

Learning-Focused Evaluation of the UNICEF Mozambique Response to the Level 2 Emergency in Cabo Delgado



EVALUATION
SUMMARY
BRIEF



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Introduction

This brief presents the outcome of the learning-focused evaluation (LFE) of the UNICEF Mozambique response to the Level 2 (L2) emergency in Cabo Delgado Province (16 June 2020 – 31 October 2021), commissioned by ESARO in accordance with the requirements for L2 emergencies.

The LFE covers the UNICEF Mozambique Country Office response to the L2 emergency in Cabo Delgado from June 2020 to the present, in accordance with the terms of reference (TOR). The evaluation began in June 2021 and extended to October 2021.

CONTEXT

The insurgency in Cabo Delgado has its roots in a long history of conflict going back to the civil war as well as economic marginalisation and tribal power dynamics.

The perception of exclusion from the benefits of natural resources exploitation in the province amidst growing poverty and lack of opportunity (the province has the highest illiteracy rate in the country, at 67 per cent, and a high youth unemployment rate, estimated at 88 per cent) created a youth-led movement which started a relatively small rebellion in 2017. Several attacks on civilians in 2018 and 2019 were met with a military response from the Government.

As a result, increasing numbers of residents left their homes in the northern districts of Palma, Moçimboa da Praia and Nangade and moved to the relative safety of Pemba. The situation escalated to a humanitarian crisis in 2020 with continuing violent attacks and consequent displacement, with current estimates of 642,404 internally displaced persons in Cabo Delgado and an additional 99,448 internally displaced persons in Nampula. Of these, 81 per cent are living with host families and 46 per cent are children.

The crisis in Cabo Delgado is essentially a child protection emergency. Children in the conflict-affected areas already faced vulnerability and deprivation because of frequent natural disasters, poor access to basic services and disease outbreaks.

Cyclone Kenneth caused widespread damage and displacement in April 2019, leaving 374,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance and ongoing support for the cholera outbreak that followed.

In 2020, COVID-19 and its restrictions, including a national curfew, limited economic opportunities for residents in the province. Child poverty is also considerably higher in the northern and central provinces than those in the south: the Cabo Delgado child poverty rate is estimated at 50 per cent.

UNICEF's strategy has evolved with the crisis from basic relief distribution to internally displaced persons in late 2019 to the latest revision of the Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal, which targets up to half a million people with multiple interventions in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, nutrition, social protection, education, child protection and communication for development (C4D).

As the conflict seems likely to become a protracted crisis for the population of Cabo Delgado, the next stage for UNICEF is to develop a longer-term strategy for the complex needs in a protracted conflict crisis in disaster-prone regions. UNICEF has an opportunity to build capacity with its government partners and local organizations, and to strengthen systems for preparedness and resilience to multiple shocks.

OBJECTIVES, PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

The overarching purpose of the LFE was to promote learning and support mid-term course corrections and long-term planning for what comes after the Cabo Delgado L2 response. In agreement with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), there was a slight shift of focus from mid-response course correction to reviewing and learning from the response and adopting a more integrated strategy, blending the strengths of a development programme with preparedness and response capacity. The objectives of the LFE were to:

- Provide a preliminary assessment of UNICEF's response to the Cabo Delgado crisis regarding its relevance, effectiveness, coverage, coordination and partnerships, with a specific focus on its adaptivity to changing conditions and how it has addressed marginalization and deprivation.
- Use key lessons and recommendations from the response thus far to enable the UNICEF Mozambique Country Office (MCO) to make mid-term adjustments and to formulate the transition from an L2 emergency response to long-term strategy as part of the new Country Programme Document (CPD).

The evaluation covered the period from the start of the UN's Rapid Response Plan, in June 2020, through the L2 emergency activation, in November 2020, to the present. The timing was designed to allow the findings to feed into a conflict- and fragility-sensitive CPD for UNICEF.

Although all sectors were considered, only education, WASH and child protection were explored through detailed data collection. The anticipated outputs set out in the TOR were altered to include recommendations for a strategic direction for an integrated programme for the northern provinces rather than a response theory of change.

The LFE considered the following core learning questions:

- How well has UNICEF responded to the Cabo Delgado emergency?
- What UNICEF approaches have had the most impact on the needs of affected households and what are the barriers in the response so far?
- What actions and changes in strategy are required to develop a conflict-sensitive, long-term programme for Cabo Delgado?

The LFE learning questions were expanded into a full evaluation matrix (as summarized in Annex 2). The matrix guided the design of questionnaire guides (supplied in Annex 4) and helped to identify key informants and focus group respondents. The steps in the evaluation are shown in the figure (below).

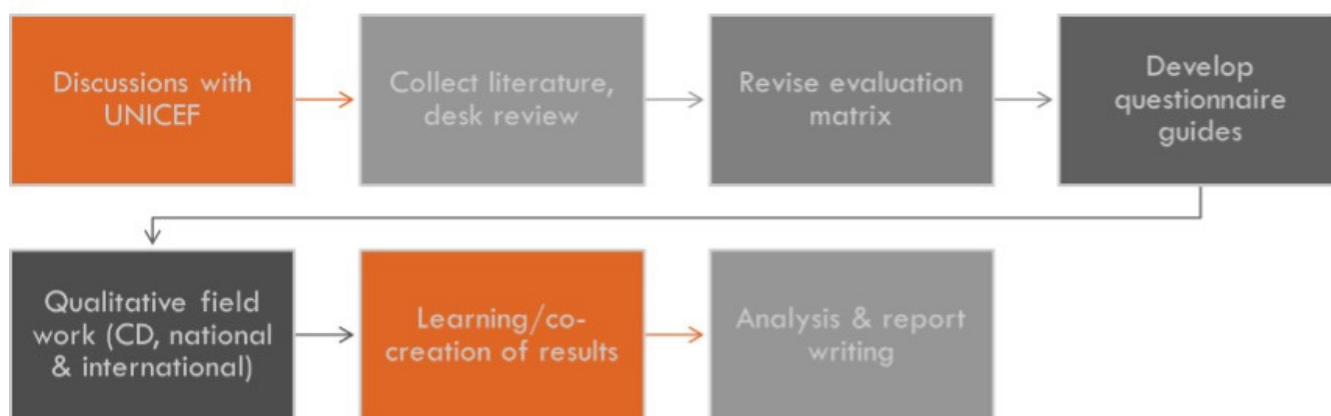
In line with the TOR, field data was collected fully independently of UNICEF, with the LFE team organizing its own transport and security and setting up focus groups and key informant interviews directly with partners, stakeholders and local authorities.

The members of the ERG provided guidance on and input for the methodology, and co-created conclusions and recommendations. A Special Advisory Group (SAG) was formed to allow external stakeholders to participate at key points in the evaluation.

The very short period available for data collection in Cabo Delgado prevented full coverage of activity sectors, geographic locations and beneficiaries. Ideally, the team should have spent two weeks in the field.

Ethical guidelines for interviewing adolescents made it difficult to organize interviews in a short field visit and the team had to adapt youth focus groups to identify the key needs and gaps in the response for adolescents.

Difficulties in obtaining visa approval meant the team leader was not able to join the team for data collection in Cabo Delgado but daily consultation and joint analysis ensured the quality of the process. Ultimately the KIIs exceeded the target sample and a wide range of UNICEF and partner staff contributed.



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this LFE are based on a systematic analysis of the primary and secondary data collected. The findings and analysis presented follow the nine main criteria areas identified for this evaluation relating to the first two learning questions concerning i) UNICEF performance so far and ii) successful approaches and challenges, and address the questions prioritized in the evaluation matrix (Annex 2). The analysis of the third, forward-looking learning question is presented in the lessons learned and recommendations.

Effectiveness

On the whole, beneficiaries appreciate the support they have received from UNICEF and its partners, and the provision of hygiene kits and nutrition screening for the newly displaced was timely and effective. Both internal and external stakeholders feel that UNICEF was slow in scaling up the response and there are still significant gaps in meeting the needs of the families and children affected. While Cluster- and UNICEF-specific information management systems are improving across UNICEF, the current monitoring does not provide enough information on activities and outcomes in each location to be able to ensure an effective 'package' of support to affected households.

Some beneficiaries indicated that local politics and power dynamics influence the distribution of relief and that certain vulnerable groups, such as widows and persons with disabilities, do not receive support appropriate to their needs. Accountability mechanisms are not evident in the response and affected populations did not always feel consulted and have not found feedback mechanisms that they can trust.

Despite the efforts of UNICEF and Government partners, basic services are still inadequate in many of the temporary camps and host communities. Many internally displaced children, especially in older age groups, are not accessing education for a variety of reasons, including stigmatization. The limited provision of child-friendly learning spaces (CFLS) or activities for children has left many children without psychosocial support and effective rehabilitation.

Coverage and Proportionality

Security constraints prevent UNICEF reaching several of the districts in the province. Some respondents felt that UNICEF had taken a very risk-averse approach compared to other humanitarian organizations and could have taken a bolder approach to reaching displaced populations in highly conflict-affected areas.

Despite considerable scale-up in 2021, UNICEF is targeting a relatively small proportion of those in need in Cabo Delgado and is providing services to even fewer. Discussions with stakeholders suggest that UNICEF may not have the capacity to cover many districts and could therefore be more effective if it focuses on successfully supporting affected populations in a limited number of districts.

QUALITY AND COHERENCE

While there are gaps in meeting the needs in some areas, the response activities in most sectors have followed Sphere standards and the Core Commitments for Children. In the WASH sector, government insists on national development standards which are hard to reach in an emergency. All actors should be familiarized with Sphere standards and accountability frameworks and are following humanitarian principles.

The MCO fully recognized its humanitarian responsibility to respond to the Cabo Delgado crisis and led the United Nations Country Team in taking action. However, the MCO's inexperience in programming for a conflict crisis resulted in sometimes incoherent planning and leadership.

With clearer, more strategic aims for the response, UNICEF could have mobilized appropriate resources more effectively.

EQUITY

The MCO commitment to inclusion, especially of persons with disabilities, is impressive and there is strong leadership and strategy in this area. Direct programming for persons with disabilities through specialist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is working well but coverage is limited. More focus on inclusion across all partner programmes is necessary but partners need capacity building to strengthen their monitoring of disability markers.

The response included some gender-specific activities, such as distribution of dignity kits and identifying girls at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Although gender equity is not an explicit aim of the response, sector activities could have more actively promoted gender equity and women's empowerment.

CONNECTEDNESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

UNICEF's mode of delivery through Government is a good strategy for ensuring connectedness with long-term programming. It helps capacity building, harmonization and sustainability itself. However, the overall sustainability of the resettlement of internally displaced persons is questionable without significant investment in livelihood opportunities.

Displaced families are reluctant to participate in delivering sustainable services and behaviour change communication when they feel their settlement is temporary. There are positive attempts to ensure sustainability of services (e.g., in WASH) but access to nutrition and health services for internally displaced persons is not likely to be sustained without moving away from a sole reliance on mobile health brigades.

The combined HAC and response plan that aims to address the needs of populations affected by three very different disasters is not fit for purpose for a complex, protracted crisis. A separate response plan for the conflict crisis would be difficult to manage but would allow for adapted benchmarks and indicators which are more appropriate to the context.

The MCO's willingness to learn from the response to the cyclones and the conflict in Cabo Delgado and apply the lessons learned to the new CPD is encouraging. The new CPD incorporates more risk-related thinking and some Programme Strategy Notes (PSNs), notably education and child protection, have integrated risk-informed and shock-responsive approaches. However, all the sector result frameworks are orientated towards a traditional development programme, despite Mozambique's risk profile, and still leave 'emergency projects' in a silo.

Collaboration and partnerships will be required to connect the emergency response to more sustainable service provision. The education CPD is already promoting stronger collaboration among sections, Clusters and the World Bank by jointly formulating an analysis and strategic response document with a budget on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH).

COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership with Government is strong, valuable and appreciated, but development-orientated rather than emergency-focused systems slow down response. Other government partnerships (such as in WASH, Health and C4D) demonstrate that the government has mechanisms in place to quickly respond to emergencies.

UNICEF has gradually increased capacity to meet its responsibilities for cluster coordination. However, having UNICEF emergency managers take on the additional role of cluster coordinators compromises the independence and neutrality of the Clusters, leaves gaps in coordination and may discourage some actors from participating.

There is evidence of weaknesses in internal UNICEF coordination both vertically (between the Maputo and Pemba offices)

and laterally (across sectors) despite considerable efforts to maintain good communication during the COVID-19 restrictions.

The establishment of a strong team in Pemba to manage and coordinate the response was a positive step but better coordination mechanisms and tools are needed.

The lack of major international NGOs has resulted in a perception that the humanitarian capacity of partners is a constraint to the response. However, there are unexplored opportunities to build local partnerships with local NGOs and civil society organizations to strengthen the response capacity.

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES FOR REPLICATION

The WASH and health sectors collaborated well in the cholera response and explored options for multi-sector activities delivered by one partner.

Community-based implementation approaches, including strengthening networks of community health workers and working with community-based organizations (CBOs), including women's organizations, for labour-intensive activities, appear to be successful in both internally displaced groups and host communities.

There are opportunities to explore alternative engagement processes beyond programme document-based contracting and to involve community workers (activistas) more consistently in programme design and delivery.

There was rapid mobilization of teams to provide immediate support to newly displaced persons at the arrival and transit sites, as well as several Joint Response Project distributions in Mueda and Palma. Stronger coordination from OCHA is required to replicate this at scale as a standby capacity.

Increasing capacity in information management in Pemba presents an opportunity to advance the adaptation and use of digital platforms for monitoring, thus improving response efficiency, especially if used by the Clusters.

APPROACHES THAT NEED ADAPTATION OR THAT SHOULD BE DISCONTINUED

Local and international staff have managed the Cabo Delgado response to the best of their ability. However, the complexity of the crisis and the need for humanitarian action that is clearly independent of all parties to the conflict, together with the challenges of working with a limited number of partners,

with narrow expertise, required a permanent team of dedicated, well-trained staff based in Pemba. Despite learning from the Cyclone Idai response and a commitment to building more institutional humanitarian capacity, the Pemba office relied too heavily on short-term surge inputs, it took too long to establish the office and it is still not at full capacity.

Monitoring systems that rely only on HAC indicators are not the most useful tool for the response managers. Examples of area-specific monitoring systems exist in the Clusters. An activity tracker introduced for the Cyclone Idai response could be adapted by the UNICEF Pemba team to identify gaps and opportunities for integrated service delivery. This should be a light tool and designed to aid field decision making.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some barriers and challenges were highlighted in previous responses (cyclone Idai) but the recommended solutions have not been initiated in time to be applied in Cabo Delgado. The solutions include improved information management systems, emergency preparedness and response (EPR) training for key staff, strategic use of surge deployments and reinforced standard operating procedures for accountability to affected populations.

There has been rapid staff turnover. New staff did not review or learn from cyclones Idai and Kenneth, so the Cabo Delgado response is, in essence, starting from scratch. The Nampula response was built on more solid learning within the team and partners. The MCO has tried to respond to some of the lessons learned from Idai, including running EPR training, but the training wasn't considered very effective in building capacity.

The MCO has accepted the opportunity to learn from the response of the last 18 months through this LFE and staff have generously committed time to contributing lessons learned and ideas for developing a more agile preparedness and response strategy. The recently produced PSNs reflect more 'nexus' thinking for programming in these high-risk areas but not all sector results frameworks have fully integrated risk-informed and shock-responsive plans.

Learning from outside of Mozambique on approaches for programming in protracted crises will be valuable. It seems the earlier perception that Mozambique was not in a complex emergency has hindered this learning. Exchanging ideas and lessons with other UNICEF country offices with experience in this type of programming would be a good way to strengthen the Cabo Delgado response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As requested in the TOR, the evaluation team formulated forward-looking and actionable recommendations to improve the ongoing responses as well as strengthen programme strategies for the next Mozambique Country Programme. These recommendations were developed out of the evaluation findings as well as the learning event with the ERG.

Immediate adaptations to improve the emergency response

1. UNICEF needs to **focus the programme in Cabo Delgado to fill gaps in unmet needs**, especially in child protection. Considering the funding constraints, this could be achieved by prioritizing critical needs in areas where UNICEF and its partners have capacity and access, without expanding the geographic coverage.

2. UNICEF should **commit to dedicated resources for coordination in all Clusters where UNICEF leads or has an area of responsibility**. There should be a Pemba-based coordinator and an information management specialist in each cluster who is not also acting as a UNICEF emergency programme manager.

3. **UNICEF should continue to collaborate with IOM and WFP to activate the JRP** and jointly strengthen targeting and accountability mechanisms across the response. This requires dedicated staffing for JRP.

4. **Displaced children must be encouraged urgently to go back to school, either through access to formal education or by providing safe learning spaces closer to their settlements**. The education programme should build capacity in government on how to monitor the integration of displaced children into existing schools and temporary learning spaces.

5. **The capacity of staff and the internal processes of the MCO and its key partners should be reviewed and strengthened to better manage emergency and nexus programmes**. This should build on the earlier ERP training but focus on filling specific capacity gaps for effective programming in Cabo Delgado.

6. UNICEF should review the planning and monitoring system for the current emergencies and consider adopting **a more flexible plan specific to Cabo Delgado, with clear strategic objectives and activity and outcome monitoring** appropriate for a protracted crisis.

Changes in strategy for conflict-sensitive programming in Cabo Delgado Province

7. In support of the recommendations from the Country Programme Evaluation, the LFE team recommends that UNICEF be **more focused on doing a few things well instead of too many things poorly.**

8. **UNICEF should develop a comprehensive strategy for the northern Mozambique programme with a focus on resilience and preparedness.** Use experience and resilience models from other protracted crises to develop this strategy.

9. **UNICEF should explore options for new, strategic partnerships,** including partnerships with local NGOs and CBOs with a focus on building capacity for humanitarian action.

10. **UNICEF should adopt a programme approach for provincial and district towns that focuses on expanded service delivery for periphery settlements** rather than camps for internally displaced persons.