



Good Practice Guidelines for Follow up to Evaluations

Endorsed at the UNEG AGM 2010, these Good Practice Guidelines provide guidance to UN Evaluation Offices and Senior Management on:

- Good practices in management response to evaluation;
- Development of systems for tracking and reporting on the implementation of the evaluations' recommendations, and
- Mechanisms for facilitating learning and knowledge development from evaluations.

These Guidelines are expected to contribute to better use of evaluation and to improve accountability and organizational learning.

Introduction

1. Evaluation plays a key role as: i) a source of evidence on the achievement of results and institutional performance, supporting accountability; and ii) an agent of change, contributing to building knowledge and organizational learning.

2. Evaluation can make an essential contribution to managing for results, and to organization-wide learning for improving both programming and implementation. Yet, the value of evaluation depends on its use, which is in turn determined by a number of up-stream key factors, including (but not limited to):

- Relevance of the evaluation, in terms of timing, so as to make evaluation findings available when decisions are taken;
- Quality/credibility of the evaluation, which derives from independence, impartiality, and a properly defined and inclusive methodology;
- Acceptance of the evaluation recommendations, which partially depends on the above two points;
- Appropriateness of practices in the management response, dissemination and use of evaluation findings.

3. In 2007, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) requested the then Evaluation Quality Enhancement (EQE) Task Force to undertake further work on the development of a paper on good practices for management response mechanisms and processes.

4. Subsequently independent consultants were commissioned to: 1) provide an overview of, and lessons learned on Management Response and Follow-up to evaluation recommendations within the United Nations system¹, and 2) develop good practice standards based on common and differential features as well as key challenges that Evaluation units within the UN system as well as IFI's, bilaterals and NGOs face when dealing with follow-up processes to evaluation².

5. The consultants' reports were discussed at the Evaluation Practice Exchange Seminar in 2009 and the conclusions from the discussion provided the guidance to the Task Force to finalize its work. It was agreed that UNEG should first develop and agree upon Good Practice Guidelines for the follow-up to evaluations —**rather than develop prescriptive standards**. Good practices are drawn from the experiences and approaches used by a wide range of evaluation functions that operate in differing contexts, with the aim that they be adapted by UN organisations to match their individual needs and organisational settings.

¹ A. Engelhardt, Management Response and Follow-up to evaluation recommendations: overview and lessons learned, 2008.

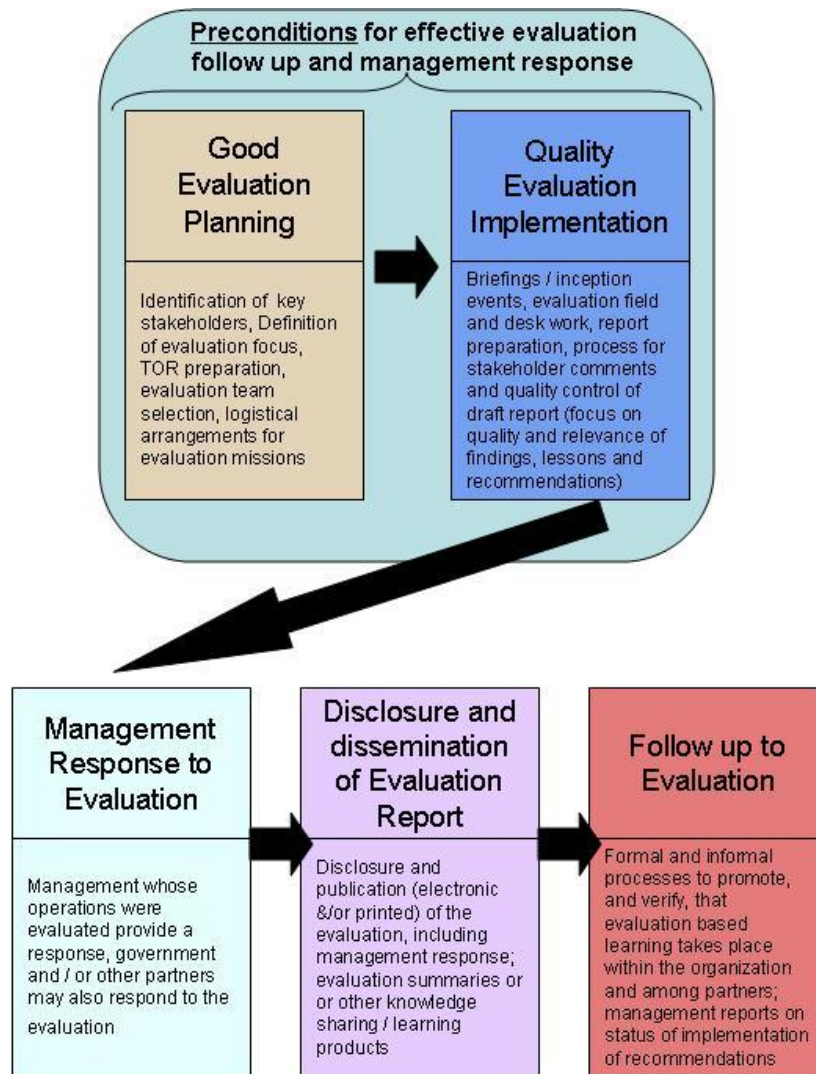
² O. Feinstein, Institutional practices for Management Response and Evaluation Follow-up, 2009.

6. By drawing extensively on the two previous reports by independent consultants, this paper aims at outlining good practices in management response to evaluation, in the development of (formal and informal) systems for tracking and reporting on the implementation of the evaluations' recommendations, and mechanisms for facilitating learning and knowledge development from evaluations. Good practices are expected to cover both the accountability and the learning dimensions of evaluation, including incentives to use evaluation results in future programming and management.

Preconditions for follow up to evaluations

7. There are certain preconditions that aid effective evaluation management response and follow-up processes, as outlined in Figure 1. Whilst description of the attributes of high quality evaluation planning and implementation processes are beyond the scope of this paper, their importance to the effectiveness of the ensuing management response and follow-up processes must be clearly highlighted.

Figure 1:



8. Involvement of internal stakeholders (and to the extent possible relevant external stakeholders) throughout the evaluation process increases the perceived relevance, and stakeholders' ownership, of evaluations. The establishment of reference and consultative groups, which advise on the evaluation's approach and provide feedback at key milestones of the process, work both to enhance the quality of the evaluation, and to increase the likelihood that evaluation recommendations will be accepted, owned, and acted upon. It is important to strike an appropriate balance between promoting the ownership of evaluation findings and recommendations without compromising the independence of evaluation, which can be aided by clearly defining the role of such a reference or consultative group prior to commencing work.

9. Another precondition for follow-up is quality evaluation recommendations. The recommendations, which should be firmly based on evidence and analysis, and logically following from findings and conclusions, are to be clearly formulated, and presented in a manner that is easily understood by target audiences. Both strategic and more operational recommendations are expected to be implementable³.

10. The evaluation's credibility is a third factor affecting the utility of the evaluation. Credibility, in turn, depends on independence, impartiality, transparency, quality and the appropriateness of the methods used⁴. Reporting lines and different structures of the evaluation units are key factors influencing the independence, credibility and, hence, the utility of evaluations.

Policy statements that deal with evaluation follow up

11. The UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System⁵ state the need for management response and systematic follow-up activities as a means for evaluations to contribute to knowledge building and organizational improvement. Standard 1.4 suggests that, "UN organizations should ensure appropriate evaluation follow-up mechanisms and have an explicit disclosure policy" to ensure that evaluation recommendations are utilized and implemented in a timely fashion and that the findings of evaluations feed into programme or project planning. An explicit disclosure policy ensures the transparent dissemination of evaluation reports.

12. The different mechanisms to deal with management response and follow-up can be distinguished along two separate, but in practice often related, dimensions: the degree of formality of the process and the way the knowledge generated by the evaluation is shared. On the one hand there are formal and informal processes, the latter being characterized by more ad-hoc interactions among evaluators and users of evaluations. On the other hand, the distinction is made between explicit (or codified) knowledge, as the one crystallized in evaluations' recommendations, and implicit (or tacit) knowledge, which is shared

³ Some agencies give an order of priority for recommendations, and / or require a timeframe to be specified.

⁴ The factors influencing the use of evaluations are discussed in Feinstein, Osvaldo (2002): "Use of Evaluations and Evaluation of their Use", Evaluation, No. 8

⁵ Available at www.unevaluation.org.

when evaluators interact with potential users of evaluations and enter into a dialogue that allows for knowledge sharing, without having that knowledge embodied in documents.

13. Although it has been shown that the formalization of, and transparency in, the set up of management response and follow-up mechanisms contributes to greater systematization and more rigorous implementation of the recommendations, the two models are by no means incompatible. Rather, each process strengthens the other's value in promoting ownership of evaluation's conclusions and recommendations by management and, at the same time, ensuring accountability within and outside the organization. Formal and informal mechanisms for management response and follow-up reporting represent powerful incentives for accountability mechanisms to work and contribute to organizational learning. To that extent, evaluation policies must be explicit about follow-up mechanisms, both formal and informal.

14. The main principles that should be embodied by an evaluation policy focused on the follow-up to evaluations include ownership, consultation and transparency.

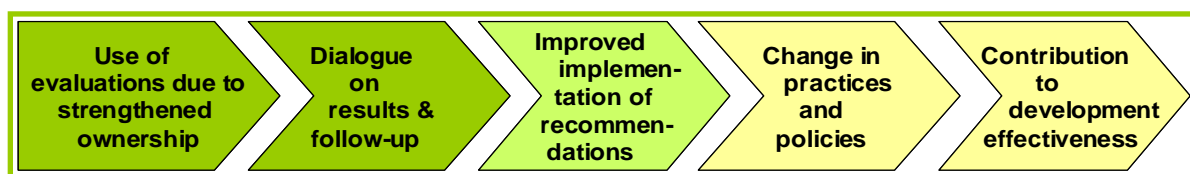
15. Similar to the importance of stakeholder's involvement during the evaluation process, stakeholders' inclusion and engagement throughout the follow-up process is not only important for accountability purposes, but it also builds ownership and increases the potential the evaluation has to impact on organizational learning.

16. Related and supportive incentives for using evaluation results, to which the organization should commit itself include: building a culture for valuing evaluation; emphasizing the need for compliance; ensuring that evaluation recommendations are relevant to and timely for the organizational agenda; ensuring a close alignment of the departmental agenda to recommendations emanating from evaluations; senior management buy-in; relating good evaluation practices to results-based programming; and the use of results for evidence based communication strategies.

17. The policy should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of evaluation offices or units, managers, and staff at large. It is also important to maintain constructive relationships with the organization's Governing Bodies and other technical departments without compromising the degree of independence of the evaluation function, which can be achieved through holding consultations with stakeholders during the policy drafting process to ensure that they are clear and supportive of their role, while also emphasizing the importance of independent assessments that reflect the opinions of all stakeholders.

18. The requirements and mechanisms for the follow-up to evaluations, including the dissemination of evaluation reports, management response and follow-up reports, must be made clear through the policy. The policy should also leave room for informal activities. Another important point to include is the time frame for the management response and for the implementation of other follow-up activities.

Figure 2:



Source: A. Engelhardt (2008)

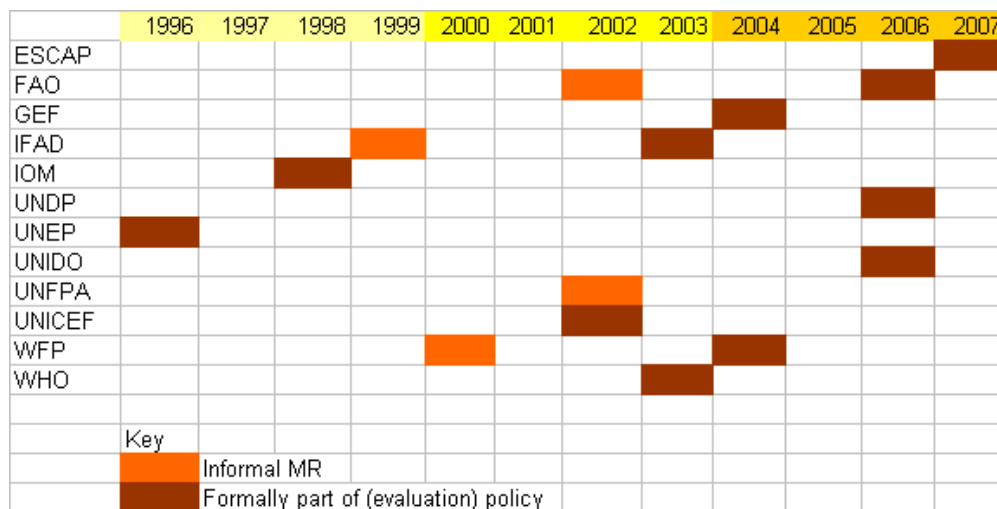
19. In this context, the institutionalization of practices for management response and follow-up is deemed essential to capitalise on the knowledge created and contribute to development effectiveness, by, on the one hand, helping to learn what worked well, what didn't work, and the reasons for these results and, on the other hand, by serving as an instrument for accountability (which, in turn, becomes an incentive for learning).

Management response to evaluation recommendations

20. The UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System suggest the development of a formal response to the evaluation by management and/or the governing authorities addressed by the recommendations. Standard 3.17 states, "Evaluation requires an explicit response by the governing authorities and management addressed by its recommendations".

21. This section outlines principles and good practices with respect to the development of approaches, mechanisms and processes to promote effective management responses to evaluation recommendations.

Figure 3: Management responses put in place formally or informally, by year



22. Management Responses to evaluations in UN agencies are most commonly embodied in the production of a formal document. The majority of the UN agencies (and other bilateral and multilateral organizations) develop management responses in a matrix form, requiring feedback to each recommendation (i.e. accepted, not accepted, partially accepted) and a list of actions that the responsible unit(s) commits to take in a fixed amount of time. The responses may also have a narrative component. To ensure relevance, the management response is often required to be completed within a specific time period after the release of the evaluation report.

23. The management response matrix constitutes the baseline for monitoring of accepted recommendations and agreed actions, which in turn informs follow-up reports on the status of the implementation. While serving as an important accountability tool, the outline of strict and close deadlines needs to take into adequate consideration the time that in some cases (e.g. joint evaluations) is necessary for the involvement of different stakeholders and/or organizational levels. An electronic

monitoring tool to track the timely receipt of documents is advisable, especially when evaluation units find themselves managing a significant number of reports and follow-up documents.

24. Although the evaluation function should not be held responsible for the substance of a response, which lies with the manager concerned, it must check the quality of management responses to ensure that the recommendations have, indeed, been responded to and have a chance of being implemented. To facilitate the process, evaluation focal points should be established to coordinate the preparation of management responses. In addition, an internal monitoring system should be established to enhance the accountability of managers, and ensure that management responses are submitted in a timely manner.

25. In the case of country level and sometimes project level evaluations jointly undertaken by UN entities and governments, management and governments should be expected to provide a response to the evaluation, which is disclosed jointly with the evaluation report. Clear roles and responsibilities are of particular importance in the case of joint evaluations, where inter-agency coordination is required for effective management response and follow-up⁶.

26. Management responses to decentralized evaluations which are managed by agency field offices and/or regional or thematic or policy bureaus⁷ should follow the processes as described above.

Elements of good practices for management responses

27. The following attempts to distil key elements of good evaluation practice that promote effective follow-up through the management response.

28. A focus on *increasing the level of ownership* of the evaluation findings and recommendations through both formal and informal processes during the evaluation process improves the likelihood of effective management response and evaluation follow-up.

29. *Clearly defined roles and responsibilities* in the processes dealing with management response and follow-up are needed and should be communicated to all key evaluation stakeholders, including managers, officers and members of Governing Bodies.

30. Establish *an agreed deadline* by which Management or other key stakeholders (e.g. Governments and possibly other partners), should provide their formal response to the evaluation.

31. A focal point should be nominated by management to *coordinate the management response*. This is particularly important in cases where the evaluation involves several operational units, and different management levels.

⁶ OECD, DAC Guidance for Managing Joint Evaluations, 2006

⁷ This is an adaptation of the definition used by WFP and UNDP, which also applies to UNICEF and most organizations. Furthermore, this definition is consistent with the one included in Hildenwall and Öbrand (2008)

32. In the case of joint evaluations involving several agencies/partners, an ad-hoc group with management representatives of the different agencies/partners should be formed to elicit a coordinated management response.

33. In case the concerned managers lack experience in preparing a management response, the central evaluation unit should routinely ***provide support by showing good examples of management response*** and clarifying any doubts, making reference to the evaluation policy of the organization (if there is one). The support role of the central evaluation unit is particularly important in the case of agencies with decentralized evaluation offices or decentralized evaluation focal points.

34. The ***Management Response should clearly indicate whether Management accepts, partially accepts or rejects the recommendations***. If the latter is the case, the reason(s) for the rejection should be provided. In the former case, actions to be taken should be mentioned in detail, indicating the time frame and specific unit(s) responsible to implement the planned action(s). When more than one unit is mentioned, it should be clear which unit is responsible for which action(s). This information should be presented in the form of a management response matrix, showing the relevant information at a glance.

35. ***Management Responses should be disclosed in conjunction with the evaluation***. However, if the management response does not become available within the agreed period, and if there are no acceptable reasons to extend (or further extend) the deadline, the evaluation report is disclosed with an indication that the management response was not made available at the date in which it was due.

36. Evaluators should be encouraged and expected to pursue opportunities for dialogue with management on evaluation recommendations and management response, trying to facilitate managers' task but, at the same time, being careful to ensure their independence and to promote management's ownership of, and commitment to, their response. Indeed, dialogue at all levels of the evaluation process increases the perceived relevance, and stakeholder ownership of evaluations.

Follow up processes and learning

37. The main purposes of institutionalizing follow-up processes to evaluations are: 1) to strengthen the use of evaluations; 2) increase stakeholder and management buy-in to improve performance; and 3) to facilitate in-depth dialogue about evaluation results and follow-up to influence the planning and implementation of strategies, programmes and projects.

38. It has been demonstrated that transparent management response and follow-up processes increase the implementation rate of the recommendations.⁸ UNEG Standard 1.5 requires the evaluation function to ensure that follow-up and regular progress reports are compiled on the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the evaluations already carried out, to be submitted to the Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations. While this may not be the practice for all evaluation functions in the UN system, all evaluation functions should consider implementing mechanisms that facilitate follow-up of evaluation recommendations.

⁸ Achim Engelhardt, "Management response and follow-up to evaluation recommendations: overview and lessons learned" p. 5.

Systematic follow up to evaluations

39. As described in the previous section, the management response matrix clearly outlines the recommendations from the evaluation, the response from management, and the actions to be taken including a clear indication of the entity responsible for the action and the timeline for completion.

40. Reporting on follow-up to evaluations should take place at regular intervals, e.g. on an annual or biannual basis. Each organization should determine the appropriate intervals and ensure that they are communicated to staff and stakeholders. Reporting intervals are ideally aligned with the organization's planning processes. A default expiration period for the tracking of follow-up to recommendations of evaluations is desirable to ensure that costs (including financial and human) necessary for tracking the implementation of recommendations are balanced with the benefits ⁹. It is also important to allow flexibility in terms of changing actions that have been agreed upon in order to ensure their relevance within a changing context.

41. There are several mechanisms for the systematic follow-up that are considered good practice:

- **Electronic platforms** have proven to be a successful mechanism for tracking the actions taken in response to the recommendations of an evaluation. The benefits of an electronic platform include the ability to generate reports and complete disaggregated analyses on the implementation across the organization, and will facilitate access by all stakeholders to the information generated. Organizations interested in developing an electronic platform for tracking should seek lessons learned from those organizations that have implemented such a platform.
- **Reporting** to governing bodies (and thus to the entire organization and its stakeholders) on an annual or biannual basis on the status of the implementation of recommendations is an effective means of ensuring accountability. The report could come in the form of an Annual Evaluation Report that covers multiple aspects dealing with evaluation in the organization or a report specifically focused on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations and follow-up actions. Reporting can serve as an incentive to implement follow-up actions in a timely fashion.
- **Discussions** on planned follow-up to evaluations and the status of implementation of the recommendations are essential for ensuring that stakeholders are aware of the findings and the actions planned and/or taken. Discussions will enable stakeholders to provide comments and suggestions for moving forward. Discussions on the follow-up to evaluations can take place systematically at the annual meeting of the Governing Body and/or through Senior Management Teams. Such discussions should focus on strategic issues of corporate significance and on recurrent findings and recommendations from project evaluations. Discussions will build ownership within the organization and serve as a further incentive to implement follow-up actions in a timely fashion.

⁹ For example, JIU per default tracks the follow-up to recommendations for a period of 4 years.

Learning and contribution to knowledge development

42. Systematic mechanisms for follow-up to evaluation recommendations are positive steps in institutionalizing a system for follow-up. However, in order to ensure effective and appropriate follow-up they should be complemented by other incentives and less formal mechanisms.

43. Several mechanisms for facilitating learning and knowledge development from evaluations are considered good practice:

- Knowledge products can include the actual evaluation report, an evaluation brief, an e-newsletter with a short summary, or other products. Knowledge products should contain the key findings and recommendations, be tailored to the audience and facilitate the use of information through clear and easy to understand language while at the same time maintaining linkage to the broader expected results of the organization. The strategy for dissemination of knowledge products is of utmost importance; it has been shown that an effective strategy depends on: correct targeting of intended users, the appropriateness of the means used to facilitate access to the evaluation findings, and, in particular, the timing of the evaluation, so as to make evaluation findings available when decisions are taken. It is also important to take advantage of the new media and technology available for disseminating knowledge such as wiki's and 'YouTube'.
- Meetings and workshops facilitate the sharing of tacit (or implicit) knowledge from evaluations. Tacit knowledge is the knowledge that is not captured in evaluation reports, for example the interpretation of evaluation findings and recommendations by individual staff members. Tacit knowledge is essential for a full understanding and an appropriate and effective implementation of the recommendations at the organizational level. The extent to which evaluation documents, follow-up reports, and lessons learned are discussed and shared, significantly affects the use of evaluation results, ensures transparency, and serves as an incentive for the organization's staff whenever the documents are disclosed to the public and/or presented in front of the Governing Bodies.
- Communities of practice (COP's) are informal mechanisms that have the potential of creating an enabling environment for the use of evaluations, providing evaluators and staff with opportunities to persuade the managers to implement the recommendations through the sharing of knowledge and good practice.

Conclusions and suggestions for use of good practices

44. The present guidelines should be tailored to the specific context of each organisation, as the evaluation functions of UN entities vary greatly in terms of the level of independence, capacity and organizational evaluation culture, which affect appropriate roles and responsibilities, the level of acceptance of evaluation and the appropriateness of related follow-up activities.

45. Management responses and follow-up to evaluations should be reflected in agency evaluation policies, which should clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the evaluation function vis-à-vis

management. While management is ultimately accountable, at the minimum evaluation units are expected to facilitate processes and promote activities related to the follow-up to evaluations.

46. Evaluation processes should aim to increase the level of ownership of findings and recommendations through both formal and informal approaches. For evaluation processes and results to be fully captured and owned as organizational lessons, it is of central importance that a tailored dissemination or communication strategy is developed for each evaluation.

47. Management responses should clearly indicate whether Management accepts, partially accepts, or rejects the recommendations. Follow-up should be well coordinated and timeframes for action agreed. Good practice suggests that management responses should be disclosed in conjunction with the evaluation. Complementing formal management responses with facilitation of learning and knowledge development from evaluations is necessary for building a culture for utilizing evaluations beyond compliance. Formalisation of management response processes in evaluation policies, followed by systematic application, is an effective way to promote organization-wide learning and improve both operational programming and implementation.

48. A combined approach that incorporates oral and written, formal and informal communication is deemed necessary to ensure that follow-up to evaluations supports organizational accountability and learning for enhanced effectiveness.

Annex 1: UNDP Management Response Template

[Name of the Evaluation] Date

Prepared by:

Position:

Unit/Bureau:

Cleared by:

Position:

Unit/Bureau:

Input into and update in ERC:

Position:

Unit/Bureau:

Overall comments:				
Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 1:				
Management Response:				
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1. description activities, then specifics as needed a. b.				
1.2				
1.3				
Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 2:				
Management Response:				
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
2.1. description activities, then specifics as needed a. b.				
2.2.				
Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 3:				
Management Response:				
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
3.1 description activities, then specifics as needed a. b.				
3.2				
3.3				

* The implementation status is tracked in the ERC

Annex 2: UNESCAP Management Response Template

A. Management response template

- It is required to publish the general remarks by management and a management response (MR) to each recommendation of the evaluation or evaluative review as an insert at the beginning of the evaluation report. (See the **Evaluation Tool 5: Evaluation report template**).
- The below MR template with follow-up actions will be included as an annex to the evaluation report and the detailed follow-up action plan with the responsible units and expected completion date should be submitted to PMD (see **template B below**).

Title of Evaluation		
	Signature	Date
Executive Secretary (or other management entity as appropriate)		
Division Chief or Head of Regional Institution (as appropriate)		
Division Chief or Head of Regional Institution (as appropriate)		
General Remarks by Management		
Report Recommendation	Management Response	Follow-up Action
1.		
2.		
Etc.		