

**For information**

**United Nations Children's Fund**

Executive Board

**Annual session 2017**

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda\*

**Management perspective on the annual report for 2016 on the evaluation function in UNICEF**

**I. Introduction**

1. The present note has been prepared by the management of UNICEF to provide its perspective on the annual report for 2016 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2017/11](#)), in accordance with Executive Board decision 2013/13. Management welcomes the annual report, which is submitted by the Evaluation Office, as it provides feedback and insights to further improve and strengthen the evaluation function in UNICEF.

**II. Governance of the evaluation function**

2. Management acknowledges that the accountabilities for the evaluation function in UNICEF were discharged in accordance with the revised Evaluation Policy ([E/ICEF/2013/14](#)) in 2016:

(a) The Executive Board exercised oversight of the evaluation function in UNICEF, providing a decision on the annual report for 2015 on the evaluation function in UNICEF and a management perspective (2016/7), as well as a request to review the plan for global thematic evaluations for 2014-2017 and an update for 2016-2017 (decision 2015/10). The update to the plan for global thematic evaluations was submitted to the Executive Board at its first regular session in 2016 ([E/ICEF/2016/3](#)) and several corporate-level evaluations were completed in 2016 in accordance with the updated plan. In addition, the Evaluation Office has responded to the request of the Board in its decision 2016/7 to include, in its next annual report, a geographic and thematic overview of coverage of evaluations. The efforts of UNICEF to support the development of national capacities for evaluation are also covered. The Executive Board also urged UNICEF to accelerate progress towards achieving the target of allocating a minimum of 1 per cent of its overall programme expenditures to evaluation, to prioritize the timely delivery of management responses and to improve the rate of implementation of evaluation recommendations. Management's response to these requests is described in the present document;

\* [E/ICEF/2017/5](#).

(b) The Global Evaluation Committee continued to fulfil an internal consultative function, and met in June 2016;

(c) The Evaluation Office provided global leadership on the evaluation function and carried out significant corporate-level evaluations, all of which are listed in the annual report for 2016;

(d) For the 90 per cent of evaluations that were decentralized, the regional directors and country representatives oversaw the evaluation planning, budgeting and expenditure and submitted the reports and management responses to the Evaluation and Research Database.

3. Management values the contribution of the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee to the governance of the evaluation function. In 2016, the Committee took note of the need for management to continue to improve its follow-up to evaluation recommendations and requested to be informed of its activities in this regard.

### **III. Evaluation coherence**

4. As requested by the General Assembly in the 2012 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR)<sup>1</sup> and reemphasized in the 2016 QCPR,<sup>2</sup> UNICEF contributes to evaluation coherence within the United Nations development system through several avenues. These include participating in and taking on a leadership role in the United Nations Evaluation Group, supporting the work on the independent system-wide evaluation mechanism and promoting evaluation coherence globally through participation in EvalPartners. Specific activities of the Evaluation Office are described in the annual report.

5. Management will continue to support such efforts, which increase the relevance and effectiveness of the UNICEF evaluation function. Management especially welcomes the active role played by the UNICEF Evaluation Office in supporting countries to develop national evaluation capacities.

### **IV. Performance of the evaluation function in UNICEF**

6. Management monitors the seven key performance indicators presented in the annual report for 2016 on the evaluation function:

#### **Indicator 1: Number of evaluations managed and submitted to the Global Evaluation Database**

7. Management is pleased to note the increase in the number of evaluations submitted in 2015 (90) relative to 2014 (80), and that the analysis of the 2016 submissions indicates a further increase. Nevertheless, the detailed breakdown by region, which has been presented in this year's report in response to decision 2016/7, clearly highlights that geographic coverage may need further improvement. The best-performing region achieved coverage of 100 per cent, with at least one evaluation submitted by every country office in the region

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution [67/226](#).

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly resolution [71/243](#).

during the period 2013-2015. For the remaining regions, the coverage ranged from 56 per cent to 95 per cent. For 2017, while acknowledging that evaluation coverage is dependent upon the prevailing conditions, including the sociopolitical context, management will request regional directors to take steps to review and increase their geographic coverage, as needed.

### **Indicator 2: Topical distribution**

8. The 2016 annual report includes a thematic overview of the evaluations submitted in 2015, including trends for the period 2010-2015. The report describes a balanced distribution of coverage in the areas of child survival, education and child protection, but what appears to be low coverage of the cross-cutting issues of social inclusion, humanitarian action, gender equality, equity and human rights. However, the report noted that, between 2012 and 2015, there was an increase in the share of sectoral evaluations that also addressed gender equality, equity and human rights as key themes. In addition, many sectoral evaluations included some coverage of social inclusion and humanitarian action. Regarding the coverage of humanitarian action, while only two evaluations were focused specifically on humanitarian issues, UNICEF has undertaken many reviews focused on humanitarian issues, some in response to donor requests. Management is confident that the number of evaluations focused on humanitarian issues will increase in the coming years as a result of the initiatives of the Evaluation Office, taken forward in collaboration with the country offices, aimed at boosting the capacity of UNICEF country teams to evaluate humanitarian activities.

9. The recommendations of the review entitled “United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF): Review of development effectiveness, 2012-2015”, which was completed by the Evaluation Office in 2016, and the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 will inform our approach to thematic evaluations going forward.

### **Indicator 3: Types of evaluation conducted**

10. Management is pleased to note that the trend towards fewer impact-level evaluations, which was observed in last year’s report, has been reversed. In 2014, 18 such reviews were carried out compared with 26 in 2015. Impact-level evaluations are methodologically challenging but potentially much more beneficial compared with output-level evaluations. Impact-level evaluations can tell us about the changes in the lives of children, while output-level evaluations confirm only how fully and well UNICEF has delivered outputs, without describing or analysing the eventual results achieved through its actions.

### **Indicator 4: Quality of UNICEF evaluation reports**

11. Although the 2016 annual report shows that the reports submitted in 2015 declined in quality relative to the reports of previous years, the results of the reports submitted in 2016 show a return to the higher quality levels. The Evaluation Office is analysing the reasons for the decline in 2015, with initial analysis suggesting that it is linked to the relative increase in the number of impact-level evaluations, which are methodologically demanding compared with output-level evaluations. The Evaluation Office will further monitor the analysis to confirm this hypothesis. If it is confirmed, additional support will be required going forward to ensure that all types of evaluations reach the required level of quality. Nevertheless, while it is important to maintain quality, the Evaluation Office has indicated that it is important to allow space for innovation and learning. Management looks forward to following up on the results of the Evaluation Office analysis in this regard.

**Indicator 5: Use of evaluation, including management responses**

12. While the 2015 report on the evaluation function for reports submitted in 2014 showed a decline in the number of management responses entered into the Evaluation Management Response system, the number improved significantly, from 79 per cent to 95 per cent, for reports submitted in 2015.

13. The greater concern is the completion of agreed actions. For evaluation reports submitted in 2015, regional and country offices reported that by the end of 2016 only 33 per cent of the agreed actions had been completed and 43 per cent were under implementation. As indicated in the annual report for 2016, there has been significant variation in the implementation of agreed actions across regions. Accordingly, in 2017 management will follow up with regional offices and country offices in which low implementation has been observed to determine the reasons and identify appropriate strategies to improve on this.

**Indicator 6: Corporate spending on evaluation**

14. In response to decision 2016/7, management submitted a plan to the Executive Board at its second regular session in 2016 proposing multiple action points including (a) stronger evaluation planning, budgeting and implementation; (b) improved information systems; and (c) stronger human resource capacities. As it is too early to detect any appreciable impact on evaluation spending, the actual percentage of the budget spent in 2016 on evaluation (0.8 per cent) was unchanged from 2015, although there was a slight increase in the absolute amount spent on evaluation activities, from \$45 million in 2015 to \$50 million in 2016. During 2017, management will continue to monitor the indicator at the regional and country levels to identify areas in which spending on evaluation activities is well below the corporate target, and will seek the reasons for such a lag.

**Indicator 7: Corporate-level evaluations**

15. The corporate-level evaluations, which are listed in the annual report, were carried out by the Evaluation Office in accordance with the plan for global thematic evaluations, 2014-2017, and included global thematic evaluations as well as evaluations of UNICEF humanitarian action and evaluation synthesis studies. Management appreciated these evaluations and prepared management responses to them. A key evaluation synthesis study completed in 2016 was the UNICEF review of development effectiveness, 2012-2015, which is briefly described in section V.

**V. Assessment of the evaluation function**

16. The evaluation function in UNICEF underwent several key assessments in 2016, which management expects will inform a further strengthening of the function.

17. The most important is the external peer review, which was requested by the Executive Board in its decision 2015/10 and is a requirement of the UNICEF evaluation policy. The review was initiated in 2016 and will be completed in 2017. Management looks forward to the report of the assessment, which will also be submitted by the external panel to the Board in 2017.

18. In 2016, the Evaluation Office completed a self-assessment of the evaluation function, which produced evidence that will feed into the external peer review. While the initial findings have been shared with management, management has not formally responded given that it will respond to the external peer review. That said, some of the initial findings of the self-assessment, for example that monitoring and evaluation staff report that they have insufficient time to devote to evaluations, will be addressed as part of the plan to increase spending on evaluation activities to a minimum of 1 per cent of overall programme expenditure.

19. As mentioned above, in 2016 the Evaluation Office commissioned the UNICEF review of development effectiveness, 2012-2015, to consider how effective the organization had been in achieving results for children, as assessed through a sample of 66 evaluations reported in the period 2012-2015. The review included an assessment of the contribution of monitoring and evaluation activities to UNICEF performance and results and an analysis of contributory factors, both positive and negative. Management recognizes these factors and will seek to build upon the insights put forward in the report. The report and the management response are to be presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2017.

20. Finally, the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network review, completed in 2016, includes an assessment of the evaluation function. While on nearly all indicators UNICEF scored “highly satisfactory” or “satisfactory”, its performance on the application of evaluative evidence in the design of new interventions was found to be “unsatisfactory”. Management looks forward to working with the regional and country offices to identify the appropriate corrective action, and will look to the Evaluation Office to monitor and report on progress in this area.

21. UNICEF management continues to be committed to an effective and efficient evaluation function, particularly in light of the key role that evaluation function plays in supporting organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results.

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