

Evaluation Management Response Document

Region: SAR

Office: Afghanistan

Evaluation Year: 2020

Evaluation Title: *Adolescents in Afghanistan: A Portfolio Evaluation with a Gender Lens (2015–2019)*

Person In Charge For Follow Up to Management Response: Ivan Ssenkubuge

Overall response to evaluation

The evaluation provides overall adolescents programming using a gender lens in UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office for the period 2015 to 2019. It evaluated adolescent specific targeted programmes as well as sectoral programmes (health, nutrition, education, child protection, WASH and social inclusion) that focused on adolescents. The report is well organized and presented. It contains a comprehensive description of the context and objectives of the evaluation, the evaluation framework and methodology, document review and stakeholder's analysis. It brings together the current evidence from a range of sources and disciplines around programming related to adolescents' rights and their enjoyment or violation. It is envisaged as a powerful evidence to inform the development of the Adolescent Strategy and subsequently feeding into defining adolescents priority focus of the new Country Programme 2022-2025. Evaluation principles are addressed in a cross-cutting manner and the findings reflect a well-balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the adolescent programme, and the challenges to achieving impact and sustainability. Cost-efficiency could not be assessed, as it was not possible to extract allocated budget and expenditure under thematic programmes to investments for adolescents. During the data collection process, online and phone interviews were opted unlike face-to-face interviews due to COVID-19 movement restrictions. The phone calls had to be based on shorter questionnaires and led to different interview dynamics, limiting the interaction between researcher and interviewee, which influenced the richness of the data and the potential to probe. What the recommendation is missing is a clear recommendation on how ACO can effectively address GBV concerning adolescents including culturally sensitive approach on how UNICEF could respond to violence against young boys' Bacha bazi. A few small suggestions for consideration in view of finalizing the report are made, including suggested Theory of Change (TOC) for adolescent programming. Although the suggested ToC is not too streamlined and explicit, it provides basis and key pointers on where the focus should be.

Planned Use of the Evaluation

The evaluation findings and recommendations are planned to be used for the Programme Strategy Note for the new Country Programme Document (CPD) and to develop youth and adolescent roadmap for the next 3 years. In consultation with Government and partners, the findings and recommendations will also be used as evidence-based for planning and designing of adolescent strategy focusing on the recommended interventions on adolescents' health, education, nutrition, ending child marriage and Skills development opportunities for young people to increase their employability which is critical for young people's potential in Afghanistan. The evaluation has also provided insights and approaches on how to improve UNICEF's work on working with and for adolescent (adolescent international programming). Lessons learned, good practices case studies will be used for scaling up adolescent programming among partners and in the new Country programme.

Recommendations and Actions

No.	Recommendations/Actions	Responsible Section (Action)	Responsible Person Name (Action)	Expected Completion (Action)	Mgt Response / Implementation Stage	Reason/Action Taken
1	Stronger coherence in the programme for youth (addressed at all UNICEF CO unit heads and management). Even though interventions were reasonably well designed, and the implicit ToC is coherent, convergent programming needs to be strengthened in the approach to adolescents by UNICEF as an organization. UNICEF needs to develop an explicit ToC as a basis for their work with adolescents. The upcoming Adolescent Strategy is an excellent entry point. If programming is more coherent and convergent, it will better enable tackling difficult issues such as child marriage and teenage pregnancy and reaching vulnerable groups. The TOC and the Adolescent strategy should take into consideration the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are opportunities in the specific interventions for adolescents to strengthen the inclusion of activities to address all current challenges, but also for more linkages in sectoral programmes, with positive youth development approaches that acknowledge the interconnectedness of various social, political, cultural, economic and ecological factors that affect adolescent lives. Where better access to rights and well-being of youth are aimed at, all challenges need to be addressed. • UNICEF can also be instrumental with their mandate to ensure stronger engagement of various stakeholders in a synergistic programme for youth. This includes actively participating in central-level platforms and mechanisms, and leading and advocating for more local-level coordination and cooperation for adolescents, notably between sectors. Such coordination should take place more regularly, and may be led alternately by different sectors to promote better synergy and understanding • A strong need for resources remains, in view of the vast needs of adolescents. UNICEF needs to present their interventions for adolescents as one programme for youth when approaching donors and partners, to generate more interest and understanding for the need for a coherent approach and to leverage available funds. Engaging in joint programmes with other UN agencies would also strengthen the approach and expected results and will gauge the interest of donors. Conceptual clarity on holistic, multi-sectoral convergent, rights-based and inclusive programming for adolescents is essential 				Agree	
1.1	This will be taken into account in the upcoming strategy, and also adolescent focused programmes will be integrated into key proposals	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	1/30/2023	Completed	A draft Adolescent girls' strategy for Afghanistan Country Office (2023-2025) was developed and shared with programme sections.

1.2	Joint programme on Sports for Development as UN key common area with UNFPA and Deputy Minister for Youth (plan for 2021 and beyond) – initiative ongoing	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	1/30/2021	Completed	
2	Ensure the upcoming Adolescent Strategy is participative and inclusive (addressed at CO management and Youth and Adolescent Development Specialist). Outside the specific adolescent programmes, there is little evidence of adolescents being treated as a distinct group with specific needs. The planned Adolescent Strategy is a very significant step representing the determination and engagement of UNICEF. • To render this engagement transversal, other sector programmes should disaggregate M&E data by age group. Moreover, the Country Office needs to develop adolescent specific output/outcome-level indicators for core programmes. • Adolescents must be engaged more strongly in the design and monitoring of programmes and policy, including the upcoming Adolescent Strategy. The global UNICEF guidance on adolescent participation in M&E can serve as a guide. It brings up a number of examples valuable for the Afghan context, such as adolescents that helped identify OOSC and adolescents participating in situation monitoring action research to identify critical issues for adolescents. • Though the focus on girls has been fully understandable in view of the existing gap in gender equality, boys also face specific needs, or issues that concern all adolescents but are more prominent for boys. These must be addressed in the Adolescent Strategy. They include pressure related to boys' perceived role as household providers, along with drug abuse, unemployment, child labour and bacha bazi. A number of hard-to-reach groups, such as youth living with disabilities, youth living in very remote areas, and youth from ultra-poor households, have been insufficiently included in interventions up to now. UNICEF needs to improve on this by including suitable targeting mechanisms and activities for these groups. Youth in the UNICEF programme and community members/bodies can be used to identify such "hidden" beneficiaries and enrol them in the programme. Where needed, adaptations must be made, or tailored activities conducted for youth with disabilities				Agree	
2.1	ensure that the adolescent strategy (2022-2024) is inclusive and participative following the Regional Office guidelines.	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	12/30/2021	Completed	The adolescent girls' strategy (2023-2025) is developed to be in line with the global strategy - "Building back equal, with and for adolescent girls: A programme strategy for UNICEF (2022-2025).
2.2	Prepare Programme Strategy Note for the new CPD.	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	6/29/2021	Completed	Due to the situation in Afghanistan, the current CPD was extended and the Integrated Services Scale-up Plan 2022 for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls was developed and rolled out.
2.3	Develop youth and adolescent roadmap for the next 3 years (2022-2024).	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	7/30/2021	Completed	The pre-existed issues and challenges for adolescent and youth in Afghanistan became more challenging after the takeover of the De Facto Authority (DfA) in August 15, 2021. Based on the humanitarian situation the scale up plan for gender and adolescents was developed for 2022 to address immediate needs in place of roadmap. In addition, adolescent and youth interventions to encourage their participation and civic engagement were implemented under Spotlight Initiative in three provinces – Kandahar, Herat and Paktia.

3	<p>Strengthen UNICEF's partnerships and coordination (addressed at CO UNICEF management, other United Nations agencies, government partners). • The needs of adolescents are enormous, the target group is vast, and some of the needs are beyond the scope and mandate of UNICEF, but nonetheless it is essential that these are addressed. It is therefore recommended that UNICEF strengthens its partnership and coordination when working with and for adolescents, and develops sustained, long-term collaboration on institutionalizing engagement and participation. • UNICEF needs to participate in all relevant existing coordination mechanisms at both levels (with United Nations agencies, NGOs and government agencies) and lead those where possible and relevant. This will help better use opportunities at national and sub-national levels with governmental and non-governmental partners and strengthen implementation quality and coverage. • There is room to strengthen collaboration and coordination with United Nations agencies, notably UNFPA, which has a strong role in youth programming, is complementary in some areas and also works in similar areas. Therefore, collaboration may benefit both. Other United Nations agencies are also good partners, including those working in poverty reduction, education, health and social protection, and UNICEF should exploit these opportunities. • UNICEF needs to forge a partnership with DMOYA, since this is the government body with the mandate to work with youth. Moreover, to address youth unemployment, this would be the appropriate government body to liaise with. Lastly, UNICEF may consider strengthening their engagement with CSOs and INGOs in community and adolescent empowerment.</p>				Agree	
3.1	<p>Participation of UNICEF in relevant youth forums • Gender Equality Forum (8 -10 June 2021) – Adolescent and Youth Network members to share their experience, motivation, how to overcome challenges on youth and gender issues • IKEA Foundation-UNICEF Symposium on Adolescent Empowerment in South Asia (6-7 June 2021) – Multi-purpose Adolescent Group (MAG) members and Director, Provincial Education Dept to share experiences, results and sustainability on MAG activities in Bamyan</p>	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	6/29/2021	Completed	<p>MAG members and Director of Provincial Education Department, Bamyan Province, Afghanistan participated in the IKEA Foundation-UNICEF Symposium on Adolescent Empowerment in South Asia (6-7 June 2021). Participants contributed Adolescent experiences on participation in the IAL programme, shared Afghanistan MAG model (presentation attached) and participated in Panel Discussion.</p>
4	<p>Continued emphasis on girls' education (UNICEF education unit, addressed at CO management, CBE implementing partners) UNICEF has successfully supported girls' education through various modalities, which is acknowledged by stakeholders and beneficiaries and is linked to what is perceived as the largest need. It is therefore recommended for UNICEF to continue doing so, but mindful of the things that worked and components that did not. • UNICEF needs to work on CBEs becoming a more permanent part of the education system, to balance the fact that the coverage of regular schools will not be nearly sufficient in the coming years. There is a large need for CBEs, and participation is high, even higher than registered, and interest is considerable, so the number may need to be scaled up. Accordingly, UNICEF needs to advocate for more Government support. • Girls are doing well in UNICEF-supported education; however, even here they drop out. Complementary activities with these girls and their families, households and communities on girls' rights and empowerment, may pre-empt such challenges from cutting their education short. Also, there are opportunities to link girls in CBEs or ALCs to youth-friendly health services and sports activities.</p>				Agree	
4.0	<p>The plan for the plan for the new CPD (2022-2025) is; expansion of more targeted CBE Programme (including humanitarian response) that includes pre-primary to reach out to most vulnerable and excluded children (one-year pre-primary + 6 years of primary)</p>	Education	Adriana Vogelaar	12/30/2021	Cancelled	<p>The action has been cancelled.</p>

5	<p>Comprehensive adolescent nutrition and health programme (addressed at CO UNICEF nutrition unit, management, MoE, Ministry of Health) • UNICEF supports provision of iron and folic acid tablets, but the needs of adolescent girls go far beyond that. The nutrition indicators do not appear favourable: there is stunting and other micronutrient deficiencies besides iron, as well as the existence of overweight girls. Potentially, there are also eating disorders. • In order to improve the nutrition status of adolescents, notably girls, and address the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, there should be a comprehensive adolescent nutrition programme, which can become part of an overall nutrition programme. This evaluation is not well placed to exactly suggest which type of activities should be designed, but activities targeting nutritional behaviour and dietary diversity, potentially through behaviour change communication, should be considered. • Furthermore, adolescent health should be addressed in programming and strategy in a comprehensive way as well. Not only will this help improve the nutrition status, but youth health indicators in Afghanistan warrant action. This should include improving access to youth-friendly health services in general, which includes the need for policy advocacy with the government to make these services available, as well as awareness raising among adolescents and the adults that surround them. Adolescents' access to health a should also include reproductive health services, with addressing teenage pregnancy, which often results from early marriage, as an important topic of focus. To make this suitable for adolescents, schools could be used as a platform, and social media can make the activities</p>				Agree	
5.0	As one of the key priorities, nutrition section is working on scaling up WIFS programme. This activity has been incorporated in KFW proposal	Nutrition	Zakia Maroof	12/30/2021	Completed	The action has been completed.
5.2	Adolescent health, a new priority for health section. Proposals submitted to Finland and Swedish embassies on Adolescent Health. The proposed programme will target a total population of 960,000 people in 3 provinces.	Health	Dick Chamla	12/30/2021	Completed	Concept note on the adolescent health, nutrition, hygiene and protection was developed and shared with donors.
6	<p>Continued strong focus on ending child marriage (addressed at UNICEF CO management and protection unit, M&E unit, UNFPA) UNICEF has managed good achievements in the awareness around child marriage, and potentially also in the actual rate, though that could not be confirmed by the data. Child marriage is a persistent problem, however, with multiple underlying reasons like poverty, the lack of an appropriate social protection system as well as the existing gendered perceptions, that are very difficult to change. With its mandate, UNICEF cannot look away and needs to continue its efforts, and where possible even scale them up. • This includes strengthening of collaboration and coordination with other development partners, notably UNFPA, especially for areas that are beyond UNICEF's reach, such as addressing overall poverty. • Increasing youth empowerment has appeared a good avenue in the battle against child marriage, so UNICEF should continue doing so and increase their investment in this area. • Decreasing child marriage should become an intrinsic part of each and every programme, since drivers are linked to many indicators such as poverty, health and education. These indicators are all interlinked and affecting the social situation of households, who marry off their daughters. Moreover, by including the topic as widely as possible, a larger group will be reached for awareness raising and finding solutions. • UNICEF should design activities for adolescent girls who have been married early or became pregnant to ensure that they will be able to continue their education and get access to their rights and the appropriate services. This will help them continue their lives in the best possible manner under the circumstances, but also contribute to preventing their own daughters from being married off early. On a parallel trail, UNICEF needs to support data collection, including in intervention areas, to monitor and assess what the real progress is, and launch in-depth studies into still occurring child marriages in order to research which factors keep hampering its eradication and to be able to adapt the programmes accordingly.</p>				Agree	
6.1	UNICEF partnered with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women to implement ending violence against adolescents (Spotlight Initiative) in 12 districts of Herat, Kandahar and Paktia provinces with a total of 713,843 direct beneficiaries.	Gender Prog Specialist (oversight role) Adolesce	Aye Aye Than	12/30/2022	Completed	The Spotlight Initiative was implemented in Herat, Kandahar and Paktia provinces. The Annual Reports are attached.

7	<p>Provide more livelihood/employment support to adolescents (addressed at UNICEF CO management and education unit, stakeholders/development partners working on livelihoods) The support of UNICEF in most cases reached up to the point in time where adolescents left school, with or without a completed education. Though interventions were in place to reach out-of-school children, this has appeared more difficult, especially for non-education related interventions. Stakeholders and beneficiaries stated their fear that all gains would be undone if adolescents are not able to find employment. It is therefore recommended that UNICEF incorporates a stronger linkage to employment for adolescents, with a focus on suitable employment for adolescent girls and young women, while simultaneously trying to be gender transformative. The following specific points may be considered: Scale up livelihood activities in adolescent programmes, with a focus on girls. Ensure these activities are designed and selected in a participative manner. At the same time, inform and expose future participants to possible lines of work that are more profitable, but are not usually done by women. • Strengthen policy advocacy and technical support to further develop government policy and programming on adolescent skilling and employability, and ensure policies are in place that include transferrable skills including employability skills as part of employment training, • Continue and further scale up the GATE programme, as this programme provides suitable employment for young women, and at the same time increases access to school for girls. On a parallel trail, girls may be encouraged to select medical, education and related professions. • Build a partnership with DMOYA to support them in implementing the youth policy and strategy and help them reach out to the subnational level and focus on the younger cohort of youth (up to 19 years of age), as this is the target group of UNICEF's adolescent programming. • Establish and/or strengthen partnership with relevant education institutions at local level such as TVET institutions. Link beneficiaries to existing programmes on increasing employment possibilities (and social protection, if these exist), with a focus on localized approaches and subsidiarity. Advocate with development partners for more support to youth employment and ensure UNICEF's visibility on this topic in platforms where youth employment is discussed, and within the United Nations family.</p>				Agree	
7.1	Children on the move project – vocational training being provided for adolescents and youth (150 female,50 male, total 200) in Herat, Farah and Ghor	Child Protection	William Kollie	11/29/2021	Completed	Targets were achieved as planned.
7.2	Supporting Covid-19 affected young women and adolescent girls in Kabul Rural – provide income generation assistance to young women and adolescents through mask production with 3,500 adolescent girls and women direct beneficiaries and 10,000 community leaders Indirect beneficiaries	Adolescents unit	Aye Aye Than	10/30/2022	Completed	Engaged and supported adolescent girls and young women through an implementing partner to produce masks. Community dialogues were conducted with community leaders, women, parents and local authorities to support empowerment of adolescents.