNICEF's Behavioural Insights Research & Design (BIRD) Laboratory is established in the Office of Research – Innocenti Centre. BIRD Lab draws on expertise from 80 staff within 7 ROs and 35 COs.

2021



2022

SOCIAL + BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

January: The C4D function is officially replaced by SBC, with comprehensive changes to programmes, job titles and funding codes.

Community Engagement, Social and Behaviour Change is elevated to a core Change Strategy in the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

May: UNICEF RELEASES ITS FIRST-EVER SBC PROGRAMME GUIDANCE, collectively crafted by a steering committee primarily composed of Country Offices.



APRIL: UNICEF HIRES ITS FIRST SENIOR BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST

September: The SBC team decides to take stock of the past, present and future of SBC – and to create this magazine.

2023

2024

June: Another Evaluation on the role of SBC is presented to the Executive Board. Eight recommendations are proposed to institutionalize SBC and strengthen UNICEF's readiness to use it as a core strategy.



SCAN TO VIEW ONLINE VERSION PDF with Hyperlinks, Extra content

A Tale of Two Apollos

Navigating change within WHO and UNICEF

By **Vincent Petit**
Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

in conversation with

Elena Altieri
Unit Head, Behavioural Insights, World Health Organization

The culture of an organization plays a significant role in its ability to change.

Cultures that are flexible, adaptive and in tune with change initiatives tend to facilitate transformation. In *Gods of Management*, Charles Handy describes four unique organizational cultures, drawing parallels to Greek deities Zeus, Apollo, Athena and Dionysus, each influencing the capacity for change in different ways.

UNICEF and WHO are Apollos. Their cultures are structured and bureaucratic, akin to the god Apollo. Known as the God of Order and Harmony Apollo represents justice, fairness and moral integrity, seeking to uphold order and stability in the world. In such organizations, defined roles and a focus on procedures and hierarchy are the norm. Handy suggests that in these settings, change is a gradual process that hinges on thorough planning and consensus-building strategies.

This is exactly what UNICEF and WHO are going through: a slow evolution to embed Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) into their core mandates. For these Apollos, success may not mean outright cultural overhaul but achieving incremental shifts that, over time, result in meaningful transformation.

THE DIFFERENCE LEADERS CAN MAKE
UNICEF and WHO's strategies both focus on introducing SBC in a way that complements, rather than disrupts, existing systems.



“

Using behavioural insights is ultimately an act of humility: it requires the community of experts and policy-makers to test each other's expert knowledge, biases and preferences, and to gather and use behavioural evidence on health-related decisions that all of us, at any given day, make on a daily basis.”¹⁷

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

However, each organization came at it from a different angle.

WHO already had established expertise in Behavioural Insights within specific health topics, but Elena Altieri created the first centralized Behavioural Insights unit, with the ambition of providing behavioural science support to all topics across the organization. To make this happen, Elena put a lot of energy towards securing high-level endorsement from central leadership to weave behavioural insights into global health policies and practices and different types of operations. Her aim was for endorsement to trickle down, resulting in more behaviourally informed initiatives that would improve health outcomes at scale. In contrast, my approach at UNICEF focused on shifting organizational practice from within programmatic teams and country offices. At the same time, we both worked to reshape the back end: massaging our operational models to support the programmatic changes we were promoting.

Over coffee, Elena and I reflected on these efforts – UNICEF's bottom-up

approach and WHO's more top-down tactics, which set its sights on the very summit: WHO's Director General. Elena's strategy to infuse behavioural science from the top began with fostering strong buy-in from Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. A dedicated advocate, Dr Ghebreyesus consistently signalled public support for its integration across the organization. He took every opportunity to discuss behavioural science on social media, highlight it in key meetings, write editorials, meet with experts, and track incubation and proof of concept processes. He spoke on the importance of behavioural insights at two World Health Assemblies and celebrated WHO's first resolution entirely dedicated to behavioural sciences.

“When an area of work is prioritized at this level, it sends a clear message,” Elena explained.

The role of leadership in facilitating innovation and change has long been studied. Social network theories highlight how social capital and relationships are crucial to influencing decision-making and supporting organizational transformation.

A theory of change, a clear vision and leadership support set Elena's plans in motion. With a behaviourally-informed approach, support from global experts – through a WHO official Technical Advisory Group – and the right stakeholders, she was able to move from theory to action.

“In our field, we are often bad students and fail to use behavioural insights to influence decision-makers. For example, when I brief WHO leadership on the dangers that come with oversimplifying human decision-making, I help them use and understand simple behavioural

frameworks that illustrate this point. It's rewarding to see senior officials thinking in terms of behavioural barriers and drivers, starting to question the premise that we cannot assume people will just do what we say or expect of them.

More and more decision-makers within WHO recognize how important the environmental context is when addressing behaviours, and regularly include this perspective in their narratives.”

While facts, figures and the promise of impact persuaded several at WHO to champion these approaches, it was not enough to motivate people within UNICEF. WHO is an organization with a complex and wide-spanning mandate that focuses exclusively on public health. UNICEF operates across many different sectors, with nearly double the number of staff working within a decentralized structure.

Despite its large and growing workforce, the constant influx of global challenges has stretched UNICEF to its limit. With teams oversaturated across the organization, there is little space left for the kind of learning and innovation needed to adopt new mindsets and tools. In this context, demonstrating the value SBC could bring wasn't getting me very far. I would need to go through our internal operations and weave SBC into the fabric of our standard planning and programming on the ground, making it an integral part of our institutional DNA. In behavioural science terms: I had to make SBC a default.



SCAN TO VIEW
ONLINE VERSION
PDF with Hyperlinks,
Extra content

This image was created using an AI service.
Read about AI and the Digital Divide on page 80

In behavioural science terms: I had to make SBC a default.

COMING UP AGAINST GATEKEEPERS

From my perspective, the toughest conversations were often with programme managers at the country level. Elena shared similar experiences at WHO where enthusiasm and eagerness to innovate for greater country impact encounter limited technical, human and financial resources to move from intention to action.

“The Director General and much of senior leadership believe in a behavioural approach to problem-solving. But staff surveys indicate that even when technical leads are on board and interested in a behavioural approach, they often don’t have time or resources to dedicate efforts to this new way of working.”

Beyond the structural and operational challenges, we both encountered tension with the deeply entrenched, expert-driven cultures of our organizations. Both WHO and UNICEF are helmed by highly educated individuals who sometimes place greater value on technical knowledge and expertise than on the practical knowledge of the communities we serve. This culture gets exacerbated by governmental counterparts who may mirror these sentiments, ultimately resulting in prescriptive interventions that generally default to the much-implemented, but not always impactful, educational or communications approaches. Buy-in from these key decision-makers within organizations is crucial, as they hold the reins of day-to-day operations and are the gateway to broader systemic change. They hold the trigger on critical programmatic and financial decisions and serve as primary liaisons to external partners wielding comparable authority within their own organizations.

Scholars of organizational change, such as Kim S. Cameron, Robert E. Quinn and Joanne Martin, have highlighted the critical need to align change initiatives with cultural

attributes to drive successful organizational transformations. This has been particularly challenging because social and behavioural change rests upon design and decision-making that centre the experiences and knowledge of rights-holders. Overcoming long-standing practices (and sometimes, egos) to place people ahead of professional expertise has proven to be no easy task.

But as SBC preaches, there’s no sense in telling people that they should change. Especially those who are least open to it. At WHO, Elena and the team prioritized addressing latent and unmet needs and used behavioural insights to generate new demand for SBC in alignment with the goals of the organization:

“There is so much to do when you are creating a new function in such a complex organization, that responding to existing interest felt like the best way to maximize resources and efforts and accumulate relevant experiences. Today we still prioritize working where there is interest and unmet demand, or in behavioural terms: where the motivation is.”

Elena was rewarded by an increase in the number of requests for her technical support without active promotion from the team.

To be honest, when you first told me about the corporate shift, I wondered whether it was really possible and how long it would take.

STAR-CROSSED COLLABORATORS

Perhaps it was ambitious, our vision of a transformation that places deeper understanding of human behaviours and social groups at the heart of policy and programme development. Yet much has changed over the years in how UNICEF and WHO approach public health and development.

Elena admitted, “To be honest, when you first told me about the corporate shift, I wondered whether it was really possible and how long it would take. Change is slow in

our organizations. And yet, all of a sudden boom, this thing goes out. And today I interact with a lot of UNICEF colleagues who talk SBC, and the alignment in thinking and approaches is really encouraging. For me, the SBC transition is a massive success because it gives UNICEF a new basis to start building on.”

As for WHO, appetite for more systematic use of behavioural science in health is becoming evident on the global stage. Ministers of Health are embracing behavioural science in discussions at the World Health Assembly. WHO, which was already focused on promoting community-based approaches in several regions, is now a rising player in trying to mainstream a behavioural science perspective into global public health. This is good for everyone, including UNICEF. Organizational Ecology suggests that change is often driven by competition for resources and the need for adaptation. WHO is undoubtedly pushing us upwards. Having partners with shared interests and a similar language presents an opportunity for these Apollos to change their fate, and rise together.

17 Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, “Using behavioural science for better health”, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* vol. 99(11) (November 2021): 755.



ASK Auntie Shifty

Our agony auntie, answers!



Fancy Facade

Dear Auntie Shifty,

In my office, there’s a lot of talk about this new shift from C4D to SBC, but I don’t understand what all the fuss is about. What has actually changed? One day my colleagues are C4D officers, and the next their name tags read SBC. I don’t see a change in what we do on the ground. It feels like old wine in a new bottle or lipstick on a pig... what am I missing?

Sincerely,
Doubtful Doug

Dear Doubtful,

Your scepticism is as sharp as a tailor’s needle. Your colleagues went to bed as C4D officers and woke up SBC specialists and you’re wondering whether it’s a change in costume or custom in this office conundrum. While it may seem like your staff swapped titles overnight, in reality the SBC community has moved mountains to make this happen. Here are some of the new heights SBC helps us reach:

The tools you know and love, and then some
– SBC goes beyond communicating information to provide a whole buffet of change. From engagement strategies to service design, wayfinding, policy change and social proofing, SBC gives you a whole menu of options.

The invisible forces
– Ever feel blind to what lies beyond a behaviour? Well, SBC helps you take that blindfold off and examine the social, cultural and environmental factors that influence what people do. With a full picture, you can customize interventions for a perfect fit.

A sixth sense for systems
– SBC recognizes that human behaviour is governed by complex public and private institutions, and helps us explore how systems might be fuelling the fire of inequality.

A better way of working (together)
– SBC is no solo act – it’s a jam session with the whole community. Community perspectives are centre stage and SBC gives us the tools to co-create a beautiful symphony of solutions from start to finish.

It’s time we let go of the C4D security blanket and face the tides of change. So, attend those team meetings! Dive into training sessions! With time, that SBC scrutiny will become SBC advocacy.

Undoubtedly yours,
Auntie Shifty

Fundraising Fatigue

Dear Auntie Shifty,

Working for a programme that is consistently underfunded and undervalued gets tiring. I’m constantly working to prove the value of myself and other SBC staff members like me. All my time and energy gets sucked into raising funds and visibility, leaving me no time to deliver high-quality work. What should I do?

Best,
Burnt out n’ Bummed out

Dear B n’ B,

It seems you’re a seasoned pro at spinning plates in the Cirque de So-Little-Money. Allow me to let you in on some backstage secrets to help you navigate the perpetual struggle for funds and recognition, and reclaim some sanity without sacrificing impact:

Prioritize and conquer

– It’s time for a tactical tango. Identify the high-impact projects that best align with one or two sectoral goals of your office. Focus your energy and side-step the less crucial tasks.

Speak the language of impact

– When dealing with funders and decision-makers, spice up your conversations with concrete indicators and data (programmatic if you lack behavioural). This helps them understand where their investment is going and what the return could be.

Assemble your army

– Build a team of champions – colleagues, mentors and higher-ups who can understand and communicate the value of your work. With a united front, the funding gods are more inclined to smile upon you.

Tell a story that sells

– To resonate with the hearts (and wallets) of potential supporters, you’ll need a compelling story – one that emphasizes all of the ways investors will be able to see and measure change. It may be challenging to promise behavioural results on a donor’s dime, so go for the ‘Tangible Transitional’, aka results en route to impact (e.g., a change in beliefs and attitudes, increased social support or self-efficacy).

Take a load off

– Schedule regular breaks, recharge your batteries and ensure you’re fit for the encore.

So what do you say? Let’s turn this draining dance into a balanced ballet.

Your number one fan,
Auntie Shifty

Three Stages of ~~Grief~~ Change

Talking (Organizational) Shift at UNICEF

“Change is hard at first-----messy in the middle-----and gorgeous at the end.”

Robin Sharma, self-help author

There are three things we are guaranteed to experience in this life — death, taxes and change. One of life’s beautiful and tragic realities is that nothing will stay the same. Yet we are hard-wired to resist the unknown. Risk aversion is built into our DNA, a remnant from when changes in our environment signalled potential danger and preserving the status quo kept social structures safely intact.

But adaptability and flexibility are also fundamental aspects of human nature. Our capacity for innovation and resilience allows us to thrive in uncertain and changing environments, whether it be in our professional or personal lives.

The field of SBC is not immune to the way we resist and fear change, or how we overcome inertia and embrace new opportunities for growth and adaptation.

Like the vast majority of organizational change journeys, the path from Communication For Development (C4D) to SBC has had its share of bumps, detours, potholes and questions about the road ahead. There’s a messy story behind the crisp lines of policy and programme documents for SBC that exist today. But the path ahead is clear, and the future looks promising.

Illustration by Oleg Borodin/Tillanelli



The Hard Truth

WHY WAS CHANGE NEEDED?

“The posters were useful in a way that they were conveying some knowledge. It’s not different from all of these ads that we are bombarded with every day. But what they did not get into, of course, is the understanding, the rationale behind why people make certain decisions.”

Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, UNICEF HQ

“In UNICEF we invest a lot in changing policies and legal frameworks. We bring the best consultants ever to help the government. But when you go to the most remote village, you wonder why the practices don’t reflect these high-level efforts on policies. That implementation gap is huge. I want to see UNICEF providing space to families and community members to discuss their own norms – not to be lectured. We lecture a lot.”

Jean Lokenga, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Indonesia

“I was never comfortable identifying as a Communication for Development Specialist. I felt like it sent the wrong signal to our partners and other folks that I was talking to that the solution was going to be communication.”

Benjamin Hickler, SBC Manager, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight

“When you say ‘Communication for Development’, for many it was not fully clear what that really means.”

Maniza Zaman, Representative, UNICEF Indonesia

“C4D focused more on the products and the communication of the products, and less on the behaviour change, the social norms and social actions that are needed in order for any of the work that we and others are doing to be sustained. We lost many opportunities – not only as UNICEF, but as a collective community trying to leverage uptake. As we have gained more experience and learned more, we have shifted our approaches, which is key. This is how it should be.”

Leila Pakkala, Director, Supply Division, UNICEF HQ

The Messy Middle

WHAT WAS THE JOURNEY LIKE?

“We don’t do change well as an organization. Any kind of change.”

Geetanjali Narayan, Principal Adviser, Organisational Culture, UNICEF HQ

“People were regularly telling me they wouldn’t take my job for anything in the world.”

Vincent Petit, Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

WHY WASN’T IT ALL SMILES FOR THE SHIFT?

“I try to avoid the term ‘shift’, because I’ve realised that it sometimes provokes a negative reaction from some of my regional and country office colleagues who feel like they’ve already been doing some of this stuff for a long time.”

Massimiliano Sani, Senior Adviser, SBC, UNICEF HQ

“Shifting to SBC would entail huge financial costs and losses to the organization – and partners – by having to rebrand multiple tools, resources, training modules, materials, etc. It would also pose a reputational risk and send a confusing message to partners on yet another name change despite significant investments at global, regional and country levels. The focus on outcomes and on social norms and behavioural sciences is already central to C4D. COs with sufficient resources have done it well, COs with limited resources just can’t. A new name will not change that reality. Investment is the key.”

Rafael Obregon, Representative, UNICEF Nicaragua

“I’ve been with UNICEF for 23 years. There’s been four different names for it, four different ways of delivering it, four different shifts. And that’s my fear. We need to understand what it is that makes sense for our programme and stick to that. My fear is that when the next SBC

Chief comes along, this person will say, “All right, now this is what we call it”. And then no one else takes you seriously. And that’s a problem, right? Because if you ask all my colleagues who have been through all these changes, they tell you it’s just a change of name. They don’t even realize what that change means or what it meant at that time.”

Sheema Sen Gupta, Director, Child Protection, UNICEF HQ

“The shift from C4D to SBC can hardly be considered a paradigm shift. The novelty in the application of SBC is the adoption of behavioural insights and ‘nuggets’ to induce change, which many consider a step backward in what UNICEF has been promoting, because it aims at influencing people to change without much regard for their involvement in the decision-making process. Communication in C4D was not primarily about passing information, but about the adoption of two-way communication to exchange knowledge, open up dialogue and

empower marginalized stakeholders to achieve sustainable change.”

Paolo Mefalopolous, Representative, UNICEF Paraguay

ON CHANGE AND HOW FREQUENTLY IT SHOULD OCCUR

“We should not assume that just because we have made some shifts, this is it. We need to invest in staying abreast of the trends and invest in our technical staff – we should not assume that they will stay abreast of the trends without the organization’s investment.”

Leila Pakkala, Director, Supply Division, UNICEF HQ

“I want to see UNICEF providing space to families and community members to discuss their own norms – not to be lectured. We lecture a lot.”

“The transformation from C4D to SBC represents the most profound shift our community of practice has experienced in my 20-year tenure.”

A gorgeous end?

“The transformation from C4D to SBC represents the most profound shift our community of practice has experienced in my 20-year tenure with UNICEF. We are not just a means, but a tangible outcome for children.”

Akiko Sakaedani-Petrovic,
SBC Manager, UNICEF Kenya

“Social and Behaviour Change feels like a more accurate description of what we do. Hopefully it helps us have better conversations about the approaches that we need to be using, which includes addressing issues with the quality of services and people’s interactions with systems.”

Benjamin Hickler,
SBC Manager, UNICEF Innocenti — Global Office of Research and Foresight

“Overall we have been doing something right and getting results – but it is also time to evolve and get better. Maybe it’s not all new science that is being adopted – behavioural science has been around for years. We are bringing it much more into the way we do business. It’s a positive move. But the question remains whether people have really understood the shift.”

Maniza Zaman,
Representative, UNICEF Indonesia

“SBC is one of the least understood and least funded parts of our work and is an unsung hero in many ways. We need to change that.”

“One of the things we did in the Country Office was that we insisted that every programme allocated predictable resources to behaviour change communication work. Our colleagues did not need to make a case to programme teams for project, time-bound funds, and knew their work was appreciated and central to all we did. It is important for the organization to make a commitment to this kind of predictability – if you value something, you commit resources to it.”

Leila Pakkala, Director, Supply Division, UNICEF HQ

“A lot of the generous money we receive to implement programming is often really strict in terms of spending, and it doesn’t allow us to be flexible. But the reality is if we want to really listen to communities, we need to be flexible. As long as we don’t sit down with the communities with different members to really understand, we do not know exactly how we’re going to implement the programme. This is something I would lobby for with donors.”

Sophie Chavanel, Chief of SBC, UNICEF Democratic Republic of Congo

“Over the past decades UNICEF has demonstrated a strong and recognized leadership on SBC. To remain relevant in this fast-evolving environment UNICEF will need to continue integrating SBC at the core of its activities, and ensure that its technical expertise is kept at the required level. It is important to note that other organizations are increasingly engaging and developing their technical capacity in this field.”

Philippe Duamelle,
Representative, UNICEF Jordan

Or a gorgeous beginning?

STAIRS TO CLIMB

“I think one of the really big challenges is the change management piece. At the country level, staff coming from a background of ‘C’ now face a shift in their roles, transitioning to advisory positions informed by social and behavioural sciences. This is particularly evident in places like Sudan. The change management challenge also extends to partners, who are still acclimating to this new era.”

Simon van Woerden,
Chief of SBC, UNICEF Sudan

“There are an increasing number of people who appreciate the value of Social and Behaviour Change, thanks to the work of the global team. But not everybody does – SBC is one of the least understood and least funded parts of our work and is an unsung hero in many ways. We need to change that.”

Leila Pakkala, Director, Supply Division, UNICEF HQ

“The shift definitely provided that very clear understanding around what SBC can do. But there is another dilemma, which is that people outside don’t understand Social and Behaviour Change. Even if most of the international and UN agencies refer to SBC, no one in government necessarily understands. I still have to explain what it is, and that is because the terminology is not there in Turkish.”

Arupa Shukla, SBC Specialist, UNICEF Türkiye

“There’s a proliferation of studies and complex tools, but I don’t always see sectors actually shifting behaviours. Maybe we have to look at the fact that we have to work with partners. Are we [UNICEF] best placed to work with communities?”

Lauren Rumble, Associate Director, Gender Equality, Programme Division, UNICEF HQ

“We have a mission for change. Whether it’s changing the lives of children or changing our organization to remain relevant in this crazy changing world, we have a mandate to change the world and ourselves. A critical, essential and non-negotiable part of that has to be Social and Behaviour Change. Historically, we have not paid that enough attention... whether SBC is applied towards internal, DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Objectives or Programme Objectives. That continues to be our Achilles’ heel. This new vision offers us an opportunity to get it right.”

Geetanjali Narayan, Principal Advisor, Organizational Culture, UNICEF HQ

A GAME PLAN TO EXPAND

“SBC is a cross-cutting strategy but in many country offices it’s confined to Health and Nutrition, because only the portfolios that have money tend to have capacity on SBC, which should not be the case. I want to see every section interact with SBC, because it’s a

cross-sectoral strategy. This thing of confining it to Health, because money is being pumped in on immunization, doesn’t necessarily help the child rights agenda. We don’t maximize the importance of SBC by confining it in one or two sectors.”

Jean Lokenga, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Indonesia

“We need to move SBC from a conceptual to an operational approach. There is a gap between what we conceptualize and what we deliver on the ground with partners and communities.”

Carlos Javier Aguilar, Regional Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF MENARO

“Despite UNICEF’s leadership in this area of work, we have all these other agencies, certainly after Covid, who were just recognizing the importance of applied behavioural science and social science to achieve the SDGs, and the signals are coming from their senior leadership. It’s Dr Tedros, it’s António Guterres, Samantha Power. These are Executive Directors of big agencies talking our language and saying, ‘We are going to do this kind of work’. In UNICEF, SBC is one of the things that we could call a comparative advantage. And yet we seem really shy or hesitant.”

Benjamin Hickler, SBC Manager, UNICEF Innocenti — Global Office of Research and Foresight

NEXT STEPS FOR SBC

“If there was something more that the shift could do to propel it a bit further, I think it would be if it became the last mile kind of intervention. By last mile, I mean with different ethno-linguist groups, those who are often left out because of mainstream culture or mainstream language. So if it really found a unique spot like that, and I don’t mean to box it in... but that would give it a bit of an oomph, because we are an equity-based agency.”

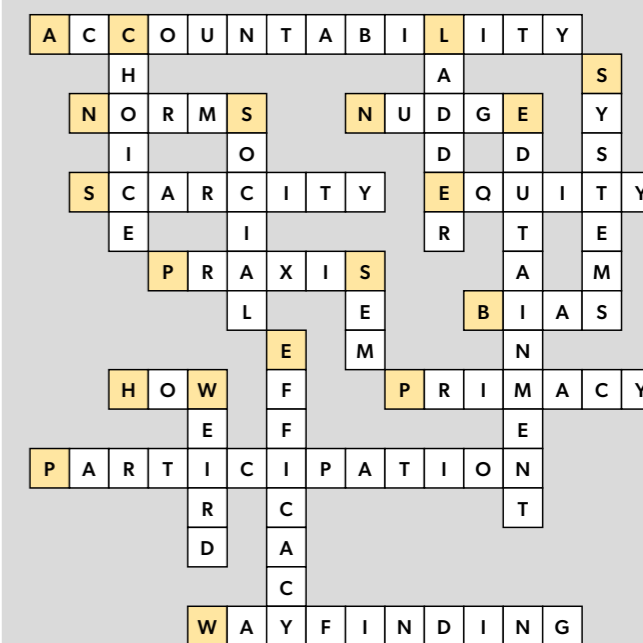
Pia Britto, Director, Education, UNICEF HQ

“We need two things in the Latin America region: political willingness for transformational change and also families and people asking for change. There’s a very strong role for SBC to plan and support this. We also need to better understand how to drive the social change agenda.”

Garry Conille, Former Regional Director, UNICEF LACRO

Crossword answers

from page 18



Steps Forward and Backward for SBC

Time to parity! Global SBC team achieves gender parity (about time!)

Health and Emergencies dominate US\$547m SBC spending in 2022... as usual

Somewhat the first-ever SBC Operational Guidance is released to the world

1,800 delegates fly to Morocco for the SBCC Summit and unironically, those same delegates flock to climate action sessions

SBC corporate evaluation finalized... now we can safely say the stuff we already knew **TOLD YOU SO**

1,800 delegates fly to Morocco for the SBCC Summit and unironically, those same delegates flock to climate action sessions **SOCIAL + BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

Not in my backyard! SBC not mainstreamed through all programmes

Banners and posters still top many COs' shopping lists

The same hands get more balls to juggle! SBC makes up 5.6% of UNICEF programme staff despite an ever-growing agenda **5.6%**

SBC intermediary outcomes still not systematically measured (but Google searches for 'what are intermediary outcomes' are WAY up)

Corporate governance: SBC is everyone's business
Everyone: Not me though, right?

Many SBC and programme staff are still ignoring the potential of digital tools and communities

Old wine, new bottle? Doubts on whether the SBC shift is having an impact

Not enough strategic partnerships with academia, especially in the Global South

Please research why Implementation Research isn't being widely implemented

Have you seen 'C'? Ongoing family feud for the missing 'C'

Trust in multilateralism low and sinking fast. SBC to stay in the boat?

Not enough strategic partnerships with academia, especially in the Global South

Data without a home — SBC indicators developed, but slow on the uptake

Data disappointment as more work needed to prioritize evidence

Hot off the presses! SBC is primed for climate work but not yet at the table

The rise of authoritarianism is important and at risk of being misunderstood — listen to people's needs!

SBC receives corporate funding for the first time, with US\$6m assigned to support the shift

SBC for all! Sectoral teams in UNICEF HQ embed their very own SBC specialists

U-Report and Internet of Good Things increasingly used for digital data collection

A word for BIRD — UNSG for Policy gives BIRD Lab a shoutout during 2023 behavioural science week

BIRD takes flight — BI labs at national and subnational levels in Ethiopia and India

The Internet of Good Things now in 45 countries

UNICEF in the mirror — BeSci used to promote internal cultural change

Sludge budge — UNICEF exploring BeSci to reduce sludge in operations and internal processes

In one week, 20k frontline workers share SBC data through digital channels during Covid

Better late than never... the first-ever UNICEF SBC programme guidance is launched (2022)

20k!

By **Massimiliano Sani**, Senior Adviser, SBC, UNICEF HQ, and **Helena Ballester Bon**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF HQ

Social Change at Scale

So much more than LIP service

By **Karen Greiner**, Regional Adviser, SBC, UNICEF WCARO, and **Raissa Vanian Edwidge**, Chief of SBC, UNICEF Niger

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**



Instead of trying to change people, what if we tried to change their context?

By ticking the 'yes' box, a taxi driver in Bogotá, Colombia agreed to pay an additional 10% on top of his required yearly income tax. The next question on Colombia's redesigned income tax form prompted him to vote on where he thinks the city should direct the extra revenue. He selected: "Elderly people in need".

At the time, the administration of Bogotá's mayor, Antanas Mockus, doubted that anyone would actually contribute more than necessary. Who would pay more than they have to? In 2002, the answer was about 63,000 people. The result of those ticked boxes? An extra US\$400,000 in the city's budget, with a strong allocation for elderly citizens living in poverty.¹⁸

While there is no fool-proof recipe for promoting social change, some ingredients have proven effective. Three vital yet often missed components of SBC are **Law, Investment and Policy** — LIP. This approach entails leveraging what governments as duty-bearers can do, rather than solely focusing on how average citizens as rights-holders can change. Instead of relying on costly and often ineffective attempts to inform, persuade or alter behaviours, the LIP framework offers impactful and exciting avenues for transformative change. For organizations like the United Nations where human rights take precedence, embracing LIP can cultivate social change without overburdening or blaming the communities it seeks to support. ■

Here are some successful examples of LIP:

Law

Requiring action by law, with sanctions for non-compliance, can yield immediate social change results at scale.

In Ghana, the National Persons with Disability Act of 2006 established the National Council on Persons with Disability (Act 715), which offers incentives to employers and manufacturers whose workplaces and services are accessible to people living with disabilities.

In Rwanda, a law banning the use and sale of plastic shopping bags and other single-use plastics led to immediate changes in behaviour, due to the unavailability of plastic products.

Investment

Governments investing in services and infrastructure can promote health and well-being.

In Mexico, EcoBici uses government and private sector funding to create eco-friendly transport (bike share) options for community members.

In 2002, the mayor of Bogotá, Colombia redesigned income tax forms to give citizens the opportunity to pay additional tax to support a cause of their choice. 63,000 people opted to pay more taxes than necessary, earning an extra US\$400,000 in revenue for the city's budget with a strong allocation for elderly citizens living in poverty.

Policy

Policy changes at local, national and international level can address systemic inequalities, improve access to essential services and create an enabling environment for social progress.

To reduce smoking, the Philippines implemented taxes on cigarettes, which resulted in a 10% decline in smoking rates between 2009 and 2021¹⁹.

Similarly, New York City introduced taxation and banned smoking in public places, resulting in a reduction in smoking rates of 5% in adults and 10% in adolescents between 2002 and 2007²⁰.

18 Bogotá Para Vivir, 2001-2003, 33-34.

19 WHO. "WHO Director-General congratulates the Philippines on its progress in tobacco control, 10 years since the signing of the Sin Tax Reform Law", news release, February 13, 2023.

20 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, "Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates Join to Combat Global Tobacco Epidemic, news release, July 23, 2008."

The Shift that Keeps on Giving

SBC is more than just in the air at UNICEF

In 2023, UNICEF spent

US\$0.68bn on SBC.

Source: UNICEF, Internal Monitoring (2023)

In 2023,

75% of Country Offices had country programmes with well-articulated SBC results.

Source: UNICEF SBC, HQ Internal Analysis (2023)

In 2023,

94% of UNICEF survey respondents said they noticed an improvement in SBC Programming Quality.

Source: Evaluation of UNICEF Investments Towards Institutional Strengthening for Social and Behaviour Change (2023)

Quality SBC programming increased by

32% from 2021 to 2023 and

94% of staff say they've noticed an improvement.

Source: Evaluation of UNICEF Investments Towards Institutional Strengthening for Social and Behaviour Change (2023)

UNICEF COs that received funding to operationalize SBC

met twice as many SBC Programming Standards in 2023 as in 2021.

Source: UNICEF, Internal Monitoring (2023)

The number of SBC staff has exceeded

500

for the first time in history. From 2021 to 2024, the number of staff increased by 25%, from 416 to 525.

Source: UNICEF, Internal Monitoring (2023)

In 2023,

67%

of 129 Country Offices reached the organizational benchmark for established or advanced standards for community engagement and social and behaviour change, compared to

35% in 2021.

Source: Evaluation of UNICEF Investments Towards Institutional Strengthening for Social and Behaviour Change (2023)

In 2023,

101

Country Offices generated social and behavioural evidence.

Data collected through community and population surveys, anthropological studies, behavioural studies and qualitative formative research demonstrate a renewed investment in behavioural evidence to inform programming.

Source: UNICEF, Corporate Strategic Indicators (2023)

zero

In 2019, UNICEF reported zero applied behavioural science activities.

Source: UNICEF, Internal Monitoring (2019)

#2

In 2022, UNICEF ranked #2 in behavioural programming out of 51 UN entities.

Source: UN, Scorecard (2022)

44

In 2023, 44 countries implemented behavioural insights interventions, compared to 11 in 2021.

Source: UNICEF, Internal Monitoring (2023)

BeSci or B.S.?

Reality-checking Behavioural Science

By **Ukasha Ramli**, Senior Behavioural Scientist, UNICEF HQ

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**

As a newly-minted member of UN 2.0's quintet of change, behavioural science has been the subject of seemingly bottomless buzz. However, in this enthusiastic rush to embrace it, certain pitfalls have emerged that threaten both its perception and efficacy:

*** The misconception that behavioural science is one-size-fits-all.** Some proponents, enamoured by the potential of behavioural science, tout it as a silver bullet for diverse and complex problems. This over-simplification undermines its nuanced and context-specific nature. One can't rely solely on behavioural biases to explain why people do what they do. A hyper-focus on behavioural science to address problems, especially when focused on individual change, may lead one to neglect necessary systemic changes.

*** The trendiness of behavioural science.** As we've seen with AI or crypto, hype often leads to hasty and improper application. In the rush to stay on trend, essential nuances and scientific rigour are sometimes overlooked. This results in misguided strategies, solutions that don't fully harness the field's true potential, and ultimately failure.

Beyond the behavioural science bandwagon that is ironically a threat to the field itself, there's also resistance from those who see behavioural science as just another trend, buried under jargon and hype.

What lies behind this scepticism? Confusion around what sets behavioural science apart from common sense or traditional approaches. Aversion to new ideas and change. Behavioural science challenges long-held beliefs and practices, which can be uncomfortable for many. The result is polarization on both sides: while some overestimate its capabilities, others dismiss it outright.

Fundamentally, there is value in understanding the underlying mechanisms of what drives behaviour. Behavioural insight is a critical part of designing innovative, evidence-based and efficient solutions to any problem that involves people. But behavioural science has an image issue. Its strengths and limitations should be communicated clearly and made accessible and relevant to diverse audiences, while avoiding over-simplification. Start by providing clear examples of where this approach has succeeded. This can be the PR that behavioural science needs to survive the vicious spotlight of development trends.

STEAL THE LOOK: BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE



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All Song and No Dance?

Making the promise of SBC a reality

By **Massimiliano Sani**,
Senior Adviser, SBC, UNICEF HQ

Illustration by **Katya Murysina**

After years of hoping and praying, Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) has finally been asked to the dance. Community Engagement and SBC was officially named as a change strategy in UNICEF's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. But how full is its dance card? On paper, SBC approaches and principles are now embedded across programmes. But in many ways, SBC is still a wallflower: a change strategy standing in front of a group of programmes, asking them to love it.

Policy guidance, technical support and efforts to secure new funding have all played a role in facilitating the embrace of SBC at UNICEF. Integrating social and behavioural sciences into UNICEF's day-to-day operations, coupled with active community participation in programme design, has helped weave SBC into the organizational fabric.

And while the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to decelerate most everything, it threw SBC into overdrive – from mitigating the spread through evidence-based communication campaigns to improving vaccine confidence by understanding the specific needs

and concerns of communities. SBC was catapulted to the forefront of UNICEF's response strategies.

We tend to flaunt UNICEF's distinctive edge: a powerful cocktail of SBC and our child rights mandate, allowing us to work across sectors and procure and deliver essential supplies. But is this true? Are we capitalizing enough on these strengths? Are they easily understood and translated into tangible assets and resources? The resounding response to these questions seems to be: well, sort of.

SBC still has a long way to go. A recent corporate evaluation²¹ found that its role has not yet been fully institutionalized. Some regions and country offices fully embrace the power and potential of social and behavioural science and tactics; others, not so much.

HOW LONG A WAY, EXACTLY?

The seniority of the SBC network is among the lowest in UNICEF, with 80% of the 525 SBC staff occupying only mid-level positions or below. There are still no Director-level positions, and only 5 out of the 7 regions have Regional Advisors. Nearly a fifth of UNICEF country offices (23 in 2023) lack a single dedicated SBC staff member, and some offices (12 in 2023) still house the SBC function in the Communication department, reflecting an outdated view of what delivering change entails.

The relatively limited presence of SBC in our results frameworks, alongside occasional reporting gaps at the country level, also gets in the way of SBC's potential to influence and make effective contributions throughout the programming cycle. While UNICEF actively supports the development of national policies and programmes, it consistently misses opportunities to diagnose, integrate and address social and behavioural drivers and bottlenecks, including at systems level.

It's hard to imagine that the private sector is skipping these steps. Anyone generating demand for a product

that no one knew they needed (see: slinkets and self-tanner) understands the profound significance of human emotions, beliefs, practices and norms. They acknowledge that investing in strategies grounded in social and behavioural science not only drives sales but enhances the experience of services and cultivates an unwavering and loyal customer base. Unfortunately, what is essential to selling smartphones and building political movements is still far from the norm in building programmes for the world's most vulnerable children.

SO, HOW DO WE GET THERE?

To take SBC from zero to hero, we need to make sure we're speaking the language of our sectoral colleagues and working within their frameworks. Interestingly enough, the narrative created to prove that our practice is legit science, particularly to medical doctors and engineers who love to distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' disciplines, is what is preventing sectoral people from accessing and owning these people-centred processes. Language and conceptual barriers fuel an 'us versus them' mentality.

For now, offering to help colleagues achieve their results seems to be the best way in. The SBC team is capitalizing on recent investment and support from senior leadership to enable the SBC function to thrive in spite of these challenges. Institutionalizing SBC is necessary to ensure that all programmes are designed with a human-centred lens that catalyzes results for children.

SBC has come a long way to get invited to the party. But it'll take time to peel it from the sidelines and get it out onto the dancefloor.

21 Evaluation of UNICEF Investments Towards Institutional Strengthening for Social and Behaviour Change (2023).

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Whose (De)fault is it Anyway?

Why *willpower alone* won't win the battle with your skinny jeans

Have you ever found yourself in a supermarket aisle next to a child kicking and screaming for a bag of gummy worms? Have you ever used work stress as an excuse to indulge in junk food? Have you ever felt like a detective trying to decipher if a food product is genuinely healthy? Have you ever found yourself impulsively buying a chocolate bar at the checkout counter? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you have been a victim of, or a witness to, the power of behavioural science.

BUT DO YOU BELIEVE ANY OF THOSE POOR NUTRITIONAL CHOICES ARE YOUR FAULT?

If you answered no, that's because you're under the spell of fundamental attribution theory, a concept in psychology which suggests that people often attribute other people's poor choices to their motivation, skill or intelligence, whereas their own poor choices are attributed to their environment. If someone has poor health, it's because they made poor choices; if your health is in decline, it's because your environment or circumstances are not conducive to healthy living. This can often be seen in the design of social policies with a focus on boosting people's knowledge or motivation to adopt better behaviours, rather than on addressing the system or environment in which those behaviours occur.

Simple behavioural interventions that seek to inform or motivate are sometimes easier and cheaper to implement than policy or legislation. But when do policies that affect systems and environments come into play?

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT NUTRITION.

There are a plethora of profit-driven food companies that invest significantly in marketing strategies that

create an 'obesogenic' environment – an environment which can lead to obesity. These marketing strategies tend to target young people with products high in fat, salt and sugar. How dare we point fingers at children and their parents for less nutritious food choices when they are continuously bombarded with aggressive marketing ploys? Such tactics include:

Misleading nutritional claims: Products labelled with terms like 'low-fat' or 'rich in vitamins' can be misleading and mask less healthy qualities.

Child-friendly packaging: Bright colours and appealing imagery are used to captivate and attract children.

Strategic product placement: Highly-processed foods with low nutritional benefits are often placed where impulse buying is most likely to strike: the checkout counter.

Behavioural science provides insights into the effectiveness of these strategies, which exploit the complex nature of nutritional information to make it difficult for most people to discern what's healthy. These strategies allow certain products

By **Rowena Merritt**, SBC Specialist, Nutrition, and **Ukasha Ramli**, Senior Behavioural Scientist, UNICEF HQ

Illustration by **Katya Murysina**

to find us at moments of low self-control and use emotional appeal to influence our food choices.

Despite the powerful influence of these marketing strategies, there is often an overemphasis on individual decision-making in public health programmes. But behaviour change does not solely rely on personal motivation. Environmental and systemic factors play a major role in our decision-making. In nutrition, policy and regulation are a necessary part of moving the needle forward and counteracting the overwhelming influence of corporate marketing and strategic product placement. Behavioural science interventions need to be complemented by regulatory or systems-level interventions, such as:

Sugar taxes: Imposing consumer taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages to discourage consumption. The introduction of a sugar tax in several countries, such as the UK and Mexico, has shown promising results, reducing the consumption of soft drinks.^{22,23}

Enhanced food labelling: Implementing clear and straightforward labelling on food products, to provide consumers with nutritional

information they can actually understand. For example, warning labels or a traffic light labelling system can tell you whether a product has high, medium or low amounts of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. This has been implemented in the UK, Chile and Argentina, and has been shown to make it easier for people to make informed food choices.^{24,25,26}

Advertising restrictions: Reducing the impact of junk food marketing, particularly that which targets vulnerable groups like children. The UK, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia have recently limited where and when advertising of junk food is allowed, in an effort to reduce consumption.²⁷

The fight against obesity and poor nutrition is not just a battle of individual willpower. It's a complex interplay of personal choices and the environment in which these choices are made. This is why a holistic approach is so important. While education and behavioural nudges have their place in behaviour change, they must be supported by a framework that addresses broader environmental and systemic factors.

Policies need to be designed in a way that not only educates but also protects consumers from the pervasive influence of food marketing. And it's not going to be easy. Better nutrition is up against private financial efforts in a sector that profits from addiction to harmful sugars and fats.

While education and behavioural nudges have their place in behaviour change, they must be supported by a framework that addresses broader environmental and systemic factors.

This is why it's important for behavioural science to focus on interventions that influence both the individual and the system – recognizing when simple nudges are not enough, and leveraging policy or regulatory interventions to support Social and Behaviour Change (see 'Social Change at Scale' on page 53).

Game time: Where are the fresh foods?

There are just three non-processed foods hidden in the supermarket above – an apple, nuts, and carrots. See if you can help these shoppers find them!



- 22 David E. Bloom et al., *The Global Economic Burden of Noncommunicable Diseases* (Geneva: Harvard School of Public Health and World Economic Forum, 2011).
- 23 WHO, *Taxes on sugary drinks: Why do it?* (2017).
- 24 Siyi Shangquan et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Food Labelling Effects on Consumer Diet Behaviors and Industry Practices", *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2018.
- 25 Bruce Neal et al., "Effects of different types of Front-of-Pack Labelling Information on the Healthiness of Food purchases – A Randomised Controlled Trial", *Nutrients* 9(12) (2017): 1284.
- 26 UNICEF, *Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling: A 'How-to' Guide for Countries* (2021).
- 27 Georgina Cairns, Kathryn Angus, and Gerard Hastings, *The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence to December 2008* (WHO, 2009).

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Reimagining Progress

Decolonization wisdom from the Amazon

By **Cássia Ayres**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF LACRO, and **Andrea Morenz de La Torre**, SBC Officer, UNICEF Colombia

Illustration by **Oleg Borodin/Tillanelli**

“May the meeting be whole and true. And may it have many purposes.”

This is how Ismenia, one of the Murui women in Puerto Nariño, began our meeting. For two years, UNICEF Colombia, with support from the Regional Office, has been working with Moniya, Vicky, Jessica and many other powerful Murui women who lead Indigenous organizations in the Amazon.

This meeting was exciting and uncomfortable, face-to-face for the first time with people we had met on countless Microsoft Teams calls over the years – an easy, convenient platform for us, but a challenging one for the intermittent, almost non-existent internet connection in Puerto Nariño.

Which is not to say that Puerto Nariño is lagging behind. In many ways, it is leagues ahead. Here, cars are banned and the only two vehicles are an ambulance and a truck for collecting recyclables. Rainwater is pooled in cisterns for washing and gardening, and electricity comes from the town’s fuel-efficient generator, which only runs until midnight. Every morning, community patrols fan out to tidy up the sidewalks. The town’s recycling and organic-waste management programmes put most world cities to shame.

In a world saddled with pessimistic climate and environmental predictions, Puerto Nariño is a hopeful model for sustainability. These breakthroughs all have a common denominator: Indigenous leadership.

The town’s namesake, Colombian general Antonio Nariño, played a key role in securing independence from the Spanish occupiers. Today, Puerto Nariño is one of 22 municipalities in the department of Amazonas in southern Colombia, and one of the country’s main gateways into the Amazon rainforest. Amazonas borders Peru and Brazil and is inhabited by nearly 75,000 people belonging to 24 indigenous groups. They live in a delicate, complex balance between modernity and tradition: DirecTV satellites powered by generators connect half-finished wooden houses to the rest of the world, while parents take their sick kids to the local shamans rather than the hospitals, which often have limited capacity and services.

For decades, social science scholars have tried and failed to understand the ancient wisdom of Indigenous communities like these, as well as the farmers and Afro-descendants who make up Colombia’s diverse landscape, in order to better understand what progress and development means to them.

Both critics and supporters of development agree that the institutional

practices of development agencies, donors and governments perpetuate dependency, breeding new forms of colonization through the erosion of diversity, local knowledge and participation from the citizens themselves.^{28,29,30} Throughout our work in Latin America, we often worry about striking the right balance between serving and preserving. UNICEF’s work with the indigenous communities of the department of Amazonas, Colombia during the Covid-19 pandemic offers hope and inspiration.

COLONIZATION AND COVID-19

When Covid-19 tore through the world in 2020, information became the most valuable currency. In scary and uncertain times, the ability to understand what was happening and how to protect oneself made everything feel infinitely less frightening and foreign. Being able to access and act on this information also significantly reduced health and mortality risks.

How did life-saving information reach the Amazon where there are over 80 indigenous languages? It didn’t. There is no indigenous-led or indigenous-serving media in Amazonas. Indigenous people contracting the virus had a fatality rate nearly double that of the general population³¹, and the reason is no secret. Inadequate information, limited health infrastructure and a cultural aversion to Western medicine make the perfect storm of risk factors.

“The death of wise men and women in indigenous families and communities represents a loss of ancestral knowledge and a rupture in their own channels of transmission and memory of their knowledge.” – Sonia, Indigenous Murui woman and specialist in ancient plants

Discussions with the women of the Organización Indígena Nimaira and La Escuela de Comunicación Indígena de la Macroamazonía Ka+ Jana Uai helped us unpack the dynamics that made these communities more vulnerable to Covid-19 infection and death:

*** No space for local leadership**
Before and throughout the pandemic, development projects did not support existing processes and forms of leadership in indigenous territories. As a result,



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they did not align with acceptable cultural needs and practices.

* Taking context for granted

There is a lack of knowledge of the geographical realities and limited internet connection of indigenous territories, and a disregard for people's time.

"It is required to send means of verification of the reported indicators, but connectivity is not taken into account and the sending of images and lists is requested again and again, in multiple tools such as shared files. In addition, training to implement these monitoring frameworks is implemented in a day or less. And then you're left in the air." – Nelly Kuirú, Murui woman and Indigenous leader

* Pre-packaged projects

Organizations implement projects with limited ability for citizens, especially young people, to participate or request support that better meets their needs.

"Young people are becoming demotivated, because many entities come but at what point do you ask the young person what they want at a dialogue table? You are already arriving with the programme and the young person says to you: At some point, can I intervene? You say: No, because we cannot change the programme." – Nelly Kuirú, Murui woman and Indigenous leader

* No meaningful connection

Long workshops take time and are typically led by people who come in and out of the community. They lack meaning and purpose for indigenous populations.

"How many people came here who had never been here before? All the NGOs were here, doing what? Taking care of the Indians. But the Indians were saying, 'Don't come to our territory, you are going to contaminate us.' A protocol was made, but what do they care? They had money they had to execute." – Nelly Kuirú, Murui woman and Indigenous leader



Francy Silva, 18, takes photographs of some of the illustrations she made for the project carried out by UNICEF and the Nimaira Foundation in Amazonas.
© UNICEF/UN0431145/Cortés

Flipping the script: From subject to storyteller

These insights call into question how development programmes are conceptualized.

How many [programmes] come directly from the needs and requests of communities and countries? How many of them are planned in cities hundreds or thousands of miles away from the communities they aim to serve?

UNICEF Colombia responded with a plan to support the department of the Amazonas with a Covid-19 approach that could mitigate some of the common issues raised by the Murui women of Puerto Nariño. The strategy was based on a community media approach, which recognizes communication as a basic human right and a vehicle for social transformation, political participation and historical narrative. It places value on communication that is evidence-based, and defined and led by local communities.

UNICEF's strategy brought together 30 community, alternative and popular media outlets across 17 departments of Colombia, with the goal of training indigenous communicators, including young people, to produce and broadcast their own information. Existing indigenous leadership, responsible for the decision-making within their

communities, led radio and face-to-face dialogue. They were also supported to tell their own stories about the health situation of indigenous communities, and to use social media to spread them further.

This approach had a significant impact on indigenous communities in the Amazonas, particularly for young people, who finally felt they had a voice.

"This time, we were the scriptwriters and directors. We stopped being the object that others portray. I decide what I want to show and how."
– Irene, 19, Indigenous youth leader and Murui teacher

- 28 Silvio Waisbord, "The institutional challenges of participatory communication in international aid", *Social Identities*, 14(4): 505-522.
- 29 Mohan J. Dutta, "Decolonizing Communication for Social Change: A Culture-Centered Approach", *Communication Theory*, 25(2): 123-143.
- 30 Thomas Tufte, *Communication and Social Change: A Citizen Perspective* (Wiley, 2017).
- 31 Susana Araujo et. al., *Key Considerations: Indigenous Peoples in COVID-19 Response And Recovery* (Brighton: Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform 2021).

Principles for a decolonized approach

When we embarked on this project, our sights weren't set on decolonization. Our aim was to reach the most remote regions with important, life-saving information. But over the course of the project, we realized that we had little to give these communities, and everything to gain.

We are indebted to the Indigenous leaders, the members of the Nimaira Indigenous Foundation, and the many wise grandparents who helped us reflect on our mindsets and step outside our comfort zones. Our collaboration provided a foundation for how SBC can support UNICEF to decolonize its programmes:

* Root project design in what communities say they need, not what we think they need

"Let's say that I go from here, to your house, to Andrea's house. Obviously I will carry my own thoughts, my own ways of life into each house. What we should do is discuss how we are going to communicate and understand each other within her house." – Nelly Kuirú, Murui woman and Indigenous leader

* Localize decision-making

Work with local and traditional authorities, within existing political structures. Avoid creating new structures, especially those that concentrate resources in large national bodies. Shifting focus from large global or national agendas to prioritize local needs and demands will require a paradigm shift.

* Examine partnerships

What partners can help UNICEF create impact? Large organizations to which we can easily transfer resources, or the local experts on the ground who understand communities and local decision-making processes? Are our systems and processes designed to allow us to partner with the organizations and people that will foster lasting impact?

* Invest in localization — the expense is worth the efficiency

A local, decentralized approach may seem expensive at face-value. It comes with the logistical cost of travelling or operating in remote, hard-to-reach areas and operating in many local languages. It requires working within low-technology settings, which takes time. In the end, these necessary investments in equity may not be more expensive than the way that we operate now: maintaining a large global and regional machinery far away from the people we serve. Taking a bottom-up approach allows programmes to be more efficient, accurate and impactful. Local experts can help allocate resources to the right places and achieve impact more quickly, saving money in the long run.

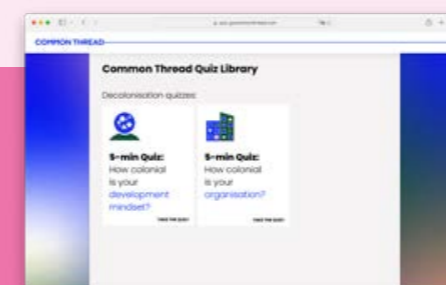
* Remove barriers to entry and funding

Indigenous and local groups are experts in their communities and their contexts, not in drafting proposals and budgets. UNICEF needs to support organizations to understand how to register, apply for resources, and manage and report on their work. Alternatively, UNICEF can meet these organizations where they're at and tailor administrative requirements to be more accommodating for their context.

* Collaborate, don't contract

A contracting arrangement, where funding is provided between monitoring reports, simply won't do. Localization requires collaboration, partnership, mutual communication and a lot of translation between local and global needs.

To reach every child and build trust, sustainability and resilience among communities along the way, decolonization must be an essential part of UNICEF's work. UNICEF Colombia put into action a model that values the knowledge of Indigenous populations, providing a blueprint for an approach that works *with* Indigenous communities rather than *for* them.



POP QUIZ

**How colonial is your mindset?
How colonial is your organization?**

Take 5 minutes to find out



SBC Works

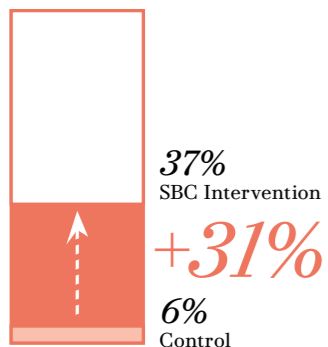
UNICEF's Direct Impact Deck compiles over 100 examples of SBC achieving real results, for real people. Here are a few examples:

Cleaner ways to encourage child health The life-changing power of handwashing

Film | Skits | Public Pledging in India

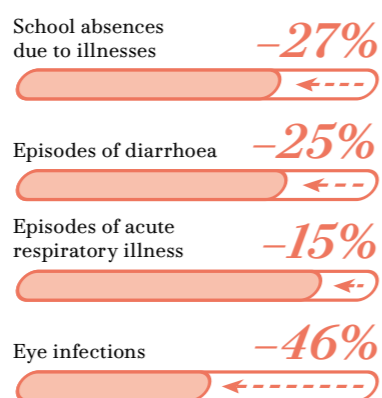
Community and school-based events that featured an animated film, skits & public pledging ceremonies led to a 31% increase in handwashing with soap.

Handwashing with soap in focus communities



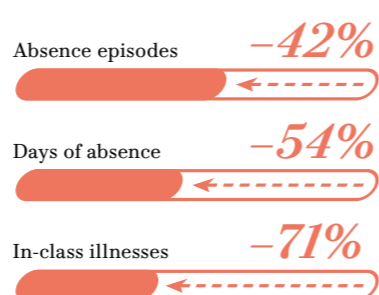
Social Marketing | Freebie in China

A social marketing programme designed according to behaviour change principles, free soap, home visits, parents' evenings and establishing a 'Good Mums' club led to fewer illnesses and absences for students.



Social Proof | Freebie in India

An expanded school handwashing programme that included soap for school sinks and student handwashing champions/peer hygiene monitors helped keep more kids healthy and in class than a standard handwashing programme.



Igniting change with spare change The impact of cash transfers

In Yemen

+15.6%
Early initiation of breastfeeding

In Zambia

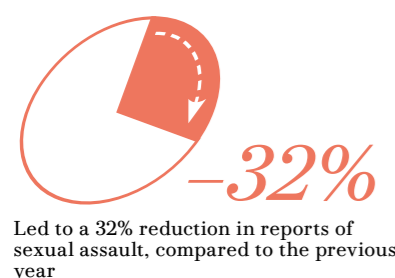
+7-8%
School enrolment

In low- and middle-income countries

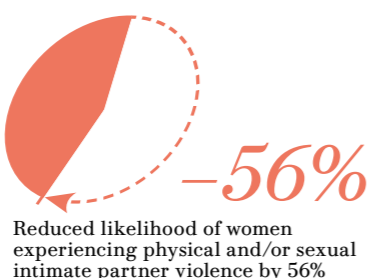
9/10 studies reviewed that measured HIV prevalence showed a positive impact from cash transfers

To learn and to lead Skill-building and local participation to reduce gender-based violence and infant mortality

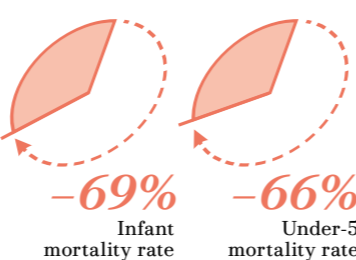
Verbal & Physical Safety Skills Training in Malawi



Verbal & Physical Safety Skills Training in Rwanda



Community Participation to Support Childcare in India



“So, do you have any proof that SBC works?”

“Pick a card.”



UNICEF's Direct Impact Deck puts SBC impact data at your fingertips

High-quality data to cite and win support for your social change, behaviour change, community engagement, communication, policy engagement and funding initiatives.

Get the deck here:
sbcguidance.org/sbc-impact-evidence



Scan the QR code to open the website

Signs of Progress

Wayfinding finds its way to vaccination in Ghana

After months of fundraising, coordinating and advocating for vaccine equity through Gavi-funded COVAX, Covid-19 vaccines were finally flowing into countries in Africa and other regions in the global south. If you were a global public health practitioner in 2021, you'll remember the moment access to Covid-19 vaccines was finally becoming more equitable. You'll also remember the confusion and panic that set in as delivery of these hard-earned doses was met with underwhelming interest and sparse uptake in country after country.

Just months before, internet servers across Europe and North America had been regularly buckling under the weight of vaccine scheduling attempts to join snaking lines outside of pharmacies and national stadiums. It seemed as though everyone over 65 had at least one friend or family member hitting refresh on a website every two seconds until a Covid-19 vaccine appointment was secured.

In typical Social and Behaviour Change folly, public health and government officials assumed that what happens in the global north happens everywhere else, too. But human behaviour once again confounded well-intentioned public plans, and millions of valuable vaccines were rapidly at risk of going to waste.

By February 2022, there was enough vaccine procured for 88%

of Ghana's population to receive one dose. Yet less than 16% of the eligible population was fully vaccinated. As Covid-19 conspiracy theories and misinformation outspread the virus, there was increasing worry that rumours would become the single unifying element of the pandemic, well before vaccination coverage. Were the majority of people in Ghana vaccine-hesitant?

UNICEF set off to investigate in Kumasi, Ghana's second-largest city and the historic capital of the Ashanti empire. Rapid, localized research revealed that most people were not hesitant towards the vaccine, but rather opportunistic. If vaccination services were clearly visible, available and easy to access, people had no objections to getting vaccinated. But people were busy and the severity of the Covid-19

By **The UNICEF Ghana SBC Team**

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**

pandemic in Ghana was low. It was a matter of prioritization, convenience and perceived cost. People in Ashanti were unlikely to go out of their way to find a vaccination site, but if the opportunity presented itself, they would be more than likely to oblige.

So, how could UNICEF turn vaccine opportunists into vaccine acceptors? Before SBC, traditional approaches might have led us towards an information campaign explaining the importance of vaccination and protection against disease. Conversations with communities led to wayfinding, a different approach to communicating information, which proved to be more effective.

WAYFINDING

When done well, wayfinding is a visual system that enables people to move through their environment to a desired destination with ease. Wayfinding at airports helps to ensure you know where you are, where you're going and what to expect when you get there. When you find solace in a glowing sign estimating the wait time of a nearby security queue, that's wayfinding at work.

% fully vaccinated people in the Kumasi region of Ashanti:

Before wayfinding 24.6%

After wayfinding 35.4%

Effective wayfinding is logical, consistent and considerate of its environment and users. Tools often used to create effective wayfinding systems include:

- * Colours
- * Symbols and icons
- * Effective language
- * Sound
- * Light
- * A designed environment (e.g., paths and rails)

The best wayfinding systems are able to effectively guide people through their physical environment and enhance their understanding and experiences within these spaces.

EXIT SIGNS

Vaccination in Kumasi was inconvenient, hard to find and unclear in its value proposition. Those who managed to find a vaccination site were met with inconsistent signage that lacked any indication of whether vaccines were available. This left people guessing. *How long will I be here? Will I even be able to get vaccinated at the end of it?* The informal nature of the signage did little to instil confidence in the vaccines or services being provided. For those who opted to enter the vaccination site, the hunt for information continued. There were no visual, verbal or written materials to explain the vaccination process, administrative requirements or costs, leaving potential vaccine recipients in the dark and all the more likely to abandon ship before getting vaccinated.

THE WRITING'S ON THE WALL

UNICEF SBC colleagues, together with the Ghana Health Service and behavioural design firm Common Thread, co-created a wayfinding system for Covid-19 vaccination in urban and peri-urban areas of Kumasi. Drawing from the colour scheme of Ghana's national vaccination card and the green and gold of the Ghana

Health Service's 'Good Life' brand, rapid prototypes were developed with important information on how to prepare for the vaccination process.

The prototypes were then tested with vaccinated and unvaccinated adults in Kumasi. Feedback from the testing underscored the importance of contextualization – people wanted to see the message in Twi and other local languages and for the person illustrated to reflect the community in which the signage would be placed. In terms of content, people wanted information to be as specific as possible and to include hours of operation.

After multiple rounds of feedback, local artists erected large-scale murals, strategically placed in busy areas, directing people towards Covid-19 vaccination sites. Following this pilot intervention, data from the Ghana Health Service's Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) showed that the percentage of fully vaccinated people in the Kumasi region of Ashanti had increased by over 10 percentage points – from 24.6% to 35.4%.

These results have made partners in Ghana curious about how behavioural design and community-driven solutions can improve health service delivery in Ashanti. This approach has piqued the interest of the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, resulting in a national initiative that brought together 48 participants across government, NGOs and the UNICEF WASH team to co-create solutions to improve the design and user experience of sustainable latrines in rural Ghanaian communities.

When you design with people, challenges turn into opportunities, or in this case, opportunists. While a wayfinding system alone will not solve every corner of the vaccination puzzle, it offers an opportunity to boost uptake among those who aren't hesitant but need services to be easily accessible. The writing's on the wall – increasing vaccine uptake doesn't always require an expensive or lengthy service overhaul, just a few signs that you're listening to those you serve.



Harvesting Hope

How collective action is tackling chronic undernutrition in Malawi

Some problems seem too messy, too massive and too unshakeable to solve alone. But what happens when people, armed with community and data, come together to solve them?

On the shores of Lake Malawi, 36-year-old Marrie Nyirenda was navigating bumps that many mothers-to-be across the country encounter well before their own bump starts to show. Marrie was drowning in questions regarding health and nutrition – questions she couldn't quite put into words. She was unaware of the new role that both should be playing in her life as an expectant mother, and in the life of her future baby.

"I was really not conversant with issues of a healthy diet; I just ate whatever was available," Marrie admits. "I didn't even know that as a pregnant woman, I was supposed to be going to an antenatal clinic three months into the pregnancy."

But even if Marrie had been well aware of the importance of a balanced diet and the six food groups, it is unlikely that this would have been enough to change her eating habits. The foods we consume are deeply influenced by psychology and culture. Shifting eating habits in Malawi would need to account for that complexity, and Malawi's erratic rainfall and prolonged dry spells. These unpredictable weather patterns show no sign of letting up. Scientists recently predicted above-normal temperatures, delayed onset of the rainy season and dry spells due to El Niño, which pose a severe threat to agricultural production in 2024. Unstable crop yields have sent food insecurity in the poorest communities. Even before the impact of El Niño, 2023 saw a huge rise in the cost of a nutritious

diet in Malawi, with fewer and fewer households able to afford it.³²

These challenges ultimately limit access to essential nutrients, affecting women and children the most. Malawi has one of the highest rates of undernutrition in southern Africa, with 35.5% of children stunted (low height for age)³³. Signs of child undernutrition are visible when they are most severe, but moderate undernutrition or stunting is often invisible and undetectable, unless a practitioner is actively looking for it by measuring arm circumference or height for age.

How do we make the invisible, visible? The answer to this could help prevent and detect undernutrition early.

DATA SHINES A LIGHT ON POSSIBILITY

In 2016, UNICEF and FAO brought together an alliance of local influencers across 10 districts, led by the government of Malawi. Religious leaders, frontline workers, nutrition volunteers and community figures came together to design a solution that not only collects data on community diets and eating habits, but offers the data to communities so that they can identify their own solutions. The common critique that local solutions are un-scalable never met Afikepo, a Community Behaviour Tracking Tool (CBTT) which ultimately reached and tracked over 3 million people.

Afikepo contains nutritional indicators to track community progress across nutrition-related behaviour change for children, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and adolescent

By **Doreen Matonga**
SBC Specialist, UNICEF Malawi

girls. The data are consolidated over a period of three months then shared with community leaders, households, frontline workers and care groups, in order to discuss corrective measures for worrying indicators.

"The CBTT acts as our guide in terms of what is working and what is not. It informs our decisions about what should be done to ensure we make

The common critique that local solutions are un-scalable never met Afikepo, a Community Behaviour Tracking Tool.

it right. If the indicators are bad, we come together as chiefs, cluster leaders and everyone, and discuss the matter," says Hanifa Siyame, a nutrition and health promoter working in Thandizo and Chimwemwe.

Issac Mvula is one of the champions of community behaviour tracking in Karonga, a district in northern Malawi that borders Tanzania. He agrees with Siyame that the dialogue sessions, backed up by local data, have been a game changer. "When we discover that there are concerning cases in the communities, the care group leader and the promoter visit the household to explore why they are having nutrition challenges, and we also step in to help with advice and resources wherever we can," he explains. The local dialogues have spurred an array of measures and

local action plans on food production, storage, consumption and more.

For example, Cyclone Freddy in March 2023 ravaged 13 districts in southern Malawi, rendering 659,278 people homeless. Over 1.6 million households became food insecure, and over 2.5 million lost their crops and livestock³⁴. Communities in Chiradzulu and Mulanje were among the three districts in the south to report low consumption of legumes, mainly attributed to the devastating effects of the cyclone. In the following community dialogue, people were already putting their heads together about how to reduce the hunger that loomed large in the next growing season.

In another community, CBTT numbers flagged that very few people were eating beans or nuts. "We had a problem with consumption of legumes, and especially the cultivation of beans, due to the weather in this area. We consulted agriculture extension workers, who gave us advice to diversify to other legumes such as pigeon peas, cowpeas and groundnuts," says Siyame. Through the power of community collaboration, they were able to devise a plan to grow and store enough beans to feed their families year-round.

Group Village Head (GVH) Chikombe says the application of the tool has promoted self-reliance and good nutrition practices in his area. "We grow vegetables, legumes, cassava and maize, which make us food-secure. Now our children are not stunted, they are bright and healthy," he reports.

The success of such a large-scale data-driven project relied heavily on digital accessibility and aggregation. Data was initially collected using paper-based surveys by nutrition volunteers, then uploaded into Kobo, a free online survey tool. This allowed data to be easily and routinely collected by community volunteers, and gave nutrition officers real-time access on their tablets.

Afikepo shows the power of data that is locally collected and owned, and shared transparently. Parents, presented with figures and facts, knew they needed to act. And when they did, a network full of caring, trusted resources emerged from the sidelines, ready to support.

As tracking nutrition behaviours gained traction, UNICEF and FAO saw an opportunity to put community data in front of higher-level decision-makers. Partners at the University of Malawi helped volunteers and frontline workers upload data into a dashboard. This created access to near real-time data, allowing it to be part of key discussions and decision-making at higher levels.

For example, in Chiradzulu district, CBTT data had continuously shown limited consumption of biofortified

Afikepo shows the power of data that is locally collected and owned, and shared transparently.

foods. Communities knew the benefits of sweet potatoes but lacked the vines to plant them. Olivia Mpulula, Afikepo District Coordinator for Chiradzulu, says a discussion on the data led one of the district partner organizations to provide sweet potato vines.



CHILDREN AGED 6-23 MONTHS

Consumption of animal source foods, legumes and biofortified foods:

from 2.4% to 19.7%

Quality of minimum dietary diversity acceptable diets:

from 30% to 40.8%

Quality of minimum acceptable diet:

from 14.8% to 27.6%

Consumption of legumes:

from 30% to 70%, in some areas

In Thyolo, data revealed limited consumption of animal source foods, despite the distribution of chickens. Further investigation revealed that few households had been able to keep the chickens alive. This discovery resulted in the district allocating a paraveterinary assistant to provide animal health services.

At the heart of these success stories lies behavioural evidence. Afikepo's impact has not gone unnoticed – the behaviour tracking tool is set to become a key part of the government's Multisectoral Nutrition Policy and Strategy for 2024-2028.

For all the messy, massive, unshakeable problems out there, instead of coping on your own, try conversing with community members. Instead of spreading awareness, share evidence. Instead of letting far-away leaders make the decisions, leave it to the locals – who know their challenges, and ultimately their solutions, best. ■

32 "Save The Children Study Unveils Alarming Food Security And Nutrition Projections for Malawi in 2024-25", *Save The Children*, February 9, 2024.

33 National Statistical Office, *Malawi Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019-20, Survey Findings Report* (2021).

34 OCHA, *Malawi: Tropical Cyclone Freddy - Flash Update No. 11* (2023).

Afikepo's results are hard to argue with, and have touched the lives of nearly 3 million people across 667,000 households.

CAREGIVERS

Women of reproductive age (15-49) meeting the minimum acceptable diets:

from 30.3% to 43.3%

Households consuming biofortified foods:

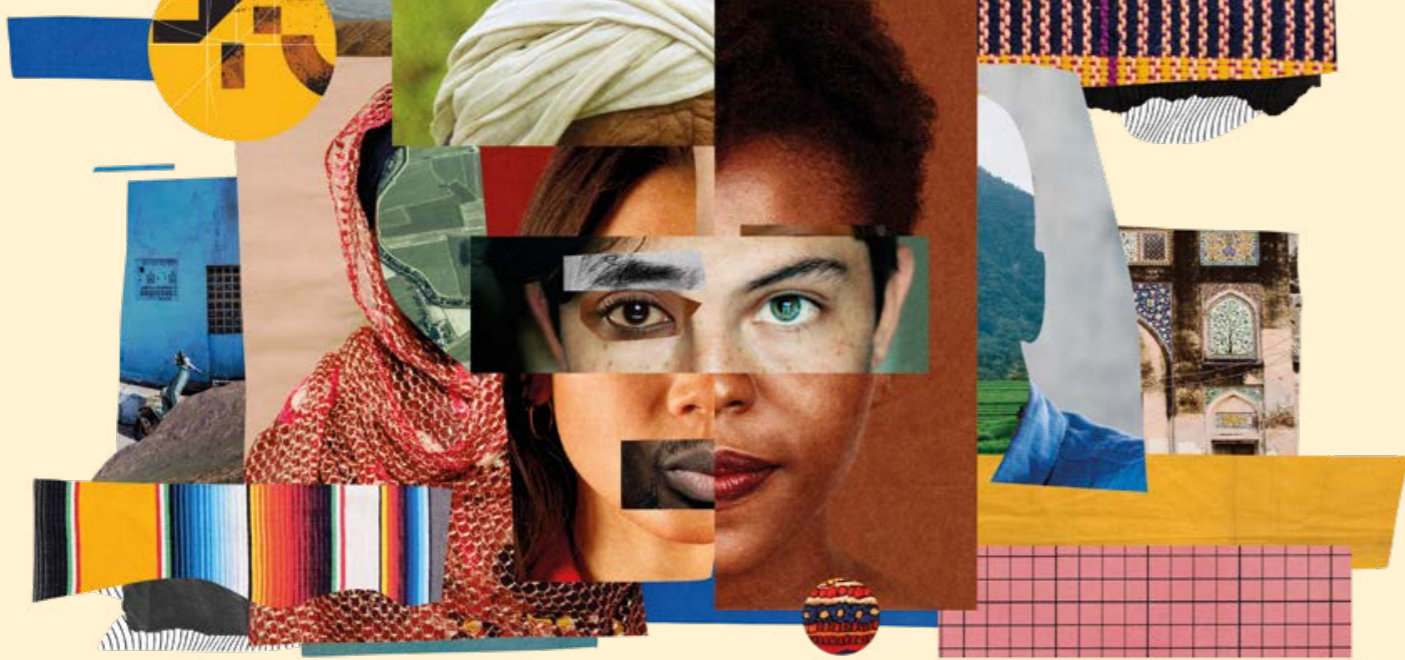
from 13.1% to 22.7%

Uptake of iron-folate by pregnant women:

from 60% to nearly 100% in all districts

Exclusive breastfeeding:

from 60.8% to 72.3%



Dodging the Silver Bullet

Why one method can't solve it all

Whenever a new Social and Behaviour Change approach arrives on the scene, it dazzles, gets debated and is inevitably challenged, debunked or discarded with some variation of the question, *is this even new?*

No matter where an approach comes from – the private sector, like human-centred design, or the government sector, like behavioural science – this ‘rise and fade’ phenomenon seems to hold true. Social marketing, all the rage during the HIV epidemic of the 1990s, now lingers in the shadows, its components folded into other approaches. The positive deviance approach that emerged from the nutrition sector, despite evidence that supports it, has yet to claim a place in the social change toolkits of most practitioners.

In this revolving door, there remains one constant: the desire to uncover a ‘magic recipe’, a singular step-by-step approach to tackling any social or behavioural challenge, with guaranteed and consistent results. This quest returns like a zombie, decade after decade, looking for something new to wrap its cold, dead hands around.

No single approach is sufficient to address the multitude of complex challenges that humans currently face.

I’m reminded of American poet Walt Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’ – “I am large, I contain multitudes”. I like to imagine him directing this line to development and human rights practitioners specifically. No single approach, no one trend, is sufficient to address the multitude of complex challenges that humans currently face.

The pieces that follow explore the array of people and projects addressing that multitude. While ‘Innovation for everyone’ zooms out, providing tips for fostering innovation here and now, ‘A spoonful of HCD’ zooms in on the development of a revolutionary kitchen

By **Karen Greiner**
Regional Adviser, SBC,
UNICEF WCARO

Illustration by **Oleg Borodin/Tillanelli**

utensil using human-centred design, or HCD. ‘New kid on the block or invaluable building block?’ looks at the ongoing role of HCD in the space and challenges my ‘rise and fade’ theory.

Just as there is no silver bullet for social change, there are no magic organizations that can do everything on their own, despite what some funding proposals might promise. ‘You, me and SBC’ offers an overview of the organizations working to promote positive change for communities, societies and the planet, and shows why it’s vitally important that we work together.

Whether you’re skimming or studying the next few pages, do be warned: you will encounter zombies. Do not be put off. The skeletons of approaches past and present hold key lessons that will help us approach the challenges of the future more equitably and effectively.

You, me, and SBC

Rising to the challenges of the future requires collaborators, not competitors

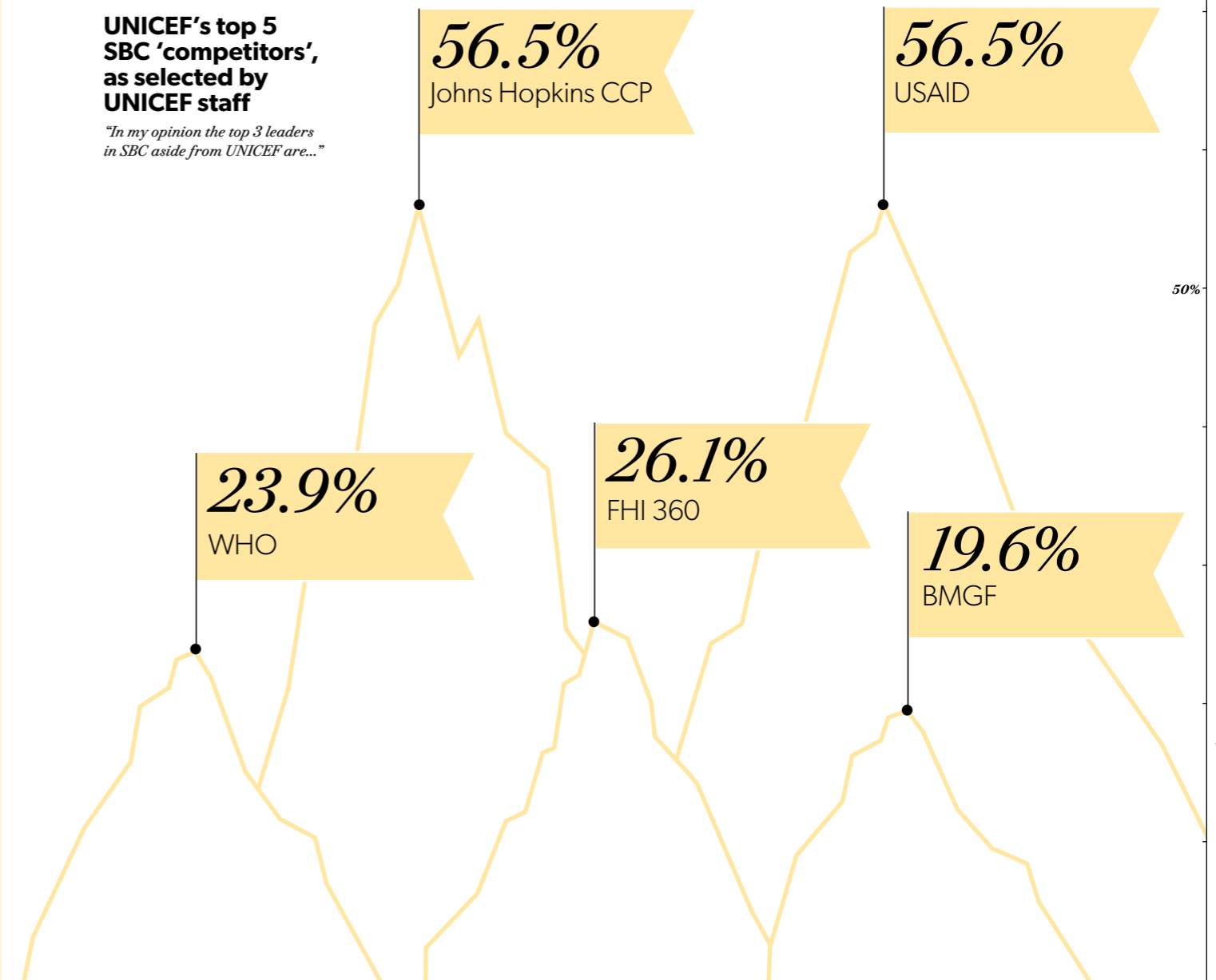
If you were to ask your colleagues who they think is leading the charge in Social and Behaviour Change, what do you think they would say?

A recent survey revealed that UNICEF SBC specialists generally fall into two camps. One side touts UNICEF exceptionalism, supporting that UNICEF has the largest specialized workforce in the world, has been doing SBC for a long time, and has built trust at the community and government level. To them, there are few or no organizations pushing SBC at the same level.

The other side isn’t so different. They accept UNICEF’s traditional strengths but recognize that the space is changing. To the question of who is leading, their response might go something like: “The SBC territory is getting crowded. The good news is more organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of SBC, and that means UNICEF has more partners, allies and opportunities

UNICEF’s top 5 SBC ‘competitors’, as selected by UNICEF staff

“In my opinion the top 3 leaders in SBC aside from UNICEF are...”



with which to do excellent work, sometimes with more support from senior leadership and wider recognition of SBC's value." UNICEF needs to focus on evidence of impact, upskilling its workforce and adapting quickly. If not, it could get left behind.

To unlock the full potential of SBC, it matters less which organization is leading the pack; more important is the way in which we collaborate and partner to address complex challenges and maximize collective impact. This is where UNICEF can play an important convening role.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb's concept of white and black swans, or expected and unexpected catastrophes, can provide another angle from which to consider UNICEF's position in the broader industry. In a recent article for the *New Yorker*³⁵, Taleb argued that contrary to popular belief, the Covid-19 pandemic was not a black swan event at all. Reliable sources predicted it and shared public warnings of an impending pandemic. Unfortunately,

these predictions were not heeded and little was done to prepare.

As with all major public health emergencies, SBC was called to duty. After all, at the heart of mitigation and control strategies was human behaviour and collective action. The success of SBC in curbing the spread of the virus would not have been possible without support from governments and partner organizations which had the tools, expertise and networks to respond.

Partnering with stakeholders enables swift mobilization of resources and expertise, tackling unforeseen challenges. Relationships forged during routine periods become pivotal in times of unpredictability. This way of working builds trust and enhances the effectiveness and coordination of planned initiatives, for smoother navigation of anticipated situations – white swans.

We have taken trust for granted in science, expertise, government and international law. One election can

detonate the foundation of decades of work. Black swans are not always global catastrophes. They don't always have clear start and end dates. To anticipate and prepare for them, UNICEF will need to build on the past while simultaneously embracing change. Organizations that are able to innovate, anticipate and rally forces are more likely to thrive in the world of Social and Behaviour Change.

35 Bernard Avishai, "The Pandemic Isn't a Black Swan but a Portent of a More Fragile Global System", *The New Yorker*, April 21, 2020.

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Extra content



Innovation for everyone: 3 ways to go further, faster

By **Karen Greiner**
Regional Adviser, SBC, WCARO

Got an itch for innovation? Luckily for you, there are several ways to scratch it without help from a dedicated innovation team within your organization. And before you groan and start clearing your schedule, you should know that the path to innovation doesn't have to be a long one. You may not land on the game-changing solution tomorrow, but you can take valuable steps to help you get there.

The first step is to recognize that innovation is for everyone, not just a select few. With that in mind, here are some things you might try:

1. CONSIDER NATIONAL INNOVATION TEAMS

National Innovation Teams help to sustain and grow investments in innovation capacity. In Burkina Faso and Niger, government leaders participating in a social change learning series formed National Innovation Teams within their Ministries of Health. Through this, they learned about the human-centred design process and how the co-creation and rapid prototyping stages are essential steps to improve services and achieve positive health outcomes in communities. The Promoting Innovation in the Sahel initiative, led by governments and supported by USAID and Ideas42, highlights how a training series can be anchored within government institutions.



2. CREATE LOCALLY-STAFFED INNOVATION CENTRES

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has staffed each of its 91 Accelerator Labs with three national positions: Head of Experimentation, Head of Exploration and Head of Solutions Mapping. The latter is responsible for uncovering innovative practices that exist within the country they operate in.

3. CREATE AN INNOVATION FUND

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) Refugee-led Innovation Fund is an example of an innovation challenge that defies the status quo when it comes to innovation, supporting initiatives of displaced communities instead of external organizations. Women for Action in Malawi used the grant to create new agricultural techniques in camps for displaced people. Another grant winner, Education for Peace, developed educational drama workshops with young people in Sudan.

All of these approaches rest upon the belief that communities already possess the talent and ideas to create the change they seek. They just need to be tapped into. Each of these approaches requires investment in that belief. Investing in local capacity and engaging with innovation that's already in motion can get us much further, much faster than if we looked for guidance from other contexts.

It sounds simple enough; but to truly make space for local talent, external actors need to de-centre their expertise and start listening.

So hop off your high horse and see just how far locally-led innovation can take you.

Even the best can do better

Here's what UNICEF staff had to say about the state of SBC:

UNICEF SBC HAS ITS EDGE:

“ Hundreds of boots on the ground and a large internal network of SBC specialists with expertise across different domains”

“ A comprehensive approach, integrating cultural sensitivity and community engagement with innovative communication methods, underscores UNICEF's instrumental role. An extensive network and expertise enables the organization to address key global issues, driving positive behavioural change and promoting child well-being from global to grassroots levels”

“ A multisectoral programme for children which helps to have an integrated approach to SBC – which no other organization has. We have dedicated human resources to design and implement SBC strategies at all levels to fulfil children's rights”

“ Community engagement and voicing community demand”

BUT IT ALSO NEEDS SHARPENING:

“ The SBC space is getting crowded. We need to demonstrate results to stay fit for purpose”

“ UNICEF SBC work should be made more visible externally. We also need to strengthen our leadership at the local level. We lack real ability to assess impact of SBC projects, hence it's difficult to justify new ones”

“ UNICEF needs to invest more in upgrading of skills, adding innovations and documenting and showcasing what is working”

A spoonful of HCD

Helping nutrition spread with a community-led utensil tweak

By **Christopher Brooks**
SBC Specialist, Digital
Engagement, UNICEF HQ

At first glance, a spoon with holes in it may not seem like the most useful utensil. But when used for baby food, its superpower is revealed. This spoon helps caregivers achieve the optimal consistency for baby food — if it falls through the holes, it's too watery. Its sidekick? A bowl with ridges that indicate appropriate portion sizes for different age groups. Together, this dynamic duo fights off malnutrition with simple modifications to everyday kitchenware.

This innovation, known as the Complementary Feeding Bowl, began with research at Emory University and was co-designed with communities in India and Kenya and validated through testing in Malawi. UNICEF has since built upon the product by adding icons to the rim of the bowl to illustrate the combination of food groups children need. Thanks to input from local communities, the food icons are customized to the palates and cuisines of different regions.

But inclusivity doesn't stop there. The product uses contrasting colours, tactile features and a chunky spoon design to cater to different abilities. It even includes reminders of the importance of breastfeeding and handwashing.

Almost half of all children globally are not eating a balanced diet during the complementary feeding period, when infants need to transition from breast milk to more nutritious foods (from 6-23 months old). This simple innovation rises to the challenge by bridging three critical behaviour change principles: information, practice and ease.

It is designed to not only advise caregivers but also equip them to practise these behaviours regularly with ease.

BUT HAS IT WORKED?

The Complementary Feeding Bowl has been implemented by 13 UNICEF Country Offices, and early results show increases in meal frequency and quantity, thickness and diversity of food. The data suggest that the bowl can help improve feeding practices for young children and maximize the impact of nutrition programmes at a relatively small additional cost. When fully scaled, this innovation has the potential to reach 57 million caregivers through existing Infant Young Child Feeding programmes. A documentation exercise is currently underway to fully assess its impact in the 13 countries and assess its viability for scale.

When we let community insights lead, even the most mundane objects can become pathways to behaviour change.

SCAN TO VIEW
PROJECT WEBSITE



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New kid on the block or invaluable building block?

Human-centred design in international development

Wikipedia will tell you that human-centred design (HCD) first came onto the scene as early as 1958, when a Stanford professor had the gall to suggest that engineers should consider the people they design for.

The creative industries soon saw its value as a problem-solving approach, a way to bring the perspectives of actual users into the making of products and services. And over the last 15 years, design thinking and HCD have crept from the margins into the mainstream for development and humanitarian organizations.

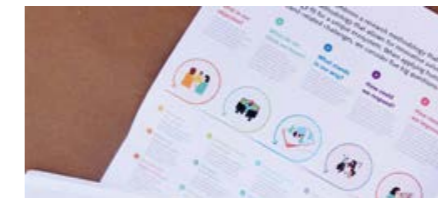
The widespread adoption and application of HCD, or 'social design', in the development and humanitarian space has led to Measured Design, a new partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and John Snow, Inc that aims to define and measure its effectiveness. This initiative builds on earlier efforts by USAID and BMGF to clarify the role and potential of HCD for public health, resulting in attempts to define terms and standards, and space to share resources and reflections at Design for Health.

In December 2023, Yux, a pan-African research and design agency based in Dakar, published a flagship study on the state of HCD in Africa. While the findings illustrate the increasing use of HCD to address a range of concerns, they also highlight

the gaps and challenges in the effective application of HCD in Africa, providing a roadmap for its advancement in the social impact field.

WHERE DOES UNICEF FALL AMONG THOSE PUSHING HCD FORWARD?

In 2017, UNICEF (with FirstHand—formerly Nucleus) launched HCD-4Health, a human-centred design approach to addressing health challenges such as demand for immunization. It has since been applied by over 30 UNICEF Country



The HCD4Health Kit © UNICEF/hcd4health.org

Offices to help solve challenges within primary health and beyond. In 2023 alone, UNICEF SBC teams used HCD to redesign services to better reach unvaccinated communities in Tanzania's peri-urban neighbourhoods, build trust between communities and health providers in Karachi, support more effective adolescent feedback for refugee services in Poland, and encourage fathers to immunize their children in Uttar Pradesh.

In 2023, UNICEF SBC and the Innocenti Office of Research and Foresight established the Behavioural Insights Research and Design (BIRD) Laboratory network to complement the HCD approach with evidence-informed solutions, experimental methods and rigorous impact evaluation.

By **Benjamin Hickler**
SBC Manager, UNICEF Innocenti—
Global Office of Research and
Foresight

How might we make HCD better? By exploring the potential of blending it with behavioural science and other disciplines to better address the most difficult problems affecting children. By investing in HCD programmes beyond health. By documenting evidence and success stories so that HCD can continue to thrive.

To some, HCD is the new kid on the block. But despite this perception, HCD has decades of results proving its staying power. It can complement SBC strengths in participatory methods, community engagement and co-design. To solidify its place in our toolkit and escape the fate of fads in our field, HCD needs to increase its focus on impact and results.

To learn more about UNICEF's BIRD Lab network, visit www.unicefbirdlab.org



SCAN TO VISIT
BIRDLAB



DRAWING A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR PLANET

Can we really leave it up to power junkies and status addicts?

Illustration by Oleg Borodin/Tillanelli

By **Vincent Petit**
Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

As the flags of 150 nations represented at the COP28 UN Climate Change Conference were lowered and custodians swept the floor of rubbish left by 85,000 participants, the air was thick with irony — or was it pollution?³⁶



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Never before had the contradictions of a massive gathering to discuss the climate crisis been more blatant: the thousands of flights taken, the hundreds of millions of dollars burned, the hours spent in the filtered, cool air of five-star hotels while outside the air quality in Dubai ranked among the worst in the world, posing major health risks to ordinary people, like those responsible for cleaning up after the whole event. Factor in the bizarre declaration to “end fossil fuels” from one of the world’s largest oil producers and a host nation which, among its UNFCCC commitments, shared its plan to increase fossil fuel production³⁷, and you have yourself a full-blown spectacle.

The number of fossil fuel industry lobbyists in attendance was record-setting. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) openly called for its member countries to oppose any text or agreement targeting energy and fossil fuel — leading to another political disappointment. Back in the US, the former president announced that his re-election would allow him to “close the border and drill, drill, drill”.

This war on the planet is part of an established and lasting political project. Even the International Monetary Fund, not exactly staffed by radical leftists, admits that “ending the fossil energy subsidies should be the centrepiece of climate action”. It also reports that governments are pouring oil on

FOSSIL FUEL SUBSIDIES, 2022:

\$7 trillion
or, *\$13 million a minute*

the fire. Globally, fossil fuel subsidies were \$7 trillion in 2022 (\$13 million a minute), a \$2 trillion increase since 2020³⁸. This represents 7.1% of global GDP. For comparison, the world spent 4.3-4.9% of GDP on education that year. Even in the face of unprecedented storms, rises in temperature and climate-related emergencies, fossil fuels have never, in history, had more government support than today. This money goes to a few dozen well-mapped projects known as ‘carbon

bombs’, projects which could annihilate every positive climate effort worldwide, both public and private.³⁹

The individuals leading the fossil energy industry are insulated from the immediate consequences of climate change, and due to their wealth will probably be the last to suffer. There are no immediate incentives or benefits for them to behave differently, because none yet supersede their financial interest.

This war on the planet is part of an established and lasting political project.

Even in this bleak capitalist reality, solutions exist. We desperately need better policies and stronger public regulations. Sociologists and economists like Thomas Piketty⁴⁰ have demonstrated that social and political mobilization throughout history has resulted in policies geared towards social and economic progress and major equity-promoting measures, which have all been imposed on elites who didn’t want them. Such was the case for progressive income tax, social security systems, free education and free medical coverage. If gatekeepers refuse to change, we as citizens must take it upon ourselves to apply pressure and forge a better future.

But the movement for the planet is not exactly winning unanimous support. In OECD countries, there are still enough voters to support the status quo. There are a number of reasons for this frustrating inertia: lack of understanding, misinformation, greenwashing, indifference, denial and complex neural processes to avoid thinking about uncertainty. The constant pursuit of buying and accumulating continues to be a symbol of success and happiness, particularly in Western cultures. Why be stuck with the iPhone 14 when you can have the 15 seven months later? Most people don’t buy SUVs for treacherous off-road expeditions, but to drive their kids to school.

We are addicted to these forms of social validation because our minds

have been colonized by aggressive and sophisticated advertising. The challenge now is to unlink happiness from consumption and progress from extravagant wealth. The solution to the planetary crisis is not solely technical, but is deeply personal and embedded in our sense of self – our morals, ethics and belief systems. We need to urgently flip perceptions so that gas-guzzling cars, lavish steak dinners and frequent, private air travel are seen as ostentatious, wasteful and lame.

But this should be in addition to, and not instead of, urgent political action. Despite efforts made to date, we are on track for an additional 2°C or 3°C increase in temperature. At this rate, incremental shifts will be too little, too late.

It's up to us to hold policy-makers accountable and create the condi-

stability and personal well-being can overshadow the more abstract and long-term consequences of unsustainable consumption in a dying world. Policy-makers need to provide alternatives that make sustainable living more accessible to all walks of life: easy pathways to change, affordable, planet-friendly solutions for what we eat and buy and how we move, earn a living and find a home. They need to prioritize incentives and compensation for those most affected. It is unfair to ask those facing poverty to lead. Those with privilege, those responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, must start the revolution. Organizations like UNICEF must boldly and unconditionally support this movement.

Both people and the systems that rule and influence our lives need to change. SBC can help in both those departments.

We need to urgently flip perceptions so that gas-guzzling cars, lavish steak dinners and frequent, private air travel are seen as ostentatious, wasteful and lame.

tions to accelerate change, from fossil fuel subsidies to marketing, food and manufacturing regulations. But politics is notoriously short-sighted and risk-averse.

Lobbyists are working overtime in every conference, corridor and meeting room to maintain the status quo and keep private interests at the centre of public policies. They use new tactics like 'discourses of delay' to justify inaction and perpetuate improbable hopes of technological solutions to all our problems. These ploys easily permeate public opinion, adding doubt and hesitation to an issue that has little grey area left.

Ordinary citizens play a critical role in fighting the lack of political will and pushing transformation forward. So, what's stopping us saving the world? But much of the world is just trying to survive. The immediacy of individual concerns such as shelter, food and job security, economic

First, we need to collect quality social and behavioural evidence to answer many questions about our daily lives. What are the cognitive barriers at play? What psychological levers can change our lifestyles? How is public opinion oriented and structured? Are people aware of the causes of climate change? How can those factors be mitigated at an individual and societal level? What are local transportation preferences? Do they match the public offering? How do people perceive plant-based diets? What emotions and meanings do they attach to their current food habits?

Quality, granular evidence can support everything from creating narratives that make change widely desirable, to informing local policy design that is contextualized and segmented to appropriately address population risk and ecosystem impact (which varies dramatically across social and income groups).

Along with shifting individual mindsets, SBC can also nurture collective action. Community and civil society engagement can be leveraged to support local organizations and initiatives for change, and to catalyze social movements. However, the real impact will come from fortified climate governance. SBC can get us there, through reinforced mechanisms for public participation, discussions on policy priorities and trade-offs, and involving those most affected in designing how we adapt. Our sector can create collective decision and accountability mechanisms that will build the ownership, cohesion and trust we desperately need – between citizens and authorities, and across our diverse societies.

The planet — and the billions of people who depend on it — will not wait forever.



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- 39 Damian Carrington and Matthew Taylor, "Revealed: the 'carbon bombs' set to trigger catastrophic climate breakdown", *The Guardian*, May 11, 2022.
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Together, for a change



Every few years, the International SBCC Summit gathers the SBC community together in one place to learn from best practices, leading theories and the reality on the ground.

Join us in 2025.

This isn't networking for networking's sake. It's a sector-wide meeting of minds. This kind of knowledge-sharing can only happen face-to-face.

SBC might just help us design better ways forward, towards a healthier, better future. Let's learn how, together.



AI in the Face of the Digital Divide

For many years, students graduating into a market with high unemployment rates in countries like Kenya and India have taken up ghost writing essays for rich students at Western universities.⁴¹ This lucrative practice is known as ‘contract cheating’. However, the launch of ChatGPT has hit the contract writing business hard as more and more students opt for free and instant essays authored by artificial intelligence (AI).

This article is not about the potential of AI to further economic inequality, but instead, the potential it holds to revolutionize education – but only if we first reduce the digital divide.

AI is evolving education as we know it. Through transforming technologies like adaptive learning platforms, students can receive more personalized educational experiences with content tailored to meet their individual needs and learning styles. By analyzing student responses and learning habits, AI tools can provide teachers with insights to help them develop more effective teaching strategies.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

It’s hard to sing the praises of AI in education when not everybody will benefit from it. The digital divide – the gap between those with and without access to digital technology and the internet – is especially pronounced in education. Internet penetration is only about 43% in Sub-Saharan Africa (2021)⁴², compared to over 90% in Europe (2022).⁴³ This disparity is even more pronounced in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, which has the largest gaps in mobile internet coverage and usage with 78% of the population still not connected.⁴⁴

In many low-income countries, less than 10% of students have access to a computer at home, and the numbers for internet access are even lower.⁴⁵

A study by the OECD suggests that students without internet access are likely to score lower in key educational areas, highlighting the importance of digital access in modern education.⁴⁶ This disparity bubbled to the surface during the Covid-19 pandemic as children in poor countries lost 66% more lifetime in education compared to children in rich countries.⁴⁷ This could be partially due to the fact that 91% of children in rich countries were able to continue learning through online lessons whereas those in poorer countries could not.⁴⁸

The digital divide has clear implications for children. The emergence of AI could drive this divide even further.

HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

- 1. Improve digital infrastructure in underprivileged areas.** This involves providing access to computers, the internet and reliable, high-speed connectivity.
- 2. Enhance digital literacy.** Educational programmes must equip students with basic digital skills to ensure that they can effectively utilise and benefit from AI-driven educational tools. Collaborative efforts between governments, non-profits and private sectors, similar to the Global Partnership for Education, can be instrumental in this regard.

By **Ukasha Ramli**
Senior Behavioural Scientist,
UNICEF HQ

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**



- 3. Develop AI tools for everyone.** For AI to support students all over the world, it is essential that tools meet their diverse needs. AI tools need to be made culturally relevant and language-inclusive.

Reducing the digital divide gets us closer to reducing education inequality. By closing this digital gap, we can ensure that every student has the chance to reach their full potential.

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Farewell Beneficiaries, Welcome Change-Makers

By **Charles Tayo**, SBC Specialist, UNICEF
Burkina Faso, and **Karen Greiner**,
Regional Adviser, SBC, UNICEF WCARO

Illustration by **Tatiana Komarova**



“People wanted to access vaccination and civil registration services, but they were facing multiple barriers, including services being closed, or not having supplies, or not understanding the administrative requirements to access them,” explains Sana Oumarou Bade.

In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Sana and his friends set out to fix that. “We would go fetch the forms that were required to access a service, and bring them back to families and explain what they needed to do,” they explain. As more people saw the value in their ‘multi-service space’, more people requested assistance and more volunteers showed up to help.

As of November 2023, twelve volunteer-led spaces had popped up in and around Ouagadougou. Despite connectivity challenges, Sana’s group managed to set up an online spreadsheet to document the kinds of support they offered. This allowed them to track common service requests and create relevant resources that could be shared widely, reaching more people than their space alone ever could.

Beyond the gratitude and praise they received from the community, for volunteers like Sana, this role fulfilled a much deeper desire. He had seen many development projects

come and go in his neighbourhood, but he had never been asked what he could contribute, and how a local constituent like himself could lead the effort. He takes pride in “local young people finding solutions, without any outside assistance”.

Sana and his friends had previously engaged with government bodies on social issues emerging from U-Report, a UNICEF polling tool that provides young people with a space to speak out about issues that matter to them. Seeing the challenges revealed by the U-Report polls inspired them to create the multi-service space.

With more than thirty-two million U-Report members across the globe, the potential to convert online engagement into youth-led offline action is massive. Can we design an approach that goes beyond asking young people what their problems are? Can we also make space for young people to be part of the solution?

Through a human rights-based approach, we can.

To understand how this could work, let’s take a look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs⁴⁹. This framework demonstrates the importance of realizing society’s basic needs first (safety, shelter, food and water), pictured at the base of the triangle. In a human rights-based approach, self-fulfilment needs such as the desire to belong and to feel accomplishment are just as important as physiological needs. Designing to satisfy the whole triangle – the ‘full person’ rather than just the ‘person in poverty’ – allows us to consider people’s complex desires, and where they want to go in their lives, as opposed to simply equipping them with the bare minimum to survive.

Fundamentally, a human rights model views everyone as potential change-makers, rather than passive beneficiaries. Change-makers are capable of promoting their own well-being and creating opportunities to support others.

While some charities and humanitarian organizations do have beneficiaries in times of acute crisis, a development organization like UNICEF should promote the belief that community members can always contribute to the well-being of their families and neighbours. For a human rights-based approach to work, there must be opportunities and invitations for people to contribute as early and frequently as possible.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?

Here are three design choices that social change practitioners can make to align their interventions with a human rights-based approach:

1. **Design interventions with multiple opportunities for community members to contribute, including adolescents and children.** Community members should contribute throughout the life-cycle of an intervention, from sharing ideas in the formative design phase to supporting data collection in the evaluation phase.
2. **Invest in whatever is required to operationalize the 'nothing about us, without us' ethos.** This might mean hiring wheelchair-accessible vehicles for your workshop, providing arrangements for child care, or making content available in different formats and languages.

3. **Align language with a human rights mindset** by banishing passive terms like 'beneficiary', 'audience' and 'target'.

MORE RESOURCES FOR ADOPTING HUMAN-RIGHTS LANGUAGE:

1. Here Are Some Dos And Don'ts Of Disability Language
2. Why is language important in disability and neurodiversity?
3. UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines

49 Kendra Cherry, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs", *Very Well Mind*, April 2, 2024.

Want to shift power in your language?

INSTEAD OF:

✗ Referring to people, communities and groups as **BENEFICIARIES, TARGETS, AUDIENCES***

✗ **WE GAVE VOICE TO...**

✗ **WE EMPOWERED... WE USED...**

✗ **WE USED YOUNG PEOPLE, WE LEVERAGED YOUNG PEOPLE**

✗ **HARD-TO-REACH COMMUNITIES**

✗ **AIDS VICTIMS, HIV/AIDS PATIENTS, DISABLED PEOPLE**

✗ Referring to the use of services and products (e.g., vaccinations) as **COMPLIANCE, ADHERENCE**

TRY USING:

✓ **COMMUNITY MEMBERS, PARTICIPANTS, CONTRIBUTORS, PARTNERS, COLLABORATORS**

* 'Audiences' can be used if the intention is limited to giving information to a presumed-to-be-passive group of people.

✓ **WE AMPLIFIED VOICES... WE CREATED PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE...**

✓ **WE CREATED OPPORTUNITIES... WE COLLABORATED WITH...**

✓ **WE COLLABORATED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, WE INVITED YOUNG PEOPLE**

✓ **UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES**

✓ **PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES**

✓ **UPTAKE, PROMOTION OF SERVICES***

*Why stop at uptake? Community members can also help to promote services.



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Stockpiling Trust

How people-driven solutions will help countries face future crises

By **Vincent Petit**
Global Lead, SBC, UNICEF HQ

In May 2023, I visited the UNICEF office in Basra, a city in southern Iraq nestled between Iran and Kuwait. Once celebrated as the 'Venice of the East', today its historic canals look a lot more like sewers. Seated on the frontlines of climate change, Basra is the epicentre of an area being decimated by water scarcity, poor sanitation, and increasingly hot and inhospitable temperatures.

Illustration by **Katya Murysina**

As part of UNICEF's effort to reduce water shortages in the city, NGOs were commissioned to consult local communities and discuss conservation. People gathered in Mosques and community centres and were met by local, skilled facilitators. I attended a couple, expecting to hear novel ways to save water. Instead, I heard citizens pleading for their government to repair pipes, organize consultations and involve them. Governance issues aside, facilitators probed the room about what could be done in the meantime to address the shortages. But the answer, or lack thereof, was clear. The people of Basra had had enough. Each day, 3 million barrels of oil were being exported as the land around them crumbled and their people were left desperate. The social contract was broken. Until the government fulfilled its basic obligations, citizens were unwilling to cooperate.

Trust is everything – and there's data to prove it. A study published in *The Lancet* that analysed 18 months of Covid-19 data revealed that countries which curbed the pandemic most

effectively weren't those with the strongest health systems, but those with the highest levels of trust⁵⁰. Of the many health security capacity indices analyzed, none showed a meaningful association with con-

Countries which curbed the pandemic most effectively weren't those with the strongest health systems, but those with the highest levels of trust.

trolling infection rates. Meanwhile, measures of trust in the government and interpersonal trust had statistically-significant associations with both the spread of the virus and the uptake of vaccines. In short, less trust meant more infections and more deaths.

In our industry, system strengthening is widely accepted as the key to crisis preparedness. However, this evidence calls attention to an avenue with perhaps greater potential: stockpiling trust.



Many governments focus on improving the supply-side across ministries without a genuine working relationship with the citizens they serve. While there's no denying the benefit of quality hospitals and schools, infrastructure alone will not secure results. Social cohesion begets cooperation, which will help communities make it through the toughest crises – and many lie ahead. Trust in public institutions will be critical to withstand these unprecedented shocks.

Unfortunately, we have a long way to go. The most recent OECD survey on trust in public institutions⁵¹ concluded that a majority of citizens perceive their governments as unresponsive to public feedback.

The majority think that it would be “unlikely that a poorly performing public service would be improved even if many

people complained about it”. More than half also agree that “the political system does not let them have a say in decision making”, with even more agreement amongst the youngest and poorest respondents. These results don't represent failed or fragile states, but rather the liberal democracies that top all development indexes.

The 2023 edition of the Edelman Trust Barometer⁵² covers a larger range of countries and confirms this trend, along with the conclusion that trust is decreasing across the world. 62% of respondents agree that “the social fabric that once held their country together has grown too weak to serve as a foundation for unity”. They also agree that private businesses are “the only institutions seen as both competent and ethical”. The continued failings of country leadership have fostered a lack of faith in public institutions and a deep, dangerous polarization. Economic anxiety, disinformation and a growing class divide deepen these cracks in the foundation of trust.

SO HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS REGAIN TRUST?

Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund in 2018, blamed corruption as the main driver of mistrust⁵³. Her statement was backed by evidence (e.g., the work of Gallup), many

international organizations (e.g., the World Bank), as well as social researchers and civil society organizations (e.g., Transparency International). Corruption also appeared as a key factor in a study in *The Lancet* on trust and Covid-19. While fighting this plague and building integrity is not directly in the remit of an organization like UNICEF, or other international development agencies, there are still other ways to contribute. The OECD finds that ethical governance and trust in public institutions can be achieved by “improving engagement with citizens in policy design, delivery and reform; enhancing political voice; continuously improving public services; and

In order for these people-centred approaches to become the norm, decision makers' will need to check their privilege at the door.

ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups”. Sound familiar? This is the basis for how UNICEF practises SBC.

We have a portfolio of proven techniques that centre right-holders in analyses, system design and decision-making, either directly through engagement or indirectly through the use of social and behavioural data. It includes: expert social science units to advise policy; community feedback and social accountability mechanisms to improve governance; human-centred design to craft better services; participatory micro planning processes to ensure last-mile delivery; social listening mechanisms to enrich information systems; behavioural research to better understand practices; norms-shifting programmes to influence social determinants; the list goes on.

We have a vast menu of options at our disposal, ready to spring into action anytime, anywhere. These techniques open the door to policies and public services that better match and respond to the needs of real people. This, in turn, fuels a public perception that the work of duty bearers is inclusive, reliable, empathetic and open to partnering, which helps citizens build trust in authorities and service providers. All of this dramatically improves countries' capacity to adapt to future shocks.

In order for these people-centred approaches to become the norm, decision-makers will need to check their privilege at the door. Holding a collection of accolades and degrees does not mean a person knows more about a community than those in and of the community itself. People possess irreplaceable expertise on their daily realities. They must play a greater role in projects and beyond, because the end goal isn't an impactful project. The end goal is self-reliance and enduring results. Civil society consultations and co-design workshops are a start, but they are not enough. Participation, ownership and consultation must become the new normal.

You might be asking yourself: Is this just a modern take on Paulo Freire's theories on criticality of participation, dressed in sectoral system

language? You might be right. It helps convince decision-makers, why not? Freire's wisdom may be half a century old but it can help us re-examine current societal fractures and deep social divides. Without more collective self-efficacy and compliance with public regulations, governments don't stand a chance against climate change, unstable economies and other chronic and increasingly complex challenges. Trust is a linchpin for addressing modern threats, and building social capital might be the single most important thing our community of practice can do. It's time we break up with systems that have been built without the input of those that they're meant to serve. It's time we start stockpiling trust, one technique at a time.

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Three Letters, Six Actions, No Excuses

Today's headlines read like plot twists from dystopian novels: tension and inequality escalating between nations, colonial hegemony resurging, climate-inflicted disasters, rights backsliding.

While it sometimes feels like we're winning small battles, it can also feel like we're at risk of losing the bigger war. How do we address these disparate challenges effectively and chart a roadmap that truly supports children?

Simply put: we need to focus on people and, in many cases, children specifically. Whether our goal is to draft a progressive Child Rights Policy, create more opportunities for girls or rebuild trust in healthcare workers, input and leadership from the people we serve will be crucial. It's the only way to truly shift mindsets, systems and individual and collective behaviour.

If you've made it this far, you might know that Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) can help us do that. It can help us design solutions that acknowledge the complexity and ever-changing nature of people and the societies we live in. Designing programmes that do not account for these nuances would be setting ourselves up for failure. While we encourage failures on the path to brilliant solutions, failing in our mission is not an option.

Thankfully, SBC presents a wealth of people-centred, rights-based approaches to tackling the polycrisis. Here are six:

- 1. Rebuild public trust.** In countries where people are more likely to report trusting others, there is less violence and more political stability and accountability⁵⁴. SBC can bring right holders and duty bearers together to build relationships, renegotiate social contracts and address community needs using evidence-based approaches. Collaboration and accountability are essential to rebuilding trust, and SBC can help establish responsive feedback mechanisms that keep communities' desires and needs in sight.
- 2. Reach and partner with underserved populations.** SBC can engage and support the populations most at risk of being left out of mainstream service delivery and systems design. By leveraging locally-led, culturally sensitive, participatory approaches, SBC can help us reach more girls with education and zero-dose children with immunizations, as well as achieve many more life-changing but stagnating goals. Shifting power and resources to local communities and civil society is key to decolonizing the sector.
- 3. Get to the root of the problem.** Deep understanding and genuine listening are the first steps of any SBC approach. This exploration helps unearth social structures, hierarchies, norms, and cultural and environmental factors that shape people's choices. Reframing old problems in new, more structural ways can reveal a rainbow of untapped solutions.
- 4. Design more impactful, cost-effective solutions.** SBC approaches offer a departure from solutions designed by remote and disconnected programme architects and funders.

By **Rania Eleessawi**,
Partnership Specialist,
SBC, UNICEF HQ, with
contributions from the
**UNICEF SBC
Network**

By treating everyone as an expert on their own lives, SBC provides a framework for co-creating with the communities we serve. This leads to practical, efficiently-resourced and locally-owned solutions with a much higher chance of achieving impact at scale.

- 5. Tackle misinformation.** As digital media and AI continue to blur the line between fact and fiction, weeding out misinformation will only grow more and more critical. SBC can help ensure people are receiving correct information when it matters most through social listening, partnering with local influencers, storytelling and behaviourally-informed messaging. Tackling misinformation goes hand in hand with rebuilding public trust.
- 6. Generate diverse evidence.** Behavioural research helps us understand and leverage the invisible strings of behaviour – the barriers and motivators that people don't tell us about, whether consciously or unconsciously. Blending evidence gathered from communities with scientific insights produces a powerful cocktail of research methods that can help us design solutions that cater to the real lives of real people.

UNICEF has long recognized the power of SBC – three letters that encompass a multitude of ideas, values and approaches. As we look to a horizon of challenges with bated breath, it is crucial that these words make it off the page and into the mainstream, so that we are equipped to tackle these issues head-on.

So what are we waiting for?

A wishlist for the way forward

There is no denying what we have achieved through SBC implementation over the last few years. There's also no denying the gaps that remain. To realize the full potential of this field, the global SBC Network urges UNICEF and its partners to:

- 1. Embed SBC as the backbone of all programmes:** UNICEF must consider how to better institutionalize Social and Behaviour Change into its strategy and programmatic work. Institutionalization involves creating the necessary structures, policies and systems to embed SBC approaches into all areas of UNICEF's programming. Institutionalizing social change means embracing it as a set of intentional corporate goals. This can ensure that the progress we make today is sustained and woven into the fabric of society, allowing it to become the norm rather than the exception.
- 2. Apply SBC inward:** In 2023, UNICEF's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team collaborated with SBC colleagues to practise what we preach and use Social and Behaviour Change to improve our organizational health. Behavioural insights can help us understand our own behaviours at work, improve our organizational culture and maximize our ability to serve children. SBC can unpack quantitative data and collect rich insights to help inform internal change strategies. How can we foster a culture that encourages speaking up and listening deeply? How can UNICEF achieve results for children without sacrificing staff well-being? There is so much to be gained from leveraging SBC as a tool for organizational change management.

- 3. Design adaptive programmes to meet community needs:** SBC can only become institutionalized when government actors invest in the infrastructure and institutions necessary to support and embrace SBC. Government involvement in social change can take many forms, from developing and implementing social welfare programmes to enacting legislation that promotes equality and justice. In all cases, success rests on building meaningful working partnerships with civil society and communities. As government partners increasingly invest in SBC, ensuring that all public stakeholders are equally invested and understand its value is critical. This will allow SBC efforts and interventions to continue long after programmes end.

In development and humanitarian settings, donors have the power to prioritize resources for social outcomes and strategies that address the underlying and systemic drivers of change for children. They can shape the way we work by allocating funds to transforming organizations and providing more flexible resources for programming. By investing in institutional capacity to deliver quality SBC programmes, they can ensure that their investments have sustainable outcomes. Funding change also means finding agile new ways to fund failure and experimentation – key elements of the SBC equation.

- 4. Help governments and partners make the shift to SBC:** We won't get very far if the people in our corner don't understand what SBC really is. It's unfortunately a nascent field for many UNICEF partners, with technical terms that are not easily translated and understood. While familiarity

with SBC is growing, going from 'familiar with' to 'fans of' will take time. UNICEF must continue to invest in simple, easy-to-adopt tools and methodologies. It must continue to share success stories and build the capacity of staff and partners, including governments and donors. Thankfully, many great resources exist. We must now focus on localizing and mainstreaming them within the sector by leveraging the power of behavioural design.

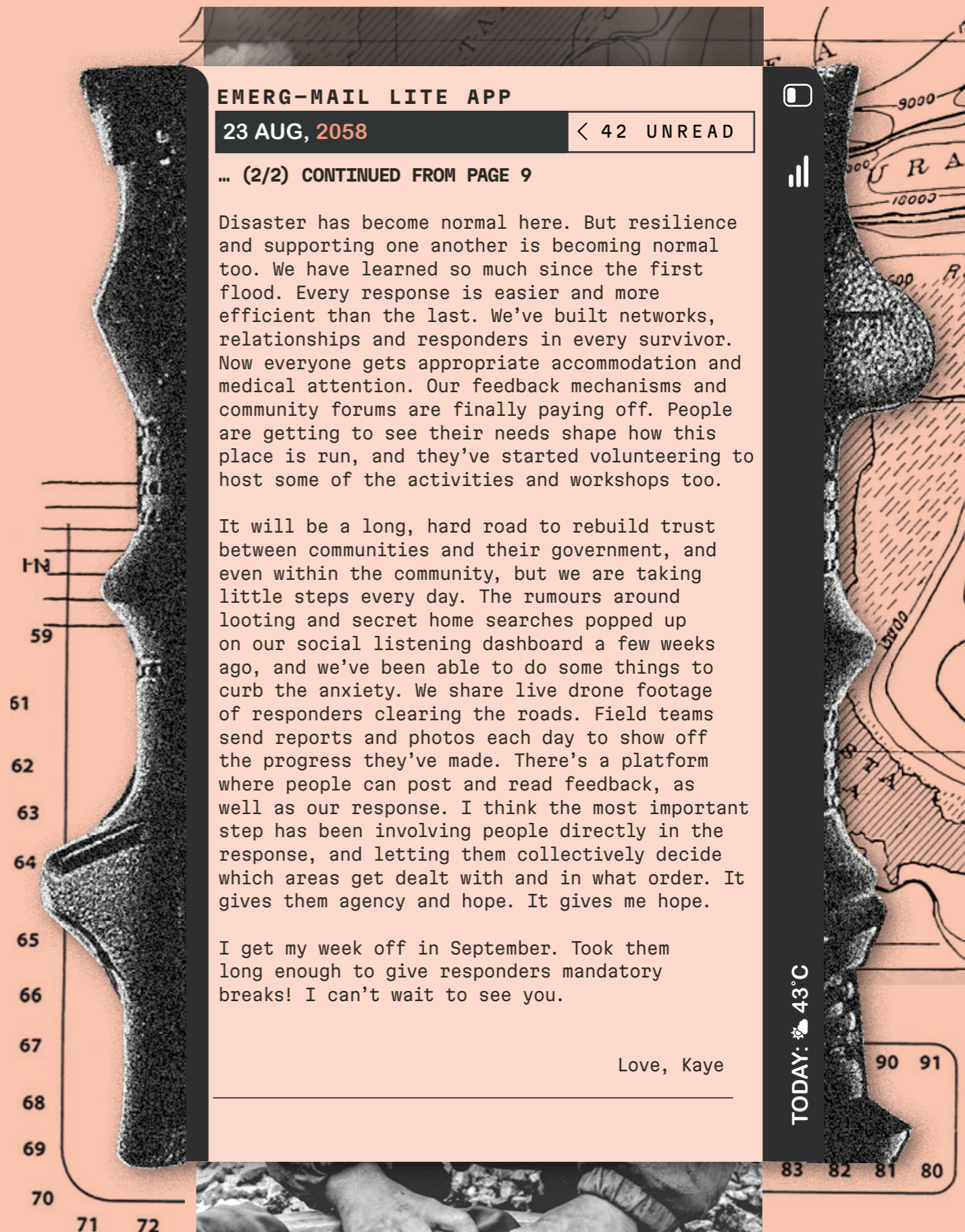
- 5. Continue to invest in staff, science and innovation:** We have made great strides towards embedding innovation and evidence-based practices in our work. But as science evolves, so must UNICEF. Ensuring that SBC staff are equipped with the latest tools and tactics within an environment that nurtures innovation will position UNICEF at the forefront of the field and allow effective programming to flourish.

Investing in Social and Behaviour Change is not just a moral imperative, but an urgent and necessary action. Poverty, inequality, climate change and social injustice require bold and transformative solutions. Social change cannot be written off as a buzzword – it is the very essence of progress and evolution. It is the foundation on which people will improve their lives, transform their societies and create a better world for future generations.

54 Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Max Roser and Pablo Arriagada, "Trust", *Our World in Data*, April 2024.

A Dispatch from Down the Line pt.II

What will change now mean for our future?



A Page of Applause

This change wouldn't be possible without thousands of people. This *Change Magazine* would not be possible without them, and this team of people.

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Drawings created by

Class 5B from Braeburn Gitanga, Braeburn Group of International Schools, Kenya

The Infants B students from Providence Elementary School in Barbados

*Our heartfelt condolences also go out to the family, friends and colleagues of **Manvi Tiwari**, who was due to author a piece for the magazine but sadly passed away.*



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