

**For information**

**United Nations Children's Fund**  
Executive Board  
**Annual session 2015**  
16-19 June 2015  
Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**Management perspective on the 2014 annual report on the evaluation function**

1. The present report has been prepared by the management of UNICEF to provide its perspective on the 2014 annual report of the evaluation function (E/ICEF/2015/10) in accordance with Executive Board decision 2013/13. UNICEF management continues to be committed to having an effective and efficient evaluation function, particularly in light of the key role evaluation plays in supporting organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results-based management.

**I. Governance of the evaluation function**

2. The Executive Board exercises oversight of the evaluation function in UNICEF and upholds the central role played by the evaluation function in UNICEF. In 2014, the Board endorsed the Plan for Global Thematic Evaluations 2014–2017. In 2014, the Board considered three corporate evaluations, and an update on the implementation of the Plan, as requested by the Board, is presented in the annual report.

3. Management notes the role played by the internal UNICEF Evaluation Committee. In September 2014, it endorsed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), clarifying responsibilities for responding to global thematic evaluation reports. It also provided guidance on an action plan strengthening the evaluation function in UNICEF, and took note of levels of expenditure on evaluation.

4. Management notes the external Audit Advisory Committee's satisfaction with measures to strengthen the independence of the Evaluation Office, as per the revised evaluation policy approved by the Executive Board in 2013 in its decision 2013/13.

**II. United Nations system**

5. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) conducted a system-wide review in 2014, 'Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the UN System', intended to support professionalization of the evaluation function. Management notes the JIU findings, in particular that the use and impact of evaluations

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\* E/ICEF/2015/4.

across the system remains a challenge. Management appreciates the finding that UNICEF is judged to have a “mature and high-performing evaluation function”. UNICEF, together with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), is found to have pertinent standards, guidance and operational procedures in place for decentralized evaluations as well as systems for quality assurance.

6. United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system emphasized the importance of evaluation and use of evaluation evidence, and called for effective arrangements for independent system-wide evaluation (ISWE). A policy on ISWE was adopted, and to guide ISWE arrangements, UNICEF supported the setting up of an Interim Coordination Mechanism in 2014. Terms of reference for two pilot-wide evaluations have been developed, with full UNICEF participation in both. Management takes note and looks forward to a receiving progress update on these two pilot evaluations planned to be implemented in 2015.

7. The first-ever General Assembly resolution specifically on evaluation capacity development (69/237), was adopted in 2014, specifically “to support, upon request, efforts to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation in accordance with their national policies and priorities”. Management welcomes the JIU finding that UNICEF “is one of only three agencies actively supporting national evaluation capacity development”. In pursuance of these efforts, UNICEF continued in 2014 to support *EvalPartners*, a network with an impressive record in national evaluation capacity development. Management welcomes and encourages the efforts undertaken by UNICEF country offices to support national capacity development, as well as efforts by regional offices regarding capacity in regional institutions.

8. Management notes the increasing number of joint United Nations evaluations, including an emerging common focus on reducing disparities. Of special note also is the joint management response on the Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality within the United Nations system. Management appreciates these efforts and looks forward to the reports for the joint evaluations planned in 2015.

### **III. Evaluation function**

9. Management notes that the annual report is clear, evidence-based, accurate and comprehensive. The report is systematic in detailing responses to the Executive Board’s requested actions and guidance on evaluation. Management takes note that the majority of the Board’s requested actions have been completed. Management also appreciates the report’s response to the observations and recommendations of the JIU, as well as the reporting against key performance indicators.

10. Management welcomes the continuing increase in the number of evaluations - from 79 in 2012 to 96 in 2013. There has also been a notable improvement in quality of evaluations: of completed evaluations in 2013, 69 per cent were assessed as good or excellent, as compared with only 36 per cent in 2009. Management notes that as implementation of the Monitoring Results for Equity System (e.g., via *inSight* dashboards and the *Results Assessment Module*) progresses and provides more real-time data, the number of formative and output-level evaluations has declined and evaluations are focusing on higher-level results. There is also more effort in the preparation of management responses. Management encourages this trend.

11. Management notes good progress overall in the increase of recorded evaluation expenditure as a percentage of programme funding, from 0.33 per cent in 2011 to 0.5 per cent in 2014. There is, however, still notable variation between regions. While management recognizes that a degree of regional variation, based upon size and nature of programmes, is to be expected, management encourages the Evaluation Office to continue to identify the bottlenecks that regions are facing as they try to increase evaluation spending to reach the target of 1 per cent of programme spending.

12. Management notes that the Global Reports Oversight System is now working well and notes the planned review of the System in 2015. The System will be the basis for the next long-term agreement for the quality reviews through to 2017. In June 2014, UNICEF launched live, real-time monitoring of many evaluation-related variables. Management notes that this allows more proactive management of issues, and encourages the Evaluation Office to continue to strengthen real-time monitoring. Two regions piloted the new Evaluation Office/Office of Research software platform (an online and enhanced Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation tool). This was developed not only to improve the planning of UNICEF research, studies and evaluations but also to enhance their utilization – through better prioritization of work in knowledge generation that has the potential for greatest impact.

13. Management welcomes the good progress reported above, and notes four main areas in which more progress is needed: (a) implementation of evaluation recommendations and organization-wide utilization of evaluation findings; (b) the increasing number of humanitarian interventions, which also increases the capacity gaps for related evaluations; (c) the incorporation of human rights, gender and equity concerns in evaluations; and (d) variation in regional productivity of evaluations (regional variations in the number, expenditure, quality and use of evaluation findings). These areas are reviewed in detail below.

#### **IV. Management responses, implementation of recommendations and utilization of evaluation findings**

14. In terms of corporate monitoring, 92 per cent of all evaluations were submitted to a corporate database in 2013, up from 10 per cent in 2009. Furthermore, management notes the good progress achieved on the rate of management response. About 90 per cent of evaluations are accompanied by a management response, up from a 2009 baseline of 10 per cent. The rate of implementation of agreed actions is reported to have increased from 57 per cent in 2010 to about 80 per cent in 2014.

15. On the implementation of agreed actions, management notes that there is good progress, based on self-reporting data. However, there are shortfalls noted. To understand the factors underlying inconsistent completion, the Evaluation Office consulted regional offices and identified the causes (such as weakness in formulating recommendations, lack of stakeholder buy-in, communication gaps, and capacity limitations, especially in multiple emergencies). Management acknowledges that there are multiple dimensions that affect the capacity of offices to implement agreed actions, and takes note of the actions taken by the Evaluation Office to support regional and country offices to address these issues. In addition, management appreciates the Evaluation Office's rigorous approach in monitoring and attention to verification of implementation of agreed actions, in addition to self-reporting.

16. With regard to the issue of overall organization-wide *utilization* of evaluation findings to inform policies, procedures and programmes, management appreciates the report's analysis. The

evidence shows that the reported uses of evaluation findings are strong at country and regional levels. The findings target broad national policies or legislative-, fiscal- and policy-related actions. Management appreciates that UNICEF country offices share evaluation findings with partners, and that evaluation findings inform country programme design and strategy. Furthermore, there is a welcome focus on results at the outcome and impact levels and on reductions in equity gaps. Such efforts are consistent across regions, and there is a welcome focus on multi-country evaluations. Management notes that the ratings for strategic intent of evaluations is high - 74 per cent.

17. The challenge appears to be more in the internal organization-wide sharing and utilization of evaluation findings – that is, how they are shared internally and incorporated in revised policies, procedures and programmes. There is a recognized need to improve in this area. Given the need for inter-divisional coordination, management takes note that the Evaluation Office participates regularly in the UNICEF Standing Committee on Data and Research, as well as in the Inter-Divisional Task Force on Research. Through such mechanisms, the Evaluation Office contributes to organization-wide dissemination and use of evaluation findings.

18. Management acknowledges that the Evaluation Office can only play an advisory and partnering role in this effort. Recognizing its accountability, however, to facilitate uptake of results, the Evaluation Office is taking actions on a number of fronts: strengthening the application of standard operating procedures; presenting evaluation findings for groups of evaluations; presenting results in multiple venues; and developing the role of Monitoring and Evaluation staff. Management appreciates these efforts and encourages the Evaluation Office to monitor uptake of evaluation findings through metrics.

19. Furthermore, management welcomes the plan of the Evaluation Office to present a “comprehensive approach to utilization” of evaluation findings in 2015, and encourages the Evaluation Office to consult widely internally. This should take into account the need to use complementary communication mechanisms to the management responses to influence decision makers. The relevance of knowledge management mechanisms is also recognized.

## **V. Increasing humanitarian interventions and capacity for related evaluations**

20. The annual report acknowledges staffing gaps in 2014 regarding evaluation of humanitarian interventions, which led to delays in completion of evaluations and in starting the corporate thematic evaluations. Management appreciates the Evaluation Office’s acknowledgment of the challenges posed by unpredictable humanitarian situations and notes the efforts already taken by the Evaluation Office (recruitment for an additional two full-time posts as well as several temporary appointments) to meet acute capacity gaps in such situations. Management notes that the Evaluation Office core resources budget was doubled in the Strategic Plan for 2014–2017, and this helped to increase capacity. A capacity to react to unplanned needs is now maintained.

21. Some regions and country offices face similar or more acute capacity gaps in such situations. Management notes the increasing number, scale, complexity and chronic nature of many humanitarian situations. Management appreciates the steps taken by the Evaluation Office and the Division of Human Resources to address capacity gaps to meet demands from unforeseen situations. However, given recent experience, management requests the Evaluation Office to continue to identify mechanisms and processes to meet the demands of unforeseen humanitarian interventions, to achieve rapid evaluation response time, including for decentralized regional- and country-level capacity. Management notes that, with support from the United Kingdom Department

for International Development, UNICEF continues to train UNICEF staff on humanitarian evaluations, and encourages further initiatives in this direction.

22. Management notes the progress achieved since the Executive Board discussion in 2012 on evaluations of the work of UNICEF in humanitarian situations. Specifically, when developing UNICEF Level 2 and Level 3 procedures and Simplified SOPs, an explicit review of all recent evaluations of humanitarian responses allowed identification of "best practice" to inform guidance. The same applies to the ongoing revision of guidelines, which will address lessons from Central African Republic, the Philippines and South Sudan. Notably, in every Level 2 or Level 3 emergency, there has been some form of real-time lessons learning and/or evaluation exercise undertaken, and each has been met with a management response plan. Similarly, the Strengthening Humanitarian Action process is informed by evaluation findings. Management recognizes the progress achieved and encourages Evaluation Office and the Emergency Operations Division to continue to collaborate closely, explicitly linking learning, evaluations, knowledge management, as well as increased rapid response evaluation capacity.

23. Management notes that there does not appear to be an evaluation planned in 2015 regarding the closer integration of development and humanitarian programmes. There are initiatives that go in this direction, for example, a case study to document good practices that will devise recommendations on how to strengthen the link between development and humanitarian actions in UNICEF programmes. In addition, the UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) section is conducting a study on the transition from cluster to sector coordination. This should provide learning material on how to strengthen government capacity to assume greater responsibility for humanitarian coordination. This should also help to make humanitarian programmes coherent and consistent with national WASH policies and programmes. Management encourages the Evaluation Office to explore options for planning evaluations in this critical area.

## **VI. Human rights, gender and equity concerns**

24. Management expresses concern about the negative trend in the involvement of beneficiaries, and government and development partners, in evaluations. Management takes note, and requests the Evaluation Office to identify the causes for the recent negative trend, given the existence of adequate guidance and tools.

25. Management welcomes the overall positive trend on including gender in evaluations, (with UNICEF scoring as "approaching requirements" on gender), but there is clearly much room for improvement. Management recognizes the efforts being made by country and regional offices, and welcomes the proposed and actual multiple actions that the Evaluation Office is taking, to improve the way evaluations include dimensions of gender, ethics and participation. These include promotion of United Nations Evaluation Group guidance on human rights and gender in evaluations, joining with the UNICEF Office of Research in disseminating guidance on safeguarding ethics in research and evaluation, and emphasizing participation as a human rights and ethical issue.

26. Management notes that the Strategic Plan and the Gender Action Plan, together with the establishment of regional gender-advisor positions, have increased the awareness and capacity of UNICEF on gender. This will translate into greater attention paid to gender in future evaluations but it may take time, nevertheless, to obtain the amount of evidence needed on gender in the evaluations expected in 2015 and 2016.

## **VII. Regional variations in evaluation**

27. On regional variations in the number, expenditure, quality and use of evaluation findings, management notes that the Evaluation Office is exploring how best to set expectations for evaluation coverage and numbers, taking into account variations in regional contexts and using the criteria set out in the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF. The Evaluation Office proposes to develop a method to measure what the evaluation demand should be in different regions, given the parameters on coverage included in the evaluation policy (on programme spending, scaling up, humanitarian context, and recent evaluation activity) and then report against those expectations. Management acknowledges the complexity of this task, and appreciates and encourages the work of the Evaluation Office in this area.

28. Management takes note of efforts made by the regions to address evaluation gaps, which are often caused by capacity and operational issues in the face of massive humanitarian interventions. As a result, it has been difficult in some regions to plan and carry out evaluations in offices where capacities are overstretched and other urgent priorities take precedence. Progress has been made in the regions facing such difficulties, yet more is needed. Management will work with the Evaluation Office to seek ways to strengthen evaluation capacity in such contexts.

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