

UNICEF evaluation summary
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Evaluation of the UNICEF L2 humanitarian response to the drought crisis 2021-2022 in Southern Madagascar

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Martin Bévalot (Team leader)
Véronique De Clerck (Deputy team leader)
Mahefa Rakotomalala (Malagasy consultant)
Tiana Lalaoarijona (Malagasy consultant)
Dia Timmermans (Quality assurance specialist)

hera – right to health and development

UNICEF Madagascar
Maison Commune des Nations Unies, Zone Galaxy Andraharo, Po Box 732, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar
Tel: +261 (0) 20 23 300 92

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This summary presents the findings, lessons learned and recommendations of the evaluation of the UNICEF's L2 emergency response to the drought crisis in Southern Madagascar, from July 2021 to July 2022, which was commissioned by ESARO (UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office) in accordance with the requirements of UNICEF's emergency protocols and evaluation policy.

The evaluation covers the response of the UNICEF country office in Madagascar. The evaluation started in July 2022 and ended in May 2023. The evaluation specifically covered the initial period of the L2 emergency declaration, from 16 July 2021 to 16 January 2022, as well as the L2 extended period from 17 January 2022 to 16 July 2022.

Context

Madagascar, one of the poorest countries in the world, faces multiple and repeated humanitarian crises linked to climate change. The rainfall deficit in southern Madagascar in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 left the population in a critical situation in terms of food security and nutrition. In addition, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 have increased the number of people living in poverty in the country by 2.3 million, including 1.3 million children, and have significantly increased the need for social protection.

Description of L2 intervention

On 16 July 2021, following food insecurity and an increase in severe acute malnutrition (SAM), UNICEF declared an L2 emergency response in line with the National Drought Response Humanitarian Plan under the leadership of the National Bureau of Risk and Disaster Management (BNGRC). UNICEF developed an operational drought response plan for and initial period of 6 months, until January 2022, and then extended its response by another 6 months until mid-July 2022. The L2 interventions covered 10 districts in 3 priority regions in the South.

Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation had a dual objective of learning and accountability. It aimed to generate concrete recommendations on how best to plan for the post-L2 phase, strengthen longer-term efforts in the Grand South, and prepare for future repeated, prolonged and climate change-related emergencies. Specific objectives included: 1) to assess UNICEF's response to issues of adequacy/relevance, effectiveness, coverage, connectivity and coherence (coordination/partnerships); 2) to assess the extent to which UNICEF has adhered to the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs), 3) to assess the extent to which UNICEF has responded effectively and in a timely manner to needs, and 4) to assess the level of preparedness of the Madagascar Country Office (MCO), including the extent to which emergency preparedness and procedures have enabled MCO to respond timely and effectively.

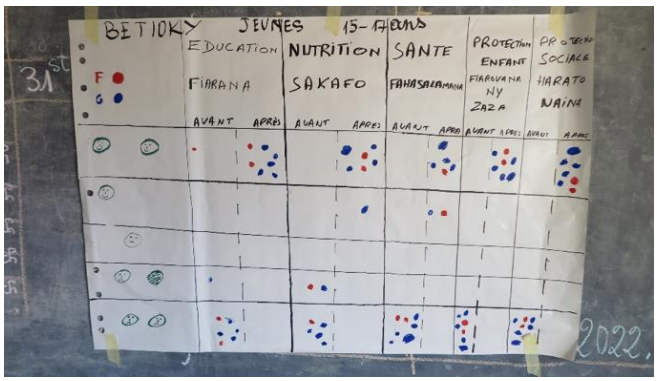
Methodology

The evaluation used a theory-based and participative approach. Inception meetings were organized to review, discuss and prioritize evaluation questions and sub-questions. The evaluation process ensured regular consultation of the whole spectrum of stakeholders at all levels and during all phases.

The data was collected through literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, district-level field visits and an online survey. Results and conclusions were triangulated using different data sources, observations from stakeholders on the ground and at different levels (HQ, regional office, country and field offices).

A special effort was made to include children and young people, who alone made up 18 of the 31 focus groups. Child-focused data collection methods were used to encourage their participation (for instance, the *smiley scale*). In total, 119 people were interviewed and 312 took part in focus group discussions in October 2022.

The recommendations put together by the evaluators were refined during two workshops, one with the members of the Evaluation Reference Group and one with ESARO and HQ.



Betioky, teenagers aged 15-17, 17 October 2022

Findings and conclusions

Overall, the L2 response had positive effects; the enhanced intervention capacities, comprising human, financial and supply resources, allowed UNICEF to better respond to humanitarian needs in the Grand South. The results obtained with the allocated resources are positive.

Relevance

UNICEF conducted pre-L2 assessments and needs analyses, including through joint inter-agency exercises, providing a solid understanding for planning, and implementing the L2 response. Despite the absence of a specific strategy integrating Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) main standards in a transversal/cross-sector way, several interventions nevertheless considered accountability to affected populations. Even though teenage girls were targeted in the needs assessment and the implementation of certain interventions, there was no cross-cutting strategy specific to gender. There is not substantial evidence of action to include or specifically target people with disabilities.

The L2 response was multisectoral but prioritized life-saving interventions (nutrition and WASH). The response embedded the humanitarian principles throughout targeting, prioritization, and implementation. The UNICEF L2 response prioritized Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Effectiveness

UNICEF's emergency preparedness and contingency planning was in place and aligned to inter-agency preparedness. The preparation and contingency planning influenced the response positively. UNICEF continuously adapted its operational and programmatic responses based on evidence and prioritization. However, there was not sufficient emphasis on understanding specific climate risks.

Nutrition: Nutrition was at the heart of the L2 response and resulted in the admission of 43,116 children under 5 years of age with SAM (severe acute malnutrition). The recovery rate was 88%.

WASH: UNICEF's WASH response was multifaceted, going beyond emergency interventions by embedding adaptation to climate change and taking a long-term perspective. The WASH sector exceeded its initial objectives, with interventions reaching 1,181,400 people (against a target of 800,000) who were able to secure the water they needed for drinking, cooking and washing.

Education: UNICEF strengthened its leadership and its coordination in the field of education, but insufficient funding meant it could not reach its objectives.

Social protection: UNICEF's shock-sensitive cash transfers reached 35,000 people, including 22,500 children.

Child protection: UNICEF surpassed its child protection objectives, with 11,141 children reached, who benefitted from psychosocial support (139 % of target). 40,364 people were sensitised on PSEA (175 % of target).

Efficiency

The lack of funding resulted in the prioritization of life-saving actions such as nutrition and WASH as opposed to actions aimed at protecting other children's rights such as education, social protection, and child protection.

While the L2 mobilized human resources and strengthened capacity at the national level, there were some capacity shortages at regional level and within UNICEF field offices. The timeliness of the emergency response was also affected by some delays in recruitment.

Coverage

Between July 2021 and July 2022, UNICEF operations scaled up significantly and achieved most of the planned targets. Overall, the L2 response achieved good geographical coverage of districts across the different programmes/sectors of intervention. In the inter-agency response, coordination and alignment remained challenging, making it difficult to cover some locations in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

Coverage was good thanks to the networks within the health system. The strategy of delivering humanitarian assistance (nutrition and water) to the last mile has been one of the success factors of this geographical coverage.

Connectedness

The L2 strategy successfully integrated longer-term considerations into emergency response planning. UNICEF's WASH sector was particularly active in supporting sustainable solution, although it underestimated the importance of community participation, which adversely affected capacity to ensure basic maintenance of installations.

As part of the L2 response, UNICEF contributed to improving access to essential health services, thereby strengthening the health system in the medium term. The resilience of local government systems and their capacity to prepare and respond to emergencies continue to be challenging due to shortages in capacity and resources.

The collaboration of UNICEF with government agencies strengthened the resilience of the nutrition system but the education sector did not benefit as much as it could have done. The child protection sector sensitized different types of stakeholders in a relatively short time.

Coordination

UNICEF led, coordinated and participated in the various clusters at the national and regional levels, which were managed by the

national authorities. The implementation of the L2 response was ensured through effective local partnerships. There is strong coordination between UNICEF and the Malagasy authorities as a result of a mutual commitment between UNICEF and the Government. The establishment of the new UNICEF regional field offices has ensured better proximity to all stakeholders and communities.

Main lessons learned

- A good understanding of the socio-cultural realities of communities is necessary. The active involvement of beneficiaries in the design of responses must be ensured. When this is not possible in an emergency situation, it is important to involve community leaders and discuss the nature and feasibility of interventions.
- To ensure a good synergy of cash transfers, there is a need for a greater link between emergency and development cash transfers. This can be done via supportive measures in essential family practices, financial and productive inclusion, early childhood development, civic education, family planning – all of which can enhance the impact of cash transfers.
- It is important to make use of existing public systems in order to avoid creating parallel coordination structures. Given the chronic nature of drought in the South, it is important to note that the health element of L2 showed that the public health system can deliver results, despite weaknesses and fragility. It is essential to strengthen the capacity of national and regional authorities to enable them to respond to future crises.
- It is important to sustain the ability to deploy different types of interventions (emergency, rehabilitation and development) simultaneously. The drought period is increasing in length and covers almost the whole year, therefore it is crucial to sustain projects in the long term, while maintaining capacity to deploy emergency interventions concomitantly.

Recommendations

The recommendations put together by the evaluators were refined during two workshops, one with the members of the Evaluation Reference Group, and one with ESARO and HQ. During these workshops, participants were able to express their views on the relevance of the suggested recommendations, the priority order for implementation as well as the way they were formulated. To facilitate the response to the recommendations, they are accompanied by suggested actions in the evaluation report.

1) **UNICEF Madagascar** should put in place additional specific measures to prevent and lessen quasi-famine conditions (IPC 4,5), by aligning with the UNICEF nutrition strategy 2020-2030 and with UNICEF's strategic priorities for famine prevention and mitigation.

2) **UNICEF Madagascar** should strengthen the integration and implementation of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) strategy.

3) **UNICEF Madagascar** should develop a multi-sector, cross-cutting gender, age and disability sensitive strategy for emergencies.

4) **UNICEF Madagascar** should strengthen child protection interventions in L2 humanitarian contexts.

5) **UNICEF Madagascar** should promote and include UNICEF's core principles in its climate policies adapted to children. It is recommended to strengthen the understanding of specific climate risks, as well as famine prevention approaches.

6) **UNICEF Madagascar** should strengthen humanitarian intervention capacities that are integrated into programming and in the context of development.

7) **UNICEF Madagascar** should strengthen multi-sector interventions in the preparedness and response to emergencies, in the design and implementation of programmes and partnerships.

8) **UNICEF Madagascar** should contribute to strengthening UN coordination for future emergencies. MCO, with ESARO support, should promote an "United in Action" strategy, including an advocacy programme, disseminating data and collective analysis that clearly demonstrate the scale and severity of the crisis and the link with climate-induced drought.