

## Consultant – Team Member for evaluation of UNICEF early childhood development programme in Thailand (2020-2024)

### Purpose of Assignment:

#### A. Background

Thailand has made strides in supporting children under five over the past decade. Sustained investments in healthcare have led to high prenatal care and child mortality rates, with 90% of pregnant women receiving at least four antenatal visits, 99% having institutional deliveries, and under-five mortality at about nine deaths per 1,000 live births. Immunization coverage is advancing towards universality, with over 80% of children fully immunized. Birth registration rates are high, though gaps remain among the stateless population. Developmentally, nine out of ten children are on track per the Early Childhood Development Index, though disparities favor girls. Early childhood education attendance is high, with 86% of children aged 3-5 enrolled, while adolescent birth rates and violent discipline at home have decreased significantly.

However, challenges remain. Early childhood development (ECD) in Thailand faces several key challenges, particularly in nutrition, early learning, parenting practices, and childcare. Nutritional issues persist, with only 14% of infants exclusively breastfed, and high rates of stunting (13%), wasting (8%), and overweight (9%) among children under five, worsening over recent years. Immunization gaps also exist, especially in the South and among migrant children.

Affordable and quality early childhood education services are limited in some regions, especially for vulnerable families, and only four out of ten young children have access to age-appropriate books, hindering literacy and numeracy development. Parental involvement is also insufficient, with engagement skewed towards mothers over fathers, influenced by traditional gender roles. Childcare is strained, particularly for children of working parents in poorer, urban areas. Nearly one in five young children live apart from both parents, often left with elderly relatives, which can adversely impact development.

These persisting challenges manifest in multidimensional poverty among children. Forty-two percent of children under five are multidimensionally poor, with higher rates in rural and northeastern areas and among non-Thai-speaking families. Poverty intersects with other factors like gender, ethnicity, and geography, exacerbating disparities. While Thailand's Human Capital Index of 61% is above regional averages, addressing these inequalities remains critical for future productivity and development outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic's long-term effects on ECD are yet unknown but are expected to be most severe for disadvantaged children.

## UNICEF Thailand ECD Programme

The 2017-2021 UNICEF Thailand Country Programme's ECD outcome aimed for all children aged 0-5 to be progressively cared for through quality ECD services and protective and nurturing family environments. The outcome had an indicative resource need of USD\$7.2 million. The expected outputs for the period were:

- ECD policy-makers have enhanced understanding of holistic child development, and capacity to implement integrated inclusive ECD programme.
- ECD professionals have strengthened capacity to support holistic development of young children.
- Parents and families have enhanced knowledge and skills on care and development of young children.

Supporting UNSDCF Outcome 2, the UNICEF Thailand programme (2022-2026) aims to enhance ECD by strengthening intersectoral collaboration, promoting nurturing and responsive caregiving, and expanding access to quality, affordable childcare and early learning. Key programme priorities include (a) establishing a coordinated framework for holistic, inclusive, gender-responsive ECD; (b) integrating nurturing caregiving practices across sectors, focusing on both parents and service providers; and (c) ensuring school readiness through accessible pre-primary education for vulnerable children.

UNICEF Thailand partners with the Ministries of Public Health, Education, and Interior to build institutional capacity for providing inclusive and integrated ECD services for children under three. This involves incorporating ECD into health and nutrition services, conducting childcare service assessments, and developing public-private partnerships.

To strengthen preschool education for children aged 3–5, UNICEF supports initiatives to enhance parental engagement, teacher training, and disability-inclusive practices. Standards, tools, and evidence on ECD services are developed to support quality and equity.

UNICEF also collaborates with the ECD Secretariat, civil society, and academia to enhance policy coordination, build institutional capacity, and establish an ECD financing framework. Additional efforts include creating a comprehensive parenting strategy and communication resources to promote holistic ECD awareness.

The UNICEF Thailand Programme (2022-2026) has an indicative resource need of USD\$8.0 million for the ECD outcome. The expected outputs for the period are:

- National and subnational institutions have increased capacity to engage parents and provide quality, inclusive and integrated ECD services and affordable quality childcare for children aged 0–3 years.
- Early childhood education agencies have improved capacity to engage parents and plan, implement and monitor inclusive and equitable quality pre-school services for children aged 3–5 years.
- Improved coordination, enabling frameworks and empowered partnerships facilitate ECD service delivery.

## Key Partners

The primary government partners of the programme are the MoPH, Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Interior (MoI), Department of Local Administration (DLA) under MoI, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA), National Economic and Social Development Commission (NESDC), national ECD policy committee, and regional/provisional health offices.

Non-state partners include other UN agencies, primarily WHO and UNESCO, Save the children, Raks Thai Foundation, Foundation for Slum Child Care (FSCC), ESTA, training colleges, medical associations, community-based organizations, private sector, foundations, think tanks, academia and experts working in the ECD space. Additionally, UNICEF also works with private sector actors on family friendly policies, and which include elements of early childhood development.

## Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) - outlined in the 2021 Programme Strategy Note – is underlined by four core principles and approaches that include adopting a system-strengthening approach, engaging caregivers, gender-transformative programming, and progressive universalism. The ToC is complemented with a nested theory of action that mirrors the outputs and outcomes of the Programme and aims for more children in Thailand (aged 0-6 years), especially the most disadvantaged, to be developmentally on track and ready to start school by 2026.

## **B. Objectives, Purpose & Expected results**

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to enhance UNICEF's accountability to key stakeholders and contribute to the design and development of the 2027-2032 UNICEF Thailand Country Programme. The evaluation will also inform implementation in the remaining period of the current ECD programme 2022-2026. The evaluation will contribute to the overall organizational ECD knowledge base with additional learnings from Thailand.

Under this overarching purpose, the evaluation has the following specific objectives:

1. Assess UNICEF work, including strategic positioning, in support of policy coordination, evidence-informed frameworks and enabling partnerships to strengthen and increase uptake of ECD services for children aged 0-6 years.
2. Examine the relevance and adequacy of UNICEF Thailand ECD approach including capacities to support Thailand in the adaption, acceleration, and scale-up efforts for strengthening ECD services for children from 0-6 years old.
3. Assess the effectiveness of UNICEF support for the improvement of high quality ECD programmes that promote holistic childhood development and school readiness for children from 0-6 years old and their caregivers.

## Key Evaluation Users

The primary user of the evaluation is the UNICEF Thailand Country Office (TCO) ECD section. Other users include TCO's government counterparts, other TCO sections and management, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), UN partners of the programme particularly UNESCO and WHO, key

development partners and donors, and the duty bearers and rights holders (particularly children and vulnerable groups).

## C. Description of the assignment

### Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation will focus on the implementation period from 2020 to 2024, spanning two programme cycles. Geographic coverage includes all areas of the country where the programme has been implemented. The ECD programme has multiple interlinked thematic workstreams at different levels of maturity and anchored at the national or subnational level aligned with the decentralized structure of the ECD sector across multiple ministries. Thematically, all outputs of the two country programmes and the relevant activities contributing to them are within the scope of the evaluation. During the inception phase, the evaluation will review and prioritize workstreams of interest aligned with the current programmatic pillars focused on the following:

- Holistic child growth and development through the lens of the Nurturing Care Framework and focused on health and nutrition, early stimulation, parenting, and care through varied service delivery and institutional pathways.
- Key interventions that UNICEF Thailand advocates for, supports and/or implements to address early childhood education and school readiness through system strengthening and improved service delivery.
- Creating an enabling policy and provisioning environment for the ECD sub-sector i.e., multi-sector coordination, policy development, capacity building, system strengthening, advocacy networks, knowledge creation and management, etc.

Although the evaluation is focused on the UNICEF Thailand ECD Programme, the complementarity with other areas of work of the UNICEF Country Programme where initiatives are in the ECD programme change logic and collaborate with other programmes such as Education, Social Policy, Child Protection, and Communications, will be considered within the scope of the evaluation.

The ECD National Committee Secretariat is conducting an evaluation of the ECD national plan (2022-2027) which is one of the tools for the operationalization of the 2019 ECD Act. This programme evaluation will be useful to the ECD national plan evaluation, and the scope of this evaluation may be adjusted to complement the Government evaluation.

### Evaluation Questions

The following table presents the evaluation questions, associated sub-questions and evaluation criteria, all of which should be addressed with reference to children from 0-6 years old.

<b>Objective 1: Assess UNICEF work, including strategic positioning, in support of policy coordination, evidence-informed frameworks and enabling partnerships to strengthen and increase uptake of ECD services for children aged 0-6 years.</b>	
<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Sub-questions/evaluation criteria</b>
1. To what extent was UNICEF support to policy coordination, evidence-informed frameworks and enabling partnerships to strengthen ECD and expand access to services for children aged 0-6 years successful?	1.1: Which UNICEF-supported strategies (e.g. advocacy and communication, evidence generation, social behavior change and community engagement, etc.) and inputs/interventions (e.g. policies, frameworks, tools, processes and/or other practices) were effective in increasing uptake of ECD services? <b>(effectiveness)</b>
	1.2: To what extent do UNICEF-supported policies and practices align with national goals for ECD and the organizational commitment to progressively reach the poorest and most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities? <b>(relevance, equity, gender and human rights, programme objectives)</b>
	1.3: To what extent is there policy coherence in the sectors that are responsible for providing ECD services? <b>(external coherence)</b>
	1.4: To what degree does the programme balance and connect between downstream and upstream work in relation to the country needs and capacity as well as internal demands of a hybrid office (working both programmatically and fund-raising)? <b>(internal coherence)</b>
<b>Objective 2: Examine the relevance and adequacy of UNICEF Thailand ECD approach including capacities to support Thailand in the adaption, acceleration, and scale-up efforts for strengthening ECD services for children from 0-6 years old.</b>	
<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Sub-questions/evaluation criteria</b>
2. To what extent has UNICEF leveraged the ECD approach to build capacities and systems to adapt, accelerate, and scale-up efforts to strengthen coordination across sectors in support of holistic development of young children 0-6 years old?	2.1: To what extent has the ECD approach been effective in increasing access and strengthening ECD services to promote children’s developmental and school readiness? <b>(effectiveness)</b>
	2.2: How effective are UNICEF strategies in identifying and building on existing national and local capacities of educators and caregivers? What new capacities were built and to what extent are these capacities and skills being used and what are the indications of their continued use? <b>(effectiveness, sustainability)</b>
	2.3: Are UNICEF resources (financial and human) and partnership arrangement well positioned to accelerate and scale-up efforts to strengthen ECD programmes? Are the partnership arrangements strategic and efficient? <b>(efficiency)</b>
	2.4: To what extent is UNICEF work on inclusive ECD meeting the holistic needs of children, particularly children with disabilities, and caregivers? <b>(relevance, gender and human rights)</b>
<b>Objective 3: Assess the effectiveness of UNICEF support for the improvement of high quality ECD programmes that promote holistic childhood development and school readiness for children from 0-6 years old and their caregivers.</b>	
<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Sub-questions/evaluation criteria</b>
3. To what extent has the ECD approach been successful in promoting early childhood development and school readiness among caregivers and children from 0-6 years old?	3.1. To what extent does UNICEF Thailand collect and utilize reliable and disaggregated data on caregiver practices, children’s developmental status and on children’s participation and learning in early childhood education for programme planning and improvement? <b>(effectiveness, equity, gender and human rights)</b>
	3.2. To what extent has the theory of change for UNICEF work in ECD held true in terms of the logic and pathways to results for children and caregivers? What are the major contributions by UNICEF in the achievement of results? <b>(coherence, effectiveness, programme objectives and targets)</b>
	3.3. Which UNICEF strategies have been relevant and effective in supporting different child populations to access ECD services, both universal and targeted approaches to improve quality of services and reduce disparities in access? <b>(relevance, equity, gender and human rights)</b>

The evaluation questions are adapted from the global evaluation of UNICEF work in early childhood development and early childhood education (2018-2023). The questions may be refined during the inception phase, based on the evaluators’ expertise, knowledge of ECD, and insights from the preliminary review of UNICEF documents to propose the final set of questions, and in consultation with the Evaluation Reference Group, and in agreement with the evaluation management team. While every effort must be made to maximize comparability to the global evaluation findings, and leveraging efficiencies in

use of standardized and tested instruments and methods, the evaluators are also expected to be responsive to the national context and the positioning of the UNICEF country programme.

During the inception phase, the evaluator must develop an evaluation matrix linking the key evaluation criteria and questions/sub-questions with appropriate evaluative indicators, the proposed methods of data collection and analysis and data sources for answering the evaluation questions and sub-question.

### Evaluation Design and Methodology

Based on the objectives of the evaluation, this section indicates a possible approach, methods, and processes for the evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Methodological rigor will be given significant consideration in the assessment of proposals. Hence bidders are invited to interrogate the approach and methodology outlined in the ToR and improve on it or propose innovative designs and approaches that best meet the objectives of the evaluation. In their proposals, bidders should clearly refer to triangulation, sampling plans, ethical considerations and methodological limitations and mitigation measures.

The evaluation will adopt a non-experimental, theory-based design to trace UNICEF contributions toward expanding opportunities for early childhood development, include school readiness. In this approach, a theory of change will be used as an evaluation tool – to interrogate and/or verify whether the necessary inputs were made, outputs realized, and the extent to which the intended outcomes were achieved.

The programme theory of change will be used to analyze how UNICEF inputs (tools, supporting activities, capacities, resources, systems, coordination mechanisms) have been translated into implementation strategies and outputs. The evaluation will also assess the extent to which the underlying assumptions and risks in the theory of change still hold true in the Thailand context.

The theory of change will undergo further refinement and validation with a cross-sectoral group of programme specialists and ECD. The UNICEF Thailand ECD programme theory of change will also be compared to – and complemented by – the theory of change generated as part of global evaluation of UNICEF work in early childhood development and early childhood education (2018-2023). This validation will provide confidence in the veracity of the proposed theory of change as a good representation of the results chain, and of the contribution that UNICEF has made to the results.

In term of process, a contribution analysis approach<sup>2</sup> is proposed, to examine the elements of the theory of change - how UNICEF inputs were converted to results (i.e., outputs and possibly intermediate outcomes). Contribution analysis explicitly addresses the issue of attribution, which is typically a challenge in multi-actor contexts where it is difficult to identify whether particular interventions or inputs from a particular actor contributed to a result and/or outcome. It searches for a plausible association between inputs and outcomes by constructing a story of influence or contribution, as evaluators make their judgements, for each the normative sub-questions. The evaluation does not aim to prove causality, but rather to identify a body of evidence that can provide defensible findings about UNICEF contribution to effectiveness in expanding access to ECD, or the lack thereof.

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<sup>1</sup> The proposed methodology is indicative and based on internal experience in conducting similar evaluations.

<sup>2</sup> <https://nonprofitbuilder.org/storage/377/Contribution-analysis-An-approach-to-exploring-cause-and-effect-ILAC.pdf>

## Proposed Methodology

### *Inception*

The inception phase will focus on finalizing the design of the key components under this evaluation and will feature five activities, as described below:

a) Search, compile and conduct a preliminary review of UNICEF documents and academic and grey literature: This activity is meant to deepen the understanding of the context of UNICEF ECD programming in Thailand, and to develop a succinct synthesis of the country context and UNICEF role in early childhood development.

b) Conduct a systematic stakeholder analysis: Concurrent with compilation of documents, key groups of stakeholders will be identified (i.e., UNICEF staff members, consultants, NGO partners, cluster members/partners, donors, researchers and other independents subject matter experts, etc.), and a stakeholder analysis will be conducted to determine the role of each key stakeholder and inputs in ECD, and in the evaluation process. Groups of stakeholders will be judged on three parameters: (i) interest and involvement in ECD work; (ii) influence/power that they exercise in major decisions about UNICEF work and, (iii) involvement of the stakeholder in the evaluation and expected impact of their involvement. Based on the stakeholder analysis, the evaluator will articulate an approach for engagement and management of the different stakeholder groups, to be used by the evaluation manager and the evaluator. The stakeholder engagement strategy should be included as an annex of the inception report.

c) Compilation of all elements of the inception report and submission: The inception report will include (i) revised evaluation questions (improved from the ToR version and informed by users as necessary) presented in an evaluation matrix; (ii) expand on the methodology featuring a well-articulated sampling strategy; (iii) reassessed and reformulated programme theory of change;<sup>3</sup> (iv) evaluation workplan allowing adequate time for any required ethical clearance procedures which is in the critical path of the project timeline and quality assurance time by the evaluation reference group; and, (v) draft evaluation tools for piloting. The inception report format will be guided by the UNEG quality checklist for evaluation inception reports.<sup>4</sup>

d) Convene a 1-day inception workshop: After circulating the draft inception report to the primary users and the evaluation reference group, the evaluation manager will convene a virtual workshop to provide an opportunity for interaction with them. The focus of the workshop will be to validate evaluation questions, discuss the scope of the evaluation and key technical elements, refine the work plan, and to communicate/manage expectations of the primary users and the evaluator. All comments from the primary users, and the reference group, on the draft inception report will be responded to by the evaluator and tracked by the evaluation manager.

e) Ethical clearance: Any needed ethical reviews will be undertaken and clearances obtained following completion of the inception report, including data collection instruments, and prior to start of the data collection phase.

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<sup>3</sup> The theory of change will be further refined in the course of the evaluation as new evidence emerges.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uneval.org/document/detail/608>

## *Data Collection*

The data collection is envisaged to feature four methods as follows:

- a) Desk-based review of UNICEF documents and secondary analyses of existing data sets: This includes planning and programming documents; situation reports; needs assessments; survey and statistics; donor proposals and reports; field monitoring reports from UNICEF and partners; country audits and financial data; data, reports and any other relevant documents deemed relevant during the inception phase.
- b) Guided self-assessments: This task involves self-assessment by the ECD team, using existing/adapted tools to assess the ECD system against a proposed set of inputs, outputs, and the characterization of the progress made towards universal access to ECD and school readiness.
- c) In-country primary data collection: Using the stakeholder analysis from the inception phase, this task involves key informant interviews with UNICEF staff, government counterparts, and different type of partners to answer a subset of evaluation questions for which the informants will be the primary sources, and also to corroborate some of the data from the desk-based review.
- d) Survey or FGD: Administration of an online survey of emerging findings (modified Delphi survey) to the Thailand Country Office, OR 1 focus group discussion (FGD) with UNICEF ECD team. The survey/FGDs will be used as an additional opportunity to collect additional data to strengthen the evidence, as well as an exercise to validate key findings and preliminary recommendations. The final set of conclusions and recommendations will be triangulated from all these sources.

Following the data collection, the evaluator will present the data collection summary to the evaluation manager and reference group, including any divergence from the inception report, its implications for analysis and how data gaps are addressed.

## *Data analysis, validation and reporting*

The activities for this phase are:

- a) Updating the data analysis plan: Accuracy, triangulation, and disaggregation of data will be of crucial importance for the comprehensiveness, usefulness, and credibility of the evaluation findings. Hence, data analysis and interpretation methods proffered in the earlier stages will be updated accordingly. Also, the evaluation will seek to identify contextual and structural/systemic factors explaining the evaluation findings – supporting or impeding performance of UNICEF in Thailand. Some of the bottlenecks may relate to country office characteristics, system-wide processes and cross-sectoral issues that lie beyond the ECD sector. These need to be listed but not examined in great depth.
- b) Drafting and submission of extended outline (zero draft): The data analysis phase will conclude with the submission of an annotated report outline, which will be a mock-up of the final report, and if possible, a collection of insights and/or preliminary findings from the data collection, which will be subjected to more systematic and comprehensive analysis.



c) Findings validation workshop: At the reporting stage, a workshop will be organized to validate preliminary findings and provide an opportunity to collectively make sense of those findings. The primary users and the evaluation reference group members will be included. Workshop feedback will be documented including any divergent views, sensitivities, or (lack of) consensus on the findings.

d) Drafting and submission of final report: The evaluation report will be presented in four drafts (completed first draft, revised draft, penultimate draft, and final report). The first draft will be reviewed by the evaluation manager, while the revised draft will be presented to the evaluation reference group for review. To be submitted for clearance by the UNICEF Country Representative, the penultimate draft should incorporate feedback from the evaluation reference group. The final draft will be submitted for copyediting and publishing.

All deliverables must be in professional-level standard English, and they must be language-edited/proof-read by someone who is proficient in English. Page limits, if any, will be established during the inception period. In general, the final report should not exceed 70 pages and should aim for conciseness, readability, and visual appeal. Monitoring deliverables about work progress are not listed but will be periodically required.

#### Norms and Standards

The evaluation will follow the [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#), [UNICEF procedure for ethical standards in research, evaluation, data collection and analysis](#), [UNEG Ethical Guidelines](#). It also has to consider the [UNEG Guidance on integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation](#) and the [UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicators](#). The final evaluation report must be compliant with the [UNICEF Evaluation Report Standards](#), and the [Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System \(GEROS\) quality standards](#), and prepared according to the UNICEF Style Guide, UNICEF Publication Toolkit and UNICEF Brand Toolkit. Dissemination or exposure of results and of any interim products must follow the rules agreed upon in the contract. Unauthorized disclosure is prohibited. The overall evaluation process must adhere to the [UNICEF Evaluation Policy](#).

#### Ethical Considerations

UNICEF requires evidence generation conducted to be in full compliance with ethical considerations. At the core of the ethical principles to be followed during the evaluation is to ensure doing no harm to children, parents or other participants in the evaluation. All informants should be offered the possibility of confidentiality, for all methods used. The evaluator is required to clearly identify any potential ethical issues and approaches, describe data and document protection protocols, and workplan for ethical review and oversight of the evaluation process in their inception report. Any ethical issues that could potentially arise during the evaluation need to be documented including how the evaluator will respond or address each.

It is crucial that the evaluation embraces the views of all key stakeholders, including a fair representation of girls and boys, especially the most marginalized and disadvantaged. Children's safety and wellbeing should always be paramount, hence the inclusion of children and adolescents in the evaluation should be in compliance with the [Ethical Research Involving Children \(ERIC\) Principles](#), and the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis. The evaluator, and

enumerators, must read and sign the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation pledge](#) and the [UNEG Code of Conduct in Evaluation](#). The evaluator will be expected to undertake the Basic Ethics Training in [Agora](#). All members of the ERG and the evaluator should also complete the '[Evaluation Fundamentals: UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Online Course](#)' on Agora.