Executive Feedback

Title of the evaluation: External Evaluation of Effectiveness of UNICEF Nutrition Accelerated Reduction of Child and Maternal Under-Nutrition in Seven Districts of Sierra Leone

Sequence No: 2017/001
Region: WCAR
Office: Sierra Leone
Coverage: Sierra Leone
Evaluation Type: Programme
Year of Report: 2017

OVERALL RATING

Fair

Implications:

The evaluation is based on a good mixed methods methodology and presents interesting findings and useful recommendations. However, some improvement is needed for the report to meet UNICEF standards. To begin, it is essential for the Executive Summary to include the evaluation recommendations, as many decision makers may not have the time to read the body of the report. Within the body of the report, it is necessary to clearly identify the evaluation objectives and the evaluation's target audience. It's also good practice to explain how stakeholders were involved in the evaluation process apart from being used simply as sources of information. For instance, was a reference group established to guide the evaluation? Were stakeholders involved in the development of recommendations? Although it appears as though the evaluation was conducted in an ethical manner, GEROS standards require evaluation reports to explicitly explain how evaluators demonstrated ethical behaviour (i.e. absence of conflicts of interest, etc.) and what ethical safeguards were put in place to protect participants. It can be useful for the evaluation report to directly reference the UNEG Ethical Standards. While the evaluation uses a good mixed methods methodology, it is important for the report to explain why the selected data collection methods were appropriate for addressing the evaluation purpose and objectives. The findings are generally strong but could be further strengthened by discussing any unplanned or unintended results and by assessing the extent to which the M&E system is effectively used for decision making. Lessons learned need to be reformulated in order to explain how they can be generalized and applied to similar programmes in other contexts. Recommendations could be more actionable by explicitly identifying the target group for action and the priority order in which they should be implemented. Finally, UNICEF requires all evaluations to consider gender equality and to mainstream gender throughout the evaluation process and the evaluation report. This evaluation could be significantly strengthened by including specific evaluation questions relating to gender equality and by discussing GEEW within the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE EVALUATIONS:

The report provides important nutrition statistics from Sierra Leone and explains why nutrition interventions are necessary, while outlining UNICEF's contributions to improving nutrition in Sierra Leone since 2009. However, the report does not discuss any differences in equity between beneficiaries (i.e. the geographic areas or groups of rights-holders where nutrition levels are lower, etc.). While stakeholders are identified, their specific contributions are not clearly outlined. While the report provides a good summary of the programme interventions, the expected results or general theory of change are not presented.
SECTION B: EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE (weight 5%)

Fair

The evaluation purpose is clearly described and includes information on how the evaluation findings and recommendations will be used. It can be assumed that the evaluation will be used by the UNICEF Sierra Leone office but the end-users of the evaluation are not explicitly identified and could include other groups (i.e. Government of Sierra Leone, other UN partners, NGOs, etc.). The report identifies things that the evaluation hopes to achieve (i.e. identification of lessons learned and best practices, etc.) but does not clearly identify these as the evaluation objectives. The evaluation scope is clearly outlined in terms of time, geography, and thematic coverage including what programming elements were not covered as part of the evaluation.

SECTION C: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY (weight 15%)

Fair

The evaluation used an adequate mixed methods methodology but the report explains that the statistical data provided by UNICEF was generally not of high enough quality to confidently determine the impact of the programme on the nutrition status of the beneficiaries (other factors may have contributed to changes in nutrition levels). The report would be stronger if it not only presented the data collection methods that were used but if it also justified why these methods were considered adequate for the evaluation purpose. The report clearly identifies the evaluation criteria and explains why the criterion of impact could not be assessed (i.e. due to missing statistical data). Unfortunately, the report does not include any information (apart from a consent form) around how ethical issues were considered by the evaluation team, including the ethical obligations of the evaluators as well as ethical safeguards used to protect participants.

SECTION D: EVALUATION FINDINGS (weight 20%)

Satisfactory

Evaluation findings are structured around the evaluation criteria and evaluation questions and make good use of multiple lines and levels of evidence and benchmarks, as well as the programme's results framework (which is also presented in an appendix). While unexpected findings are vaguely discussed throughout the report, they are not clearly identified or discussed in any great detail. The report is strong at assessing the programme's M&E function but could be further strengthened by discussing in greater detail how M&E information is used by the programme's management to inform decision-making.

SECTION E: EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS & LESSONS LEARNED (weight 15%)

Fair

Conclusions are analytical in nature and highlight the programme's primary strengths and areas for improvement as well as the foreseeable implications of the findings. They are structured around the programme objectives, which provides a useful way of assessing the extent to which the programme objectives were or were not met. Lessons learned are presented on pp. 55 and 56 but are not presented in the correct format and are overly specific to the object of evaluation. Lessons learned should identify generalizable lessons that can be applied to similar programmes in other contexts.

SECTION F: RECOMMENDATIONS (weight 15%)

Satisfactory

Recommendations are logically derived from the evaluation findings and conclusions and will likely be useful to decision makers. While it could be assumed that most of the recommendations are targeted towards the UNICEF Sierra Leone Country Office, this should be explicitly stated and it should be clearly mentioned if any recommendations are intended for other stakeholders. Recommendations are nicely grouped into categories but the order in which they should be implemented is not clearly identified. The report does not specify how the recommendations were developed and whether stakeholders were involved in the process.
SECTION G: EVALUATION STRUCTURE/PRESENTATION (weight 5%)

**Satisfactory**

The report is well structured with clear sections and sub-sections and is presented in a logical order. The opening pages contain all of the required information with the exception of the timeframe of the evaluation. It is particularly useful that the evaluators include their contact information within the opening pages. The annexes include all of the required information (including the ToRs; lists of people interviewed and documents reviewed; copies of data collection tools; an evaluation matrix; and a description and justification of the evaluation team composition) but not all of the annexes are accessible as some of them are embedded into the text through links that are not functional.

SECTION H: EVALUATION PRINCIPLES (weight 15%)

**Unsatisfactory**

The evaluation report discusses the extent to which the programme was sensitive to equity considerations and includes recommendations on how to improve equity. However, there is no evidence that the evaluation used a human rights framework and GEEW principles were not thoroughly mainstreamed throughout the evaluation. The report explains how the evaluation methodology was sensitive to gender equality concerns (i.e. female enumerators worked with female respondents whenever possible) but there are no specific evaluation questions designed to collect information on gender equality and gender is hardly mentioned in the evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (weight 5%)

**Fair**

The Executive Summary is well written and provides insightful information around the evaluation and its methodology as well as the evaluation findings and conclusions. However, the Executive Summary does not include a section with any recommendations, which is one of the most important elements to include in the summary and is essential for decision makers.

**Does the evaluation meet UN SWAP evaluation performance indicators?**

3 Missing requirements

**Recommendations for improvement**

*Section A*

It is important to not only identify programme stakeholders but to also discuss their contributions towards the programme. An effective way of doing so can be to present stakeholders and their contributions within a summary table in the programme description section of the report. Additionally, it is good practice to provide disaggregated data and information on different groups of beneficiaries to understand any equity differences that may exist between rights holders (including between girls and boys). It is also good practice to present a summary of the programme's key results targets and a general programme theory of change to help the reader to understand early on in the report what the programme is expected to accomplish. If a ToC model does not already exist, it is useful for the evaluation team to re-create one, even if only in general terms.

*Section B*

It is good practice to clearly explain which groups are expected to use the information generated by the evaluation. This information helps to strengthen the evaluation purpose. Additionally, evaluation objectives should be clearly identified and labelled as such.

*Section C*

The report could benefit from increased credibility through a description of why certain data collection methods were chosen to meet the evaluation purpose and objectives (i.e. what was the purpose of using KII or focus group discussions?) Additionally, it is a GEROS requirement to include information in the report about how the evaluation team upheld ethical principles (including conflicts of interest, accountability, etc.) and what kinds of ethical safeguards were put in place to protect participants. It is useful to reference the UNEG Ethical Standards found here: [http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102](http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102)
| Section D | An effective way to identify and discuss unexpected results is to include a dedicated evaluation question and a dedicated sub-section within the report to explore unplanned outcomes. Additionally, it is good practice to assess a programme's M&E system. As part of this assessment, it is particularly useful to discuss how M&E data is used by decision makers and to provide recommendations on how to better base decision-making on documented evidence. |
| Section E | Lessons learned should identify generalizable lessons that can be applied to similar programmes in other contexts and should not simply present highlights from the evaluation findings. |
| Section F | In order for recommendations to be clear and actionable, it is important to explicitly include some specific details including the target group for action for each recommendation as well as the order in which the recommendations should be implemented. This additional guidance helps stakeholders to effectively implement the recommendations. It is also good practice to explain how the recommendations were developed and the extent to which stakeholders participated in this process. Stakeholder involvement in the development of recommendations adds additional credibility to the evaluation and to the recommendations. |
| Section G | It is useful to not only include the date of the final evaluation report but to also specify the timeframe of the evaluation within the report's opening pages. Additionally, it is best to attach all documentation in the annexes directly to the evaluation report and to not rely on links to external documents since links are not always reliable. |
| Section H | It is good practice to structure evaluation reports around a human rights framework and to use human rights language (i.e. rights holders, duty-bearer, etc.). For instance, the report could be strengthened by explaining how adequate nutrition is a human right. Additionally, even though the programme is focused on women and children, it is still necessary to mainstream GEEW principles throughout the evaluation and the report. To ensure that gender is taken into consideration, it is useful to dedicate specific evaluation questions to gender equality (i.e. how well the needs of both girls and boys were met by the programme, the extent to which the programme design considered gender equality, etc.). |
| Section I | It is absolutely essential to include the evaluation recommendations in the Executive Summary, as they are key for decision makers and oftentimes decision makers only have time to review the Executive Summary in isolation from the rest of the evaluation report. |