SUMMARY REPORT

EVIDENCE FOR CHILDREN
Report from a Roundtable

There is growing recognition of the need for more evidence-informed funding decisions, programme design and practice to effectively meet urgent challenges in tackling child mortality and malnutrition, and in providing quality early childhood development services and basic education. The global evidence base, however, is generally weak, scattered and too poorly translated to be useful to policy makers and practitioners. Meanwhile, many widely-used approaches are not supported by rigorous evidence.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Campbell Collaboration and the International Rescue Committee therefore organized an Evidence for Children Roundtable in June 2018. The aim was to explore how to improve coordination among those interested in enhancing evidence-informed decision making for child welfare. Participants included senior United Nations staff involved in research, programming and policy, non-governmental organizations, academics, development partners, other specialists working on child rights issues, campaigners for evidence literacy, and representatives from evidence synthesis centres with an interest in child welfare and well-being, including attendees based in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

This report presents the crucial debates held at the Roundtable while also serving as a first call to action for those who work in the field of child welfare.

### Roundtable objectives

- To convene a community of practice on #EvidenceForChildren and to stimulate ongoing discussion and coordination to fill priority evidence gaps;

- To increase awareness of the need for evidence-informed approaches and the role of evidence synthesis in particular, when developing and implementing policies and practice for child welfare;

- To begin a discussion on the need for enhanced investment in international development ‘evidence architecture’ at national and international levels;

- To highlight the still significant lack of evidence in humanitarian contexts and the need for continued, long-term investment;

- To share good practice, lessons and experience in overcoming challenges to evidence uptake and use, and in building an organizational evidence culture.
About the Roundtable partners

The Campbell Collaboration is an international network which publishes high-quality systematic reviews of social and economic interventions around the world. It promotes positive social and economic change through the production and use of systematic reviews and other evidence synthesis for evidence-based policy and practice. As a first step towards consolidating the evidence base for children, the Campbell Collaboration and UNICEF have produced a child welfare mega map (see Section 4) showing the interventions and outcomes for which evidence is reported in over 300 systematic reviews.

The International Rescue Committee is a humanitarian organization working in over 30 crisis-affected countries. It has invested in generating rigorous evidence to inform programming for children in humanitarian contexts. Research is integrated into programme development so that interventions on the ground generate evidence, for example in the area of early childhood development in conflict situations. The International Rescue Committee’s interactive Outcomes and Evidence Framework (see Section 5) provides a set of tools for staff to ensure programmes are driven by the best available evidence.

Roundtable highlights

Quality evidence is a key driver of positive change in children’s lives. Exciting developments in evidence synthesis are paving the way for a richer, more robust and more extensive evidence base, as researchers, advocates, policy makers and development and humanitarian practitioners work towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

To realize the vision of achieving meaningful impact in children’s lives through evidence-informed action, stakeholders interested in #EvidenceForChildren agreed on the importance of facilitating a discussion on the need to build a community of practice or network to concert efforts around five core themes:

- **Invest in evidence and gap maps**, which are a vital tool in enhancing the evidence architecture;
- **Identify urgent evidence gaps** to be filled by evidence synthesis and new primary research;
- **Create demand for evidence** among users internally and among policy and decision makers, using evidence synthesis and mapping to make evidence accessible and understandable;
- **Create shared research agendas** to maximize resources, to generate evidence strategically, and to unite evidence supply and demand to ensure evidence is institutionalized into the policy and programming cycle;
- **Enhance the ability of children to participate in research**, to ensure that children have a voice in decision making.

UNICEF is strengthening its generation, communication and use of evidence through improving staff capacity and optimizing its knowledge management. As a normative actor, UNICEF can set the agenda for children globally, while as a humanitarian actor it has the capacity to deliver, scale and adapt services through key operational and implementational research, as well as through system-strengthening efforts. The Office of Research – Innocenti convenes partners to shape global debates and dialogue and influence national policies and next generation research agendas on children, including adolescents.
There is a **global commitment** to reach the **most vulnerable** and to **leave no child behind**. However, robust evidence is needed to reveal who those children are, where they are, the challenges they face, and the interventions that work (including when and why) in support of their well-being.

The Sustainable Development Goals represent new challenges and a growing ambition for children. There is an urgent need to understand and address previous shortfalls in interventions for children. An increase in school enrolment is not sufficient to mean more children are learning: an increase in supervised births does not necessarily equate to more lives saved. The evidence community can rise to this challenge with new, collaborative ways of working which draw on innovations in generating, communicating and analyzing evidence. Evidence is at the heart of understanding these and other complex issues. Ultimately, evidence is about impact on the ground – informing what can be achieved, how it can be achieved, and with what level of resources. And that evidence needs to be informed by children themselves.

Globally, many governments have reaffirmed their commitment to prioritizing the use of evidence in their development agendas, and from a growing national revenue base, are increasing their own investment in evidence generation. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges in generating and using evidence effectively, not least the parallel trend of ‘fake news’ and populist politics being experienced in many countries worldwide.
There are other practical challenges in the use of #EvidenceForChildren, including internally within many organizations such as UNICEF. These include:

- Fundraising and financing for evidence generation and programming is often decoupled, when it needs to be integrated;
- Knowledge-sharing is often a largely oral tradition, with limited documentation of good practices and tacit knowledge in particular;
- There may be little investment in evidence-related skills and learning products;
- Many organizations tend to have a weak culture of evidence use even if they are expert in quality evidence generation and communication;
- Humanitarian responses benefit from far less evidence than do development actions (with around 100 impact evaluations for the former, compared to 4,300 for the latter, in LMICs). Increased investment in rapid evidence generation is needed in fragile and conflict-affected contexts due to the imperative for immediate action;
- Policy and decision makers need to actively engage with the goal of creating shared research agendas, to enhance learning and the utility and effectiveness of evidence.

A vision of evidence for children: critical needs

To support the most effective #EvidenceForChildren, there is a critical need for:

- Identifying and addressing the most pressing gaps in knowledge and practice;
- Creating demand for evidence to enhance its use and relevance;
- Synthesizing evidence to help time-strapped practitioners to design better programmes, with a bias towards evidence that can inform action;
- Investing more in evidence generation in crisis-affected contexts, balancing the need for speed and quality;
- Developing refined, shared research agendas to enhance ownership from the outset;
- Enabling greater participation of children in research to better capture their unique views and perspectives.
Barriers to the use of evidence include a lack of external and internal demand for evidence; a lack of research availability and accessibility; a lack of clarity, relevance and reliability of findings; and a lack of opportunity or incentives to analyze or use evidence to inform decision making.

It is critical to build demand for evidence to inform policies and practice. This can be achieved through investments such as building end users’ analytical capacity and the skills to understand and appraise evidence; building a culture of evidence-informed policy analysis; and fostering strong linkages between policy analysts and policy makers and practitioners. It is equally important to understand internal demand for (or lack of) evidence, barriers and incentives to uptake, and the crucial role of values and belief systems, as well as the evidence itself in decision making. UNICEF, for example, is undertaking an internal survey on current attitudes and practices in evidence generation and use among staff, to understand demand for evidence and inform its own policies and programmes.

Even where demand for evidence exists, this can be undermined if there is limited patience for the way evidence can be accessed and understood. Simply summarizing information to enhance availability and access is not always enough.

The International Rescue Committee has described how the ‘easy, attractive, social and timely’ framework (see Figure 1) from the UK social purpose company, the Behavioural Insights Team, can help foster greater uptake of the evidence it generates. This framework seeks to:

**Make evidence easy,**

presenting actionable evidence to decision makers so that they can digest it quickly in order to make decisions;

**Make evidence attractive,**

creating products such as data visualization tools that have aesthetic strength and allow users to play with data;

**Make evidence social,**

linking demand and supply through relationships and collaborations with policy makers and researchers and the internal brokering roles of technical advisers who support country offices and national teams in programme design and implementation;

**Make evidence timely,**

embedding evidence-informed decision making into core business processes.

Simply summarizing information to enhance availability and access is not always enough.
The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has learned from early failures around uptake of evidence. It also recognizes the importance of promoting the significance of context to programme colleagues using the evidence base. The IRC’s Outcomes and Evidence Framework (see Section 5) addresses these and other issues.

Knowledge brokering

A key method for making evidence accessible, attractive and timely is to translate it into user-friendly evidence maps and portals which can be easily consulted for programme and policy design (see Figure 2). These can be further synthesized into guidance and simple checklists to ensure the planning cycle is based on available evidence. In this sense, knowledge brokering emerges as a means of institutionalizing the use of evidence (Figure 3), rather than just existing as a parallel system. Ideally, the technical product will be accompanied by human facilitation based on an understanding of potential users and a physical brokerage or interpretative function.

Figure 2: Evidence pyramid for knowledge brokering

The top levels of a potential evidence pyramid (checklists, guidance, portals) as proposed by the Campbell Collaboration, would save decision makers from having to find and consult primary evidence. World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, for example, are informed using high-quality systematic reviews of evidence through state-of-the-art systematic search strategies, synthesis, quality assessments and other methods. While the health sector has shown significant advances in producing evidence-based guidelines and policy, in other areas of work, such as child rights and welfare, progress is hindered by a lack of evidence synthesis.

For examples of evidence maps and portals, please see Section 3.
The clear communication of quality evidence is key to its utility and use, as well as to building trust.

Strong platforms for policy advocacy are needed that unite stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector as well as academics and policy makers. Researchers and practitioners need to blur the arbitrary line which separates their work and engage in active dialogue to allow evaluation and research to be built into ongoing programming. It is equally important to document the economic, social and environmental impacts of evidence-informed decision making, not just in the abstract – how evidence can influence policy for example – but in the tangible ways that evidence can affect children’s lives.

Creating trust in evidence

Poor science often goes viral with misleading headlines, and the research sector itself has created headlines, such as those covering the ‘reproducibility crisis’ (in which more than 70 per cent of 1,576 researchers surveyed by Nature in 2016 failed to reproduce another scientist’s experiments). There are now numerous exposés of poor research, with campaigning organizations such as Sense About Science mobilizing civil society to challenge the misrepresentation of science and evidence in public life. This organization supports higher standards of reporting through initiatives such as its free STATScheck service for journalists, where statisticians fact-check claims about data.

The clear communication of quality evidence is key to its utility and use, as well as to building trust. 

Source: Campbell Collaboration
While impact evaluations are vital in determining ‘what works’, the importance of context means that single studies cannot inform global policy. Evidence synthesis – the process of assessing all studies on a subject together, such as through a systematic review – allows individual findings to be interpreted within the context of global knowledge and to reconcile often competing claims through looking at a broader body of evidence.

**Evidence and gap maps**

Evidence and gap maps are a vital tool in enhancing the evidence architecture, as they provide a systematic and visual presentation of available, quality-assured evidence for a particular sector or sub-sector, including completed and ongoing primary studies, meta-analyses and systematic reviews. Evidence mapping allows users to clearly identify the most pressing gaps in knowledge and practice that should be filled by evidence synthesis and new primary research, for researchers and research commissioners. As such, evidence and gap maps allow for a strategic, policy-oriented approach to setting the research agenda and are critical in making evidence accessible and understandable to policy and decision makers.

Evidence and gap maps use a rigorous approach to evidence synthesis: they have a pre-specified protocol, a systematic search strategy, and clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. In this way, they are similar to a systematic review, but there are key differences (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Systematic review</th>
<th>Evidence and gap map</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning</strong></td>
<td>Often limited to a single intervention and a limited range of outcomes</td>
<td>Broad scope of interventions across a sector or sub-sector, with a full range of outcomes across a causal chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting</strong></td>
<td>Summarizes what the evidence says</td>
<td>Summarizes what evidence is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use</strong></td>
<td>Informs policy and practice</td>
<td>Informs research priorities and research funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Campbell Collaboration

A typical map is a matrix of intervention categories (rows) and outcome domains (columns) (see, for example, Figure 4 in Section 4). The bubbles in the matrix cells denote the existence of a systematic review, impact evaluation or protocol in the relevant focus area; clicking on a circle will open up a summary page. The bubbles often have traffic light colour coding that can denote, for example, high, medium or low confidence in the conclusions of a systematic review, based on a careful appraisal of the methods applied. Or the coding might represent the strength of evidence presented, categorized as strong, inconclusive or weak. The size of the bubble usually denotes the relative size of the evidence base.
Evidence and gap maps guide users to high-quality evidence to inform strategy and programme development. However, it is important to distinguish between the **generalizability** of evidence, which applies everywhere; and the **transferability**, where findings could be used in other contexts. More work is needed to identify markers which can be used to indicate if evidence is transferable across contexts.

The Elevate Children Funders Group has developed a funders’ map to help its network of philanthropic organizations identify areas of met and unmet need in support for children and youth facing adversity. The data improves coordination, advocacy and, hopefully, impact. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexed (LGBTQI) organizations use data on the lack of funding for LGBTQI in their advocacy. Future plans for the map include making some parts open access, a funding analysis, and the development of a good practice index.

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### Examples of open access evidence maps, gap maps, and portals

**Building Effective and Accessible Markets (BEAM) Exchange**
Evidence map for market systems interventions
https://beamexchange.org/resources/evidence-map

**Campbell Collaboration Online Library**
Campbell systematic reviews, plain language summaries and methods series
https://c Campbell/collaboration.org/library.html

**Education Endowment Foundation evidence summaries**
Accessible summaries of education evidence on boosting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries

**European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) best practice portal**
Includes briefings, implementation inventories, an evidence database, and standards and guidelines for drug-related interventions

**Evidence Aid**
Uses knowledge from systematic reviews to provide evidence on interventions that might be considered in the context of natural disasters and other major health care emergencies
http://www.evidenceaid.org

**George Mason University, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy**
Evidence-based policing matrix
https://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/the-matrix

**International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)**
Various maps including on adolescent sexual and reproductive health; intimate partner violence prevention; social, behavioural and community engagement interventions for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; and water, sanitation and hygiene evidence
http://www.3ieimpact.org/about-expertise/mapping

**International Rescue Committee**
Various maps including on cash transfers and humanitarian emergencies

**Sightsavers**
Various eye health evidence maps
https://research.sightsavers.org/gap-maps/

**UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti**
Adolescent well-being in LMICs
http://www.unicef-irc.org/evidence-gap-map

**United States Government**
Access to education in maps for conflict settings, such as on health-related threats, and natural disasters
https://eccnetwork.net/resources/evidence-gap-maps/

**Evidence map of mindfulness**

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Great articulation of the evidence building architecture by @HowardNWhite during the #EvidenceForChildren.

Talked about 4 waves -
#1 - NPM and Results agенция
#2 - Randomisation
#3 - Evidence Synthesis
#4 - Knowledge Brokering

Where is your organization right now?

NPM: New public management
The Roundtable launched an exciting collaboration between the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and the Campbell Collaboration: the mega map on child welfare in low- and middle-income countries (Figure 4).

UNICEF is investing in major synthesis products to raise awareness of what is known and not known in terms of #EvidenceForChildren. The mega map was developed in response to the scattered nature of evidence on child welfare and children at risk, and takes a systematic approach to identifying existing evidence and evidence gaps.

While an evidence and gap map summarizes systematic reviews and primary studies (impact evaluations), this mega map has a higher-level scope, summarizing existing systematic reviews and evidence and gap maps. It provides an intuitive, interactive and visual overview of 302 systematic reviews on child welfare interventions in LMICs, as well as 16 evidence and gap maps, with ongoing work to expand its scope and maintain its relevance.

The mega map is linked to the five goal areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021: every child survives and thrives; every child learns; every child is protected from violence and exploitation; every child lives in a safe and clean environment; and every child has an equitable chance in life. As such, five research briefs have also been produced outlining key areas of evidence synthesis and evidence gaps pertaining to each goal area. A podcast ‘Closing the gap on child well-being: Kerry Albright on the new evidence mega map which summarizes the mega map findings is also available on the UNICEF – Innocenti SoundCloud website.

The mega map is a key tool for enhancing evidence-informed decision making at UNICEF and among its partners, and will act as a global public good and UNICEF resource by potentially:

- **Helping to prioritize global needs for evidence synthesis** by quickly identifying areas where there is a need to fill research and knowledge gaps, and by strengthening or scaling up new evidence generation for children;

- **Identifying evidence gaps around which evidence generation will be coordinated**, rather than duplicating efforts;

- **Highlighting evidence to inform programming and policy advocacy** through support to UNICEF country offices.

As a result of funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the mega map will be a ‘living map’. It will be updated annually to include more evidence as it is produced, over the lifetime of the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018–2021), thus maximizing its relevance and utility for decision making.
Figure 4: The mega map on child welfare in low- and middle-income countries
Initial findings from the child welfare mega map

- **Health is well covered in systematic reviews.** For example, around 100 reviews report the effects of antenatal and postnatal care on mortality, morbidity and other health outcomes; a similar number examine community health interventions such as community health workers.

- **Early childhood development and education are also significantly represented.** There are around 50 studies reporting the effects of early child nutrition interventions, and close to 20 reviews assess ways to improve learning and achievement.

- **Health and education are also well covered in evidence gap maps.** Most of these focus on health, education or the environment.

- **Mental health and pedagogy are less covered.** Mental health is poorly represented, and education coverage focuses more on traditional education outcomes than systematic issues such as pedagogical approaches.

- **There is little evidence on non-traditional areas of child rights.** Childhood safety, child trafficking and risk factor reduction are poorly represented.

- **There is little evidence to support the girl child.** Areas such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and gender-based violence also remain almost evidence free. While there are studies in these areas, there is insufficient synthesis to accumulate bodies of knowledge.

- **Research for children in humanitarian settings is lacking.** There is a need to interpret evidence in complex sectors important to children such as education and child protection, particularly in humanitarian settings.
The International Rescue Committee has developed an interactive Outcomes and Evidence Framework to support humanitarian and development professionals in designing effective programmes. It delivers key information on outcomes related to health, safety, education, economic well-being and power. These are further developed into 26 outcomes with full theories of change and indicators. The framework provides evidence of how interventions work or don’t work to achieve the outcomes, and includes guidance on how to measure progress. Programme guidance is being produced to support the framework and provide in-depth synthesis of evidence about interventions together with programmatic experience.

When a user clicks on an outcome, such as ‘male partners and other males do not use violence against women’ in the safety theory of change, an evidence card appears which shows the availability of evidence and whether it is positive, uncertain or negative (Figure 5). The information is simplified into ‘top-line information’ so that users can easily judge its relevance. This is similar to an evidence and gap map (albeit that it only shows what evidence exists, not where there are gaps) but is linked to the theory of change, giving information on indicators and linked outcomes. An additional level in the evidence map shows more information about the conclusions and context, such as if the information is from a refugee camp, a stable context, a conflict or a disaster.

Where there is no evidence, the best hypothesis of appropriate pathways is illustrated, and a number of gap maps are produced in Excel.

"Congratulations for this milestone... so interesting and happy to see that we are more looking to use and exploit the evidence available and invest to cover the gaps."

'The framework provides evidence of how interventions work or don’t work to achieve the outcomes, and includes guidance on how to measure progress.'
Figure 5: Evidence card for the outcome ‘male partners and other males do not use violence against women’
The participation of children in evidence generation and research and development processes is still not often prioritized or valued: children are seen as beneficiaries or subjects as opposed to experts, agents of change or major stakeholders. Researchers and the international development community need to challenge the societal norms and discourses surrounding the capacity and rights of children to participate in decision making and ensure that those affected by research have a voice in that research process. Children’s and adolescents’ participation in research is a nascent topic of much debate, with key challenges to be explored, such as how children’s voices can influence governance; the ethics, dangers and risk of generalizing children’s voices; and social-political and cultural challenges to involving children in policy decisions.

There are, however, examples of good practice. Save the Children actively collaborates with children in gathering evidence. Through its ‘Dreamland’ children’s consultation process, for example, children construct their ideal territory in which their rights are fulfilled (see Figure 6). The voices of children are then collected into a situational analysis which informs country strategic plans. Another example is a community child researchers initiative in Somaliland, which conducts research for the country’s child well-being.

Figure 6: Dreamland children’s consultation process

Child rights situational analysis

Country strategic choices

Country strategic plans 2019–2021

Source: Save the Children
report card. Thirty children aged 13–17 years were trained in research and indicators of well-being. This allowed children to generate data on their well-being, shape discourses and be partners in informing community priorities.

UNICEF recognizes the critical importance of children’s voices in generating evidence, and is developing tools to support and advocate for ethical evidence generation involving children. Meanwhile, the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti supports the portal Ethical Research Involving Children and has produced working papers such as ‘What we know about ethical research involving children in humanitarian settings: an overview of principles, the literature and case studies’ (2016), ‘Children and the data cycle: rights and ethics in a big data world’ (2017) and ‘The ethical involvement of children with disabilities in evidence generation’ (forthcoming). UNICEF has also developed toolkits for conducting research with children and adolescents. See for example https://www.unicef-irc.org/adolescent-research-methods/

“\[It was great to see so much interest in proactively introducing a robust evidence base into the sector.\]"
Researchers and policy makers in the Global South are vital to enhancing #EvidenceForChildren: well-intentioned policy recommendations made by those outside of the region often fail to respond to local contextual and political realities. A more grounded and local use of evidence is needed, supported by the development of evidence synthesis skills, an embedding of these skills into research centres, and a means of brokering the importance of evidence and evidence synthesis with Southern governments.

It is important to listen to evidence users, and have respect for local knowledge when research is conducted and its use encouraged. Evidence needs to drive and inform decisions, alongside a deep understanding of the context, which may have been gained by individuals over many years or decades of experience. A diversity of experts, ideally from within the community, can champion ideas and tell an evidence-informed story that connects with people’s values.

The work of three important organizations was highlighted during the Roundtable. The Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) with a Secretariat based at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, supports 37 evidence synthesis centres based in 24 LMICs to enhance capacity and use synthesized evidence to support practice and policy across disciplines. GESI is currently conducting a needs assessment to identify the capacity building needs of the centres in terms of conducting systematic reviews, translating knowledge and setting priorities.

The African Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation, based at Makerere University, Uganda, is building capacity for conducting and using systematic reviews. It is also developing innovative rapid response briefs and mechanisms to respond to urgent demands from policy makers for synthesized evidence in East Africa.

The International Center for Evaluation and Development, based in Nairobi, Kenya is supporting the development of homegrown evidence-informed policies in Africa that are adapted to local conditions and context. To achieve this, there is a need to revamp national policy and research institutions, build capacity for policy analysis, create a culture of evidence-informed policy analysis, and foster strong linkages between policy analysts and policy makers. It is especially critical to build demand for evidence-informed policies within government ministries to ensure that appropriate public investments are prioritized.
The mechanisms for partnerships in evidence generation for children are currently underdeveloped, with multiple actors working on similar studies, creating duplicate databases, and wasting resources, time and opportunities to further the research agenda. An ecosystems approach is needed which unites cross-sectoral stakeholders and champions to create shared research agendas and resources.

Cross-sectoral partnerships are crucial in furthering the evidence agenda for children and can take different forms, all potentially involving stakeholders such as children, academia, civil society, donors, governments, the international development community and the private sector. Examples include:

- **Convening donors** to collaborate on joint investments in evidence;
- **Research partnerships** to avoid duplication and maximize opportunities for generating evidence;
- **Research–policy partnerships** to enhance evidence demand, utility and use;
- **Research–implementation partnerships** to generate evidence through the programme cycle and break down research/programme silos;
- **Research–practice–policy partnerships** to combine implementation research with opportunities for piloting programmes and policy toolkits.

Other opportunities for evidence coordination and partnership include the creation of an #EvidenceForChildren community of practice; the development of joint programme guidance; common evidence standards and guidelines; shared, synchronized or integrated workplans; and a common coding framework so that all actors undertaking reviews in a particular sector can code data into a single database. In addition, actors can share findings; engage in joint funding of specific studies or activities; benefit from joint support to synthesis studies through the Campbell Collaboration’s ‘global pooled funds for children at risk of abuse and neglect and for child welfare in low- and middle-income countries’; and undertake implementation research and adaptive learning to ensure immediate utilization of findings within programming.
The potential benefits of evidence coordination

- Strengthens evidence ecosystems, internally within organizations, within sectors and in-country;
- Institutionalizes evidence generation;
- Supports global public goods with open access data, meaning partners are not competing for funding;
- Allows for better use of resources to generate more evidence;
- Fosters commitment;
- Opens up a more self-critical culture;
- Allows for learning from others’ mistakes as well as from their successes;
- Enhances understanding of the contribution of research and evidence for decision makers;
- Increases utilization of research and evaluation findings;
- Strengthens strategic alliances and partnerships for an evidence-informed policy-making process as an integral part of fostering the development agenda in the Global South.

The findings are based on a survey conducted between October and December 2017. Targeted at stakeholders working with children in crisis and vulnerable contexts in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT), the survey was designed to better understand their current data-driven practices and needs. The final sample included a total of 176 respondents who reported working with children, youth, families, schools, and/or teachers (50 researchers, 102 practitioners, 17 funders, and 7 civil servants). While the response rate was fairly high, the results are unlikely to be representative of the field at large.
Momentum is gathering to create a global coalition on #EvidenceForChildren to lead and advocate for the use of robust evidence for child policies and programmes. Attendees at the Roundtable plus interested partners can help support the following activities by seeking mechanisms and funding to sustain an #EvidenceForChildren community of practice or network, and by facilitating the actions directly. Meanwhile, please join the community by emailing research@unicef.org and following the #EvidenceForChildren hashtag on social media.

For researchers and their partners

- Develop rapid response briefs, particularly in humanitarian settings, and ‘quick and clean reviews,’ with different models to provide evidence synthesis (including suitable quality caveats) in three days, 30 days or three months;
- Explore the different types of evidence needed to inform decisions including implementation research, impact assessments and cost-effectiveness data;
- Explore evidence synthesis products with aesthetic strength and bring in design and communication experts to make them more powerful, in collaboration with potential end-users;
- Build the capacity of researchers in advocacy and communications, and bring communications practitioners on board at an early stage;
- Acknowledge and address the politics and hard choices that arise when decision-makers shift to more evidence-informed practices, including the residual importance of values and belief systems;
- Find and support evidence champions among partner policy makers and implementers;
- Establish informal networks and relationships between universities and ministries at the policy level, and formal relationships such as through a memorandum of understanding;
- Explore cross-sectoral and cross-country collaborations which can enhance or translate the evidence base in multiple sectors or contexts;
- Use more inclusive approaches to evidence generation and use – which involve the people and children that evidence is designed to serve.

WHAT NEXT?
For donors and their partners

- Donors demanding the generation and use of quality evidence can provide incentives and act as an enabler. However, this should be balanced with perceptions of bias when a donor is funding research so full transparency is necessary;
- A community of donors including foundations can act as champions of open access data;
- Listen to what is needed on the ground, rather than focusing too tightly on funder priorities;
- Make real investments in research, including replication, verification and peer review;
- Pursue multi-donor partnership on organizational learning to ensure that evidence and lessons are utilized across respective member organizations;
- Create an ‘online matching’ forum to connect researchers, funders, the private sector, universities and non-governmental organizations to identify research projects and joint stakeholders;
- Establish a sustainable global funding mechanism for high-quality evidence synthesis to scale up recognition of its value.

Building the evidence architecture

- Agree on shared standards, information sharing, coordination and cooperation;
- Approach evidence synthesis as a global public good, and use open sourcing of tools and platforms for data, including a global repository for evidence synthesis products (such as the Campbell Online Library);
- Identify new evidence gap maps and reviews for inclusion in the updated mega map, annually until 2021;
- Work with other interested parties to build demand for evidence products and architecture;
- Create tools that use the best available, rather than perfect, evidence while gaps are being filled;
- Continue to develop global standards, particularly around qualitative evidence synthesis;
- Build reflection and learning into institutional structures – a culture of learning where the penalty addresses failure to learn, rather than failure itself;
- Unite the evidence agenda with accountability structures for results-based management or adaptive learning;
- Monitor and review case studies of mega map use and host an event to share experiences.

Filling the gaps

- Complete the empty areas of evidence and gap maps, such as unpacking priority cells in the mega map through enhanced evidence synthesis or production of primary studies to fill evidence gaps and/or to develop programme guidance based on sound evidence;
- Coordinate evidence demand with a small set of like-minded donors for priority reviews around major gaps (e.g. on gender-based violence, child marriage, sexual exploitation and trafficking);
- Create evidence platforms where there is a lack of evidence, including on the environment, urbanization and migration;
- Build rigorous evaluation into international and national programmes;
- Support global pooled funds to minimize duplication of effort and enhance strategic coordination and prioritization;
- Use the mega map in conjunction with the Elevate Children Funding Group’s funding map to ensure that important issues are not neglected.

Forward planning on #EvidenceForChildren - looking at what’s next for this group and its research agendas - adeptly led by @i thorpe
The Roundtable provided an opportunity for stakeholders to come together and share experiences, questions and inspiration. The aim was to determine how to collaborate on strengthening the generation, communication and use of #EvidenceForChildren in the future.

While attendees came from the different worlds of academia, international development funding and civil society, among others, they share a passion for driving research, data and evaluation, ensuring the availability of such evidence to different audiences, and examining how findings can be taken forward and used to create impact for children. Many issues need further exploration and the participation of interested stakeholders is welcomed as this important work is developed.

Partnerships, coordination and collaboration are absolutely key, as all concerned collectively strive towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and a future fit for children.

Interested partners are invited to join the #EvidenceForChildren community by emailing research@unicef.org and following the #EvidenceForChildren hashtag on social media.
A–Z OF SOME USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

3ie database of policy briefs, systematic reviews and impact evaluations
http://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/evidence-gap-maps

Africa Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation
http://www.chs.mak.ac.ug/afcen

Africa Evidence Network
http://www.africaevidencenetwork.org

American Educational Research Association
http://www.aera.net

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare
http://www.csbc4cw.org

Campbell Collaboration Online Library
https://campbellcollaboration.org/library.html

Centre for Evidence and Implementation
https://www.ceiglobal.org

Children and AIDS Learning Collaborative
http://childrenandaids.org/learning-center-page

The Comparative and International Education Society
http://www.cies.us

CPC Learning Network
http://www.cpcnetwork.org

DevInfo human development data
http://devinfo.org

Elevate Children Funders Group
http://elevatechildren.org

Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance (ELRHA)
https://www.elrha.org/about-us

Epistimonikos collaborative, multilingual database of health evidence
http://www.epistimonikos.org

ERIC Institute of Education Sciences
https://eric.ed.gov

Ethical Research Involving Children project
https://childethics.com

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) best practice portal

Evidence Aid
http://www.evidenceaid.org

Evidence-informed Policy Network

The Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) Network
http://www.gesiinitiative.com

Global Partnership for Knowledge Sharing
https://www.knowledgesharingfordev.org/global-partnership

Global TIES for Children: Transforming Intervention Effectiveness and Scale
https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/lhdcg/global-ties

GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluations)
https://bestpractice.bmj.com/info/toolkit/learn-ebm/what-is-grade

Health Data Collaborative
http://www.healthdatacollaborative.org

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)
https://www.poverty-action.org/impact/case-studies

International Centre for Evaluation and Development
http://www.iced-eval.org

International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)
https://www.inasp.info

International Rescue Committee interactive Outcomes and Evidence Framework
http://oef.rescue.org

Multi-donor partnership on organizational learning

Politics & Ideas
http://politicsandideas.org

Results for America
http://results4all.org

Save the Children
https://www.savethechildren.org

Sense about Science, challenging the misrepresentation of science and evidence in public life
https://senseaboutscience.org

Social Systems Evidence database
http://www.socialsystemsevidence.org

Society for Research in Child Development
http://www.srcd.org

UK Government What Works Network
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network

UNICEF briefs reviewing contemporary research methodologies for adolescent well-being in LMICs
http://www.unicef-irc.org/adolescent-research-methods

UNICEF dedicated data site
https://data.unicef.org

UNICEF dedicated evaluation site
http://www.unicef.org/evaluation

UNICEF dedicated research site
http://www.unicef-irc.org

UNICEF Evidence for Action blog
http://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action

UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
http://mics.unicef.org

United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation
http://www.childmortality.org

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Learning Lab
https://usaidlearninglab.org

World Bank Blog: ‘Bridge the gap between research and policy, one panel discussion (and 145 studies) at a time’

World Health Organization (WHO) Handbook for Guideline Development
http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/m/abstract/Js22083en
A-Z OF CHAIRS, FACILITATORS, PANELLISTS AND SPEAKERS

Lawrence Aber, Wilner Family Professor of Psychology and Public Policy; Co-Director, Global TIES for Children, New York University

Kerry Albright, Chief, Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

Dave Algos, Dave Algos Consulting

David Ameyaw, CEO/President, International Centre for Evaluation and Development, Andrews University

Jeannie Annan, Director of Research and Evaluation, International Rescue Committee

Shahida Azfar, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF

Nicole Behnam, Head of Violence Prevention and Response Technical Unit, International Rescue Committee

Trevor Butterworth, Executive Director, Sense About Science USA

Laurence Chandy, Director Division of Data, Research and Policy, UNICEF

Annie Dufo, Executive Director, Innovations for Poverty Action

Racha Fadlallah, Researcher, Center for Systematic Reviews on Health Policy and Systems Research, American University of Beirut

Priscilla Idele, Deputy Director, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

Ghazal Keshavarzian, Director, Elevate Children Funders Group

George Laryea-Adjei, Director of Evaluation, UNICEF

Taitos Matafeni, Head of Impact, Innovation and Evidence, Save the Children UK

Jodi Nelson, Senior Vice President, Policy and Practice, International Rescue Committee

Ekwar Obuku, Centre Co-ordinator, Africa Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation

Ellen Piwoz, Senior Programme Officer for Nutrition, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Sarah Schmidt, Deputy Chief of Party, United States Agency for International Development LEARN

Ian Thorpe, Chief of Learning and Knowledge Exchange, UNICEF

Howard White, Chief Executive Officer, Campbell Collaboration

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Africa Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation Ekwar Obuku

American Institutes for Research Hannah RIng

Bernard van Leer Foundation Esther GDH

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Ellen Piwoz

BRAC USA Devon Mclorg

Brookings Institution Jenny Perlman Robinson

Campbell Collaboration Howard white

Catholic Relief Services USA Scott levevre

Child Fund International Darcy Strouse

Columbia University Radhika I'Engar

Comic Relief Katie brown

Dave Algos Consulting Dave Algos

Dorothea Haus Ross Foundation Ken goody

Elevate Children Funders Group Ghazal Keshavarzian

Evidence Action Anne Healy

Evidence for Policy Design (Harvard Kennedy School) Charlotte Tuminelli

FHI 360 Anne Smiley

Girl Effect/Nike Foundation Dwan Kaojuki

Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) Racha Fadlallah

Global TIES for Children Lawrence AbE

Impact Matters Michael M. Weinstein

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) Annie DuflO Jeffrey Mosenkis

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INee) Emily Varni

International Centre for Evaluation and Development, Andrews University David Ameyaw

International Rescue Committee (IRC) Jeannie Annan Nicole Behnam

Jodi Nelson Jamie Weiss-Yagoda

Mercy Corps Karen Scriven

MERL Tech Linda Raftree

Moving Minds Alliance Mari Ullmann

Oak Foundation Helena Duch

Open Society Foundations Kate Lapham

Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Maria Quattri

Plan USA International Craig Geddes

Save the Children Taitos Matafeni Laurel Maclaren

Sense About Science USA Trevor Butterworth

The Rockefeller Foundation Shawna Hoffman

Together for Girls Begoña Fernandez

UN Secretariat Andrew Claypole

UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Laurie Manderino

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Keny Alibright Kate Alley Patricia Arquero Caballero Ian AU Shahida Azfar Sarah Baranik Joseph Barnes Silaja Birks Laurence Chandy Sumaira Chowdhury

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Marco Segone

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) LEARN Sarah Schmidt

US Fund for UNICEF Kelsey Garcia Perry Landman Gabriella Morris

War Child Canada James Topham

Yale University Nicholas Alipui
ROUNDTABLE PROGRAMME

Wednesday 27th June (focus on advocacy for more evidence synthesis for children)

08.30-09.00 Registration

09.00-09.15 Welcome and housekeeping

09.15-09.45 Session Theme: The Need for Better Evidence for Children

10.15-10.45 Session Theme: How UNICEF is working to build an evidence culture within the organization

10.45-11.05 Refreshment Break

11.05-12.00 Session Theme: Improved Evidence Synthesis, Mapping and Coordination for Children

12.00-13.00 Lunch

14.00-14.45 Groupwork and interactive session

14.45-15.00 Quick Feedback to Plenary

15.00-15.30 Refreshment Break

15.30-16.15 Groupwork and interactive session

16.15-16.30 Quick Feedback to Plenary

16.30-16.45 Take home reflections from three Roundtable participants

16.45-17.00 Closing Remarks and Next Step

17.00 End of day one
### ROUNDTABLE PROGRAMME

**Thursday 28th June (focus on capacity-building and lesson-learning for evidence practitioners)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Chair/Chairpersons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00–09.30</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.30–10.30</td>
<td><strong>Theme: The Importance of Evidence Synthesis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chair: Annie Duflo, Executive Director, Innovations for Poverty Action</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction to commissioning and conducting Evidence and Gap Maps (EGMs)</td>
<td><strong>Howard White, Chief Executive Officer, Campbell Collaboration (45 mins)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What EGMs don’t capture</td>
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<td>- Q&amp;A (15 mins)</td>
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<td>10.30–11.00</td>
<td>Refreshment Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00–12.30</td>
<td><strong>Groupwork and Interactive Session</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitator: Howard White, Chief Executive Officer, Campbell Collaboration</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Chance for workshop participants to have hands-on engagement with the MegaMap on Child Welfare in LMICs to:</td>
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<td>- find evidence they might not be familiar with and identify how this could help inform what they are doing</td>
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<td>- find gaps and prioritize the most important/pressing questions to answer in their sectors.</td>
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<td>- give feedback on utility and design</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30–12.45</td>
<td><strong>Introduction to the afternoon’s Action Timeline exercise</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitator: Ian Thorpe, Chief- Learning and Knowledge Exchange, UNICEF</strong></td>
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<td>12.45–13.30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.30–14.15</td>
<td><strong>Theme: Putting the User First</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chair: George Laryea-Adjei, Director of Evaluation, UNICEF</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Getting user perspectives built into evidence synthesis for children</td>
<td><strong>Taitos Matafeni, Head of Impact, Innovation and Evidence, Save the Children UK (15 mins)</strong></td>
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<td>- Q&amp;A/Discussion (15 mins)</td>
<td><strong>Ekwaro Obuku, Centre Co-ordinator Africa Centre for Systematic Reviews and Knowledge Translation (15 mins)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>14.15–15.00</td>
<td><strong>Theme: The Political Realities of Evidence Uptake</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chair: Kerry Albright, Chief Research Facilitation &amp; Knowledge Management, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>- Evidence Uptake and Ongoing Challenges to Strengthening Evidence-informed Decision-making</td>
<td><strong>Trevor Butterworth, Executive Director – Sense About Science USA (15 mins)</strong></td>
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<td>- Q&amp;A/Discussion (15 mins)</td>
<td><strong>David Ameyaw, CEO/President, International Center for Evaluation and Development, Andrews University (15 mins)</strong></td>
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<td>15.00–15.15</td>
<td>Refreshment Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.15–16.00</td>
<td><strong>Theme: Looking to the Future</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitator: Ian Thorpe, Chief- Learning and Knowledge Exchange, UNICEF (30 mins)</strong></td>
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<td>- Action Timeline to start identifying next steps and commitments</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.00–16.15</td>
<td><strong>Closing Remarks and Takeaways</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jeannie Annan, Director of Research &amp; Evaluation, International Rescue Committee (5 mins)</strong></td>
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<td>- Howard White, Chief Executive Officer, Campbell Collaboration (5 mins)</td>
<td><strong>Laurence Chandy, Director – Division of Data, Research and Policy, UNICEF (5 mins)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>16.15</td>
<td><strong>Close of Roundtable</strong></td>
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For further information please contact:

Kerry Albright / Alessandra Ipince
UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti
kalbright@unicef.org / aipince@unicef.org

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