TERMS OF REFERENCE

EVALUATION OF THE UNICEF-GOVERNMENT OF NETHERLANDS COOPERATION PROGRAMME ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT 2008-2010

BACKGROUND

The Early Childhood Development programme, supported by the Government of the Netherlands (GoN) aims to promote comprehensive programming approaches to early childhood development in selected countries with a focus on sustainable policy development and partnership to scale up successful interventions. In consultation with Regional Offices and the GoN Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative, ten countries from Asia and Africa have been selected: Cambodia, Ghana, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Malawi, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Swaziland. In addition, all seven of UNICEF’s Regional Offices and Headquarters receive funds to strategically support the scaling-up of ECD activities and specific support to those countries listed above.

The detailed programme design can be found in the Early Childhood Development Proposal document which covers the period April 2008 – December 2010 with a funding support of 13.5 million USD by the Government of the Netherlands. The overall goal of the programme is to expand holistic early childhood development, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the ten selected countries from Asia and Africa:

The three strategic objectives of the programme are to:

1. Generate, manage and disseminate new knowledge in support of ECD interventions, essential to inform decision makers on investing in ECD;
2. Increase capacity of service providers and decision makers on ECD and improve behaviour, practices, skills, choices and decision-making powers of caregivers;
3. Mainstream ECD in national development policies and programmes.

Following UNICEF’s organizational structure, the Programme has been implemented through UNICEF’s support at three levels: (1) at the country level (where the programme is guided by agreements between UNICEF, the government departments and identified NGOs in the key documents called Country Program Action Plans and the annual work plans) with UNICEF ECD Officers or focal points responsible for managing programme planning and implementation; (2) at the regional level, with ECD Advisors or focal points for ECD, playing a key role in providing technical support, capacity building, networking as well as monitoring quality at the country level and (3) at New York Headquarters, with the ECD Unit providing overall coordination, guidance and technical support to the Regions and Countries. Programme achievement, challenges and the way forward were the subject of the Annual meeting of all implementing countries, donors and extended ECD network held in New York, in May 2009. Apart from the meeting report, a comprehensive donor report for programme progress in 2008 is available. Country programme progress reports will be available in March.

EVALUATION PURPOSE

An independent evaluation of the programme in 2010 was planned as part of the programme proposal. The purpose of the proposed evaluation is to strengthen on-going and upcoming ECD programmes and
policies by systematically generating and disseminating evidence on the latest ECD programme performance and experience including identification of good practices. The lessons and recommendations will be used by UNICEF, donor countries and a variety of partners to advocate for leveraging of resources for appropriate and effective ECD strategies and interventions to help realise the MDGs and child rights. The specific **objectives** of the evaluation are as follows:

a) To provide an analytical review of the progress achieved in implementing the ECD programme, identify key successes, good practices and gaps and constraints that need to be addressed.

b) To assess the programme’s performance using standard evaluation criteria of relevance/appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact (potential) and sustainability.

c) To examine the use of cross-cutting issues/strategies including human rights-based approaches, results-based planning and gender equality/mainstreaming.

d) To generate evidence based lessons, recommendations to guide the way forward to further strengthen on-going efforts, new initiatives including possible programme replication and scaling up.

The timing of the evaluation is scheduled to inform the UNICEF planning process, to share the sample of good practices globally, but also to perform corrective measures and make necessary programmatic shifts when needed.

At the global level, the findings and recommendations will be used for developing new/revised ECD policy documents, technical guidance and for further advocacy and fundraising efforts. At the country level, the country specific recommendations will be used in designing, planning and implementing effective ECD programmes at the national level with a clear focus on disadvantaged and difficult to reach children.

**EVALUATION SCOPE AND FOCUS**

The evaluation will assess programme achievement and performance at two levels, at the overall ECD strategy level and at the level of the 3 main programme pillars namely: capacity development; knowledge generation and management and mainstreaming ECD in programmes and policies (see the basic programme logic in Annex I).

The primary focus of the evaluation is to examine overall ECD programme results and processes at the country level, as well as NYHQ and regional level efforts/support. In addition, the evaluation will intensely examine achievements and performance in **four** selected countries. More specifically, the evaluation will provide evidence-based analysis in order to answer the following questions:

**Programme relevance/appropriateness**

The key questions (to be answered at HQ, RO and CO levels) are:

- How appropriate is the programme strategy as regards to the overall need and objective to expand holistic early childhood development in general and in various country contexts?
- How does the programme relate to other UNICEF supported initiatives which are key to realising ECD goals?
At the Country level, more specific questions will be asked. How relevant and appropriate are the country specific programme strategies and interventions in responding to:

- Country specific needs related to ECD issues of all young children, covering key health, nutrition, early learning, and protection elements?
- Demand and needs of the disadvantaged and less reached young children and families?
- ECD related priorities set forth in the National Development Plans and Policies?
- Demand and needs of service providers?

**Programme effectiveness**

The key questions are:

- To what extent was the Programme successful in generating, processing and disseminating useful knowledge in support of ECD interventions in COs, ROs and NYHQ?
- To what extent did the Programme increase capacity of service providers, caregivers and decision makers on ECD in the 10 countries?
- To what extent did the Programme mainstream ECD in national development policies and programmes in the 10 countries?
- How successful was the programme in addressing particular needs of and targeting/reaching the disadvantaged and less reached young children and families?
- To what extent and in what ways did it influence/change partnerships amongst various parties including the Governments, NGOs, CSOs and others?

In addition, at the country level:

- What are the major achievements in ECD that are attributable to the ECD programme; which strategies have yielded good results? Where are the gaps that need to be addressed?
- What are the key successes in generating new knowledge by the programme? Is it well documented and disseminated within the country and outside? What are the knowledge gaps which still prevent bigger investment in ECD?
- Were capacity building interventions designed to meet the learning needs assessment? What is the contribution of the programme to national capacity-building efforts among ECD and health professionals, policy makers and civil society and/or the private sector?
- To what extent did programme contribute to increasing knowledge and service providers’ practices in promoting and supporting ECD? What is the estimated coverage of service providers and caregivers with these interventions? Is there any evidence of increased knowledge and improved caregivers/service providers’ practices after those interventions (e. g. follow-up visits)? What is the programme role in capacity-building of UNICEF staff? Policy makers? Service delivery providers? Institutions? What the new capacities consist of and how they are being used including for policy/programme development?
- To what extent has the programme contributed to policy dialogue and development of new ECD policies and programmes in the 10 countries participating in the programme? How holistic and comprehensive are those policies? Are they focusing on the most marginalized children? What are still the critical policy/programmatic gaps (if any)? How successfully have links been made between sectors/policies key for young child survival and development?
- Are there any particular good practices and lessons? If yes, please describe.

**Programme efficiency**
• How systematically have the funds been allocated/utilised at each level (across administrative levels and programme strategies/activities) to realise programme objectives? If there are delays/deviations in fund allocation/utilisation, how were these justified and what are the implications for attaining programme objectives? What lessons and recommendations can be drawn for the future?

• How effectively have the programme resources been used to deliver outputs in a timely fashion in order to achieve programme objectives? To what extent were funds used in a cost efficient manner in order to optimise programme outcomes? What conclusions can be drawn regarding sustainability and expansion/replicability of the approaches used?

• How effective and efficient were the coordination mechanisms at the country level (i.e. coordination with Government, including different ministries and other implementing partners, other stakeholders (other UN agencies, NGOs, donors, etc.)? If noticeable gaps are evident, how can they be addressed?

• How timely and effective was UNICEF RO’s and HQ’s guidance and support in achieving overall goals and objectives of the programme? How successful was the coordination between NYHQ, RO and COs within UNICEF? To what extent did the Programme influence internal structures and processes and goals within UNICEF?

Programme sustainability (country level)

The evaluation will examine administrative, institutional, technical and financial sustainability and explore possible opportunities for expansion of effective ECD interventions (partly drawing from questions under efficiency above):

• How appropriate are the current interventions in terms of the ability to sustain without direct UNICEF/ Government of Netherlands technical/financial support?
• What level of progress has been achieved to build ECD programme’s sustainability in its current form?
• What are the issues and options related to the feasibility for replication and expansion?

Programme Impact (outcomes / potential impact)

The programme has been implemented for less than two years and in most cases programme intensity may not be sufficient to examine impact. However, the evaluation will address to the best extent possible the following questions some of which relate to outcome level changes and potential impact:

• To what extent did the programme contribute to a supportive environment of young children (at the family, community and policy level)?
• What is the evidence regarding national and sub-national engagement and ownership of the ECD programme initiative? To what extent has national ownership of ECD programme increased? What are the success factors and lessons learned? Where this has not occurred fully, what are the constraints and consequent lessons for the future? Is there any evidence of increased budgetary allocations?
• What was the programme contribution in creation of strategic partnership (do we know the indicators or do we leave it open to the evaluators? Towards joint ECD goals at the global, regional and national level?
• How significantly has the programme contributed to either revitalize or put ECD high on the national policy and developmental agenda?
Additional Evaluation Questions (Cross-cutting issues)

Human rights-based approach in programming (HRBAP) and gender equality:

How successfully were the key principles of HRBAP applied in planning and implementing the programmes? In particular:

- To what extent and how did the programme involve parents and ECD service providers and other stakeholders in programme design and implementation?
- Was the programme informed by capacity assessment at all levels? How adequately?
- To what extent were the national and local context (knowledge, beliefs, gender and cultural differences) taken into account when programmes were designed at the country level? Were the underlying/root causes of problems/challenges identified and to what extent was the programme able to address them including through appropriate (incl. advocacy and communication) strategies?
- To what extent has the programme contributed to an equitable access to basic ECD services of all population groups? Has the programme made special provisions to reach disadvantaged/marginalised population groups (i.e. ethnic minorities, poorest families, children affected by disabilities)?

To what extent gender equity existed in participation, decision making and access throughout the program cycle?

Result-based approach in programme planning and management:

- To what extent was the programme successful in using key elements of result-based planning and management? More specifically;
- Were the objectives SMART and monitoring reporting indicators/plans developed adequately using internationally agreed indicators in a timely manner?
- How often were outcomes and outputs measured? Was data sufficiently disaggregated to identify excluded groups? To what extent was data/information generated through the Information and monitoring system used in decision-making (i.e. adjusting the planned results/targets, shifting programme focus)?

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

The evaluation will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will involve an extensive inception phase which is based on secondary information sources, gathering of some basic information and visit to one country, a detailed inception report will be prepared. The report which will include draft findings from the first phase of the evaluation will be presented at a meeting planned for early June. The second phase will involve further investigation and preparation of the evaluation report to be delivered by end September, 2010.

Given the multi-dimensional focus of the evaluation, a multitude of methods will be used combining documentary review, interviews, field observation visits, and surveys as follows.

a) Review of secondary data and documents: A list of relevant documents has been prepared and the documents are readily accessible. In addition, programme managers will provide data that are readily available from various sources. The data will be reviewed and analysed during the
inception phase to determine the need for additional information and finalisation of the detailed evaluation methodology.

b) Interviews with key informants: Subjects include members of the Steering Committee, programme coordinators in the countries involved including sub-national level, UNICEF Representatives or deputies, ECD focal points/programme managers, selected project officers at the country office, selected regional and HQ level.

c) Field observation and focus group discussions with service providers, participants/beneficiaries in the programme (ECD service providers, ECD decision/policy makers/NGOs, parents). When organising field visits, gender balance, equal geographical distribution, representation of all population groups, representation of the stakeholders/duty bearers at all levels (policy/service providers/parents/community) to be represented in the interview. It is proposed that four countries are selected (based on criteria to be developed in consultation with the evaluators) for field visit. No major survey at the level of the beneficiaries is envisaged.

Key data collection methods/sources include:

- Baseline information. Each country office will be responsible to compile baseline information on the situation in the country before the intervention and later phases based on secondary data and information that is readily available.
- Internet-based Survey of all parties involved in the programme (UNICEF HQ, ROs, COs, selected donor representatives). Country offices will be responsible to include the local counterparts accordingly and to compile the data at the country level. In-depth, structured interviews and focus group discussions with the selected stakeholders mentioned above.
- In depth interview with selected key informants at the country level (in selected countries which will be visited).
- There is no field level survey envisaged unless the inception phase recommends the need for a survey is essential for the evaluation. If a survey is justified, it will be budgeted separately.

The evaluation is expected to draw out relevant comparisons where possible. This will require comparing ECD programmes across various settings both in terms of institutional processes and performance. For such comparisons, the evaluators must be clear of what is to be considered as a “good” standard. Where possible the evaluation should identify good practices that will form the basis for quality design and assessment efforts in future ECD programming.

**EVALUATION MANAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION**

The evaluation will be managed as an independent evaluation by UNICEF's Evaluation Office under the leadership of a Senior Evaluation Specialist. A Reference Group, chaired by UNICEF Evaluation Office and comprising of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Netherlands, UNICEF ECD Unit and UNICEF Evaluation Office will provide guidance to the evaluation and will comment on all products of the evaluation including the inception report and draft reports.

As the main counterpart, ECD Unit in Programme Division will be responsible for information sharing and arranging meetings of the Reference Group. The ECD Unit will also set up an advisory group representing UNICEF Regional Offices and participating country offices to establishing links between evaluators and UNICEF RO/COs and to facilitate their full participation in the evaluation.
UNICEF ROs/COs will be responsible for providing relevant information at the regional and country level, providing access to relevant reports/statistics, organizing field visits, logistical support, organizing meeting with different stakeholders at the country and regional level. UNICEF COs will also be responsible in assisting in the recruitment of a part-time national consultant in the 4 case study countries.

**EVALUATION TEAM COMPOSITION**

The evaluation is planned to be conducted by an institution or by a registered consultancy group/firm. It is proposed that the team consist of two international evaluation experts (a leader and a technical expert) one of whom must have significant research/evaluation background in ECD. The exact division of work will be decided by the institution/team, but in general, the team leader will have the responsibility for all negotiations, decisions, and deliverables. The technical work is to be divided between the team leader and the team member. Either the team leader or the member must be a woman. In addition, a third consultant (data processing/information specialist) who would help gather information, undertake data analysis will be involved on a part time basis. For each of the 4 participating countries, a national consultant, one per case study country is also envisaged.

The qualifications and experience required are as follows:

**Team Leader:**
- Extensive evaluation expertise and experience and a strong commitment to undertake the evaluation
- Knowledgeable of institutional issues related to development programming (including funding, administration, the role of the UN system, partnerships, human rights, sustainable development issues)
- Familiarity with ECD policy and programme issues either as researcher/evaluator or programme manager
- Team leadership and management, interpersonal/communication skills

**Team Member (technical expert):**
- Extensive evaluation expertise and experience, including methodological and data collection skills;
- Demonstrated skill in conducting evaluations of ECD or related programmes
- Team work and inter-personal communication

**Team Leader and Member:**
- Language proficiency: English (mandatory), French and/or Russian are an advantage (depending on the countries selected for the field visits). Excellent writing skills in English.
- Significant international exposure and experience in working with UN agencies (desirable).
- Advanced university degree in social science, preferably in a topic related to ECD.
- Good communication, advocacy and people skills. Ability to communicate with various stakeholders. Ability to express concisely and clearly ideas and concepts in written and oral form.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**
The evaluation process will adhere to the United Nations norms and standards and ethical guidelines for evaluation available at: http://www.uneval.org/currentwork/currentworklist.jsp?currentworkid=100&doc_cat_source_id=2&doc_source_id=100

**TIMING AND DELIVERABLES**

The evaluation is expected to commence in March and completed in September 2010. It is planned that the contract will be signed by early March and the work on the evaluation will commence by mid-March. The key deliverables are as follows:

- Evaluation plan outlining detailed scope, evaluation framework; methodology; field visit timing and data collection methods (within 2 weeks of signing of the contract).
- Detailed Inception Report, based on the first country visit and secondary data and documentary review, providing findings based on the work completed during the inception phase and final evaluation design/plan. A draft will be shared in advance for comments.
- Presentation of inception report findings and recommendations at early June 2010 meeting.
- Case study reports for 4 countries (drafts to be shared in advance).
- First draft of the evaluation report for review by the reference group.
- Second draft with an executive summary.
- Final edited report (end September 2010).
ANNEX I: ECD Programme LOGIC (Summary)

Operational Goal: Sustainable and effective programmes delivered at scale and quality to all disadvantaged children including in emergencies