Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Evaluation Policy

July 2012

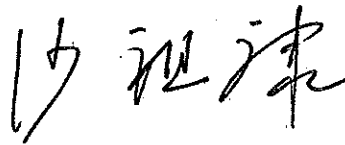## Foreword by the Under-Secretary-General

Member States and the Secretary-General have made numerous calls for evaluation to be strengthened at the Secretariat. OIOS noted, in a number of reports, that the evaluation capacity of the Secretariat is inadequate and recommended the establishment of a dedicated evaluation capacity for Secretariat departments.

Evaluation can play an important role in improving programme performance, by identifying gaps, lessons learned and by strengthening monitoring. Experience suggests evaluation often results in better decision-making, better programme design and planning and improved organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluation can also improve compliance, oversight and accountability. In short, evaluation can be an important management tool.

This policy is an important step towards enhancing DESA's evaluation function and ensure its utility, credibility and independence and alignment with United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Norms and Standards. DESA will prepare an implementation guide to support improved evaluation practice and to provide detailed guidance to staff on evaluation implementation.

This policy will be reviewed and updated every six years, in line with ongoing guidance from OIOS and UNEG. This will take place for the first time in early 2017, to align with the Strategic Framework planning process.

I would like to thank the DESA evaluation team and the members of the departmental network of evaluation focal points for their contribution to developing the evaluation policy. I count on the cooperation and support from all Divisions in using and further enhancing this policy to strengthen DESA's evaluation function.

Sha Zukang
Under-Secretary-General

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A. The Evaluation Policy

1. Background and introduction
a. Background to the evaluation policy

The policy is based on the Secretary-General's Bulletin on planning, monitoring and evaluation (ST.SGB.2000/8), the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards, and Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) guidance on evaluation and development of evaluation policies.[1] It seeks to strengthen the institutional framework for the conduct of evaluation activities by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)[2], to establish a common understanding and approach to the function, and to promote consistency in practice. This policy is divided into two sections. The first section covers general evaluation principles for DESA; the second section is a plan setting out how DESA will implement the policy.

The evaluation policy and its implementation plan also clarify:

- The objectives of evaluation in DESA;
- The connections between the different kinds of evaluations carried out in the UN Secretariat and within DESA;
- What kinds of evaluation need to be carried out and why;
- Accountability for implementation of the policy, and responsibility for managing evaluations;
- Capacity required for evaluation implementation and follow-up.

The policy was developed through a review of UN mandates and guidance on evaluation, evaluation policies within and outside the UN system, and interviews with DESA staff.

The policy anticipates the following results:

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[1] UN (2000) *Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. Secretary-General's Bulletin.* ST.SGB.2000/8 http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=ST/SGB/2000/8; *UNEG Norms and Standards* (2005) http://www.uneval.org/normsandstandards/index.jsp; OIOS (2005) *A Guide to Using Evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat.* http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/evaluation_manual.html; OIOS (nd) *Guidance to Programmes for Developing an Evaluation Policy* http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/ied_guidance_for_dev_ep.pdf
"Each organization should develop an explicit policy statement on evaluation. The policy should provide a clear explanation of the concept, role and use of evaluation within the organization, including the institutional framework and definition of roles and responsibilities; an explanation of how the evaluation function and evaluations are planned, managed and budgeted; and a clear statement on disclosure and dissemination." UNEG Norms, p. 7.

[2] Throughout this policy, "Programme" corresponds to the whole of the Department's programme of work, while "programme" used in a generic sense can encompass a whole Sub-programme or components thereof. "Sub-programme" refers to "the main basic programme planning and budgeting structure" which in the DESA organizational context corresponds to the programme of work assigned to each of the Divisions (as contained in the Strategic Framework and the Proposed Programme Budget).

- Evaluations that are timely, relevant, and of use to DESA, the inter-governmental bodies it services, and partners;
- Improved integration of evaluation as a tool for supporting learning and strengthened planning, programming and management;
- A more rigorous approach to the identification of lessons learned and strengthened longer-term application of lessons learned;
- Enhanced results reporting and accountability at all levels, including communication about DESA's achievements;
- Increased synergies between sub-programmes.

b. Principles of evaluation in DESA[3]

i. DESA will use the following definition of evaluation:

> An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance etc. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system. An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of the organizations of the UN system and its members. .....Evaluation feeds into management and decision making processes, and makes an essential contribution to managing for results. Evaluation informs the planning, programme, budgeting, implementation and reporting cycle.[4]

This definition includes the main evaluation criteria that need to be used in an evaluation – relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability[5]. It includes accepted evaluation standards – credibility, reliability and usefulness. And it positions evaluation as part of the overall strategic planning process.

ii. Evaluation can be differentiated from monitoring, which is defined in the UNEG Norms (p. 6) as: "Management's continuous examination of progress achieved during the implementation of an undertaking to track compliance with the plan and to take necessary decisions to improve performance." DESA's mandatory self-assessment (see section A.2.b.) as currently carried out and planned in this policy falls under this definition.

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[3] Adapted from the *UNEG Norms of Evaluation in the UN System*

[4] *UNEG Norms for Evaluation in the UN System*, p. 5.

[5] See OIOS Glossary of Monitoring and Evaluation Terms for definitions: http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/mecd/mecd_glossary/index.htm

iii. Evaluation at all levels in DESA must serve an explicit management purpose, and will be conducted in a manner which promotes follow up and use.

iv. Evaluation findings, recommendations, and lessons will be made widely available and disseminated to all relevant stakeholders.

v. Evaluation results and recommendations will be duly considered, with management responses and action plans developed and disseminated as appropriate.

vi. The management response will address all recommendations and clearly identify where accountability for follow up action resides. The management response will be prepared within three months of the completion of the evaluation.

vii. Evaluations should be carried out in a participatory and ethical manner. The welfare of stakeholders should be given due respect and consideration.

viii. Evaluations should be conducted in a gender and culturally sensitive manner. This includes respecting the confidentiality, protection of source and dignity of those being interviewed and the routine use of sex-disaggregated data and analysis.

ix. Evaluations should be conducted in an independent manner. External evaluators should be used wherever possible.

c. The focus of DESA evaluations: accountability and learning
The Secretary-General's 2000 Bulletin and the UNEG Norms and Standards have established that there are two main purposes of evaluation in the UN system, accountability and learning.[6]

Section A.2. sets out the different evaluations DESA will be responsible for in the context of the need to include an appropriate balance of accountability and learning focused evaluation. Accountability will be achieved mainly through external reviews by OIOS,

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[6] The Secretary-General's Bulletin notes (p.16) : "The objective of evaluation is: (a) To determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives; (b) To enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives." The *UNEG Norms for Evaluation in the UN System*, (2005: p.5) note: "Purposes of evaluation include understanding why, and the extent to which, intended and unintended results are achieved, and their impact on stakeholders. Evaluation is an important source of evidence of the achievement of results and institutional performance. Evaluation is also an important contributor to building knowledge and to organizational learning. Evaluation is an important agent of change and plays a critical and credible role in supporting accountability."

the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), and the Board of Auditors (BoA), and through Programme Performance Reporting on the Strategic Framework. Organizational real time learning, systematic reflection, and building knowledge will be achieved through evaluation led from within DESA, as set out in section A.2.b. A focus on thematic and real time learning will support synergy and complementarity between sub-programmes. DESA staff will participate in facilitated learning exchanges with the objective of improved programming.

d. Evaluation and RBM in the UN
DESA will ensure that evaluation is an integral part of its RBM system, by establishing evaluation as part of its planning and programming processes, by strategic selection of evaluations on key areas of concern to DESA, and feeding evaluation findings back into strategic planning. All evaluations in DESA will be carried out to ensure synergy and complementarity. Evaluation will also support strategic planning by analysing the linkages between the overall objectives of the Department and outputs in the Department's Strategic Framework.[7]

e. Project evaluation
Projects including those implemented under the Development Account, the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) and extra-budgetary resources are subject to project-specific evaluation which contributes to programme-level evaluation. Guidelines for project evaluation are under development and implementation of the guidelines will be overseen by the Capacity Development Office.

f. Strengthening of DESA's evaluation practice
Attempts to strengthen evaluation practice and define its evaluation focus need to take into account:

- The normative, analytical and operational scope of DESA's work;
- The challenge of evaluating DESA's focus on policy support to United Nations intergovernmental processes, which is acknowledged as challenging to evaluate;
- The relatively limited budget for evaluation;
- The multiple roles and current capacity of evaluation focal points.

These factors will be addressed by drawing on current best practice in evaluation of normative interventions; ensuring synergy and appropriate networking between sub-
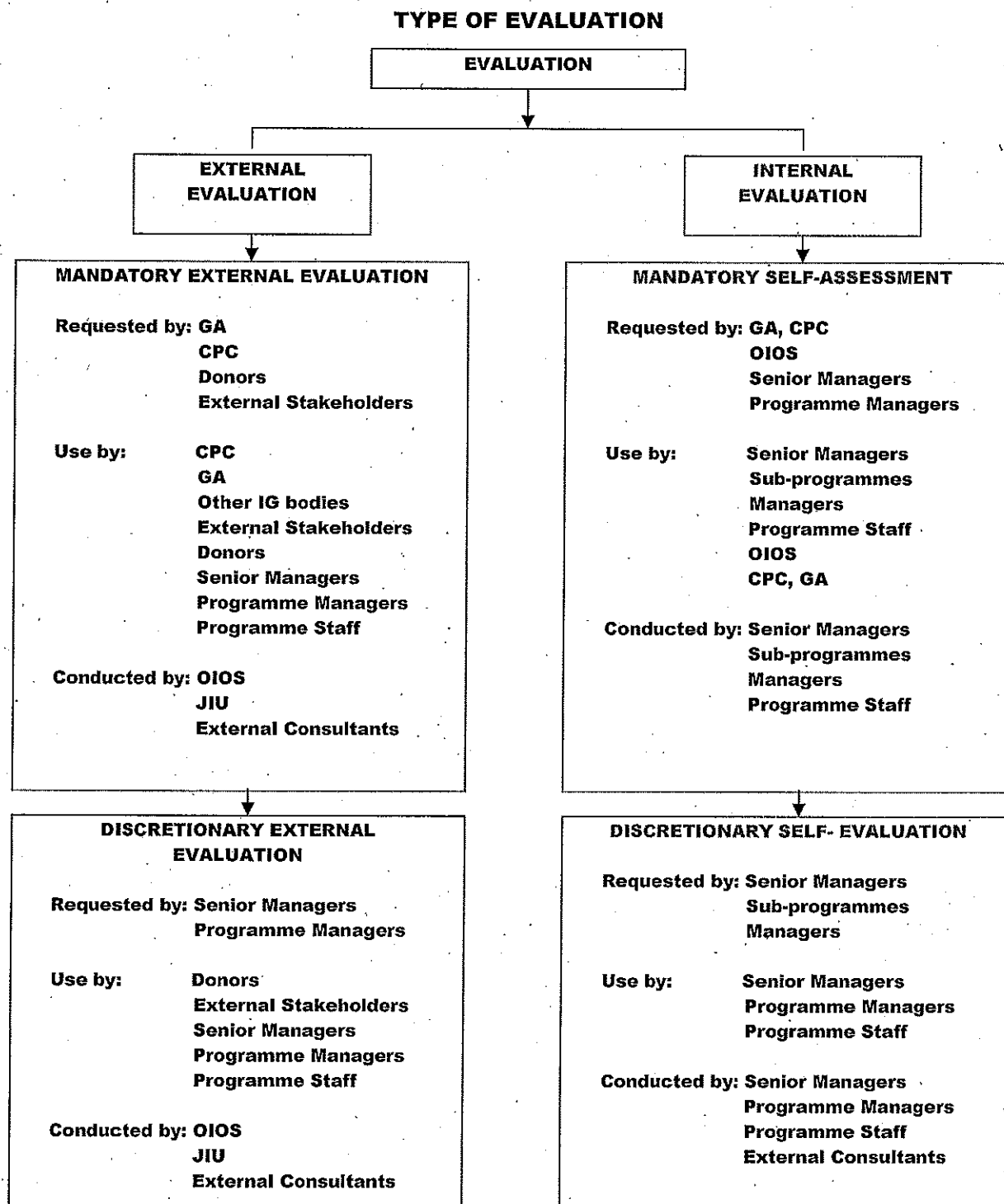
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[7] This area was considered as problematic in the 2011 programme evaluation of DESA by OIOS (E/AC.51/2011/2).

programmes; and targeted capacity development for DESA staff, as set out in the implementation plan in Part B of this policy.

2. Types of evaluation in DESA

Types of evaluation in DESA are set out in Figure 1 and discussed in this section.

Figure 1: Types of evaluation in DESA

TYPE OF EVALUATION

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                          │   EVALUATION     │
                          └────────┬─────────┘
                                   │
              ┌────────────────────┴────────────────────┐
     ┌──────────────────┐                      ┌──────────────────┐
     │    EXTERNAL      │                      │    INTERNAL      │
     │   EVALUATION     │                      │   EVALUATION     │
     └────────┬─────────┘                      └────────┬─────────┘
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MANDATORY EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Requested by: GA
                 CPC
                 Donors
                 External Stakeholders

Use by: CPC
                 GA
                 Other IG bodies
                 External Stakeholders
                 Donors
                 Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers
                 Programme Staff

Conducted by: OIOS
                 JIU
                 External Consultants

MANDATORY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Requested by: GA, CPC
                 OIOS
                 Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers

Use by: Senior Managers
                 Sub-programmes Managers
                 Programme Staff
                 OIOS
                 CPC, GA

Conducted by: Senior Managers
                 Sub-programmes Managers
                 Programme Staff

DISCRETIONARY EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Requested by: Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers

Use by: Donors
                 External Stakeholders
                 Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers
                 Programme Staff

Conducted by: OIOS
                 JIU
                 External Consultants

DISCRETIONARY SELF- EVALUATION

Requested by: Senior Managers
                 Sub-programmes Managers

Use by: Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers
                 Programme Staff

Conducted by: Senior Managers
                 Programme Managers
                 Programme Staff
                 External Consultants

The main purposes and functions of external evaluation are to:

a. External evaluation
The main purposes and functions of external evaluation are to:
- Ensure impartiality;
- Help establish the merit and worth of the programme and sub-programmes and the extent to which they have discharged their mandates and objectives and have had an impact;
- Produce reports that are intended for use by intergovernmental bodies as well as by programme and sub-programme managers.

External evaluations are designed and conducted by independent, external evaluators who have had no involvement with the programme's/sub-programme's activity: the programme/sub-programme manager's role is as an evaluand. External evaluations often focus more on oversight, accountability and support to decision-making at the governance level than lesson learning, for example ensuring that results are being achieved as planned and funds are being spent efficiently. There are two types of external evaluation:

Mandatory External Evaluation
Mandatory external evaluations are mandated by an intergovernmental body, and undertaken by independent UN oversight bodies, such as OIOS or JIU, in consultation with programme managers. These evaluations tend to focus on accountability, be broad in scope, and commonly analyze strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for improving effectiveness, efficiency, impact and relevance. They can, however, be narrower in focus when addressing "red flag" items of pending OIOS evaluations.

Discretionary External Evaluations
In this type of evaluation, the programme and/or sub-programme manager requests an external evaluation team, or OIOS or JIU, to design and conduct the evaluation. Discretionary evaluations are particularly useful during key points in the programme cycle when managers wish to improve the performance of their programmes/sub-programmes on the basis of objective assessments. Discretionary external evaluations may take a wide scope and look at issues of impact and effectiveness. They may also cover benchmarking of a programme's/sub-programme's performance in relation to other non-UN programmes that are engaged in similar activities.

b. Internal Evaluation
Internal evaluations are:

- Useful in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes/sub-programes;
- Designed, conducted and managed by programme/sub-programme managers and their staff;

- Concerned with issues that are of primary interest and use to programme/sub-programme managers;
- Concerned with assessing programme/sub-programme performance and results;
- Useful methods for identifying lessons learned and best practices.

There are two types of internal evaluation:

Mandatory self-assessments
Mandatory self-assessments are helpful to management in periodically reviewing programme/sub-programme implementation and assessing whether the programme/sub-programme is on track for achieving expected results at the end of the biennium. They should be performed at least once during the biennium, and framed by the expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement in the Strategic Framework. Findings are entered into IMDIS and provide input into the Secretary-General's biennial report on programme performance of the UN.

Self-evaluation
Self-evaluations are primarily useful when formulating best practices and lessons learned, and revising ongoing programming. There are two types of self-evaluation[8]: i. self-evaluations that focus on an individual sub-programme and/or components within it; ii. self-evaluations that focus on cross-cutting and/or thematic issues relevant to a number of sub-programmes. In both cases, self-evaluations are:

- Commissioned and conducted by programme/sub-programme managers for their own use;
- Not required to be reported upon at the intergovernmental level;
- Of particular value when results are insufficiently identified and documented and/or areas and means for improvement are not clear;
- Assessments that cover areas and issues over and above those that are covered by mandatory self-assessments;
- Used by programme/sub-programme managers to double-check the working hypotheses used to explain the rationale of their programmes/sub-programmes.

While managers may contract external consultants and specialists to help with the exercise, they will design and manage the evaluation and be ultimately responsible for the quality of the reports and for using the results to improve operations.

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[8] The Secretary-General's Bulletin rule 107.2(c) notes: "the evaluation system shall include the ad hoc in-depth evaluation of selected programme areas or topics conducted internally or externally at the request of intergovernmental bodies or at the initiative of the Secretariat. In determining whether an in-depth evaluation should be carried out, the results of self evaluation shall be taken into account. At least one in-depth evaluation study shall be undertaken each year. Such a study shall normally be completed within two years."

DESA will carry out both types of self-evaluation on a regular basis. Each sub-programme will carry out one self-evaluation that focuses on an individual sub-programme and/or components within it per biennium. DESA will carry out one self-evaluation that focuses on cross-cutting and/or thematic issues (i.e. functions) relevant to a number of sub-programmes per biennium. Further details are included in the policy implementation plan.

B. Action Plan for implementation of the policy

1. DESA's evaluation architecture, accountability for implementation of the policy, and lines of responsibility[9]

This policy differentiates between *accountability* for oversight, which will rest with the Under-Secretary-General and Division Directors, and *responsibility* for the evaluation function, which lies with the departmental network of evaluation focal points[10].

The DESA Under-Secretary General will be accountable for implementation of this policy and for ensuring an enabling environment for the evaluation function in DESA. Specific aspects of such an environment require that:

- adequate capacity and resources are available to support implementation of the evaluation function in line with the provisions of this policy;
- all relevant findings and lessons learned are utilized and contribute to decision making and management;
- the evaluation function is adequately staffed;
- a system is in place for explicit planning for evaluation and for systematic consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in evaluations;
- mechanisms are in place for distilling and disseminating lessons to support learning and systemic improvement.

DESA Division Directors will be accountable for:

- ensuring an evaluation plan[11] is developed for their Division;
- preparing a management response for each evaluation under their respective Division (see below);
- ensuring that evaluation recommendations are appropriately followed up;
- ensuring there is adequate staff evaluation capacity.

The Office of the Under-Secretary-General, supported by the evaluation team, will be responsible for:

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[9] UNEG Standards, p. 1: "A comprehensive institutional framework for the management of the evaluation function and conduct of evaluations is crucial to ensure an effective evaluation process." UNEG Norms, p. 9: "Each organization of the UN system should have formal job descriptions and selection criteria that state the basic professional requirements necessary for an evaluator and evaluation manager."

[10] In September 2011, the Under-Secretary-General set up a departmental network of evaluation focal points. Each Division designated one staff member as a focal point and one staff member as the alternate. The network is coordinated by an evaluation team located in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and is reporting to the Under-Secretary-General through the Chief of Office.

[11] Evaluation plans (see section 4) are prepared as part of the Proposed Programme Budget (form 12).

- providing direction to the evaluation function in DESA, including in selection of evaluation topics;
- managing the cross DESA self-evaluation, with the support of the departmental network of evaluation focal points;
- managing the biennial review of evaluation findings (see below);
- ensuring that evaluation results are fed back into the programme planning processes;
- serving as focal point for external evaluations conducted by OIOS, JIU or BoA.

The evaluation team will be responsible for:

- ensuring that this policy is disseminated throughout DESA;
- coordinating biannual meetings of the Evaluation Focal Points;
- maintaining an archive of completed Evaluation Plans and evaluations;
- continue coordinating regular programme monitoring in IMDIS and finalization of the DESA Programme Performance Report;
- coordinating the preparation of the Division's Evaluation Plans (form 12 of the Proposed Programme Budget submission);
- managing the review of this policy every six years.

The members of the departmental network of evaluation focal points will be responsible for:

- attending the biannual meetings of Evaluation Focal Points;
- drawing up their respective Division's Evaluation Plan (see below);
- supporting the implementation of the cross-DESA self evaluation;
- managing their Division's biennial self-evaluation;
- continue regular monitoring of the Division's programme performance in IMDIS and contribution to the DESA Programme Performance Report.

The purpose of the biannual meetings of the departmental network of evaluation focal points will be to:

- exchange information and good practices and promote real time learning within DESA;
- compare evaluation findings;
- plan for and support the implementation of the cross-DESA self evaluation;
- assess progress in implementation of this policy.

2. Capacity requirements for implementation

DESA will prepare an implementation guide to support improved evaluation practice and to provide detailed guidance to staff on evaluation implementation.[12] The implementation guide will be used in capacity development for DESA staff. It will set out guidance on the types of self-evaluation outlined in the policy, when to carry out specific evaluations, methodologies and evaluation planning. The implementation guide should be based on the UNEG *Standards for Evaluation in the UN System*, and the OIOS (2005) *A Guide to Using Evaluation in the UN System*.[13]

It is envisaged that the first cross DESA self-evaluation, to be carried out in the 2014-2015 biennium, will be a pilot.

3. Capacity development of DESA evaluation staff

DESA will carry out a capacity assessment of its staff and in particular of the members of the departmental network of evaluation focal points.

Based on the capacity assessment, DESA will ensure that adequate training opportunities for relevant staff, in particular members of the departmental network of evaluation focal points, will be identified.

DESA will also take advantage of already existing capacity development offered through UNEG or other equivalent bodies for all staff.14

The training will cover areas, such as,

- Design and management of evaluation processes, including with multiple stakeholders;
- Survey design and implementation;
- Project/ programme/ policy planning, monitoring and management;

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[12] As per OIOS' recommendations in its guidance on development of evaluation policies within the Secretariat. OIOS (nd) *Guidance to Programmes for Developing an Evaluation Policy*. http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/ied_guidance_for_dev_ep.pdf; and UNEG Standards, pp. 6-7: "Evaluation guidelines should be prepared and include the following: Evaluation methodologies that should reflect the highest professional standards; evaluation processes, ensuring that evaluations are conducted in an objective, impartial, open and participatory manger, based on empirically verified evidence that is valid and reliable, with results being made available; ethics, ensuring that evaluations are carried out with due respect and regard to those being evaluated."

[13] http://www.uneval.org/normsandstandards/index.jsp; http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/evaluation_manual.html

[14] E.g. the free online training offered by UNICEF and others: http://www.mymande.org/elearning/course-details/3

- Understanding of a human rights-based approaches to programming;
- Understanding of gender equality considerations[15];
- Understanding of Results Based Management (RBM) principles;
- Logic modeling/ logical framework analysis;
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis;
- Participatory approaches.

4. Evaluation plans[16]

Evaluation plans, which are required for each sub-programme, are integrated with the biennial programme budget cycle (form 12 of the Proposed Programme Budget submission). They are prepared by programme managers and contain the following elements: a definition of the purpose of the evaluation and the anticipated application of evaluation findings; the evaluation methodology to be employed; the characteristics of the evaluation (e.g., the scope of coverage and the period covered); the measures of change (e.g., the nature of the progress and the impact indicators to be employed); the means of information collection; the administrative arrangements; and the resource requirements.

The evaluation plan sets out the topic, timing and who will conduct the following for the biennium:

- mandatory external evaluation;
- discretionary external evaluation;
- self-evaluation – both individual divisional and cross-DESA;
- mandatory self-assessment.

It also sets out expected results of internal evaluations, and resources required, including work months, and budgetary resources broken down into consultant, travel and other.

The evaluation plan is drawn up by the divisional evaluation focal point in consultation with colleagues and the evaluation team, and is approved by the Director of the Division as part of the Division's Proposed Programme Budget submission.

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[15]   The Technical Notes to the UN *System-wide Action Plan* for the implementation of the Chief Executives Board Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (CEB/2006/2) set out requirements for gender-sensitivity in evaluation http://www.unwomen.org/2012/04/un-women-welcomes-a-landmark-action-plan-to-measure-gender-equality-across-the-un-system/

[16]   Secretary-General's Bulletin *Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation* ST/SGB/2000/8 Rule 107.2.

5. Management response and evaluation recommendations follow-up matrix

In order to increase evaluation use, a follow up matrix to evaluation recommendations will be included as part of each DESA evaluation as follows:

Finding	Recommendation	Responsible for follow-up	Timing of follow-up	Budget required for follow-up

Evaluation recommendations should cover the main evaluation findings, be clearly written, concise and feasible within contextual and budgetary constraints. Recommendations may be prioritized into those of primary and secondary importance.

For each recommendation there will be a management response noting if the recommendation has been accepted or not, and the planned follow-up action (which may draw on the completed evaluation follow-up matrix above). Where recommendations are not accepted the management response will clearly demonstrate the rationale for this.

6. Learning from DESA evaluations

DESA will maintain a searchable electronic depository of evaluations. All evaluations will be made available on the DESA Intranet.

Every two years DESA will summarize the main findings of its evaluations to feed these findings into the programme planning processes, leading up to the development of the Strategic Framework. This will also support communication about DESA's achievements both internally and externally.

The Evaluation Team will be responsible for preparing the summary for DESA, including on the cross-thematic topics, drawing on summaries prepared by Evaluation Focal Points for division-specific evaluations.

7. Tracking the effectiveness of the policy

This policy will be reviewed and updated every six years, in line with ongoing guidance from OIOS and UNEG. This will take place for the first time in early 2017, to align with the Strategic Framework planning process. It is envisaged that this review will include a

meta-evaluation[17] of evaluation quality against accepted international evaluation standards, and a peer review[18], which will be managed by the evaluation team.

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[17]   http://michaelscriven.info/images/EVALUATING_EVALUATIONS_8.16.11.pdf
[18]   http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=945

ANNEX

Acronyms

BoA	Board of Auditors
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
RBM	Results-based Management
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group