Learning from Nutrition Programme Evaluations
A Thematic Report
Child malnutrition costs lives.

- 20 million children under 5 suffer from severe acute malnutrition and are at a nine times higher chance of dying.
- One in four children under 5 are stunted, reducing chances of survival and hindering optimal health and development.

The stakes for UNICEF are high.

- Child survival and development is a key focus of the CRC and UNICEF’s mandate – heightened role in emergencies
- Outcome 4 of the new Strategic Plan (2014-2017) concerns improved and equitable nutrition provision and outcomes.
- Spending on nutrition is growing, esp. in emergencies – need for accountability; Major partnerships have also evolved.
To inform roll-out of UNICEF’s Strategic Plan, new strategy for addressing child undernutrition and future policies and programmes by

- Reviewing evaluation quality and coverage in the field of nutrition
- Presenting key findings from evaluations by evaluation criteria and cross-cutting issues
- Assessing the use of evaluations
- Providing recommendations to strengthen programming and results.
Data Sources / Evidence

- Meta-analysis of 49 evaluation reports
- A survey of UNICEF country offices on evaluation use
- Consultations with selected UNICEF staff
- Broader research / desk review of related documentation
• **Quality is generally adequate** although one-third of the evaluations were “mostly satisfactory”

• **Evaluation coverage is inadequate** vis-à-vis requirements
  
  • Very few evaluations in some regions
  • No evaluations commissioned by ROs
  • Micronutrients is most commonly evaluated (36) and nutrition in emergencies the least (9)
• Generally positive findings

• The majority of nutrition programmes are aligned with local needs and national policies

• 20% of evaluations identified weaknesses in programme design (e.g. poor understanding of causal factors, missing baselines) and insufficient multi-sectoral linkages
Effectiveness of UNICEF-supported nutrition programmes (n=39)

- All targets met or likely to be met: 62%
- Some targets met or likely to be met: 20%
- Target not met or unlikely to be met: 18%

- **Success factors:** strong partnerships, adequate system strengthening and capacity development, integration into national systems, rapid response in emergencies
- **Constraining factors:** unrealistic timeframes, gaps in programme design, inadequate funding, weak M&E systems, insufficient qualified personnel
Efficiency

- Funding is unevenly distributed; Some components (infant and young child feeding, maternal nutrition, community management of acute malnutrition) are underfunded relative to need.

- Evaluations provide weak evidence on programme costs and other operational aspects.

- Over half of the evaluations note weak human resource capacity (implementing partners) as a challenge.
The majority of evaluations note that programme sustainability and scale-up are a concern.

Key issues include:

- Weak national systems, insufficiently trained staff, high turnover of staff
- Failure to integrate nutrition into national health systems and lack of linkages with other sectors
- Insufficient national ownership
- Reliance on external funding/procurement, lack of national funding commitments
Findings by Cross-Cutting Issue

Equity, gender equality and social inclusion

• Nutrition programmes were generally successful in adequately targeting those in need; reaching out to the hard-to-reach was a recurring challenge

• Only 8 of 49 evaluations considered gender and HIV/AIDS as cross-cutting issues

• Only 3 reports looked at disability; all found that disability was not adequately integrated into nutrition programming

Sectoral integration and coordination

• Evaluation reports noted mixed results

• Some found that nutrition programming had been successfully integrated with one more sector, others reported challenges (limited understanding of nutrition needs, poor programme design, insufficient coordination)

• Only a third of evaluations found coordination to be adequate
Findings by Cross-Cutting Issue

Development of national systems and capacities

- Evaluations note that weak national systems and capacities regularly undermine scale-up and sustainability.
- Evaluations reported mixed results in upstream policy work, weaknesses in technical support for integration of equity and gender aspects and multi-sectoral approaches.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Results were mixed: Some examples of successful M&E/innovative information systems; many references to weak monitoring and data gaps.

Partnerships

- Only a small number of evaluations report on partnership initiatives; where included, partnerships were found to have synergistic effects leading to gains in process, coverage and outcomes.
Use of Evaluations

- **Management responses** have been prepared for 78 per cent of the nutrition programme evaluations conducted in the past five years.
- ESARO and EAPRO are the most responsive, having prepared management responses for 90 per cent and 83 per cent respectively of the evaluations.
- Only 17 per cent of **planned actions** have been reported as completed, while 55 per cent of agreed actions are reported to be underway.
- **Areas of evaluation use** have included:
  - Advocating for and changing policy
  - Programmatic and operational shifts
  - Mobilizing resources and building ownership
Key Conclusions

• **Important achievements** were made through UNICEF nutrition programmes in recent years, however, much remains to be done to **improve programme performance and results**.

• Evaluations show **mixed findings on programme design as well as programme effectiveness** and both need to be addressed systematically.

• **Sustainability of results and programme scale-up** is a key concern. This will require enhanced funding, increased national ownership, significant investments in system-strengthening and use of multi-sectoral approaches.

• **Evaluation coverage** of nutrition programmes in both development and emergency contexts **falls below requirements**. **Increased investment in evaluation is required** (including evaluation of partnership initiatives) to match UNICEF’s’ major commitment to improving child nutrition.

• **Follow up of actions planned in the Management Response has been insufficient**. It requires management action.
Recommendations (Summary)

• Improve nutrition **programme design** in line with results-based management principles, including
  • Identification and **sharing of good practices** and guidance
  • **Training** on results-oriented programme planning and management and on the use of multi-sectoral approaches

• **Strengthen national/local systems** to respond to priority nutrition needs through upstream policy work, technical support and institutional capacity development.
  • Prepare and disseminate context-specific **guidance/tools** on systems development and institutional capacity for nutrition
  • Enhance UNICEF’s own capacity on **advocacy and upstream policy work** and nutrition system strengthening

• Develop strategies and plans to address gaps in **evaluation coverage**, especially in countries with a high malnutrition burden and in humanitarian emergencies.

• Improve the dissemination and **use of evaluations**.