

Seminar - Exploring the Policies on Equity

OSLO, 10 MAY 2012

BACKGROUND

Since the launch of UNICEF's Special Report "Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals" in September 2010, UNICEF has forcefully embraced an equity-based approach to child survival and development. A pro-equity approach focuses on the most deprived and vulnerable children that are disproportionately concentrated in the poorest and most marginalized parts of the population. UNICEF has put forward the argument that an equity-based approach will help countries meet the Millennium Development Goals quicker and more cost-effectively than currently is the case, and that an equity-based approach is not only a moral obligation but also a necessary condition for achieving sustainable human and economic development. These are important considerations also in a post-2015 perspective.

The objectives of the seminar, which was organized by Norad in collaboration with UNICEF and the Norwegian National Committee for UNICEF, were to:

- Gain a better understanding of the evidence base and the theory of change that underpin UNICEF's equity-based approach.
- Explore how an equity-based approach with a focus on the most marginalized children and communities fits with other models for poverty reduction and development, for example universal welfare approaches and insurance schemes.
- Learn more about and discuss how an equity-based approach is being implemented by UNICEF at country level, what the implications are for field offices and how they engage with national governments, civil society and other partners.

KEY ISSUES

The following are some of the key issues that were discussed in the seminar.

1. Equity stands at the heart of development both intrinsically in its own right (e.g. social justice) and instrumentally because of its societal payoff, which is widely documented. By adopting an equity-based approach across its thematic priorities, UNICEF is well placed to contribute in advancing knowledge and practice in the broad and emerging movement for equity - with an emphasis on human development and social protection, and taking the lead for children and adolescents in particular.
2. While equity is widely discussed and on the agenda internationally and in many countries, there remains an ambiguity to the concept and in how it is implemented in practice. The "Narrowing the Gaps" report, while effective in making the case and mobilizing for equity, does not fully address the policy and technical complexities associated with an equity-based approach. Discussants at the seminar raised in particular the following issues: (1) how a targeted equity-based approach that focuses on the poorest and most marginalized groups or areas fits with more holistic universal approaches; (2) how UNICEF's equity-based approach relates to the proven human-rights approach to development (HRAD), not least since this is considered to be a major UNICEF hallmark and contribution to rights and development, and (3) whether the equity-based approach really addresses the fundamental and underlying dimensions of power, discrimination and lack of rights.

- a. As to the relation between equity-oriented and universal schemes, the discussants and seminar participants leaned towards framing targeted equity-focused interventions as part of universal, comprehensive social policies for successful poverty reduction, and getting the balance right according to needs and context. Importantly, it might not make sense to target interventions in very poor or fragile contexts (where most of the population will live in extreme poverty). There is also a risk that targeting might lead to perverse incentives, i.e. actions might be taken that assure that a group or individuals continues to be classified as “needy” in order to continue to receive benefits. A point was also made in relation to whether targeted interventions in low-income country settings primarily should be externally funded through aid, with longer-term investments for universal schemes borne by national governments when able to do so.
 - b. Several asked what is new with the equity-based approach, and how it relates to (or differs from) the human rights based approach to development pioneered by UNICEF and which can provide an effective framework for analysis, action and monitoring. While both approaches promotes non-discrimination and human dignity focusing on the most disadvantaged and espousing the use of disaggregated data, UNICEF’s equity-based approach could be interpreted as not emphasizing the responsibility of so-called duty-bearers (e.g. national governments) to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of citizens, nor the need to empower and promote active participation of right-holders.
 - c. As to rights, power and discrimination, interesting remarks were made concerning the need to work on fundamental power relations without antagonizing relationships. As such, contrary to some other concepts, equity seems to be an acceptable term that opens up for opportunities to engage in policy dialogue and concrete actions.
3. Context matters a lot. While an equity-based approach can provide a framework for causal analysis and action for the reduction of (child) deprivations, strategies are necessarily highly dependent on the underlying determinants and bottlenecks at family/community, service delivery and upstream policy, norms and environment level. This emphasizes the necessity for local analysis rather than blueprint solutions.
 4. The participants and panelists based their understanding and comments on the Narrowing the Gaps study from 2010, which so far is UNICEF’s only public document on equity. The UNICEF presentation at the workshop clarified how the equity re-focus has evolved since 2010 and that UNICEF’s approach to equity was a practical and comprehensive way to implement universal children’s rights. This was helpful to allow for a better understanding of the re-focus on equity. At the same time, the need to elaborate a public document that updates UNICEF’s partners and constituencies on the concepts, theory of change and operationalization of the re-focus on equity became evident.
 5. The country-oriented discussions, in particular the presentation on results-based management through monitoring for equity and the Georgia country case focusing on combining “upstream” equity approach with focused service delivery interventions linked to a monitoring framework for reducing the children living in institutions, clearly showed that sound management practices involving collection and use of relevant program data go hand-in-hand with and provide the basis for an effective equity-based approach.

6. The seminar pointed to the need for more analysis and research, such as (1) documenting what works and what does not work drawing on lessons learned from the 26 countries which are in their initial implementation phase, both in terms of similarities and context-specific experiences, and how such approaches complement national strategies. (b) whether the equity-based approach is really more cost-effective than universal approaches in all contexts; (c) a more nuanced understanding of the “identity” of individuals and groups that are the targets of social inclusion policies (e.g. whether they really wish to be targeted, and the implications of this)

FOLLOW-UP

- Significant follow-up work has been undertaken by UNICEF since the launch of the equity-based approach in September 2010. This came clearly across in the seminar by way of the presentations and the open and constructive discussions. There is a need to document and communicate this both as it regards to conceptualization and to operationalization.
- It will be important to avoid the development of parallel strategies and programmes to reach more or less the same goals. In particular, UNICEF should further explore how the equity-based approach and the human-rights based approach could be further aligned or integrated.
- The seminar provided a base for further institutional dialogue between the Government of Norway and UNICEF. Norad will further engage in analytical and operational work related to equity and poverty reduction in a post-2015 framework.

REFERENCES

“Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the MDGs”, UNICEF September 2010:

<http://www.unicef.it/Allegati/Narrowing%20the%20Gaps%20to%20Meet%20the%20Goals.pdf>

Executive Summary, “Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the MDGs”, UNICEF September 2010:

http://www.unicef.or.jp/about_unicef/pdf/Narrowing%20the%20Gap%20two%20pager%20final.pdf

Presentations at the Norad Equity Seminar:

<http://www.norad.no/no/aktuelt/arrangementsskalender/exploring-the-policies-on-equity>

08:45-09:15	Registration and coffee
09:15-09:30	Opening and welcome – Villa Kulild, Director of Norad
Part I: The Evidence Base and Theoretical Perspective of the Equity Approach	
<i>Chair : Bernt G. Apeland, National Committee UNICEF Norway</i>	
09:30-09:50	The Theoretical Perspective and Argument for UNICEF's focus on a Pro-Equity Approach Presentation: Christian Salazar, Deputy Director, Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ
09:50-10:40 7 min prepared interventions.	Inequality and Structural Change, Universal Access vs Targeted Interventions Discussant: Katja Hujo, Research Coordinator, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
	Equity Approach: Implications for Financing, Universal Access vs Targeted Interventions Discussant: Eva Kløve, Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Equality, Social Organisation and Performance, Department of Economics, University of Oslo
	Equity and Human Rights in Development, Differences and Similarities Discussant: Margot Igland Skarpeteig, Team Coordinator Rights and Social Equity Team, Norad
	Equity, Entitlement, and National Poverty Reduction Policies, Trade Offs and Cost Efficiency Discussant: Dan Banik, Associate Professor and Research Director, Center for Development and Environment, University of Oslo
10:40-11:30	Session on Discussion, Questions and Answers - UNICEF wrap up Moderator: Camilla Helgø Fossberg, Norad
11:30-12:30	Lunch
Part II: Operationalisation of the Equity Approach, 13.00-16:00	
<i>Chair: Paul Fife, Norad</i>	
12:30-13:15	Strategies for the Equity Approach: Decentralised Monitoring for Action Presentation: Rudolf Knippenberg, Deputy Director, Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ ,UNICEF
	Operationalisation of the Pro-Equity Approach: Comparative Case Studies from Africa (Nigeria, DRC, Benin) Presentation: Rudolf Knippenberg, Deputy Director, Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ ,UNICEF
	UNICEF Case Study from Georgia: The Equity Approach and Child Protection Presentation: Georgia, Roeland Monasch, Representative, UNICEF Georgia
13:30-14:00	Comments by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save the Children Norway: Kim Terje Loraas (on Operationalising an Equity and Human Rights Based Approach for Child Wellbeing) • UNICEF Norwegian National Committee: <i>Bernt G. Apeland</i>, (on application of a Pro-Equity Approach in a Norwegian context)
14:00 – 14:45	Session on Discussion, Questions and Answers Wrap-up Moderator: Paul Fife, Norad