



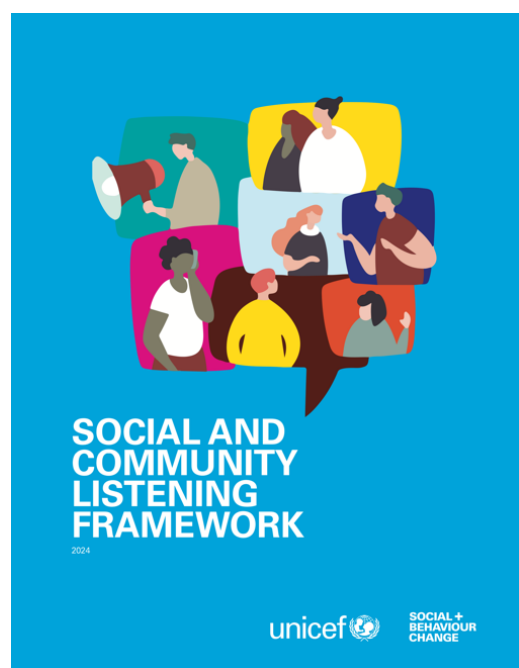
Social and Community Listening

Tracking public opinion and responding to rumours

Social and Community Listening (SCL) is a systematic approach to understanding community voices by gathering and analyzing existing data from digital, media, and direct feedback channels. SCL is not new, listening to communities and designing locally relevant interventions have been at the core of UNICEF's operations for decades. SCL is an evolution of this community-centric commitment. It builds on conventional methods of feedback by incorporating modern technologies and expands data sources to create a more holistic and responsive system for understanding community needs.

By tracking discussions and concerns on issues ranging from health and vaccination to educational access and child protection, SCL helps identify trends, detect emerging risks, and inform programmatic decisions. This approach empowers teams to connect their interventions with the real and evolving needs of children and communities, ensuring that their work remains relevant and impactful.

[Download the UNICEF Social and Community Listening Framework here.](#)



Defining Social and Community Listening

UNICEF's SCL Framework 2024 defines the practice as, "the process of gathering and analyzing readily available community voices from publicly accessible online, offline, and on-ground sources to inform programmatic action." SCL focuses on passively listening to publicly accessible data rather than actively soliciting input. This approach emphasizes the authenticity of "community voices" and respects the context in which information is shared.

Online platforms like social media, blogs, forums, and public websites offer immediate insights into

community concerns, often highlighting issues as they arise in real time. Offline media such as newspapers, radio, and TV broadcasts capture perspectives from communities that may not be well-represented online, particularly in areas with limited internet access. On-ground sources, including feedback collected through call centers, public meetings, field reports, academic research, and interactions with frontline workers, provide grounded, localized insights into community challenges.

Objectives and Impact of Social and Community Listening

The primary goal of SCL is to translate community sentiments into actionable interventions. By observing conversations and narratives, SCL can detect emerging issues, uncover social and behavioural trends, and provide nuanced insights that help organizations respond effectively to community needs.

Integrating SCL into programme planning and advocacy also helps programme teams adapt quickly to rapidly changing environments, such as during public health emergencies, natural disasters, or periods of social tension.

Relevance of SCL to UNICEF

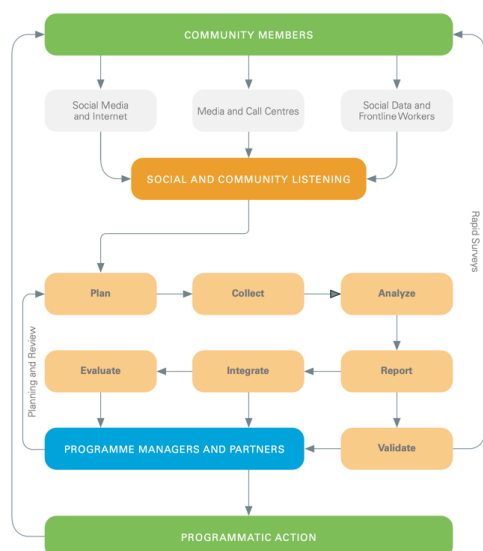
For UNICEF, Social and Community Listening is essential for advancing its mission to protect children's rights and well-being by enhancing programme relevance and community alignment. With a focus on children and underserved populations, UNICEF uses SCL to understand issues affecting children, adolescents, young people and families around any programme priority.

Applications in UNICEF's Work for Children

- 1. Public Health Emergencies:** SCL allows UNICEF to track public sentiment in the context of public health emergencies, for which vaccinations intervention or other preventive health interventions might be required. For example, during an immunization drive, SCL can reveal community concerns or misinformation, enabling targeted SBC strategies that can address fears or myths affecting children's health.
- 2. Social and Behavioural Research:** SCL provides UNICEF with insights into social and behavioural drivers, such as attitudes toward adoption of services or preventive behaviours. By aligning the insights collected with behavioural models, UNICEF can better understand community behaviours that affect children and adapt programmes to encourage healthier, more supportive environments.
- 3. Crisis Response:** In emergencies like natural disasters or conflicts, SCL is used to assess urgent needs and monitor the effectiveness of response efforts. Community feedback on access to resources, such as food, water, or medical aid, helps UNICEF optimize resource allocation and adjust recovery efforts in real time.
- 4. Policy and Advocacy:** SCL captures authentic community voices and experiences, which UNICEF uses to support advocacy efforts. This data provides evidence for programmatic and policy recommendations that amplify community concerns, pushing for systemic changes that benefit children's welfare.

The SCL Process

Social and Community Listening generally utilizes the following steps:



1. **Plan:** Define clear research questions linked to programme objectives. Conduct Information Ecosystem Analyses (IEAs) and identify relevant keywords.
2. **Collect:** Gather data from multiple sources—online platforms, offline media, and on-ground reports, each contributing unique perspectives.
3. **Analyze:** Analyze data using both quantitative metrics (volume, reach, engagement) and qualitative methods (thematic coding, narrative analysis) to derive actionable insights.
4. **Report:** Synthesize findings into standardized reports with a focus on clear, actionable recommendations.
5. **Validate:** Cross-check insights using surveys, frontline interviews, or community meetings, strengthening confidence in the data.
6. **Integrate:** Embed SCL insights into programme planning and decision-making processes to ensure their practical application.
7. **Evaluate:** Set goals and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of SCL in achieving desired programme outcomes.

The entire process involves active collaboration with Programme Managers and Partners to ensure that the planning and review stages align with the overall objectives of the intervention and reflect community needs.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Despite its advantages, SCL presents challenges, particularly around data privacy, representation, and ethical considerations. For example, data privacy concerns arise when handling sensitive information, such as health-related discussions, which must be anonymized to protect individuals. Ethical considerations also include obtaining community consent, ensuring transparency about how the data is used, and addressing the risk of surveillance or misuse of public data. Additionally, SCL relies on publicly available data, which may not always represent the full spectrum of voices within a

community, especially those lacking access to digital platforms. UNICEF addresses these limitations by combining SCL with on-ground sources and validation exercises to ensure a more balanced perspective.

Ethical standards are central to SCL practices, with UNICEF emphasizing data anonymization, community consent, and transparency about how data is used. Protecting the integrity and privacy of the communities served is a priority, especially when listening to sensitive topics such as child health and protection.

Benefits of SCL for Community-Centered Programming

By placing community voices at the forefront of decision-making, Social and Community Listening supports more inclusive, community-centered programming. It provides an unfiltered view of community concerns and priorities, allowing teams to adapt to evolving needs and mobilize resources effectively. For UNICEF, this means not only addressing immediate needs but also striving for systemic improvements that lead to better long-term outcomes for children.

SCL's emphasis on authentic community input ensures that interventions are shaped by those most affected, leading to greater trust and ownership by the community. Moreover, SCL allows for dynamic, real-time adjustments in programme strategies, making UNICEF's interventions more agile and capable of addressing both acute and chronic challenges faced by children. By building strong feedback loops, SCL helps UNICEF foster resilience in communities, equipping them with the tools and information they need to actively participate in shaping their futures.

Future of SCL

Advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) present new opportunities to further enhance SCL's capabilities. AI-driven analytics, natural language processing, and machine learning can help automate data collection and analysis, allowing for more accurate sentiment analysis, rapid trend detection, and deeper insights into community narratives. These advancements will enable organizations to be even more proactive in addressing emerging community issues. By leveraging AI, SCL can scale to include broader and more diverse data sources, providing richer, real-time insights that will improve the responsiveness and impact of humanitarian and development interventions. As SCL evolves, its integration into global humanitarian and development efforts, coupled with the power of AI, will continue to redefine how organizations listen, engage, and act on the voices of those they serve.

Summary

Social and Community Listening represents a transformative approach to understand and respond to community needs. Through its real-time, inclusive, and community-driven insights, SCL enables organizations like UNICEF to tailor interventions, promote evidence-based advocacy, and enhance the effectiveness of programs supporting children's health, education, and protection.

Resources

- [UNICEF SCL Framework - 2024](#)