Office of the Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board
Template for delegations commenting on the draft country programme documents
2024 second regular session

Draft country programme document commenting period: 11 June to 1 July 2024 [18:00 hours Eastern Daylight Time]

Delegations are kindly invited to use this template to share their comments on the draft country programme documents being presented to the Executive Board during the forthcoming session.

Delegation name: Embassy of Belgium in Kinshasa
Draft country programme document: DRC

In accordance with Executive Board decision 2014/1, draft country programme documents are considered and approved in one session, on a no-objection basis. All comments received by the Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board before the deadline stated above will be posted on the Executive Board website.

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<th>Delegation’s comments</th>
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<td><strong>General comments</strong></td>
<td>UNICEF acknowledges and appreciates the comments from the Kingdom of Belgium on its draft Country Programme Document 2025-2029 and welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information that could not be adequately covered in a document of 6,000 words.</td>
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<td>- On May 28th, the UNICEF team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo presented to the donors their Country Program Document (CPD) in Kinshasa. The Embassy of Belgium was represented by its environment and education experts.</td>
<td>• UNICEF was honoured to count with the Embassy of Belgium among the participants, and we thank you for the constructive feedback, suggestions and comments received during the presentation. We would like to clarify that the drafts CPD and the RRF documents were shared in advance of the meeting to inform all development partners and provide them with sufficient time and opportunity to share their comments and recommendations during the meeting.</td>
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<td>- The presentation was given without prior consultation, which meant that no recommendations could be included beforehand. Most of the donors were surprised by this format. Furthermore, the implementation capacity of the program raised many questions and concerns among the majority of partners present during the presentation. Therefore, donors were only able to do recommendations during the Q/A sessions after the presentation.</td>
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While the document received is concise, we note that it lacks the level of detail present in the version presented in Kinshasa.

In addition, there were several sectoral bilateral meetings with by each UNICEF section with their respective key partners (Government, NGO, Donors…) during the prioritization phase to strategically design the country programme in line with the priorities of the development partners.

UNICEF acknowledges and takes seriously the concerns about the programme’s implementation capacity. As part of the CPD development process, UNICEF conducts a strategic analysis through the Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP). This analysis includes an internal capacity and affordability analysis to ensure that the adequate and sufficient financial, technical, and human resources are in place to enhance the planning and implementation of the new Country Programme. The CPMP exercise is guided by evidence building, lessons learned, and the core principles of the organization. In addition, UNICEF is mindful of the funding environment in the DRC and develops a resource mobilization and leveraging strategy to support the implementation and fundraising aspects of the new country programme. Both the CPD and the CPMP aim to align the programme with our presence and capacity to effectively achieve results for children, while enhancing overall programme and operational capacity.

UNICEF CO in DRC acknowledges the comment related to the concise version of the CPD. It should be noted that the mandatory and strict word limit of 6000 is determined by the Executive Board, and this implies that the most critical and topline information is included. Many supporting
- This CPD is in the continuity of the 2019-2024 CPD by:
  o Continuously pursuing interventions in traditional sectors such as health, nutrition, water and hygiene, and education;
  o Maintaining the same geographic areas of intervention, focusing on Kasai, Kasai Central, Maniema, and Sankuru;
  o Providing development and humanitarian support in South Kivu, North Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika.

- UNICEF aims to continue to deliver targeted and comprehensive support in areas such as child labor in mining, urban development, response to Ebola and cholera outbreaks, and building resilience, among the other key priorities of the agency.

- Overall, this CPD is in line with the various documents referenced, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and the country's sectoral policies and plans (health, nutrition, AIDS, etc.) [and also with Belgian sectoral cooperation policies].

- The next CPD builds on current achievements and lessons learned while introducing significant changes to UNICEF’s way of working in DRC. It places a strong emphasis on equity, particularly in areas where children have the greatest needs (multidimensional poverty) and enhancing geographic and programmatic convergence. While the sectors will remain the same (linked to UNICEF’s mandate and Global Strategic Plan Goal areas), some specific interventions and priority geographic areas will be very different. In addition, UNICEF will continue to prioritize programme support in areas such as child labor in mining, urban development, and building resilience, among the other key priorities.

- UNICEF welcomes the comment regarding the alignment of the CPD with UNSDCF and national priorities, and Belgium’s sectoral cooperation policies.
Although the partners in the various fields of intervention are listed, the partnerships observed are only indicative rather than truly operational or optimal in the sense of complementarity and synergy. This is the case with: UNFPA (in the reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality and infant morbidity), the World Bank (Multisectoral Nutrition and Health Program - PMNS), in the fight against malnutrition, the group of financial and technical partners in health (GIBS) in the supply of essential medicines, the group of financial and technical partners in social protection (GIBPS) in the national social protection plan.

It is difficult to see how this very, even over-ambitious CPD can be implemented in the complex context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is marked by considerable challenges. Therefore, the implementation of such a programme encompassing so many priorities made up of different sectors might be challenging if not unrealistic. In addition, the Belgian delegation recommends limiting the geographic and thematic focus in the sectors and areas of intervention in the DR. This approach is likely to enhance efficiency in achieving expected outcomes that would benefit the population's well-being.

UNICEF appreciates the comment related to the partnerships with other stakeholders including UN agencies. UNICEF agrees that the list of partners may evolve throughout the CPD implementation period depending on opportunities for synergies. But the partners already listed for each sector have been purposefully identified for their comparative strengths and how they will complement our programme outcomes and results; and many of these partnerships are already operational. In addition, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, there will be joint workplans for each outcome defined in the UNSDCF and will be implemented and monitored collaboratively under the leadership of the UNCT (United Nations Country Team) and with the support from the PMT (Programme Management Team).

UNICEF understands the concerns of the Kingdom of Belgium about the ambition of the CPD in light of the complex context in DRC. We would like to take this opportunity to underscore that integrated programming and geographic focus will make the implementation of the new CPD more effective compared to current and previous ones. Instead of attempting to cover the DRC nationwide with limited-scale interventions spread across the 26 provinces (which are often driven by funding opportunities), UNICEF will adopt an equity approach. This approach focuses on the most deprived children by concentrating efforts in the most vulnerable provinces (geographic convergence: 4 provinces for development interventions, 4 provinces for humanitarian interventions in line with a nexus approach, and 4 specific issues to address in most affected localities) and delivering purposefully designed packages of integrated interventions.
- How are these ambitions going to be achieved, or at least targeted, in the context of the transition outside MONUSCO's support on the ground? The reduction in the UN's logistical capacities will be considerable.

(programmatic convergence) to address their specific needs and prevent the root causes of their vulnerabilities.

In addition to these intensive, deliberate, and targeted interventions (downstream), UNICEF will continue supporting system strengthening, including the development and effective implementation of transformative public policies, and domestic resource mobilization and allocation to social sectors along with external fundraising. This will enable the government to expand the coverage and quality of social services for vulnerable children and communities at both national and provincial levels, ensuring no one is left behind.

Regarding the withdrawal of MONUSCO, significant consequences are anticipated, and a plan is being finalized based on lessons learned from the withdrawals from Kananga, Haut-Katanga and Tanganyika (completed) and in South Kivu (ongoing). The UNCT will implement this plan with the involvement of all agencies including UNICEF.

The three major concerns identified are: threats to security and peace; logistical challenges, particularly pertaining to transportation; and the risk of increased human rights violations.

These will be addressed under Outcome 2 of the UNSDCF 2025-2029. UNICEF will contribute to this under Outcome 5 of the new CPD, as indicated in the Results and Resources Framework (RRF).

UNICEF will continue to lead the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), as indicated in Paragraph 33 under Child Protection interventions.
Due to word limit of the CPD, UNICEF’s approach and interventions to mitigate the consequences of MONUSCO’s transition and withdrawal are further elaborated in the 2025-2029 Child Protection Programme and its accompanying strategy note.

### Comments on specific aspects of the draft country programme document

- As previously mentioned during the Kinshasa donor consultation on May 28, 2024, Belgium emphasized that the current guarantees for WASH services for children in zones affected by climate change (both short-term events and long-term changes) and areas impacted by natural disasters remain largely unaddressed.
  
  - We acknowledge that quantifying this risk is challenging, as the rapid pace of climate change creates a dynamic environment with numerous and diverse zones of change, varying in scope and intervention conditions. However, it is essential to be aware of and prepared to respond to the impacts of climate change on work conditions, particularly for WASH services, as this is crucial for achieving the overall goals of this CPD. Unfortunately, the limited references to this reality in the document suggest a lack of awareness or willingness to continuously assess this risk, which may be addressed by individual stakeholders maintaining a focus on it.

- Regarding education, how do the objectives of the GPE programme in the DRC tie in with those of this programme?

UNICEF appreciates the comment of the Kingdom of Belgium highlighting the crucial challenges related to potential impacts of climate change. Addressing this issue is of utmost importance. The CPD’s third outcome is “WASH and Climate” and references are made to this priority throughout the CPD, including in the Programme Rationale (para 5 and 11), Programme Priorities and Partnerships (para 15, 26, 27-b-c) and Risk Management (para 41), and in the Results and Resources Framework.

Furthermore, the CO plans to update the Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC) prepared in 2019 that will be used to consolidated sectors’ strategies on climate resilience, including for WASH.

Regarding Climate Resilience WASH, the CO is supporting the Ministry of Environment to conduct a WASH sector risk vulnerability analysis with the support of SIWI that will be the foundation to develop a Climate Resilience and System Strengthening national strategy for the sector, as both thematics are closely imbricated, that will be implemented in the course of the CPD and will be detailed in the WASH workplan.

UNICEF welcomes the comment related to the alignment of GPE objective. The planned interventions for Education are fully aligned with UNICEF engagement under the GPE,
One critical area that has been understated is the implementation of Universal Health Coverage in the DRC, which encompasses both health and social protection. In order to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, UNICEF's 2025-2029 CPD should place a particular emphasis on it. In contrast to the current CPD, which is nearing its conclusion, we recommend that the next CPD provide UNICEF with greater flexibility to optimize its interventions aimed at reducing maternal and child mortality, of course in perfect alignment with UNFPA. This would enable UNICEF to more effectively support the implementation of Universal Health Coverage in the DRC which is one of the key partnerships in this sector as indicated in Paragraph 31.

UNICEF appreciates the comment related to the Universal Health Coverage. The health component is fully aligned with the national Universal Health Coverage (UHC) strategy and will actively support the government and other UN agencies such as WHO and UNFPA in implementing coordinated and synergistic interventions.

The vision of the UNICEF DRC health programme is rooted in supporting the country to achieve UHC, with a focus on children and women. This is well articulated in the detailed Explanatory Notes (EN) and further in the relevant workplans. The health EN provides detailed objectives, strategies and interventions for the programme.