UNICEF PROCEDURE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN RESEARCH
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I.   Rationale

To underpin its programmes, policy and advocacy work, UNICEF invests substantially in conducting as well as commissioning research. Yet unlike evaluation, research in UNICEF lacks a systematic, standardized process for assuring its quality. A sound quality assurance (QA) system for research is critical to UNICEF's mandate to enhance its reputation as a knowledge leader on children; ensure scarce resources are not wasted; and to protect the children, women and other stakeholders who participate in the research, and whose lives are affected by its outcomes.

In line with these conditions and values, the purpose of this Procedure is to support the building of an organization-wide quality assurance system for research in UNICEF. The Procedure outlines five broad principles and five minimum standards which individual offices and divisions will need to build on to develop more detailed operational procedures to ensure appropriate research quality assurance mechanisms in their settings.

The objective of this Procedure is therefore to:

- establish minimum quality assurance standards for UNICEF research globally;
- strengthen the quality and positive impact of the research and evidence base underpinning programming, advocacy and policy efforts; and
- ensure the protection of, and respect for, children's rights within all UNICEF research undertaken and/or commissioned from conception through to dissemination.[1]

II.   Applicability / Scope

i.   All **UNICEF research, as defined below under part IV.** The focus of this Procedure is on research as defined there, but its application to studies and major situation analyses is encouraged.

ii.   Research undertaken and commissioned by all sections of UNICEF – including Country Offices (COs), Regional Offices (ROs), and Headquarters divisions (HQ)[2] – both in **partnership and independently**. Where a UNICEF partner has its own mechanisms for research quality assurance, they may complement but **not substitute** or detract from the minimum standards in this Procedure.

iii. This Procedure does not apply to evaluation work. Evaluations in UNICEF are governed by procedures and a quality assurance system established by the Evaluation Office. In incidental cases 'research' may overlap

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[1] For further information on the protection of children's rights in research, see the *Procedure for Ethical Standards in UNICEF Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis*, available on line at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/OoR/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Procedures.aspx>. See also the draft *UNICEF Child Safeguarding Policy* and the *Strategic Guidance Note on Institutionalizing Ethical Practice for UNICEF Research.*

[2] National Committees are also encouraged to apply the standards in this Procedure to the research they undertake or commission through partners.

with 'evaluation'. When this is the case, UNICEF procedures for evaluation apply instead of this Procedure.[3] In instances where the definitions and scope of this Procedure need clarification, guidance may be sought from the Office of Research-Innocenti and the Evaluation Office.

III. Audience

All UNICEF staff involved in the development and implementation of research, most notably research managers, as well as Country Representatives, Regional Directors and Heads of Divisions who will be responsible for assuring high standards of quality in UNICEF research.

IV. Definitions

Key terms

Research Quality Assurance system – principles, standards, resources and processes deployed to continuously guide, assess, monitor, and improve the quality of UNICEF's research programmes and products, and provide assurance about the care and control with which research was undertaken.

Research – the systematic process of the collection and analysis of data and information, in order to generate new knowledge, to answer a specific question or to test a hypothesis. Its methodology must be sufficiently documented to permit assessment and replication. Research in UNICEF should examine relevant issues and yield evidence for better programme and policy advice.[4]

Major Research[5] – research projects that last longer than 18 months, and/or have a budget above USD 100,000, and/or any classification/definition in place in COs or ROs that, at a minimum, meet these guidelines.[6]

Evaluation – a systematic and objective effort to determine the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts, based on agreed criteria and benchmarks among key partners and stakeholders. It involves a rigorous, systematic and objective process in the design, analysis and interpretation of information to answer specific questions. It provides assessments of what works and why, highlights intended and unintended results, and provides strategic lessons to guide decision-makers and inform stakeholders.

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[3] For a more elaborate definition of what constitutes 'evaluation' and 'research' in UNICEF, see the *Taxonomy for Defining and Classifying UNICEF Research, Evaluation and Studies* available on line at
<https://icon.unicef.org/apps02/cop/edb/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Taxonomy%20Version%202_%20September%202014.pdf>
[4] *Taxonomy for Defining and Classifying UNICEF Research, Evaluation and Studies*,
<https://icon.unicef.org/apps02/cop/edb/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Taxonomy%20Version%202_%20September%202014.pdf>
[5] Definition of major research adapted from: UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti. *Guiding Principles for Research Quality Assurance Mechanisms.* 20 June 2013, p. 2. < https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/OoR/SiteAssets/OoR%201_Guiding%20Principles%20on%20QA%20for%20research.pdf>
[6] Some offices have existing thorough definitions and mechanisms for research. For example, UNICEF China classifies research into three tiers of strategic priority and assigns review processes accordingly. See: UNICEF China, *UNICEF-China Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Quality Assurance of UNICEF-Supported Research, Studies, Surveys and Evaluations towards Results for Children.* 2013, p. 2; The Evaluation Office uses the criteria of relevance, usefulness and commitment by senior management to use evaluation findings, high quality design and implementation to define 'major' evaluations. These can be adapted to further define research priorities. See: UNICEF Evaluation Office, *Guidance on Prioritization of Major Evaluations at the Decentralized Level,* January 2010.

Study – an initiative to establish current knowledge around a specific topic through the summarization, interpretation or assessment of information and data. Studies are generally descriptive in nature and address immediate needs of a particular UNICEF sectoral intervention (programmatic, policy and advocacy) primarily at national or sub-national level. Examples include rapid assessments, situation analyses, literature/desk reviews, mapping exercises, and sector-specific surveys.[7]

Other terms
Final Report – for the purposes of this Procedure a final report is a publically available report produced consequent to the interim or final findings of research.

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) – a specifically constituted review body established or designated by an entity to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects recruited to participate in biomedical or behavioral or social science research. IRBs attempt to ensure, both in advance and by periodic review, protection of subjects by reviewing research proposals and related materials. IRB protocols assess the ethics of the research and its methods, promote fully informed and voluntary participation by prospective subjects capable of making such choices (or, if that is not possible, informed permission given by a suitable proxy), and seek to maximize the safety of subjects.

Primary Data – the creation of new data via first-hand collection.

Research Steering Committee (internal) – for the purposes of this Procedure a Research Steering Committee consists of UNICEF staff who provide an oversight system for all research carried out by the office or division under their mandate. The committee's responsibilities include reviewing all research plans in the office/section annual integrated monitoring, evaluation and research plan (IMERP or PRIME), all research proposals, and where appropriate, drafts and final research products to ensure they adhere to the quality assurance standards outlined in this Procedure. The internal Research Steering Committee will also provide technical and procedural advice throughout the research project as required.

Secondary Data - information gathered from pre-existing sources or databases.

V.   Procedure Statements

This Procedure is informed by the following five principles:

i   UNICEF is accountable for the quality of its research
UNICEF is accountable to donors, partners, policy-makers, development practitioners, research participants – and other parties influenced by its research – and most importantly to the world's children, to ensure that its research is of high quality. Research questions need to be timely and relevant, and the methods used need to appropriately match the questions and context and be implemented using a high quality protocol. Research proposals, drafts and dissemination products need to be reviewed to ensure that rigour is applied throughout the research process and accurate messages reach key stakeholders.

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[7] *Taxonomy for Defining and Classifying UNICEF Research, Evaluation and Studies,*
<https://icon.unicef.org/apps02/cop/edb/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Taxonomy%20Version%202_%20September%202014.pdf>

ii **UNICEF research needs to be relevant and address and examine the critical issues affecting children**
UNICEF research needs to ask well-defined questions that have the potential to positively impact the lives of children and their families. It needs to address new and emerging national, regional and international development challenges, and advance knowledge on children. Within this context, a clear "theory of change" and/or a rationale for the research that directly links research findings with specific results for children and their families is necessary. Consequent to this imperative, UNICEF research may need to examine vital issues that are politically sensitive, yet important from a child rights and well-being point of view, particularly in the case of research efforts that address structural inequalities, both nationally and globally. UNICEF research needs to address critical knowledge gaps in the literature and in development practice.

iii **UNICEF research needs to be carefully prioritized and resourced**
A well-planned and strategically oriented research agenda will not only contribute to ensuring that relevant, unanswered and forward-looking questions are addressed, but also prevents duplication of efforts and wastage of funds on unnecessary research. It is important that planning processes are used to narrow down focus areas and prioritize the most critical topics for research. Practical matters such as the cost of research, timelines and capacity to carry out the required work need to be carefully considered when setting any research agenda. Requests from donors and other stakeholders to conduct research within a tight timeframe need to be realistically assessed, and where a strict deadline poses a risk to the quality of the research, re-negotiated. It is more beneficial to carry out fewer strategically-focused, high-quality research projects than a large number which may not have sufficient resources to achieve an impact, or indeed meet the minimum quality assurance standards outlined in this Procedure (see section VI below).

iv **UNICEF research must do no harm and must explicitly consider ethical issues**
UNICEF's primary responsibility is to the world's children. All UNICEF research should have a clear approach that explicitly considers ethical issues throughout the research process and minimizes risks to children and other stakeholders impacted by the research. It is better to do no research than risk doing research that may harm children or their families and/or tarnish UNICEF's reputation.

v **UNICEF is accountable to appropriately use, share and act on the results of research**
As is the case for UNICEF evaluations, management should be accountable for sharing and acting on the outcomes of research.[8] Appropriate dissemination and advocacy strategies need to target key stakeholders in the most direct and effective ways and follow-up is necessary to record how the research was used. Research that has direct implications for UNICEF programming and policy advocacy needs to be strategically shared and acted upon internally. All UNICEF research should be stored on the Evaluation and Research Database and in other formats that increase knowledge sharing, learning and collaboration across the organization.

VI. Implementation of the Procedure for Quality Assurance in UNICEF Research: Five minimum standards

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[8] UNICEF Evaluation Office, *Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS)*, January 2013, p. 2.

The implementation of the *UNICEF Procedure for Quality Assurance in Research* requires that **five minimum standards**, derived from the key principles listed above, be observed. The standards are the basic foundations that UNICEF COs, ROs, and HQ divisions need to follow when conducting research. Not all research requires the same level of quality assurance – smaller exploratory studies may not need an external peer review or a dissemination strategy – but it is critical that at least a minimum threshold of quality assurance standards is reached in all UNICEF research. This Procedure distinguishes between 'major' and other research projects, with major projects having additional requirements, including the completion of an inception report and an external peer review (see sections 3.2-3.5 below). In instances where limited resources and capacity make it difficult to meet the minimum standards, the risks and benefits of the proposed research should be reconsidered and if found to fall short, the research should not take place. Figure 1 summarizes the different stages, roles and processes outlined in the minimum standards.

All UNICEF research must adhere to the following <u>five minimum standards of quality</u>

Minimum standard 1: Clear quality assurance mechanisms

It is important that UNICEF is clear and transparent about the type of quality assurance mechanisms applied to its research. To this end:

1.1   All COs, ROs, and HQ divisions will develop clear **operating procedures** for research quality assurance in their settings, which adhere to the five minimum standards outlined in this Procedure.[9] Individual COs may adapt existing procedures from other offices or ROs may develop common procedures for their region. The procedures do not need to be dedicated specifically to research and may include evaluations and studies, as long as the quality standards for research are clearly defined and in line with this Procedure.

1.2   UNICEF staff must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interests to their head of office and the Ethics Office.[10] Additionally, all research publications will disclose any actual or potential **conflict of interest** by the researchers.

1.3   All research publications will outline the **type of review** (e.g. internal review, external peer review, etc.) that was undertaken.

Minimum standard 2: Prioritization of research

Prioritizing and carefully planning a research project is key to narrowing down focus areas, choosing the most critical topics and ensuring that sufficient capacity and resources exist to carry out the research according to standards of high quality.

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[9] For examples, see: UNICEF China, *UNICEF-China Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Quality Assurance of UNICEF-Supported Research, Studies, Surveys and Evaluations towards Results for Children.* 2013; UNICEF Pakistan, *UNICEF Pakistan – Workflow for Research Studies & Surveys,* 2013; Office of Research-Innocenti, *Guiding Principles for Research Quality Assurance Mechanisms: UNICEF Office of Research,* 2013. All products available on line at <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/OoR/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Resources.aspx>

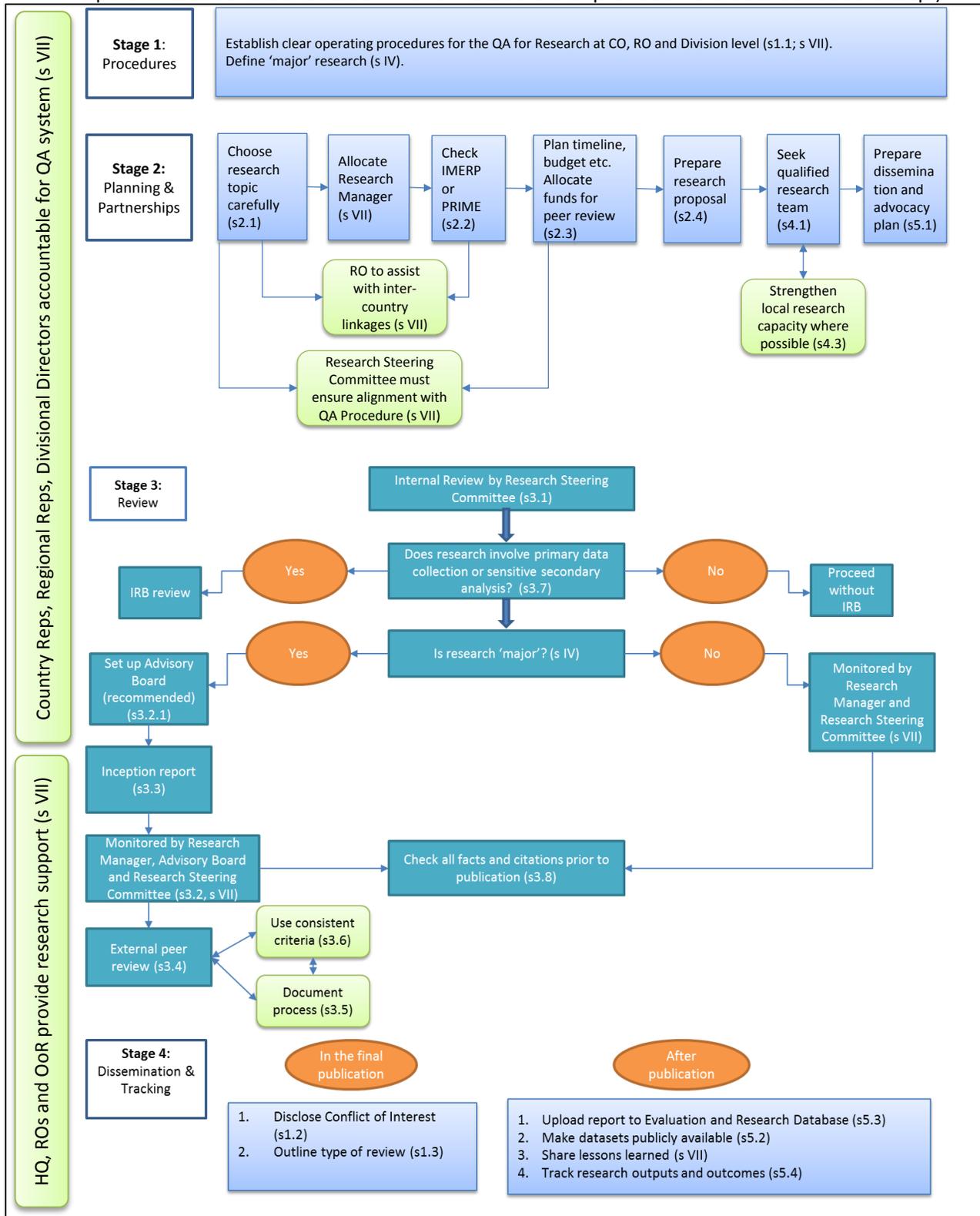[10] In accordance with UNICEF (2012), *Financial Disclosure and Declaration of Interest Statements*, Executive Directive CF/EXD/2012-003, staff must disclose actual or potential conflicts of interests to their head of office and the Ethics Office. Further advice regarding conflict of interest can be found in UN (2013), *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service*, International Civil Service Commission, New York.

2.1   **Research topics** will align with national, regional and/or global UNICEF priorities and/or address new and/or emerging issues in ways that advance knowledge on children.

2.2   Each office/division will **explicitly check** whether similar research is planned or taking place in another part of UNICEF. All planned research will be entered into the **PRIME**[11] system and a search conducted to identify potential overlap or opportunities for collaboration in UNICEF.

> 2.2.1   To reduce duplication and identify collaborative opportunities with external actors, a literature review or another type of mapping, review or synthesis exercise (e.g. a gap map) should be undertaken prior to starting a research project. Where relevant, collaborations across UNICEF offices and sectors should be established to increase the scope of the potential findings and enhance the quality of cross-cutting research.

2.3   The proposed topics, budgets, timelines and other necessary resources of UNICEF research will be **carefully planned in annual planning processes**. Sufficient time and budget for an external peer review needs to be allocated during the planning phase of **major** research projects.

2.4   All proposed research will have a **research proposal/concept note** prepared. (See Annex A for an example of what to include.)

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[11] PRIME is the electronic, on-line version of the Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan (IMEP/IMERP). All IMERPs will eventually become available on line, making it possible to check UNICEF research plans across countries and regions.

Figure 1: A summary of the stages, roles and processes depicted in the minimum standards. (Numbers in parentheses denote the section in this Procedure that provides more details about the step.)

Country Reps, Regional Reps, Divisional Directors accountable for QA system (s VII)

Stage 1: Procedures — Establish clear operating procedures for the QA for Research at CO, RO and Division level (s1.1; s VII). Define 'major' research (s IV).

Stage 2: Planning & Partnerships

- Choose research topic carefully (s2.1)
- Allocate Research Manager (s VII)
- Check IMERP or PRIME (s2.2)
- Plan timeline, budget etc. Allocate funds for peer review (s2.3)
- Prepare research proposal (s2.4)
- Seek qualified research team (s4.1)
- Prepare dissemination and advocacy plan (s5.1)

RO to assist with inter-country linkages (s VII)

Strengthen local research capacity where possible (s4.3)

Research Steering Committee must ensure alignment with QA Procedure (s VII)

Stage 3: Review

Internal Review by Research Steering Committee (s3.1)

Does research involve primary data collection or sensitive secondary analysis? (s3.7)
- Yes → IRB review
- No → Proceed without IRB

Is research 'major'? (s IV)
- Yes → Set up Advisory Board (recommended) (s3.2.1)
- No → Monitored by Research Manager and Research Steering Committee (s VII)

Inception report (s3.3)

Monitored by Research Manager, Advisory Board and Research Steering Committee (s3.2, s VII)

Check all facts and citations prior to publication (s3.8)

Use consistent criteria (s3.6)

External peer review (s3.4)

Document process (s3.5)

HQ, ROs and OoR provide research support (s VII)

Stage 4: Dissemination & Tracking

In the final publication
1. Disclose Conflict of Interest (s1.2)
2. Outline type of review (s1.3)

After publication
1. Upload report to Evaluation and Research Database (s5.3)
2. Make datasets publicly available (s5.2)
3. Share lessons learned (s VII)
4. Track research outputs and outcomes (s5.4)

Minimum standard 3: Reviewing research

Research intended to inform programming, policy and advocacy should undergo a thorough review process, which screens and signposts issues of quality throughout the research process. The number and type of reviews required for a research project depends on its scope, technical complexity, funding sources and potential for impact. All projects that meet the definition of **'major research'** as outlined in this Procedure (see section IV: Definitions) will undergo an **external peer review** in addition to a standard internal review (see details at 3.4 and 3.5 below).

3.1   All UNICEF research – regardless of scope or budget – will undergo an **internal review** by an internal **Research Steering Committee**. Where capacity permits, an internal Research Steering Committee comprised of appropriately qualified staff will be set up at the CO, RO and Division level for this purpose (see Annex E for a sample composition and responsibilities of an internal Research Steering Committee). In instances of limited capacity at the CO, assistance will be sought from the RO, HQ, and other COs. Smaller COs may join efforts to set up a shared, virtual Research Steering Committee for this purpose.

3.2   The research proposal will undergo an **internal review** to ensure alignment with strategic priorities, capacity to undertake the project, technical quality, ethical issues and any other relevant operational or technical issues. The internal Research Steering Committee will also be consulted at times when technical and procedural advice is needed throughout the course of the research project.

> 3.2.1   It is recommended – but not a requirement – that **major research projects** also have **an external advisory board** set up to provide technical and procedural guidance in addition to the internal review. Members of the external advisory board may include national or international technical experts (academics, researchers), specialists from UN and other international organizations, specialists from government, and specialists from civil society and other grassroots organizations. The external advisory board should review the research proposal, the inception report and/or the final draft. In cases where research projects undergo a review by an institutional ethics review board (IRB) that has sound technical knowledge of the research topic and methodology, the need for an external advisory board may no longer apply. The internal Research Steering Committee should be mandated with deciding the type of advisory board that is appropriate for a research project (see Annex E for details regarding the Research Steering Committee).

3.3   **Major** research projects should have an **inception report** prepared which expands on the Terms of Reference (ToR) to describe: the conceptual framework; the methodology including the research design, sampling, data collection instruments, data sources, and data analysis methods; and the schedule. It should also report any limitations that need to be resolved prior to starting data collection or acknowledged throughout the research process.

3.4   Prior to any type of externally available publication, **major research projects** will also undergo an **external peer review**. A minimum requirement for the **external peer review** is two **independent** non-UNICEF reviewers, recognized as experts in the relevant field and able to provide **independent, impartial, and high-quality** comments. The feedback from external reviewers should – as a minimum –

include a recommendation on whether the product is suitable for publication or whether it should be revised, or rejected.

        3.4.1   Exceptions to this rule may be Discussion and Working papers, documentation from conferences or research products which are works in progress and where external review will take place at a later stage. In instances where seminar presentations or some other type of consultation with assigned reviewers have provided a sufficient level of quality assurance, senior management (Director, Representative, Deputy Representative) or the Research Steering Committee may waive the need for an external review.

3.5   The **external peer review** process must be documented and kept on record.

3.6   All reviewers must use **consistent, clear criteria** when assessing the technical quality of research.[12] (See Annex B for sample review criteria.)

3.7   All research projects will review their ethical obligations as outlined in the *UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis* and the *UNICEF Strategic Guidance Note on Institutionalizing Ethical Practice for UNICEF Research* and undergo an **ethics review** as required.

3.8   All citations in a UNICEF publication must be checked to reduce the risk of incorrect reporting.

> **Minimum standard 4: Ensuring appropriate research capacity**

It is unlikely that any office or section will have the internal capacity to carry out all types of research. During the planning phase, available capacity needs to be reviewed and additional support sought as necessary. In cases where a certain research topic requires ongoing examination, it is advisable to set up Long Term Arrangements for Services (LTAS) with appropriately qualified research institutions to save time on procurement processes, ensure technical consistency, and assist other parts of UNICEF with related research. To meet the minimum quality assurance standards for research capacity on a case by case basis, UNICEF offices and sections will:

4.1 Seek partnerships with qualified research institutes, universities, think tanks and other research groups.[13]

4.2 Commission research contracts based on the **quality and expertise** of the research team and the quality of the proposed methodology, in addition to **affordability**.

4.3 Where the design of the research permits, strengthen local research capacity by partnering with **national stakeholders** and involving them in the planning, data collection, data analysis, peer review and other aspects of the research project.

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[12] For examples of peer-review processes, see: Information Network (RIN), *Peer Review: A guide for researchers*. March 2010, RIN, London, UK, <www.rin.ac.uk/peer-review-guide>

[13] It is important to ensure that these partnerships are in line with the recommendations of the upcoming report of the audit of Services Procurement by the Office of Internal Audit.

> **Minimum standard 5: Dissemination, advocacy and tracking the impact of research**

The strategic dissemination of research is critical to its impact on programmes, policy and advocacy and needs to be thoroughly planned from the start. At a minimum:

5.1 All UNICEF research intended to have an impact on programmes, policy, and advocacy will have a **dissemination and advocacy plan** included and budgeted in the initial research proposal. The strategy will be reviewed (e.g. with partners, key stakeholders, Chief of Communications, CO Management Committee) and where necessary, updated prior to its implementation.

5.2 Where copyright, ownership and other contractual agreements permit (See Annex C for a basic overview of UNICEF Intellectual Property Rights), datasets compiled as part of UNICEF research will be made **publicly available** to reduce the likelihood of duplication and allow further exploration.

5.3 All UNICEF research must be uploaded to the Evaluation and Research Database.

5.4 Mechanisms will be employed to track the outputs and outcomes of all research intended to influence policy and programmes. Examples include monitoring citations, downloads, presentations to key stakeholders, media mentions, and any references to the research in policy documents.

VII.   Accountabilities, Roles and Responsibilities

Establishing Operating Procedures

a)   As outlined in section 1.1 under Minimum Standard 1, all COs, ROs, and HQ divisions will develop and set out clear **operating procedures** for research quality assurance in their settings.[14] Individual COs may adapt procedures from other offices or ROs may develop common procedures for their region.

Responsibility for Oversight of Quality Assurance for Research

a)   Country Representatives, Regional Directors, and Divisional Directors are accountable for the overall quality of research in the offices/divisions that report to them.

b)   The **internal Research Steering Committee** is responsible for reviewing the quality aspects of the research proposal, and where appropriate, drafts and final research products.

c)   The **internal Research Steering Committee** is responsible for reviewing the CO and RO annual integrated monitoring, evaluation and research plan (IMERP or PRIME) to ensure research products are appropriately classified as 'research' in accordance with the *UNICEF Taxonomy for Research, Evaluation and Studies*, and subject to the QA standards outlined in this Procedure.

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[14] For examples, see: UNICEF China, *UNICEF-China Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Quality Assurance of UNICEF-Supported Research, Studies, Surveys and Evaluations towards Results for Children.* 2013; UNICEF Pakistan, *UNICEF Pakistan – Workflow for Research Studies & Surveys,* 2013; Office of Research-Innocenti, *Guiding Principles for Research Quality Assurance Mechanisms: UNICEF Office of Research,* 2013. All products are available on line.

Establishing Research Priorities

a)	The **RO** will assist with **inter-country linkages** and the setting of **research priorities.**

Research Management Oversight

a)	A **research manager**[15] (see Annex D for the suggested qualifications and competencies of a research manager) will be designated for each research project and will be responsible for managing the project's planning, deliverables, peer review, dissemination, monitoring of research uptake, and any other tasks required for successful completion.

b)	Research managers will ensure that lessons learned from the research are shared within UNICEF, and where appropriate, disseminated externally via publications, conferences, knowledge sharing platforms, databases etc.

Organizational Support for Research Programmes

a)	**HQ, ROs** and the **Office of Research-Innocenti** (OoR) are responsible for providing other parts of UNICEF with research related support as set out in their mandates, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), and other strategic documents.

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[15] This is not a new role, but likely to be an appropriately qualified UNICEF staff member from the unit that is commissioning and managing the research project.

VIII. Risk Management

Typical Risks to this Procedure	Minimum Expected Mitigation Measures *(relative to each Risk identified)*
Procedure: UNICEF Procedure for Quality Assurance in Research	
Risk Category:	
High Risk / Sensitive Procedure:	
1. Governance and Accountability • Lack of appropriate oversight for quality assurance processes. • Research managers may redefine 'research' as 'study' to avoid following the Procedure.	• Appropriate accountabilities established as noted in section VII of the Procedure. • The Procedure outlines that the internal Research Steering Committee is responsible for reviewing the annual integrated monitoring, evaluation and research plan (IMERP or PRIME) to ensure all research products are appropriately classified as 'research' and subjected to the QA process outlined in this Procedure.
2. Funding and External Stakeholder Relations • Longer time frames required for quality assurance processes may lead to stakeholder impatience or reduced interest.	• Consultation with stakeholders regarding potential additional resources required to ensure quality assurance processes. • Graded requirement for quality assurance processes in accordance with scope and scale.
3. Budget and Cash Management • In light of the additional requirements/ recommendations including internal and external (where relevant) reviews, dissemination and advocacy plans and a more participatory approach, the time frames and resources for research projects are likely to increase.	• Emphasis placed on clear prioritization of research projects in line with budget.

IX. ANNEX

Annex A: Recommended Components of a Research Proposal/Concept Note

Box 1: Research proposal/concept note content

The research proposals/concept notes of major research projects should outline:
o   How the research will contribute unique knowledge and/or add to existing knowledge;
o   The conceptual framework or theory of change;
o   The rationale for commissioning the research;
o   The proposed research methodology, including the research design, sample population and size, definitions of key variables and concepts, data source or data collection methods, data analysis methods, and any other relevant methodological issues;
o   Any issues related to research ethics as instructed in the *UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis* and in accordance with the *UNICEF Strategic Guidance Note on Institutionalizing Ethical Practice for UNICEF Research*;
o   The (desired) research team and its (required) qualifications and experience;
o   Any significant resource requirements or resource issues;
>   o   The expected research review process and how it will be established;
>   o   The involvement of end-users and other stakeholders in the research process;
>   o   Proposed approach to dissemination and advocacy;
>   o   A draft budget.

Annex B: Sample Criteria for Reviewing Research

Box 2: Criteria for reviewing research

A quality assurance process for research begins with **clear criteria** for defining and assessing its conceptual and technical quality. Quality assurance criteria can be developed by the research manager or review committee and should include all aspects of technical quality. The five criteria below are only an example and may be used and/or adapted by UNICEF offices and divisions when conceptualizing and reviewing research.

Conceptualization	Is the research question well-defined? Does the research report present a clear and relevant conceptualisation of the issue? Is the research piece relevant to improving the work of UNICEF?
Potential for Impact	Does the research demonstrate potential for impact? E.g. stimulate policy debate, improve effectiveness of interventions? Does the research bring attention to a neglected area deserving further inquiry? If relevant, does the research show potential for scaling up and replicability?
Methodology	Are the methods employed appropriate? Has the right type of information and data been assembled to address the issue?
Innovation and Originality	Does the issue concern new or emerging national, regional or international development challenges or present them in a novel way? Does the research contribute to advancing work in and adding knowledge to this field?
Writing and Presentation	Is the report well-organized and clearly and succinctly written? Are the conclusions based squarely on the paper's findings? Are recommendations concrete and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?

Annex C: Basic Overview of UNICEF Intellectual Property Rights

UNICEF general terms and conditions for individual and institutional contractors provide guidance on intellectual property within standardized UNICEF contracts**.**

General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants / Individual Contractors
- See the UNICEF Human Resources Manual for details.[16]

General Terms and Conditions (Institutional Contracts)
- See the UNICEF Supply Manual for details.[17]

Should an institution or an individual wish to change the general terms and conditions of the contract as relates to copyright, patents and other proprietary rights, then alterations to the above conditions need to be proposed by the contractor/contracting institution and sent to the UNICEF Office of the Legal Advisor for consideration and advice prior to any contractual agreement.

Annex D: Suggested Qualifications and Competencies of a UNICEF Research Manager

The role of the UNICEF Research Manager may be ascribed to a pre-existing position such as a monitoring and evaluation officer/adviser, programme officer, social policy adviser, or any other relevant research-oriented role at COs, ROs and HQ. A suggested profile for the Research Manager is outlined below. It is recommended that this profile also be consulted in the event that new recruitment for the position takes place.

A Research Manager should:

- Hold postgraduate qualifications;
- Have experience conducting or managing research;
- Have solid research, analytical and writing skills;
- Have a knowledge of, and an ability to network with, national research institutions and national institutional review boards (IRBs);
- Be capable of understanding data collection and analysis done by others and be able to judge the quality of the work;
- Have undertaken all relevant online modules or face-to-face training available as relates to Quality Assurance and Research Ethics.[18]

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[16] The UNICEF Human Resources Manual is available on the UNICEF intranet under 'UNICEF Manuals: Policies and Procedures'. See the Administrative Instruction on Consultants in the DHR Electronic Handbook.
<https://intranet.unicef.org/Corp/EHandbook.nsf/a635567617817e8d8525737f004b780a/c199c1d2e5bc58a3852573fe005f83bc?OpenDocument>
[17] The UNICEF Supply Manual is available on the UNICEF intranet under 'UNICEF Manuals: Policies and Procedures'.
<https://intranet.unicef.org/policies/dhr.nsf/Manual%20/Supply%20Manual?OpenView&Start=1&Count=999&Collapse=15#15>
[18] For training on Ethics, see The Ethical Research Involving Children Project. For training on QA, see the e-course on Research and Evidence at UNICEF on Agora (DHR learning platform) and the QA section on the Office of Research-Innocenti Team site. Please visit the OoR Team site for the latest information on webinars and other training opportunities regarding ethics and QA.

In the instance where personnel and resources cannot provide for a suitably qualified staff member, Regional Offices should be contacted to provide appropriate support and the most relevant candidate selected and provided with the necessary training available from the Office of Research-Innocenti.

Annex E: Suggested Composition and Responsibilities of the internal Research Steering Committee

Several UNICEF offices already have an internal **Research Steering Committee** and their procedures can be used as a guide when setting up a committee appropriate to the context of an RO, CO or HQ division. Sample descriptions of the role and tasks of an internal **Research Steering Committee** can be found in:
- UNICEF Ethiopia Standard Operating Procedures, which outlines the functions of its Research and Policy Advocacy Committee;
- The UNICEF China ToR for the Peer Review Group on Studies, Surveys & Evaluations (SSEs);
- WCARO Research and Evaluation Steering Committee ToR.

For other relevant samples, see the resources at:
https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/OoR/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Quality%20Assurance%20Resources.aspx

A suggested minimum profile for the internal Research Steering Committee is outlined in Box 3 below. It is recommended that this profile be adapted to the needs of individual offices and divisions. Large COs may need a more elaborate Research Steering Committee, while smaller COs may need to set up a virtual committee in collaboration with the RO and other COs.

> *Box 3: Suggested composition and responsibilities of the internal Research Steering Committee*
> **Objective**
> - To ensure that all research supported by the given office or division (e.g. Regional Office, Country Office or HQ Division) meets the minimum standards of quality outlined in the *UNICEF Procedure for Quality Assurance in Research*.
>
> **Composition**
> - The committee may expand on existing mechanisms with a similar function and also review evaluations, studies, data collection and analysis and other evidence generating activities.
> - At a minimum, the committee should have four members, consisting of: a Chair with sound research experience (e.g. a Social Policy Specialist or an M&E Specialist at the P4/L4 or P3/L3 levels); two programme staff with research experience; and a programme assistant responsible for the administration of the committee (organizing meetings, taking minutes, following up on action points).
>   - ROs and COs that conduct a large number of research projects should increase the committee membership accordingly (e.g. two co-chairs, four programme officers). COs that do not conduct a lot of research or do not have the necessary staff capacity in their office to compose a Research Steering Committee should explore options for establishing an inter-country committee, where the review function is shared with similar (in terms of composition, region, and/or research interests) COs and/or the RO.
>   - Where time and resources permit, Country Representatives, Regional Directors and Heads of Divisions – or their deputies – who are ultimately accountable for research quality assurance should also be involved in the work of the committee.

Meeting and response frequency
- o As necessary to suit the context of local research.
- o All research proposals and requests should be responded to as soon as possible and feasible.

Responsibilities
- o Review plans for all research supported by the Regional Office, Country Office or HQ Division under its mandate.
- o Review the annual integrated monitoring, evaluation, and research plan (IMERP or PRIME). Ensure research, evaluation and studies are categorized in accordance with the *UNICEF Taxonomy for Research, Evaluation and Studies*. Ensure research topics meet national, regional and global priorities.
- o Review all research proposals/concept notes and ToRs and ensure they meet the requirements outlined in the *UNICEF Procedure for Quality Assurance in Research*, the *UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis*, and any other relevant procedures and guidelines.
- o Recommend both internal and external technical experts to act as research advisers.
- o Recommend 2-3 independent external technical experts to act as reviewers.
- o Assist with identifying appropriate ethics review boards or mechanisms.
  - o Make a judgment as to whether an ethics institutional review board (IRB) has sufficient technical knowledge about the research topic and methodology to act as the external advisory board. In the case of an affirmative decision, this will overrule the requirement to set up a new external advisory board for the research project.
- o Review progress, inception and final reports as necessary and provide guidance.
- o Engage with external researchers, attend presentations outlining findings and provide guidance as necessary.
- o Assist with the dissemination and uptake of findings as necessary.

Annex F: Selected Resources to Support Research Quality Assurance at UNICEF

The following tools and resources may be useful for supporting research quality assurance mechanisms at UNICEF.

1. For the overall process
The Quality Assurance pages on the OoR Intranet Teams site provide advice, sample tools and guidance for the QA for the overall research process. The site also shares useful resources for building UNICEF research capacity, including methodological briefs and research syntheses. See: https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/OoR/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Quality%20Assurance%20for%20 UNICEF%20Research.aspx

2. Peer review
A guide on peer review published by the Research Information Network (RIN) provides an overview of the process in the research community, and outlines some of the current debates on peer review. See: Research Information Network (RIN), *Peer Review: A guide for researchers*. March 2010, RIN, London, UK, www.rin.ac.uk/peer-review-guide

3. Ethical research guidance

The Ethical Research Involving Children Project provides guidance and advice for conducting ethical research with children. The project's key resources include an International Charter, a Compendium and a website with a rich repository of evidence-based information, resources and links to relevant journal articles, and also a platform for critical reflection and dialogue. See: www.childethics.com

4. Publications to assist with the conceptual understanding and common procedures for QA for research

- For definitions of quality, discussion of quality concepts, and a review of how a culture of quality was established in European universities, see: European University Association (EUA), 2008, Implementing and Using Quality Assurance: Strategy and Practice
- For guidance on quality management of research in higher education institutions (also applicable to other research institutions), see: Higher Education Quality Committee, (HEQC), 2005, A Good Practice Guide for Quality Management of Research
- An overview of a number of key issues on QA for scholarly research and how to assess it: Research Information Network (RIN), 2010 Quality Assurance and Assessment of Scholarly Research
- Guidelines on QA national frameworks and management, quality assessment and reporting, and other related issues: Expert Group on NQAF, 2012 for UNSD, Guidelines for the Template for a Generic National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF)