

EVALUATION OFFICE

# Guidance for Management response to evaluations

ENHANCING CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT FOR THE STRATEGIC USE OF  
EVALUATIONS

JANUARY 2016

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children

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## Introduction

The purpose of this internal guidance on Management Response is to strengthen the use of evaluation by UNICEF management and, to the maximum extent possible, its partners, thus fostering greater ownership over the process of change and ultimately ensuring accountability for results. It does so by facilitating strategic engagement on evaluation findings and appropriate follow-up actions through a formal process that includes:

- Holistic consideration of the evaluation report;
- An indication whether management agrees, partially agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the evaluation report;
- A written formulation of time-bound action-plans, and those responsible for ensuring their implementation; and
- Implementation and monitoring of the planned actions.

The Global Evaluation Management Response Tracking System documents management's response and follow-up actions to all evaluations managed by UNICEF, including joint evaluations. It provides a written record of what actions are planned in response to evaluations and what is actually done. In this sense, it not only strengthens organizational accountability for results, but also transparency in the process of determining how results will be achieved.

## Justification

Several corporate decisions have been taken committing UNICEF to respond to evaluations in an appropriate manner. The UNICEF Evaluation Policy states that "Country Representatives, Regional Directors and, as appropriate, Divisional Directors will ensure that recommendations are fully considered with concerned partners, that accepted recommendations are acted on, and that annual reports include a statement on the status of evaluation follow-up". The 2008 UNICEF Executive Board's decision on the Evaluation Policy requests "preparation and availability of management responses for all evaluation reports" and systematic incorporation of evaluation findings and recommendations "into all relevant policy and strategic documents, including country programme documents". 2009, 2010 and 2011 Executive Board decisions restated such a request.

Management response is a formal mechanism that helps ensure that evaluations are used, contributing to organizational effectiveness, learning and accountability.

## Important factors for a good Management Response

### 1. Understanding when a Management Response is needed

A Management Response is required for every [evaluation](#) where UNICEF has had partial or complete decision-making power<sup>1</sup> in the evaluation process, and/or UNICEF has fully or partially financed the evaluation. This requirement extends to evaluations that UNICEF manages directly or jointly with partners. Please take note of the definition of an evaluation in the link above as management responses are required only for reports that meet the criteria.

The only case a Management Response is not required by UNICEF offices is when UNICEF had a role that does not rise to the level of decision-making power. i.e: a) UNICEF sits only on the advisory committee or reference group in which opinions are offered but the decisions are taken by others; and b) UNICEF has been consulted as a stakeholder but the decisions after the consultation were taken by others.

In the case of UNDAF evaluations, UNICEF should facilitate, in cooperation with UNCT members, a joint management response. UNICEF is accountable to develop a management response only for recommendations directed to UNICEF (individually or as a joint partner together with other stakeholders). If no recommendations are addressed specifically to UNICEF, or if the development of a joint Management response is not possible, UNICEF Office should develop a

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<sup>1</sup> Key elements of decision-making power are: a) whether or not to undertake an evaluation; b) evaluation's objectives; c) approval of the terms of reference; d) budget; e) selection of evaluation team; e) approval of the actual methodologies to be employed; f) quality assurance of the evaluation process and products; g) acceptance of the deliverables

Management Response and explain in the “Overall response to evaluation” why a full fledged Management response was not developed, and no actions planned.

## **2. Supporting the Management Responses of partners, including Country-led evaluations**

In these cases where a Management Response by UNICEF offices is not required, UNICEF may be asked by those that managed the evaluation to support the development of their own Management Response (i.e. by offering technical advice) or respond to recommendations addressed to UNICEF. If the UNICEF office decides to support or take action in response, it still does not need to upload the response in the UNICEF tracking system. In the case of Country-led evaluations managed by UNICEF partners, UNICEF should always offer technical assistance to develop the Partner’s Management Response. This, in addition to strengthening national evaluation capacities, maximizes the use of evaluations to influence policy, programme and projects relevant to children.

## **3. Understanding roles and accountabilities within UNICEF**

Managers are those with the power to take decisions as a result of the evaluation. The types of actions that might be needed determine which managers must be involved. Responses often require a combination of financial, human resource, planning, implementation, partnership, advocacy, M&E, and communications actions, and should involve the appropriate managers.

Within UNICEF, there are three main accountabilities, which may engage different people. These are:

- Leadership to ensure the Management response is developed and implemented: this is the responsibility of the Head of Office.
- Development and implementation of actions is the responsibility of Programme Chiefs responsible for the programme evaluated.
- Coordination of development and implementation of the management response, and overall technical support: this is the responsibility of the monitoring and evaluation specialist unless the Representative designates someone else.

The advice of the Regional M&E Chiefs should be sought when the office is having trouble understanding how to manage the Management Response process.

## **4. Understanding the role of external stakeholders in responding to UNICEF-led evaluations**

In the case a UNICEF-led evaluation has recommendations addressed to external stakeholders, it’s important to make the distinction between UNICEF partners bound through partnership agreements, and other stakeholders without any formal agreement with UNICEF. In the former case, UNICEF should solicit the partner engagement within the framework of the partnership agreement. In the latter, UNICEF should solicit their voluntary engagement in the Management Response process. However, if they choose not to commit to actions that UNICEF feels are needed, they cannot be forced but this information can be noted in the MR.

One key indirect external stakeholder should be engaged at the proper moment. All completed evaluations are independently quality rated by a firm external to UNICEF. This firm can provide a rating within 10 working days ordinarily, once the evaluation is uploaded to the Evaluation and Research Database. This quality assessment can help the stakeholders have confidence to accept or reject major elements of the evaluation. Offices should upload their completed evaluation (and inform Ada Ocampo at the Evaluation Office) onto the [Evaluation and Research Database](#) within 15 working days of receiving the completed report, in order to receive the results of the quality review given that they still have 3-4 weeks to complete the MR.

## **5. Planning for the proper time frame**

Management responses should be developed with two key periods in mind:

- a. The first 60 days after the report is delivered. In this period the office should try to accomplish three things:
  - Fully disseminate the report and stimulate stakeholder interest
  - Develop a clear view of the quality of the report

- Prepare the actual Management Response describing all actions to be undertaken.
- b. The first year after the report is delivered. The Management Response is only required to cover a 1 year period. Offices are welcome to add actions beyond year 1 but this is for their use and need not to be entered into the tracking system. The 1 year period is the maximum that actions can realistically be predicted, and it forces the team to consider practical actions actually implementable in a year.

Many offices have noted that it can be impossible to project within 60 days what the full response should be or can be over the year. This is particularly true with partners that are insistent in combining Management Response discussions with already planned consultations. The Management Response can be pragmatic in these cases. It can include conditional statements or future milestones where more complete parts of the response will be determined. For example, these are acceptable actions within a Management Response:

- At the mid-year or end-year Review with government, the implications of the evaluation for new training of service providers will be reviewed, and any agreed actions put into the annual work plan.
- If, as is now projected, a national consultation is held around the poverty reduction strategy in mid 20XX, the findings of the report will be shared with stakeholders and advocacy conducted to increase attention to children and their communities as recommended in the evaluation.

These future actions and conditional commitments must be entered into the tracking system along with concrete near-term action, and updates made later about what actually occurred.

## 6. Understanding what needs to be responded to and the response options

There are two things to be responded to, which are discussed in turn:

- a. Recommendations of the evaluation team. Offices are obligated to respond to the recommendations placed in the report. The options for response are:
  - **Accepted**, meaning Fully Accepted: the Office feels this recommendation should be completely implemented, and the response should show how, by whom and by when that is to be done.
  - **Partially Accepted**: the Office feels part of the recommendation is in error and will not be responding to it, but accepts and will take action for the other part. Note that the reason for a partial acceptance must be given.
  - **Not Accepted**: the Office feels the recommendation is based on inaccurate findings or does not address the findings in the correct way. The reason for non-acceptance must be stated.

In the case the evaluation team includes a very large number of recommendations, an office is not obligated to respond to each one. Instead, it should ask the consultant to prioritize the recommendations, and then limit the response to the most important 5-10 recommendations. The consultant should be offered the chance to prioritize to avoid the office picking only easy recommendations to respond to.

- b. Key Findings that are not covered by consultant recommendations: For many reasons the consultants may choose not to address certain findings with follow-up recommendations. The two most likely are that they are limiting the recommendations to a priority few or they do not understand the programming context well enough to know how important the Finding is. The office should weigh all the evidence in the report and judge if additional responses are needed. In effect, the office is adding its own recommendations. When this occurs, the Office only needs to describe the additional action it intends to take.

## An overall calendar of the Management Response process

### Stage 1: Include Management Response within the Terms of Reference during the evaluation planning phase

Preparation for Management Response starts when an evaluation is planned. Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR) should clearly state the intended use by the intended users (how the evaluation process and results will be used and by whom). The ToRs should suggest [but not limit to] a maximum number, and should clearly ask the evaluation team to prioritize the top 5 to 10 for action. It should state that a management response will be done afterwards.

It should be remembered that the Terms of Reference are not only the overall directions for the consultants. They are a management overview and contract for all that will participate. The TORs can include accountabilities and deliverables beyond what the consultants will produce. It is good practice to state in the TORs who will lead the Management Response process, and it is possible to attach this reference note as an annex to the TOR.

## **Stage 2: Arriving at well-designed recommendations during the implementation phase**

During the report writing phase, the evaluation team should pay close attention to formulating good recommendations. The following are most likely to lead to good recommendations:

- Key stakeholders are consulted during the development of recommendations, which heightens programmatic and technical relevance.
- An appropriate sequencing in the implementation of recommendations is noted, especially when one part of the response is contingent upon a prior action being completed.
- The recommendations clarify where change is needed to solve problems and also where positive aspects should be continued or enlarged.
- Recommendations are referenced at the point where the finding evidence and analysis is made, to show the logical connection. The full recommendations can be fully presented in a concluding chapter, but referencing them within the document is helpful.
- The specific organizations that the recommendation is directed to should be noted, so there is no mistake about who should respond. It is not necessary to specify who within the organization needs to respond.

UNICEF offices, as well as key stakeholders, should review the evaluation report and process in its entirety, and comment on it, with particular attention to the draft recommendations. However, after the advice is given, it is up to the evaluation team to decide to accept it or not.

## **Stage 3: Developing the Management Response through a formal process**

Designating lead persons or units and placing the Management Response process firmly in the managerial calendar [e.g. CMT] is imperative. Announcing it to counterparts and advocating their engagement in the Management Response by UNICEF leaders signal that it is important. Developing a timetable and putting it into necessary event agendas creates the space for consideration. Recording the results of the Management Response discussions and, where possible, getting formal acceptance, creates an expectation of follow-up.

Note that the formality need not be overly rigid. For example, how to record the Management Response agreements and get stakeholder acceptance can take many forms. The UNICEF format is an option, but simpler possibilities like a memo are acceptable.

## **Stage 4: Registering the Management Response in the UNICEF Global Evaluation Management Response Tracking System (EMR)**

The office can use its own management tools to track accountabilities and action taken. However, there is a single standardized global system for tracking management responses. Here is the technical [guide on how to use](#) the Global Evaluation Management Response Tracking System (EMR). Kindly note that the guide now contains two sections, the first section is related to the Evaluation and Research Database (ERDB) and the second section is related to the EMR.

Once a promised action is considered no longer relevant or valid due to a changed context, it can be canceled or reformulated in the system. When changes are made, the office is asked to prove a clear justification.

## **Stage 5: Implementing and monitoring the Management Response**

The designated units or organizations implement actions by the expected completion date. Progress on management response implementation is reviewed at Office Management Team meetings on a quarterly basis, where any necessary update and adjustment is discussed and decided. The office should register updates in the tracking system quarterly and

should attach any documentary evidence on the progress of actions. The management response monitoring should continue until all the actions are taken or cancelled.

## **Stage 6: Global tracking and verification of Management Response implementation**

The Performance Management System of UNICEF has included a dashboard on Evaluation (see Annex). Within this are indicators related to Management Response. The Key Performance Indicators shown in the dashboard are the following:

- % and number of Evaluation reports submitted to the Global Evaluation Database with Management Response uploaded to the Global Management Response tracking system
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management) completed
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management) underway
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management) not started
- % of actions referring to evaluation reports of two previous years (for example, recommendations presented in 2010 reports to be implemented in 2012) still open. Cancelled actions will not be taken into consideration as “still open”

This information is available to all offices in real time through the Performance Management tools linked to Vision (i.e. the dashboard). The Evaluation Office, in cooperation with Regional Offices, tracks Management Responses as a key corporate indicator. The results are shared with the Global Management Team; the Global Evaluation Committee, the Executive Board, and Regional Directors.

Verification of what is claimed in the tracking system can be initiated in three ways:

- Through a request from the Regional Office, based on information in the dashboard or in a communication from HQ.
- By a request from the HQ Evaluation Office. This will normally be linked to a desire to identify good practices.
- Through the normal procedures of the Office of Internal Audit (OIA). OIA is allowed to verify the existence and implementation of the management response during scheduled office audits.

### **Additional information**

For additional information, guidance and feedback, please use the following resources:

- Recommended starting point: the UNICEF [Intranet page on Management Responses](#) and related pages on the Dissemination and Use of evaluations
- Your Regional M&E Chief
- The Evaluation Office via the [evalhelpdesk@unicef.org](mailto:evalhelpdesk@unicef.org)

## UNICEF Evaluation Management Response Template

**Evaluation title:**

**Region:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Office:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation Year:** *(Please note the date should be the date of the report and not the year the information is entered onto the system)*

**Person-in-charge for Follow-up to Management Response:**

**Overall response to the evaluation:** *Include here Senior Management general impression on the process and outcomes of the evaluation, adequacy of evidence collected, and reasonableness of and the concurrence with findings. Were there shortfalls or limitations in the process and/outcomes? Are there any additional insights not articulated in the recommendations?*

**Planned use of evaluation:** *Include here what's the process to facilitate the intended use by the intended users, focusing on how evaluation findings will affect implementation of the programme and contribute to evidence-based decision making*

**Allowed Editor:** *Include here name/s of person/s who will edit the Management Response in the EMR Tracker*

### RECOMMENDATIONS and ACTIONS:

#### Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 1:

#### Management Response: (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree):

#### If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:

Actions planned	Responsible Office	Responsible Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents

#### Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 2:

#### Management Response: (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree)

#### If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:

Actions planned	Responsible Office	Responsible Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents

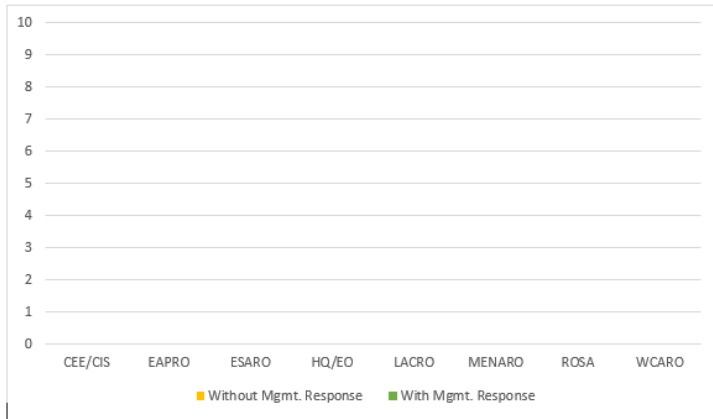
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## Decentralized Evaluation Function – Key Performance Indicator Dashboard

Date:

### A. 2014 Evaluation Reports Submitted with Management response uploaded to the Global Tracking System

2014 - Submitted with Mgmt. Response



Source: [Global Evaluation Database](#) and [Global Management Response \(EMR\) Tracking System](#) and [Live Insight Global Dashboard Evaluation Overview](#)

### B. Global Quality of 2014 Evaluations



Source: Geros and [Live Insight Global Dashboard Evaluation Overview](#)



**C. Global Implementation of 2014 Management Responses**



Source: [Global Management Response \(EMR\) Tracking System](#) and [Live Insight Global Dashboard Evaluation Overview](#)

**D. Implementation of 2011 Management Responses \*\*\***

Regions	Actions Mgt's. Committed	% Completed	% Underway	% Not Started	% of 2013 Open
CEECIS					
EAPRO					
ESARO					
MENARO					
ROSA					
TACRO					
WCARO					
<b>Total</b>					

Source: [Global Management Response \(EMR\) Tracking System](#) and [Live Insight Global Dashboard Evaluation Overview by Region](#)