

Management Response to the external independent strategic review of UNFPA evaluation function

Report Issue Year	Evaluation type [joint, impact or institutional]	UNFPA Business Unit in charge for management response (MR)	Region [AP, AS, EECA, ESA, LAC, WCA, HQ]	MR Coordinating Units Focal Point	Date of submission
2018	Institutional	Evaluation Office	All	Evaluation Office	April 2018

Overall assessment: The purpose of the review of the evaluation function was to (a) assess if the evaluation policy should be revised or not – and, if so, identify areas of the policy that should be revised; and (b) provide an independent assessment of the evaluation function in UNFPA against the UNEG norms and standards of independence, credibility and utility.

The review found a consensus in UNFPA leadership at central and decentralized levels: (a) the independent evaluation function is critical to the sound functioning of the organization and key to the successful realization of the UNFPA mission; and (b) evaluation is indispensable for sound management and policy decision-making, for independent accountability reporting and for generation of evidence-informed knowledge. These findings reflect, within UNFPA, a broad-based understanding of, and agreement on, the role and value not only of evaluation, but as well of the necessary independence of the evaluation function. This consensus constitutes a strong foundation for evaluation in UNFPA – and, as such, should be consolidated, cared for and built on. This is a shared responsibility across the organization, at governance and management levels, and in countries, regions and headquarters.

The review found that the UNFPA evaluation policy is fundamentally sound. However, it considers the current UNFPA evaluation policy requires updating for it to be consistent with developments and changes both within UNFPA and in the broader United Nations and global contexts; the evaluation policy is amenable to adjustments that would better reflect the priorities of UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021. Finally, a revised evaluation policy should allow for, and support, change and innovation in UNFPA evaluation practices.

The review did not find evidence of or suggestions to the effect that there are threats to organizational independence. In terms of behavioural independence, the review considers the independence of external evaluators to be appropriately safeguarded. Quality assurance mechanisms for the decentralized evaluation function contribute to safeguarding independence for regional and country programme evaluations managed by decentralized business units. With respect to the governance and organization of the UNFPA evaluation function, the review is of the opinion that the structure and processes in place for accountability to the Executive Board as well as for the relationships between the Evaluation Office and UNFPA management are functioning well. However, the review considers that improvements could be made: to the quality of Evaluation Office reporting to the Board as well as its relationships with UNFPA management and with regional and country monitoring and evaluation staff.

The review considered that, largely, corporate and decentralized evaluation processes are transparent and inclusive – the two dimensions highlighted in UNEG norms and standards as being key to the credibility of evaluation. The review also found that UNFPA guidance recognizes that other important norms contribute to the credibility of evaluations, such as the ethical conduct of evaluation teams, which are impartial and demonstrate appropriate professional and cultural competencies. While the review did not seek to assess the consistency of evaluation practice in UNFPA with these norms, in its extensive round of interviews and meetings, it did not come across indications to the contrary. Finally, the review found that the UNFPA quality assurance system

for evaluations contributes to the credibility of both corporate and decentralized evaluations.

In terms of performance, the review found that – within the parameters set by the evaluation policy and the UNFPA financial and administrative framework – the evaluation function has progressed relative to the objectives it has set for itself, and done so with reasonable regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The review also found that the evaluation function generally reports on its work in a manner consistent with UNEG norms and standards. In the context of an independent and distinct evaluation function, developed some five years ago, the performance of the current systems can be considered a reasonable and commendable achievement.

The review considered the UNFPA evaluation function to be managed with due regard for utility. However, the review highlights the importance for UNFPA of adapting continuously its evaluation processes to best support the attainment of the UNFPA mission in rapidly changing and challenging contexts. In particular, there should be a focus on strengthening communication effectiveness, including the effectiveness of written reports relative to their intended readerships.

Overall response to the evaluation: UNFPA welcomes the external independent strategic review of UNFPA evaluation function. This review provides an independent assessment of the evaluation function, both corporate and decentralized, in UNFPA, against the UNEG Norms and Standards of independence, credibility and utility. It is a key learning exercise, not only for the Evaluation Office, but also for the Organization at large, in that it will contribute to ensuring that UNFPA is able to effectively demonstrate its contribution to development results within its mandate. The consultative process of the review made it a valuable learning opportunity in itself, which led to the real-time assimilation of its findings and conclusions, including allowing real-time implementation of some recommendations. UNFPA accepts all recommendations and commits to their timely implementation.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATION(S) AND PROPOSED MANAGEMENT ACTION(S)

Recommendation 1: Policy	The evaluation policy should be updated for consistency with evolutions and changes both within UNFPA and in the broader UN and global contexts.	Priority: High
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Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status : Accepted

Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl. unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made
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1.1. Update the Evaluation Policy for consistency with evolutions and changes both within UNFPA and in the broader UN and global contexts, including the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan and recent developments in the UN and global contexts	Jan 2019	EO in consultation with Executive Board and OED	Not started	
Recommendation 2: Communication	Presentations of results and recommendations from corporate evaluations to the Executive Board be mindful of its governance function and its requirements. This means, among other considerations, not delving into technical and methodological information beyond what is necessary to provide the Board.			Priority: High
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status : Accepted				
Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl. unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made
2.1 While the full reports of corporate evaluations will continue to be made public in the EO website, EO will present results and recommendations using the format of Executive Board's documents, focusing on information relevant to the Board's strategic, policy and programming interests.	February 2018	EO	Completed	This action started to be implemented at the 2018 First regular session, when the Formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative was presented using the Executive Boards' documents format. From now on, this practice will be adopted for all corporate evaluations. This action has been implemented in a real-time fashion thanks to the consultative process of the review, which led to the real-time assimilation of its findings and conclusions, including allowing real-time implementation of some recommendations.
2.2 For corporate evaluations, the Evaluation Office will revamp the user-friendliness of evaluation reports, will continue producing evaluation briefs and executive summaries. An evaluation executive summary in English, French and Spanish will be systematically produced and made available - together with the evaluation report at	December 2018	EO	Started	

the time the evaluation is presented to Executive Board.					
Recommendation 3: Reframing evaluation	Guide the evaluation function in UNFPA towards a better balance between accountability, decision support and learning purposes.				Priority: High
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status: Accepted					
Actions Planned		Expected completion date	Lead implementing unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made
3.1.	Include better balance between accountability, decision support and learning purposes as a strategic priority in the recently developed 2018-2021 Evaluation Strategy.	April 2018	EO	Completed	The 2018-2021 Evaluation Strategy, developed in full consultation with key stakeholders at all levels, calls for a better balance between accountability, decision support and learning. This action has been implemented in a real-time fashion thanks to the consultative process of the review, which led to the real-time assimilation of its findings and conclusions, including allowing real-time implementation of some recommendations.
3.2.	In line with the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan (2018-2021), continue experimenting new approaches in corporate evaluative exercises. For example, a) a meta-analysis of the engagement of UNFPA in highly vulnerable contexts based on clustered Country Programme Evaluations to be presented at the Executive Board 2018 Annual Meeting; b) a corporate developmental evaluation to be conducted, for the first time, and presented at the 2019 Executive Board Second Regular Meeting.	a) May 2018 b) Sept 2019	EO		The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan (2018-2021) approved by the Executive Board at the 2018 First regular meeting includes a number of corporate evaluations and evaluative exercises with a particular focus on learning, two of which will be implemented by May 2018 and Sept 2019 respectively.
Recommendation 4:	Better integrate relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation. The conception of evaluation quality should be based on a more comprehensive and value-based understanding of				Priority: High

Quality	quality			
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status: Accepted				
Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl. unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made
4.1 Include a) a conception of evaluation quality based on a more comprehensive and value-based understanding of quality, and b) Better integrate relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation through innovation, as strategic priorities in the 2018-2021 Evaluation Strategy	April 2018	EO	Completed	The 2018-2021 Evaluation Strategy, developed in full consultation with key stakeholders at all levels, calls for a) a conception of evaluation quality based on a more comprehensive and value-based understanding of quality, and b) Better integrate relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation through innovation. This action has been implemented in a real-time fashion thanks to the consultative process of the review, which led to the real-time assimilation of its findings and conclusions, including allowing real-time implementation of some recommendations.
4.2 Review and update the Handbook on how to design and conduct Country Programme Evaluations (decentralized evaluation function)	December 2018	EO	Started	
4.3 Develop a new e-learning programme to better integrate relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation and results based management (RBM)	June 2019	EO, PD (for the RBM component) and DHR	Started	
Recommendation 5: Decentralized	Address progressively the nature and organisation of the decentralized evaluation function, through a clearer frame of reference for the organization's decentralized evaluation function at regional and country			Priority: Moderate

Evaluation	levels.				
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status: Accepted					
Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl. unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made	
5.1 Develop a frame of reference for the decentralized evaluation function at regional and country levels that recognizes and respond to the diversity of local contexts	June 2019	EO, PD , ROs and DHR	Not started		
Recommendation 6: Evaluation reports	Address the evaluation reports' issues highlighted by the review in regards to the methodology, findings and analysis, conclusions and communication			Priority: Moderate	
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status: Accepted					
Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl. unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made	
6.1 Review templates and guidelines of evaluation reports	June 2019	EO and ROs	Not started		
6.2 Review quality assurance mechanisms	June 2019	EO and ROs	Not started		

Recommendation 7: Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment (EQAA)	Update progressively the EQAA system to address the observations highlighted by the review	Priority: Moderate		
Management Response to Recommendation acceptance status: Accepted				
Actions Planned	Expected completion date	Lead impl unit	Implementation stage	Summary of progress made
7.1 Carry out a rapid assessment of the existing Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment (EQAA) system to ensure the observations highlighted in this review are taken into consideration	June 2019	EO and ROs	Not started	
7.2 Continue piloting the full decentralization (i.e. delegation of responsibilities for the approval of terms of reference and pre-qualification of evaluation consultants) of Country Programme Evaluations' Quality assurance in the LAC region. Extend the pilot to at least two more Regions	June 2019	EO and LAC, and two additional ROs	Started	