

Evaluation of the Equity Focus of UNICEF Malaysia Country Programme

UNICEF declared 2014 as the Year of Innovation for Equity – to focus the world's attention on ways to identify and demonstrate innovative ways to improve the well-being of children worldwide. UNICEF strongly believes that a fair chance in life for every child is essential for sustainable development. Without equitable opportunities for the most disadvantaged, investments and interventions made in the hopes of creating a more peaceful and prosperous world will have limited impact. Focusing on the poorest and most disadvantaged children benefits not just children, but also families, communities and economies. Targeting investments, policies and programmes specifically to the needs of the children who are repeatedly left behind is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do.

UNICEF, which emphasizes equity in its programming, policy advocacy and public communication work, knows from experience that equity-focused interventions can work. UNICEF sees equity as being based on the principle of universality guaranteeing the fundamental rights of every child, regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location or other status. In Malaysia UNICEF has applied the equity focus to address the needs and rights of marginalized and vulnerable children in the areas of education, child protection and justice for children and its programme which includes upstream policy advocacy and programmatic work on cross-sectoral issues. It supports the Government and engages with the civil society, as well as the private sector.



"Sustainable economies can grow if we give every child a fair chance in life. We can reverse the vicious cycle of inequity and inequality by setting in motion a virtuous cycle, by working to invest in every child, everywhere, from the beginning of her life. Greater equity in opportunity today producing fewer inequalities tomorrow."

Anthony Lake – UNICEF Executive
Director at Executive Board Special Session
on Equity, June 16, 2015

In 2014, UNICEF commissioned an evaluation to examine to what extent UNICEF Malaysia Country Programme (2011-2015) has been able to integrate an equity focus into its programme design and implementation, and contribute to achieving results for children. The evaluation was carried out by an external evaluator between November 2014 and January, 2015. The intent was to fine tune equity focus in planning the new Country Programme (2016-2020), which heavily support Government of Malaysia's focus on "Improving wellbeing, Enhancing Inclusiveness and Human Capital Development".

The programme recognizes the need for working closely with all key stakeholders, generating evidence to identify bottlenecks and barriers for those children, who are left behind, and ensure appropriate policy decision making is facilitated through technical support and cooperation.

The evaluation, which was very participatory in nature, included key stakeholders from the Government Ministries, civil society organisations, the UN system in Malaysia and some of the key partners at Sabah and Sarawak level during the research period.

The evaluation concluded that:

- The current programme addresses issues of excluded and marginalised children in majority of the work under partnership and cooperation between UNICEF and the Government of Malaysia. Equity is most prominently addressed within the sectoral area of education (alternative learning for undocumented children) and child protection (children with disabilities);
- UNICEF Malaysia has on the whole been consistent and fairly effective in advocating for equity and influencing national in dialogue with Government, as well as implementing activities that relate to equity for children; and
- There are positive signs of UNICEF Malaysia's influence on policies regarding equity for children, in relation to 11th Malaysia Plan (the country's 5-year development plan) and the revision of the Child Act, both seen to be examples of UNICEF's good working relationship with Government.

The evaluation recommended that UNICEF's work with the private sector, advocating for child-focused Corporate Social Responsibility aimed at delivering programme results, could focus even more clearly on equity issues. Two good examples were cited, noting how the media is used to convey equity messages. Public advocacy around children with disabilities, as well as child protection issues like abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, has successfully been done leveraging a growing Facebook audience. The report makes concrete recommendations to better address public advocacy issues, and other recommendations for making equity an even stronger focus in the next country programme cycle.

For complete evaluation report, please visit:
http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_82675.html