



Formative Evaluation of the Country Programme between the Government of Madagascar and UNICEF (2015-2020)

With a change in power considered unconstitutional, the 2008-2009 crisis that followed that shift led to the suspension of foreign aid provided by traditional donors operating in the country, except for humanitarian interventions. Since then, UNICEF has played a key role in the country, and is proving to be, within the framework of its cooperation programme with the Malagasy government 2015-2020, one of the main development partners in the health and water, hygiene and sanitation sectors. This document presents an overview of the results of the evaluation of this Country Programme.

Ranked 162nd out of 189 (HDI 2019), Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 75% of its population living on less than \$1.90 a day. The political instability of recent decades and the suspension of foreign aid between 2009 and 2014 have further weakened Madagascar's already precarious economy. Development indicators are low in all areas: health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and child protection, among others. While gender inequalities vary from one region to another, they remain generally widespread across all sectors. Natural disasters and epidemics are also common in the country, especially in the southern regions, and increase the inequalities and vulnerabilities of a population that is highly dependent on external aid. Malagasy children are among the first victims of this situation.

Description of the Country Programme

Endorsed by the Government of Madagascar and approved by the UNICEF Executive Board in February 2015, the Country Programme Document (CPD) and the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) cover the period 2015-2020 with a total budget of USD 198 million. The main objective of the programme is to contribute to the "achievement of equitable results for the poorest and hardest-to-reach children and families."

In response to the above-mentioned challenges, UNICEF and its partners at national, regional and community levels are focusing their interventions in six key sectors: health, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, education, child protection, policy and social protection. The programme also integrates cross-cutting approaches


and strategies, with an emphasis on communication for development (C4D), emergencies and, since a mid-term review (MTR), children's and women's rights. The logical framework of the CPD is structured around seven outcomes corresponding to each of the above-mentioned sectors of intervention, including an intersectoral outcome that integrates cross-cutting approaches and strategies.

Objectives and scope of the evaluation

Conducted between August 2019 and February 2020, the main objective of this formative evaluation of the country programme between the Government of Madagascar and UNICEF (2015-2020) was to inform and support the country office's efforts to design the next country programme document (2021-2023), whose planning started at the end of 2019. The findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations of this evaluation should thus guide the UNICEF Madagascar Country Office in this exercise. The scope of the evaluation covered the UNICEF country programme, as approved by the Executive Board in February 2015, as well as all modifications and revisions to the original programme that occurred during the period under review (2015 to 2019), such as adjustments following the MTR in 2017. In addition to assessing the degree of achievement of the expected results and identifying the factors that contributed to and inhibited the achievement of these results, this evaluation also includes an analysis of the organizational structure and strategic positioning of the country office. At the sector level, the evaluation focused on the assessment of the health and WASH sectors.

Findings and conclusions

Relevance

 The main findings on the relevance of the country programme confirm the alignment of the CPD with the priorities of the Government of Madagascar, UNICEF's global priorities and with the needs of the population identified in the SitAn that preceded the CPD development. However, the CPD pays little attention to ECD and adolescent programming. The country office demonstrated its flexibility by adapting its programmes to a constantly evolving context characterized by numerous emergencies including droughts, cyclones and plagues that significantly affected the implementation of the country programme. On the other hand, this flexibility led the office to somewhat deviate from its initial programming, aligning itself more often than not with the shifting priorities of the government, but also those of its donors. Notwithstanding these shifts, UNICEF has a clear comparative advantage in various areas, notably in the WASH, education and child protection sectors. Its ability to operate at sub-national level with these sectors is another key strength of the country office.

Gender equality has not been mainstreamed in the planning and implementation phases of the country programme. The CPD was not based on a gender

analysis and does not describe the differentiated effects of the programme on women, men, girls and boys. In addition, the annual and programme monitoring reports do not include indicators or gender-disaggregated data. The recent addition of a gender specialist to the country office team should significantly contribute to strengthening gender mainstreaming in the next CPD. Also, there has not been a systematic and coherent approach to addressing the concerns of rights holders in programme design and implementation.

Effectiveness



UNICEF has achieved its goal of providing high-quality technical support to the design and adoption of policies, frameworks and strategies across all sectors of the country programme. Their operationalization was hampered by a number of external factors, thus obtaining mixed results in terms of improvements to the living conditions, well-being and rights of communities, families and children.

Humanitarian and development initiatives directly targeting populations have nonetheless contributed to the achievement of tangible results in terms of maternal and newborn care, child immunization, WASH, nutrition, education and child protection, although not all the targets of the expected results and outputs have been achieved.

Some examples of tangible results for children, families and communities include:



Health: Improved access to health care through the opening of all 73 basic health centres (CSBs) previously closed due to lack of staff in the nine intervention regions of the PASSOBA-Santé Programme and, at the end of the programme, integrating almost all of these staff (537) into the civil service, 70% of whom are women health workers; maintaining a good immunization coverage, notably in DTP3 in particular.



C4D : In order to improve knowledge and acceptance of child immunization among the population, awareness raising campaigns complemented the action of the central government and NGOs in promoting continuous communication and social mobilization through radio, television and other media.



WASH : In 2019 alone, UNICEF estimates that it has contributed to providing sustainable access to safe drinking water to more than 63,000 people through boreholes (30 new boreholes and the rehabilitation of eight others) and through the rehabilitation of a major pipeline in the south. A total of 721,000 people has obtained sustainable access to safe drinking water since 2015.

Innovations in WASH implemented around the rehabilitation of the pipeline do not equitably benefit the most vulnerable populations living in remote areas as they do not have direct access to it and the prices for water trucking services are not within their reach.

Coordination between UNICEF and the multiple national emergency management bodies, whose capacity remains weak, is complex but well organized and, as lead of the nutrition, education, WASH and social protection clusters and co-lead of the health cluster, UNICEF has generally been effective in emergency preparedness and response.

Efficiency



The majority of the financial contributions UNICEF allocated to the government was utilized at sub-national level by regional directorates in line with the needs of the population. However, the majority of UNICEF staff is based in Antananarivo. This suggests that the country office structure is not fully aligned with its operations and may not be well adapted to respond to the needs of more remote or vulnerable communities in a timely manner.

With regard to UNICEF staff, they are qualified and generally motivated, but the level of seniority of management positions in the country office is not commensurate with the ambitions and requirements of the programme. At the decentralized level, the fact that community health workers (ASC) contributing to the implementation of the programme at the community level are unpaid volunteers increases the efficiency of the programme. On the other hand, Regional Technical Assistants (ATR) at the sub-national level are positioned in the offices of decentralized government structures, which, while it reduces operational costs, tends to result in ATRs performing tasks that should be the responsibility of government officials, possibly due to unclear or poorly understood terms of reference.

Regarding its partnership approach, UNICEF was perceived as a key actor playing a leading role in a number of sectoral clusters. While its role in these structures promotes communication and concertation, it does not guarantee an increased level of programmatic or operational coordination at central and decentralized (or sub-national) levels.

In terms of results-based management, the lack of theories of change or sectoral results chains hampered the efficiency of the UNICEF country programme. The evaluation team did not find evidence that, at the time of the midterm review or other annual planning exercises, sufficient efforts were deployed to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies used to achieve the intended outcomes. Also, while the monitoring and evaluation system used to measure the progress of programme results provided some useful data for decision-making, the validity and reliability of data related to several targets and indicators at output and

outcome levels can be questioned. In general, indicators did not allow for disaggregating data by region or gender.

Sustainability



Efforts to build the capacity of national and regional institutions and to make sure they take ownership of the development processes promoted by UNICEF are effective strategies to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved under this country programme. However, this sustainability is threatened by the low absorption capacity of external assistance by UNICEF's government partners and by the absence of a number of enabling factors such as: stability and continuous capacity-building of government staff; the existence of clear mechanisms to ensure the continuity and monitoring of interventions; sufficient levels of transparency; and reliable, high-quality suppliers of goods and services (private and public).

A number of bottlenecks affecting the sustainability of sectoral interventions were identified at the sectoral level, for example:

- ⇒ Lack of capacity of schools and of community health centers (CSB) to build and maintain infrastructure and lack of integration of WASH in schools and CSB activities into the monitoring systems of the Ministries of National Education and Ministries of Health.
- ⇒ The insufficiency of quality interventions targeting districts, communities and families relying on sound communication for development strategies, on dialogue and on knowledge transfer about human rights, children's rights, on how to claim their rights, and, above all, on the benefits of adopting essential family practices.
- ⇒ During the current programme cycle, UNICEF substantially invested in the construction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and in supplying its partners with much-needed equipment and material, thus relieving the Malagasy State from its responsibility, as a duty-bearer, to ensure the well-being of its population. At the same time, it seems UNICEF's investments in building the capacity of rights holders to take ownership of development initiatives was also not sufficient.



Recommendations

1. The country office should design the next country programme, of a duration of only three years, as a transition programme to develop a long-term vision, results and realistic targets that it will be able to achieve in partnership with the Government and through upstream integration of its proven cross-cutting strategies, including gender.
2. The next country programme should maintain the multi-level approach by working with the Government at national and regional levels while consolidating its regional interventions where the needs of women and children are greatest.
3. The country office should capitalize on its current comparative advantage through its presence in the regions by gradually strengthening its presence at the decentralized level.
4. The country office should conceptualize and operationalize an approach to strengthen internal intersectoral collaboration and address in a holistic and multisectoral manner the challenges children face from birth, especially the first 1,000 days of life, through adolescence.
5. UNICEF should capitalize on its role as leader of the numerous sectoral clusters in order to improve coordination among its technical and cooperation partners to respond in a concerted manner to the country's development challenges.
6. The next country programme should include a more comprehensive analysis of risks, such as those related to the capacity of government partners to absorb external aid, mapping out the opportunities and costs required to implement sustainability and/or scaling up plans for all its interventions.
7. The country office's results-based management approach should include: strengthening the operationalization of its monitoring and evaluation system so that it is able to generate credible and timely data for programmatic purposes; and developing a strategy and knowledge-sharing platform on lessons learned and good practices from various interventions.
8. The country office should strengthen its collaboration with civil society organizations and more systematically involve community and district representatives in the target regions in the preparation of the next country programme in order to ensure that intervention strategies are well adapted to the needs and priorities expressed by the populations and rooted in the realities on the ground.
9. The country office should continue to strengthen the knowledge and skills of its staff on gender issues to ensure gender is fully mainstreamed in all its interventions.