

Executive Summary

Summary of the intervention

UNICEF's Country Program in Costa Rica for the period 2018-2022 has been designed to carry out strategies and actions that benefit children and adolescents throughout the country, mainly those who are in conditions of greater social vulnerability. Some of the abovementioned strategies also have as direct beneficiaries' other stakeholders such as guarantors and co-guarantors of rights, mainly aiming at the development of conditions, capacities, and information for decision-making as well as the improvement of planning processes and execution of actions to reduce access gaps to human rights. This Program contains both national and focused initiatives. Most of them are located in urban areas of the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM, for its acronym in Spanish), but others are situated in cantons far from the center of the country, on coasts or border areas and in rural communities.

Evaluation purpose and objectives

This evaluation was both summative and formative. In its summative dimension, it sought a better understanding of the kind of results and achievements derived from the Country Program as a whole and from its implementation at the national and subnational levels, taking into consideration all the activities carried out between 2018 and the first semester of 2021. On the other side, in its formative dimension, it identified the contributions of the Costa Rican local office and, more generally, if the experiences and lessons learned during the evaluation period contributed to UNICEF's global agenda, to the fulfillment of the SDGs and if it provided inputs for the design and implementation of the next CPD that will start in 2022.

Objective of the evaluation

Evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and sustainability of the 2018-2022 CPD, including the strategies applied and associations for each result, taking into account the emerging challenges and opportunities to contribute to the next CPD design, so that its relevance, strategic positioning, management, staffing and responsiveness to national needs are evidence-based

Methodology

This evaluation applied both a Utilization-Focused and a theory-based approach. The evaluation included the participation of multiple stakeholders, based on their knowledge and experiences, using complementary approaches such as: the Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), the theory-based approach, human rights and gender equity approaches, and the equity-focused approach. Likewise, it is based

on a predominantly qualitative methodology, incorporating some elements of descriptive statistics, mainly to generate the information, analysis and recommendations needed for decision-making

Main conclusions of the CPD 2018-2022 evaluation

Relevance

- a. The CPD-2018-2022 **responds to the needs of promotion and protection of children and adolescents rights** and has had the ability to adapt to an adverse and emergency context. However, the intervention has substantive elements for improvement, including: **a) Mainstreaming of Gender, Interculturality, Human Rights and Equity approaches** in the programmed actions, **b) Identifying populations with greater access gaps** and their intersectionality from a territoriality perspective, **c) Sufficiently flexible planning** that allows adaptations, but with a level of specificity that guarantees the measurement of results, **e) Alignment of CPD planning** with the United Nations Cooperation Framework to maximize the contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.
- b. The topics of interest for children and adolescents and what the CPD 2018-2022 proposes coincide, however, the design and its strategies and interventions are based more clearly and forcefully on readings of the national reality carried out by the adults that make up state organizations, civil society, academia and UNICEF, keeping the **participation of children and adolescents to a query level, reducing their opportunities to exercise their agency** in addressing the issues that concern them.
- c. The process of designing the next CPD has the challenge of **maximizing the relevance of UNICEF**, linked to a) the rigor in analysis of **UNICEF's strategic positioning** for the next five years, b) how to address children and adolescents needs and demands in the country, c) **base the design on a ToC** that takes into account the context still marked by emergency situations, as well as by the worsening of the problems generated by them.

Effectiveness

- a. The available evidence **does not allow to estimate the magnitude of the achievement of the results** proposed in the CPD and the influence of the strategies on these results. However, stakeholders from the public sphere, as well as from civil society and partner agencies, highlight contributions that are clearly linked to the activities and products defined in the CPD and its ToC. This allows approaching both the results and the identification, through the triangulation process, of the strategies that were implemented to achieve said results, such as evidence generation, knowledge generation and capacity building, as well as models and programs.

- b. The improvement areas specified in the relevance criterion about the consistency and content of the CPD design determine the management process, therefore, they negatively influence the achievement of results.
- c. The **crucial factors that affected the achievement of CPD results** in the evaluated period are related to the health emergency response to the **Covid-19** pandemic and the carrying out of activities to address the situation of migrant children and adolescents and their families, as a result of the **increase in migratory flows** from Nicaragua and Venezuela. This caused that priorities for both UNICEF CR and the government **were redirected towards containment**.

Efficiency

- a. **Increasing efficiency** for the coming years is critical to UNICEF's operation as **regular funds are expected to decrease**, since Costa Rica is expected to become a high-income country in the next two years. Likewise, there is a reduction in social investment not only due to the pandemic but also due to the country's fiscal policies. Finally, it is noted that the private sector donor base is very low.
- b. The way in which the budget is received and prioritized influences the efficiency of the 2018-2022 CPD to the extent that, for this period, there is an increase in financial resources that exceeds the average operational execution capacity of the office. Likewise, a **poor ability to identify these critical points and apply effective contingency measures during the operation** was found. Adding resources made it possible to increase the execution of actions, however, the existing evidence does not allow to conclude that this would conduct to greater effect and impact results.

Coherence

- a. The CPD 2018-2022 shows low internal coherence since **few strategies and interventions where there is a link between components were identified**. Regarding external coherence, government stakeholders attribute **political and technical legitimacy to UNICEF**, which has allowed it to position itself and establish positive relationships, aimed at building strategic alliances. However, work within the United Nations System's framework requires adjustments in order to have interventions that are more coherent and complementary, so that they contribute to the achievement of joint results.

Sustainability

- a. The **escalation and reproducibility of the models is low** because they have been conceived more as activities than as a strategy, this becomes clear in the **poorly standardized ways of design, measure and evaluate** them for their strategic use in addressing problems. The models, despite

responding to the problems and needs of the country, depend on the State to give them continuity to guarantee their sustainability. Nevertheless, this achievement is partial and depends on the scope that each model has reached.

- b. Although efforts are made by UNICEF to promote the **creation and strengthening of some institutional capacities** at the design and start of operation phase of the models, this support process is insufficient since it is **not sustained over time until scalability is achieved**.

Main Recommendations of the CPD 2018-2022 evaluation¹

- a. Use the inputs from IBINA and EDNA to explicitly identify the territories and populations in the most vulnerable condition, that is, those that will be prioritized for interventions, as well as ensure the mainstreaming of gender, intercultural, human rights, and equity approaches in each supported process, including the mainstreaming of these processes in the ToC.
- b. Build the ToC of the new CPD proposing tangible and achievable results according to the technical, financial and human capacities of the office. UNICEF Costa Rica will annually analyze the need to update the ToC of the CPD, to ensure its relevance over time.
- c. Create participation spaces for children, adolescents and youth aimed at design, manage, and evaluate programmed interventions, taking advantage of existing spaces within the framework of the SNPI, to promote the exercise of the agency of this population.
- d. The new CPD must identify and justify which strategies and interventions are at the strategic level and which are at the operational level, including the expected results for each one and record it in a theory of change that guides execution.
- e. Plan the next CPD under the Results Based Management model, prioritizing the design of a monitoring and follow-up system to estimate UNICEF's contribution at all planned ToC levels. This involves establishing the direct relationship between the CPD, the National Planning System and its corresponding instruments (National Development Plan, National Policy for Children and Adolescents, among others) and the United Nations Cooperation Framework, reporting indicators that are linked to the government actions.
- f. For the next CPD management process, it is recommended to design and implement a "mitigation plan for identified risks " during the design phase, which allows mitigating both foreseen and emerging events, as well as the effects that these could have on the operation and the country conditions in topics perceived as crucial knots, such as education and care.

¹ The recommendations presented are the result of a participatory construction between the reference team of the evaluation process (involves: Costa Rican government, evaluation team, LACRO monitoring and evaluation department and UNICEF evaluation officer) and the Costa Rican Office staff.

- g. Become institutionalized the six-monthly review, based on the Monitoring System and feedback from counterparts, to make decisions based on evidence.
- h. Design the "model strategy", adapting it to the particularities of the Costa Rican context and institutions, that includes: strategic purpose, characteristics of the prioritized topics, design structure, cost structure, operation structure, requirements for reproducibility and staggering, so that the strategy works in a standard way and provides the conditions to promote public-private alliances that give them sustainability.
- i. Design a comprehensive efficiency strategy of the intervention by a) implementing a diversified fundraising strategy with multilateral donors and private companies, b) having costed models for the government, c) demonstrating results by executing joint monitoring and evaluation frameworks with the government, the private sector, and civil society, identifying the type of resources that each one can contribute to achieve the expected change
- j. Improve the adaptive capacity in management, creating efficient mechanisms for hiring human talent in the face of increases in financial resources and changes in emergency situations.
- k. Guarantee the definition of results to be achieved as a priority (a single ToC), and plan actions based on the contribution of the components to achieving said results, so that components are not an end in themselves, but are oriented to maximize the scope of results and advance in the faithful compliance of children and adolescents rights in Costa Rica. For this, there must be a clear definition of the roles and functions played by the stakeholders/areas (in a multisectoral way). In this sense, the monitoring and communication components must serve as cross-cutting issues to the entire intervention, to maximize the scope of results.
- l. Plan and implement the new CPD in a way that UNICEF Costa Rica's contribution to the results produced along with other United Nations System Agencies can be measured (according to UNDAF). Likewise, the work plans that UNICEF signs with governmental institutions must be registered at Mideplan's Cooperation Unit (responsibility that falls on the institutions). For the convenience of UNICEF, it is recommended that the implementation of actions be conditioned to the approval of Mideplan's Cooperation Unit, since this is the way in which Costa Rica registers the contribution of international cooperation to the country. This includes the construction and planning of interventions aligned to the PNDIP and the National Policy for Children and Adolescents.
- m. Define the criteria for the prioritization of models that will be given continuity in this new period, and that their quantity be defined based on those that are more focused and demonstrative, in order to guarantee learning about the effects of the expected changes, as well as the sustainability of the model. This, in turn, implies reviewing the model strategy in terms of its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.

- n. Build a protocol of models for the design, prototyping, validation, negotiation, operation and evaluation to ensure its sustainability and escalation through public, private and civil society actions.