



**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.

Purpose / Objectives of the Report



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)

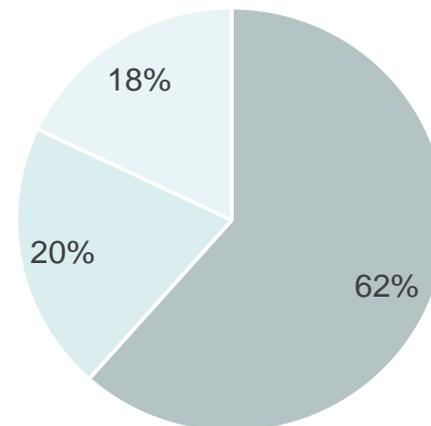


- Generally positive findings
- The majority of nutrition programmes are aligned with local needs and national policies
- 20% of evaluations identified weaknesses in programme design (e.g. poor understanding of causal factors, missing baselines) and insufficient multi-sectoral linkages



Effectiveness of UNICEF-supported nutrition programmes (n=39)

- All targets met or likely to be met
- Some targets met or likely to be met
- Target not met or unlikely to be met



- **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



- **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**.