

Terms of Reference

Early Childhood Development Kit Humanitarian Evaluation

Position: Early Childhood Evaluation Consultant

Duration of the consultancy: 75 days, December 2016 - December 2017

I. Background and context

1. UNICEF Evaluation Office (New York) plans to contract with an **experienced early childhood evaluation consultant** to conduct a **formative evaluation** on UNICEF's approach to supporting inclusive and equitable play and development opportunities for children ages 3 to 5 through the use of the [Early Childhood Development Kit](#). The evaluation will be conducted in Uganda from December 2016 - December 2017, where the UNICEF Country Office is currently using the ECD kits within a humanitarian programming context.
2. **Global Context:** The *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 31 states that every child has the right to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child. However, play is often undervalued in many learning contexts in early childhood and primary school for a variety of cultural, economic and institutional reasons. Play is crucial for children's development and resilience by supporting their creativity, self-confidence, communication skills, and cognitive functioning. Play that enables children to participate in group learning with their peers and adults can also promote a sense of comfort, trust, safety and belonging. Play also contributes to improved health outcomes for children by lowering their anxiety and stress levels to support optimal brain development. For these reasons, innovative play-based ECD programming approaches are required to ensure children's right to play are realized, especially among the most marginalized groups of children.
3. However, UNICEF estimates that more than 200 million children are not reaching their full developmental potential. Emergencies arising from armed conflict or natural disasters can cause serious threats to the physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of children, their families and communities. It is estimated that over 1 billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict, and of these, around 246 million are under 5 years old. Every year for the next decade, about 175 million children will be affected by natural disasters caused by climate change. With emergencies and protracted crisis on the rise, UNICEF is committed to safeguarding children's development and contributing to resilient, peaceful and sustainable societies. Early childhood development programmes that encourage and incorporate inclusive play-based learning opportunities are critical to achieving this objective.
4. **UNICEF Programming Context:** UNICEF advocates for children's right to play as a basis for supporting their learning and development in its [child rights policy frameworks on early childhood development](#) (ECD) and programmes such as [peacebuilding and education advocacy](#), [child friendly schools](#), [child friendly spaces](#) and [education in emergencies](#). Since 2009, UNICEF's [Early Childhood Development Kit](#) (ECD kit) has been the primary service strategy to supporting young children's right to play when integrated into existing ECD centres and programmes. The ECD kit consists of a box filled with toys and learning materials for up to 50 children that address the developmental progress of children from birth to age six, as well as resource guides to support early childhood development programme managers in its implementation and use.¹ The aim is to reduce toxic stress for children through play after an emergency, and to increase the capacity of children, parents, preschool teachers, and duty bearers to support early learning and development in a range of programming contexts (see Annex A, ECD Kit Concept Note for more background on the genesis and purpose of the kits).

¹ An Activity Guide, Coordinator's Guide and Facilitator's Guide should be included in each ECD Kit. These guides are standard in English, Arabic and French, and translation into other languages have been completed by Regional Offices (LACRO translated and adapted into Spanish) and by Country Offices (North Korea CO translated materials into Korean). See, for example: [Early Childhood Development Kit: Activity Guide](#); and the [ECD Kit Handbook for Caregivers](#).

5. **Status of ECD Kit Programming:** In December 2015, the Evaluation Office and Early Childhood Development Section at UNICEF HQ completed an assessment on the distribution, uses and potential outcomes of the ECD kits when integrated into existing UNICEF programming in early childhood (see Annex B, Global Assessment of UNICEF's ECD Kit, 2009-2015). The assessment found the ECD kits were used in [86 countries](#) with more than four million young children and their caregivers in emergency, peacebuilding and development contexts from 2009 and 2015. The kits were successfully integrated into diverse ECD/ECE programmes in collaboration with a range of partners (such as international and local NGOs and government ministries) through one-time workshops with community volunteers, supervision and mentoring of parents, and train-the-trainer approaches with the Ministry of Education and preschool teachers. These trainings supported parents and caregivers to gain skills and knowledge for using the ECD kit play and learning resources. UNICEF staff reported the ECD kits had potential for supporting children's early learning, development, and psychosocial well-being, as well as fostering positive relationships among children, and between children and their caregivers. However, the assessment also revealed that additional programming and capacity development were required in order for the ECD kit play and learning materials to be leveraged to their fullest potential for children and their caregivers.

II. Evaluation purpose, rationale and uses

1. **Purpose of the Evaluation:** The purpose of the evaluation is twofold: 1) to evaluate the effectiveness of the ECD kit interventions on children's psychosocial well-being, early learning and development in a humanitarian context; and 2) to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of different approaches for improving caregiver interactions with children and the use of the ECD kits for early learning and development.
2. **ECD Kit Interventions for Evaluation:** The evaluation will compare the effectiveness of the existing way in which the CO is using the ECD kit (the foundational ECD kit intervention) when compared to an enhanced innovation in the ECD kit intervention. Currently the Uganda Country Office has a comprehensive training framework for all caregivers, including those working in refugee settlements. It is a modular framework implemented over one year, comprising of 3 face to face sessions interspersed with practical experience in the assigned ECD centres during which trainees are also provided on-site supervision support.
3. **Evaluation Rationale and Uses:** While several assessments regarding the use of the ECD kits within specific countries affected by emergencies have occurred, the evidence available is largely focused upon the relevance and quality of the kit contents, rather than on its delivery, uses, and outcomes.² Given UNICEF and its partners have invested more than 20 million USD in the provision of the ECD kits globally since 2009, an evaluation that examines the effectiveness of different ECD kit intervention strategies is timely and critical. The evaluation results will inform decision-making on UNICEF's future programming for the ECD kit by providing recommendations to support and leverage play-based innovations in early childhood in humanitarian contexts. The evaluation will also provide recommendations for scaling up effective play-based early learning interventions to advocate with government ministries for the provision of stimulating environments for children, where caregivers use play as a foundation for child learning and development.

III. Evaluation objectives and scope

4. **Evaluation Objectives:** The primary objective of the evaluation is to document and analyse the benefits and challenges of the ECD kit interventions for children and their caregivers through a formative evaluation design that can yield judgments on the effectiveness of different training approaches. A secondary, but related objective of the evaluation, is to assess the relevance of the ECD kit interventions in relation to the country and programming context. To ensure UNICEF's equity agenda is addressed, the evaluation will also include an approach for analysing the relevance and effectiveness of the ECD kit interventions for different subgroups, such as children with differing abilities, and girls and boys from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as relevant to the selected contexts.

² See, for example: [The use and impact of ECD kits: Post-earthquake Haiti 2010](#), an evaluation study prepared by Lisa Deters in September 2011 as part of a doctoral dissertation with Macquarie University and in collaboration with the Consultative Group on ECCD. See also Annex A for a global assessment on the ECD kits from 2009-2015.

5. **Programming Context:** The formative evaluation will take place in Uganda to analyse different approaches for implementing the ECD kit interventions within humanitarian programming. In this context, the ECD kit is primarily meant to be used as a strategy for emergency response to affected populations by enriching child friendly spaces and other ECD settings with play and learning materials. Through routine exposure to the toys and materials, the ECD kit is designed to assist children and their caregivers to return to normalcy and to improve child psychosocial well-being, learning and development. The sites for the evaluation will include refugees from South Sudan.

IV. Evaluation questions

6. **Evaluation Questions:** Indicative evaluation questions are provided in Table 1. These questions provide an overall structure for the evaluation to facilitate qualitative comparisons of the ECD kit interventions. These questions address the [OECD-DAC evaluation criteria](#) of relevance/appropriateness and effectiveness. **Descriptive evaluation questions** provide information and verifiable facts about the programming landscape (such as the country context and the development challenges that ECD/ECE programming are designed to address; a description of implementing partners, among others). **Normative evaluation questions** will require making judgments, based upon [OECD-DAC criteria](#) and defensible evidence (such as whether the intervention was relevant to the intended beneficiaries, whether or how the intervention is effective).

Table 1: Indicative Evaluation Questions and Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Indicative Evaluation Questions
Relevance, Appropriateness	<p>Descriptive Evaluation Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How relevant are the ECD kit interventions in relation to the country context, children’s and women’s rights, and UNICEF’s equity agenda? 2. How and to what extent do the ECD kit interventions align with UNICEF’s strategic and country programme plans, government priorities, national ECD/sectoral plans and the sustainable development goals? 3. How have country teams adapted / added to the standard kit to make them more relevant in actual practice?
Effectiveness	<p>Normative Evaluation Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How and to what extent do the ECD kit interventions contribute to children’s psychosocial well-being, early learning and development outcomes? 5. How do these outcomes vary for girls and boys of different ages and backgrounds, as relevant to the country context? 6. How effective are the adult capacity development approaches used in the ‘foundational’ ECD kit intervention when compared to the ‘enhanced’ ECD kit intervention with regards to the desired outcomes and impacts? 7. What are the mechanisms and processes through which the ECD kit ‘foundational’ and ‘enhanced’ interventions are effective? 8. What changes in caregiver interactions with children and the use of the ECD kit for learning and development can be observed as a result of the ‘foundational’ versus the ‘enhanced’ ECD kit interventions? 9. How do these changes in caregiver outcomes vary among different sub-groups, such as parents, preschool teachers, ECD practitioners and community members?

V. Evaluation approach, design and methodology

7. **Evaluation Approach:** The ECD kit toys and learning materials are an enrichment resource that is integrated into existing early childhood programmes or emergency response strategies to enhance early learning and development opportunities for young children by strengthening the linkage with play. Therefore, the evaluation will assess how and to what extent an existing ECD programme delivery model leverages the ECD kit toys and materials for children's benefit through different capacity development and implementation approaches.
8. **Evaluation Design:** The evaluation will employ a **formative evaluation design** to analyse the relevance and effectiveness of the ECD kit interventions on child and caregiver outcomes. Given an objective of the evaluation is to qualitatively compare the 'foundational' and 'enhanced' ECD kit interventions, **two intervention groups** will be established reflecting these different approaches. The evaluator will conduct field work in two time periods with a representative sample of each group to draw conclusions about the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions. If operationally feasible, a **third group that has no access to ECD kit interventions** will be included in the evaluation design as a qualitative control group to help the evaluator isolate the unique contributions of the ECD kits on children's early learning and development outcomes.
9. **Evaluation Participants:** The evaluation will include five populations with a representative sample of: 1) children between the ages of 3 and 5 years, and 2) caregivers 3) Government (Teacher Education Department, MoES; includes trainers) 4) Implementing partners and 5) parents. The evaluation is expected to identify early learning and development outcomes for girls and boys, as well as qualitative changes in caregiver practices. The evaluation should also qualitatively examine the relevance of the ECD kit interventions for girls and boys, children with disabilities, and with children from relevant cultural/ethnic backgrounds in regions where UNICEF is working. Similarly, the evaluation should include an examination on the relevance and effectiveness of the different capacity development approaches for sub-groups of caregivers (i.e., for teachers vs. parents, males vs. females).
10. **Evaluation Methods:** A combination of qualitative and participatory methods may be utilized in the evaluation. Individual-level and group-level methods may be required (such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups and group behavioural observations). Participatory methods can be used to meaningfully engage stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, including methods that allow for self-reporting of perceptions about an intervention, as well as the analysis of the evaluation results.
11. **Outcomes Harvesting and Theory of Change Analysis:** To the extent possible, the evaluation should identify and isolate the unique contributions of the ECD kit interventions on the reported outcomes for children ages 3 to 5, and for caregivers through a "most-significant change" and "theory of change" contribution analysis. This analysis will incorporate the inputs, strategies, outputs and *potential* outcomes and impact of the ECD kit interventions, as contextualized to the specific country and delivery models employed by UNICEF and its partners.
12. **Ethical Guidelines and Requirements:** Conventional ethical guidelines are to be followed during the evaluation, especially given the need to include vulnerable children and their families in the evaluation. Specific reference is made to UNICEF policies and procedures for ethical standards in research, evaluation, data collection and analysis. Good practices not covered therein are also to be followed. Any sensitive issues or concerns should be raised with the evaluation management team as soon as they are identified. In all contacts with children, ethical guidelines regarding issues like confidentiality and not exposing the child to danger must be carefully respected. In addition to exercising ethical considerations for informed consent, no participant other than UNICEF staff may be compelled to cooperate with the evaluation. UNICEF will direct staff to participate where needed.
13. **Integration of Human Rights:** Gender equality and children's and women's rights should be integrated into the evaluation processes. Principles of inclusion, participation, and developmentally appropriate evaluation methods are examples of this mandate.

VI. Evaluation tasks, deliverables, level of effort and timeline

14. **Evaluation Tasks:** The specific tasks for the evaluation include:

- a) A selective desk review of relevant academic, policy and UNICEF programme literature on play as it relates to children’s learning, development and psychosocial well-being in low-income countries to inform the evaluation plan;³
- b) Consultations with UNICEF programme specialists and local partners to gather data on the existing approaches for using the ECD kits, to analyse the intervention context, and to operationalize the evaluation plan for data collection in the field;
- c) Submission and approval of the evaluation plan and protocols by an appropriate review board for research with human subjects;
- d) Travel to and within the country selected for this evaluation at two times: one trip in February during the trainings, and another trip in October/November to analyse the effects of these trainings;
- e) Field data collection using a well-constructed research protocol and data collection toolkit to obtain primary data from multiple sources in culturally and developmentally appropriate ways;
- f) An approach to digitally manage, store, quality assure and analyse the evaluation data, including data visualizations and infographics; and
- g) Writing and production of an inception report, data collection toolkit and evaluation report; and
- h) Preparing and presenting a PPT slide show to the Reference Group on the evaluation results and recommendations.

15. **Description of Deliverables:** The primary deliverables include: A) an inception report, B) a data collection toolkit, C) a final evaluation report, and D) a Power Point presentation.

Evaluation Deliverable	Level of Effort	Timeline
Contracting for Evaluation	--	December 2016
Inception Report	10 days	January 2017
Data Collection Toolkit	10 days	February
Field work & data analysis, time 1	15 days	March
Field Work & data analysis, time 2	15 days	October/November
Evaluation Report	20 days	December
PPT Presentation	5 days	December
Total	75 days	

16. **Deliverable A: Inception Report:** The inception report will be instrumental in confirming a common understanding of what is to be evaluated. The inception report will not exceed 20 pages in (excluding annexes), and will include:

- a. Evaluation context – demonstrated understanding of the literature (internal and external to UNICEF) on the state of the field relevant for the proposed evaluation;
- b. Evaluation purpose and scope – confirmation of objectives and scope of the evaluation;
- c. Evaluation criteria and questions – final set of evaluation questions, and evaluation criteria for assessing performance;
- d. Evaluation design and methodology – description of the design and its limitations; a sampling approach; a description of data collection methods and tools, and a description of the data analysis approach;
- e. Evaluation work plan and timeline;
- f. Annexes (as required).

³ We expect the consultant to already have the technical knowledge required for this evaluation, and thus, the literature/document review is intended to be a brief exercise that provides a context on the latest research on play and early learning as it applies to this evaluation and UNICEF ECD/ECE programming.

17. **Deliverable B: Data Collection Toolkit:** A data collection toolkit is required to ensure a high quality field visit approach for collecting relevant data at the selected sites. These protocols might include a manual with the following information:
- a. A clearly stated purpose of the evaluation that can be understood by diverse stakeholders (for example, with children who are 5 years of age, or with parents who have low literacy levels);
 - b. Procedures for obtaining informed consent from evaluation participants;
 - c. Data collection instruments and procedures;
 - d. Data management procedures; and
 - e. Procedures for reporting issues or ethical concerns.
18. **Deliverable C: Evaluation Report:** A summative and comprehensive evaluation report is required upon completion of this assignment. The evaluation report is expected to provide descriptive quantitative and qualitative results, an analytical synthesis of the findings through a theory of change contribution analysis, and recommendations for improving ECD kit related programming. The report will not exceed 40 pages, **excluding** the executive summary and annexes. A complete report will include:
- a. an analysis of the evaluation context, as it relates to UNICEF’s equity agenda, the ECD kit and ECD programming;
 - b. an analysis of key issues relevant for the evaluation (excerpted from the inception report and literature reviewed);
 - c. a summary of the methods and sample (excerpted from the inception report);
 - d. evaluation findings and conclusions, well substantiated by the data and evidence, cross-referenced against evaluation questions and criteria;
 - e. a set of actionable recommendations that correspond with evaluation conclusions;
 - f. bibliography and list of background materials used; and
 - g. Annexes (as relevant).
19. **Deliverable D: Power Point Presentation:** A Power Point presentation is required at the end of the evaluation. The presentation should include a succinct and visual summary of the evaluation process, results and recommendations. The presentation should be prepared in a way that a person who is not a member of the evaluation team can understand the evaluation process and results.
20. **Reporting Format and Quality Assurance:** Reports will be prepared in English, according to the UNICEF House Style and UNICEF standards for evaluation reports as per the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System ([GEROS](#)) guidelines. The first draft of each deliverable will be received by the evaluation manager who will work with the evaluation consultant on necessary revisions. The second draft will be sent to relevant stakeholders in CO, RO and HQ for comments. The evaluation manager will consolidate all comments on a response matrix, and request the evaluation team to indicate actions taken against each comment in the production of the penultimate draft.

VII. Professional Qualifications

21. The Evaluation Office will contract with an experienced evaluation consultant who has the appropriate mix of skills and the capacity to carry out a complex, qualitative evaluation with vulnerable children. The desired academic qualifications, competencies and professional experiences for the consultant are as follows:
- Academic preparation in early childhood development, educational psychology, or related social science discipline at the Master’s degree level. A PhD qualification will be an added advantage.
 - Demonstrated experience conducting research with young children and/or in early childhood education programming, with knowledge or experience in play-based early learning an asset;
 - Seven years of post-MA/MSc practice in designing and implementing evaluation and or research projects, preferably in developing countries;
 - Demonstrated field work experience in humanitarian settings;
 - Specialized qualitative data collection and analysis skills required to execute the evaluation (such as knowledge of focus groups, most-significant change methods, behaviour observations, etc.);
 - Strong data management and analysis skills for qualitative information;

- Knowledge of innovative forms of text and graphic representations (e.g., infographics, data visualizations) will be an added advantage;
- Institutional affiliation with a national university or academic network in Uganda will be an added advantage; and
- Proficiency in English is required, with proficiency in other UN languages an asset.

VIII. Supervision and Duty Station

22. **Accountabilities:** The incumbent shall work under the direct supervision of ECD Evaluation Specialist, UNICEF's Evaluation Office, and will coordinate actions with ECD Team at HQ, RO and CO as required. Payments for all deliverables must be approved by the ECD Evaluation Specialist.
23. **Work Location and Travel:** The consultant is expected to work remotely from home or their own office for this assignment. This assignment requires travel to and within Uganda for the evaluation, and potentially to New York.

IX. Application Procedures

All interested and eligible candidates should send an application packet including the following:

- Answers to the 3 application questions listed below;
- Updated CV/Resume;
- A completed Personal History Profile (P11) <http://www.unicef.org/about/employ/files/P11.doc> if UNICEF Evaluation Office does not have it on file already; and,
- A sample evaluation report, with a clear indication of the applicant's contribution in the report.
- Availability and daily fee.

The application packet should be transmitted via email to the Evaluation Office by **1 December 2016**, at the very latest, using the following email and subject heading:

Email: evalofficeapplications@unicef.org

Email Subject: Early Childhood Evaluation Consultancy

Application Questions

Please answer the following questions; **do not exceed 2 pages** in your response.

1. What previous research projects or evaluations have you led (or contributed to) that are similar to the content and/or objectives of this evaluation? What lessons can you bring from these experiences for the present assignment?
2. Based upon your knowledge of early childhood development and the objectives of this evaluation, describe the process you would recommend for finalizing the evaluation design.
3. What challenges may be encountered when conducting data collection in the field? How can these challenges be addressed or mitigated?