

# EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES AND UNICEF EIGHTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN 2019–2023

The Philippines Country Programme Evaluation (PCPE) assessed the performance of the Government of the Philippines and UNICEF Eighth Country Programme for Children (CPC8) and identified lessons to inform the design of CPC9, to be launched in 2024. The evaluation focused on:

- 1) strategic positioning and systems strengthening;
- 2) equity-driven and gender-responsive programming;
- 3) emergency preparedness and humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming;
- 4) innovation-piloting-modelling-scaling up;
- 5) cross-cutting issues (gender, disability, human rights, equity); and
- 6) integrated programming (for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Adolescents).

The PCPE applied a holistic approach rather than evaluating individual sectors or programmes and was guided by a theory of change (ToC) reconstructed retrospectively in consultation with the UNICEF Philippines Country Office (PCO). The ToC sought an overall change whereby more children and adolescents in the Philippines enjoy their rights, develop to their full potential, and live in environments that are safe, protective and conducive to their needs.

To this end, CPC8 is designed around four outcomes aimed at achieving behaviour change in individuals and institutions. The results are expected to be achieved through the implementation of 13 change strategies, and cross-sectoral and integrated programming. The CPC8 Action Plan (CPAP) is implemented through a series of rolling workplans at national and subnational levels. At the subnational level, CPC8 focused on selected regions, provinces, cities and municipalities. Special attention was given to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The PCPE followed a participatory approach based on appreciative inquiry with a focus on positive results that were analysed through a realist approach and contribution assessment to identify what worked well and under what circumstances. This included the identification and analysis of success stories that key stakeholders from the PCO, the Government of the Philippines at national and subnational levels, and partner agencies perceived as significant for promoting the rights and protection of children and adolescents.

The PCPE assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of CPC8 and was informed by a comprehensive review of around 150 documents, key informant interviews with 120 purposely sampled stakeholders, an online perception survey with the participation of 95 invited external stakeholders, and two appreciative inquiry workshops with key stakeholder groups.

## Key findings

### Relevance

CPC8 is highly relevant to evolving needs in the Philippines. The PCO is recognized for its leadership in promoting the rights and protection of children and adolescents in line with national priorities as well as international frameworks. UNICEF strategic positioning is based on its technical capacities, its ability to form partnerships and key systems strengthening principles. The PCO's successes are determined by the use of a combination of change strategies to address barriers, its ability to mobilize and leverage national resources and coordination mechanisms, and its capacity to adapt and remain flexible in response to changing contexts, including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the situation in BARMM.

### Coherence

UNICEF programming is based on strong partnerships and joint programming with other stakeholders, including government partners at national and subnational levels. CPC8 builds on existing coordination at these levels and is thus strengthening the mechanisms and increasing the potential for sustainability. The strategic partnerships contributing towards success in several programmatic areas, including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, nutrition and child protection are possible because of the PCO's leadership and convening power. However, there are challenges in clearly identifying the capacities of partners and their comparative advantages and regularly updating partnerships, yet also opportunities for working and engaging more extensively with the private sector.

UNICEF is perceived to be a key player in the Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (PFSD) and the United Nations Country Team. The successful partnerships with the other United Nations agencies build on complementarities, as highlighted in the effective joint programming in BARMM.

CPC8 sector strategies, for example for ECCD and nutrition, are developed with reference to national priorities and the expectation that they will contribute to the national development framework. The change strategies are generally aligned with UNICEF Strategic Plans but lack an emphasis on emerging areas such as humanitarian-development and humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming. However, CPC8 implementation has moved towards some of the emerging change strategies, for example the positive development in risk-informed humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming in BARMM.

### Effectiveness

UNICEF change strategies have reinforced its strategic positioning and leadership role in the Philippines. Comprehensive implementation of these strategies is likely to further strengthen UNICEF's positioning.

The success of CPC8 has been underpinned by UNICEF's innovative responses, coherence and consistency in advocacy and partnerships at both national and subnational levels. Many bottlenecks have been effectively addressed through successful combinations of change strategies. For example, CPC8 has addressed critical issues such as corporal punishment, lack of birth registration, and child marriage in BARMM through advocacy, partnerships, capacity development, knowledge management, communication, joint United Nations programming, and good vertical and horizontal coverage.

The PCO's provision of technical assistance to and resources for its local partners has contributed to improving capacities and organizational performance for responding to child-related issues and concerns.

CPC8 is on track to achieving the majority of its targeted results, with notable advances particularly in health and nutrition, child protection, operational and programme effectiveness, social policy and governance, with less progress made in education and learning interventions.

One of the remaining challenges for effective implementation of the change strategies is the nature of the systems strengthening approach. This generally consists of addressing individual components of systems rather than using a 'whole system' approach.

### Efficiency

UNICEF programmatic ambitions are aligned with its resource allocation. The cooperation agreement for the CPAP developed with clear commitments from both UNICEF and the Government, as well as relevant rolling workplans with different implementing institutions have been efficient tools. UNICEF has demonstrated its ability for resource mobilization, which has contributed to its programmatic and geographical success in the Philippines. The PCO has also been able to swiftly shift from a focus on development to emergency response when required to do so, as evidenced by its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and super typhoons.

However, human resource challenges (staff shortages,) have led to some inefficiencies and caused delays. While UNICEF has been able to mitigate staff shortages through the recruitment of consultants and temporary appointments, this approach is considered to be detrimental to strengthening longer-term capacities within the PCO.

Moreover, there is limited cross-fertilization of data collection, which is a missed opportunity. However, the digitization processes under way at the PCO will help to facilitate this.

## Sustainability

UNICEF long-term normative support to the Philippines is highly recognized. Such support has led to revisions in legislation and frameworks, although further work is required to ensure their compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Additionally, there are challenges in the implementation of these laws, policies and development plans.

CPC8 has provided continued support to existing structures such as the Council for the Welfare of Children, the ECCD Council, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council, and the National Nutrition Council. This has strengthened these bodies for integrated, multisectoral and multi-stakeholder child and adolescent rights programming at the national and subnational levels.

With regard to the ‘innovation-piloting-modelling-scaling up’ model, this is not systematically applied while innovations are still marked by risk aversion and exit strategies are not clearly articulated in both CPC8 and its programmes. However, initial signs of long-term commitment to scaling up and UNICEF support to systems strengthening are likely to sustain efforts in at least some sectors, such as health.

## Key findings from CPC8 success stories

1. Very high degree of knowledge among different stakeholders about UNICEF and CPC8 and a clear perception of UNICEF as being successful in the Philippines.
2. PCO seen as a strategic player in promoting the rights and protection of children.
3. External stakeholders, above all government representatives and civil society organizations, rated the PCO’s thematic programmes highly.
4. Key success stories identified include:
  - a) CPC8 support to BARMM;
  - b) Normative support;
  - c) Advocacy and communication, including advocacy efforts for SBC;
  - d) Emergency response and adaptation under emergencies;
  - e) Elements of systems strengthening.
5. Key drivers of success build on UNICEF’s long experience in the Philippines, high technical capacity of staff, continuity, flexibility, a focus on partnerships and the capacity to listen.

## Conclusions

### Overall conclusion

CPC8 2019–2023 in the Philippines has successfully supported the development and rights of children and adolescents despite facing numerous challenges such as natural hazards, the COVID-19 pandemic and health emergencies. PCO management flexibility, adaptability, leadership, advocacy and partnerships have helped to overcome these challenges. Stakeholders perceive the PCO and CPC8 positively, and the change strategies have contributed towards achieving a number of results. However, an overall theory of change for CPC8 is lacking and challenges exist with cross-sectoral programming. Two major challenges for the reconstructed CPC8 theory of change are: prioritizing the move from outputs to

outcomes; and integrating the role of the United Nations Partnership for Sustainable Development in the overall theory of change. The PCO has provided effective systems building support to BARMM through local knowledge, strong partnerships, consistency, expertise and continued presence in the region. However, there is a need to evaluate whether a full-fledged sub-programme for BARMM is required to strengthen the autonomous Government’s capacity for ensuring a peaceful transition with full commitment to the principles of the CRC, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

## Strategic positioning and systems strengthening

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The PCO is recognized by external stakeholders for its leadership in promoting the rights and protection of children in various sectors in the Philippines. However, there is no transparent and agreed strategic positioning strategy, which is necessary to identify focus areas for the PCO and to justify its support in the implementation of the CRC. Systems strengthening, including policies and legislation, governance, coordination, budgetary allocations, human resources, and monitoring and evaluation, were identified as critical components contributing to the success of CPC8. While systems strengthening is well developed in some sectors such as child protection and health, it is an emerging concept for the PCO, and there is no office-wide approach to systems strengthening with horizontal and vertical integration. Recent initiatives in child protection and nutrition have carried out systems analysis in line with corporate guidance from UNICEF on systems strengthening.

## Equity-driven and gender-responsive programming

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The design of initiatives under CPC8 addresses gender equality and disability, but a specific and updated local analysis considering the dynamic context is lacking, and there is no prioritization of gender-responsive or gender-transformative programming. Similarly, there is limited attention to issues of equity-driven and gender-responsive and transformative programming in staffing. Moreover, the lack of clarity on different terms along the gender continuum reflects limited recognition and understanding of why gender-responsive programming is a critical change strategy for all thematic programmes. Similarly, while the PCO is recognized for explicitly referring to the needs of people with disabilities, this has not been translated into clear strategies based on the capacities of people with disabilities. The PCO has recently recruited gender and disability consultants to address the lack of specialized expertise, but a strong gender mainstreaming support structure is required with sufficient staff, leadership, finance and technical and organizational resources based on a CPC gender mainstreaming strategy.

## Emergency preparedness and nexus programming

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The PCO's emergency responses have been successful due to its quick mobilization, local connections and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. Specific success stories include the PCO's response to Super Typhoon Odette and the COVID-19 pandemic, including its management of COVAX. However, these emergency actions had negative consequences for ongoing development activities, which had to be reduced or put on hold. The PCO needs to adopt a stronger humanitarian-development approach, with sufficient attention to a continuous response capacity among existing local organizations. The work on shock-responsive social protection is a good example of PCO support for strengthening resilience in national systems. Capacity was strengthened at the national level, but the challenge remains at the subnational level, particularly in a context of stronger devolution.

## Innovation-piloting-modelling-scaling up

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The innovation agenda within the CPC8 results monitoring framework lacks a comprehensive analysis of where innovations are required to address persistent challenges for children's welfare in the Philippines such as stunting. While the PCO has partnerships with academic institutions for developing innovative approaches, there is no overall innovation strategy. The lack of a clear strategy to ensure that the modelling role supports overall CPC8 effectiveness is also identified as a major challenge. Piloting work is siloed and not sufficiently integrated in systems strengthening, and there is often no reference to scaling up. There is a need for a safe space to recognize failure and document it for others to learn from.

## Integrated programming

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The long tradition of multisectoral and multi-stakeholder councils, such as the Council for the Welfare of Children and the ECCD Council in the Philippines, should provide an enabling environment for CPC8 attempts at integrated programming. At the PCO level, the cross-sectoral task forces have sufficient authority and independent resources for efficient and effective integrated programming. Nevertheless, the overall perception is that the absence of an overall theory of change for CPC8 reinforces the traditional siloed structure of the PCO. This affects the PCO's capacity to respond to national plans through effective complementarity of technical programmes and an integrated cross-sectoral approach based on systems strengthening.

## Digital transformation

The PCO has undergone a digital transformation through the Technology for Development taskforce where new programmatic approaches were implemented and internal administrative procedures streamlined. The approach has focused on the roll-out of digital public goods such as digital banking. Through CPC8, the PCO has supported the Government in understanding specific needs and challenges and identifying and developing

appropriate tools in line with the Government's strong focus on digital transformation as stated in the Philippine Development Plan. However, digital transformation is still an area in progress with a need to define what it means in the different areas of children's rights and protection and as part of different systems responsible for implementing the CRC. Likewise, post-COVID-19 accountability to affected populations would need to be further analysed, including through the perceptions of the rights holders.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1 – Systems strengthening:** Review organization-wide approach and understanding regarding systems strengthening, identify gaps and develop a more integrated systems strengthening approach and strategy. Specifically, the strategy should:

- Take into account both humanitarian-development-peace nexus and development programming;
- Take a vertically and horizontally integrated systems approach from the barangay level through the municipality, city, provincial, regional and national level. This does not mean that the PCO should work at all levels but it should support development of vertically and horizontally integrated systems;
- Be included in the country programme results monitoring framework.

**Recommendation 2 – Systems strengthening:** UNICEF upstream work should include strengthening government systems for public financing for children and continuing to strengthen the legislative framework for child protection and child development, ensuring legislation is implemented.

**Recommendation 3 – Strategic positioning and integrated programming:** Reinforce the integrated approach to programming and further strengthen UNICEF's strategic positioning. Specifically:

- Develop an integrated overall CPC9 ToC, to be updated as part of management reviews, including risk management. Indicate change strategies to be used for achieving outcome and output level results. Reposition the role of the PFSD in the ToC to be at the output level;
- Prioritize areas of focus rather than assuming leadership across many areas. This may mean supporting other actors to take leadership in some areas;
- Map the programmes and interventions being conducted by government and non-government actors to identify gaps and align with CPC9.

**Recommendation 4 – BARMM:** Continue the work in BARMM focusing on vertical and horizontal systems building and use BARMM to test/trial triple nexus programming. Specifically:

- Consider the options for a full-fledged sub-programme based on the situation report for BARMM, with its own outcomes and outputs;
- Develop an overall rolling change strategy for BARMM in cooperation with key partners, which should be reviewed and updated regularly;
- Develop a BARMM results monitoring framework as part of the overall CPC9 results monitoring framework;
- Strengthen Innovation-piloting-modelling-scaling up with a strong focus on sustainability.

**Recommendation 5 – Partnerships:** Further strengthen the PCO's capacity to achieve results by working in partnership. Specifically:

- Assess actual partners' capacities and comparative advantages;
- Regularly review partnerships, assessing strengths and weaknesses and, if needed, change or add new partners;
- Explore the potential of partnering with the private sector.

**Recommendation 6 – Emergency preparedness and nexus programming:** Develop an overall humanitarian-development nexus programming strategy. For BARMM the nexus programming should be based on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Specifically:

- Mainstream the nexus programming, risk reduction, risk monitoring and risk response activities into the development agenda and all sector programmes to ensure continuous emergency response capacity;

- Undertake a response capacity assessment of the PCO and key partners;
- Promote joint United Nations Country Team nexus programming;
- Have dedicated staff to engage in emergency response without affecting the continuity of regular programmes;
- Include relevant indicators in the results monitoring framework.

**Recommendation 7 – Equity and gender:** Strengthen equity-driven and gender-responsive programming. Specifically:

- Ensure the principles of multiple overlapping deprivation analysis (possibly around the main life cycle phases – early childhood, primary school age, adolescence, women of reproductive age) are the basis for CPC9 programming;
- Strengthen the availability of disaggregated data at the national level and in the CPC9 results framework to allow monitoring of the most deprived children, adolescents and caregivers;
- Increase PCO capacity on CRPD programming principles and resource allocation for gender-responsive and transformative programming within the different programme units;
- Strengthen the CPC9 results framework with disaggregated indicators and data, including gender-responsive and gender transformative outputs for each outcome area. All indicators should at least be sex- and age-disaggregated where relevant and complemented with gender equality indicators where possible and available;
- Build CPC9 programming on explicit and well-defined partnerships with national women’s organizations, other United Nations agencies and civil society;
- Strengthen the structure of the PCO, including resource allocation for gender-responsive and transformative programming within the different programme units. The cross-sectoral gender approach should be reinforced with sufficient leadership capacity and resources.

**Recommendation 8 – innovation-piloting-modelling-scaling up:** Develop and implement strategies for the ‘innovation- piloting-modelling-scaling up model’ of key innovative programme interventions. Specifically:

- Undertake a dynamic scalability analysis in cooperation with the Government;
- Develop the models in close cooperation with the Government, defining specific ‘cut-off criteria’ for piloting and modelling and regularly review for scaling-up opportunities. The plans should be revised and adapted regularly in cooperation with the national partners;
- Develop an ‘embrace failure’ culture at the PCO, for example through Fail Fairs and documenting pilots/model experiences, as well as learning lessons to inform further work.

**Recommendation 9 – Social and behaviour change:** Develop an office-wide SBC strategy and action plan. Specifically:

- Review the existing communication for development (C4D) strategy and identify lessons learned for the new SBC strategy, ensuring attention to different geographic locations, sectors and stakeholders;
- Develop a road map for the full transition from C4D to SBC at the PCO;
- Identify national and subnational SBC capacity and training opportunities and develop relevant partnerships.

**Recommendation 10 – Digital transformation:** Continue the digital transformation learning from work undertaken so far. Specifically:

- Undertake a lessons learned exercise on digital transformation during the COVID-19 response to identify successes and challenges experienced with regard to specific stakeholder groups;
- Develop and implement a digital transformation strategy that is regularly reviewed and revised according to changing needs and context.

