

ENDLINE EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE UNICEF CAMBODIA SUB-NATIONAL APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

UNICEF is mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure that every child survives and thrives, is protected from harm, has rights to participate, and has the opportunity to develop to their full potential. In Cambodia, UNICEF supports the Royal Government to strengthen national systems that deliver equitable and inclusive services to children and adolescents, especially the most disadvantaged. UNICEF Cambodia's Country Programme Document (CPD) 2024–2028 prioritizes convergence, decentralization, and accountability in public service delivery to accelerate progress toward national and global development goals, including SDG commitments.

Within this context, the UNICEF Cambodia Sub-National Approach (SNA) was launched in early 2024 as a strategic delivery modality to enhance integrated, gender-responsive, and rights-based services for children and adolescents by reinforcing provincial governance, planning, and financing systems, from both supply and demand sides. It represents UNICEF's contribution to the Royal Government's National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development Phase II (NP-2) and builds on past work to support decentralized, multi-sectoral service delivery models.

This Terms of Reference (ToR) sets out the parameters for an independent endline evaluation of the SNA, covering its implementation between 2024 and 2027, across the target provinces.

BACKGROUND

The SNA was designed in response to longstanding challenges in ensuring equitable access to quality health, nutrition, education, and child protection and social services for Cambodia's most vulnerable populations and affording children the right to participate at subnational level. The SNA specifically seeks to strengthen the role of provincial and district administrations in delivering convergent social services.

The programme's Theory of Change envisions four intermediate outcomes, sub-national accountability, improved human resources, strengthened financial capacity, and community engagement, contributing to the ultimate goal that children and adolescents in the targeted provinces, especially the most vulnerable, have improved access and use of social services to realize their rights to protection, health, and education.

An evaluability assessment (EA) of the SNA, completed in mid-2025, supported the programme to have a clear logic model, results framework, and measurable indicators that made it amenable to evaluation. This endline evaluation scheduled for 2027 will assess the programme's performance, sustainability, and potential for scale-up. It will also generate strategic evidence to inform UNICEF's future support to decentralized governance and service delivery in Cambodia.

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The primary **purpose** of this endline evaluation is to generate credible, timely, and actionable evidence on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and equity responsiveness of UNICEF Cambodia's Sub-National Approach (SNA), being implemented between 2024 and 2028 under the Country Programme (CPD 2024–2028). The findings will serve to inform programme and policy decision-making by the Royal Government of Cambodia, UNICEF, development partners, and sub-national authorities regarding the future design and potential scale-up of the SNA.

The evaluation is expected to support mutual accountability and learning, providing an independent assessment of how well the SNA has contributed to improving access to and quality of convergent, gender-responsive, and rights-based social services for children and adolescents, particularly the most vulnerable, including girls, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities. Moreover, the evaluation

will document lessons learned and good practices that can guide replication in other provinces (beyond the three target provinces) and will feed into the design of the next country programme (2029–2033). The primary audiences include UNICEF Cambodia, the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD), relevant ministries (MoI, MoEF, MoP, MoH, MoEYS, MoSVY), and provincial administrations. Secondary users include civil society partners, other UN agencies, and donors investing in decentralization and service delivery systems.

Objectives. The endline evaluation of the SNA aims to:

- Assess the extent to which the SNA achieved its intended outcomes and contributed to improved governance, financing, and delivery of convergent social services for children and adolescents at the sub-national level.
- Evaluate the relevance, coherence, and added value of the SNA approach within the broader framework of Cambodia’s Decentralization and De-concentration (D&D) reforms (NP-2), national development priorities, and UNICEF CP 2024-2028.
- Examine the efficiency and sustainability of the institutional and capacity development efforts under the SNA, including subnational ownership, planning, budgeting, and monitoring functions.
- Identify lessons learned, innovative approaches, and bottlenecks that affected implementation and results across different provincial contexts.
- Provide actionable recommendations for improving the design and operationalization of decentralized, convergent service delivery models in future programmes.

Scope. The evaluation will cover the full implementation period of the SNA from 2024 to 2027. The coverage will be national while greater focus will be on the three implementation provinces.

The evaluation will assess all four intermediate outcomes in the revised Theory of Change, sub-national accountability, human resources, financial resources, and demand-side/community engagement, along with associated outputs and key activities. It will also consider the cross-sectoral nature of the programme (health and nutrition, education, child protection, and social policy) and examine results disaggregated by gender, age, disability, and ethnicity to the extent possible. Internal UNICEF management and coordination mechanisms may also be reviewed where relevant to programme effectiveness and sustainability.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation will apply the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria to assess the design, implementation, and outcomes of the SNA in the targeted provinces of Cambodia. Each criterion will be examined through a set of key questions and sub-questions, with cross-cutting attention to gender equality, equity, disability inclusion, and child rights.

A. Relevance

- To what extent was the SNA relevant to the needs and priorities of children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable (e.g. under poverty, girls, children with disabilities, ethnic minorities)?
- How well did the SNA align with national development strategies, particularly the NP-2, UNICEF Cambodia CPD, and sector-specific policies in health, education, child protection, social protection, and nutrition?
- To what extent were the SNA design and interventions responsive to sub-national realities and governance capacities in the target provinces?

B. Coherence

- How well did the SNA complement or synergize with the efforts of government line ministries, other UN agencies, development partners, and civil society organizations?
- To what extent was the SNA coherent with UNICEF's overall strategic priorities at the country, regional, and global levels?
- How effectively was convergence across sectors (education, health, child protection, nutrition, and social protection) promoted through the SNA?

C. Effectiveness

- To what extent did the SNA achieve its intended intermediate outcomes as defined in the Theory of Change and results framework?
 - Improved sub-national accountability for convergent social services?
 - Strengthened human resources and management capacities?
 - Increased and more effective budget allocation and execution?
 - Enhanced demand-side engagement and community participation?
- What factors contributed to or hindered the achievement of planned results?
- To what extent were evidence-based planning and participatory coordination mechanisms institutionalized at the provincial level?
- Were intended results equitably realized across provinces and among different population groups?

D. Efficiency

- How efficiently were human, financial, and technical resources at the UNICEF side utilized in delivering SNA activities and outputs?
- Were programme management, coordination, and support structures cost-effective at the UNICEF side?
- Did the programme leverage partnerships and local systems effectively to avoid duplication and maximize results?

E. Impact

- To what extent did the SNA contribute to improved access to and utilization of quality, convergent social services (health, education, protection, nutrition) by children and adolescents in the targeted provinces, as compared to non-targeted provinces which are socio-economically similar?
- Did impacts, if any, differ across groups (e.g., child age, gender, disability, ethnicity)?
- Has the SNA contributed to systems-level transformation in provincial governance, planning, or service delivery?

F. Sustainability

- To what extent are the SNA results likely to be sustained beyond the life of the current country programme?
- What evidence is there of increased provincial ownership and embedded practices?
- Have systems, capacities, and budget processes been strengthened to allow continuation of convergent service delivery?
- What risks threaten sustainability and what strategies have been implemented to mitigate them?

G. Cross-Cutting: Equity, Gender Equality, and Human Rights

- To what extent did the SNA address gender inequalities and barriers for girls' access and utilization of services?
- How well did the programme integrate a rights-based approach to ensure the participation and inclusion of vulnerable children and youth?

METHODOLOGY

The endline evaluation of the SNA will adopt a mixed-methods approach that triangulates qualitative and quantitative data to assess the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, with specific attention to equity, gender equality, disability inclusion, and child rights. The methodology will be participatory, utilization-focused, and contextually grounded, ensuring that findings are credible, actionable, and aligned with the needs of key stakeholders.

Overall Design

A qualitative theory-based design such as contribution analysis will be applied, structured around the SNA Theory of Change and results matrix. The quantitative component will use quasi-experimental methods, such as difference-in-differences, to assess the impact of SNA on service access and utilization in the targeted provinces, as compared to similar SNA implemented provinces, subject to data availability and an impact analysis feasibility assessment.

While the evaluation will be primarily summative, aiming to assess results and performance over the 2024–2027 implementation period, it will also include a formative component to identify lessons learned and recommendations that could inform the potential scale-up of the SNA model. This will involve documenting, for example, through operational research, the strategies, approaches, and specific provincial contexts that may not be fully reflected in the universal results matrix. As the results matrix alone may not provide a comprehensive picture to guide replicability or scalability, the evaluation will further seek to capture these additional dimensions.

Data Collection Methods

A combination of primary and secondary data sources will be used:

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Semi-structured interviews with representatives from UNICEF, national ministries (e.g., MoI, MoEF, MoH, MoSVY, MoEYS), provincial governors' offices, sectoral departments, and development partners. Interviews will explore implementation experiences, coordination mechanisms, and institutional shifts.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Conducted with community members, service providers (e.g., teachers, health workers, social workers), and adolescents to understand demand-side changes, perceptions of service quality, and community engagement.

Case Studies: Where appropriate, in-depth case studies of specific interventions will be documented to provide rich, contextualized insights into the processes and outcomes of the programme. These case studies may focus on particularly innovative or effective components of the SNA, such as successful community mobilization efforts or operational tools used at the provincial level.

Document Review: Analysis of key documents including the SNA strategy note, ToC, results matrix, annual and provincial workplans, monitoring reports, provincial budgets and spending data, joint planning guidelines, capacity development plans, and previous evaluability assessment report.

Secondary Quantitative Data: Existing administrative data on the access and use of social services from government systems will be analysed, upon availability of the data for consultant’s use.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling approach will be used to select a representative subset of key informants and FGD participants to ensure balanced representation by gender, role, and inclusion of vulnerable groups, and location.

Ethical Considerations

The evaluation will follow UNICEF’s Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, including assent from adolescents. Special care will be taken when involving vulnerable groups, and all data will be anonymized and securely stored.

Limitations and Mitigation

Potential limitations include data availability gaps, variability in documentation across provinces, and the difficulty of attributing change directly to the SNA in a complex policy environment. These will be mitigated through triangulation of sources, transparent reporting of assumptions, and the use of contribution analysis principles where appropriate.

Timeline

Scenario A. With no quasi-experimental impact analysis component:

The expected duration of this evaluation is 4 months with 50 days of level of effort by the consultant.

Scenario B. With quasi-experimental impact analysis:

The expected duration of this evaluation is 6 months with 90 days of level of effort by the consultant.

Phase	Deliverable(s)	Time Estimate
Inception	1. Draft Inception Report (conceptual framework, methodology, work plan and data collection tools) 2. Final Inception Report	4 weeks
Data Collection and preliminary analysis	3. Presentation on Initial Findings (Power Point Presentation)	6 weeks
Draft Report and Consultation	4. Comprehensive Draft Report	4 weeks
Final Evaluation Report and Dissemination	5. Final Report 6. Presentation of findings (Power Point Presentation)	3 weeks