Evaluation of the Project ‘Seven Things This Year Initiative’

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

This independent evaluation of the project ‘Seven Things This Year Initiative’ sought to assess the progress that the project has made in achieving its intended results, based on the project’s relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, connectedness and sustainability. ‘Seven Things This Year Initiative’ was initiated in 2012 as one of the few projects in Myanmar with the vision of focusing exclusively on the thematic areas of maternal and child health. It aimed at engaging women, mothers and caregivers to enhance their role in and contribution to child health and development by promoting seven key family health practices.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The project was seen to be relevant in the Myanmar context with respect to its theme of maternal and child health and its responsiveness to the country context and needs. It was observed that the project methodology, with its use of social network theory of change and a cascade model was befitting to the needs of the context and its requirements.

The effectiveness of the project was measured by the level of awareness generated amongst respondents about the seven key family health practices. The evaluation displayed favourable results about the awareness of the behaviour of exclusive breastfeeding, with 95 per cent respondents in ‘case’ and 88 per cent in ‘control’ displaying knowledge of the concept. Sound understanding on the topic of nutritional requirements for pregnant women was noticed as the evaluation revealed that 96 per cent and 90 per cent respondents in ‘case’ and ‘control’ respectively consumed extra food during pregnancy. Positive conversion of awareness into practice was witnessed for immunization, as 94 per cent respondents in ‘case’ and 91 per cent in ‘control’ reported having immunized their infants as per age. Further, the evaluation showed low levels of practice with only 52 per cent respondents in ‘case’ and 46 per cent in ‘control’ responding positively to having used insecticide treated bed nets.

With regard to efficiency, the evaluation team noted that the project had a total budget of MMK 236,903,715 (approximately USD 215,367). A preliminary finding suggested that the project saw 100 per cent utilisation of the funds. However, further analysis indicated that the project had a weak financial management system.

The project was implemented under the partnership of three key stakeholders namely, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS)
and the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) that implemented the project. The evaluation observed that while there existed **convergence at the top level**, there was **limited coordination at the grass-root level**.

In terms of **sustainability**, the evaluation revealed that there was **no defined exit strategy** in the planning stage of the project, due to which various drawbacks surfaced in the transition phase of implementation. In many townships, the project was abruptly discontinued as soon as its designated time period ended.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

The evaluation helped gain insights into existing practices and aided in identifying some main lessons. The primary lesson is the idea of proper planning and its impact on a project. It was seen that appropriate planning can provide a detailed structure to aid the implementation of the project. Further, it was observed that monitoring and reporting play an essential role in the success of a project as they not only set up feedback mechanisms for timely reporting but also monitor barriers and challenges faced in order to correct project course mid-tenure. The evaluation also noticed that employing contextually feasible intervention methods like the cascade model greatly improved its effectiveness. Moreover, the practice of forging relevant partnerships with Government ministries and civil society organisations (CSOs) was seen to be critical to attaining the desired project results.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON POTENTIAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The recommendations for the project were developed with the vision of strengthening key areas in cognizance of the lessons learnt from the project. The main recommendations are, in order of priority, as follows:

- **Developing sound Results Based Monitoring Framework (RBMF):** The evaluation recommends that UNICEF should develop a RBMF detailed with definitive outcomes and outputs for the project, along with activities and objectively verifiable indicators. The appropriate development and utilisation of the same would not only provide a platform for proper monitoring and reporting systems to be used, but also greatly improve accountability of results. Further, this framework should be established in consultation with key stakeholders like Government ministries and CSOs. Such an approach would cultivate a sense of ownership towards the project and expedite the institutionalisation process.

- **Appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the project:** Post the development of a RBMF, it is critical to put in place a supervisory/monitoring framework to ensure effective implementation of the project. In order to facilitate concurrent documentation of information, reporting formats should be introduced that capture quantitative and qualitative data on the coverage and impact of activities. Further, supervision meetings with project managers and volunteers would allow them to share the challenges faced at the grass-root level and contribute to capacity building of facilitators.

- **Ensuring project sustainability:** In order to address the sustainability of the project as a whole, the evaluation suggests advocacy with Government authorities and donor agencies at a macro-level to help continue and institutionalize the project. Coupled with that, the project also must focus on developing an exit strategy to cement the progress made so far and imbibe a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst all stakeholders.

- **Introducing platforms for support-provision:** With respect to the immediate operational measures, the evaluation recommends the introduction of refresher trainings for project volunteers in order to reinforce the knowledge imparted to volunteers and rejuvenate their association with the project.

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