

CASE STUDY:
REVIEWING AND REDESIGNING UNICEF'S GLOBAL STRATEGY

PROBLEM

In 2006, UNICEF – the world's premier agency for children – initiated an independent review of the global organization to help **assess its organizational health** and **build a new foundation** for continuous improvement going forward.¹ UNICEF proactively initiated the organization-wide review, not because it was in crisis, but rather to **build on its numerous past successes** and **capitalize on opportunities** to achieve maximum results for children, particularly given various internal changes and external shifts.

APPROACH

UNICEF selected GivingWorks through a world-wide competition to design and lead the broad-based strategic review and to highlight opportunities to more effectively deliver results for children. The review was conducted in three stages: a **participatory organizational assessment** to pinpoint the strengths, weaknesses, and strategic opportunities; an articulation of a proposed **strategic direction** based upon UNICEF's comparative advantages and partnership opportunities; and refinement of an **organizational design** that combined cohesive structures, efficient systems and processes, and a robust internal capacity to deliver on the agreed strategic vision.

Active in 190 countries and with initiatives that span across a range of children's issues, UNICEF is impressive in size and scope. To carry out this effort, GivingWorks conducted a thorough assessment of UNICEF's global program and management effectiveness, as well as interviewed staff at all levels of the organization, external partners, and client and donor governments. At the conclusion of the initial assessment phase, the Deputy Executive Director for Programs observed:

"It is rare to find an external consultant who is able to absorb a vast amount of information, sift through a lot of the chaff and focus on the essence of the feedback in an insightful and judicious manner...All too often, external consultants come up with predictable boiler-plate presentations, with certain statements that apply to most organizations. I found GivingWorks' analysis truly penetrating, and assessment of the situation very perceptive with a good understanding of all the nuances."

Fifteen months after the project ended, the Deputy Executive Director for Management looked back and noted:

"We found the GivingWorks staff to be of remarkable quality and capability. They not only quickly demonstrated a solid grasp of public sector and United Nations-specific issues, but also sensibly adapted significant lessons and concepts from the private sector into their strategy recommendations for UNICEF. The presentations and discussions with our Global Management Team were well-prepared, lively and thought-provoking."

¹ The UNICEF Organizational Review was jointly funded by UNICEF and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

RESULTS

The year-long assessment and analysis produced a set of recommendations designed to enhance the organization's strategic coherence, position it to drive systemic change for children, and build readiness to capitalize on external trends and opportunities. Our detailed recommendations were anchored around five **overarching strategic shifts**:

- ❖ **Sharpen program focus, formulation and strategy**, including developing a country segmentation scheme to enhance strategic thinking, program design, and continued learning
- ❖ **Realign structures and systems to deliver quality results** by improving service and support to Country Offices and realigning internal structures
- ❖ **Position UNICEF as the global knowledge leader for children** by investing in research, expanding linkages to external knowledge centers, enhancing vetting and quality control of knowledge resources, developing an array of new knowledge products, developing technical expertise networks with on-demand access, and systematically sharing and scaling up good practices
- ❖ **Enhance partnerships for resources and results** by adopting a more strategic approach based on mutual value and comparative advantage and oriented around specific results, with greater emphasis on linking with the private and NGO sectors to facilitate *innovation and adoption of low-cost, high impact products and services for vulnerable children*.
- ❖ **Manage for performance** by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of human and financial resources and business processes management and bringing greater coherence to the structure of key functions.

UNICEF continues to make progress on implementing the long-term shifts recommended by the review. According to the Deputy Executive Director for Management, "The Organizational Review of UNICEF carried out by GivingWorks contributed to the analytical foundation for the transformational efforts currently underway in UNICEF." In February 2009, UNICEF management updated its Executive Board on the sustained effort underway to implement the long-term strategic shifts recommended by the Organizational Review.²

² Both GivingWorks' Organizational Review report and UNICEF's 2009 update can be accessed on GivingWorks' website.