Evaluation in UNICEF

Is UNICEF performing well? How do we know? Evaluation in UNICEF sets out to provide answers. It provides timely and objective information on UNICEF’s activities to improve the well-being of children and women. It supports transparency and accountability and provides UNICEF with reliable evidence for learning, decision-making, advocacy and performance improvement.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) strives to build a world where the rights of every child are realized. Through its policies, programmes and advocacy, the organization promotes children’s well-being worldwide by combatting poverty, violence, disease and discrimination. It acts at the grass-roots through partners. In 2013, delivery of UNICEF’s mission was supported by 11,767 staff members and an expenditure of US$ 4.2 billion.

Across UNICEF, various kinds of evaluation are carried out including programme, country/regional, institutional performance, global thematic and joint evaluations, in both humanitarian and development settings. Around 100 evaluations are produced every year.

Evaluation Policy

The 2013 Evaluation Policy defines evaluation as a shared function within UNICEF, with key roles distributed across senior leaders and oversight bodies, heads of offices, technical evaluation staff and sectoral programme staff. The headquarters-based central Evaluation Office serves as steward of the evaluation function, steering the development of evaluation policy, strategy and systems, including evaluation quality assurance processes. Its director reports to UNICEF’s Executive Board through an annual report on the evaluation function, which includes information on selected evaluations.

The Evaluation Office focuses on the promotion of an enabling environment for evaluation and providing ready access to evaluation information. It also commissions independent global thematic evaluations, conducted mainly by external consultants, and undertakes evaluation capacity development within and outside the organization.

Most of UNICEF’s evaluation work takes place at the decentralized level (see Snapshot, overleaf). Together with programme countries, UNICEF country offices commission most UNICEF evaluation work. Country and regional level evaluation activities also include developing nationally/regionally specific evaluation strategies, engaging in partnerships for evaluation and supporting national evaluation capacity development.

For more information, visit www.unicef.org/evaluation/
Evaluation Planning

For the period 2014-2017, an evaluation plan was prepared by the Evaluation Office, listing global thematic evaluations reflecting the strategic priorities of the organization. This work programme is submitted to the governing body for information and is available online (see Box on Resources). The selection of corporate evaluations (including evaluation syntheses and methodological reviews) followed a consultative process.

At the decentralized level, UNICEF's regional and country offices currently prepare annual monitoring and evaluation plans which are approved at those levels. Following a recent decision by the UNICEF Executive Board (February 2014), costed evaluation plans will now accompany every Country Programme Document presented to the Board.

Stakeholder Involvement

Promoting stakeholder involvement in evaluation is a key aspect of UNICEF's evaluation work, with a view to enhancing ownership and use of evaluation findings and recommendations. UNICEF aims to set up reference groups for all major evaluations and ensure that all voices, including those of the most vulnerable groups, are heard in evaluation exercises. The My M&E website, a partnership platform initiated by UNICEF, includes learning modules on involving and engaging various stakeholders from all levels at each stage of an evaluation.

Promoting National Evaluation Capacity Development

UNICEF places strong emphasis on developing national evaluation capacity, which includes not only strengthening the evaluation systems of national governments but also those of civil society partners. Various guidance materials including a conceptual framework for national evaluation capacity development are publicly available. UNICEF has also organized a series of webinars and online trainings on equity-focused evaluations open to internal and external audiences.

Quality Assurance

UNICEF’s Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) is a tool for assessing the quality of decentralized and central evaluation reports along various dimensions. Stakeholder analysis is included as a section in the assessment along with equity, gender and human rights dimensions. These quality assessments have been carried out by an independent external company since 2009 and are reported on in UNICEF’s annual evaluation report.
Use of Evaluation

UNICEF evaluation reports are available online through an evaluation database which is searchable by date, country, region and thematic area. Efforts are made to extract lessons from evaluations and communicate these within and outside the organization in the form of information briefs, abstracts, workshops and meetings with senior management, staff and stakeholders.

Within UNICEF, Management Responses to evaluations are issued by the head of the unit responsible for the activities evaluated (see Box). These responses are managed through the use of a Management Response Matrix (MRM) as well as an Action Plan (AP). Both management and the central Evaluation Office monitor the implementation of recommendations. Quarterly monitoring reports are sent to the chief executive and senior management.

Evaluation - A Shared Responsibility

The decentralized nature of the evaluation function is a reflection of UNICEF's commitment to spread an evaluation culture throughout the organization and its work with partners. Designated UNICEF staff in regional and country offices dedicate time to monitoring and evaluation activities.

A number of training courses are available to UNICEF staff on Results-based Management and on Monitoring and Evaluation. Extensive guidance material is available on UNICEF’s intranet, much of it tailored specifically to UNICEF’s needs. The My M&E web portal with its various guidance and training materials, toolkits and other evaluation resources is also widely used within the organization.

Management response to evaluations

The aim of the management response mechanism is to strengthen the use of evaluation by UNICEF management, stakeholders and, to the maximum extent possible, its partners. The goal is to foster greater ownership over the process of change and accountability for results.

The management response process facilitates 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, with assigned responsibilities for implementation; and
- Implementation and monitoring of the planned actions.

Evaluating as One – Working Together in the UN System

UNICEF has provided leadership and support to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), not only at the headquarters level, but also through several regional initiatives and through United Nations country team monitoring and evaluation working groups. UNICEF participates actively in UNEG work and contributes funding and technical inputs to key UNEG efforts. UNEG guidance materials are promoted for use within UNICEF. Additionally, UNICEF continues to support joint/multi-agency evaluations at both global and country levels.

Resources

Evaluation and good practices website:
- www.unicef.org/evaluation/

Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2013):

Plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017:

Evaluation and research database:
- www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/
The purpose of this brochure is to provide an introduction to evaluation in UNICEF and to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, within UNICEF and between UNICEF and its partners. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the organization. For more information, please contact the Evaluation Office.