EMR Tracker

Evaluation Management Response Document

Region: ESAR

Office: Zambia

Evaluation Year: 2025

Evaluation Title: Evaluation of the COVID-19 Response and Resilience Building of Health Systems in Zambia

Person In Charge For Follow Up to Management Response: Susan Suzika Chima

Overall response to evaluation
The evaluation confirms that the project effectively met its primary objective of strengthening health systems and supporting governments—Zambia included—through coordinated, multisectoral efforts. Leveraging partnerships with institutions such as KfW, the World Bank, WHO, and other UN agencies, the project contributed meaningfully to enhancing outbreak preparedness, ensuring continuity of essential health services, and reinforcing long-term health system resilience. In Zambia, UNICEF's interventions were well-aligned with national priorities, notably the National Multisectoral Contingency and Response Plan (NMCPRP) and the COVID-19 National Vaccine Deployment Plan (NDVP). The project's integrated and multisectoral approach proved essential in advancing a robust pandemic response and offers valuable insights for future health emergency preparedness and systems strengthening.

Planned Use of the Evaluation
The evaluation findings will be used to inform strategic planning and decision-making for future health system strengthening and emergency preparedness initiatives. Key lessons and recommendations will guide the refinement of multisectoral coordination mechanisms, enhance outbreak preparedness, and improve the continuity of essential health services during public health emergencies. In Zambia, the evaluation will support alignment of future interventions with national frameworks such as the NMCPRP and NDVP. Additionally, insights from the evaluation will be disseminated to key stakeholders, including government partners and development agencies, to foster learning and promote evidence-based programming across sectors.

Recommendations and Actions

No.	Recommendations/Actions	Responsible Section (Action)	Responsible Person Name (Action)	Expected Completion (Action)	Mgt Response / Implementation Stage	Reason/Action Taken
1	1. Institutionalize Multi-Sectoral Emergency Response Structures				Partially Agree	
1.0	Ensure the sustainability of DEPCs and RRTs by embedding them into routine health governance structures	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Ensure the sustainability of DEPCs and RRTs by embedding them into routine health governance structures:Zambia has decentralized District Health Services, thus District Health Offices are now under the District Local Government and thus all support for emergency preparedness and response by UNICEF contributes to building district systems. UNICEF has supported District Epidemic Preparedness and Response Planning since 2023.
1.0	Strengthen collaboration between the Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Local Government (MOLG), and other relevant sectors to improve coordinated responses.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Strengthen collaboration between the Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Local Government (MOLG), and other relevant sectors to improve coordinated responses. As the Health team, we do not work with MOLG. The Health Cluster is also to be led by WHO. While we can simply state that we will engage WHO for effective coordination, we may not have the - platform to be fully accountable.
1.0	Develop provincial- and district-level contingency plans for future public health crises.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Develop provincial- and district-level contingency plans for future public health crises.

2	2. Expand Localized Supply Chain and Logistics Systems				Partially Agree	
2.0	Decentralize the procurement and distribution of essential medical supplies, including PPE, oxygen, vaccines, and diagnostics, to avoid bottlenecks in crisis response.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	This is not in line with the government strategy. Additionally, this is not the right approach, as it will take away the power of economy of scale
2.0	Establish regional supply hubs to improve last-mile distribution to rural areas.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Establish regional supply hubs to improve last-mile distribution to rural areas. Thes already exist in the country
2.0	Invest in real-time stock monitoring and forecasting systems to prevent supply shortages.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF through their partnership with Design for Life will be training ZAMMSA , MOH's Control tower and EPI staff to: 1.Analyse their national supply chain networks to identify bottlenecks, costs, inefficiencies, carbon emissions and opportunities (e.g the hub strategy) 2.Perform simulations of alternative supply chain/distribution/transportat models/scenarios (e.g. integration, level skipping, reverse logistics etc) and assess the impact of these alternatives on KPIs (e.g. product availability, costs, manpower
3	3. Develop Long-Term Investment Plans for Critical Healthcare Infrastructure				Partially Agree	
3.0	Expand oxygen plant installations beyond urban centres to ensure widespread access.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Given plants are established in large institutes, taking installation outside of urban centers may not make economic sense and not economically viable
3.0	Strengthen laboratory infrastructure to enable faster testing and diagnosis at the provincial level.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Action 2 falls outside UNICEF's area of focus.
3.0	Improve cold chain capacity to support vaccine and diagnostic reagent storage in hard-to-reach areas.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	The MoH with support of the Global Fund has constructed 6 Oxygen Plants around the country, UNICEF constructed one plant on the Copperbelt. Through the Pandemic Fund and with support of the US CDC, UKHSA, the Zambia National Public Health Institute has been supported to strengthening laboratory capacities at national and provincial level - Zambia now has a fully-fledged Public Health Reference laboratory in Lusaka. Cold chain capacities have been further improved with support of funding from GAVI, KfW and USG.
4	4. Strengthen Healthcare Workforce Development and Retention				Partially Agree	

4.0	Increase recruitment and training of healthcare workers, particularly in intensive care, laboratory services, and epidemiology.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Action 1 is a WHO mandate
4.0	Provide incentives to retain skilled personnel in rural and underserved areas.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Recruitment of healthcare workers and their retention is beyond UNICEF mandate, but these recommendations are part of MoH's continuous capacity improvement efforts though limited by a finite fiscal space.
4.0	Establish psychosocial support programs to address burnout and improve workforce resilience	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF working with other partners under the Adolescent programme supports psychosocial capacity development and systems strengthening in the sector
5	5. Integrate UNICEF-Supported Interventions into National Health Policies				Agree	
5.0	Secure long-term government funding for IPC, risk communication, and community engagement strategies initiated during COVID-19.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	With the support of partners including UNICEF, Zambia has secured funds under the 1st round of the Pandemic Fund call, funded areas included aspects of the IPC/RCEE Pillars. The prevailing global shifts in the development assistance landscape, however, will complicate and limit success in achieving this recommendation.
5.0	Maintain and expand cold chain and oxygen infrastructure investments to improve routine service delivery	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF supported the renovation of vaccine storage facilities at national and all 10 provincial levels with installation of air conditioners to maintain optimal ambient temperatures, supported procurement and installation of four new WICs rooms at the NVS and Provincial Vaccine Stores (PVS). These upgrades expanded cold chain storage capacity from 166,128 to 197,000 litres, enabling storage of over 14 million vaccine doses, sufficient to fully vaccinate approximately 430,163 children under the age of 5. Ultra-cold chain capacity was also expanded from 6,500 to 7,800 liters through deployment of specialized equipment across all 10 provinces, significantly strengthening the system's ability to manage COVID-19 vaccines requiring ultra-low temperatures

5.0	Develop pandemic preparedness plans that incorporate lessons from UNICEF's COVID-19 response, ensuring continuity in emergency response mechanisms.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	The Government of Zambia has a statutory body, under the Ministry of Health, the Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI), which is tasked and mandated to plan for, respond, monitor and report on the national health security. UNICEF works closely with ZNPHI in all the processes for pandemic/emergency preparedness, response and reporting and in process ensures the incorporation of the lessons from the COVID-91 pandemic.
6	6. Strengthen Community-Based Vaccine Awareness Campaigns				Agree	
6.0	Expand the role of traditional and religious leaders as trusted vaccine advocates, ensuring localized messaging that resonates with diverse communities.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF supported the community engagement meetings such religious and traditional leaders dialogue meetings to address vaccine related hesitancies as well as got support from the these key influencers to support vaccinations. Furthermore, the partnership fostered with ZINGO (Zambia Interfaith networking Group) is a critical platform for ongoing engagement.
6.0	Invest in digital and mass media campaigns to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, using culturally appropriate and evidence-based communication strategies.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF developed evidence informed communication materials, such as posters, flyers brochures and radio and TV spots that we distributed to all the 10 provinces additionally UNICEF supported training of 100 digital mobilizers (10 per province) and equipping them with tools for digital engagement. Mass media campaign through national TV/Radio and community stations is being implemented in collaboration with MOH during routine immunization, child health weeks, new vaccine introductions and commemoration days like Africa Vaccination Week.

6.0	Implement targeted outreach programs in low-uptake regions to increase vaccine accessibility and awareness.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF supported the community engagement meetings such religious and traditional leaders dialogue meetings to address vaccine related hesitancies as well as got support from these key influencers to support vaccinations. UNICEF supported the development and coordination of the RCCE national technical working group as well as the development of the National RCCE plan and the COVID 19 SBC strategy with strong steps to the integration of the C19 into routine service delivery. Trained and oriented 100 digital social mobilisers to support with demand generation using social media platforms and help debunk myths and misconceptions reaching over 10 million social media followers. Community engagement was centered around strengthening the capacity of the community volunteers and 3500 were capacitated with key information to reach out to households with COVID 19 messages. Other targeted interventions included reaching out to elderly people in the communities who may have missed out on the vaccine through established local community-based organizations. Planned activities include strengthen demand generation activities through integration of COVID 19 into the routine immunization. Developing messages that equally integration C-19. Supported outreach activities and continued to build capacity of key influencers at community level. Ensure supportive supe19. Supported monitor activities and continued to effective implementation.
7	7. Enhance Cold and Supply Chain Management				Agree	

7.0	Expand solar-powered refrigeration and mobile storage units to ensure vaccines remain viable in hard-to-reach areas.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF, with support from GAVI, is solarizing 250 off-grid health facilities in remote and hard-to-reach areas across Zambia. This initiative aims to enhance vaccine storage and improve the delivery of overall health services. Additionally, with support from AU-CDC, UNICEF is installing a 100KW solar system at the national vaccine store. This system will ensure the safe storage of over 40 million vaccine doses annually, while providing reliable, climate-friendly, and cost-effective energy to strengthen the immunization program and the broader health system. UNICEF also facilitated a national training workshop on temperature monitoring and data use strategies. The workshop brought together approximately 20 participants, including members of the NLTWG, and national and provincial cold chain officers. The objective was to strengthen immunization systems by promoting optimal cold chain performance and real-time temperature data use for informed decision-making across all levels of the supply chain

7.0	Improve real-time vaccine stock tracking to prevent shortages and optimize distribution.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Additionally, with support from AU-CDC, UNICEF is installing a 100KW solar system at the national vaccine store. This system will ensure the safe storage of over 40 million vaccine doses annually, while providing reliable, climate-friendly, and cost-effective energy to strengthen the immunization program and the broader health system. UNICEF also facilitated a national training workshop on temperature monitoring and data use strategies. The workshop brought together approximately 20 participants, including members of the NLTWG, and national and provincial cold chain officers. The objective was to strengthen immunization systems by promoting optimal cold chain performance and real-time temperature data use for informed decision-making across all levels of the supply chain. To further support cold chain monitoring, UNICEF procured and supplied 500 Berlinger FT2E 30DTR devices and 150 cold chain maintenance tool kits for use at national, provincial, and district vaccine stores.
7.0	Strengthen last-mile delivery mechanisms by investing in transport logistics for remote health centres.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Under AU-CDC support, UNICEF is also procuring a refrigerated truck to enhance timely and effective vaccine distribution to the last mile. In addition, the DRIVE initiative is being implemented to support the last mile solution and to reduce the number of zero-dose children, promote equity in vaccine availability, and improve the performance of immunization and other primary health care programs.
8	8. Improve Equity in Vaccine Distribution				Agree	

8.0	Develop a decentralized vaccine allocation model that prioritizes high-risk and underserved populations.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF continues to provide technical support and assistance to the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure timely forecasting, allocation, shipment, and distribution of vaccines to all populations, with a particular focus on special populations, including high-risk groups, rural communities, and hard-to-reach areas. This support includes strengthening and building the capacity of the National Logistics Technical Working Group (NLTWG), analyzing and provide technical guidance on monthly vaccine management reports, facilitating partner coordination meetings, and supporting technical committees at various levels. These efforts aim to enhance system efficiency and improve immunization service delivery across the country.
8.0	Strengthen intersectoral coordination to ensure vaccines reach marginalized groups, including those in rural areas and informal settlements.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF continues to provide technical support and assistance to the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure timely forecasting, allocation, shipment, and distribution of vaccines to all populations, with a particular focus on special populations, including high-risk groups, rural communities, and hard-to-reach areas. This support includes strengthening and building the capacity of the National Logistics Technical Working Group (NLTWG), analyzing and provide technical guidance on monthly vaccine management reports, facilitating partner coordination meetings, and supporting technical committees at various levels. These efforts aim to enhance system efficiency and improve immunization service delivery across the country.

8.0	Integrate mobile vaccination units into national immunization programs to expand outreach efforts.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	To further expand outreach and ensure equitable access to immunization services, UNICEF is supporting the expansion of the EPI outreach sites to reach remote and underserved communities, including those with limited access to fixed health facilities. UNICEF supported MoH in procurement and distribution of 16,100 vaccine carriers, 2650 cold boxes to strengthen outreach EPI vaccine distribution. By bringing vaccines directly to the population, outreach and mobile units help reduce missed opportunities for immunization, improve coverage rates, and contribute to the reduction of zero-dose children.
9	9. Integrate COVID-19 Vaccination with Routine Immunization Programs				Agree	
9.0	Merge COVID-19 vaccination with childhood immunization services to enhance efficiency and public trust.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	With support from UNICEF and other partners, MoH has developed a COVID-19 integration strategy and henceforth, COVID-19 vaccines are delivered through the routine immunization system and health care workers have be and continued to be trained to deliver services in an integrated approach.
9.0	Establish permanent vaccine outreach services that cater to both routine and emergency immunization needs.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF also supported the coordination and finalization of COVID-19 integration plan into routine immunization, supported and increased the vaccine storage capacity at all levels to receive and accommodate COVID-19 vaccines, UNICEF supported the integrated distribution and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines with routine immunization vaccines to the last mile, supported development of the costed plan for C-19 integration into routine immunization.
9.0	Train healthcare workers on multi-vaccine delivery strategies to improve overall immunization system efficiency.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	With support from UNICEF and other partners, MoH has developed a COVID-19 integration strategy and henceforth, COVID-19 vaccines are delivered through the routine immunization system and health care workers have been and continued to be trained to deliver integrated immunization services in a multi-vaccine approach.
10	10. Institutionalize Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Strategies				Agree	

10.0	Embed RCCE efforts into national immunization programs to ensure sustained public engagement beyond COVID-19.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	COVID-19 vaccine demand and RCCE effort is now integrated as part of Primary Health Care (PHC) comprehensive package and the recently finalized Immunization Advocacy Communication Social Mobilization (ACSM) strategy as a long term demand strategy.
10.0	Conduct social listening initiatives to monitor misinformation trends and adjust messaging accordingly.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	Several steps taken to strengthen social listening actions for public health priorities including public health - ZCO established and supported a network of 100 Digital Mobilizers (10 per province) to gather social listening insights and disseminate tailored responses. ZCO supported MOH in finalization of SOP to strengthen community feedback mechanisms, being rolled out to subnational level. Moreover, the online social listening supported by ESARO integrates Zambia specific data on key issues. Digital surveys are also deployed as needed through Viamo or U-Report platforms.
10.0	Develop long-term partnerships with community-based organizations to maintain vaccine advocacy efforts.	Health and HIV	Atnafu Getachew Asfaw	12/31/2025	Completed	ZCO enhanced capacity of key national CSO partners to engage in vaccine advocacy and demand generation. These include interfaith networks, senior citizens networks and Red Cross societies. The organizations implemented tailored SBC interventions targeting segments of populations/geographic locations with low uptake of vaccine. Moreover, as part of ZCO effort to institutionalize SBC capacity, UNICEF partnership with University of Zambia school of public health established SBC center of Excellence supporting evidence generation, HCD design and capacity building in various areas of public health priorities