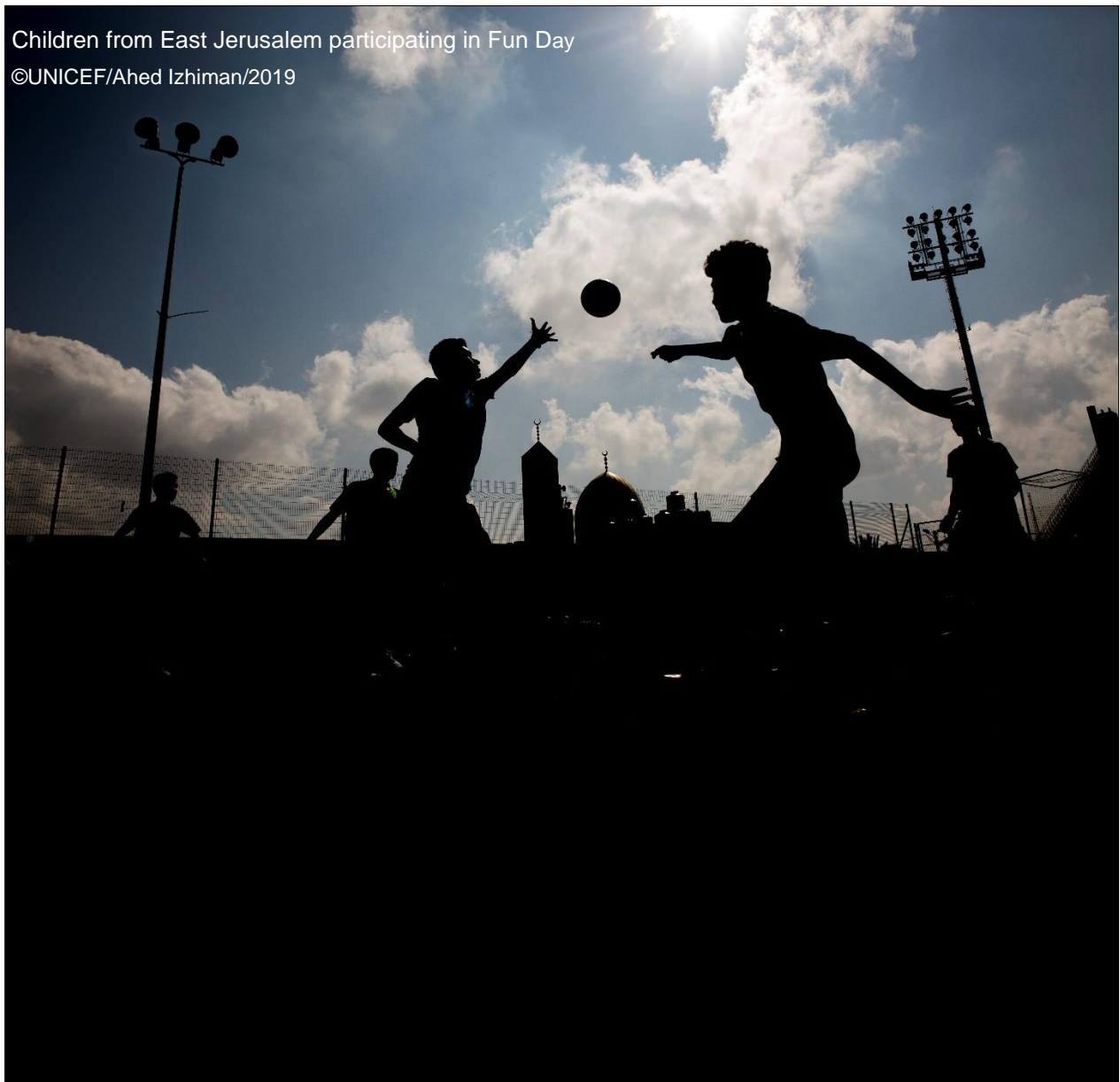


External Evaluation of the Project “Safeguarding Children's Rights in East Jerusalem”

FINAL REPORT



Title:	Formative evaluation of the East Jerusalem programme to provide evidence on the outcomes or results of the protection project on the lives of beneficiaries that can be attributed to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) interventions
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1. Introduction

1.1. Project rationale and main activities

The Safeguarding Children's Rights in East Jerusalem Programme is a multi-year child protection intervention to support children to be safe and protected. The programme is informed by:

- The United Nations East Jerusalem Response Strategy that highlights the needs of children in East Jerusalem;
- Findings and recommendations of a Rapid Appraisal and consultations conducted with key stakeholders in 2016; and
- A mapping exercise of organizations that provide services in East Jerusalem that was conducted in 2017.

In 2017, UNICEF reached 780 children and parents with child protection interventions. In 2018, UNICEF partners reached more than 1,000 vulnerable and at-risk children (40% girls) and 500 parents. In 2019, UNICEF and local partner organizations supplied services to more than 1,730 vulnerable and at-risk children (45% girls) and 850 parents. Services included rehabilitation and therapeutic services, remedial education (to reduce risk of school dropouts), access to child-safe places, positive engagement in educational activities, awareness-raising of children and their families on child rights, resilience-building activities and recreational activities in the programme's target areas. Through the generous contribution of the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), UNICEF also enhanced child protection interventions in East Jerusalem by supporting local community-based organizations (CBOs) to improve awareness of children's rights, operational capacities to utilize and account for resources, and coordination among local child protection service providers.

1.2. Evaluation purpose

The purpose of this formative evaluation is to assess the extent to which the goals of the child protection project on safeguarding the rights of children in East Jerusalem are being met. The evaluation examines whether the project is fit for purpose and strategically positioned. There are also secondary objectives, among them assessing the relevance of project activities, the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the programme using Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria, stakeholder satisfaction, the manner in which cross-cutting issues are addressed and how the project could be adjusted and strengthened.

The evaluation took place between May and December 2020. It was originally scheduled to be completed by October, but data collection was delayed because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluation design, planning, implementation, analysis and writing were

conducted according to the United Nations Evaluation Group’s (UNEG) guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality and the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

1.3. Methodology

The evaluation team addressed the evaluation criteria using secondary and primary data, seeking to develop a holistic overview of the project’s activities and their impact on the targeted population. The team:

- reviewed the project documents, and
- Collected primary data using qualitative methods to capture different stakeholders’ perceptions of change that could be attributed to the project. The team conducted a series of Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the different stakeholders of the project. Interlocutors included children and parents who were participating in sport, remedial education activities, psychosocial support and awareness-raising. The evaluation activities also included UNICEF partners, relevant UNICEF staff, donors and a selected number of community members and leaders where the project was implemented.
- Chose to rule out in-person surveys as high-risk, given COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Challenges and limitations

Time Frame: The evaluation took place within a compressed time frame due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions on gathering and movement. Instead of being conducted between May and October 2020, the evaluation time frame was extended to December 2020.

Data Collection: The pandemic also affected data collection, as randomly selected participants were reticent to participate, affected by lockdown or delayed by their own participation in the pandemic response (project staff). It was not always possible to randomly select replacements in line with the evaluation planning, given the emergency situation.

Participation & Tools: The data collected would have greatly benefitted from additional insights gleaned through observation of activities and more participatory work with children, but this was simply not possible. The project’s Rapid Appraisal and ‘baselines’ set at activity level by partners throughout the project sought to act as a proxy for one established baseline, which would have made it easier to build monitoring tools that capture change.

Gender & Human Rights: For the purposes of this evaluation, ‘particularly vulnerable’ groups of children include girls and persons with disabilities. Given the evaluators’ limited in-person

engagement with beneficiaries it was not possible to explore gender perspectives in great detail. The analysis offers a gender perspective where data is available, but for the most part issues raised by male and female beneficiaries had many commonalities. As detailed below, partners are not fully able to target children with disabilities due to access, infrastructure and training gaps; for the same reasons, children with disabilities are not adequately represented in this evaluation.

Ethics: This evaluation was undertaken in accordance with UNICEF’s guidelines. UNEG norms/standards and the UNEG ethical guidelines to ensure that potential risks were prevented and that participating children and their caregivers were treated with the utmost respect throughout the evaluation process. Beneficiaries' confidentiality and anonymity were protected throughout the evaluation, and no identifying information was collected or is included in this report.

2. Major findings

Broadly, the evaluation found that project activities respond to challenges identified by the local community, and ongoing activities continue to respond well to the needs of the community. The project does not duplicate existing activities but rather builds upon them. Overall, beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction with the project and confirmed that the activities met their expectations. Children and caregivers reported that the activities were conducted in places they considered to be safe and reputable. Partners clearly plan activities according to needs and with respect to gender.

The following section lays out these findings in more detail using the OECD-DAC criteria employed in the evaluation, followed by findings related to the COVID-19 crisis and a conclusion and lessons learned.

2.1. Relevance: ‘Relevance’ refers to (a) the extent to which UNICEF’s Safeguarding Children’s Rights Programme responds to the needs of beneficiaries and to the priorities of UNICEF and its partners and (b) the way UNICEF adapted the intervention to changes in circumstances over the timeline of the programme.

Finding: The objectives of the project remain valid. The project was designed to respond to a number of child protection issues that still need addressing.

Finding: The partners and beneficiaries agree that the project’s activities respond to the needs of the communities. The range of activities offered are deemed both appropriate and necessary among community stakeholders. Scaling up the activities would inevitably enable more children and families to access these critical opportunities. Across the various phases of

funding, the project scaled up the activities and managed to reach more beneficiaries, which was welcomed by partners. However, the local communities reported that additional activities and coverage are critical.

Finding: The project took account of some cross-cutting themes, notably gender and children’s rights. There remain significant gaps in holistically addressing disability.

Overview of evidence to support findings

The UNICEF East Jerusalem Project is based on the 2016 Rapid Appraisal of children, two consultation workshops with key child protection actors in East Jerusalem organized in 2016, and a Mapping Study of organizations providing services to vulnerable children. The Rapid Appraisal, Mapping Study and consultation workshops form the empirical basis upon which this project was designed and conducted.

Consistency of activities with overall project goal

The project activities were designed to respond to challenges identified by the local community in the 2016 Rapid Appraisal. Four years later, community members and leaders report that these challenges remain in the communities targeted by the project. As such, project objectives that seek to provide children with access to protection services and activities to strengthen and support their mental health and well-being remain relevant. Further, the evaluation found that current activities respond well to the needs of the community. The activities carried out by partners within the project do not duplicate existing activities but rather build upon them. Beneficiaries supported the activities. Parents in FGDs did request greater inclusion of men among project beneficiaries. The development of targeted activities for fathers would be a welcome addition to future work, in addition to the current array of activities.

Geographical reach based on identified vulnerabilities

All partners cited the Rapid Appraisals as the basis upon which activities within the programme were decided. The project was described as flexible, and different partners explained that they were able to change activities depending on emerging needs. For example, one partner identified a greater need in their community to work with persons with disabilities and proposed to UNICEF a project extension.

Partners evaluate their activities on an ongoing basis with the support of activity coordinators who are in direct contact with beneficiaries. These discussions inform planning for the next phase of the project.

Cross-cutting themes

Partners clearly plan activities in accordance with needs, including gender. Individualized support extended through the programme was mentioned repeatedly by mothers throughout the evaluation and should be considered one of the project’s key strengths.

However, the evaluation found gaps in providing the same level of service when planning activities to be accessible and offering individual care and attention to people with disabilities. This was primarily because partners lacked sufficient support and resources to incorporate varying levels of physical ability into their activities. For instance, several partners reported that it would not be possible for them to adapt their premises to be easily accessible for people with disabilities because they lacked the resources to do so via the scope of this project. Similarly, partner staff lacked what they deemed to be the necessary training to adequately support children with disabilities.

2.2. Effectiveness: ‘Effectiveness’ refers to the extent to which UNICEF’s Safeguarding Children’s Rights has achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and results.

Finding: **The project objectives have partially been achieved.** Under Objective 1, coordination is an essential element in support of the first project objective. Under Objective 2, the development of a joint strategy is key. Under Objective 3, access to support and counselling has been strengthened throughout the project.

Finding: **The effectiveness of the project’s activities suffered from the gaps between partnership agreements (between UNICEF and partners).** The impact of funding gaps should always be reported to the donor. In the future, donors should be encouraged to avoid making cuts in funding.

Finding: **The root causes of many child protection concerns in East Jerusalem limit the extent to which project objectives can be fulfilled.** This observation was emphasized by many stakeholders.

Overview of evidence to support findings

Achievement of project goals

Outcome 1: Improved access to prevention and protection services

The evaluation found that the number of project participants has increased over time, although it does not appear that access was widened to include children in additional communities or vulnerable groups. The evidence gathered clearly shows that access to activities under the

project is highly valued by beneficiaries. Coordination was established in 2018 to enable and support partners in working together in East Jerusalem under a shared framework. The core coordination tasks include:

1. Improving coordination, service delivery and information sharing; and
2. Building the capacity of child protection partners and encouraging child protection mainstreaming.

The evaluation found that coordination has played a formative role in allowing partners who had not previously been in contact to understand each other’s activities and coordinate their work. Partners said that coordination has been fundamental in enabling children to access a broader range of protection services and assisted them in avoiding duplication of activities and services. Coordination has contributed to more referrals and more children being able to take part in activities and access services based on where they live. This is the strongest evidence found by the evaluation that access to services is increasing.

Coordination remains scalable, with the prospect of increasing levels of coordination and improved capacity, particularly in relation to the referral system. UNICEF reported that many activities are planned including building the capacity of the coordination partners, increasing the number and quality of civil society organizations (CSOs) participating, and strengthening linkages with other coordination platforms in the West Bank.

Across the different types of stakeholders, all respondents reported that psychosocial and mental health activities are useful in this context. As some interviewees reported, the recruitment of a social worker/psychologist to be present at local community organizations to listen to the communities’ concerns was effective in easing communities’ anxieties and tensions. Several partners particularly noted the engagement of a treatment centre to provide mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) services including psychosocial first aid, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) to children is ‘critical to the everyday resilience of children in East Jerusalem’.

Among community members consulted, many were aware of the UNICEF-funded activities in East Jerusalem. They overall had positive feedback on these activities in achieving the stated objectives and in meeting the needs of the population in the area. In particular, they highlighted the importance of psychosocial activities in addressing the stresses faced by the population.

Outcome 2: Improved evidence-based interventions

The joint strategy to improve the protection of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem was developed in late 2018. The purpose of the strategy was to articulate a shared understanding of priorities and actions, including clear roles and responsibilities. UNICEF indicates that there have been delays in implementing the joint strategy due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcome 3: Improved access to rehabilitation and support services

Different partners reported that a key success of the project has been the creation of spaces for women to engage more in awareness training. One partner described this as something new and said that, over the course of the project, there had been an increasing number of women attending such sessions.

Community members appreciated the learning activities implemented by different UNICEF partners. These activities, they said, respond to a critical need in their communities in the context of the low quality of education in many schools. The subjects being taught (Arabic, Math and English) were viewed as those most important to the pupils. In general, these educational activities, remedial education and special education activities were welcomed and praised, as they compensate for the care and support overburdened parents sometimes cannot provide.

Furthermore, sport activities were also appreciated, with many children reported as benefitting from skills and knowledge provided in sport training. However, beneficiaries described the lack of proper infrastructure for women and girls, and noted the absence of public space for women's sports.

Nearly all of the interviewees expressed a high demand for the services provided. The activities were perceived as relevant to the priorities and concerns of the communities, yet they were limited in number and coverage and could not reach all those who need them. When confronted with the idea that the project targets the most vulnerable, evaluation participants responded that everyone in East Jerusalem is in need, and all activities conducted there – not only those provided by UNICEF – are insufficient.

Gaps between different phases of the project, which the evaluation team understands was due to funding, had a negative effect on the continuity of children's participation in the project. As a result, many children involved in the first phase (for one partner) did not return for the second phase. However, this was reported to UNICEF, and the subsequent phases continued without a similar gap.

Beneficiary satisfaction

Overall, beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the programme and said the activities met their expectations. Children and caregivers reported that the activities were relevant, suitable to their age and gender, and were conducted in places they considered to be safe and known to everyone, including their families.

Throughout the FGDs and in interviews conducted with children, many stated that the activities had been stimulating and supportive, helping them deal with the challenges they faced. Beneficiaries reported that trainers and facilitators were kind, caring, encouraging and

supportive. The majority of parents and children said that the activities improved their well-being.

Beneficiaries who were involved in remedial education reported that the activity helped them with school and homework. They viewed this as very important, especially those who are close to graduation. Their ability to continue to higher education is very much dependent on their success in high school. The majority of children spoke of the challenge of re-integrating into school. However, several children described the positive influence that the activities played in enabling them to return to education, in particular by supporting their mothers in finding an appropriate school.

However, many of the beneficiaries were unclear on why activities had ended when there were gaps in the project. This reiterates the importance of giving attention to ensuring there are no gaps in support services in the next phase of the project.

Intervention design

The overall intervention is clearly designed to respond to the needs assessment conducted in 2016 and the mapping of organizations and activities already underway in East Jerusalem. Reflecting on the activities they could access, both mothers and children frequently referenced the way in which the project helped them to think about their own well-being. Most successful within the project were cases where multiple issues were addressed simultaneously. Women or children who were engaged in only one activity expressed far less effect on their overall well-being. With this in mind, horizontal strategies (attempting to reach the largest number possible) may not suit the reality of East Jerusalem, and it is worth focusing on a more vertical approach (addressing multiple issues and intersectionality for small numbers of beneficiaries). This has implications for the expected impact and sustainability of this project, which are discussed below.

Regarding the design of specific activities, the evaluation found that partners maintained different approaches in designing activities. While some partners had clear systems of evaluating their own work, engaging in community feedback and then using this feedback to make changes to activities where necessary, other partners did not evidence systematised consultation with communities. Strengthening these linkages could improve overall responsiveness and results.

Factors enabling and constraining UNICEF's effectiveness

Factors that contributed to the effectiveness of this intervention in East Jerusalem include:

1. Sustained investment into specific areas (MHPSS, support, remedial education).

2. Direct work through partners, with relationships built and sustained over a prolonged period.
3. Recruitment of staff from the same areas as the intervention, which helps build trust and positive relationships between children and facilitators.
4. Conducting activities in local CBOs that are known within the communities and easy to access.
5. Engagement in centres and CBOs with a strong sense of belonging and integration.
6. Trainers’ and facilitators’ positive and empowering attitudes, kindness and genuine care that were extended towards children.
7. Activities that responded to the needs of the beneficiaries by providing fun and entertainment as well as educational/developmental purposes.
8. Flexible approaches that allowed partners to adapt to the needs of the context. This was particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which partners were required to quickly adapt their activities to an unprecedented context.

Factors that constrained the effectiveness of this UNICEF intervention include:

1. Gaps between different phases of the project for some partners, meaning that some children who had been engaged in the early stages dropped out.
2. Incomplete and perhaps mismatched plan implementation and follow-up within communities.

2.3. Efficiency: ‘Efficiency’ refers to the extent to which UNICEF’s Safeguarding Children’s Rights Programme delivers results in a timely and economic manner.

Findings

Finding: The project delivered within budget both in 2018 and 2019 and effectively promoted a culture of value for money. It maximized strong pre-existing partnerships and emphasized the importance of coordination.

Finding: The project format capitalized on established working practices within partner organizations and existing staff capacity for the delivery of activities. This had a positive effect on overall efficiency.

Finding: The absence of a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) among partners hampered the ability to track progress effectively and to enable partners to report against outcomes rather than outputs. For instance, there is a significant difference between tracking attendance and recording feedback from a training course on one hand and tracking the impact of what children have learned during the course on the other. It would be useful programmatically to understand individual outcomes in a more systematic way.

Overview of evidence to support findings

Cost effectiveness

The project delivered within budget both in 2018 and 2019. The programme capitalized on existing partner service provision in East Jerusalem. This ensured that it was not ‘reinventing the wheel’ but was instead taking advantage of established approaches and practices that were already familiar to partners, thereby increasing efficiency. Overall, partners reported having sufficient resources to implement activities under this programme. However, the continuing demand for services puts pressure on staff, teachers and trainers.

In spite of the overall positive responses to the coordination among partners, it was noted in several interviews that this approach created additional pressures on staff in partner organizations who did not initially have capacity to fully follow up on every centre.

Resources for the project were adequate, but the reach is currently limited. Services are in high demand, and partners reported that increased funding would be needed to enable a higher number of beneficiaries to access the project. Feedback from beneficiaries stated that needs in East Jerusalem had not changed and in fact there is a need for more activities (noting that the current activities do not reach all those in need).

Timely monitoring and reporting mechanisms

UNICEF monitors the effectiveness of the project through a range of methods. These include:

1. The tailored development of M&E plans for each partner;
2. Reports from partners against their project deliverables and agreed-upon targets;
3. Regular follow-up from UNICEF M&E staff on progress against M&E plans; and
4. Direct contact with and monitoring visits to partners.

UNICEF supports project partners to ensure continued engagement in their internal M&E processes. This includes the development of integrated M&E plans and accountability frameworks with each partner. These plans include clear explanations of indicators, explanation of means of indicator verification, the frequency with which data is expected to be collected, who is responsible for data collection and how data will be used. M&E training is also provided to each project partner by UNICEF and is maintained with regular reviews, depending on the pre-existing M&E capacity of each partner.

There appeared to be inconsistencies between partners’ levels of M&E capacity and the evaluation found that partners currently have extremely varied understandings of/engagement with monitoring and reporting. This is partly to be expected since, as highlighted above, different partners started the project at different points in time. Further UNICEF has conducted data

quality assurance assessments with several implementing partners but not all. A review of M&E training and the extent to which partners are able to act upon the skills delivered may be desirable.

Available monitoring data presents quantitative findings (e.g., the numbers of children reached) rather than in-depth learning (e.g., the impact and effectiveness of different interventions). This is an area in need of development in the next phase of this work. More nuanced qualitative indicators could help to resolve this.

2.4. Impact

‘Impact’ refers to the extent to which UNICEF’s Safeguarding Children’s Rights Programme has resulted in higher-level effects, whether positive or negative, intended or unintended. This evaluation has not found sufficient evidence related to the impact of this project to substantively answer these questions.

Findings

Finding: Beneficiaries, their caregivers and partner organizations all reported throughout the evaluation that the project’s activities had a positive impact on the target population.

When discussing impact, examples were given that included improvement in school performance, increased self-esteem, more confidence in navigating the public sphere, and an improved sense of overall family well-being.

Finding: Community members reported high levels of acceptance of interventions being offered and overall satisfaction with the activities offered. The evaluation takes this as a critical proxy for understanding the impact of the project. However, a stronger understanding of beneficiary satisfaction could have been developed via the collection and collation of related data by UNICEF.

Overview of evidence to support findings

Reaching the target population

The target population of the project has successfully been reached, with the exception of children with disabilities. Across the five communities in East Jerusalem, UNICEF has consistently met (or very nearly met) the target number of participants reached and activities conducted by each partner. As a result, there has been a substantial increase in the number of children and family members accessing activities through this programme each year since its inception.

Reporting the ‘real difference’ the project has made to beneficiaries

Across the different levels of stakeholders in this evaluation, examples highlighted how the project benefited them and the local community. For one, as reported anecdotally by many community members and partners, the project was useful in improving the school performance of children by enabling children to stay connected to education. This impact is reflected in children continuing to go to school and in reporting better school performance.

The participants also reported increased levels of optimism and self-esteem among children who took part in the project activities. The activities gave them a daily structure and routine and helped them to form new friendships and peer groups. This change was felt and perceived by parents who reported improvement in children’s behaviour. According to the parents of beneficiaries and community members, the project activities also impacted families as a whole, as the activities helped mothers to manage their stress and develop their approaches to parenting. This impact reportedly brought harmony to the whole family.

Beyond the family unit, project activities contributed to improving the well-being of the target communities, helped the partners and small community-based structures to continue providing services to the population, and thus enhanced resilience within the community.

Satisfaction of beneficiaries, caregivers and community members

Two indicators of impact that were highlighted by community members were the ‘satisfaction’ of the community with the services provided and the ‘acceptance’ of the project and its activities by the local community. Staff members involved in the project activities reported that beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the activities implemented. They usually contacted the partners to know if other activities would be organized in the future. The beneficiaries usually took the initiative to recommend the activities to other relatives and neighbours. This proved to be effective in recruiting participants for each new round of activities.

Community members involved in the project reported that it was difficult to recruit participants to take part in psychological debriefing or family therapy sessions at the beginning of the project. However, over time, the quality of services provided made more parents and families open to seeking help from civil society organizations. According to many interviewees, this acceptance is relatively new, especially in very conservative areas of East Jerusalem.

2.5. Sustainability

‘Sustainability’ refers to the extent to which the benefits of UNICEF’s Safeguarding Children’s Rights Programme will, or are likely to, continue. This section discusses sustainability by

addressing matters inherent to the programme structure; feedback and complaints mechanisms; issues of complementarity, partnerships and coordination; and the inevitable impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of this work going forward.

Findings

Finding: The evaluation found that sustainability has been considered throughout the different phases of design and implementation. This is evidenced by UNICEF’s tendency to work with previous partners or with partners involved in other programmes. In addition, implementing partners for this project have largely remained the same throughout the cycle.

Finding: There is a potential for improving sustainability by preparing partners to lead on social change even when UNICEF and other international organizations are not present. This can be done by building the capacity of partners and investing in maximizing coherence and connectedness with other programmes.

Finding: Sustainability could be better approached through the clear definition of realistically achievable goals. Scaling down the overall objectives of the project and reconsidering what the project can sustainably achieve could be useful in this regard.

Overview of evidence to support findings

Project sustainability

This project’s sustainable effects were visible in that it provided beneficiaries and their families with ways to cope. One of the most important aspects of the project was a realisation of the significance of self-care and well-being as a means of assisting mothers to cope with change. Mothers are often the main caregivers and also bear most of the household responsibilities. Due to the project, some women adopted changes in their lifestyles to include self-care (for example, taking time for themselves, doing regular exercise). Their conclusion was that they “need to feel better so they can continue to give”. In essence, they found a path to greater resilience.

Feedback and complaints mechanisms

Partners cited different avenues by which beneficiaries could ask questions related to the programme or present complaints. This suggests that there are gaps across the programme in offering and applying systematic feedback and complaint mechanisms. For example, some partners note informal ways of gathering feedback and complaints, such as by project staff making their phone numbers available to beneficiaries, establishing WhatsApp groups, and running focus groups. Other partners had more formalized systems to file and respond to complaints and feedback. Partners with a strong, pre-existing M&E capacity were better able to establish these processes for activities within the UNICEF programme. There is room for

capacity building in this area, including a systematic approach for reporting back to beneficiaries about actions taken as a result of their feedback. UNICEF reported that it is aware of existing gaps and continuously engages partners in capacity building activities in this domain.

Complementarity, partnerships and coordination

A core success of this programme hinges on the strength of UNICEF’s relationships and cooperation with partners. Through this programme and its emphasis on coordination, alignment of activities within the sector, and capacity building across the sector, UNICEF is investing significantly in partner organizations. This has been possible due to the strength of the working relationships in place. The project builds on the existing resources and capacities of local partners and encourages them to invest in their existing staff in a way that paves the road for sustainable interventions. Thus, the project activities and the way they were managed supported a sustainable intervention. Each of the partners interviewed reported that they were doing activities that are similar to what they proposed to implement under UNICEF’s partnership (i.e., psychosocial and mental health, special education, sport activities, etc.). This aspect was also reflected in the partners’ current activities besides the ones under their UNICEF partnership.

Activities managed by partners pre-date UNICEF involvement and are aligned with the long-term vision or strategy of each partner. To this end, partners involved in the project are all playing to their own strengths and have, in some cases, a vast institutional knowledge of their own to bring to the activities conducted under this programme. Some partners reported challenges in building trust in communities in order to conduct their work. For their work to be sustained as part of the project, it will be necessary to consider what efforts can be made to support these partners as they integrate into the East Jerusalem setting.

COVID-19 presented additional challenges. Some partners were able to shift to providing some of their services and activities online during the pandemic. UNICEF and project partners should reflect on the use of U-Report to support public service information/awareness-raising at the community level by collecting statistical information.

2.6. Coherence and connectedness

‘Coherence’ refers to the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution, the extent to which other interventions (particularly policies) support or undermine the intervention, and vice versa.

‘Connectedness’ refers to the synergies between the UNICEF Safeguarding Children’s Rights programme and other interventions within and outside of the organization.

Findings

Finding: The project is designed and built on relevant strategies and plans in place.

These include UNICEF’s Strategic plans, the United Nations East Jerusalem Response Strategy, the Rapid Appraisal and consultations conducted with key stakeholders in 2016, as well as a mapping exercise of organizations providing services in East Jerusalem that was conducted in 2017.

Finding: The evaluation found that the activities and the general approach of the project are aligned with those of UNICEF’s partners and other organizations working in East Jerusalem. To the knowledge of the evaluation, based on the perspectives of partners and community members, the project’s activities do not contradict and or negatively affect other ongoing interventions in the same communities.

Finding: As the project builds directly on the existing work of partners in East Jerusalem, it consolidates links between interventions and actively seeks to avoid duplication of services between organizations.

Overview of evidence to support findings

UNICEF’s East Jerusalem project is very compatible with both development and humanitarian interventions in both the State of Palestine (SoP) and the child protection sector. In relation to wider national and international development and humanitarian agendas, this project clearly aligns with key strategic priorities. The UN Development Assistance Framework is the strategic programme framework of the UN system in the SoP. The project is equally aligned to the strategic objectives and core pillars of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in the SoP as pertains to East Jerusalem. It addresses the core vulnerabilities of people in need; expands local action, ownership and partnerships; and seeks to improve the impact and efficiency of humanitarian action. By working to coordinate and consolidate activities and services to safeguard children’s rights in East Jerusalem, the project aligns with all three of the multi-year strategic objectives of the 2018–2020 SoP HRP.

In terms of wider UNICEF policy, the project is well-aligned with the objectives and strategy of the UNICEF Area Programme 2018–2022. It is also aligned with the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal, particularly the core target of increasing access to child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support interventions.

2.7. Coverage

‘Coverage’ refers to the extent to which the communities in East Jerusalem that face life-threatening suffering were provided with impartial assistance and protection proportionate to need.

Findings

Finding: The targeted areas in this project were selected based on the results of the mapping carried out by working protection actors in East Jerusalem and was informed by the Rapid Appraisal findings and recommendations, especially on geographical areas of concerns. The targeted areas were also discussed in stakeholder consultations in 2016.

Finding: The discussions with partners showed that the concerns and challenges that the project attempts to tackle are shared across the five targeted areas and that the needs in these areas still exist.

Finding: Although the project is designed to address the needs of the most vulnerable, discussions with partners and beneficiaries showed that some of those falling under this category are not fully covered, mainly requiring scaling up. The evaluation team was informed by UNICEF that plans for 2021–2023 programming include scaling up activities and reaching hundreds of beneficiaries through online activities.

Overview of evidence to support findings

UNICEF used a participatory, consultative process to formulate this project. The initial discussions surrounding its implementation were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders. There was a broad consensus surrounding the necessity of this project and the appropriateness of the selected areas in reaching East Jerusalem’s most vulnerable children.

The project’s five target communities are deemed to be the most vulnerable based on a needs assessment conducted in 2016. Ad hoc reporting since 2016 has enabled the project to remain appropriate in terms of addressing the vulnerabilities reported in the 2016 assessment. Many of the staff working in partner organizations live in the communities in which they work and are therefore able to ensure the project remains relevant to specific needs in each area. According to partners and community stakeholders, the vulnerabilities identified in 2016 remain in these areas and have not changed significantly.

The UNICEF Project Manager remains in close contact with partners regarding changing contexts in the different locations. The project has demonstrated flexibility to adjust where needed to allow partners to pursue activities they deem to be most meaningful.

Four years after the initial needs assessment that formed the basis of this project, the evaluation suggests that a subsequent assessment be commissioned. While the areas targeted should remain the same, more in-depth analysis of vulnerabilities within these communities would enable the project to develop its inclusive approach. The evaluation team has been informed that UNICEF is planning to conduct a series of studies/research to address this knowledge gap.

2.8. Cross-sectoral issues (HRBA and Equity)

‘Cross-sectoral issues’ refer to UNICEF’s internal efforts to align projects with both a human rights-based approach to programming (HRBAP) and an equity agenda.

Findings

Finding: The project was well aligned with the UNICEF equity agenda in relation to addressing the needs of different target groups, ages and genders. This is evident across different stages of the project, from planning to implementation to monitoring and feedback.

Finding: The project currently does not adequately address the needs of differently abled people. While the incorporation of differently abled people in project activities is outlined at the planning level, partners reported significant challenges in creating practical opportunities for children with disabilities to partake in activities.

Overview of evidence to support findings

UNICEF’s equity agenda means that all children have an opportunity to survive and to develop and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias or favouritism. The equity-based approach in UNICEF’s programmes and policies seeks to understand and address the root causes of inequity so that all children, particularly those who suffer the worst deprivations in society, have access to education, health care, sanitation, clean water, protection and other services necessary for their survival, growth and development.

The project was well-aligned with the equity agenda in its efforts to address the needs of different target groups, ages and genders. The need to attend to gender varies in different parts of East Jerusalem. The evaluation found that gender was carefully considered in the planning of activities, including selection of the trainers, teachers and activity beneficiaries. Involvement of girls in activities varies per area of Jerusalem. Long-term engagement with communities has therefore been key to ensuring girls’ participation. For instance, partners held numerous open days and friendly tournaments to encourage more dialogue with the community. After several months, this resulted in girls being permitted to take part in sports activities. Additionally,

partners sought to employ trainers/staff in communities where they are from in order to remain attentive to local cultural dynamics.

Regarding the needs of differently abled people, the project has gaps in aligning with UNICEF’s equity agenda. Adapting activities to be accessible for people with disabilities was a challenge for partners, who did not have adequate additional support. The evaluation found that while efforts were made to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities, physical access requirements such as building accessibility (ramps) and transportation were difficult to accommodate. When activities take place online (especially now in a context of COVID-19), the participation of people with disabilities is more difficult to monitor.

Given the scope of this qualitative evaluation, the limitations of existing M&E data collection to pinpoint the broader impact of this work highlighted above, and the gaps in programming discussed above, it is impossible for the evaluation to judge the extent to which protection interventions established by UNICEF through this project have reduced gender-based, geographic, disability-based or economic-based inequalities.

UNICEF’s HRBA is a conceptual framework for the process of human development. This approach is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress. This approach underpins the equity agenda. To the extent that the project was guided by a rights-based approach from its inception, the HRBA is well accounted for within this project. Nonetheless, it was unclear to the evaluation team how UNICEF ensured that the HRBA was integrated into the project design, particularly with regards to specific activities.

3. COVID-19 and its implications for the project

Although the evaluation covers the entire project duration prior to and during the pandemic, we believe it is critical to share learning from the COVID-19 response, which may help in the planning and development of future activities. In the context of COVID-19, activities have been flexible and made great efforts to move online. This included efforts to understand which teachers and families were not familiar with the required technology and organizing trainings to respond to these emerging needs. Overall, beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction with the efforts made by partners to continue activities in light of the pandemic. Children described using exercise videos at home shared by trainers and filming themselves doing the exercises to share back with the trainer.

Partners have had mixed experiences in navigating activities during the pandemic. For some, the pandemic has limited the reach, coverage and possible approach taken to activities. Several partners found that it was much harder to recruit participants to online workshops, which mean that staff had to conduct multiple workshops to reach the required number of target beneficiaries for a particular activity. This was both costly and time consuming, and success was dependent upon the availability and generosity of individual staff in allocating greater portions of their time to this work.

Inevitably, the move online has meant that those without access to the necessary technology are excluded from activities. In addition, partners reported that young people with disabilities generally do not have access to adapted technologies and that women and girls are often given less access to the internet than boys. Given the challenges, some partners decided to suspend their activities in order to concentrate on developing training materials for the future.

However, some partners have found that moving to online activities in the context of COVID-19 worked better than expected and increased their reach through online 'open days' that were attended by a higher-than-usual number of children. Another partner launched an emergency 24/7 hotline that enabled them (to some extent) to continue their activities in spite of COVID-19 restrictions. This suggests a good opportunity for capacity building between partners. Building a strong knowledge base of what works and ways of working collectively moving forward would be useful. Given the likelihood that the pandemic will continue and that vaccine distribution may prove challenging, investment in sharing and consolidating ways of continuing to work online and at a distance will be critical.

4. Conclusions and lessons learned

Overall, the project is fit for purpose in seeking to safeguard child rights and the objectives remain valid in the context of East Jerusalem. The concerns and needs of the community have not significantly changed. The project responds to a number of ongoing child protection issues that remain priorities for local communities. The programme works by providing child-friendly spaces, psychosocial services, supportive education, sport and advice for children. In this way, most of the activities provided are responsive and remedial. There is tremendous engagement on the part of implementing partners and UNICEF. The next phase of the project would benefit from reflecting on the addition of innovative elements into the project, re-enforced M&E, and discussions on project sustainability. There are a number of examples of good practices and lessons learned from the project:

Good practices

A wide range of good practices have been established throughout the project and can be taken forward into the next phase. Principle among these are the following:

- The development of a well-functioning coordination mechanism
- The establishment of a strong client referral mechanism
- Regular UNICEF Project Manager support of partners
- Partners’ swift ability and efforts in moving to online services and activities during the pandemic where possible

Lessons learned

As the project moves into the next phase, there are a number of lessons that can be capitalized upon. These include:

- The need to develop systematic monitoring of beneficiary feedback to help both UNICEF and partners to develop learning opportunities and to ensure strong and consistent communications with the communities they serve.
- The need to clearly communicate consolidated data and its analysis to partners in order to enhance activity delivery.
- Ensuring that complaint mechanisms are standardized across partners and that complaints are systematically documented and addressed.
- Including more qualitative indicators in future iterations of the existing, clearly defined M&E plan.

The evaluation notes the value of lengthening partnership agreements for sustainability. At this stage, however, there is little to suggest a strategic leadership approach to localization and community ownership. The evaluation team has noted the importance of creative programming to promote inclusion of children with disability. There may also be scope to extend the geographic coverage of the programme to other underserved areas.

The evaluation team has provided good practices and lessons learnt in relation to the OECD DAC criteria. Addressing these will be important for the next phase of the project to better safeguard child rights in East Jerusalem. The good practices and lessons learned by the project are areas of focus to continue for the next phase of the project:

- **Relevance and coverage:** The programme is relevant, but the project objectives should be reviewed. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic should be assessed and risk mitigation undertaken for the next phase of the project, noting that the duration of the pandemic is not clear. Vulnerability assessments of children in East Jerusalem, with consistent inclusion of gender-segregated, disability-sensitive criteria, and accounting for changes in vulnerabilities need to be taken into account for the next phase of the project.

- **Effectiveness:** Gaps between partnership agreements must be avoided to ensure continuity and sustained participation in the project among participants and increased attention to monitoring activities and streamlining data collection through U-Report will improve effectiveness. Further consideration of reintegration into mainstream education, are needed to improve the overall effectiveness of the project.
- **Efficiency:** The project operates within budget and builds on existing work and resources among partners. This could be improved by the establishment of more opportunities for inter-partner learning and capacity building, particularly regarding the monitoring of activities.
- **Sustainability:** Urgent attention to feedback and complaints mechanisms across the project is needed to increase the sustainability of this intervention and the continued engagement of participants.
- **Impact:** Measurement of the impact of the project is currently challenging with limited, gender-disaggregated data on beneficiary satisfaction with activities and limited data to understand detailed aspects of the project.
- **UNICEF's Cross-sectoral Issues:** One of the over-arching areas to focus on in the next phase of project planning and implementation is for UNICEF and project partners to have a better understanding of the extent and types of disability faced by beneficiaries and the challenges faced by caregivers of the differently abled.