

UNITED NATIONS EVALUATION GROUP
REPORT OF THE MEETING
26-27 APRIL 2004
UNV, BONN

INTRODUCTION

The annual meeting of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) was held in Bonn on 26-27 April 2004 and hosted by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in the historic Marshall room where the Marshall Plan was signed. The meeting was attended by 25 of the member agencies. This meeting also welcomed a new member, CTBTO (Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization), to UNEG this year. The meeting agenda focused on strategic issues which included “Partnership for Development” and “UN Reform and Evaluation”. In terms of methods and approaches the agenda included sessions with inputs from several members on “Evaluation Capacity Development” and “Country Evaluations”. Following the initiative of last year the meeting included presentations from the Chair of the DAC Network on Evaluation and a member of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) of the Multilateral Banks. In addition, this year the meeting invited the President of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) and the President of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE). This report highlights the summary of the discussions and the recommendations as well as feedback from the four sub-working groups.

The meeting started with an address by the new Chair of the UNEG, Saraswathi Menon who took up her position in December 2003. In her introduction, the Chair raised a series of questions and thoughts around two types of issues: the global and strategic perspective of evaluation and second relating to methodology and evaluations internal role and function. In terms of the strategic issues, the first question related to how have the norms and principles espoused by the UN translated into the conceptual frameworks, architecture, methodology, conduct and use of evaluations. How are we underpinning our evaluative approaches on the MDGs. The development community is moving towards a greater understanding of development effectiveness and the contribution of a multiplicity of partners and to stronger national achievements. Evaluation no longer looks at only the efficiency of providing the inputs but the larger context and raising questions on national ownership and capacity and track partnerships which are a prerequisite for contributing to outcomes and impact. In this sense, how are we increasing the rigor of self-assessment and evaluations that are managed at a decentralized level. The extent to which evaluations have made use of partnerships and whether evaluations draw upon or are sufficiently responsive to the monitoring and evaluation systems in place at national levels. Are evaluation systems making use of south-south cooperation and in what ways are they contributing to capacity development? The introduction also raised the involvement of civil society in evaluation approaches and monitoring performance assessment of countries. Finally the introduction addressed the dual role of evaluation as accountability and learning function and possibilities of increasing collaboration amongst

the evaluation units of the UN system to identify areas of strategic concern, to build a wealth of evaluative evidence and strengthening each other's capacity and system. Examples of possibilities were presented, such as a jointly assessing performance at the country level, developing a peer review process similar to the DAC and joint capacity development efforts.

The introduction by the Chair was followed by the report back of the working groups.

Norms and Standards

The working group held an e-discussion on EVAL-FORUM and the consolidated results were shared with all UNEG members in October 2003. In collaboration with OIOS, UNICEF conducted a survey on the situation of evaluation in the following areas: evaluation policy, evaluation capacity, evaluation planning, types and use of evaluations, access and dissemination, experience with self-evaluation and measures to strengthen the evaluation system.

Some key findings of the responses presented to UNEG were:

- 78% of UN organizations have an explicit evaluation policy which is regularly revised or evaluated; 83% of UN organizations have guidelines; however there is a great diversity in the entity that authorizes the evaluation mandates.
- Overall of 43 entities, 41 have staff dedicated to evaluation; however staff is sometimes limited to only a few individuals or part time;
- Regular budgets ranged from less than \$ 1 million to above \$ 40 million

Discussion following the presentation raised the issue of how to take this information further – to deepen the analysis. The next steps should include a verification of the data by the agencies based on a clearer understanding of the questions and an analysis going beyond the reporting of responses. One of the points raised was also the challenge in accomplishing the work for this working group. Use of e-mails is certainly difficult but what incentives exists for members to participate in the working groups outside of the annual UNEG meeting.

Knowledge and Learning

The year in review provided mixed results – positive and negative. On the positive side the group launched in July 2003 the UNEF – a discussion forum whose membership has reached 250 and is growing.

The forum hosted 7 discussions since July 2003:

- Simplification and harmonization – UNDAF M & E;
- Lessons Learning Exercise - DESA
- Rules and regulations covering Evaluation of all UN activities. The working group on Norms and Standards hosted this discussion and was commended for making use of the forum discussion.

- Assessment of MDG reports in collaboration with UNIDO;
- The Development Effectiveness Report;
- TCPR Theme # 1 – DESA
- What's next in capacity Development – UNFPA

Challenges faced by the working group include the following:

- a lot of time is spent networking with members urging them to contribute;
- some discussions do not generate enough responses – those that had over three responses were followed up by a consolidated response;
- need for more members to also volunteer topics for discussion and facilitate;

The Forum also received queries on sources of information, consultants and posting of vacancies. Earlier in the year the forum tried to establish a calendar of evaluations to share amongst members but only two agencies responded.

One of the problems that the working group was unable to address as yet was joint evaluations. In the discussions it was noted that for the last 10 years the UNEG meetings refers to the difficulties in joint evaluations and that this should be linked to the lack of joint programmes. One of the challenges in knowledge and learning and for the future is how the knowledge and learning being generated in individual agencies can be shared and especially with the partners in the south.

MDGs: Towards common M & E systems

UNIDO sent out questionnaires for the group and received 5 answers upon which the presentation was partly based. At the agency level reporting on MDGs is often annual and largely input/expenditure based. In some cases agencies are “tagging” MDGs to agency programme expenditures to justify in terms of MDG reporting. There are challenges and difficulties in reporting on MDGs at the country level due to: a clear association between inputs and outputs, outcomes and impacts/MDG; contribution to the UNDAF and PRSPs; country level aggregation of results and the gap between programme outcomes and impact – the “missing middles”.

Among the issues highlighted by the survey:

- MDGs, PRSPs and UNDAFs: while there is a parallel drive on country level PRSP M & E and MDG reporting there is a conceptual problem of separating MDG and PRSP reporting and the MDGs do not alone reflect the reality of PRSPs and UNDAFs; it was noted that the CCA indicators do not cover MDGs.
- Logical framework (OECD/DAC definition): there is a need for consistent application if log frame type methodology is to be used for MDG programming and basis for consolidated reporting; application of a log frame methodology at the project level may not be consistent within agencies let alone between agencies;
- Contribution and attribution: There is a need for consolidated reporting – however member states expectations and agency accountability is also driving the need for

- agencies to individual MDG contributions with the use of different attribution techniques and reporting frameworks;
- Implications of the latest CCA guidelines: the recent CCA/UNDAF guidance and the results matrix and M & E framework provide an answer to consolidation.
- Data: There is a need for reliable and timely data for MDG reporting; the survey also noted a trend in statistical capacity building.

During the discussion it was noted that the MDGs do present a great challenge – especially the lack of the link between PRSP and MDGS leading to a significant overlap. The report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly in 2005 present a challenge to the UNEG as to what evaluation can do and specifically linking to the statistical communities. The role of developing countries in generating ownership and leadership was also raised.

Evaluation Capacity Development

In an analysis of the work carried by members in this area the working group noted that there were four lines of activities:

- Production of resource materials: manuals, guides, printed, web; customization: the report back made specific reference to the experience of IFAD and customization. IFAD had produced a comprehensive practice guide in 2002 for M&E. However, producing a guide in itself is not a sufficient step in enhancing the M&E capacity in partner countries therefore in 2002 and 2003 IFAD embarked on efforts to customize the guide according to regional specificities and requirements. The note for the customization of Asia and Pacific region was shared with members.
- Learning Events: workshops, exchanges, dialogues: the working group noted quite a few learning events were organized by members but that there is a problem in the coordination of these events and members are missing opportunities of joint activities. It was noted that calendar to be set up the knowledge and learning group should also include activities for evaluations and enable collaboration amongst members on workshops for example.
- Diagnostic: country level: OED provides ECD support to a number of World Bank Operations country teams including the provision of ECD resource materials, preparation of country studies, and advice on country diagnostic work and ECD action plans.
- Support to Evaluation Associations/Societies: promoting capacities through learning by doing approach. It was noted that there are a lot of national capacities in evaluation (Malaysia, Uganda etc) and good practices such as IDEAS, IOCE but UNEG should also seek how to transfer practices south-south.

Evaluation capacity development has become more timely – but one issue of crucial importance is the role of the evaluation department vis- a vis the operational units in developing capacity. In some cases it is seen as an operational activity but this can jeopardize the independence of evaluation. In the case of IFAD it was mentioned that they are disengaging from ECD due to the issue of independence but also due to limited

resources. There are tremendous opportunities for joint ECD activities – at least for a subset of agencies and it would be interesting to identify countries where some UNEG members can work together. One challenge is the different approaches of members, for example in Uganda it was noted that less M&E was needed. It was suggested to do a self-assessment and focus UNEG member efforts on fewer activities. It was suggested to harmonize and coordinate members' ECD efforts to decrease efforts of partners' countries but also advocate similar methodologies.

An important point raised was how to promote an evaluation culture and changing the mindsets of partners. Evaluation is still seen as a donor driven activity and UNEG should promote the evaluation culture so partners also allocate resources to evaluation. It was noted by the DAC Evaluation Network that even within DAC there is a need to build capacity and common learning. Partnerships are often established for programmes but not for evaluations. Some UNEG members noted that before building the capacity of others we need also to address capacity issues within UNEG.

In the conclusion to the introduction and the report back it was noted that UNEG needed to reflect on how the working groups work together and going beyond sharing information and confronting issues such as why we cannot undertake joint evaluations and look at areas of concern, prioritization and implications for individual agencies.

PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

For this session presentations were made by the DAC Network for Development Evaluation, the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG), the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) and the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE).

Key issues from the presentation by DAC concerned the mandate, identification of priorities and functioning of working groups. The model of the task forces is a good practice for the DAC. The task forces, established on a voluntary basis are task oriented, they decide on the programme of activities and then have to deliver a product – for example a proposal or a synthesis of evaluation findings. The task force model allows for work amongst a diversity of members and strong partners with those with less resources and capacity. Guiding principles have been a driving force for the DAC as is evident by the DAC Glossary on RBM. DAC is working on setting standards on the quality of evaluation taking into consideration: reliability of data, validity of methods, usefulness of findings, independence, transparency and professionalism of the evaluation office. The discussion noted the need to further the public debate on aid effectiveness and the role of aid. Linked to this is the issue of whether the UN M&E systems are doing the tasks they should – the DAC meeting in January tabled a proposal to conduct an evaluation of multilateral organizations. UNDP is going to be a pilot in the preparatory study. This type of evaluation would respond to the issue of whether multilateral organizations have the monitoring and evaluation systems capable of providing the quality of data necessary for delivering evaluations of required quality and that there is a high degree of trust in the organizations' monitoring and evaluation system.

The presentation by ECG covered the background and mandate of ECG as well as good practice standards to harmonize project evaluations, governance, capacity building and joint evaluations. Most of the discussion centered around the work priorities of the ECG: country programme and country assistance evaluation methodology; policy based lending evaluation methodology; evaluation capacity development; promoting clarification of and synergy between independent evaluation and self evaluation; evaluability assessments of operations and policies. Discussion focused on self assessments and independent evaluation and mention that in some cases the latter are seen as audits. IFAD was cited as an example of an independent Evaluation office reporting to the board and its experience would be useful to the UNEG. It was suggested that UNEG may want to take a closer look at how the DAC and ECG network function because they also have similar challenges and may present lessons. The session also further raised the issue of creating synergy and coordination among all the partners in the UNEG in terms of harmonization of standards and procedures of evaluation.

The session included presentations by a society for development evaluators (IDEAS) and a society for the development of evaluation societies (IOCE). An important aspect of both presentations is the promotion of partnership and the involvement of civil society. In the discussions questions were raised as to whether there is a common understanding of partnership and who defines the partnership – an illusion was made to the horse and rider and whether it was paternalistic. The paradigm shift and the shift to higher level evaluations also merited exchange – has essentially meant a move from the management of the evaluation process to an assessment of impact. With the move to thematic and policy evaluations there is still a need for project and programme evaluations as building blocks and as the source of data. IDEAS raised the point that while project evaluations are good if we continue with micro level evaluations we will not be able to see the impact or the longer term effect.

UN REFORM AND EVALUATION

This session was conducted by video conference with the Director of UNDG and DESA with special reference to the TCPR. Key issues from the session included national capacity and working with partners. The donors are moving away from project support to budget support and this is an area of interest for UN system agencies in building national capacity in the management, monitoring and evaluation. Questions were raised as to why the UN system is not grasping the opportunity by engaging itself in the sector wide approach by addressing the issue of capacity. Regarding harmonization and simplification of evaluation processes and methods the discussion referred back to the earlier point of harmonizing programmes as well. The reality is that some agencies have adopted harmonization and simplification in their daily work while others have not and communication is a challenge in this area.

OIOS also referred to a meeting in December 2003 where the Steering Committee on Reform and Management requested OIOS to establish a working group to develop proposals on strengthening programme monitoring and evaluation.

The specific proposals included:

- enhancing the role of the intergovernmental review of results-oriented M&E products;
- defining roles and responsibilities for results-oriented M&E with a specific focus on self-evaluation;
- Developing a strong evaluation function within the programmes of the Secretariat.

These proposals were endorsed at the Steering committee meeting in April 2004 and it was proposed that UNEG to the extent possible should undertake parallel efforts in their work to strengthen evaluation in the UN.

EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO and UNFPA presented capacity development and in their two organizations. The session started with a discussion of capacity development and its definition – the ability of systems and individuals to support development. The process of building needs to be at the individual, organizational and society levels. Evaluation capacity development encompasses the planning of M&E and it is important to promote a sound understanding of programme design and planning, M&E and management. Strategies to develop evaluation capacity include:

- at the human resources level it is important impart skills and this should go beyond evaluation units but should be a part of some of the key jobs in an organization;
- Utility of M&E for learning and accountability – and recognition of managers as champions of this.
- Development of common tools and procedures;
- Partnership- the UNDAF has given an enormous opportunity to identify partnerships and ways of collaborating together;

The discussion finally looked at the complementary roles of audit and evaluation. A key issue from the presentation and discussion is the internalization of evaluation and including it as a competency in the job descriptions and performance assessments of individuals. It was clear that evaluation capacity building is a common concern of UNEG members and linked to this how we measure the outcomes of evaluation capacity development. The session also highlighted the importance of ensuring a degree of consistency between self-evaluation and evaluation and this set the stage for next session on country evaluations.

COUNTRY EVALUATIONS – CHALLENGES IN COUNTRY EVALUATIONS

IFAD, UNICEF, UNCDF and UNDP made presentations during this session on their approaches to country evaluation. The presentations touched upon methodologies, approaches, cost effectiveness, timeliness as well as challenges to the different agencies. The discussion highlighted many of the concerns and challenges raised in the presentations and focused on the following specific issues:

- Cost of the evaluation and its relation to the cost of the portfolio being evaluated;
- Importance of methodological rigor and how to deal with exogenous factors – such as other projects and donor interventions;
- Reasons for country evaluations and their timing linked to the preparations of new country programmes;
- The evaluation of country strategies as an alternative to country evaluations;
- Involvement of the UNCT in the evaluation and distinguishing from UNCT implementation and evaluation;
- Coordination was a major concern – especially in countries if several agencies decided to undertake country evaluations and the consequences on national ownership and increased transaction costs;
- The DAC noted that on the issue of multi country evaluations the bilateral approach is to undertake joint programming of evaluations and with harmonization this is further facilitated as in the case of Zambia.
- Attribution versus contribution
- Working together – there is still considerable hesitation to working together and in terms of nationally owned we cannot claim national ownership because the country evaluations are not commissioned by national partners but agencies and the focus is reporting to the EB;
- Need to go beyond country evaluations as a product but a reflective approach that involves stakeholders;

CONCLUSIONS

Following the sessions on the substantive issues the following areas emerged as action points for further discussion and decision in setting the priorities for UNEG:

- Positioning of UNEG within the UN system; how should UNEG feed into the UN reform process given that operational activities should in fact be based on assessments and evaluations undertaken by UNEG members. In line with this it was noted whether joint boards might be a way forward and UNEG could envision making a presentation as UNEG to the joint board.
- MDG – there is clearly an issue between country reporting and agency reporting and how should UNEG move forward on this;
- Processes and methods – the UNDAF M&E Plan provides an opportunity and UNEG should look at the framework and all should own it and make it part of their work;
- Capacity – within our organization and national capacity: baseline on capacity and what do we mean by capacity; agency to agency cooperation; developing training packages and stocktaking of what exists to identify our adherence to certain approaches and methods; identify countries where we can work together;
- The report of the Norms and Standards working group shows a wide spectrum of issues and UNEG needs to specifically work on: a) principles of norms and standards and b) evaluation function itself within the UN system;

- Country evaluations- there is an increased emphasis in all agencies to undertake country evaluations and UNEG might want to take stock and see what needs to be done methodologically – especially regarding results at the development level and attribution with the UN system. UNEG should also consider joint country evaluations.
- Thematic evaluations – identification of common areas where collaborative work on thematic evaluations could take place.
- Methodology and architecture of Evaluations: agreement on approaches; RBM and Managing for results;
- Knowledge Management Working group provides a service to the UNEF and would it be better to review and change its function from a working group to a service provided by the Secretariat on discussion forums (UNEF), calendar, consultants roster and evaluation plans and processes.
- Partnerships: UNEG needs to link its thinking with the professional groups such as IDEAS and IOCE and introduce a more substantive partnership; several of UNEG concerns are common with DAC such as country ownership, the initiative on evaluating multilateral organizations and peer reviews and what ways of collaborating and sharing.
- Methods of working: the working group modality needs to be reviewed and can be inspired from DAC task force, make them more purpose oriented, restructure and reporting on results.

An issue was also raised on the rotation of the Chair however it was noted that the Chair needs to be rotated with the Secretariat. Unfortunately this might discriminate against members with limited resources and the discussion should be in terms of burden sharing. It was recommended to have Vice Chairs with a geographic balance and would enable smaller agencies to participate as well. The Chair represents UNEG at the DAC but in order to increase the substantive inputs from UNEG to the DAC it was requested that the President of the DAC Network on Evaluation raise the issue as to whether other UNEG members – Vice Chairs could participate in the appropriate DAC groups.

The discussion in the breakout groups following the above points centered on what the role and objectives of the UNEG should be and whether UNEG should become more structured, results and issues oriented. UNEG should also review its priorities and on the basis of that establish work plans including resources and time commitments. UNEG should position itself in terms of the value added and its uniqueness and should develop its vision in strengthening the evaluation function and linking it to the Secretary General's Agenda for Reform.

SETTING PRIORITIES FOR UNEG 2004-2005

Following deliberations in working groups the members recommended that:

- 1) The Working groups should be limited to three: Norms and Standards, Evaluation Capacity Development and UN Reform and Harmonization (this third group

would encompass MDGs and would also address the broader issues of ownership).

- 2) The Knowledge and Learning Group would become a part of the Secretariat's core function and provide an on-going service on UNEF discussions, website, calendar, consultants and other activities.
- 3) The working groups would work differently – product driven with a work plan, specific deadlines with results and budgets. The three groups will develop a work plan to be submitted by the end of May.
- 4) UNEG should identify a way to link up with the SG's Agenda for Reform and the Evaluation function.
- 5) Regarding the UNDAF M&E Plan UNEG should be a part of the work on-going on developing methods and processes for the UNDAF evaluation.
- 6) UNEG should work at developing a clear vision and work plan that reflects resources (human and financial) and the commitment of its members.
- 7) Instead of having a rotating Chair it was decided to have the leaders of the three working groups as Vice Chairs to the Chair – keeping in mind a geographical balance. The current conveners of the working groups would initiate discussions within their groups to nominate a leader (chair) by mid-May and inform the UNEG secretariat and to provide work plans consequently.

OTHER – FINANCIAL/ADMINISTRATIVE

A report on the financial situation was presented by the UNEG Secretariat. As agreed in earlier meetings it was decided to have voluntary contributions to support the functioning of UNEG and its activities. To date contributions for this year have only been received from UNDP and UNICEF totaling \$ 25,000. Members who have not yet contributed were encouraged to do so and a letter will be sent to follow up.

Next Meeting:

UNEG members thanked UNV for the hosting of the meeting and it was noted that there had been a suggestion to have the Rome based members to host the next annual meeting. The UNEG Secretariat will follow up and identify an appropriate time.