

# UNICEF Evaluation of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) -Round 4

Evaluation Part 2: MICS funding, stakeholder needs and  
demands and use

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CO	UNICEF Country Office
D&A	UNICEF Data and Analytics Section (previously Statistics and Monitoring Section)
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization
GMC	Global MICS Consultation
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
HQ	UNICEF Headquarter offices
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MORES	Monitoring Results for Equity System
NSO	National Statistics Office (or MICS' Implementing Agency)
RO	UNICEF Regional Office
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCARO	UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa
WHO	World Health Organization

## Executive Summary

### *Overview*

Demand for quality, internationally comparable data has grown considerably as part of the aid effectiveness agenda, greater accountability for results of development partnerships and in advance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target date of 2015. Household surveys serve as an important means of obtaining such evidence, in part, through a small set of recognized, international programs which produce comparable data on common indicators.

UNICEF contributes to the required evidence-based through implementation of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), an international household survey program. UNICEF takes the lead role for reporting on six MDGs related to children and MICS provides data on twenty-three of the 48 indicators of progress toward the MDGs. As part of the international statistical infrastructure, UNICEF also helps to develop methodologies and indicators, maintain global databases, disseminate and publish relevant data. The survey platform has evolved through content expansion and considerable improvements in data quality over four rounds in which more than 240 MICS surveys have been conducted.

The post-2015 environment is already characterized by an even greater attention on and demand for data with important implications for countries and development partners. Likewise, as development agencies intensify their focus on outcome- and impact-level data; household survey programs are viewed as the vehicle to meet these needs. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to contribute to and guide these efforts with MICS serving as a highly-regarded anchor. However, significant developments are unfolding which will challenge those responsible for large-scale data generating efforts like the MICS.

### *Evaluation objective, methods and audience*

Given its importance and size, the MICS program is periodically evaluated with global evaluations (i.e. following MICS1 and MICS3). Moreover, the MICS is a dynamic program which adjusts in important ways between rounds. To maximize learning from Round 4 and to aid preparations for Round 5, UNICEF sought this independent external evaluation. The MICS evaluation was designed with two distinct parts. The evaluation's first part identified whether and how lessons learned from prior rounds had been acted on by the program and examined the suitability of preparation for Round 5. A final report on Part 1 issues was submitted to UNICEF in June 2013.

This report addresses the second set of evaluation issues with the objective of assessing the overall design and management of the MICS program and the utilization of MICS data. In doing so, the evaluation sought to examine whether UNICEF and other stakeholders derive maximum value from the investments made and are prepared for sustainable management of the MICS program. Three overarching questions guided Part 2 of the evaluation, as follows:

- To what extent are UNICEF and partners able to assure adequate funding in terms of quality, timeliness, and stability, for round 5 and, if possible, later rounds?
- How far is MICS coherently and efficiently designed to meet stakeholders' diverse needs and demands, taking note of requirements and expectations for statistical and analytical capacity development?

- How far have consumers of the data at various levels been exploiting the potentials of the rounds 3 and 4 MICS data across diverse purposes (e.g. research, policy advocacy, decision taking about going to scale etc)?

The evaluation is best characterized as a process evaluation which examined UNICEF internal structures, dynamics and practices notably related to funding, stakeholder needs and MICS data utilization. The evaluation drew on mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative, including structured document review, interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders via both face-to-face and electronic communications, a set of country case studies and an on-line survey of MICS data users. The intended audience of this evaluation is largely internal to UNICEF and comprised of managers with responsibilities for governance and oversight of the data and analyses agenda as well as those responsible for managing and directing resources for data collection across levels (i.e. Headquarters, Regional and Country offices).

### *Main findings and conclusions*

(1) Based on a review of MICS budgets from 42 countries (2010-2012), the estimated average cost of a survey was \$746,000. The known costs of conducting a MICS survey have increased between rounds 3 and 4 driven by rising costs of inputs, expanded technical support and increased sample sizes. However, estimating the total cost of a MICS survey is still limited by the lack of data on the contributions of governments.

(2) UNICEF remains the largest funder of the MICS surveys with Country Office contributions totaling 37% of required funds and HQ-allocated “top-up” monies also at 37%. Among other contributors, UNFPA and USAID stand out for the number of MICS supported or the amount contributed, respectively.

(3) Practices at country level to raise other sources of funding have changed little from previous rounds. There does not appear to be any commonly-used or systematic process of identifying or approaching partner agencies in-country for contributions –no “game plan” for how a Country Office would go about acquiring external resources.

(4) The lack of a “game plan” is important for two reasons. A recently-completed Resource Mobilization Strategy for the Data and Analytics Section estimated that governments and donors in-country could be contributing 35% of the costs of a MICS survey (currently these sources represent approximately 26%). In addition, while senior managers were consistently laudatory of the MICS survey program, they also pointed to a serious lack of predictability in funding and cited the need for an increasingly diversified resource base.

(5) UNICEF staff exhibit greater understanding of the MICS, its intended purpose and limitations in its use vis-à-vis current data needs and demand. For example, respondents had a greater recognition of the negative implication of larger sample sizes and cited the efforts of the HQ/D&A/MICS team and RO MICS Coordinators in raising awareness of the issue.

(6) Respondents across levels consistently flagged two important gaps in UNICEF’s ability to monitoring and track progress in areas of strategic importance specifically child disability and adolescents.

(7) As was found in the evaluation of MICS3, inter-agency working groups remain a highly-effective means of influencing the content of the MICS. The very close working relationships between program area experts and data/analysis experts was frequently cited as a factor in shaping and guiding a range of data collection and analytical efforts including the MICS.

(8) The MICS survey program, as represented by the fourth and fifth round, has demonstrated a considerable ability to adapt within the confines of its stated objective of generating high quality and comparable data.

(9) MICS data are being used increasingly in multi-country analyses which utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out-of-school. These uses are notable in that they are not one-time analytical efforts but systematic, multi-country endeavours with built-in technical support mechanisms. A facilitating factor may be that there is now an adequate “critical mass” of data collected through standard methods and with known quality to build upon.

(10) In contrast to the MICS3 evaluation where use was primarily related to global-level monitoring, the current evaluation found MICS data utilized in a wide range of analytical efforts by a diverse set of actors. Factors that facilitate the use of MICS data include increased confidence in data quality and increased ability to analyze global data sets that use MICS and DHS data interchangeably. Factors which hinder further analyses of MICS data relate largely to *capacities* particularly at country office level. In addition, MICS process and materials do not always maximize opportunities related to utilization including further analyses.

#### *Main recommendations*

(1) As a global authority on the rights and well-being of children, UNICEF should enter the post-2015 period with a cogent strategy to guide its data efforts. The MICS would, of course, be a central element in the data strategy. With the commitment to MDG reporting fulfilled, the timing would provide an opportunity for forward- thinking on the direction of the MICS.

(2) UNICEF should develop tools to better gauge MICS costs and contributions with an eye towards sustainable survey implementation. These could include tools to better enable Country Offices to acquire external funding, to collect data on value of government contributions, and to better estimate, plan and manage technical assistance resources.

(3) Building the positive changes between rounds 3 and 4, UNICEF should facilitate use of MICS data through expansion of current platform elements. For areas of strategic priority, UNICEF should strive to see that multi-country analyses become the “norm” much as inter-agency working groups are for the development of new indicators and survey content. It is also recommended that UNICEF develop and conduct an analysis workshop around specific themes. These workshops would invite regional and country partners workshops to bring their MICS and DHS data sets along with a preliminary analyses plan. This is one of several areas of potential collaboration between UNICEF and DHS identified in the evaluation.

## Section 1 Introduction

### a. Background

In recent years, demand for quality, internationally comparable data has grown considerably as part of the aid effectiveness agenda, greater accountability for results of development partnerships and in advance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target date of 2015<sup>1</sup>. Household surveys have served as important means of obtaining such evidence, in part, through a small set of recognized, international programs which produce comparable data on common indicators.

UNICEF makes vital contributions towards the required evidence-based through implementation of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), an international household survey program. UNICEF takes the lead role for reporting on six MDGs related to children<sup>2</sup>. More broadly, the MICS provides data on twenty-three of the 48 indicators of progress toward the MDGs. As part of the international statistical infrastructure<sup>3</sup>, UNICEF also helps to develop methodologies and indicators, maintain global databases, disseminate and publish relevant data. Together with a separate but related household survey program, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), MICS is a fundamental source for assessing progress towards national and global development achievements and challenges. The survey platform has evolved through content expansion and considerable improvements in data quality over four rounds in which more than 240 MICS surveys have been conducted (Table 1).

Round	Dates	No. of countries/ surveys
1	Mid-1990s	60
2	Late 1990s-early 2000s	56/57
3	2005-2007	49/53
4	2009-2011	55/65
5	2012-2015	41/47

The post-2015 environment is already characterized by an even greater attention on and demand for data with important implications for countries and development partners<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, as development agencies intensify their focus on outcome- and impact-level data, household survey programs are viewed as the

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<sup>1</sup> Concept Note. Results and Accountability Building Block. 4<sup>th</sup> High-level forum on aid effectiveness. 29 Nov-1 Dec 2011, Busan, Korea.

[http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/images/stories/BB\\_Results\\_and\\_Accountability\\_25\\_November.pdf](http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/images/stories/BB_Results_and_Accountability_25_November.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/mdg/index\\_unicefsrole.htm](http://www.unicef.org/mdg/index_unicefsrole.htm)

<sup>3</sup> As used by the UN System Task Team on the Post- 2015 UN Development Agenda, statistical infrastructure refers to “the whole of professionally staffed statistical services in a government or organization, a body of practice and documentation on statistical methods used in collecting and processing the data including standard concepts, definitions and classifications, and practical experience in data compilation and dissemination.”

<sup>4</sup> United Nations. 2013. A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty And Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development. (This UN panel recommends that a Global Partnership on Development Data be created to bring together a diverse set of interested stakeholders and as a first step develops a global strategy to fill critical gaps, expand data accessibility, and mobilize international efforts to ensure a baseline for post-2015 targets is in place by January 2016.)



vehicle to meet these needs. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to contribute to and guide these efforts with MICS serving as a highly-regarded anchor<sup>5</sup>. However, significant developments are unfolding which will challenge those responsible for large-scale data generating efforts like the MICS.

This report examines a set of priority issues primarily through the experience of the fourth rounds of the MICS survey program. The issues include financing of the surveys, stakeholder needs and demands and MICS data utilization. Following the introductory section, the second section of the report presents the evaluation purpose, main themes and questions and methods used. The third section covers the three main evaluation themes in turn by sub-section. Each sub-section begins with specification of the main question and sub-questions and ends with summary points on key findings. These key findings form the basis for the discussion in the conclusions section. Finally, a set of recommendations are made with identification of the actions required and actors who would be responsible.

## **b. Evaluation Purpose, Objective and Scope**

The MICS survey program operates on a scale which makes it unique within UNICEF and on parallel with very few peers outside of UNICEF. Key stakeholders in the MICS survey program are both internal and external to UNICEF. Within the organization, UNICEF/HQ, Regional Offices and Country Offices all play roles in coordination, planning and technical oversight of the surveys. Very strong working relationships between the agency's program area experts and its data and analytics experts are well-established and address issues including MICS survey questionnaire content, analyses and data utilization. Prominent country implementation partners include the National Statistical Office and oftentimes, line ministries. External stakeholders are frequently international agencies specialized in monitoring global agreements and goals (e.g. MDG monitoring) and UN specialized agencies which make extensive use of MICS data via global databases (e.g. UNFPA, WHO, World Bank, International Labor Organization, UNESCO). Bilateral development agencies are also invested in the MICS survey program as well as universities and institutions around the world engaged in analyses.

Given its importance and size, the MICS program is periodically evaluated with global evaluations (i.e. following MICS1 and MICS3<sup>6</sup>). Moreover, the MICS is a dynamic program which adjusts in important ways between rounds. To maximize learning from Round 4 and to aid preparations for Round 5, UNICEF sought this independent external evaluation of its MICS program. The MICS evaluation was designed with two distinct parts. The evaluation's first part aimed to quickly identify whether and how lessons learned from prior rounds had been acted on by the program and to examine the suitability of preparation for Round 5. Part 1 issues were fully addressed and a final report submitted to UNICEF in June 2013<sup>7</sup>. This report addresses the second set of issues related to management of the MICS program and utilization of MICS

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. Executive Board. First regular session 2012. 7-10 February 2012. Item 7 of the provisional agenda\* Harnessing knowledge to achieve results for children

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed S, Ali D, Bisharat L, Hill A, LaFond A, Morris L, Plowman B, and K Richter. Evaluation of UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys Round 3 (MICS3). Final Report. 2009. [www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_52700.html](http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_52700.html).

<sup>7</sup> Plowman BA and JC Fotso. 2013. UNICEF Evaluation of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) – Round 4. Cluster 1: Response to lessons learned in prior rounds and preparations for Round 5.

data. The Terms of Reference covering both components of this evaluation appear in Annex 1 and the Executive Summary of the Part 1 Report appears in Annex 2.

The objective of the evaluation's second part was to assess the overall design and management of the MICS program and the utilization of MICS data. In doing so, the evaluation sought to examine whether UNICEF and other stakeholders derive maximum value from the considerable investments made, and are prepared for sustainable management of the MICS program. Three overarching questions guided Part 2 of the evaluation, as follows:

- To what extent are UNICEF and partners able to assure adequate funding in terms of quality, timeliness, and stability, for round 5 and, if possible, later rounds?
- How far is MICS coherently and efficiently designed to meet stakeholders' diverse needs and demands, taking note of requirements and expectations for statistical and analytical capacity development?
- How far have consumers of the data at various levels been exploiting the potentials of the rounds 3 and 4 MICS data across diverse purposes (e.g. research, policy advocacy, decision taking about going to scale etc)?

The evaluation was initiated with a focus on Round 4 performance (corresponding to the period 2009 to 2011) and preparations underway for Round 5 which will span the period 2012 to 2015. The imminent conclusion of the MDG period in 2015 makes MICS Round 5 an important source for estimating the success of the MDG efforts over the period 2000-2015. Accordingly, the timeline for Round 5 is largely driven by the need for MDG indicator data for key preparatory steps in advance of the UN Secretary General Final MDG Progress Report in September 2015. Throughout the data collection phase of the evaluation, it became apparent that many concerns and challenges pertained not only to Round 5 but moreover to what comes afterwards. Therefore, the scope of the evaluation was adjusted slightly to accommodate questions related to whether and how to adapt the MICS to best serve UNICEF's and stakeholders needs in the coming years.

### **c. Team and management**

The first part of the evaluation was conducted by two international consultants recruited through competitive process by the UNICEF Evaluation Office. One of the two consultants departed the team with the completion of the first part of the evaluation. The second phase was carried out by one consultant who was responsible for all aspects of design, data collection, analyses and report writing.

The UNICEF Evaluation Office, in close coordination with the Data and Analytics Section was responsible for the development of the Terms of Reference, recruitment and selection of the consultant team and communication within UNICEF on the evaluation. Throughout the evaluation, the UNICEF Evaluation Office provided direction and facilitated the consultant's work. The HQ/D&A/MICS Unit played a critical facilitating role by providing documents and forwarding requests for information to regional MICS coordinators. Both the Evaluation Office and HQ/D&A/MICS Unit reviewed drafts of this report and provided written feedback.

## Section 2 Evaluation methodology

### a. Design and methods

The evaluation of part 2 issues is best characterized as a process evaluation which examined UNICEF internal structures, dynamics and practices notably related to funding, stakeholder needs and MICS data utilization.

The evaluation drew on mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to address the issues included in the evaluation framework. The methods included structured document review, interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders via both face-to-face and electronic communications, a set of country case studies and an on-line survey of MICS data users. Brief descriptions of the methods appear below. Methods are described in detail in Annex 3.

- Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who are consumers of MICS data or facilitators of MICS data use including UNICEF staff in country offices<sup>8</sup>, technical staff in Program Division and in Data and Analytics Section at UNICEF HQ. Interviews were also carried out with a number of UNICEF senior managers<sup>9</sup> who were considered as high-order consumers within UNICEF and who direct the programming and advocacy efforts that MICS supports. A list of individuals interviewed appears in Annex 4 and an illustrative interview guide appears in Annex 5.
- The evaluation relied on a structured review of documents identified and compiled from numerous sources. For case study countries, UNICEF Country Office staff provided MICS budget information and material on country-level utilization of MICS data; Country Program Documents were accessed from the Country Program Depository maintained on the UNICEF website; and other documents included countries' Millennium Development Goals reports<sup>10</sup>, Poverty Reduction Strategies, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (<http://www.undg.org/>), UNICEF CO Annual Report and CPDs, and websites of national statistical offices. Documents generated by inter-agency working groups on monitoring and evaluation were another important source. A list of documents reviewed appears in Annex 6.
- An on-line survey was developed specifically for individuals who requested access to MICS micro data. UNICEF/HQ/D&A provided a list of individual users who requested access between March

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<sup>8</sup> During the first part of the evaluation, staff from UNICEF Regional Offices (13), implementing agencies (11) and RO/CO consultants (8) were prioritized for interviews based on the issues addressed. In the second cluster evaluation, more emphasis was placed on UNICEF HQ staff from multiple divisions as well as key external consumers and collaborators.

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this report, senior managers refer to staff at the level of deputy director of a division and higher.

<sup>10</sup> (<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/mdg-reports/>)

2012 and July 2013<sup>11</sup>. The survey was developed and implemented using SurveyGizmo and included both close- and open-ended questions. Questions covered basic background variables (e.g. region, institution), analytical purpose for the requested MICS micro data, status of the analyses, whether available in the public domain, whether used for dialogue with stakeholders on the status of women and children, any decisions taken based on the analyses and ease of access. The on-line survey appears in Annex 7.

- Nine countries/surveys<sup>12</sup> were selected for more in-depth examination of data needs and use of MICS data via a case study approach. Selection of the case study countries/surveys was guided by several variables which paralleled the main lines of inquiry for the evaluation. As MICS data use is an important aspect of evaluation, eligibility was limited to those countries/surveys which *published a MICS4 report*. The set of countries/surveys was selected to include a variety of contexts although clearly not intended to be representative of any single region or setting. For each of these country/surveys, interviews were conducted CO staff and an extensive set of documentation reviewed. A brief survey profile was prepared for each which highlights key variables across all evaluation themes. Profiles appear in Annex 8.

## **b. Limitations**

The examination of funding for the MICS was limited by lack of information from several important sources. These gaps are described in the relevant chapter. In addressing stakeholder needs and demands, it was necessary to distinguish between needs that are addressable through household surveys from a broader set of data needs and demands. This is particularly important as the current organizational environment can be characterized as one of shifting focus (e.g. the disaggregated data need for UNICEF's equity focus as seen in the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES), more focus on building countries' routine information systems). For many interviewees, the role of and value derived from the MICS was well-understood and their priority data needs were related to program-level data. As a result, the report, at points, includes both household survey and non-survey data needs while maintaining focus on the programming priorities of UNICEF.

Finally, evaluating data use encompasses a potentially wide variety of actors at global, regional and country levels and variety of types of use. Interviews were focused on UNICEF staff at both HQ and CO levels and partner agencies at the international level. The on-line survey served as the means to acquire input from a broader range of actors including government, NGOs and universities. Information from Part 1 interviews with in-country partners were utilized where appropriate. Finally, two concepts that the evaluation sought to examine (i.e. use of MICS in equity "case studies" and the supportive environment for further analysis) were not possible to assess either due to respondents' lack of a common

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<sup>11</sup> A total of pool of 519 individuals requested access during that period. From this pool of potential data users, those unwilling to be contacted, bounced e-mails, individuals on extended leave and UNICEF staff were removed resulting in an effective number of 389 MICS data users. A total of 133 individuals responded to the surveys resulting in a 34% response rate.

<sup>12</sup> Lao PDR, Vietnam, Belize, Iraq, Palestinian population in Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone.

understanding (equity “case studies”) or flaws in segments of evaluation instruments (on-line survey question on supportive environment factors).

## Section 3 Findings

### a. Funding the MICS Surveys

The 2008 MICS evaluation found that the estimated total expenditure for MICS3 was about US\$18.6 million, including CO and HQ costs. Approximately 85 percent of the expenditures came from the country level and 15 percent from HQ level including “top-up” monies. UNICEF’s average expenditure per country was US\$300,000; if UNICEF HQ expenses are apportioned across countries, this total price tag came to US\$356,000 per country<sup>13</sup>.

The prior evaluation found that, in addition to UNICEF’s contribution, countries leveraged funds from sources including governments and other development partners. Sixty-nine percent of MICS3 surveys had a non-UNICEF contributor. Other UN agencies were frequent funders of the MICS3 (e.g. UNFPA contributed to approximately one-quarter of MICS 3 surveys). There was clearly an interest among development partners to continue to support the MICS. However, partners expressed concern related to the time lag between survey fieldwork to report dissemination and wanted to see survey results are made available sooner.

In light of these earlier findings, Part 2 has a distinct focus on the pattern of MICS4 funding as well as the stability of funding for MICS5 and beyond from both UNICEF as well as its diverse partners.

*Key question:* To what extent are UNICEF and partners are able to assure adequate funding in terms of quality, timeliness, and stability, for round 5 and, if possible, later rounds.

*Sub-questions:*

*What is the total estimated expense of the MICS surveys – taking into account multiple sources of funding (country office funds, regional office funds, HQ funding including D&A budgets and top-up monies), non-UNICEF sources (derived from country survey contributions)?*

*What is the degree of dependence of country offices on top-up monies to conduct the surveys? What are implications for MICS where CO resources are, in general, quite low; how are those surveys being funded?*

*Have strategies for external fund raising evolved over time? If so, how? What are the major sources of external (non-UNICEF) sources of funding for the MICS? What are the strengths and weaknesses of fund raising processes?*

*What steps do country offices take to secure added funding at the country level? What are the best practices and lessons learned in raising additional funding for the surveys by the COs?*

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<sup>13</sup> These figures were generated using all sources of information available to the Evaluation Team in 2008. However, that team urged caution in the use of these figures as underestimation was likely.

*To what extent have countries taken over the funding of the MICS? What is the likelihood of greater country investment in the MICS? Does the MICS program operate with a strategy for exiting countries with capacity and resources?*

*What are the expectations of external donors regarding the use of contributions?*

By way of background, the mechanism through which MICS surveys are financed is described briefly here. The MICS surveys are financed by multiple sources, the largest being UNICEF itself. Within UNICEF, funding streams are primarily designated as either Regular Resources (RR), non-earmarked funds that can be deployed strategically towards areas of growing priority or to fill gaps as required, or as Other Resources (OR) which are restricted in their use (i.e. earmarked) as donors direct these resources to specific programs or activities. Each year a portion of total Regular Resources equivalent to 7% is allocated at the discretion of the Executive Director to respond to evolving needs, encourage innovation, promote UNICEF's equity agenda and support partnerships in strategic and innovative activities that help achieve the MDGs (called the 7 per cent set aside). Finally, there are Regular Resources that support programs that have remained unfunded for more than one year (referred to as RR for OR)<sup>14</sup>. At HQ, regional and country levels, the MICS survey program depends on combination of these internal as well as external resources.

The HQ/D&A/MICS typically receives an allocation of the 7% set-aside funds in order to extend financial support to Country Offices planning a MICS survey. Referred to as "top up" monies, these funds are intended as HQ–allocated support to fill gaps after all UNICEF resources at the national and regional level, and all domestic and international agency partner contributions are included. Top-up funds are released once the Regional Office concurs that the Country Office has pursued all possible avenues of funding.

In 2011, \$3.1 million in discretionary regular resources was allocated to 22 country offices and two regions (e.g. East Caribbean Multi-Country Program and the Gulf Area Office)<sup>15</sup> for the MICS. In 2012 and 2013, approximately \$4 million in "top-up monies" were made available to HQ/D&A/MICS for allocation to countries.

At country level, survey operations are funded by the Country Offices' resources as well as the "top-up" monies allocated by HQ/D&A/MICS. National authorities make substantial investments in the MICS surveys primarily through in-kind contributions. Development partners also provide support to the surveys on a country-by-country basis.

## **Data Sources**

Two main methods were used to answer questions related to funding: document review and interviews. The document review focused on budgetary information from round 4 and relied on information from COs and HQ/D&A/MICS. Interviews were conducted with UNICEF senior managers responsible for external fund raising and directing resources, and with program managers at CO, RO and HQ levels with

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<sup>14</sup> UNICEF Report on Regular Resources. 2013.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF. August 2012. Report on Regular Resources 2011.

direct MICS budgeting and implementation responsibilities. Interviews were sought with non-UNICEF stakeholders who most frequently committed funds to the implementation of surveys at country level.

Information on survey budgets were drawn primarily from a request made by the evaluator to individual Country Offices which conducted a MICS4. The template for the request built on Survey Profile Sheets which are summaries completed by the Country Offices and maintained by the HQ/D&A/MICS team. Through the Regional MICS Coordinators, each Country Office was asked to update budgetary information and to provide more specific information on funding sources. In addition, information on the distribution of the “7% set-aside” funding for the period 2009-2013 was reviewed as well as HQ/D&A section annual work plans and budgets. Finally, Country Program Documents (CPDs) for a selected set of Country Offices were reviewed. The evaluation did not examine expenditures. However, the prior evaluation of MICS 3 found that budgets and expenditures varied by as little as 15%; consequently, it is felt that the budget analysis offered fair insight into actual spending.

### Data Gaps

These estimates are based on available information for the costs of surveys for specific countries inclusive of the Country Office, HQ “set-aside funds”, other UN agencies, bilateral partners and others. However, these estimates do not account for the following additional resources that, in some cases, may be significant portions of the total survey costs:

1). Governmental contributions: In each country, substantial contributions are made by the government either through direct financing or in-kind contributions. As described in the CO submissions, these contributions can include vehicles, travel and fuel expenses; contributions to the training of interviewers; and use of existing infrastructure for data entry, storage of materials, communication, and management of data; among others. In some cases, the time of government staff involved in the survey is monetized. Only 19 of the 42 budgets provided either a direct financial contribution or estimated the value of the in-kind contributions. Comparability of these estimates is very limited as differing items were included in the in-kind estimations. Further, it was not possible to gauge the likelihood of greater country investment in the MICS without a sound basis of existing investment levels. Due to the incomplete data and lack of comparability, the estimated MICS4 budgets are presented here *without* the estimated government contribution<sup>16</sup>. ***Having information on government contributions relative to the total funding envelope would seem to be a first step in contemplating longer-term sustainability at least from the financial angle.*** The MICS 3 evaluation also found no clear or standard documentation to quantify or describe the substantial in-kind contributions and recommended that budget guidelines be revised in order to track these resources.

2). UNICEF Regional Office support: In addition, UNICEF Regional Offices support countries in the conduct of their MICS surveys through provision of technical assistance both from the Regional MICS Coordinator

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<sup>16</sup> Exceptions including Qatar which is entirely funded by the government and Ghana where the National Malaria Control Program made a financial contribution drawn from a Global Fund grant.



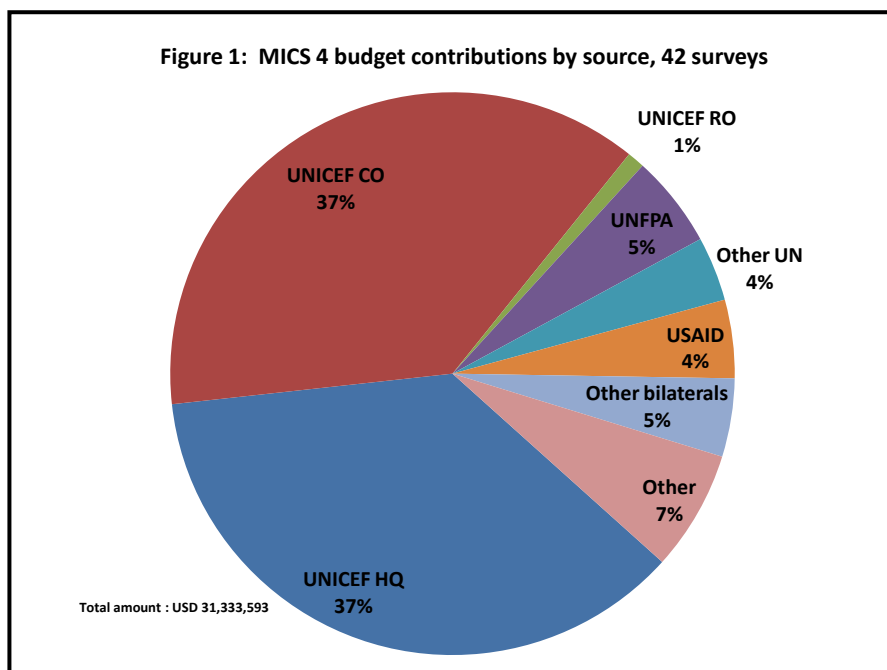
as well as consultants. These costs are not tracked for individual countries and are therefore not easily allocated. Available estimates of the Regional Offices' costs of providing technical support through consultants to each country range from \$USD 33,000 to \$ 50,000<sup>17</sup>.

3) UNICEF HQ support: Budget estimates presented below do not include expenses associated with the HQ/D&A/MICS Unit functions such as development of survey tools and guidelines, HQ-provided technical assistance, the costs of regional workshops, nor salaries associated with UNICEF personnel at HQ, regional or country-levels. These are clearly substantial costs. As indirect indicators, the total funding for the section that houses the MICS unit averaged \$10 million per year in 2012 and 2013 (inclusive of \$4 million average annual set-aside funds).

### Overall mean budgets

The evaluation examined the budgets for 42 MICS surveys conducted during the period 2010 to 2012. The average MICS budget was \$746,000 with a median amount equals to \$534,000. The MICS budgets examined ranged from a high of \$ 2 million (Democratic Republic of Congo) and a low of \$127,300 (St. Lucia).

On average, each Country Office contributed \$317,000 complemented by an additional \$294,000 in top-up monies. ***A limited comparison<sup>18</sup> with Round 3 information shows that the estimated average budget of a MICS survey has increased significantly from an estimated \$300,000 in Round 3 to \$746,000 in Round 4.*** Increased survey budgets are to be expected for a variety of reasons including overall increases in the cost of inputs (e.g. transportation,



equipment and salaries). A partial factor in increased survey costs is the substantial increase from Round 3 to Round 4 in the number of households sampled (i.e. an estimated 29% increase as reported in Part 1 of this evaluation).

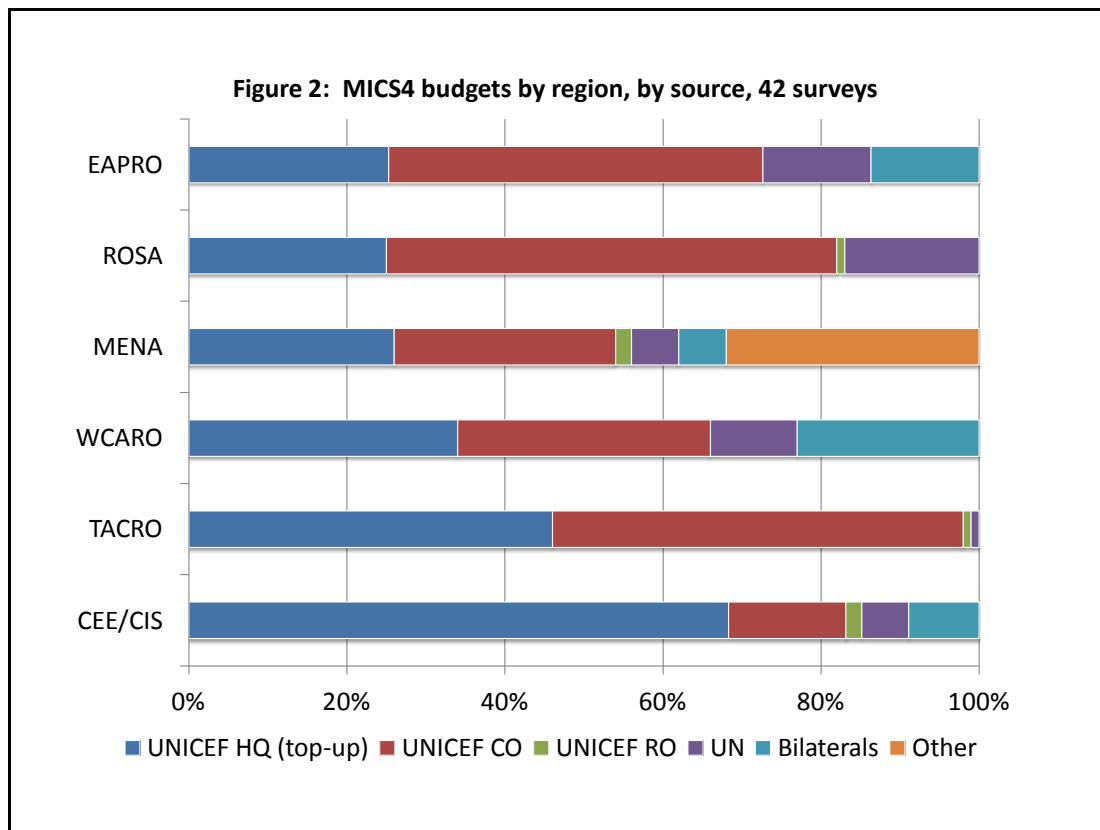
<sup>17</sup> These estimates provided by the WCARO MICS Regional Coordinator and the Dalberg Associates UNICEF Data and Analytics Resource Mobilization Strategy, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> The underlying data from the MICS3 evaluation was re-reviewed for the current evaluation. At the time of the prior evaluation, these data were considered likely underestimated. However, the current evaluation's estimates of Round 4 survey costs are similarly underestimated per the data gaps described.

## Funding Sources

UNICEF is the main contributor of the MICS surveys on average. **Of the 42 budgets reviewed, UNICEF HQ/D&A/MICS contributed 37% with “top-up” monies and Country Offices also covered 37% of the total from their own resources (Figure 3.1).** Regional Offices made minor direct financial contributions to survey implementation dwarfed by their important role in coordination and provision of technical assistance. UN specialized agencies together represent 9% of survey budgets with UNFPA playing the leading role. Of the budgets reviewed, UNFPA contributed to 17 surveys with an average contribution of nearly \$98,000. Bilateral agencies including USAID, JICA, Australian DFAT, the Swiss and Swedish government, together contributed 9% of the budgeted amounts.

The source of funding varies widely by region<sup>19</sup> as seen in Figure 3.2 below. The same percentages are tabulated in Annex 7, Table 2. Starting on the left-hand of each bar is the top-up funding. Regions with smaller Country Offices and budgets are the leading recipients of top-up monies. In the CEE/CIS region, top-up funds represent 69% of the total amount of the budgets examined. Countries in the TACRO region received 46% of their MICS4 funding from the top-up monies. The differing role of the Country Office is notable in these two regions with TACRO COs providing 52% of the total and CEE/CIS COs covering 15%. In the remaining regions, top-up monies as a proportion of the total ranged from 24% to 35%.



<sup>19</sup> The Eastern and Southern Africa Region is not included in these figures due to the small number of budgets received (2). All other regions had between 4 and 11 countries included in the budgetary estimates.

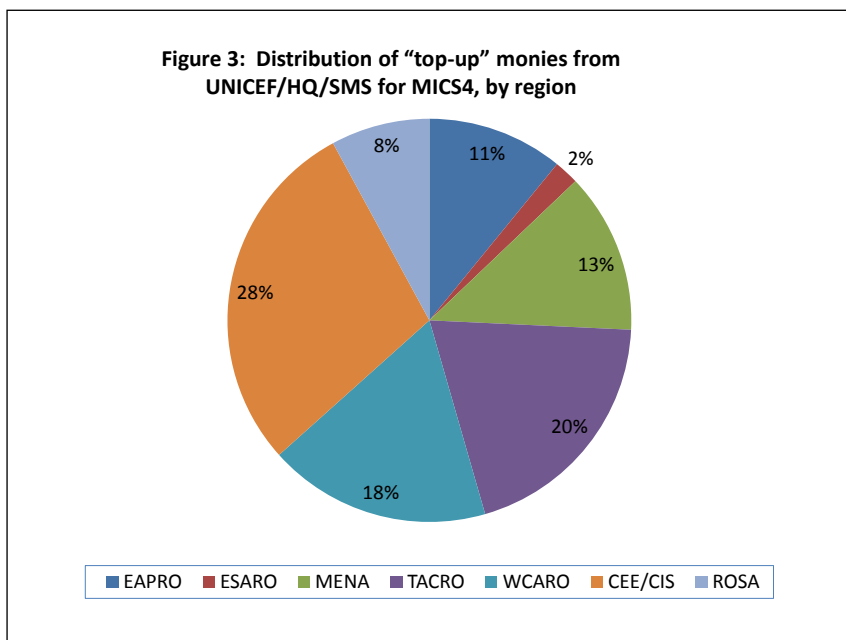
The contribution of the UNICEF Country Office appears next in red. Again, considerable variation is seen between regions with Country Offices contributing 15% in CEE/CIS to 57% in the Regional Office for South Asia. Other UN agencies are important contributors in ROSA (17%) and EAPRO (13%) while WCARO receives an estimated 23% of funding from bilateral agencies, notably USAID. Finally, MENA stands out with 32% of funding coming from other sources, specifically the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund and the Qatar MICS survey, an entirely government funded survey.

MICS budgets were also assessed in relation to the total resource envelope for a set of UNICEF country programs (both RR and OR) which span three to five years. **Based on data from 33 countries, the total budget for the MICS4 (both CO and top-up funds) expressed as a percentage of country program budget averaged 2.7%. At the time of the MICS4, UNICEF guidance<sup>20</sup> stipulated that 3-5% of all program expenditures be dedicated to data gathering efforts including evaluation, studies and research.** In smaller UNICEF country programs, defined as less than \$10 million, the total MICS budget represented 5% of country program resources. For the purposes of this evaluation, larger country programs were classified as country programs with resources greater than \$100 million. Among those larger country programs, the total cost of a MICS was minuscule- less than one-half of one percent (0.4%).

### Allocation of Top Up funds

The determination of top-up allocation begins with HQ/D&A/MICS team and Regional Offices discussing potential resource needs and developing a list of countries that may need funding for the MICS during the upcoming year. Subsequently, a list of countries with an indicative funding amount is submitted to an HQ-based Allocations Committee with the understanding that some countries will require more than indicated and others less.

Of those Country Offices that receive top-up monies, an average of \$294,000 is received. Of all top-up monies allocated for MICS4, nearly half (48%) went to CEE/CIS and TACRO (see Figure 3.3). **The phrase ‘top-up’ suggests a relatively smaller contribution to a base of significant national resources. While this is sometimes true, the fact that a third of MICS funds come**



**from HQ means that HQ is a strategic funding partner. Further, a number of countries have proven unable to raise even a third of the needed funds and are highly dependent ( $\geq 70\%$  of the total MICS**

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF Evaluation Policy. 5 December 2007. Executive Board First regular session 2008. 29 January-1 February 2008. E/ICEF/2008/4.

**budget) on top-up funds.** Those countries/offices include Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, Jamaica, Macedonia, Mongolia, Serbia, Suriname, Turkmenistan, and the Palestinian population in Lebanon. These are all upper middle countries with the exception of Mongolia, a lower middle income country. No comparable data on income status was available for the Palestinian population in Lebanon.

The availability of top-up monies also safeguards HQ/D&A/MICS team's voice in design choices which affect the technical validity of the MICS. Part 1 of the evaluation found that UNICEF significantly expanded the envelope of technical support resources to guide MICS implementation and introduced a more structured approach to technical oversight and quality assurance processes. Despite these advances, there are still instances where partners at national level—including UNICEF country offices -- authorize sample sizes choices or other decisions that introduce high technical risk to the survey. In short, UNICEF HQ/D&A/MICS has leveraged top-up funding to ensure a consistent and high-quality internationally comparable MICS platform.

There are no established standards for the amount of top-ups monies that would preserve this technical oversight function. ***The D&A Resource Mobilization Strategy estimated that top-up monies equal to approximately 25% of a MICS survey budget should safeguard HQ/D&A/MICS input into design choices which most directly impact data quality.*** Of the 42 budgets examined for this evaluation, only nine countries received 25% or less of their MICS budgets from top-up monies. These countries include Iraq, Afghanistan, Argentina, Qatar, Indonesia-Papua, Laos, Sudan, Nepal (Mid- and far-Western regions) and Ghana. Most of these countries have circumstances which are untypical for the MICS program including a fully government-funded survey in Qatar; fully Country Office-funded survey in Afghanistan; the Iraq MICS was funded largely through the UN Trust Fund for Iraq; and in Laos, the joint MICS and DHS (called the Lao Social Indicators Survey) attracted substantial contributions from partners in-country.

The Resource Mobilization Strategy went on to categorize countries according to in-country stakeholders' ability to pay. These categories included:

- Countries where the UNICEF Country Office budget is large and can be used to fund MICS if adequate planning and budgeting are in order;
- Middle-income countries where the UNICEF CO budget is small, but national governments have the ability to contribute to fund MICS if adequate outreach and advocacy efforts are in place;
- Priority countries for bilateral and multilateral donors can significantly contribute to fund MICS if adequate fund-raising efforts are in place.

The HQ/D&A/MICS team sees the middle category above as the most acute funding challenge. In settings where small country offices have very limited budgets and where few other donors remain, top-up monies are viewed as a main source of survey funding.

### **Partner funding of the MICS**

Partners in-country are also contributors to the MICS surveys. These partners are considered here as either United Nations/multilateral agencies or as bilateral agencies. As seen in Table 2, among the UN

agencies, UNFPA is the most frequent contributor a situation unchanged from Round 3. Across seventeen countries, UNFPA’s contributions totaled US \$ 1.66 million. While averaging approximately \$100,000 per survey, UNFPA’s support ranged widely by country from \$500,000 in Laos to just over \$9,000 in Jamaica. In one other country (Vietnam), UNFPA made its contribution to the MICS directly to the National Statistics Agency and the exact amount was not reported to the evaluator.

A new contributor to the MICS surveys in this round is UN Women which contributed to three surveys. A single contribution was reported from the World Bank for a sub-national survey (Madagascar) which covered a World Bank-funded project area. In Iraq, the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund contributed the majority of the required resources for the MICS survey. In Pakistan, UNICEF assisted the provincial government to prepare a funding proposal which was then circulated to donor agencies.

Among the bilateral contributors, USAID was the most frequent with support extended to four MICS surveys with an average \$350,000 per survey. In two cases (Lao PDR and Ghana), USAID’s support was inclusive of technical support provided by the contractor of the Demographic and Health Surveys. An illustration of the benefits that can development partners can derive by investing in the MICS appears in the boxed text below. **Looking across contributors, UNFPA and USAID stand out either for the number of MICS supported or the amount contributed.**

**Table 2: Non-UNICEF contributors to MICS surveys, by type**

	# of MICS supported	Total
<b>UN Agency/Multilateral</b>		
UNFPA	17	\$ 1,663,809
UNDP	3	\$ 585,000
UN Women	3	\$ 90,000
WHO	3	\$ 75,559
WFP	2	\$ 165,000
World Bank	1	\$ 220,000
UNHCR	1	\$ 10,000
<b>FAO</b>	1	\$ 10,000
<b>Bilateral agency</b>		
USAID	4	\$ 1,400,000
Swiss Cooperation	3	\$ 340,000
JICA	2	\$ 505,780
AusAID	1	\$ 295,576
Gov’t. of Sweden/ SIDA	1	\$ 264,900

In Round 3, approximately 69% of surveys had one or more non-UNICEF contributors compared to 60% in Round 4 which cannot be considered a significant difference. Another commonality between rounds was that contributions from other agencies often come with a quid pro quo regarding questionnaire content.

Oftentimes, partner agencies contribute with the intention of including specific questions or modules. These additions are not part of the MICS standard materials and may even be questions without validation. Increasingly, it appears that Country Offices and implementing agencies negotiate an agreement with the partner whereby the questions/modules are included in field work but not tabulated or published in the MICS report (thereby eliminating the need to make time-consuming changes to existing MICS data processing programs). The contributing agency assumes responsibility for data analyses and reporting. However, in contrast to the example from the Democratic Republic of Congo (boxed text below); partner agencies do not necessarily plan for the needed technical and analytical

support to use these additions meaningfully. As reported by several COs, there may be little or no feedback and the CO may be unaware whether or how the resulting data was reported or used.

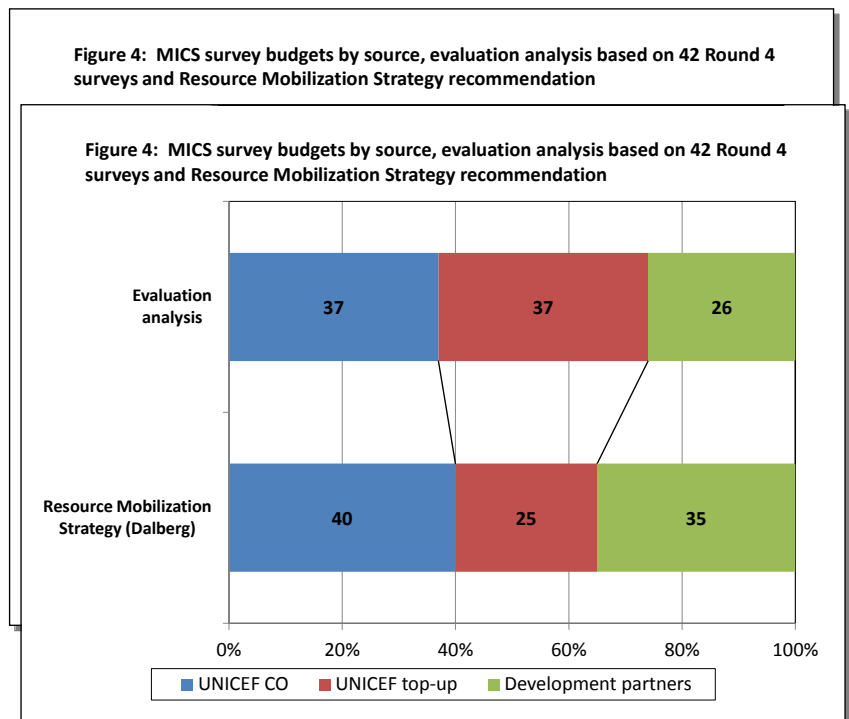
The Resource Mobilization Strategy developed by Dalberg Associates noted opportunities to tap into donors who demonstrate a keen interest in high-quality, timely data. The recommended shift appears in

With partner support, the MICS in the Democratic Republic of Congo generated data

Figure 4 whereby the increased contributions of development partners will be needed to offset a proportionally smaller top-up allotment. The Resource Mobilization Strategy also concludes that UNICEF/HQ/D&A will need to demonstrate a balanced and flexible approach that is responsive to donors' priorities if those external funds are to materialize. ***The challenge for UNICEF is to attract external resources and tolerate some degree of adaptation, while maintaining the international standards which underlie the MICS platform. This balance largely rests on the Country Office which, with support from Regional MICS Coordinators, will need to anticipate that adaptations will be sought, the technical backing to understand how adaptations could negatively affect the survey and the skill to negotiate acceptable adaptations.***

### Fund raising practices

Practices surrounding fund raising have not evolved significantly from previous rounds (as per MICS3 evaluation). UNICEF/HQ and the Regional Office may advise the Country Office but the responsibility of pursuing other funding sources for the MICS survey rests with the Country Office. Practices were found to vary widely across countries in terms of the processes and persons involved. Indeed, fund-raising appears to be driven through the initiative of individual Country Office staff as opposed to a consistently applied process.



Most CO interviewees described a process for Round 4 wherein CO contributions to the survey are identified (sometimes by section) and shortfalls are sought from the HQ-allocated top-up monies. ***There does not appear to be any commonly-used or systematic process of identifying or approaching partner agencies in-country for contributions – there is no “game plan” for how a Country Office would go about acquiring external resources.*** Indeed, several CO interviewees reported that they did not seek partner

contributions in order to avoid the complications described above that may arise when new content is requested.

In countries planning for a Round 5 MICS with certainty, interviewees reported steps to mobilize by identifying potential contributors, encouraging government contributions, convening stakeholder meetings and estimating shortfalls in funding. However, for a small number of CO interviewees, the discussion of future funding (Round 5) seems to start with the availability of top-up funds.

Identifying contributions from other UN agencies may be initiated with the UNICEF Representative discussing the opportunity often within the context of the UN Country Team (UNCT) meetings. Based on interviews with CO staff, these discussions within the UNCT varied. Some Country Office respondents report an active Representative role engaging both UN agencies and other donors while other respondents could not say with certainty that any such dialogue occurred. There was also a fair degree of uncertainty expressed regarding the commitments made from other UN agencies with some commitments never materializing (“thought that UNDP would contribute but nothing forthcoming yet”; “UNFPA offered but it didn’t come through”).

Senior management in the Country Office plays an important role in resource mobilization for the MICS. Not only is planning and budgeting of the CO’s own program resources needed, the CO also needs to seek funds from among UN and other agencies and, when needed, to appeal to HQ/D&A for top-up funds. These practices are consistent with UNICEF guidelines which stipulate responsibilities of the Representative’s vis-à-vis monitoring and evaluation as follows<sup>21</sup>: “*For monitoring and evaluations to meet quality standards, the Representative has to ensure that appropriate resources are invested...*”. This accountability cannot be met only through internal resource mobilization. Country Offices that have been reluctant to approach non-UNICEF donors need to do so in a forthright manner and stress the value delivers for all development partners.

As a guide, the Resource Mobilization Strategy estimated that national governments and development partners in-country should be contributing 35% of the total costs of a MICS survey. Of the MICS4 survey budgets reviewed, only five had partner contributions greater than or equal to 35% (Moldova, Laos, Madagascar, Ghana and Pakistan/Punjab province). Unfortunately, the contributions of national governments could not be quantified for this evaluation.

### **MICS and sustainability**

The comments of senior managers were consistently laudatory of the MICS survey program (“*gives us a seat at the table*”, “*a global public good*”, “*has exceeded all initial expectations*”) and viewed it as an element of UNICEF’s core business. At the same time, almost all senior managers interviewed pointed to a serious lack of predictability in regard to funding particularly as related to the 7% set-aside monies. These counter-pressures are seen in two statements from senior managers as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> UNICEF. 2012. Programme Policy and Procedure Manual. Page 298.

- *“the allocation of the 7% set-aside monies to the MICS reflects the organization’s priority on data and analytics”*
- *“obviously the 7% set-aside is not sustainable over the long-term”*

The issue of resource unpredictability was accompanied by reference to a MICS “exit strategy” among several senior managers. Currently, there is no exit strategy for the MICS program. The intended outcome of such a strategy was not precisely defined but respondents provided a range of rationale including: (i) an intent to diversify resources for the MICS (i.e. greater donor and country contributions) in keeping with its role as a global public good; (ii) a belief that NSOs are able to more independently collect the data; and (iii) a stated desire to re-direct investments more into routine systems. Clearly, longer-term sustainability of the MICS survey program involves some greater diversity of funding sources and contributions by development partners, governments and Country Offices. ***However, given the strong support voiced for the MICS survey program and recognition of MICS as an important part of the UNICEF “brand”, the near-constant questioning of core resource availability seems incongruent.*** As viewed by one senior manager, the MICS survey program is chronically underfunded (*“they have to beg for money”*) while also heralded as a corporate priority.

The uncertainty of funding played out in early 2012 with an unexpected shortfall in funds usually used to support HQ-functions such as developing survey tools and guidelines and supporting MICS implementation through technical assistance and quality assurance. The shortfall precipitated a fundraising effort to secure funds needed to safeguard the implementation of MICS Round 5. The response from donors was consistent with that found in interviews for the Resource Mobilization Strategy – donors have little appetite to support aspects of the MICS program which they view as a UNICEF core responsibility. The needed external resources were mobilized including one-time grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Korean National Committee for UNICEF and a small yearly grant from the German Government<sup>22</sup>.

Sustainability of the MICS has both financial and technical elements. The discussion in this section has focused primarily on the financial aspects of sustainability. Technical capacity is another critical factor in sustaining the MICS surveys as sources of high-quality, internationally comparable data. As noted in the DHS evaluation, continued technical assistance is the primary means to ensure international comparability and data quality. That evaluation further advised that any attempt to modify the TA package should be based on an understanding of how much TA is provided and for what specific purposes.

Within UNICEF, senior managers questioned whether the implementing agencies, primarily National Statistical Offices, could implement the MICS survey with less technical support from the HQ/D&A staff. However, the underlying issue seemed not to be one of longer-term sustainability or capacity-building but rather a search for means of cutting costs.

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<sup>22</sup> Dalberg Associates. UNICEF Data and Analytics: tracking the situation of children and women. Resource Mobilization Strategy. Executive Summary. April 2013.



One highly-visible element of the MICS survey program is the global and regional workshops in which HQ and RO survey specialists assist COs and implementing agencies in survey design, data processing and dissemination/further analysis. The workshops are seen as an anchor in the MICS technical assistance package which also includes HQ- and RO-based desk-reviews of materials and country visits. During workshops, HQ and regional staff and consultants provide technical guidance and support directly to implementers.

Between July 2009 and February 2013, the implementation of MICS4 entailed 20 workshops. While it was not possible to calculate all related expenses, the number of person days, estimated based on workshop schedules, agendas and participant lists<sup>23</sup>, can serve as a proxy. For the MICS Round 4 workshops, HQ staff and consultants totaled 793 person days and RO staff and their consultants accounted for another 746 person days. ***Taken together, HQ and RO staff and their respective consultants devoted 6 person-years to the conduct of the MICS4 workshops.***

While six person-years represent a large-scale commitment to this form of technical support, there is an interesting, albeit partial, contrast to be made with the DHS surveys. The DHS surveys provide technical assistance through short-term visits to the implementing country from DHS headquarters. It is estimated the full package of technical assistance for *an individual country* totals 1.5 person years, on average and includes 10-12 visits to country in addition to the HQ-provided support<sup>24</sup>. ***Although a strict comparison is not possible, it appears that the MICS program operates successfully with far fewer technical resources and less travel (e.g. if the DHS model were applied to the MICS Round 4, the number of per years of TA would total between 80 and 100 per years) and that MICS workshops are a relatively efficient form of technical assistance which in turn bolsters data quality.***

The MICS 3 evaluation found that the majority (63%) of on-line survey respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following statement “The MICS can be conducted in this country in the future without external technical assistance”. In the current evaluation several Country Office interviewees continued to identify the capacity of national statistical officers as an issue moving forward. Across regions, staff expressed concern about in-country capacity as well as the pending retirement of experienced NSO staff. In the words of one Country Office respondent, there is a “*huge capacity gap between the people who know what needs to be done and the new comers*” – and this in a country where a bilateral donor made a long-term investment to strengthen statistical capacity.

Looking forward to a time when partners pass UNICEF as the main funder of MICS surveys in individual countries, steps will be needed to keep decisions technically-grounded, for example through advocacy (e.g. for government financing) and capacity strengthening of implementing agencies. As discussed

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<sup>23</sup> A table with the break-down of MICS workshop figures appears in Annex 7, Table 1.

<sup>24</sup> The DHS program also offers a more limited technical assistance package for countries considered to have strong survey capabilities. When the most recent DHS evaluation was carried out (three years into a five year phase, 2008-2013), only seven of 38 surveys underway or completed had received the more limited TA package.

above, one means is through the continued technical input from survey implementation specialists at HQ and RO levels. ***In addition, when considering the trade-offs between reduced funding and sustained technical rigor, it would benefit UNICEF to use a quality assurance tool to assess the survey lifecycle, document areas of weakness and assist in plans to strengthen.*** Tools to gauge the technical soundness of survey operations are available, at least in draft form, and should be employed, for example through a survey quality assurance framework developed via IHSN<sup>25</sup>. This and possibly other tools should be tested and implemented in full collaboration with the DHS program to ensure consistency in both approach and findings.

### Summary points

- Estimating the total cost of a MICS survey is still limited by lack of data on the contributions of the country's government. Having comparable information on government contributions relative to the total funding envelope is an important step in working towards sustainability. This information is perhaps most pertinent in upper middle countries with limited CO resources and where HQ-allocated top-up monies make up a large percentage of survey funding.
- Based on a review of MICS budgets from 42 countries (2010-2012), the average estimated cost of a survey was \$746,000 with a median amount equal to \$534,000. The known costs of conducting a MICS survey have increased between rounds 3 and 4 driven by rising costs of inputs, expanded technical support and increased sample sizes.
- UNICEF remains the largest funder of the MICS surveys. Based on 42 survey budgets, Country Office contributions totaled 37% of required funds matched by HQ-allocated top-up monies also at 37%.
- The phrase 'top-up' suggests a relatively small contribution to a base of significant national resources. While this is sometimes true, the fact that a third of MICS funds come from HQ means that HQ is a strategic funding partner. A number of countries are highly dependent ( $\geq 70\%$  of the total MICS budget) on top-up funds.
- Based on data from 33 countries, the total budget for the MICS (both CO and top-up funds) expressed as a percentage of the country program budget averaged 2.7% compared to UNICEF guidance that 3%-5% of all program expenditures be dedicated to evaluation, studies and research.
- Looking across other contributors, UNFPA and USAID stand out either for the number of MICS supported or the amount contributed. In absolute terms, they are leading external funders of the MICS surveys in-country, each accounting for approximately 5% of the total.
- Practices surrounding fund raising seem to have changed little from previous rounds. There does not appear to be any commonly-used or systematic process of identifying or approaching partner agencies in-country for contributions – there is no "game plan" for how a Country Office would go about acquiring external resources.

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<sup>25</sup> Description and working documents for the survey quality assessment framework (SQA) can be found at <http://www.ihsn.org/home/projects/survey-quality-assessment-framework-SQA>.

- Country Office management plays an important role in resource mobilization for the MICS, an accountability that cannot be met only through internal resource mobilization. Country Offices that have been reluctant to approach non-UNICEF donors need to do so in a forthright manner and stress the value delivered for all development partners. As a guide, the D&A resource mobilization scenario estimated that governments and development partners in-country contribute 35% of the total costs of a MICS survey.
- Senior managers were consistently laudatory of the MICS survey program and viewed it as an element of UNICEF’s core business. However, they also pointed to a serious lack of predictability in regard to funding particularly as related to the 7% set-aside monies and cited the need for an increasingly diversified resource base.
- Given the strong support voiced for the MICS survey program and recognition of MICS as an important part of the UNICEF “brand”, the near-constant questioning of core resource availability is incongruent. Likewise, there were widely differing points of view around the need for and purpose of an exit strategy.
- Based on associated costs, the MICS workshops are an efficient form of technical assistance which in turn bolsters data quality.
- Even as resources become more diversified, UNICEF, in partnership with others such as DHS, should focus on in-country capacity to sustain technical rigor and gauge readiness to implement with more limited technical support. As an immediate practical step, it would benefit UNICEF to invest in and employ a quality assurance tool to assess the survey lifecycle, document areas of weakness and assist to put in plans to strengthen. UNICEF and DHS should share experiences with these approaches to the mutual benefit of both.

## **b. Stakeholder needs and demand**

The prior MICS evaluation (2008) identified a number of strengths and weaknesses in the practices to identify and negotiate stakeholder needs and demands. Among the strengths were the dynamics between teams within UNICEF, for example between staff in D&A and the Program Division, which worked together closely to define data needs and the means of collecting that information. Also cited were the processes whereby UNICEF and other organizations reach interagency agreements on the measures and methods for specific program areas. These alliances forged between UNICEF, other UN agencies, expert groups, and donors, were seen as an important asset for MICS strategic management

The weaknesses found in the prior evaluation focused on intentions of multiple stakeholders, including UNICEF HQ and COs, to add new indicators and to press for greater levels of disaggregation of data. As a ready-made and widely-regarded vehicle, the MICS was viewed as a likely platform for a number of data needs and demands. The ability of D&A to resolve these conflicts was limited and no higher-level actor intervened to arbitrate demands with consideration of technical soundness. Given the centrality of these issues, the part 2 evaluation undertook an examination of stakeholder demands and needs.

Key question: *How far is MICS coherently and efficiently designed to meet stakeholders' diverse needs and demands, taking note of requirements and expectations for statistical and analytical capacity development?*

Sub-questions:

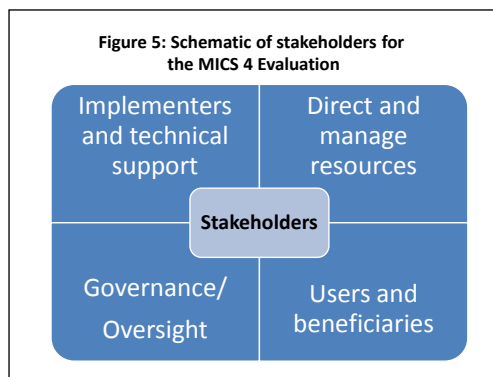
*How do stakeholders define their needs in regards to survey data? What are the priority needs of stakeholders by category? To what extent do needs differ by sector? level?*

*What processes guide MICS design choices to meet stakeholder needs and demands? To what extent are MICS processes, content and products adaptable to stakeholder needs and demands?*

*What are the requirements for statistical and analytical capacity associated with these needs?*

*To what extent have design choices in R4 and proposed for R5 addressed these needs and demands?*

The methods used to examine these questions included interviews and document reviews. Data needs were examined in all interviews thereby generating a picture across levels and programs. The definition of stakeholder utilized for the evaluation was those with “the power to respond to, negotiate with, and change the strategic future”<sup>26</sup> of the MICS. This definition was made operational through an emphasis on four categories presented in Figure 5 below including with governance and/or oversight for the MICS survey program (UNICEF senior management), direct and manage resource flows (CO and RO staff, HQ/D&A/MICS and major external contributors), users and beneficiaries (UNICEF/HQ Program Division staff and D&A staff, CO staff, other agencies and users of MICS micro-data) and implementers and technical support (NSOs and consultants). More detail on these categories and numbers of individuals interviewed appears in Annex 8.



<sup>26</sup> Adapted from Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. 1998. Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management. London: Sage Publications.

## Data needs

***In contrast to the earlier evaluation, UNICEF staff appear to have a greater understanding of the MICS survey package, its intended purpose and limitations in its use vis-à-vis other data needs and demand. Respondents were more likely to define their needs for survey data with appropriate and realistic expectations.*** Particularly in regards to the data needed for equity-related analyses and reporting, respondents had a clear understanding of what the MICS (or comparable HH survey) could and could not provide.

Table 3 points to the role of household surveys in results monitoring for the UNICEF Strategy. While MICS and other surveys are an important source – providing 44% of data needs at the impact and outcome levels, there is also considerable variability between priority program areas in their reliance on HH surveys as a data source.

***Respondents across levels consistently flagged two important gaps in UNICEF’s ability to monitoring and track progress in***

***areas of strategic importance specifically child disability and adolescents<sup>27</sup>.*** These areas are summarized below. A third area of need, for disaggregated data, was mentioned far less frequently but is considered here as well given the interesting changes from the findings of the prior evaluation. Finally, this section includes a text box which describes widely-felt needs related not to household surveys but to data generated through other means.

**Table 3: Household surveys are an important source of strategic-level performance measurement**

At the corporate level, the need for household survey data is reflected in UNICEF’s Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and accompanying results framework. As a source, the MICS, as well as other household surveys, account for 44% of all impact and outcome-level indicators (as tabulated below) and represent a critical component of monitoring progress towards goals and targets.

Indicator level	Measured by HH survey	Total #
<b>Impact</b>	6	18
<b>Outcome</b>		
<b>Health</b>	8	10
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	1	5
<b>Water, sanitation, hygiene</b>	4	9
<b>Nutrition</b>	4	7
<b>Education</b>	4	7
<b>Child protection</b>	5	10
<b>Social inclusion</b>	0	7
<b>Total</b>	32	73
	<b>44%</b>	

<sup>27</sup> Other data needs were identified with varied degree of relevance for household survey programs. For example, data needs related to child protection were frequently mentioned including issues such as children outside of family care (for example, in institutions or living on the street), data on child migration and issues of physical abuse and access to justice. Surveys, although not necessarily of households, may be an increasingly important data source as reflected in the Strategic Plan 2012-16 results framework which include the following performance indicator: “the number of countries that collect and publish routine and sample survey-based data on violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children, including violent deaths and violent injuries with UNICEF support”.

### *Children with disabilities*

A consistently mentioned data gap related to children with disabilities. Senior managers at UNICEF/HQ and respondents in four of the nine COs canvassed, across regions and socio-economic levels, described a priority need for information on children with disabilities. MICS3 included optional modules on child disability based on a set of ten screening questions to identify increased risk of disability. However, a UNICEF-commissioned analysis questioned the utility of those questions for cross-country comparison<sup>28</sup>. While efforts are underway to address the need for comparable and reliable data on children with disabilities, the current round of MICS does not include questions on children with disabilities. Among Country Offices, there was an expectation that revised questions on child disabilities would be included in MICS5 and considerable disappointment that those questions were not yet available.

To address the need for data on child disability, UNICEF is engaged with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, a multi-agency working group focused on disability measures suitable for censuses and national surveys. In 2011, UNICEF joined a sub-group on children to collaborate on the development of a module intended to measure child (and youth) disability in surveys. To date, steps in the process include development of a conceptual framework to generate proposed questions, multi-country cognitive testing of the instruments in Oman, Belize, India, Montenegro and USA and revisions of a Module on Child Functioning and Disability based on these findings. Next steps include further cognitive testing of the revised Module and then field-tests. UNICEF has been working to create the guidelines and accompanying documentation for the modules. The new module is expected to be ready for actual data collection later in 2014.

### *Adolescents*

Respondents also consistently identified data gaps related to adolescent populations. At least one of the CO interviewed has a new CPD inclusive of an adolescent focus. That CO plans thematic study including drafting of a concept note and indicators as well as a baseline survey. They are investing in the hope that a standardized approach for this area will be available within a few years. A recent review<sup>29</sup> also points to a lack of knowledge on protective factors that enable adolescents to be resilient in the face of adversity. It is however, acknowledge that these needs are better addressed through research rather than large-scale household surveys.

To address information needs on the challenges facing adolescents, the fourth round of the MICS included new questions relevant to adolescents and young people, such as access to media (television, radio and printed media) and technology (use of computers and the Internet), and use of alcohol and tobacco. In addition, questions on subjective well-being were developed for youth aged 15–24 and covered perceived life satisfaction in areas of family, friendships, living environment, school, job, income level, physical appearance and overall happiness. The MICS4 questionnaire also captures young people’s assessment of recent changes in living conditions and their expectations about the future.

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund and University of Wisconsin. Monitoring Child Disability in Developing Countries. Results from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. 2008.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. Progress for children. A report card on adolescents. Number 10. April 2012.

Despite these advances, a number of respondents, including UNFPA, a frequent contributor to MICS surveys, point to data gaps regarding adolescents notably the lack of information on those aged 10–14. Both MICS and DHS surveys ask individuals questions in a retrospective manner inclusive of the adolescent period. However, both survey programs have avoided gathering information directly from young adolescents due to concerns about validity (e.g. their understanding of the questions asked) and consent issues). Although some organizations such as the Population Council have conducted nationally representative surveys of adolescents and used findings to inform interventions, these surveys are not considered to generate cross-national comparisons.

### *Disaggregation*

***Continued demand for further disaggregated data was expressed across countries. As noted above, in six of the nine Country Offices, those demands were related to the equity agenda and were balanced with clear, realistic expectations of the role of MICS.*** In general, respondents also had a greater recognition of the negative implication of larger sample sizes for household surveys. One senior manager cited the Bangladesh experience where a very large survey resulted in very poor quality data<sup>30</sup> and applauded the openness with which a self-critique was disseminated (“*refreshing that we could put that out there*”). The important role of the HQ/D&A/MICS team and Regional MICS Coordinators were frequently mentioned in helping to advise on these decisions.

Nonetheless, the MICS program still encounters demands for larger sample sizes and the platform has adapted in several ways. Between rounds 3 and 4, the evaluation estimated a 29% increase in sample sizes<sup>31</sup>. The number of countries which conduct sub-national surveys to generate estimates at lower geographic/administrative level or for specific population groups has also increased between rounds, from four such surveys in Round 3 to sixteen in Round 4. In one case study country, the CO supported the use of MICS survey methods for a sub-set of districts to test if reliable information in small areas could be generated more frequently (“*mini-MICS*”)<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Why bigger isn't always better - getting the sample size right in the Bangladesh MICS. Carel De Rooy, UNICEF Representative. UNICEF/BANA2009-00916/Noorani.

<sup>31</sup> In Cluster 1 of this evaluation, the team found that among the 14 countries that implemented both MICS3 and MICS4, the average sample size was 18,122 in MICS4, compared to 14,041 in MICS3.

<sup>32</sup> This CO-led exercise encountered delays due to weaknesses in capacity and generated practical lessons for future application.

**Text Box: Needs related to other data collection methods**

Throughout the interviews, household surveys were unquestionably viewed as a vital element of UNICEF's work particularly for situation analyses at country levels and global-level monitoring. In contrast, UNICEF Country Office staff repeatedly raised data collected through methods other than surveys as an

**Processes guiding design choices**

**As was observed in the prior evaluation, the most effective means of influencing the content of the MICS is through the activities of inter-agency working groups devoted to advancing the measurement of a specific program.** These groups typically work towards a shared set of data standards, norms and parameters that would enable countries to collect data according to best practice and make data comparable across countries and over time. Membership includes relevant UN agencies, NGOs, academia, bilateral partners, and survey research groups. These groups, which range from informal working groups to officially recognized and resourced entities, have been effective drivers in introducing new content to the MICS as well as other household survey programs.

While work is underway across a wide range of program areas, examples from two groups, early childhood development (ECD) and water supply and sanitation (WS&S), are used here to exemplify how new content is introduced to the MICS survey program.

*Early childhood development.*

The effort to develop valid new questionnaire content is very well-reflected in the work of the early childhood development community. The path followed to get new, programmatically-relevant indicators into the MICS for wide-scale application may be instructive for other program areas.

An earlier version of ECD content was included in MICS3 which examined elements in the theory of change including home environment and access to ECD services. However, work continued including a partnership with Plan International to assess child development via a 158 item questionnaire which was piloted in the Philippines (2007). With guidance from the UNICEF/D&A/MICS Team, the ECD unit worked to simplify and reduce the questionnaire while also assessing its validity in different settings. Subsequently introduced in MICS4, the module comprises 17 questions, including a 10-item ECD Index. The ECD Index serves as an outcome indicator by capturing the percentage of children ages 36 to 59 months who are on track in literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional, and learning domains. Fifty-five MICS 4 surveys have included the ECD questions. The data have been used widely including a special edition of the Journal on Child Development<sup>33</sup>, journal articles<sup>34</sup> and UNICEF publications<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Child Development [Volume 83, Issue 1](#), pages 46–61, January/February 2012

<sup>34</sup> Engle PL et al. 2011. Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries. *Lancet*. 378: 1339–53. Published Online September 23, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF. February. Inequities in Early Childhood Development: What the data say Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. 2012



The MICS is now the only global source to measure the outcomes of early childhood development in a holistic manner. A further advantage is the ability to disaggregate the data to reveal important inequities faced by children such as those related to gender, area of residence, ethnicity and household poverty. In the words of one interviewee, the availability of these data has “*changed the nature of the dialogue*” with countries and partners around ECD. An external evaluation of UNICEF’s early childhood development program concluded that the promotion and use of the MICS4 ECD module data could produce substantial benefits to all levels of UNICEF and country counterparts. The ECD indicators were seen as particularly useful to facilitate national monitoring and international comparisons of children’s progress in key developmental domains<sup>36</sup>. At the global level, MICS4 data is being used for analyses on issues including risk factors and protective factors via partnerships with the academic community. At country and regional levels, the external evaluation noted the need for technical assistance to analyze the ECD data and to use it for policy and program development. Interestingly, these efforts were undertaken without a dedicated inter-agency working group dedicated to ECD monitoring and evaluation although mobilization of the ECD community was driving factor.

#### *Water supply and sanitation.*

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) is a well-established working group which serves as the official UN mechanism tasked with monitoring progress towards MDG Target 7c on drinking water supply and sanitation. Within UNICEF, staff from the UNICEF/HQ/D&A and the WS&S section work closely together on JMP activities and partner with WHO. Technical task forces are convened for specific purposes and access additional expertise as needed (e.g. NGOs, academia).

During 2012, JMP working groups undertook a rigorous consultation process to frame a common vision for a post-2015 global goal along with a proposal for evidence-based targets and indicators. WHO and UNICEF tasked the working groups to:

- identify a goal which is aspirational, measurable, of global relevance;
- review existing relevant indicators and monitoring mechanisms for their potential use in global monitoring post-2015;
- ensure that the principles underlying the Human Right to Water and Sanitation are reflected in new indicators, to the extent possible; and
- deliver a menu of options of one or more global goals, with corresponding targets and indicators, in each of the categories (drinking-water, sanitation, hygiene and equity and non-discrimination).

A subsequent meeting<sup>37</sup> reviewed the proposed targets and indicators in terms of formulation and measurability. A JMP working group devoted to measurability issues identified actions for further follow-

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<sup>36</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2011. Evaluation of UNICEF’s Early Childhood Development Programme with Focus on Government of Netherlands Funding (2008–2010): Global Synthesis Report. July.

<sup>37</sup> Report of the second consultation on post-2015 monitoring of drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene, organized by WHO and UNICEF, hosted by the Royal Government of the Netherlands in the Hague, 3-5 December 2012.

up and research such as developing methods to assess ‘individual’ open defecation practices; identifying an appropriate metric for monitoring progressive realization in reducing inequalities, and developing a benchmark value for ‘acceptable household expenditures on WASH’. Some consideration has been given to developing a WASH-specific household survey. A simpler approach, albeit still challenging, would be expansion of the current WASH modules of MICS and DHS.

In MICS Round 5, an important design choice involved the potential inclusion of household water quality testing. This addition came as a result of a culmination of activities including a three country study that tested the validity of survey questions which rely on self-reported behavior. The study concluded that the MICS and DHS question on household water treatment does not give a reliable indication of the frequency or the effectiveness of HWTS<sup>38</sup>. Based on those findings, the JMP recommended that these questions be removed from these surveys programs. Moreover, the JMP funded the development of a water quality testing protocol and survey module that was tested as part of the MICS Round 5 pilot in Bangladesh. Based on the pilot and further field-testing (Nepal, Sindh Province, Pakistan), the module and accompanying guidelines are being finalized. Finally, the JMP is mobilizing to cover, in part, the costs of primary data collection through the MICS. For the period 2013-2014, the JMP sought donor support to cover a total amount of \$2.5 million from WASH funding.

### **Adaptability positives and negatives**

***The MICS survey program, as represented by the fourth and fifth rounds, has demonstrated a considerable ability to adapt within the confines of its stated objective of generating quality, internationally comparable data.*** Among the adaptations seen in advance of and during MICS4 and 5 are:

- adjustments in the questionnaire to accommodate new, validated content including early childhood development, post-natal health checks, unmet need for family planning, child labor, access to mass media/IC, tobacco use, among others
- an increase in average survey sample size of approximately 30% between rounds 3 and 4
- an increased number of sub-national surveys (e.g. province-specific) and population-specific surveys (e.g. Roma populations)
- modification of questionnaire content for country-specific needs and development partners albeit without full integration into data processing and reporting

Taken together, these adaptations represent a fairly dynamic survey program which can and does make adjustments. The parameters for these adaptations are consistently stated around data quality, timeliness and adherence to international standards. It is these characteristics that have brought MICS to the forefront of a small number of such survey programs and enabled UNICEF to assume a position as a major generator of data on the situation of women and children.

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<sup>38</sup> The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP). Annual Report 2012.

None the less, there are also some important limitations to the ability of the MICS survey program to adapt. The major factors, as cited above, relate to adherence to international standards, data quality and timeliness. More practically, adaptations made at country level require resources (e.g. software programmers), expertise and time. Additional limitations are considered in the section below.

As described above, inter-agency collaboration around valid indicators and measurement methods is an essential driver of MICS adaptation. Within UNICEF, this work is often advanced through team work in which Program Division staff and D&A staff work closely together bringing complementary skills. Indeed, Program Division staff repeatedly cited their close working relationships with D&A staff on these activities. Two elements stand out in this arrangement. ***While the processes of developing content are well documented by some inter-agency working groups, it is less clear exactly how decisions are made about their inclusion in the survey.*** It was not possible for the evaluator to identify specific criteria used to guide the selection process or decision-making authority. For example, in the Round 5 pilot survey (Bangladesh), there was a short household consumption module tested. That module was deemed too complex and lengthy for inclusion in the MICS5. However, it was difficult to identify when and how that decision was made.

Overall, there appears to be no centralized strategic assessment of information needs nor prioritization process. New needs primarily emerge through the inter-agency working groups or through collaboration of D&A focal points with staff from the Program Division. In contrast, the MEASURE DHS program, which also depends on input from the inter-agency working groups, additionally conducts an extensive and transparent assessment of stakeholders at the beginning of each round. For UNICEF, minimally, better documentation of discussions and decisions would be beneficial.

Finally, several respondents urged greater forward-thinking about the direction of the MICS. The feeling was that the MICS program rolls forward from one round to the next, adding questions and other modifications. In particular, multiple interviewees pointed to countries achieving middle-income status which are expected to balk at collecting data associated with low-income settings. Areas of interest are expected to shift and the ability of MICS to meet these needs tested. ***Longer-term more strategic thinking is required for the program, as per the following respondent: “we need to think about where we are going to be in 10 years, for example with MICS modules for use in other national surveys by statistical offices and content like psycho-social well-being; in post-2015 environment, we need to stand back and consider the data needed”.***

### Summary points

- UNICEF staff exhibit greater understanding of the MICS, its intended purpose and limitations in its use vis-à-vis current data needs and demand. For example, respondents had a greater recognition of the negative implication of larger sample sizes and cited the efforts of the HQ/D&A/MICS team and RO MICS Coordinators in raising awareness of the issue.
- A consistently mentioned data gap related to children with disabilities. Senior managers at UNICEF/HQ and respondents in four of the nine COs canvassed, across regions and socio-economic levels, described a priority need for information on children with disabilities. Among

some Country Offices, there is a sense that development at the global level is slow in producing these needed tools.

- Despite advances, a number of respondents, including UNFPA - a frequent contributor to MICS surveys, point to data gaps regarding adolescents notably the lack of information on those aged 10–14.
- The most effective means of influencing the content of the MICS is through the activities of inter-agency working groups devoted to advancing the measurement of a specific program.
- The MICS survey program, as represented by the fourth and fifth round, has demonstrated a considerable ability to adapt within the confines of its stated objective of generating quality, internationally comparable data.
- However, clarity was lacking around how adaptation decisions are made. There seem to be no specific criteria used to guide the selection process or decision-making authority.

### c. Use of MICS data

The evaluation of MICS Round 3 found strong evidence of its use at the global level in a range of advocacy and reporting materials. In addition to its value as an important source of MDG reporting, members of interagency working groups and other global stakeholders emphasized the extensive and increasingly important contribution of MICS data in filling data gaps and informing advocacy in public health, education, and child rights. By contrast, the prior evaluation found less evidence of MICS use at the country level beyond inclusion in a variety of reports. In particular, the evaluation noted only limited evidence of links made between the data and specific programming actions or policy developments for either UNICEF or governments. Among the reasons cited for low levels of data use in country, the most frequent reasons included lack of ability to effectively use data, sensitivity about results, and delays in reporting data.

The current evaluation investigated the extent to which recent MICS data have been or are being used by UNICEF and national and global stakeholders and decision-makers working in UNICEF's focus areas (child survival and development, basic education and gender equality, HIV/AIDS and children, and child protection). The key question examined was:

*How far have consumers of the data at various levels (governmental, UNICEF, others) been exploiting the potentials of the rounds 3 and 4 MICS data across diverse purposes, and adjustments made to improve utilization in round 5?*

*Sub-questions:*

- *Over the last few years, what has been the degree of utilization of MICS data across diverse purposes (e.g. research, policy advocacy, program planning, implementation and evaluation, and decision taking about going to scale)?*
- *Within UNICEF and among national partners, what are the factors that inhibit or promote data demand and information use for research and decision making?*

- *What are the traits and features of the MICS data (and MICS program at large) that hinder or support the use of MICS data for research and decision making?*
- *What is the current understanding of the roles and responsibilities for further analysis and practical application of the MICS data?*
- *What has the MICS program undertaken in Round 4 and/or is planning to undertake in Round 5, to improve data utilization within UNICEF and among national, regional and international partners?*
- *What are the key activities and actions needed to improve the utilization of MICS data for research and decision making at national, regional and global levels?*

Integrated into this section are also a set of sub-questions around data archiving and other supportive analytic and knowledge management arrangements that are in place to assist end users. Sub-questions included:

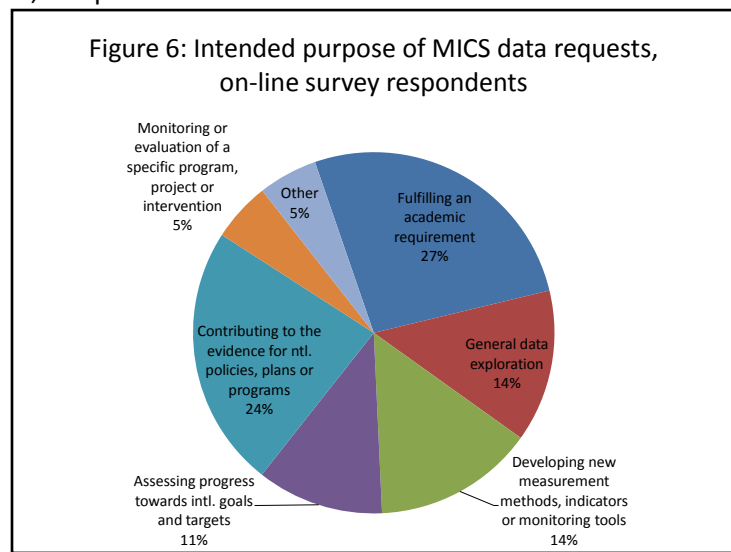
- What are the experiences of end users with MICS reports and other dissemination materials, and with MICS Compiler, and their perceived quality of, and access to these resources?
- What are the experiences of end users with access to MICS datasets, their opinions on the data archiving systems, and their assessment of user-friendliness of the datasets and the variables therein?

The following section begins with an overview of findings from an on-line survey of MICS dataset users followed by consideration of its use at global and country level. The Report then focuses on factors which hinder or support the use of MICS data and steps that might be taken to improve utilization. Questions on the utilization of MICS data were informed through multiple methods including interviews, extensive document review, country case studies and an on-line survey of individuals who requested access to MICS micro data. Throughout this section, vignettes are used to illustrate the types of analyses being carried out with MICS data as provided by on-line survey respondents.

### Overview of MICS data use: on-line survey findings

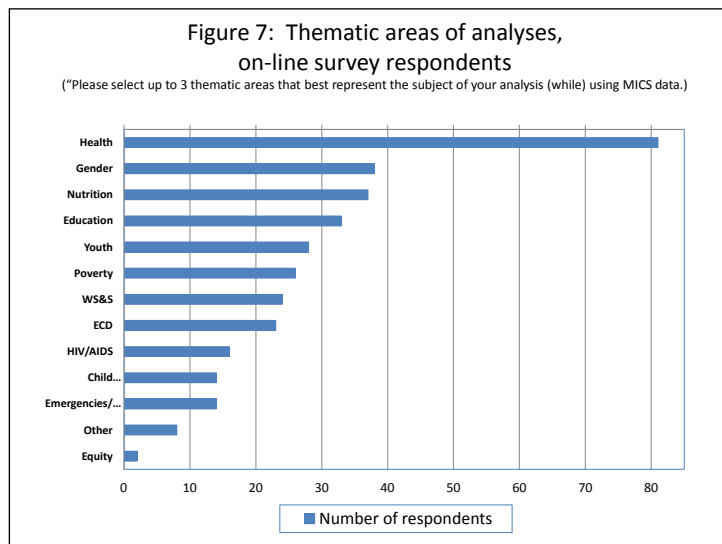
As reflected in the on-line survey responses, the patterns of utilization for MICS data cross a number of purposes. These patterns may not be representative of *all* MICS users as they are based on individuals who requested access to MICS datasets. However, the distribution of respondents, by type of organization, is similar to that found in the complete data of data requesters. When triangulated with information from other sources below, a more complete picture emerges.

As seen in Figure 6, approximately one-quarter (27%) of respondents stated that the purpose of their request was to fulfill



an academic requirement. For another quarter (24%), the purpose of their request was to contribute to the evidence base for national policies, plans and programs. Fourteen percent of respondents used the MICS data to develop new measurement methods, indicators or monitoring tools and an equal number conducted general data exploration. Approximately one in ten utilized the MICS data to assess progress towards international goals and targets (11%). A small percentage (5%) requested the data in order to monitor or evaluate a specific program, project or intervention. In Annex 8, each of these purposes is illustrated by several examples of the issues examined, as provided by the respondents.

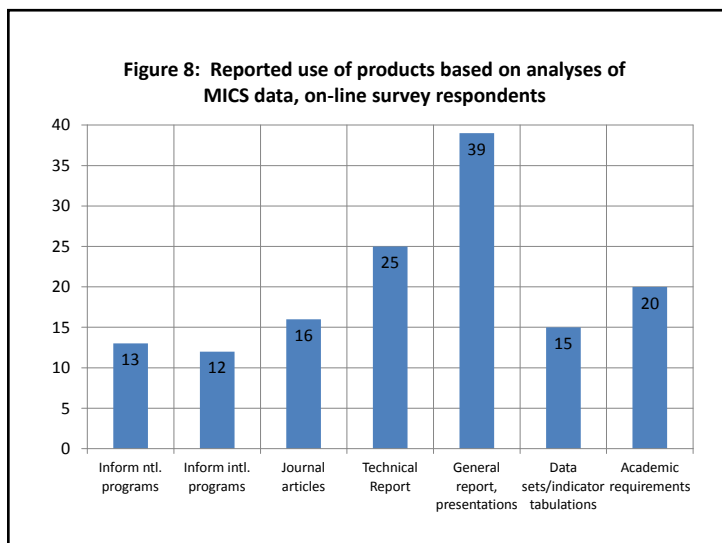
On-line survey respondents were further asked to indicate the thematic area(s) of their MICS data analyses. As seen in Figure



7, health topics are the leading subject for analyses followed by gender, nutrition and education. Areas with the fewest responses include child protection, emergencies/ humanitarian action and equity analyses. In contrast, two of these areas with fewer responses, child protection and equity, figured prominently in interviews.

Of all on-line survey respondents, 80% reported that the MICS data acquired was used to generate specific products. As seen in Figure 8 the most commonly cited products were general reports and presentations (39), technical reports (25) and academic requirements (20). It is important to note that academically-oriented work is not necessarily related to an individual's thesis or dissertation. As seen in the vignettes presented below, academic use includes analyses of MICS as part of methodological development or work commissioned by a development agency.

Among on-line respondents who generated specific products with their requested MICS data, fifty-seven percent indicated that the products were available in the public domain. Survey respondents were also asked if the products or analyses generated with MICS data were used in stakeholder dialogue or decision-making concerning the situation of women and



children. The majority of respondents replied “no” (44%) while 32% respondent “yes” and 24% did not

*Vignettes of MICS analyses in academic organizations:*

*“MICS data was used in an investigation of sub-national variation in access to water and sanitation using hierarchical mixed models. This has been extended to look at household crowding, urban typologies and other contextual factors influencing risk of infectious disease. The resulting academic papers contributed to discussion about improved targeting of neglected tropical diseases control programs.”*

Respondent from a UK-based academic organization.

*“We do equity analyses on health interventions, nutrition interventions, mortality and fertility, calculating coverage and rates by subgroups of wealth, maternal education, area, etc. The resulting country equity profiles were used in reports and presentations such as Women Deliver.”*

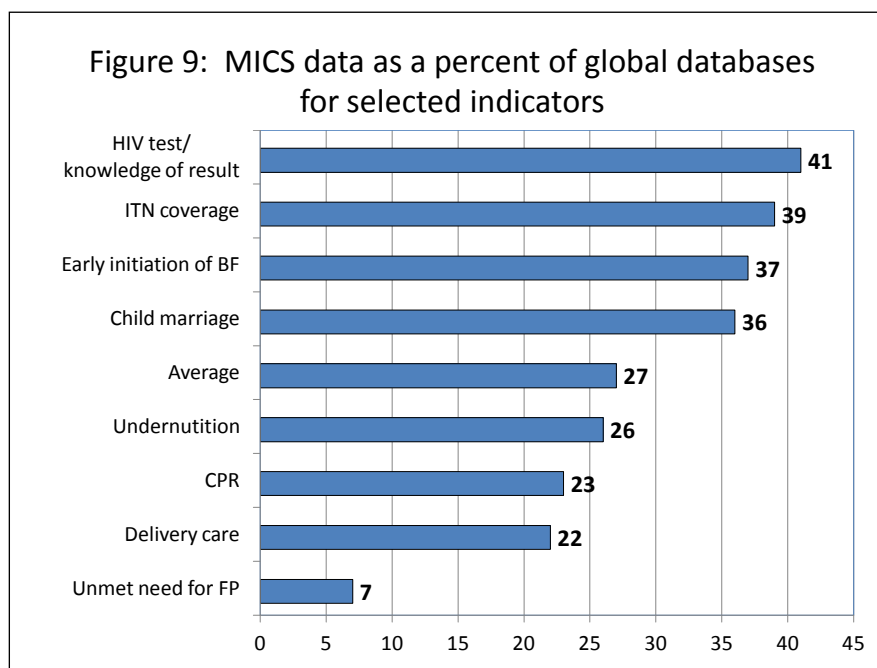
know.

### Global level monitoring and analyses

At the global level, there are several highly visible uses of the MICS data. MICS is very frequently used to report country progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. At the time that the UN General Assembly approved the Millennium Declaration<sup>39</sup>, the MICS survey program was in its second round and positioned to serve as an important platform for MDG indicator monitoring.

A review of global data bases show that, for set of indicators relevant to the status of women and children, the MICS data accounts for significant portion of the most recent data points (Figure 9, indicator definitions and data sources can be found in Annex 9). For this set of indicators, four of which are MDG progress measures, the MICS accounts on average for 27% of data points. These measures, albeit non-randomly selected, are a reflection of the degree to which MICS contributes to the monitoring of relevant international goals and indicators measurable through the survey. Not depicted here is the important role of the MICS data for MDG indicators which are modeled or estimated from household survey data. Among the leading indicators created through modeling or estimation are infant and under-five mortality rates, maternal mortality ratios and access to water supply and sanitation. For example, of all of the survey data points utilized to generate under-five mortality estimates since the year 2000, the MICS have accounted for 20%<sup>40</sup>. Although not a surprise, the MICS data serves as an important foundation of the global databases used to monitor the situation of women and children.

***The work to harmonize the MICS and DHS has been a great advantage to global monitoring of international goals and targets.*** These two survey programs are stalwart data sources for all of the measures above and many more, complemented, depending on the indicator, by other more specialized surveys (e.g. Malaria Indicator Surveys, Reproductive Health Surveys, and nutrition surveys).



<sup>39</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. United Nations Millennium Declaration. ARes55/2. 18 September 2000. Fifty-fifth session. Agenda item 60

<sup>40</sup> United National. Inter-agency Group on Mortality Estimates.



***Harmonization of the MICS and DHS has also contributed to another highly visible form of global-level data utilization. Standardized methods and comparable indicators has allowed for an expanded and more consistent global data set upon which analyses can be carried out.*** One result of the harmonized data sets is the rise in publication of analyses by UNICEF and its partners. During the period 2011 to 2013, the average annual number of publications was 23 compared to 11 during the period 2005-07. These analyses cover a more diversified set of themes as well moving beyond flagship publications (e.g. State of the World Children, Progress for Children) to themes including birth registration, female genital mutilation/cutting, disparities in sex and adolescents. These reports are often multi-agency efforts carried out by inter-agency working groups which utilize the global data bases for policy- and program-relevant analyses (e.g. (Interagency Group on Child Mortality Estimation, Malaria MERG, Water/Sanitation: JMP for Water and Sanitation, Child Protection MERG).

***The MICS data has also being used increasingly in multi-country analyses which utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out-of-school.*** Vignettes of multi-country analyses, as drawn from the on-line survey, appear in the boxed text below.

One example of this work is the Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities<sup>41</sup> which examined gaps and

*Vignettes of MICS in multi-country analyses:*

*“MICS data was used for a comparative analysis of poverty and stunting. The resulting data was used in presentation for U.S. government agency reviews and informed targeting for Feed the Future USG initiative”*

Respondent working in a government agency based in the U.S.A.

*“MICS data was used to examine the state of literacy and non-formal education in Togo and other countries of West Africa. The data was presented to NGOs, UN agencies and ministries. The resulting analytical report is part of the official documents produced by the project CapEFA Togo”*

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<sup>41</sup> UNICEF. 2007. Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities 2007-2008. Guide. September.

opportunities in national poverty reduction strategies, the specific disadvantages faced by families with children, and policies that could more effectively reduce child deprivations by providing better services and protection. Using both MICS and DHS data, fifty-four countries from seven regions participated in the study supported in their analyses by UNICEF and the University of Bristol. These studies serve as policy advocacy tools which provide policy options and recommendations on how legislation, policies and programs could best support child rights.

In addition to its use in the Global Study of Child Poverty and Disparities, MICS data is being used in other initiatives to develop and apply poverty metrics. These include the Multiple Overlapping Deprivations Analysis (MODA)<sup>42</sup> supported by UNICEF's Office of Research. The MODA also utilizes MICS, DHS or other household survey data to create an index focused on the child as the unit of analysis. Its analytical approach measures the number of deprivations each child may experience simultaneously thereby identifying those in greatest need<sup>43</sup>.

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), an international measure of acute poverty covering over 100 developing countries, also utilizes MICS data<sup>44,45</sup>. The MPI assesses poverty at the individual level and classifies the degree of their poverty based on number of deprivations that individual experiences. Originally developed for use in the UNDP's Human Development Report, the MPI was created by researchers at the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. MICS data accounts for 39% of country data points for the MPI in the 2014 Human Development Report<sup>46</sup>. Global data bases are updated on an on-going basis and a network of researchers share their experiences directly with policy makers in other countries who are exploring the possibility or who are in the process of implementing such measures. Currently 22 countries and five institutions participate in the network.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data were used to explore equity issues for a common ethnic minority, Hill People, in communities across three countries in South East Asia: Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand<sup>47</sup>. The analysis was intended to serve as an example that may be replicated in other countries concerned with equity for children of ethnic minorities or through inter-country co-operation for addressing inequalities among cross-national ethnic communities. The paper has been shared with the Country Offices for use in their advocacy.

Since 2010, UNICEF has partnered with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) on an out-of-school children initiative which aims improve information and carry out analyses related to multiple deprivations

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<sup>42</sup> [www.unicef-irc.org/MODA](http://www.unicef-irc.org/MODA).

<sup>43</sup> De Neubourg, C., J. Chai, M. de Milliano, I. Plavgo, Z. Wei (2012), 'Step-by-Step Guidelines to the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA)', Working Paper 2012-10, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

<sup>44</sup> Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2013), Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Data Bank. OPHI, University of Oxford. Available at [www.ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index](http://www.ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index)

<sup>45</sup> Alkire S, Conconi A, and Roche JM. 2013. Multidimensional Poverty Index 2013: Brief Methodological Note and Results. February. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI)

<sup>46</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-6-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi>

<sup>47</sup> Engilbertsdóttir S., Evans MC and I. Shrestha. 2013. Considering Cross-National Equity: 2013Children in Highland Populations in South-East Asia. Working Paper.

that these children face in regards to education. These analyses are based on both household survey data (MICS and DHS) as well as administrative information. Twenty-six countries participate in the initiative which has yielded both national and regional studies. Based on the experiences and lessons learned from the UNICEF/UIS global initiative, two major publications will be produced: a global report on out-of-school children, and a guidance document with methodology to address the problem of out-of-school children. Countries work on analyses and policy recommendations with support from UIS and UNICEF and attend regional workshops to share findings and frame policy discussions.

***The global-level examples above are notable in that they are not one-time analytical efforts but systematic, multi-country endeavours with built-in technical support mechanisms. A facilitating factor may be that there is now a “critical mass” of data collected through standard methods and with known quality to build upon.*** Throughout the interviews, there was no reference to any UNICEF strategy to promote or steer these initiatives nor clearly articulated roles and responsibilities. Efforts to further analyze MICS data at HQ level is often the product of individuals’ initiative

### Country-level analyses and monitoring

Consistent with Figure 9 above, MICS is a frequent source for MDG monitoring. Among the eight case study countries, six have used MICS data for their MDG reports often intermixed with DHS reports. The between-survey intervals range from 1 year to five years. The two case study countries which have not relied on their MICS data for MDG reporting conducted sub-national MICS surveys (i.e. Pakistan and Nepal).

**Table 4: MICS use in UN and UNICEF program documents**

Case Study	UNDAF	UNICEF CPD	UNICEF COAR
Belize	Yes	Yes	Yes
Congo, Demo. Rep.	NA	Yes	Yes
Iraq	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lao PDR	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lebanon (Palestinian population)	NA	Yes	Yes
Nepal	No	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	No	Yes
Sierra Leone	NA	Yes	Yes
Vietnam	Yes	Yes	Yes

NA indicates that the UNDAF preceded the MICS.

**Table 5: MICS appearance/accessibility on non-UNICEF sites**

Case Study	NSO website	IHSN	# of downloads
Belize	No	Yes	451
Congo, Demo. Rep.	NA	No	--
Iraq	Yes	Yes	224
Lao PDR	Yes	No	--
Lebanon (Palestinian pop.)	Yes	No	--
Nepal	Yes	Yes	39
Pakistan (Balochistan)	Yes	Yes	322
Sierra Leone	NA	Yes	138

MICS data use in UN and UNICEF key documents was also examined in the

<b>Vietnam</b>	Yes	Yes	241
NA indicates that the NSO website could not be accessed.			

case study countries. As seen in Table 4, in five of the nine case studies, the MICS was utilized in the UNDAF most frequently for situation analyses or included in the results framework as a data source. The sub-national MICS survey in Nepal was the only case where available data wasn't used in the UNDAF. MICS is also used very consistently in UNICEF Country Program Documents. The provincial MICS survey(s) in Pakistan were the exception. All Country Office Annual Reports make use of the MICS data – often providing substantial description of a variety of ways the data was utilized by UNICEF and partners.

Case study countries were also assessed in terms of their “visibility” on the websites of the national statistical agencies as well as their inclusion in the International Household Survey Network (ISHN) catalogue (Table 5). These findings should be interpreted with caution as the frequency and thoroughness with which a NSO website is maintained is clearly beyond the mandate of UNICEF. Nonetheless, it was found that in six of the nine case studies, the MICS data could be located on the website. As can be expected, there was variation in the prominence and placement of the MICS survey and the whether the Report only or the Report and data were available. In two cases, it was not possible to access the website of the national statistical organization. In Belize, the previous MICS (2006) was featured but not the more recently completed round (2011). In six of the nine case studies, MICS survey data could be accessed on the website of the IHSN along with the number of downloads.

Highlights of uses of MICS data from the case study countries appear in Table 3.4 below. The complete profiles for the case study countries/surveys appear in Annex 6. In addition, vignettes of country-specific use of MICS data, as drawn from the on-line survey responses, appear below.

*Vignettes of country-specific analyses of MICS data:*

*“The MICS data was used to examine outcome level indicators to help assess contribution of the*

**Table 6: Highlights of MICS data use from case study countries**

<b>Belize</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levels of malnutrition reported though MICS prompted a follow-up micronutrient survey and contributed to MOH discussions/decisions on community-based surveillance of neonatal conditions</li> <li><i>The Status of Adolescent Girls in Belize. Results from the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS4).</i> Population Council. UNICEF, Belize. April 2013</li> </ul>
<b>DR Congo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An equity analysis based on MICS data identifies socio- economic groups who have no access to basic social services. Together with administrative data, MICS data is analyzed by UNICEF to address the key bottlenecks and barriers to access to basic social services at national and provincial levels</li> <li>Efforts in birth registration focused on shortcomings identified by MICS 2010: a MOH decree now includes birth registration as a compulsory element in pre- and post-natal follow-ups.</li> </ul>
<b>Iraq</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An equity analysis was finalized based on MICS4 results and provided CO an opportunity to develop area based plans. A UK Natcom funded project will pilot equity focused programming and may inform strategic direction for the Country Program. Districts were selected based on MICS4 data and the equity analysis.</li> <li>Advocacy relating to MICS4 findings, particularly a finding of 5.3 million children deprived of many of their fundamental rights, resulted in requests by key Government entities for more thorough briefings to better understand the issues facing Iraq’s most deprived.</li> </ul>
<b>Lao PDR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In conjunction with Government commitment to “A Promise Renewed’, LSIS data was used in advocacy meetings to increase national resource allocation and in strengthening policies and guidelines for priority interventions.</li> <li>A burden of child mortality analysis using LSIS data prompted attention to areas previously not explicitly addressed, including newborn health, pneumonia, and diarrhea.</li> <li>A study of the economic consequences of malnutrition based on the LSIS data was incorporated into the gov’t. research plan and will serve as background for the National Human Development Report to address off-track MDGs. The CO will use LSIS in advocating for integrated social &amp; economic policies by examining contributions of social development /service delivery to economic development.</li> </ul>
<b>Nepal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MICS data were used to confirm coverage of birth registration in districts where a BR campaign was conducted.</li> <li>The data from MICS4 will be further analyzed by applying the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis to assess the dimensions of deprivation of children.</li> </ul>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The government of Balochistan used MICS data for district profiles, Atlases and preparation of Comprehensive Development Strategy (2013–19). Punjab has started using latest MICS data for the preparation of the Punjab Economic Report and the upcoming Annual Development Plan.</li> </ul>
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further analysis of MICS4 data on factors associated with FGM/C was completed and followed by ethnographic research to better understand factors contributing to abandonment. Results were shared with partners in a dissemination meeting organized by the CO and will be used for evidence-based strategy development in 2013.</li> <li>Selected data on child rights from MICS4 were disseminated in 3 districts among district councils, Paramount Chiefs and other community leaders and representatives. The information provided an opportunity for chieftom representatives to discuss, plan and monitor implementation of agreed actions to improve the welfare of children in their localities.</li> </ul>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UNICEF supported the plan to integrate multidimensional child poverty into poverty reduction measurement through publishing the 2011 MICS report.</li> </ul>

## Dissemination

Dissemination is viewed as a means of encouraging the use of MICS data. Beyond the creation of the final report, dissemination might take the form of organizing an official release of the final data, engaging media or making MICS data and micro data widely available. ***Between Rounds 3 and 4, a major change occurred in the availability of dissemination materials through the development of a set of templates that serve as simple tools to present MICS key findings (e.g. with posters, presentations, booklets, an agenda for journalist workshop).*** Templates are based on commonly-used software and include step by step customization guides. A collection of example of country-produced materials can be found on [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org). Indeed, interviewees in the case study countries cited a use of wide range of types of dissemination products and events. In most cases, these efforts were guided by a dissemination plan.

However, some questioned the tangible effects of dissemination efforts asking of specific products “to what end?” ***Senior managers spoke of the need to look beyond the dissemination tools to ask more probing questions of the data.*** One senior manager recounted an experience which emphasized the role of Representatives and Deputy Representatives in prompting these discussions. She recalled a study on violence against children (not a MICS) wherein the Representative brought staff together to discuss implications of the study. The Representative’s key message was that dissemination needed to go beyond the usual partners and that every section should find ways to address such violence within their program. One senior manager pointed to the need to bring a core set of people together, perhaps via think tanks, to query “*how is this informing us?, which direction should we move in?*” complemented with documentation to demonstrate the return on investment.

Even in cases where certain products were well-received, there is little knowledge on whether or what effect was achieved beyond dissemination. As reported by one Country Office M&E Office, “*We did a child-friendly report based on the MICS with local animation. We found it quite an interesting and useful publication – it got good media coverage and was received by the Vice-Chair of Planning Commission. A print run of 20,000 was distributed to schools. It would be interested to do a follow-up assessment to see how the materials were used.*”

***Partnerships figure prominently in dissemination best practices.*** In one case study country, the dissemination plan was jointly developed by the Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF and UNFPA. MICS launch events and products (memory sticks, leaflets, thematic cards, dataset availability) were undertaken by these partners together while further analyses activities were conducted separately. In another country, the Statistical Institute, with UNICEF’s support, is reaching out to the national university to hold “days of dialogue” around specific issues emerging from the MICS4 (for example, nutrition, disability). An overall objective of these efforts is development of a national research agenda on children.

## Factors that hinder or support utilization of MICS

***In the previous evaluation, many respondents pointed to data quality issues and delayed report publication as factors that hindered utilization of the MICS surveys. In the current evaluation, there were notable differences in the factors that affect the utilization of MICS data. In general, interviewees focused on gaps in the capacities needed to make effective use of the MICS.*** These areas

include capacity of staff within UNICEF country offices; abilities of staff to conduct simple manipulations of MICS data on an “on demand” basis; and continuity with national statistical agencies particularly recruitment and retention of talented young staff. Additional factors identified relate to analytical thinking about program logic; inclusion and placement of data utilization within the MICS program guidance and materials and country ownership. These are described briefly below.

### ***MICS data use and internal capacity***

The first phase of this evaluation concluded that UNICEF has expanded the envelope of technical support resources available to support MICS implementation. This has been accomplished through the placement of Regional MICS Coordinators in the Regional Offices, UNICEF MICS consultants in country offices as well as increased availability and use of HQ/D&A/MICS- and regionally-based consultants specialized in survey design and implementation.

Despite the expanded set of technical resources, serious concerns continued to be raised about the ability of the UNICEF country office staff to plan and oversee MICS surveys and to utilize MICS data effectively. As one UNICEF interviewee stated: *“The CO doesn’t have the technical capacity to have an informed discussion with national counterparts”*. An important and consistently-stated qualifier was that the capacities across offices differ enormously with larger, better funded offices having stronger staff.

However, important partners who sought to support MICS surveys reported mixed experiences with UNICEF M&E officers at CO (*“mostly confused, sometimes great”*). ***In attempting to dialogue with UNICEF CO around survey coordination (including jointly conducted surveys), it was felt that CO capacity was low and decisions not technically sound (e.g. “when we try to have technical discussion they can’t engage at country level”). Partners sometimes appeal to UNICEF/HQ/D&A staff to weigh in with the country office on technical decisions. It appears that partners were not aware that Regional MICS Coordinators were in place to support these types of discussions.***

The same partner raised concerns about their support to combined MICS surveys or MICS elements included in other surveys (*“it is not clear what we are buying into --- is it a MICS or something else?”*). Based on previous experience with poor quality data, this partner advises their country offices to firstly ascertain if the survey is a stand-alone MICS. If the survey is to be combined with another effort, then *“we advise them not to fund it”*.

Moving forward, combined surveys or “piggy-backing” elements of the MICS onto other surveys may become an issue of increased importance as countries look to utilize existing/other surveys for MICS-related elements. Interviewees from several UNICEF country offices referred to on-going efforts to utilize other regularly conducted national surveys (e.g. annual labor force survey) to collect indicators from the MICS survey. Moreover, other development partners, recognizing a need for more frequent surveys, are strategizing to a) work more closely with MICS and DHS, and b) examining countries’ surveys plans with an aim to leverage other existing surveys.



HQ and RO respondents, who work closely with COs, report that country offices staff does not go further than the information that appears in the report nor have they mobilized local resources for further analysis. **Multiple examples were provided wherein country offices cannot themselves utilize the MICS dataset (e.g. as one HQ respondent said “If a CO has to contact me for a wealth quintile data – something is wrong; there should be a local resource for it”). Those that have successfully done so see it as a process, getting the CO staff interested, guiding them to see possibilities for analysis inherent in the data, utilizing consultants or in-house resources for analytical work, and consultation with line ministries to add programmatic detail and relevance.** Others report that Country Offices may commission analytical work themselves though rarely consulting HQ-based technical staff for advice. These materials are not typically shared (HQ Program Division staffer: “usually we just come across these materials”) and are, at times, not consistent with global messaging on priority issues.

Some Country Office respondents acknowledge that lack of time and skills were important impediments to use of MICS data and almost unanimously reported that external resources were needed for further analyses of their MICS data (e.g. “even in house; people are not aware that you can tweak and customize to make it more suitable to our needs; it would require a consultant to lead/ help us do that; we don’t have the right people for the analysis”). This appears to be an ad hoc approach with no real locus for initiation or oversight of the further analyses. In other cases, data sets are shared with partner agencies, for example UNFPA, UNESCO, the World Food Program or the President’s Malaria Initiative, for specific analyses.

Another gap relates to UNICEF HQ program officers, who are more data savvy but nonetheless face hurdles in utilizing MICS data. Often times, these barriers relate to statistical/analytical capacity to use the data sets. One officer reports that while the Childinfo website provides very basic information, it does not allow cross-tabulations. When such data is needed, the respondents reported that they: “have to run down to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and look for a certain person and if that person is out of the country, then I’m in trouble”. Several interviewees said that there a single person within their unit who could conduct relatively simple, yet rapid data manipulation. Granted these instances seem most related to ad hoc requests. Others report that with basic skills they are able to generate their most commonly used variables (albeit variable names differ across data sets making the work more complicated).

Many respondents reported a wide gap between the use of the MICS reports and the ability to do even simple tabulations from the data. Both UNICEF and external respondents reported that country offices rely on what can be obtained from the reports but do not know that it is possible to re-tabulate certain indicators or create new cross-tabs<sup>48</sup>. As reported earlier, respondents from the Program Division frequently reported a dependency on D&A staff report to manipulate the MICS data for them. This user cited [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org) for the simple data needs but noted the inability of Childinfo to produce cross-tabs. **None of the MICS consumers questioned were familiar with the MICS Compiler while several were users of the DHS StatCompiler or the World Bank povcalnet (poverty portal).** For users in program areas

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<sup>48</sup> These observations were uniformly prefaced by the recognition of the widely varying capacities between different offices.

more data familiarity, simple interfaces are needed to allow cross-tabulations. If the MICS Compiler is intended to serve this function, then potential users are unaware of it.

### **MICS and country ownership**

In several countries, several officials interviewed cited difficulties with a lack of flexibility within the MICS platform. These observations come from upper middle income countries with relatively strong statistical systems. The need to adhere to standardized processes and products was cited as a problem by multiple respondents in these countries. For example, in regards to the standard report structure respondents stated “we’re not interested in the rigid report”; “we were told that our own interests had to wait until later, another report at a later time”.

Several interviewees made the connection between a feeling of “ownership” of the data and the subsequent use of that data. In Laos, for example, the process of developing the Laos Social Indicator Survey, a joint DHS – MICS survey, was seen as helping strengthen the use of the results. The Laos government was closely involved in decisions on how to combine the two surveys.

***Multiple respondents in case study countries cited the importance of involving line ministries particularly the Ministry of Health. In Laos, in recognition of weak MOH involvement in the MICS3, steps were taken to engage the MOH in LSIS preparations by teaming them with the Bureau of Statistics.*** One means of achieving this greater collaboration was through the appointment of joint MOH-BOS co-chairs for the survey-related committees and working groups. In contrast, in another country conducting MICS4, a very strong sense of ownership in the Ministry of Planning was seen as hindering ownership in line ministries. In this instance, compounding factors included control of assorted ministries by differing political parties and lack of strong, central leadership to force coordination.

### **Utilization as part of MICS materials**

As found on [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org), the MICS survey platform provides extensive documentation on survey tools including model questionnaires, manuals, data processing materials, dissemination templates among other materials. The emphasis, appropriately placed, is on the means of generating high-quality data.

Among these materials, data utilization does not figure as strongly within the MICS platform (e.g. there are no sections of the manual devoted to utilization). The final set of workshops addresses data dissemination and utilization with objectives related to enhanced skills and knowledge MICS data interpretation; increased awareness of dissemination tools and methods; increased understanding of topics and methods for further analysis; and drafting of plans for MICS dissemination and further analysis which would subsequently be adapted for country application. A spreadsheet template is made available (i.e. topics and questions for further analysis) which allows participants to identify questions, methods and responsible parties, along with dissemination products, costs and feasibility.

***The participants in these workshops frequently (41%) come from implementation agencies (typically the national statistical institute). While it may be assumed that they “will carry the message back” about***

**opportunities for further analyses, their own priorities are more focused on report completion. Moreover, they do not normally bring the programmatic expertise needed to frame analyses of greatest need/relevance for decision-makers.** For example, one staff member of a National Statistics Agency said: *“Our bureau of statistics does little research, we are hard-core data collectors; we’ve now started to create a micro-data access point (a desk, computer, software, data set) which will sit in the bureau and we plan to have another at the national university.”* On the other hand, groups such as academics and private non-profits which were among the leading requesters of data sets are not involved in the data dissemination and further analysis workshops.

An interesting parallel exists within UNICEF. The HQ/D&A/MICS team is focused on assuring consistency with other international actors in household surveys and supporting countries to gather high-quality data. Responsibility for data analyses is appropriately placed on the partnership of staff from the HQ/D&A/data analyses team and those of the Program Division around specific analytical efforts as was mentioned repeatedly as a facilitator in using MICS data. Likewise, country-level data analyses is perhaps best served by bringing together the data experts (e.g. NSOs, implementing agencies, universities) with those working more closely with programs (e.g. line ministries) to facilitate further analyses.

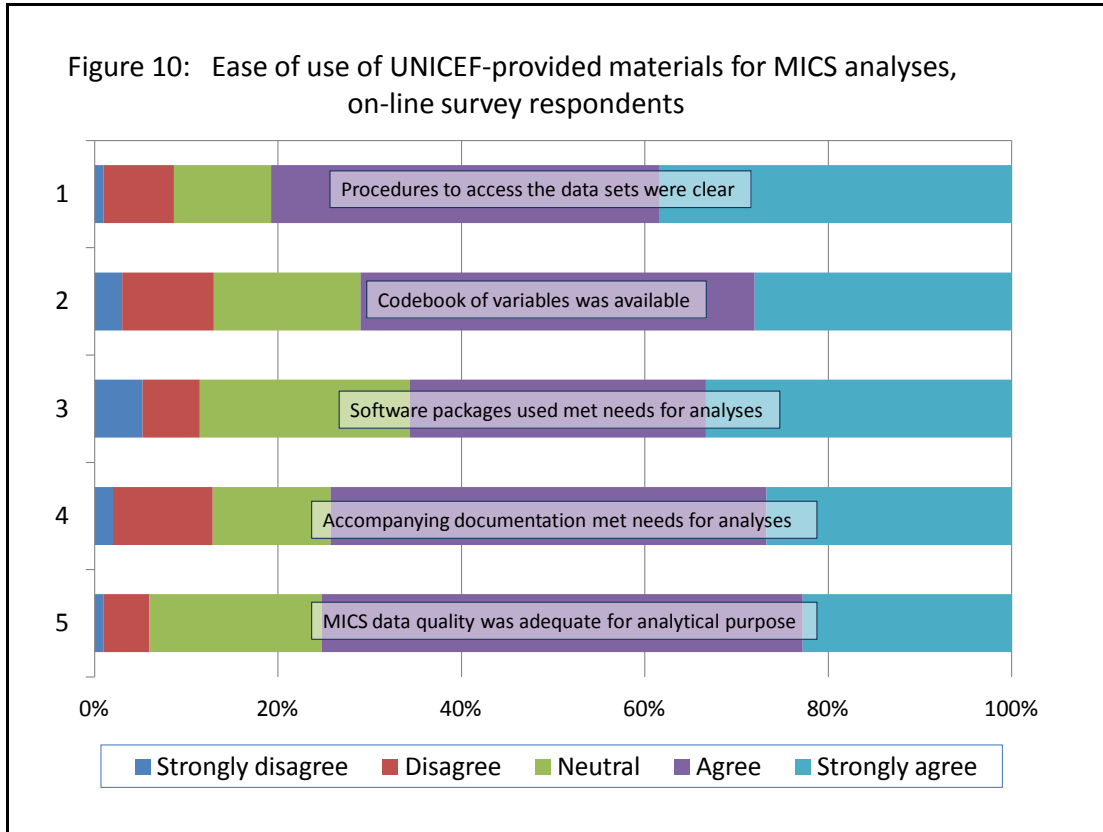
Finally, some respondents described a longer-term process to make better use of data for program strengthening and to inform what works and why. Many respondents referred to the need to make better use of data triangulation as a method of utilizing data from various sources (*“look across data sources and ask – ‘is this good enough to provide guidance/answers to decision-makers?’”*). However, questions were repeatedly raised about the internal capacities to conduct secondary analyses and to develop and test theories of change, with the exception of certain program areas or specific country programs.

### **Experience of MICS data end-users**

On-line survey respondents were queried on their experiences with MICS datasets, their opinions on the ease of access and their assessment of user-friendliness of the datasets and the variables therein<sup>49</sup>. **As seen in Figure 10, five elements related to UNICEF-provided materials (data access procedures, codebook of variables, software packages, accompanying documentation and quality of the data) were viewed very favorable. For each of these items, over 60% of either agreed or strongly agreed that the UNICEF materials meet their needs for further analysis.**

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<sup>49</sup> A second set of questions dealt with other supportive factors such as technical support and costs and were intended to reflect the environment in which the user was working. These questions did not perform well in the on-line survey due to large numbers of “not applicable” responses.. Therefore the results are not presented in this report.



Respondents viewed access the data set favorably with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the procedures were clear. These users were somewhat less favorable of the codebook and accompanying documentation. Thirteen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that these items were available and useful for their work. These patterns are consistent with those found in the open-ended comments provided in the survey.

Fifty-one percent of respondents felt that there were specific steps that could improve their use of MICS data for further analyses. The remaining 49 % divided roughly evenly between “no” and “don’t know” categories. Respondents were further asked to identify the steps that should be taken to improve their experience in using the MICS data (Table 6). This table should be used with some caution as the number of written responses was small. **Most frequently cited step to improve use of MICS data sets was the need for greater standardization in across MICS data sets. This issue also came up in numerous interviews with both internal as well as external users of the MICS data.** In the words of one analyst with a partner agency “With DHS; you can envision a cross-tabulation and then run it for 10-15 countries pretty easily; for MICS, you cannot do that; you have to be very careful”.

Recommendation	Number of respondents
More standardization (e.g. variable names, value labels) across MICS data sets	10

Specific content changes in questionnaire (e.g. birth histories, ethnicity, disability)	7
Codebook with greater depth and detail	6
Better, more consistent geo-coding including use of GPS	5
Make data sets available in STATA	5
More documentation on sampling	4
More timely response from UNICEF/HQ/D&A to requests	3
Better web interface for the MICS data	2
Provide the analytic code/program used for each specific survey	2

These opinions were also provided through the on-line surveys as follows:

*“Data recording of specific variables to allow for cross-country analysis could be improved. In that regard, I found DHS data more suitable for cross country comparison due to data recording of variables like years of education”.*

*“ MICS are often more difficult to use than other household survey data sources because across MICS datasets, variables are named, labeled, and coded without consistency, requiring much manual labor by the end user to standardize data before performing calculations”.*

### Summary Points

- Based on an on-line survey of MICS data set requesters, the leading purposes of data requested were related to fulfilling an academic requirement (27%) and contributing to the evidence base for national policies, plans and programs (24%). Fourteen percent used the MICS data to develop new measurement methods, indicators or monitoring tools.
- Requesters of MICS data sets examined a wide variety of issues with health, gender, nutrition and education heading the list of themes for analyses.
- The most visible use of MICS data is in global monitoring. For a select set of indicators relevant to the status of women and children, the MICS accounts for an average of 27% of data points in global monitoring databases.
- MICS is also an important source for MDG indicators which are modeled or estimated from household survey data. For example, of all of the survey data points utilized to generate under-five mortality estimates since the year 2000, the MICS have accounted for 20%<sup>50</sup>.
- The MICS data is being used increasingly in multi-country analyses which utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out-of-school. These uses are notable in that they are not one-time analytical efforts but systematic, multi-country endeavours with built-in technical support mechanisms. The previous MICS evaluation did not identify activities of this nature. A facilitating factor may be that there is now an adequate “critical mass” of data collected through standard methods and with known quality to build upon.

<sup>50</sup> United National. Inter-agency Group on Mortality Estimates.

- In contrast to the 2008 evaluation where use was primarily related to global-level monitoring, the current evaluation found MICS data to be utilized in a wide range of analytical efforts by a diverse set of actors.
- Factors that facilitate the use of MICS data is increased confidence in the quality of the data (as was reported in the evaluation's part 1 report), increased ability to compile global data sets that use MICS and DHS data interchangeably, intensive analytical work made possible by the partnership of UNICEF/HQ/D&A staff with Program Division staff.
- Factors which hinder the further analyses of MICS data relate largely to *capacities* particularly at country office level. In addition, MICS process and materials do not always maximize opportunities related to utilization including further analyses. For example, there are no sections of the manual devoted to utilization. The final set of workshops addresses data dissemination and utilization however participants frequently come from implementation agencies (typically the national statistical institute) which may be more focused on report completion than opportunities for further analyses.
- On-line survey respondents viewed access to the data set favorably with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the procedures were clear. These users were somewhat less favorable of the codebook and accompanying documentation.
- Fifty-one percent of on-line survey respondents felt that there were specific steps that could improve their use of MICS data for further analyses. The most frequently cited step to improve the analyses of MICS data was the need for greater standardization across MICS data sets. This issue also came up in numerous interviews with both internal as well as external users of the MICS data.

## Section 4 Conclusions

### Funding

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive picture of the total expense of the MICS surveys due to serious data gaps particularly related to government contributions both direct and in-kind. This gap was noted in the prior evaluation (2008) as well along with a recommendation to carry out more systematic tracking of these contributions. Based on analyses of the available budgetary information from 42 surveys, the best estimate for the cost of a MICS4 survey is \$746,000.

MICS continue to be a predominantly UNICEF-funded endeavor with roughly equal amounts (37%) of funding for implementation provided by Country Offices and HQ-allocated top-up monies. Among non-UNICEF contributors, UNFPA is the most frequent as was found in the previous evaluation (2008) while USAID provides the largest average amount per survey.

Over time, the phrase 'top-up' may have become a misnomer as it suggests a relatively smaller contribution to a base of significant national resources. While this is true for some countries, the fact over a third of MICS funds come from HQ-allocated top-up monies puts HQ on par with the COs as a partner in funding. A number of countries characterized by small CO budgets and little other donor presence are highly dependent (> 70% of the total MICS budget) on top-up funds. It is important to note that the top-

up monies can serve to safeguard HQ/D&A/MICS team's voice in design choices affecting technical validity thereby providing needed leverage to ensure a consistent and high-quality MICS platform.

Practices surrounding fund raising have not evolved significantly from previous rounds (as per MICS3 evaluation) and were found to vary widely across countries in terms of the processes and persons involved. While UNICEF/HQ and the Regional Office may provide advice, the responsibility of identifying other funding sources for the MICS survey rests with the Country Office. In general, CO interviewees described a process for Round 4 wherein CO contributions to the survey are identified (sometimes by section) and shortfalls are sought from the HQ-allocated top-up monies. There does not appear to be any commonly-used or systematic process of identifying or approaching partner agencies in-country for contributions – there is no “game plan” for how a Country Office would go about acquiring external resources. To the extent that any common steps are followed, these include identifying potential contributors, encouraging government contributions, convening stakeholder meetings and estimating shortfalls in funding. However, these fund-raising steps appear to be driven through the initiative of individual Country Office staff as opposed to a consistently applied process.

As was found in the previous evaluation (2008), monies acquired from partners in-country are often accompanied by requests for modification to the MICS survey instruments. Country Offices and implementing agencies appear to strike a balance by integrating some adaptations and providing data directly to the contributor without making costly changes in data processing. While the D&A Resource Mobilization Strategy noted opportunities to tap donors' keen interest in high-quality, timely data, it also concluded that UNICEF/HQ/D&A will need to demonstrate a responsiveness to donors' priorities if those external funds are to materialize. The challenge for UNICEF is to attract external resources and tolerate some degree of adaptation, while maintaining the international standards which underlie the MICS platform. This balance largely rests on the Country Offices which, with support from Regional MICS Coordinators, need to anticipate that adaptations will be sought, to have technical backing to understand how adaptations could negatively affect the survey and to negotiate acceptable adaptations.

While consistently laudatory of the MICS survey program, senior managers also pointed to a serious lack of predictability in regard to funding particularly as related to the 7% set-aside monies. Although not a specific stated objective of the MICS program, most senior managers referred to an “exit strategy” though the intended outcome of such a strategy was not precisely defined. Varying rationale were provided including: (i) an intent to diversify resources for the MICS (i.e. greater donor and country contributions) in keeping with its role as a global public good; (ii) a belief that NSOs are able to more independently collect the data; and (iii) a stated desire to re-direct investments more into routine systems. Currently, there is no “exit strategy”.

If this is the direction sought by senior management, important precursors include (i) better estimates of governments' direct and in-kind contributions for more accurate total cost figures and (ii) a means to gauge readiness to implement household surveys with more limited technical support (e.g. a quality assurance tool). Overall, evidence suggests that the MICS generates data which is equivalent in quality

to other international household survey efforts with far fewer financial and human resources. It is difficult to envision that substantially greater efficiencies could be achieved from the current MICS model.

### Stakeholder needs and demands

Compared with the previous evaluation (2008), this evaluation found that UNICEF staff have a seemingly greater understanding of the MICS, its intended purpose and limitations in its use vis-à-vis current data needs and demand. For example, respondents had a greater recognition of the negative implication of larger sample sizes and cited the efforts of the HQ/D&A/MICS team and RO MICS Coordinators in raising awareness of the issue.

Across a wide range of respondents, consensus emerged around a few priority data gaps. A consistently mentioned data gap related to children with disabilities. Senior managers at UNICEF/HQ and respondents in four of the nine COs canvassed, across regions and socio-economic levels, described a priority need for information on children with disabilities. At global level, partner agencies are actively collaborating on the development of a module and accompanying materials to measure child (and youth) disability in surveys. While the new module is expected to be ready for use later in 2014, among some Country Offices, there was a sense that development at the global level was slow in producing these needed tools. Similarly, despite advances in MICS4, a number of respondents, including UNFPA - a frequent contributor to MICS surveys, point to data gaps regarding adolescents notably the lack of information on those aged 10–14. In contrast to measurement of child disability, there are no current efforts to further address adolescents aged 10-14. Both MICS and DHS surveys ask individuals (e.g. aged 15-19 years) questions in a retrospective manner but both avoid gathering information directly from young adolescents due to concerns about validity and consent issues.

As was observed in the prior evaluation, the most effective means of influencing the content of the MICS is through the activities of inter-agency working groups devoted to advancing the measurement of a specific program. In addition, the close working relationships between Program Division staff and D&A focal points were repeatedly raised as a proven avenue to address stakeholder needs. These working arrangements largely cover the spectrum of needs related to household survey data through needs identification, indicator formulation, validation, testing of survey instruments and analyses and report-writing. In sum, the partnering of program expertise and data/statistical expertise is an important foundation of UNICEF's evidence-based approach.

The MICS survey program, as represented by the fourth and fifth round, demonstrated a considerable ability to adapt within the confines of its stated objective of generating quality, internationally comparable data. Adaptability was evidenced in a range of changes including inclusion of new questionnaire content and increased use of sub-national or population-specific surveys. However, there seems to be no specific criteria or documentation used to guide the inclusion or non-inclusion of new content. Overall, UNICEF does not employ any periodic assessment of information needs nor a prioritization process. Finally, greater forward-thinking about the direction of the MICS was urged by some interviewees. Rather than focusing only on the immediate needs and modifications, some voiced the need for longer-term more strategic thinking (e.g. *where we are going to be in 10 years?*”).



## MICS data use

The landscape of MICS data use is more widely-varied and robust than that found in the prior evaluation. MICS data remains highly-visible in global monitoring of international goals such as the MDGs – which would be severely hindered without the MICS as it accounts for approximately one in every four data points (for relevant indicators). However, the data is being used increasingly in multi-country analyses which utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out-of-school. Requesters of MICS data sets described analyses with varied purposes that spanned a wide range of analytical topics with health, gender, nutrition and education heading the list.

Factors that facilitate the use of MICS data include increased confidence in the quality of the data (as was reported in the evaluation’s cluster 1 report), increased ability to compile global data sets that use MICS and DHS data interchangeably, and intensive analytical work made possible by the partnership of UNICEF/HQ/D&A staff with Program Division staff. For example, as a result of more harmonized data sets the average annual number of data-driven analytical publications more than doubled in the period 2011-2013 compared to 2005-07. These publications now moving beyond flagship publications (e.g. State of the World Children, Progress for Children) to cover a more diversified set of themes including birth registration, female genital mutilation/cutting, disparities in sex and adolescents.

The previous evaluation (2008) found data quality issues to be an important impediment to data use. With important gains made in data quality, the factors which hinder the further analyses of MICS data relate largely to *capacities* particularly those at country office level. While CO M&E officers cannot be expected to carry out any extensive analyses, it seems that they do not frequently ask further questions of the data sets nor do they routinely tap local resources such as universities for further analyses. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this pattern as well. In addition, MICS processes and materials do not always maximize opportunities related to utilization including further analyses. As an illustration, there is little coverage of data utilization in the Manual and workshops focused on data dissemination and utilization aren’t attended by those who would be directly involved in analyses. On-line survey respondents were largely satisfied with issues of database access but felt that greater standardization was required across MICS data sets.

## Section 5 Recommendations

The following five recommendation sets are high-level in nature. Each recommendation outlines a course of action based on findings along with proposed actor and timeframe. These recommendations should be seen as complementary to the more technically –focused and short-term recommendations which emerged from part 1 of the evaluation.

### (1) Develop a corporate “data strategy” for the post-2015 period

This overarching recommendation goes beyond the MICS program per se to address the broader organizational environment in which it operates. As laid out in the introductory section of this report, the post-2015 landscape portends increased demand for data on the situation of women and children and existing household survey programs as seen as one vehicle to meet these needs. ***As a global authority***

**on the rights and well-being of children, UNICEF should enter the post-2015 period with a cogent strategy to guide its data efforts.** The rationale for a corporate data strategy is woven throughout the cluster 1 and part 2 evaluation reports. Among the drivers are:

- Given an interest in greater diversification of data collection methods, the strategy should seek to maximize investments by articulating when, where and how to effectively integrate data across sources, specifically household surveys with other routine information systems
- Given UNICEF's commitment to an equity agenda, the strategy should identify best practices in data collection and analyses related to that agenda and encourage wider use of validated methods
- Given that other UN agencies are among the lead contributors to and important users of MICS (i.e. UNFPA, UN Women, WFP), the strategy should enable UNICEF staff at all organizational levels to work towards UN coherence with regards to data issues.
- Given that the prior MICS evaluation (2008) and the current evaluation note considerable weaknesses in the M&E function in some country offices coupled with the agency's decentralized nature, the strategy should evaluate the staffing needed for successful strategy implementation and ensure that UNICEF works efficiently across organizational levels. For example, looking forward, Country Offices may well need to anticipate partner-requested adaptations in the MICS, acquire technical backing to understand how changes might negatively affect the survey, as needed; and have the skills to negotiate acceptable adaptations.

The MICS would, of course, be a central element in the data strategy. ***With the commitment to MDG reporting fulfilled, the timing would allow a forward-looking opportunity on the direction of the MICS.*** Specifically, it would allow consideration of:

- the relevance and modality of the MICS to best serve the needs of upper middle income countries
- best practices regarding the incorporation of MICS content into other national household surveys and vice versa the inclusion of other survey content "piggy-backed" onto the MICS
- expectations for co-funding from CO, government, partners and top-up in sequence
- expectations regarding sustainability in collaboration with partners such as DHS

Strategy development would need to reflect organization-wide thinking and carry the weight of senior management backing. It is suggested that the strategy development effort be based in the Office of Deputy Executive Director and involve key internal and external stakeholders. Preparatory activities including development of background document and consultations could begin in late 2014. Data strategy development and roll out should be timed to coincide with UNICEF actions and plans regarding the post-2015 agenda and its own strategy cycle (i.e. 2014-2017).

## (2) Develop tools to better gauge MICS costs and contributions with an eye towards sustainable survey implementation

This recommendation has several important sub-components which appear below. Enhancing sustainability of the MICS would need to begin with several building blocks. Many of these are aimed at

acquiring more accurate information about relative levels of contributions and sources. However, it is important to recognize that sustainability is not currently an explicit objective of the MICS survey program. Efforts in this direction will require additional resources and expertise, in the short-term, beyond those currently devoted to the MICS.

a) ***A more clearly articulated strategy for financing*** is required including a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities for financing the MICS surveys. Country Offices are responsible for mobilizing the majority of the monies needed to fund the MICS and they can be better supported in this role with clearly articulated fund-raising strategies and tools. Given the variability in MICS funding sources by region, such strategies may be appropriately created at regional-level and tailored to setting and constellation of donors present. In addition, plans and budgets for MICS surveys should appear in Country Program Documents and action plans. HQ-allocated “top-up” monies should be seen as funding of last resort and requested only when all in-country contributions have been secured.

If these actions are insufficient to redress the balance of funds, then UNICEF might consider the use of thresholds (for example, HQ top-up monies are available only after a country has mobilized 60% of the estimated budget). Finally, as conduits to the UNCT, UNICEF Representatives should be aware of and involved in resource mobilization for the MICS. The distribution of MICS funding sources across countries in each region should be shared in the Regional Management Team. Representatives in countries where top-up funds are more than half of the MICS budgets should be expected to provide an outlined plan on how any upcoming MICS will be resourced.

b) ***UNICEF needs to acquire more consistent and accurate estimates of the government contributions to the MICS surveys.*** Minimally, government budgetary allotments should be encouraged and recorded. However, the larger task involves the costing of in-kind contributions as was similarly recommended in the previous evaluation (2008). Based on the budgets reviewed for the current evaluation, accurate costing of the surveys requires some guidance for all UNICEF COs to use in estimating the value of in-kind contributions. Best practices from other organizations should be reviewed as an initial step. This task will require some form of costing expertise and should be informed with HQ/D&A/MICS Team with substantive input from the Regional MICS Coordinators. The guidance should be developed, with external expertise if needed, and utilized in Round 5.

c) Looking towards longer-term sustainability, ***additional information is also required on the volume, type and costs of technical assistance provided to countries from external consultants*** often through the regional office. As was similarly recommended by the MEASURE DHS evaluation, intentions to replace external technical assistance with national institutions will require a plan to track TA by country and survey. This type of information exists at both regional and HQ-levels but needs to be tracked more closely and compiled, ideally by country, type of technical assistance and cost. With some short-term assistance, UNICEF/HQ/D&A/MICS team

along with Regional MICS Coordinators can take on this responsibility and the information should be collected routinely throughout Round 5. As with several other recommendations, this activity would be mutually beneficial to UNICEF and USAID if conducted in a coordinated manner with the DHS program for consistency.

### (3) Increase utilization of MICS survey data through expansion of current platform elements.

As concluded above, MICS data use has evolved significantly between rounds 3 and 4. MICS data is being utilized by a wider audience and for a more diverse set of themes. There are however, areas where MICS data use could be further facilitated. These are summarized in sub-recommendations below.

- a) The evaluation found a diverse set of MICS users and a robust array of differing analyses. The MICS data is being used increasingly in multi-country analyses which utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out-of-school. These uses are notable in that they are not one-time analytical efforts but systematic, multi-country endeavors with built-in technical support mechanisms. ***For areas of strategic priority, UNICEF should strive to see that multi-country analyses become the “norm” much as inter-agency working groups are for the development of new indicators and survey content.*** One way of doing so is to resource these efforts as an integral part of research, evaluation and learning agendas with partnerships sought with universities and research institutes. Where further analyses packages already exist, [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org) could serve a clearinghouse function where these materials could be accessed. This effort would seem to fit within the mandate of the Data and Analytics Section and would present a multi-year undertaking with substantive input from research and policy sections.
- b) MICS data analysis is insufficiently addressed in the regional workshops. ***It is recommended that UNICEF develop and conduct a free-standing analysis workshop around specific themes.*** This workshop is not intended as an additional MICS workshop. Rather, these workshops would invite regional and country partners workshops to bring their MICS and DHS data along with a preliminary analyses plan. Analyses plans that have the support and interest of the relevant ministry and Country Office would receive priority consideration (i.e. decision-linked analyses). Given the degree of harmonization achieved between the MICS and DHS, there could be considerable advantage for analysts interested in trend and comparative analyses. After the workshop, participants could be coached by experts (from country or regional levels) to see their analyses through to completion. The development and conduct of these workshops should be the responsibility of the data analyses team within D&A in close partnership with Program Division staff in the thematic area of analyses. The workshop might draw from thematic areas with existing “off the shelf” analytical packages as used in multi-country studies such as out of school children, multidimensional poverty index and child poverty and disparities.

- c) ***Given that many Country Offices lack the human resources, time and software needed for data analyses, it is recommended that COs partner closely with academia/research institutes with these attributes.*** These partnerships would not be solely for academic purposes but to create avenues ready to explore and analyze data for programming and policy making, as needed. At the time of survey design, it is not too early for the Country Office and implementing agencies to be discussing where the data will be “housed” for further analyses. The pool of organizations with these capabilities may well be regional in nature and the Regional Office would play an important role in facilitating these linkages.
- d) ***Among a cadre of data-savvy staff located in the Program Division, there is a need for simple interfaces which will allow cross-tabulations and basic analyses functionality.*** It may be that the MICScompiler is intended to serve this role but is it virtual unknown among the staff who seek to use MICS data. It is recommended that the MICScompiler platform be assessed in light of needs, modified to address those needs and brought fully up-to-date. Currently the MICScompiler includes only Round 3 data. Moreover, the system needs to be made more visible to all potential users.

#### (4) Build a foundation for sustainability

The MICS survey program has been steered steadfastly towards the creation of data on the situation of women and children in a manner which meets international norms and standards. Intensive, hands-on workshops and technical support, direct and remote, have served to both introduce and reinforce the methods underlying these standards. Evidence of the success comes in the form of expanded and increasingly diverse types of further analyses carried out with MICS data and its use on an equal par with the much larger, longer-running Demographic and Health Surveys. These efforts are best carried out in the D&A section over the long-term (e.g. term 5 years) and in close collaboration with the DHS project and other survey implementers.

***If sustainability is to become a new and explicit objective of the MICS survey program, then it should be viewed over the long-term.*** This thinking should be initiated with more clearly stated objectives for the sustainability effort (e.g. is it about diversifying funding? building country capacities? short-term cost cutting?) Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the current MICS staffing at HQ and in Regional Office taking on an additional objective while maintaining program pace and data quality. This is another area where close collaboration with the Demographic and Health Survey program would be beneficial. UNICEF and DHS should liaise around capacity-building approaches through sharing of information and tools<sup>51</sup>.

***As part of this effort, greater attention is needed to develop criteria and tools to assess the readiness of an implementing agency to conduct the MICS survey with less external technical assistance.***

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<sup>51</sup> The newly-awarded Demographic and Health Surveys project has two senior-level positions and an entire unit devoted to capacity building.

Determining if the capacity is in place to carry out the survey should use objective criteria and represent a harmonized approach with other major actors. The International Household Survey Network has drafted a survey quality assurance framework which encompasses the lifecycle of the survey and documents the steps that should be taken along more formal recording of decisions taken and changes made. This type of a tool could help to address the poor quality documentation reported in the cluster 1 report. In addition, the tool could lend itself to making judgments on adherence to the international standards which are the foundation of quality, comparable data. Unfortunately, the framework was never finalized as several issues were unresolved. UNICEF should invest the resources required to bring the survey framework to completion including field validation. If proven valid, such a framework could inform technical determinations about country readiness to conduct the MICS surveys with a lighter technical assistance package.

## (5) Develop more transparent and regular needs assessment and criteria for MICS questionnaire content

Inter-agency working groups are an effective mechanism for channeling stakeholder needs and demands into indicators and questions sets appropriate for large scale surveys. However the process of assessing needs across IAWGs and determining the readiness of items for inclusion in large-scale survey implementation is less clear. A case in point is the development and inclusion of questionnaire items on childhood disabilities with country offices expecting new survey materials and feeling “out of the loop” on the status of these tools.

The prior evaluation (2008) recommended that the *governance of the MICS requires a transparent process for the review of new indicators that applies agreed criteria to determine whether indicators should be included in the MICS*. That recommendation was primarily based on the need to manage stakeholder demand for inclusion of new questions. Now some five years later, the MICS survey program, and related processes such as the IAWGs, have evolved to a point where **a coherent needs assessment exercise could benefit not only the MICS but could help to build a shared understanding of the placement of the survey vis-à-vis other data collection efforts**. Minimally, a transparent assessment process would bring together data experts, program experts and managers to discuss issues related to indicator readiness for large-scale implementation and the types of investments needed to bring proposed content to that point. Overall, such a process could help to build a more data-savvy organization.

As part of this process, program areas without a track record in collecting household survey data (e.g. rights, emergencies) can learn more the process and the best ways of engaging. This recommendation is not to imply that the MICS is the appropriate vehicle for addressing data needs in these areas through expansion of the existing survey. **However, both the previous and current evaluation recommend that stronger ties are forged between humanitarian and emergency operations and HQ/D&A**. Given the prominence of these areas in UNICEF’s Strategy 2014-2017, it is recommended that HQ/D&A work with relevant program staff to examine ways in which data needs may be addressed - be it through surveys or other means.