Opening remarks

H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale, President of the UNICEF Executive Board

Delegates, partners, colleagues.

Good morning and warm welcome to the 2019 Evaluation Learning Day, which is an opportunity to pause and reflect, and to learn from each other about what works and what does not.

As we forge ahead with the implementation of 2030 Agenda and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021, I am very pleased to open this Evaluation learning event, hoping it will allow for open and frank discussions on the emerging issues in key evaluation topics and be an occasion to share lessons and good practices among UNICEF staff and partners.

In addition to presiding over deliberations at the Executive Board, I had the chance to visit several programs on the ground this year. It was an opportunity for me to observe, at first hand, the complex environment in which we operate and the multifaceted dimensions of problems that UNICEF and partners are dealing with: humanitarian situations are on the rise, climate change is impacting millions of lives, malnutrition, epidemics and poor quality education persist, and emerging challenges like growing urbanization, mass migration and new types of violence are affecting children everywhere.

These complex challenges mean that policies and programs have to be adapted in a permanent way, so that the rights of children are fulfilled everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances. I must say that, on the ground, I have, indeed, observed the fast pace at which change is occurring. Still, continuous learning is necessary. Therefore, evaluation is crucial. Evaluations, when undertaken well and on time, and if responsive to the needs of children and of organizations, can help shape the evolution of plans and programs in various contexts.

For us, at the Executive Board, evaluation is a source of insight that we have as we oversee the work of UNICEF. Without evaluation, it is difficult to understand what is truly working or not. Without evaluation, we will struggle to assess and enhance progress in achieving the SDGs and fulfilling children’s rights everywhere, as well as the broader principles and values of the UN.

That is why evaluation is on every single agenda of the Executive Board. That is why we look forward into the report of the Evaluation Director at every single session of the Board. And that is why we keep a close eye on the performance of the evaluation function –at the corporate, regional and country level. Without the evaluation, we, the Board and other levels of management in UNICEF, will not have adequate evidence to support delivery for children in a timely manner.

Colleagues, I would like to underscore three crucial variables, as we use evaluation evidence. These are: coverage, quality and timeliness of evaluations. To learn about what
progress is being made, evaluation must seek to cover the scope of the organization’s work, of good quality and must be responsive in terms of being ready when we need the information. We expect to see more evaluations in the goal areas and countries in which UNICEF works. We would also like to hear about how country offices are progressing in the implementation of the Costed Evaluation Plans, which are part of the country programs that the Executive Board approves.

In this vein, I welcome the theme for your discussion today: Evaluation for Decision-making. I am glad we have the opportunity to exchange ideas about how to improve the important link between evaluation and decision-making.

I would like to congratulate UNICEF, the Director of Evaluation and their entire evaluation function, for convening such an important meeting. I am happy that my fellow Board Members, Member States, UNICEF staff from headquarters, Regional and Country Offices, other UN agencies, government, academia and civil society partners, are present to join the discussion.

In 2018, we approved the new evaluation policy for UNICEF that outlines the key priorities on evaluation coverage, quality, use, governance, funding, partnerships and national evaluation capacity development. The new Evaluation Policy seeks to ensure that the organization and its partners use evaluation for learning, continuous improvement and strengthened accountability in pursuit of results outlined in the 2030 Agenda and the Strategic Plan. Your focus today on the country level is therefore an important one.

To ensure that the UNICEF evaluation function delivers on its core mandate, the Executive Board approved the setting up of the Evaluation Pool fund that seeks to supplement the resources that the organization commits to evaluation. This is to support the commitment that UNICEF has made -that it will dedicate 1% of its programme resources to evaluation activities-. The Executive Board will continue to support the implementation and monitoring of the evaluation policy.

I encourage all to take advantage of this event to learn from each other and exchange ideas that you will take back to your offices. For us, at the Board, 2019 is a particularly important year for children all over the world. It marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As we continue to commemorate this anniversary, I wish to remind you, the evaluation community, that you have an obligation to help build on what is working, and to modify what is not working.

As you work, always know that the UNICEF Executive Board is behind you. We need you continue to succeed in your work – so we can have the needed evidence to oversee the organization. Countries and partners need you to excel in your work and to connect in a timely manner –so services are delivered in a proper manner to fulfill the rights of children everywhere. Please continue to count on our support.

I wish you success as you reflect and learn from each other today, knowing that it will help UNICEF continue its journey to deliver effectively on attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and the Strategic Plan targets towards the realization of the rights of every child, everywhere, and leave no child behind.

I thank you for your attention.