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Management response to the annual report for 2018 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

I. Introduction

1. UNICEF management welcomes the annual report for 2018 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2019/14). In accordance with Executive Board decision [2013/13](#), a management response is presented in this report.

2. Based on the request of the Executive Board, future annual reports are to be structured around the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and focus on policy areas and spending as well as the revised evaluation policy. This management response covers the key elements of the evaluation function, including drivers, outputs and outcomes, as presented in the original report.

II. Strengthening the drivers of the UNICEF evaluation function

A. Revised evaluation policy

3. Management notes the endorsement of the revised evaluation policy by the Executive Board in 2018 in its decision [2018/10](#) and applauds the Evaluation Office for its work on the policy. Management appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with the Evaluation Office and noted similar insightful collaboration with Member States on the revised evaluation policy. Management further recognizes the contributions of the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee.

4. UNICEF management welcomes the incorporation of principles, procedures and accountabilities that respond to the purpose of the Evaluation Office in the revised evaluation policy. Management considers that the corporate implementation framework provides UNICEF with a coherent approach that supports the

* [E/ICEF/2019/9](#).



implementation of the policy and includes actions designed to increase the use of evaluation findings and recommendations.

B. Strengthening evaluation planning

5. Management notes that material steps have been taken to implement the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 (E/ICEF/2018/3). These steps include the regional office roadmaps for implementing the evaluation policy and quality assurance measures for country offices and the identification of opportunities for synergy with other United Nations agencies. The steps are anticipated to enhance the implementation of the revised evaluation policy. Management further notes that the new guidance on country-level costed evaluation plans released by the Evaluation Office in early 2018 has already been taken into account in country programme documents presented to the Board in 2018.

6. Considering the review initiated by the Evaluation Office on existing evaluation methodologies among United Nations partners, management looks forward to a strengthened methodological approach in country programme evaluations that will incorporate the link with the plans of partner agencies and with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations at the country level.

C. Governance

7. Evaluation plays a key role in supporting the organization in the delivery of programmes. Management notes that the Evaluation Office has continued to engage key stakeholders, including the Executive Board, in the institutional governance of the evaluation function, to support the implementation of the evaluation policy and to strengthen the work of the Evaluation Office.

8. Management emphasizes the key roles of the independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Director of Evaluation and the independent Evaluation Advisory Panel, and the leadership of the UNICEF Executive Director in providing strategic guidance and direction as well as ensuring the implementation of the evaluation policy. Furthermore, management noted that during 2018, the internal Global Evaluation Committee (GEC), and UNICEF divisional and regional directors continued to be engaged in supporting the evaluation function at the headquarters, regional and country office levels. In this capacity the GEC supported improvement in the evaluation function, including progress on the implementation of management responses, promoting the use of evaluations and ensuring adequate resources for the evaluation function. Management also welcomes the support of the country representatives, country office evaluation specialists and the newly appointed regional evaluation advisors who engage in the evaluation process in ensuring adherence to prescribed norms and standards as outlined in the policy.

9. Management supports the emphasis on collaboration with other United Nations entities and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) for system-wide evaluations and for carrying out joint evaluations and notes the efforts of the Evaluation Office in collaborating with UNEG on strengthening the evaluation network.

D. Systems, guidance and tools

10. Similarly, management commends the Evaluation Office on the development of the new “real-time evaluation plus” approach and the use of evaluability assessments. Management notes the value this approach brought to the critical evaluations done in Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Yemen. Management further anticipates that these enhancements, along with the related guidance and training, will strengthen UNICEF and humanitarian response programmes.

11. Management commends the Evaluation Office for the effort in merging legacy systems and launching the new and integrated evidence information systems integration platform which links planning, monitoring, analysing, reporting and archiving all evidence generation activities together in one system. Management welcomes the enhanced user-experience and the platform’s improved ability to report on key evaluation performance indicators.

E. Resources

12. Management acknowledges the rising demand for high quality and timely evaluations, and notes that in 2018, the geographical coverage of evaluations was broader than ever before. Supporting this level of activity requires strengthening the internal capacity of the evaluation function. UNICEF continues to support the Evaluation Office with the necessary financial and human resources, as demonstrated by the establishment in 2018 of three new regional evaluation advisers. The organization has also committed to two more regional evaluation adviser positions by the mid-term review of the UNICEF integrated budget to ensure that all regional offices will be equipped with an evaluation position.

13. Likewise, the organization is supporting skills development for all staff with responsibility for managing evaluations at the country level, particularly in relation to the implementation of standards and analysis on gender equality, Sustainable Development Goals or humanitarian assistance.

14. Management is pleased to note that the financial resources allocated to the evaluation function at UNICEF have continued to increase, with \$50 million spent on evaluation in 2018. This noted an increase of 0.13 per cent from 0.67 per cent of the UNICEF total programme budget in 2017 to 0.8 per cent in 2018. Management continues to make progress towards achieving the 1 per cent target set out in Executive Board decision [2018/10](#) and the evaluation policy.

F. Partnerships and the promotion of evaluation coherence within the United Nations

15. UNICEF evaluation efforts include strengthening partnerships within the United Nations. Management views with appreciation the initiatives and commitments of the evaluation function to working together with other entities of the United Nations system, particularly the preparation of the evaluation of the common chapter in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 with the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) as requested by the respective Executive Boards. Joint evaluations and discussions at inter-agency levels will offer the necessary coherence for moving forward with the United Nations reform agenda.

16. Management commends the Evaluation Office on multiple inter-agency and evaluation network efforts throughout the year, namely: the evaluations of the Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation and of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage that are anticipated to be published in mid-2019 with UNFPA; a joint evaluation synthesis related to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and, with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, work on various UNEG initiatives; and providing technical and financial support to the inter-agency humanitarian evaluations steering group on two inter-agency humanitarian evaluations. The first evaluation will focus on the collective humanitarian response of the humanitarian country team to the recurring droughts in Ethiopia, and the second on efforts to empower women and girls in humanitarian action.

17. The Evaluation Office was also active at the regional level in supporting the work of the African Union, Ethiopia and the Economic Commission for Africa in organizing a forum on national evaluation capacity development in Africa. Working with key stakeholders, UNICEF regional offices also contributed to evaluation initiatives and in building national evaluation capacity in various countries.

18. Management recognizes related partnering efforts of the evaluation function such as the first-ever Evaluation Week organized in the West and Central Africa region (WCAR) for Lusophone countries in that region. Held in Guinea-Bissau in October 2018, the event gathered government officials, development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia and professional evaluators and culminated in participants signing a national declaration of intent on evaluation and committed to engaging further to enhance the quality of evaluations and evaluation capacity development programmes in the future.

III. Outputs from the UNICEF evaluation function in 2018

A. Evaluation submissions, coverage and quality

19. UNICEF management notes the positive trend reported by the evaluation function regarding the number and coverage of evaluations in 2018. The number of submitted evaluations increased from 96 in 2017 to 107 in 2018 (11 per cent increase) with geographical coverage expanding from 87 per cent in 2017 to 89 per cent in 2018 (2 per cent increase). Evaluation coverage has steadily improved since 2012 and the current coverage includes 120 offices and three regional evaluations (Europe and Central Asia Region, Eastern and Southern Africa Region and WCAR). We anticipate that this trend will continue in 2019, as a result of the enhancements that were introduced, and the financial support provided through the pooled fund.

20. Management notes with appreciation that to date all 104 evaluations submitted have been assessed for quality, and that no reports have been rated as unsatisfactory, with 74 per cent considered satisfactory, 13 per cent highly satisfactory and the remaining as fair. Management also notes that evaluations have covered all areas of the Strategic Plan with 83 per cent covering the cross-cutting themes of humanitarian evaluations and gender equality and with Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives clocking the most evaluations.

21. Regarding the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the UNICEF aggregated average for 2017 (6.15) was,

unfortunately, below the target. We strongly encourage the Evaluation Office to include among their 2019 plans the development of gender equality evaluation guidance and an assessment of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan.

B. Knowledge Management

22. Management stresses the commitment of UNICEF to effective knowledge management and its investments therein. We anticipate that the organizational enterprise content management initiative will support the implementation of evaluations by providing a central source of information accessible to all users of the organization.

23. We welcome efforts (webinars, events and periodic papers) by the evaluation function to promote learning and sharing of knowledge and thus improve the understanding and approaches used in evaluation practices at UNICEF. We expect these efforts to result in UNICEF personnel becoming better equipped to undertake quality evaluations.

24. Management also hopes that initiatives, such as the Learning Day, hosted for the first time in 2018, set an example at all levels of the organization to foster discussions on evolving trends in evaluation and lessons learnt.

C. National evaluation capacity development

25. Management endorses the continued efforts of the Evaluation Office to support countries in creating the appropriate environment for evaluations and in improving local capacities for evidence-based reporting related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

26. Management recognizes the engagement undertaken by the Evaluation Office during 2018 to strengthen partnerships. Management further applauds the leadership exercised by UNICEF in inter-agency and global partnerships for joint national evaluation capacity development activities, such as the EVALSDGs global network, EvalPartners management group and the global parliamentarians event EvalColombo2018 which resulted in the endorsement of the Colombo Declaration and through which stakeholders renewed their commitment to more effective national evaluation capacity development.

IV. Outcomes from the UNICEF evaluation function in 2018

A. Management responses and public disclosure

27. Management appreciates that all evaluations were made available to the Executive Board and general public in 2018. Management responses were provided for all evaluations (100 per cent) reported in 2017. This represents an improvement compared to the management responses in the annual report 2017 (97 per cent). Similarly, the rate of completion of the management response actions showed progress, with 52 per cent of actions completed compared to 46 per cent in the previous year.

B. Use of evaluation evidence

28. Management welcomes the findings of the study undertaken by the Evaluation Office on how evaluations influence the organization. We are fully aware that evidence from evaluations is a reliable source for influencing positive change in the organization. We are pleased to receive confirmation that evaluations are being used to support change, confirm programme effectiveness (e.g. cash transfers programmes in Nigeria and Togo) and challenge how problems are understood and addressed by UNICEF programmes at the country level (e.g. water, sanitation and hygiene programmes in Laos and Mali).

29. We further recognize the contributions of evaluations in strengthening the coherence of interventions in the local context. This was the case in the formative evaluation of child protection systems strengthening in Myanmar conducted by UNICEF, which led to the development of a comprehensive policy framework, from national legislation to guidelines for implementation.

C. Corporate evaluations

30. Management notes with appreciation the work of the Evaluation Office in initiating and finalizing several corporate evaluations during 2018. Management reaffirms its support to all efforts by the organization to address the recommendations emanating from these evaluations.

Innovation in UNICEF

31. Management notes that the evaluation of innovation in UNICEF found that implementation of innovation is falling short, with a number of barriers being noted: risk aversion, lack of clarity regarding the staffing model and contrasting opinions on the optimal balance between focusing on tested technologies and those at early stages. Management is committed to developing a shared strategic vision to innovation, making the necessary changes to move innovation towards a means of achieving results for children, and using a portfolio management approach to ensure the alignment of resources with strategic priorities and comparative advantages.

Level 3 response to the cholera epidemic in Yemen

32. In response to the evaluation, UNICEF strengthened efforts to prevent and respond to acute watery diarrhoea and cholera in Yemen. Following recommendations from the evaluation conducted, partnerships were established and 4.6 million doses of oral cholera vaccine were procured. The strengthening of preparedness and monitoring was possible through a number of critical actions that were initiated immediately. The follow-up of the response will be tracked through the Yemen Emergency Management Team under the leadership of the UNICEF Global Emergency Coordinator for Yemen.

Out-of-School Children Initiative

33. Management notes that the formative evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) presented to the UNICEF Executive Board concluded that the initiative has helped shape national priorities and formulate robust sector plans. Management further noted that the initiative was evaluated as less effective in supporting

implementation and that the evaluation recommended revising the theory of change and methodological framework of the initiative. In accordance with Executive Board decision [2019/05](#) requesting the provision of responses to the recommendations included in the OOSCI evaluation, management will continue to support the implementation of related action plans and provide updates accordingly.

Drinking water supply programming in rural areas and small towns, 2006–2016

34. This evaluation was conducted with the aim of identifying opportunities to optimize UNICEF contributions to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation. We note the resulting contributions made to rural water supply (RWS) along with the recommended opportunities of improvement in partial delivery of commitments and the need for a holistic and systematic approach in RWS programming. Management will focus on a more systematic programming approach, as well as on scalable service delivery models for rural and small-town water supply in moving towards achieving universal access to water by 2030.

Response to Rohingya refugee crisis

35. Management notes the findings of the real-time evaluation led by the Evaluation Office on the response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. We noted the commendable achievements highlighted in terms of scaling up programmatic intervention, advocacy efforts and service delivery in this humanitarian response. Management is strongly committed to working on the recommended areas of improvements related to strategy, context analysis and planning, coordination, protection and advocacy and knowledge management and data.

D. Examples of evaluations undertaken by country offices

Cambodia—Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund

36. Management welcomes the findings resulting from the evaluation of the Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund. Management notes the evaluation found that the partnership was adequately aligned with the relevant capacity-development strategies and that the Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund has achieved the related outcomes at the individual and institutional level. Management acknowledges the opportunities for improvement related to efficiency and sustainability and integration of equity and gender equality.

37. Management appreciates the relevance of the evaluation to current and future UNICEF programming on systems strengthening in the education sector at national and subnational levels. The evaluation has been used to inform the design of Phase III of the Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund and as a reference for other programmes in Cambodia and globally. The plan is to use the evaluation as an advocacy tool and to engage with other development partners in the sector.

India—Community-based disaster risk reduction and school safety programme in Bihar

38. Management appreciates the findings resulting from this evaluation that recognize the programme as relevant and timely in disaster risk reduction and that it has improved knowledge on rights and entitlements of the community in relation to disaster reduction. Among the findings of the report, management also notes that the

community-based disaster risk reduction and school safety programme in Bihar has been effective in engaging vulnerable communities with Governments and other partners on disaster risk reduction. Management recognizes that more efforts must be made in terms of the inclusion of women in the planning process and expects that the programme can be expanded beyond its original location.

Haiti—Hurricane Mathew

39. Management welcomes positive attributes identified by the evaluation that describe the UNICEF response as rapid, appropriate and effective. Management also appreciates the opportunity given by the evaluation to improve emergency preparedness towards a better measured response in terms of geographical coverage, availability of resources and the development of a local network. Management has approved with some reservation the recommendations and has not accepted two recommendations for which action plans are beyond the mandate of UNICEF and involve all United Nations entities responding to the emergency. Management has already prepared a plan to address high priority recommendations and is committed to ensure that recommendations involving other United Nations partners and CSOs are included in the process of preparedness and emergency response for the annual hurricane season in Haiti. Similarly, management will bring the relevant strategic recommendations for input into the 2019 review of the UNDAF to the attention of the United Nations country team.

Zimbabwe—Support for education

40. Management welcomes the conclusions, recommendations and useful lessons learnt as identified by the evaluation. Conclusions indicated that in spite of the challenging context, the Global Partnership for Education fund and Education Development Fund (EDF) achieved remarkable success in delivering the expected outputs relevant to the needs of the sector. Eight recommendations were issued, two of which were not accepted and one which was partially agreed to. The recommendations included: ensuring that development partners play a more strategic role and ensuring that equity is central to the school financing policy, among others.

41. The EDF steering committee reviewed the recommendations and accepted all but one recommendation. Responses have been provided considering what can realistically be done within the operating context.

V. Conclusion

42. Management recognizes that evaluations are influencing a positive change in the organization and reaffirms its support to concerted efforts to improve the implementation of actions throughout the organization during 2019, with emphasis on those regions with the least rate of completion.

43. Management also acknowledges the rising demands for more improvement and accountability in UNICEF interventions and operations at all levels of the organization and welcomes the work of the Evaluation Office to achieve this purpose. We are fully committed to continuing to strengthen the evaluation function.