In 2013, political rivalries triggered a violent conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR). The conflict left approximately 2.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (out of a total population of 4.6 million people). UNICEF appealed for more than USD 620 million between 2013 and 2015 to cover programming needs in CAR, of which nearly USD 410 million was received. With this funding UNICEF was able to strengthen its field presence and accelerate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the populations in need. This brief summarizes the evaluation of that effort.

The Central African Republic (CAR) has suffered from decades of instability, weak governance and conflict. Although the country has great mineral wealth, most of its citizens experience poverty and disease. CAR’s social indicators are among the lowest in the world; in 2012, it was ranked third from last out of 187 countries or territories on UNDP’s Human Development Index.

In 2013, political rivalries triggered a violent conflict. Militias associated with the main political parties committed wanton violence, looting, destruction and killings. By the end of 2013, the entire population was directly or indirectly affected. Approximately 2.2 million, out of a total population of 4.6 million, were in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 394,900 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 20,300 refugees. Children, who make up half of the population of CAR, have borne the brunt of the crisis. Insecurity and lawlessness throughout the country have led to children being displaced, separated from their families, recruited by armed groups, maimed, mutilated, abducted, raped and killed. More than 1.2 million children have been affected and many still remain at risk and continue to require assistance and protection.

For more information visit https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_92843.html
UNICEF’s Response
In December 2013, the United Nations declared a system-wide Level 3 (L3) emergency, and the Humanitarian Country Team\(^1\) approved a 100 Day Action Plan and then a Strategic Response Plan in 2014. Also in December 2013, UNICEF’s Executive Director activated UNICEF’s corporate emergency procedures, mobilizing the organization’s global resources to meet the needs on the ground.

The UNICEF emergency programme was focused on life-saving interventions to address vaccine-preventable and waterborne diseases, malaria and malnutrition, as well as reducing the risks faced by displaced populations. In addition, UNICEF and its partners provided psychosocial assistance and safe learning spaces to children affected by armed conflict and worked on the identification, release and community-based reintegration of children associated with armed groups. Efforts were also made to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and address the needs of GBV survivors.

Findings and Conclusions
Despite the difficult operating environment and the limitations (please see Box 1 for more details), UNICEF was substantially able to deliver on its core objectives.

Role and Strategy
The evaluation found that UNICEF’s response and programme strategies were relevant and appropriate. They were well aligned with the United Nations’ plans and the Core Commitments for Children (CCCs). However, UNICEF’s strategy was poorly informed by needs assessments and gave insufficient attention to accountability to beneficiaries. Also, UNICEF’s response strategy was insufficiently connected with longer-term development goals, did too little to promote early recovery, and invested too little in community resilience. UNICEF supported some development in practice, especially in health and education; it prioritized building government institutional capacity and it recognized the need to strengthen community capacity and resilience.

Programme Response
The evaluation found that UNICEF was effective in delivering programmes in CAR, its coverage of needs was good and large in scale, and its response was generally successful. UNICEF met, by more than two thirds, a majority of its targets in 2013, and made steady progress towards meeting most of its substantially increased targets in 2014. The agency was able to improve coverage by increasing field presence with mobile teams, by setting up six field offices, and by strengthening its dedicated cluster capacities.

Box 1: Contextual Limitations
The evaluation’s conclusions should be considered within the contextual limitations impacting the humanitarian response in CAR, many of which are beyond UNICEF’s control. These contextual aspects include:

\(!\) A near collapsed state, weak government and persistent capacity gaps.
\(!\) Poor infrastructure, with many roads inaccessible during the rainy season, and some parts of the country completely cut-off.
\(!\) A lack of physical access to Séléka-controlled areas due to the presence of active armed groups, and lack of physical access to areas outside of Bangui due to blockages of routes by police and military;
\(!\) Security issues leading to safety risks for UNICEF and implementing partner staff.
\(!\) The protracted nature of the crisis and the impact that this has had on the country’s abilities to provide assistance.

However, targeting was considered too modest in 2013, requiring large increases during 2014. The evaluation found that UNICEF programmes targeted different populations, sometimes with little prioritization. For example, health and nutrition adopted a universal approach, targeting their services nationwide, instead of specific geographic areas or crisis-affected populations. Education targeted safe learning spaces and directed some activities towards affected communities, but implemented others...
nationwide, such as the distribution of learning materials. WASH prioritized IDPs and host communities. Child protection was concentrated on 12 priority prefectures out of 16 nationwide.

Certain categories of beneficiaries were excluded or poorly covered due to security reasons, including displaced communities, the Peuhl nomads and the population in the north of the country.

**Engagement with others**

UNICEF’s response and programmes were coordinated with other actors. Given the weak government capacities and the need to respond quickly, UNICEF relied relatively little on government capacities but it worked with ministries or technical staff, wherever possible, and it sought to develop state capacities where INGOs were absent. Implementing partners observed that UNICEF strongly encouraged them to build the capacity of workers in the public sector.

UNICEF carried the most weight within the cluster system, leading the WASH, education and nutrition clusters and child-protection sub-cluster. Inside the Humanitarian Country Team, the UNICEF Representative represented these clusters, sub-cluster and UNICEF.

The evaluation found that UNICEF and humanitarian agencies did too little to involve the beneficiaries in the response. There was little space for consultation with communities. UNICEF sought to integrate principles of participation, accountability and feedback, through children’s participation in inter-community dialogues, supply usage monitoring, and third-party programme results monitoring. Despite this, UNICEF recognized that consultation and accountability towards the affected population was poor, mainly due to lack of awareness in the country office.

---

**Box 2: Assessment of UNICEF’s Response by Key Evaluation Criteria**

- UNICEF’s response and programme strategies were **relevant and appropriate**, and aligned to UN plans and CCCs, but poorly informed by needs assessments, and accountability to beneficiaries.

- UNICEF response and programme strategies were generally **coherent** but additional efforts are needed to establish full integration between the sectors.

- UNICEF’s **coverage** of needs was generally good and large in scale especially in Bangui, for IDP sites and areas within reach of UNICEF. UNICEF and partners increased coverage during 2014 as it scaled up operations, and achieved wide coverage.

- UNICEF’s response strategy was insufficiently **connected** with longer-term development goals, although it supported some development in practice, and prioritized building government’s institutional capacity.

- UNICEF was **effective** in delivering programmes in the CAR. Analysis shows programmes were effective in achieving results, albeit with some variation across sectors and considerable room for improvement across the response.

- While UNICEF was slow to respond to needs outside of Bangui in 2013, the organization acted quickly to scale up its operations, and expanded coverage to support a large number of people in need across its core sectors. However, it is difficult to measure how **efficiently** the programmes were delivered due to limited evidence on cost of the response.

- UNICEF’s response and programmes were **coordinated** with other actors. UNICEF ensured that all the clusters it led had dedicated cluster coordinators. Inside the HCT, the UNICEF representative not only represented UNICEF but also these clusters, allowing for a broader overview and a degree of ‘double representation’.
UNICEF should update risk analyses and put in place adequate preparedness arrangements in all COs facing chronic and complex emergencies, and should include reinforcing response capacities, development of preparedness plans, and conducting early and regularly updated situation assessments/or strategic risk analysis.

Based on lessons learned from the CAR experience, UNICEF should review its partnership model and operations function, and consider reviewing the comparative advantage of UNICEF’s partnership model in emergencies where government and INGO partners are not sufficiently available to implement programmes; and revising management systems to ensure the entire operations function supports achievement of programme results in an emergency.

UNICEF should develop a multifaceted, long term strategic response to CAR’s chronic crisis and complex emergency, and apply such an approach in similar situations. This is necessary to strengthen relevance, the coherence of activities, external coordination, coverage, and connectedness with development efforts.

In CAR, the CO should consider developing a comprehensive protection strategy to address CAR’s protection and human rights crisis, informed by a wider assessment of rights, and developing an advocacy strategy to support it.

UNICEF should develop an appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework and system to support strategic decision-making, accountability to stakeholders, and learning for improvement in CAR.

**Internal Management and Process**

Prior to Level Three (L3) activation, CAR was a Level Two (L2) emergency. The evaluation found that during the L2 phase, the country office did not prepare adequately for an escalation. It missed opportunities to enhance operational capacities to respond, including undertaking risk analysis, scenario planning, resource mobilization, and enhancing cross-cutting areas such as office governance, human resources, partnerships, supplies and logistics, security, and monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF’s weaknesses during the L2 phase were compounded by weakness at the Humanitarian Country Team level, where efforts to ensure preparedness were also inadequate.

The L3 declaration led to a critical increase in capacities and resources for the response. It provided human resources support through fast-track recruitment and surge deployments, leading to the rapid deployment of competent staff.

The L3 declaration provided for a “simplification” of procedures for Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) which reduce the signing of a PCA from one month to three days. Despite this, the evaluation found that the CAR country office’s procedures for negotiating PCAs and releasing payments to NGOs were too slow, and that simplified procedures were not implemented. Implementing partners reported it took a month to sign a PCA and another month for the funds to be released, leading to late starts and delayed results. This was identified as a major obstacle to scaling up the response.

Overall, the evaluation found that internal management and process issues presented key areas for improvement.

---

**Box 3: Key Recommendations**

- UNICEF should update risk analyses and put in place adequate preparedness arrangements in all COs facing chronic and complex emergencies, and should include reinforcing response capacities, development of preparedness plans, and conducting early and regularly updated situation assessments/or strategic risk analysis.

- Based on lessons learned from the CAR experience, UNICEF should review its partnership model and operations function, and consider reviewing the comparative advantage of UNICEF’s partnership model in emergencies where government and INGO partners are not sufficiently available to implement programmes; and revising management systems to ensure the entire operations function supports achievement of programme results in an emergency.

- UNICEF should develop a multifaceted, long term strategic response to CAR’s chronic crisis and complex emergency, and apply such an approach in similar situations. This is necessary to strengthen relevance, the coherence of activities, external coordination, coverage, and connectedness with development efforts.

- In CAR, the CO should consider developing a comprehensive protection strategy to address CAR’s protection and human rights crisis, informed by a wider assessment of rights, and developing an advocacy strategy to support it.

- UNICEF should develop an appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework and system to support strategic decision-making, accountability to stakeholders, and learning for improvement in CAR.