Executive Feedback

Title of the evaluation: Evaluation of the UNICEF Response to the Lake Chad Basin Crisis in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria

Sequence No: 2018/001
Region: WCAR
Office: WCARO
Coverage: Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria
Evaluation Type: Programme
Year of Report: 2018

OVERALL RATING

Satisfactory
Meets UNICEF/UNEG standards for evaluation reports and decision makers may use the evaluation with confidence

Implications:

SECTION A: BACKGROUND (weight 5%)
Fair

The report does a nice job of describing the causes of the emergency crisis in the Lake Chad Basin and how it has affected the wellbeing of children. However, the report does not clearly describe the institutional capacity (or lack thereof) of governments to respond to the crisis. Furthermore, while the report identifies the number of beneficiaries in need, it does not clearly specify how many of them were targeted by the response. The report also does not specify the specific locations where the intervention took place, its budget or its timeline. On the other hand, the report clearly lists the main activities undertaken by UNICEF in each of the five sectors addressed, and key indicators with established targets for each sector are included in an annex. However, the response's expected results are not clearly presented. Additionally, the report states that because of the uniqueness of interventions in the four countries of focus, the evaluation team did not reconstruct a theory of change. Furthermore, several partners are identified in the findings section, but the report does not clearly identify their specific contributions towards implementation. Finally, the relative importance of the intervention to UNICEF is not clearly explained.

SECTION B: EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE (weight 5%)
Satisfactory
The report clearly defines the evaluation purpose of learning and accountability. Additionally, the report identifies specific primary users (UNICEF WCARO, as well as UNICEF Country and Field Offices). However, while the report identifies general uses of the evaluation, it does not clearly explain how each user intends to specifically use the evaluation findings and recommendations. On the other hand, the evaluation scope (in terms of the timeline, thematic and geographic areas covered) is well defined. However, one of the objectives presented in the TOR ("to propose corrective measures, including improving current responses and scale up") is not clearly listed in the report.

SECTION C: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY (weight 15%)

Fair

While the evaluation draws on mixed methods, no particular evaluation approach is mentioned within a discussion around the evaluation design. The evaluation covers standard OECD-DAC criteria, as well as humanitarian evaluation criteria. The evaluation matrix is structured around evaluation questions and corresponding data sources; however, evaluation questions are not accompanied by lines of inquiry or indicators and, therefore, the analytical framework used to answer evaluation questions is not entirely clear. On the other hand, the evaluation does a good job of describing data collection methods. Data sources are explained by a sampling done in 3 stages, but no discussion about the potential gaps or limitations of these choices is provided. While the report presents a section on limitations, it does not explain whether these limitations have affected the evaluation team’s ability to answer all evaluation questions rigorously. Additionally, no mitigation strategy is presented for any of the limitations identified in the report. Finally, general ethical safeguards are clearly described. However, the report does not make explicit reference to the UNICEF procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children and does not clearly mention the obligations of evaluators.

SECTION D: EVALUATION FINDINGS (weight 20%)

Satisfactory

The report provides answers to all evaluation questions, which are reiterated throughout the findings thereby enhancing clarity. The evaluation presents both positive and negative findings, as well as the factors enabling and hindering the achievement of results. Additionally, the report compares actual results with established targets. However, the report does not present a clear results framework or specifically discuss which results were expected, which makes it difficult to understand the extent to which results were achieved. On the other hand, both positive and negative unintended results are discussed. The report also does a nice job of presenting the different views of several consulted stakeholders (e.g., UNICEF staff, community workers, implementing partners). However, while the methodology notes that FGDs were conducted with children, their perspectives are not clearly presented in the report. Finally, the report provides an assessment of the intervention’s M&E system, and explains the extent to which it has been used for decision making.

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

The report does not include a separate section on conclusions, but rather separate conclusions per evaluation criterion embedded with the findings section. Conclusions are logically linked with the findings and provide a nice summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. However, the conclusions lack the level of analysis that is required from good conclusions and do not clearly explain the potential implications of evaluation findings on the future. Finally, the report includes a separate section on lessons learned. Lessons are correctly formulated, contribute to general knowledge and can be applied to wider contexts.

SECTION F: RECOMMENDATIONS (weight 15%)

Satisfactory

Recommendations are linked to evaluation findings and conclusions. Recommendations are clearly targeted at specific users (i.e., unit or staff) and are prioritized on a three-point scale. However, there are too many recommendations (i.e., over 40 main recommendations, which each include several sub-recommendations), making it unclear within these three categories which recommendation should be implemented first. Additionally, many recommendations are overly broad and unlikely to result in concrete action. Finally, the report confirms that recommendations were not validated prior to the elaboration of the draft report, but that the regional and country offices having participated in the evaluation all developed a management response plan before the publication of the report.

SECTION G: EVALUATION STRUCTURE/PRESENTATION (weight 5%)

Satisfactory

The opening pages include all of the necessary information, including the name of the evaluated object, its timeline and geographic reach, as well as the names of the evaluators and commissioning organisation. The annexes include key elements (e.g., country case studies, the TOR, an evaluation matrix, and a list of consulted stakeholders). However, a list of consulted documents and data collection tools are missing. It is understandable how such a large object of evaluation (a multi-country emergency response) may result in a long document, but the current length of the report is excessively long at 176 pages, making its navigation challenging and ultimately less user-friendly. Finally, most sections are logically presented. However, instead of presenting a separate section on conclusions, they are embedded within the evaluation findings based on each evaluation criterion.

SECTION H: EVALUATION PRINCIPLES (weight 15%)

Satisfactory
The evaluation is strong at integrating equity principles and provides an interesting assessment of the extent to which UNICEF was able to reach the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in a context of high insecurity. Additionally, the report provides an interesting analysis of the capacity of UNICEF country offices to implement gender-sensitive programming in an emergency context and provides several recommendations for improvement in this area. However, gender is addressed mostly within a standalone section and limited sex-disaggregated data is presented throughout the report. Although the evaluation adopts human rights language, it does not clearly reference international human rights instruments (e.g., CRC, CEDAW, etc.). Finally, the report confirms the presence of an evaluation reference group and explains how evaluation users were involved in the validation of findings. However, stakeholders were not involved in the development and/or validation of recommendations.

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (weight 5%)

Fair
A satisfactory executive summary is included at the beginning of the report and it is comprehensive enough to help understand the evaluation process and results. However, its length (23 pages) makes it challenging to fulfill its mission of providing users with a quick-to-read summary. It presents some duplications with the content of the report itself as opposed to a succinct summary of the report. The Executive Summary includes most of the required elements (overview of the context, the assignment, the results, and recommendations). However, it does not include any conclusions.

Does the evaluation meet UN SWAP evaluation performance indicators?

| 6 | Approaches requirements |

Recommendations for improvement

The evaluation uses a strong mixed-methods approach that draws on the perspectives of more than 500 individuals from diverse stakeholder groups and therefore provides a robust evidence base for the findings. Even so, the report could be improved in several areas. First of all, it needs to be shortened to be usable to stakeholders (no more than 80-100 pages maximum); it should present correctly formulated, analytical, and forward-looking conclusions; and it should clearly prioritize those recommendations that should be addressed first. This guidance should be provided by the Evaluation Manager to the evaluation team through the ToRs and reinforced throughout the evaluation process.

Even though the evaluation looked at a somewhat irregular object of evaluation, the evaluation could have addressed these areas for improvement had it followed the GEROS standards in these regards. Finally, the decision to create an evaluation reference group was sound since this practice increases evaluation quality and ownership. However, in the future, the reference group should not only validate evaluation findings but also the recommendations.
Section A

The report should have devoted some space to briefly summarize the response objective, locations, and timelines. Emergency contexts are characterized by rapid-onset responses and development partners seldom have time to develop a well thought logframe and ToC, as they normally do in development settings. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the extent to which UNICEF’s response was successful, it is essential that the evaluators outline the main results expected to be achieved through the response. Furthermore, the report could be improved by providing more information on the institutional context within which the response took place and by clearly identifying the type and number of beneficiaries targeted by the intervention. Finally, it is good practice for evaluations to identify, within the context section, key implementing partners and their respective contributions toward implementation. This could be done using a table format. For more information on how to map stakeholders and their contributions, please see: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/mapping_stakeholders. In cases of humanitarian evaluations, presenting this information is particularly important to set the stage for the finding on coordination. Finally, the report could be improved by explaining the relative importance of the intervention to UNICEF (e.g., by comparing the intervention's budget to UNICEF's overall spending on emergency responses, etc.).

Section B

Within UNICEF, regional, country and field offices have different functions and are therefore likely to use evaluation findings and recommendations differently. To ensure that recommendations are well targeted and therefore more likely to be implemented, it is good practice for evaluation reports to clearly identify specific uses for each of the users. This could be done using a table format. Additionally, it is important for the report to clearly explain any changes made to the evaluation objectives as originally stated in the TOR.

Section C

The evaluation could be strengthened by describing which evaluation approach was used to guide the evaluation and by justifying the choice of methods. To learn more, please see: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/start_here/decide_which_method. The evaluation matrix represents the main analytical framework of any evaluation. Therefore, it is good practice for evaluation matrices to include the indicators that will be used to respond to the evaluation questions. Additionally, it is important for the report to explain how the limitations have (or have not) affected the quality/accuracy of findings presented in the report. In this regard, it is also important for each limitation to be accompanied by a mitigation strategy. Finally, the report could be improved by making explicit reference to the ethical obligations of the evaluators and to the UNICEF procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children.

Section D

The report could be improved by further presenting the perspectives of children consulted by the evaluation team. Additionally, even though the object of evaluation (being a humanitarian response) inevitably has a less developed results framework and theory of change design than a standard programme, the quality of the evaluation could have been strengthened had the evaluators attempted to more clearly define the response’s expected results and the inherent theory of change. This would have provided the evaluators with a more solid framework against which it could have assessed results.
Section E

To meet GEROS standards, the evaluation report would need to present analytical conclusions that facilitate collective reflection about the intervention, and that take advantage of the privileged external viewpoint of the evaluators. Conclusions must go beyond a presentation of the findings and facts and should explore their implications on the future of the initiative or UNICEF’s work. The report could be improved by presenting a separate section on conclusions at the end of the report, rather than separate conclusions embedded within the findings section. This would allow the evaluators to elevate the conclusions beyond the findings, make them more analytical and forward-looking, which would thereby better prepare the reader for the recommendations ahead.

Section F

To maximise the likeliness that recommendations will be implemented, it is better for the evaluators to provide fewer recommendations that are more focused and to explain in greater detail how these should be implemented. By providing fewer recommendations, prioritizing those using a three-point scale would then make more sense. Finally, to ensure that recommendations are utilisation-focused, it is important that the evaluators validate recommendations with users before a management response plan is developed. For more information on how to craft good recommendations, please consult: www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/recommendations_in_evaluation.

Section G

It is good practice for evaluation reports to include as annexes the data collection tools, as well as a list of consulted documents. To ensure that the evaluation report remains accessible to all users, it good practice to keep its length to approximately 40-60 pages. The report includes several pictures and the evaluation team could reduce the overall length of the report by removing some of these or by placing them within the annexes. The report could also be strengthened by including a separate section on conclusions prior to the recommendations.

Section H

The evaluation could be improved by anchoring the analysis within a human rights framework (such as the CRC, the CEDAW, etc.) and by making reference to specific articles stipulated therein. Additionally, the report could also be improved by presenting more sex-disaggregated data throughout the report. In this regard, it is good practice for the gender analysis to be mainstreamed throughout the evaluation, in addition to being discussed in a standalone section. For more information on how to mainstreaming GEWE into evaluations, please see: http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/gender-responsive_evaluation_handbook. It is also good practice for stakeholders to be consulted during the development of recommendations to ensure that they are relevant and actionable.

Section I

The purpose of the executive summary is to provide a short overview of the object of evaluation; the evaluation process; and key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It is essential that the Executive Summary be succinct (no more than 5 - 6 pages) so as to be useful to decision makers who may not have the time to read the full report. Therefore, it is essential that the Executive Summary be shortened and that properly formulated conclusions be added.