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UNFPA Management Response to the Biennial Report on Evaluation

Item 6: Evaluation

Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS
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Contents

Introduction

1.   Management welcomes the Biennial report on evaluation, Report of the Director, Division for Oversight Services (DP/FPA/2012/8) and thanks the Division for its feedback and critical look at the UNFPA systems and the quality of evaluation. Management has reviewed the report and presents its final response here, in the form of a general response to the issues raised and discussed in the report, and specific responses to each of the report recommendations. This response supersedes the preliminary response provided by Management at the informal consultation on evaluation held during the Executive Board's annual session in June 2012.

2.   The present response may be read together with the *Management Response to the report "Quality assessment of UNFPA decentralized programme evaluations", DOS, 17 February 2012,* which provides more details on issues raised in this response.

I.   General response

3.   Management agrees with the Division for Oversight Services (DOS) report on a number of the issues it raises. However, it should be underscored that progress has been achieved in a number of areas which the report has not acknowledged. Furthermore, given the recent independent review of the evaluation policy by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Management will be addressing the remaining challenges, including the gaps in the current evaluation policy.

A.   Areas of agreement

4.   Management agrees that the coverage of decentralized evaluation has improved: all country programmes that ended in 2011 conducted an end-of-country programme evaluation. However, as indicated in the report, the quality of decentralized evaluation needs continued attention and remains poor for a number of reasons.

B.   Areas of concern

5.   The report does not consider the significant **progress of the decentralized evaluation function** in the key areas of *coverage*, *quality* and *use*. Because the report is focused primarily on work undertaken in 2010, Management is concerned that the report leaves the reader with the impression that there has been a lack of progress on evaluation in the organization. Further, the reader may assume that the report is describing a current, rather than an historical state.

6.   Therefore, Management would like to take this opportunity to highlight the significant efforts made to improve decentralized evaluations since the approval of the evaluation policy in June 2009 at the Executive Board annual session.

II.   Progress in strengthening decentralized evaluation

7.   **Evaluation coverage**. Management has conducted country programme evaluations (CPEs) with coverage of evaluations having markedly increased within a year of the approval of the 2009 policy. A hundred per cent of country programme documents (CPDs) submitted to the Executive Board annual session in 2011 were accompanied by a CPE and a budgeted evaluation plan, compared to 35 per cent in 2010. This was a result of strengthening evaluation planning, coordination and culture. This is a direct response to a major recommendation in the 2010 Evaluation Quality Assessment (EQA) report, and UNFPA would have welcomed the 2012 report's acknowledgement of this achievement.

8.   **Evaluation quality**. As noted elsewhere, Management is aware that the quality of evaluation is not yet at the desired level. However, a comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of evaluation has been developed and is being implemented. This comprises: improvement of country programme results and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks; development of guidelines and tools; training and webinars; establishment of quality enhancement mechanisms; institutionalization of knowledge sharing and continuous learning from experience; as well as planning and coordination of evaluation. Details of some of these strategies are provided below:

- Strengthening results and monitoring and evaluation frameworks
  To improve results and M&E frameworks, Management developed country programme design assessment tools and institutionalized a Programme Review Committee (PRC) which assesses the quality of country programme designs, including the results and M&E frameworks. The PRC reviews and rates all draft CPDs submitted for Executive Board approval and provides feedback, which the countries use to improve the designs of the final CPD. This quality assurance process has already resulted in improvement in CPD designs. For example, of the CPDs submitted to the Board's annual session 2012, the PRC had rated four of them as unsatisfactory. These four were referred back to the country and have since been improved; in a second round of the PRC review, the four CPDs were rated satisfactory. In addition, 99 per cent of the output indicators in the CPDs have both baselines and targets; in contrast, only 3 per cent of the output indicators for corresponding CPDs of the previous cycle had both baseline and target figures.

- Development and enhancement of guidelines
  Guidelines on a wide range of topics have been developed to support the process and improve the quality of evaluation:

  - Evaluation Process Guidelines (2011)
  - United Nations Development Group Results-Based Management Handbook (UNFPA was co-chair)
  - Evaluation Consultant's Orientation Package (2011)
  - Results-Based Management Training Guide (2010)
  - A Framework for Quality Results Reporting in UNFPA (2011)

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- Evidence-Based Programming Guidance Note (2011)
- Guide for Developing Robust Results Frameworks for Effective Programmes (updated 2011)

- <u>Equipping staff with evaluation skills through training in results-based management and evaluation</u>

Major efforts in evaluation training to strengthen the evaluation capacity of country office staff took place in 2010 and 2011. Coverage included:

- Face-to-face training: 258 staff (in 2010) and 254 staff (in 2011)
- Webinars: 43 staff (in 2010) and 268 staff (in 2011)

Altogether:

- 197 country offices participated in face-to-face evaluation training during 2010-2011
- 115 country offices participated in webinars during 2010-2011
- 87 per cent of the country offices of all regions attended an evaluation training during 2010-2011
- 92 per cent of CPE managers in 2011 were trained and coached in evaluation management.

Management has seen the first benefits of the training efforts in an improved evaluation quality starting in 2011 and expects to see full impact in 2012.

- <u>Institutionalization of peer review and quality enhancement mechanisms</u>

To further improve the quality of evaluations several mechanisms have been established, including:

- A Peer Support Network that allows for needs-based support
- Review of CPE terms of reference (TORs) by Regional M&E Advisers: 100 per cent TORs have been reviewed and signed off in 2011
- Evaluation Management Committee (EMC) for each evaluation: 95 per cent of the evaluations were guided by an Evaluation Management Committee in 2011
- Review of all draft evaluation reports by Regional M&E Advisers: 80 per cent of the draft reports were reviewed by the Regional M&E Advisers in 2011
- Use of feedback from EQA, and from consultants who implemented high-quality evaluations, to plough back lessons learned into future evaluations
- Evaluation consultants roster.

- <u>Effective coordination of the evaluation function by management</u>

The overall coordination of the evaluation function at headquarters, regional offices and country offices includes the following tasks:

- Coordination of monthly teleconferences between headquarters and regional offices
- Annual global meetings: joint planning, review of progress, strategy and action plan development
- Status updates on evaluation implementation: preparation of progress report on action plan implementation
- Coordination of global evaluation trainings
- Fund-wide M&E network established (50+ M&E practitioners)
- Knowledge sharing about evaluation function:
  a) *Evaluation intranet and My M&E Net maintenance*
  b) *Support for populating evaluation database*
  c) *Provision of evaluation-related input for organizational reporting*

9.   **Evaluation use and learning**. Management has promoted the use of and learning from evaluation findings and has intensified efforts to ensure further improvements in this area. Use of evaluation evidence and lessons learned is stimulated Fund-wide through several activities. including:

- Mandatory management responses to all evaluations that are monitored through the management response tracking system
- Institutionalization of a review process to ensure that results of the CPEs inform the development of CPDs; and, most importantly, that countries are using evaluation results to develop CPDs. A review of the CPDs submitted to the Executive Board at the first regular session 2012 showed that all of them had considered results of the respective CPEs
- Dissemination of evaluation policy briefs analysing and synthesizing evaluation findings
- Production of information materials such as the 'Evidence & Action' series on evaluation topics.

III.   The analysis methodology

10.   The EQA assessment has been used to analyse and conclude about trends in the quality of decentralized evaluations in UNFPA. While Management acknowledges the shortfall in the quality of these evaluations, it is concerned with the inconsistency of the EQA methodology over the years. The EQA methodology varies for the years 2005, 2010 and 2012, to the extent that it is difficult to assess trends and determine whether there has been any improvement or not.

IV.   Report findings and conclusions on independence, structure and location of the evaluation function

11.   Management's position is that the report's findings and conclusions on independence, structure and location of the evaluation function are superseded by the work which the Executive Director has commissioned from the OIOS. Management's proposed response to issues

associated with independence, structure and location of the evaluation functions is set out in its separate response to the OIOS report on the review of the UNFPA evaluation policy.

V. Specific management response to the recommendations of the report

DOS recommendations	Management response
a) *The Evaluation Branch, Division for Oversight Services, should fully exercise its evaluation management function by restoring the necessary link between the accountability and learning dimensions of evaluation, which are artificially split, as per the UNFPA Evaluation Policy. However, a unified evaluation function does not preclude that a number of evaluation-related tasks may be performed in distinct organizational units.*	**Not yet accepted, pending outcomes of the OIOS review of the current evaluation policy.** Management considers this recommendation to be superseded by the Office of Internal Oversight Services review of the current evaluation policy. That review will lead to a revised evaluation policy which in turn will guide Management in how best to secure the appropriate organizational arrangements so that independence of evaluations is upheld appropriately.
b) *Ensuring the use of evaluation results (for example, the issuance and follow-up of management responses; ensuring that recommendations and lessons learned guide programming; and identifying and sharing good practices) is key to improving programming. These evaluation-related tasks, which are also programme-related, should rest with the Programme Division.*	**Accepted.** Management is already implementing this through a fully operational management response system. Management responses were prepared for 70 per cent of the CPEs conducted in 2011, compared to 20 per cent for CPEs conducted in 2010; and CPE results are used to inform programming: 100 per cent of CPDs to be submitted to the Executive Board annual session have been informed by CPE results. The PRC is another quality assurance mechanism that involves use of CPEs to assess CPD design. CPDs rated "satisfactory" have increased from 50 per cent in June 2011 to 91 per cent in June 2012 because of the quality enhancement process.
c) *Besides the use of evaluation results, improved programming also necessitates the continuous input of data and information produced by an effective, results-oriented monitoring system (see figure 1). Such a system does not exist at UNFPA; current monitoring, as performed in country offices, is largely focused on budget expenditure and is activity-oriented.*	**Accepted.** UNFPA management has a monitoring system. However, we recognize its weaknesses and are in the process of reviewing and improving it.

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