

GEROS Evaluation Quality Assurance Tool

Version: November, 2020

Evaluation of the Back to Learning initiative in Syria

REPORT RATING SUMMARY			
Overall Rating		71%	Satisfactory
●●●●●	Exceptional (96% - 100%)	5	
●●●●●	Highly Satisfactory (87.5% - 95.99%)	4	
●●●●-	Satisfactory (62.5% - 87.49%)	3	Meets UNICEF/UNEG standards for evaluation reports and decision makers may use the evaluation with confidence
●●●- -	Fair (35% - 62.49%)	2	
●- - - -	Unsatisfactory (0% - 34.99%)	1	
REPORT DETAILS			
Title of the evaluation report		Evaluation of the Back to Learning initiative in Syria	
Report sequence number		Syria/59/2020/16894	
Region		MENA	
Year of report		2020	
Office		UNICEF Syria Country Office	
Coverage (countries)		Syria	
ToRs present		Yes	
Date of review (dd/mmm/yyyy)		June 4, 2021	
Name of review firm		DeftEdge	
CLASSIFICATION OF EVALUATION REPORT			
Management of evaluation (Managerial control and oversight of evaluation)		UNICEF managed	
Unicef goal areas (Alignment with strategic plan priorities)			
Every child survives and thrives		No	
Every child learns		Yes	
Every child is protected from violence and exploitation		No	
Every child lives in a safe and clean environment		No	
Every child has an equitable chance in life		No	
Gender equality (cross-cutting)		No	
Humanitarian action (cross-cutting)		Yes	
Evaluation object		Thematic area	
Evaluation type		Summative and formative	
Evaluation strategy		Mixed methods	
Evaluation design (primary method used)		Non-experimental	
Evaluation level		Impact	
Geographic scope		National	
Primary SDG(s) covered (number)		Not specified	
EQA Summary:			
<p>The evaluation assessed Back to Learning, a multi-donor funded initiative implemented by UNICEF in the Syrian Arab Republic and covered a period from 2013 to mid-2019. The evaluation was challenging to carry out given the instability, humanitarian context, and gaps in project data. The assessment covered three pillars of the intervention - provision of education supplies, community mobilization/media campaign, and school rehabilitation. It adopted a mixed-method data collection approach entailing sample surveys, desk review, and key informant interviews. The findings, lessons learned, and conclusions are very brief but captured the intervention's strengths and weaknesses. The recommendations appear useful but could be further developed and presented together in a separate Recommendations section of the report. The data collection and verification during the evaluation process suffered due to challenges in obtaining the required approvals to access crisis-affected field locations. As well, gender could have been better mainstreamed into the evaluation process.</p>			
Recommendations for Improvement:			
<p>The formal part of the evaluation report is brief at just 23 pages long. However, the annexes are quite extensive and include the Inception Report, making the total document being over 130 pages. It is usual practice for the final evaluation report to include a fuller description of evaluation design (including the evaluation questions), methodology, and sampling strategy in the main part of the document and to not attach the Inception Report. It is also good practice to use the theory of change and to more fully integrate gender considerations into the evaluation process, including carrying out a more indepth gender analysis.</p>			
SECTION RATINGS			
SECTION A:	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (weight 5%)	83%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 1.	Can the executive summary inform decision-making?		
i	Is clearly presented, serves as a standalone document useful for informing decision making, and is of relevant conciseness and depth for key users (Maximum of 5 pages unless otherwise specified in ToR).	Yes	The executive summary is 4 pages long and briefly covers the background, evaluation's objective and methodology, evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
ii	Includes all necessary elements (overview of the intervention, evaluation purpose, objectives and intended audience, evaluation methodology, key conclusions on findings, lessons learned if requested, key recommendations) as per the ToR.	Partially	The information on the intended audience is not very clear but other required elements are included.
iii	Includes all significant information needed to understand the intervention and the evaluation AND does not introduce new information from what is presented in the rest of the report.	Yes	It provides sufficient understanding and does not introduce new information from the rest of the report.
SECTION B:	BACKGROUND (weight 5%)	79%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 2.	Is the object of the evaluation clearly described?		
i	Clear and relevant description of the intervention, including: location(s), timelines, cost/budget, and implementation status.	Yes	A clear description of the intervention is given with an explanation on how it is not a standalone project/initiative and it is integrated into larger projects.

	ii	Clear and relevant description of intended rightsholders (beneficiaries) and duty bearers (state and non-state actors with responsibilities regarding the intervention) by type (i.e., institutions/organizations; communities; individuals...), by geographic location(s) (i.e., urban, rural, particular neighbourhoods, town/cities, sub-regions...) and in terms of numbers reached, with disaggregation by gender, age, disability... (as appropriate to the purpose of the evaluation).	Yes	The background chapter provides a detailed overview of the intervention and stakeholders engaged in implementing the different program components.
Question 3.		Is the context of the intervention clearly described?		
	i	Clear and relevant description of the context of the intervention (i.e. relevant policy, socio-economic, political, cultural, power/privilege, institutional, international factors) and how context relates to the implementation of the intervention.	Yes	There is an overview of the turbulence of the crisis and its effect on Syria's education system. It highlights the need and importance of launching the back to learning intervention and evaluating it to provide accountability to the rights holders, partners, and contributors.
	ii	Linkages drawn to the SDGs and relevant targets and indicators for the area being evaluated.	No	There is no direct mention of SDGs in the report.
	iii	Clear and relevant description (where appropriate) of the status and needs of the rightsholders/beneficiaries of the intervention.	Yes	The evaluation report clearly defines the status and the needs of the children (rightsholders) and provides details of the stakeholders.
Question 4.		Are key stakeholders, their relationships and contributions clearly identified?		
	i	Identification of implementing agency(ies), development partners, right holders, and additional duty bearers and other stakeholders; and of linkages between them (e.g., stakeholder map) (if relevant).	Yes	The implementing parties, stakeholders and the relationship between them is clearly identified.
	ii	Identification of the specific contributions and roles of key stakeholders (financial or otherwise), including UNICEF.	Partially	Back to learning was started in 2013 by UNICEF's country office in Syria and its evolving role is shown. The financial contributors are identified, and there is reference to the involvement of volunteers, CSOs and the private sector. The report does not include the details of the contributors or how this initiative collaborated with other programs.
SECTION C:		EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE (weight 5%)	90%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 5.		Is the purpose of the evaluation clearly described?		
	i	Purpose of evaluation is clearly defined, including why it was needed at that point in time, its intended use, and key intended users.	Yes	The evaluation's purpose is clearly defined. Through this evaluation, decision-makers will gauge the extent to which the Back to Learning initiative contributed to a change in the number of children enrolled in schools. Intended users are identified.
Question 6.		Are the objectives and scope of the evaluation clear and realistic?		
	i	Clear and complete description of what the evaluation seeks to achieve by the end of the process with reference to any changes made to the objectives included in the ToR (if applicable).	Yes	It is clearly specified that the evaluation seeks to assess the program interventions, identify good practices, and provide recommendations.
	ii	Clear and relevant description of the scope of the evaluation: what will and will not be covered (thematically, chronologically, geographically with key terms defined), as well as, if applicable, the reasons for this scope (e.g., specifications by the ToRs, lack of access to particular geographic areas for political or safety reasons at the time of the evaluation, lack of data/evidence on particular elements of the intervention).	Yes	The scope is relevant, clear, and aligns with the ToR.
Question 7.		Is the theory of change, results chain or logic well articulated?		
	i	Clear description of the intervention's intended results, or of the parts of the results chain that are applicable to, or are being tested by, the evaluation.	Partially	The intended results of the intervention are described in the text showing the Back to Learning approach. This shows briefly the results chain, although more detail could be provided.
	ii	Causal relationship between outputs and outcomes is presented in narrative and/or graphic form (e.g., results chain, logic model, theory of change, evaluation matrix).	Yes	The report specifies that the evaluation scope depends on its three programs. The report provides a narrative description of the relationship between the program's outputs and outcomes.
	iii	For theory-based evaluations, the theory of change or results framework is assessed, and if requested in the ToR, it is reformulated/improved by the evaluators.	Not Rated	
SECTION D:		EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY (weight 20%)	75%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 8.		Does the evaluation use questions and the relevant evaluation criteria that are explicitly justified as appropriate for the purpose of the evaluation? <i>UNICEF evaluation standards refer to the OECD/DAC criteria - Relevance; Coherence; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Sustainability; Impact (not all are necessarily relevant for all evaluations). Evaluations should also consider equity and leaving no-one behind, gender and human rights based approach (these can be mainstreamed into other criteria). Humanitarian evaluations should also consider Coverage; Connectedness; Coordination; Protection; Security.</i>		
	i	Evaluation questions and sub-questions are appropriate for meeting the objectives and purpose of the evaluation. The relevant criteria are specified and are aligned with the questions.	Partially	The questions and sub-questions assess the evaluation evidence using the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact, coverage, and cooperation. They satisfactorily meet the overall objective and purpose of the evaluation. The list of the evaluation questions is given in the annexed inception report but is not included or referred to in the main report. Good practice is for the questions, which are the framework for the evaluation, to be highlighted within the report.

	ii	In addition to the questions and sub-questions, the evaluation matrix includes indicators, benchmarks, assumptions and/or other processes from which the analysis can be based and conclusions drawn.	Partially	The matrix is included in the annexed inception report but is not included or referred to in the main report. However, it includes indicators and benchmarks in terms of sub-questions.
Question 9.		Does the report specify adequate methods for data collection, analysis, and sampling?		
	i	Evaluation design and set of methods is relevant and adequately robust for the evaluation's purpose, objectives and scope; and are fully and clearly described.	Partially	The evaluation design is only very briefly described in the main report (although more information is in the inception report). It appears thorough and reliable and is guided by the ToR. The evaluation used multiple data sources and data collection methods, including desk review, observation, focus group discussions, a survey, and key informant interviews. But more information on the tools, in particular, is needed.
	ii	Data sources are appropriate - these would normally include qualitative and quantitative sources (unless otherwise specified in the ToR) - and are all clearly described.	Partially	The evaluation used multiple data sources. More information on the sources would be helpful.
	iii	Sampling strategy is provided - it should include a description of how diverse perspectives are captured (or if not, provide reasons for this).	Yes	The evaluation team designed the sampling strategy in collaboration with UNICEF's staff. The evaluation adopted a purposive sampling approach and collected data from five out of 14 governorates of Syria.
	iv	Clear and complete description of the methods of analysis.	Partially	For the analysis, it is noted that the quantitative results are triangulated by qualitative findings in the report. More clarity about data analysis would have been helpful.
	v	Methodology allows for drawing causal connections between outputs and expected outcomes.	Yes	The methodology makes the causal connections clear.
	vi	Clear and complete description of limitations and constraints faced by the evaluation, including gaps in the evidence that was generated and mitigation of bias, and how these were addressed by the evaluators (as feasible).	Yes	The description of the limitations and mitigation strategies is complete and adequately described.
Question 10.		Are ethical issues and considerations described? The evaluation should be guided by the UNEG ethical standards for evaluation. As such, the evaluation report should include:		
	i	Explicit and contextualized reference to the obligations of evaluators (independence, impartiality, credibility, conflicts of interest, accountability).	Yes	All five criteria are specified and how they are applied is explained in the ethical consideration section.
	ii	Description of ethical safeguards for participants appropriate for the issues relevant to methodology and how they are applied (respect for dignity and diversity, right to self-determination, fair representation, compliance with codes for vulnerable groups, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm). For those cases where the evaluation involves interviewing children, explicit reference is made to the UNICEF procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children.	Yes	The UNEG ethical standards guide the evaluation, and it complies with the conduct prescribed by and expected from UNICEF.
SECTION E: EVALUATION FINDINGS (weight 25%)			100%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 11.		Do the findings clearly address all evaluation objectives and scope?		
	i	Findings marshal sufficient levels of evidence to systematically address all of the evaluation's questions, sub-questions and criteria.	Yes	The evaluation report has answered all the questions specified under relevance/appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability/connectedness, coverage, and coordination.
	ii	Explicit use of the intervention's results framework/ToC in the formulation of the findings.	Yes	The Table-1 (the Back to learning initiative in Syria - the three pillars in numbers) in the effectiveness section has achievements illustrated with data.
Question 12.		Are evaluation findings derived from the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available, objective, reliable and valid data and by accurate quantitative and qualitative analysis of evidence.		
	i	Evaluation uses credible forms of qualitative and quantitative data. It presents both output and outcome-level data as relevant to the evaluation framework. Triangulation is evident through the use of multiple data sources.	Yes	Even though the evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach, the analysis heavily relied on qualitative data. Qualitative data included stakeholder and rights-holder interviews, and quantitative data captured information on BTL staff. Triangulation was an essential part of the evaluation, and it captured diverse perspectives and experiences. The report provided sufficient evidence for the findings under each criteria.
	ii	Findings are clearly supported by, and respond to, the evidence presented, including both positive and negative. Findings are based on clear performance indicators, standards, benchmarks, or other means of comparison as relevant for each question.	Yes	Findings are clear, and they respond to the evidence presented in the report. Both positive and negative aspects of the findings are embedded in the results.
	iii	Causal factors (contextual, organizational, managerial, etc.) leading to achievement or non-achievement of results are clearly identified. For theory-based evaluations, findings analyse the logical chain (progression -or not- from implementation to results).	Yes	The causal relationships are clearly identified concerning achievement and non-achievement of results.
Question 13.		Does the evaluation assess and use the intervention's Results Based Management elements?		
	i	Assessment of the adequacy of the intervention's monitoring system (including completeness and appropriateness of results/performance framework - including vertical and horizontal logic, M&E tools and their usage if required in ToR) to support decision-making.	Yes	It is noted the system has improved significantly over time - it became more effective and integrated with the recruitment of an information management officer.
SECTION F: EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS & LESSONS LEARNED (weight 10%)			50%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)

Question 14.	Do the conclusions clearly present an objective overall assessment of the intervention?		
	i Conclusions are clearly formulated and reflect the purpose and objectives of the evaluation. They are sufficiently forward looking (if a formative evaluation or if the implementation is expected to continue or have additional phase).	Partially	There are five forward-looking conclusions but they are only very briefly stated and do not cover all of the criteria.
	ii Conclusions are derived appropriately from findings, and present a picture of the strengths and limitations of the intervention that adds insight and analysis beyond the findings.	Yes	The conclusions are derived from the findings and provide insights into the interventions' limitations and strengths of the interventions, e.g., UNICEF's position as co-lead of the education sector and its network of implementing partners enabled efficient coordination of the initiative.
Question 15.	Are logical and informative lessons learned identified? [N/A if lessons are not presented and not requested in ToR]		
	i Identified lessons stem logically from the findings, have wider applicability and relevance beyond the object of the evaluation.	Partially	The lessons learned stem from the evaluation findings; however, lack sufficient contextual information. The lessons cover the system, structural, and strategy aspects of the intervention; however, their broader applicability could have been more clear
	ii Lessons are clearly and concisely presented, yet have sufficient detail to be useful for intended audience.	No	The lessons are too brief to be useful for the audience.
SECTION G:	RECOMMENDATIONS (weight 15%)	38%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 16.	Are recommendations well grounded in the evaluation?		
	i Recommendations align with the evaluation purpose, are clearly formulated and logically derived from the findings and/or conclusions.	Yes	The recommendations are based upon the evaluation findings, but are written into the findings section instead of being placed at the end of the report.
	ii Recommendations are useful and actionable for primary intended users and uses (relevant to the intervention); guidance is given for implementation, as appropriate.	Partially	The recommendations are very brief (one sentence) but appear practical and useful. However, most do not include enough information to guide their implementation.
	iii Process for developing the recommendations is described, and includes the Involvement of duty-bearers, as well as rights holders when feasible (or explanation given for why they were not involved).	No	The report does not explain the process of recommendation development- it does not appear that the duty-bearers or rights-holders had input.
Question 17.	Are recommendations clearly presented?		
	i Clear identification of groups or duty-bearers responsible for action for each recommendation (or clearly clustered group of recommendations). Clear prioritization and/or classification of recommendations to support use.	No	Those responsible for taking action could be more clearly shown. Unicef standards also call for recommendations to be prioritized or grouped.
SECTION H:	REPORT STRUCTURE AND PRESENTATION (weight 5%)	50%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 18.	Does the evaluation report include all relevant information?		
	i Opening pages include: Name of evaluated object, timeframe of the evaluation, date of report, location of evaluated object, names and/or organization(s) of the evaluator(s), name of organization commissioning the evaluation, table of contents -including, as relevant, tables, graphs, figures, annexes-; list of acronyms/abbreviations, page numbers.	Yes	All elements are included in the opening pages of the report.
	ii Annexes include, if not in report body: terms of reference, evaluation matrix, list of interviewees, results chain/ToC/logical framework, list of site visits, data collection instruments (such as survey or interview questionnaires), list of documentary evidence. Other appropriate annexes could include: additional details on methodology, results chain, information about the evaluator(s).	Partially	The majority of the elements are present in the Annex (1 to 8). Missing is some form of result chain/ToC/logical framework.
Question 19.	Is the report logically structured?		
	i Structure is easy to identify and navigate (for instance, with numbered sections, clear titles and sub-titles, well formatted).	Partially	Although the report structure is easy to follow, section numbers could have improved the report's legibility. Further, it would have been helpful if the report had included evaluation questions for different findings.
	ii Structure accords to UNICEF guidelines for evaluation reports: context, purpose and methodology would normally precede findings, which would normally be followed by conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations.	Partially	The report structure generally follows UNICEF's guidelines, however, a separate section for the recommendations is needed to meet standards instead of including them in the evaluation findings section.
Question 20.	Is the report well presented?		
	i Report is of reasonable length; it does not exceed number of pages that may be specified in ToR.	Partially	The report is only 23 pages long, excluding the four-page executive summary. The ToR specified a maximum of 50 pages. The report could have been longer to accommodate some of the missing elements.
	ii Report is easy to understand (written in accessible way for intended audience) and generally free from grammar, spelling and punctuation errors.	Partially	The report is mostly well-written although there are a number of spelling and grammar errors.
	iii Frequent use of visual aids (such as infographics, maps, tables, figures, photos) to convey key information. These are clearly presented, labeled, and referenced in text.	No	There is just one visual aid; a table on p 17 that provides details of enrollment data and number of children/people reached.
SECTION I:	EVALUATION PRINCIPLES (weight 10%)	57%	Comments on Rating (include explanations for any criterion not rated)
Question 21.	Did the evaluation design and style consider incorporation of the UN and UNICEF's commitment to a human rights-based approach to programming, to gender equality, and to equity?		
	i Reference and use of rights-based framework, and/or CRC, and/or CCC, and/or CEDAW and/or other rights related benchmarks in the design of the evaluation.	Yes	The evaluation design considered the three mentioned Conventions.
	ii Clear description of the level of participation of key rights holders and duty bearers in the conduct of the evaluation (for example, a reference group is established, stakeholders are involved as informants or in data gathering).	Partially	A reasonable mix of duty bearers (UNICEF staff, representative of the education sector and Ministry of Education, implementing partners and donors) and rights holders were engaged and interviewed for the evaluation.

	iii	Language is empowering and inclusive, avoiding gender, heterosexual, age, cultural and religious bias, among others; use terminology of rights holders and duty bearers; data is disaggregated by marginalized group; differential results are assessed (distribution of results across different groups).	Partially	The language is neutral without any biases. The rights-based and duty bearer terminology is used. But the data disaggregation by gender, age, disability, and social group mentioned in the evaluation design is not very evident in the evaluation report. However, Annex 7- Figure 2 has an FGD disaggregation table with the gender profile of the participants.
	iv	Evaluation assesses the extent to which the implementation of the intervention addresses child rights and Leave No-one Behind (gender and other excluded and marginalized groups). It is disability inclusive.	Yes	The evaluation assessed the extent to which the intervention addresses children's right to safe and secure education. Disability is considered.
Question 22.		Does the evaluation meet UN SWAP evaluation performance indicators? (Note: this question will be rated according to UN SWAP standards)	3	
	i	GEEW is integrated in the Evaluation Scope of analysis, and evaluation criteria and questions are designed in a way that ensures GEEW-related data will be collected.	Partially integrated	The evaluation scope did not include GEEW. The objectives section notes that the evaluation assessed both child rights and gender equality components. However, there was not as much attention given to gender as was requested in the ToR.
	ii	A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data analysis techniques are selected.	Partially integrated	The inception report's methodology section specified that the evaluation approach, data collection, and data analysis included gender sensitivity and equality components, but this was not reflected in the evaluation report's methodology section. There was clear intent to have a gender-responsive process but the actual practice used should be explained in the final report.
	iii	The evaluation Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations reflect a gender analysis.	Partially integrated	The report did not include a contextual discussion on gender. The findings and recommendations sections briefly reflected on gender equality issues, but the discussions could have been more substantial.

SWAP Rating Guidance

i GEEW is integrated in the Evaluation Scope of analysis, and evaluation criteria and questions are designed in a way that ensures GEEW-related data will be collected.

- Does the evaluation assess whether sufficient information was collected during the implementation period on specific result indicators to measure progress on human rights and gender equality results?
- Does the evaluation include an objective specific to assessment of human rights and gender equality considerations or was it mainstreamed in other objectives?
- Was a standalone criterion on gender and/or human rights included in the evaluation framework or mainstreamed into other evaluation criteria?
- Is there a dedicated evaluation question or sub-question regarding how GEEW was integrated into the subject of the evaluation?

ii A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data analysis techniques are selected.

- Does the evaluation specify how gender issues are addressed in the methodology, including: how data collection and analysis methods integrate gender considerations and ensure data collected is disaggregated by sex?
- Does the evaluation methodology employ a mixed-methods approach, appropriate to evaluating GEWE considerations?
- Are a diverse range of data sources and processes employed (i.e. triangulation, validation) to guarantee inclusion, accuracy and credibility?
- Does the evaluation methods and sampling frame address the diversity of stakeholders affected by the intervention, particularly the most vulnerable, where appropriate?
- Were ethical standards considered throughout the evaluation and were all stakeholder groups treated with integrity and respect for confidentiality?

iii The evaluation Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations reflect a gender analysis.

- Does the evaluation have a background section that includes an intersectional analysis of the specific social groups affected by the issue or spell out the relevant normative instruments or policies related to human rights and gender equality?
- Do the findings include data analysis that explicitly and transparently triangulates the voices of different social role groups, and/or disaggregates quantitative data, where applicable?
- Are unanticipated effects of the intervention on human rights and gender equality described?
- Does the evaluation report provide specific recommendations addressing GEWE issues, and priorities for action to improve GEWE or the intervention or future initiatives in this area?