



# Core SBC Principles

## A systems-oriented, human rights-based, people-centred approach

This Programme Guidance explains the various approaches and provides the necessary tools to help you design SBC initiatives for complex development and humanitarian challenges. However, creating effective, sustainable, and equitable SBC programming requires much more than a simple understanding of these tools and approaches. To deliver quality SBC, we need to adopt a fundamental mindset. Here, we outline the core principles of UNICEF's mindset for designing SBC programmes that are human rights-based, people-centred and systems-oriented.

### Core principles

- Our approach is **human rights-based**. The core goal of all UNICEF programmes is to uphold the rights of all children. Strategies should aim to realize the rights of those who are most marginalized, excluded or discriminated against.
- Our approach is **people-centred**. People's rights, desires and needs should be placed at the centre of all policies and programmes. People should have a say in their own development. All UNICEF initiatives should be community-led and geared towards enhancing community self-reliance, social justice and participatory decision-making. Community-led development is how we respect and support communities in the process and outcomes of our work.
- Our approach is **systems-oriented**. SBC programmes must tackle each challenge holistically. When designing policies and programmes, we must consider the complex relationships between people, services, norms and institutions within a broader community structure, and how each element within the larger system might support or hinder the achievement of our objectives.

### Realizing the rights of all people: A human rights-based approach to SBC

For over two decades, UN agencies have been working towards a [human rights-based approach](#) to programming that focuses on realizing the rights of those who are most underserved and marginalized, and seeking to restore and recognize the dignity of these individuals. This approach often requires a detailed analysis of societal and gender norms, discrimination and power imbalances, as well as a reinforcement of the capacities of duty-bearers (usually governments) to respect, protect and guarantee rights.

The core principles of a human rights-based approach include:

- **Rights fulfilment:** Programmes uphold the realization of human rights as the fundamental goal of development and focus primarily on restoring the rights of marginalized and excluded groups.
- **Local participation and ownership:** The development process is owned by communities through participation in the development process, and community ownership is both a means and an explicit goal.
- **Empowerment:** People are recognized as key actors in their own development. Strategies

actively seek to empower them.

- **Evidence:** Rigorous research is used to both understand challenges and to monitor and evaluate outcomes. All measurable goals, targets, and indicators throughout the programming are formulated based on human rights standards.

### Putting people at the centre: A people-centred approach to SBC

It seems obvious that people's needs and desires should be central to programme design. However, development initiatives are too often conceived far away from the communities they aim to serve. They fail to meaningfully involve individuals as agents of change in their own communities. Thus, the programmes we try to "create demand" for are often programmes that have not been designed to meet the needs of community members. By taking a people-centred approach, we can work with communities to ensure that policies align with their lived realities. This eliminates the additional steps to "ensure compliance" with interventions and "build trust" with communities because these elements are inherent to a people-centred process. By partnering with civil society institutions, we can make communities feel included in the decisions that impact their lives.

The fundamental principles of a people-centred approach include:

- **Participation:** When people get to be agents and leaders in their own development, policies and programmes better reflect the needs and values of the societies they intend to serve. Participatory processes promote self-sufficiency and seek justice by focusing on community perspectives over Western perspectives that could further perpetuate inequitable systems. By collaborating with target groups, we can get a better sense of how one's experiences, priorities, hopes, fears and motivations are shaped by their social, structural and cultural context. Participatory processes, when carried out properly, can also help to prioritize underserved populations, challenge systems of dominance and contribute to intersectional social justice.
- **Sustainability:** Shortsighted development initiatives can lead to natural resource depletion and unsustainable economic practices. Ensuring that communities have a say in their development leads to economic self-reliance and more sustainable communities and ecosystems.
- **Proper techniques:** Principles mean nothing without action. The [human-centred design](#) methodology provides an efficient and effective way to place people at the heart of the design process. [Feedback and accountability mechanisms](#) and [community engagement](#) processes are also essential to a people-centered practice.

### Considering the system as a whole: a system thinking approach to SBC

A systems approach encourages programme designers to focus on the interconnectedness of elements within a system. Systems, in our case, could refer to a health system, an education system, or even an entire society. Within these systems there are people, processes, services, institutions, norms and laws. A systems thinking approach is especially critical when tackling complex or wicked problems like climate change, health equity and persistent poverty.

A systems thinking approach forces us to think about the impact of our actions. If we introduce a new service or influence an element of the systems, how will it affect the people we intend to serve? How will it affect others within the community? What are the unintended consequences of our actions? How might each element of the system (laws, social norms, services, relationships) support or limit our objectives and intended impact?

The [key principles of systems thinking](#) include:

- **Interconnectedness:** All elements within a system – people, institutions, services – are connected to one another. To carry out large-scale Social and Behaviour Change, we must consider the impact of our programmes on every actor within the system.
- **Synthesis:** We must seek to understand all of the elements that create and further complicate social and development challenges as dynamic, interdependent factors. Understanding these factors as deeply intertwined rather than isolated and discrete may require them to be tackled together.
- **Emergence:** A systems thinking approach requires us to understand and describe development outcomes as a cumulative result of changing relationships, systems strengthening, and social and environmental change.
- **Feedback loops:** Elements within a system are interconnected in ways that may reinforce one another. This creates feedback loops that we can observe, learn from and ultimately influence.
- **Causality:** A systems thinking approach sheds light on the causes and effects within a dynamic and evolving system. For each action we take as development practitioners, we must consider not only the immediate, proximal results of that action, but also the future actions it will inspire – otherwise, we risk a plethora of unintended consequences.

#### Putting it all together

Distinct but overlapping, these three approaches form the basis of UNICEF's mindset for Social and Behaviour Change. In all programmes, we seek to dignify people by placing their rights and needs above all else. We involve people as agents of change rather than passive recipients of services or commodities. We consider the complex, interconnected and dynamic socioecological contexts in which people live, including the relationships between people and systems of power or influence. By upholding these principles, we can design programmes that effectively address challenges and build upon existing opportunities holistically.

#### Putting it into practice

The table below outlines a few actions to keep in mind when conceptualizing policies and programmes, designing activities and evaluating impact, to ensure that all UNICEF SBC initiatives are rights-based, people-centred and systems-oriented.

**When conceptualizing policies and programmes**

- Involve communities in the identification and prioritization of social and behavioural challenges
- Design all aspects of the implementation to be community-led, inclusive and participatory
- Ensure that government actors and agencies are positioned as duty-bearers, who exist to support community needs, rather than as the sole decision-makers. Allocate sufficient time and resources to understanding the broader system of contextual drivers and barriers to Social and Behavioural Change
- Incorporate monitoring and accountability systems to ensure that policies and programmes do not reinforce inequitable power structures

**When designing activities**

- Ensure that all activities empower and give agency to the communities and individuals involved
- Co-design solutions with communities; ask for input early and often from a diverse range of voices
- Prioritize the needs of the most marginalized voices within society
- Consider participation and agency as valid outcomes of activities
- Aim to build the capacity of local actors to lead the design and implementation process, when possible.

**When evaluating impact**

- Include agency and empowerment as key outcomes, focusing on underserved populations
- Measure systemic and downstream changes as a result of programmes
- Seek to capture and report any unintended or negative consequences in a transparent manner
- Ensure widespread dissemination of results to all stakeholders (both governments and community structures)
- Use qualitative research and storytelling methods to build a deep understanding of the "why" behind any results

**Sources:**

**Human rights-based approach**

- [The Human-Rights Based Approach \(UNFPA\)](#)
- [Minimum quality standards and indicators in community engagement \(UNICEF\)](#)

**People-centred approach**

- [Towards a More People-Centered Paradigm in Social Development \(Aspalter, 2006\)](#)
- [IDEO Design Thinking](#)
- [Human-Centered Design: Accelerating results for every child by design \(UNICEF, 2016\)](#)

**Systems thinking**

- [A Definition of Systems Thinking: A Systems Approach \(Arnold & Wade, 2015\)](#)
- [Tools for Systems Thinkers: The 6 Fundamental Concepts of Systems Thinking \(Acaroglu, 2016\)](#)