Draft revised evaluation policy of UNICEF

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Informal briefing in advance of the annual session of the
Executive Board 2023
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Item 10: Draft revised evaluation policy of UNICEF
Reference document: UNICEF/2023/EB/11
Background

Fixed function, evolving alongside its context

Evaluation function remains constant, but evolves with the organization and its operating context

Main purposes of a UNICEF evaluation policy

1. Reassure all stakeholders that we are following established international norms and standards and thus can be regarded as being well positioned to fulfil our organizational learning and accountability role through relevant, credible and useful independent evaluations

2. Demonstrate how we will apply these established norms and standards within our specific organizational context

3. Ensure consistently high adherence to established international norms and standards, with the highly decentralized structure and culture of UNICEF

4. Maximize clarity of expectations and roles and responsibilities for the function and for the implementation of the policy

Commits to a 2022 independent review and subsequent review and revision of the 2018 UNICEF evaluation policy (Para 68)
Background
Processes completed on schedule, in line with Executive Board expectations

- Executive Board updated on Independent Peer Review and policy review and revision process in February 2023


- Zero-draft revised policy shared for internal comment (3 Feb-20 Mar); feedback incorporated into current draft
Overall approach
Extensive and Inclusive

Evaluations/Reviews/Assessments

Desk review of other documents
- Discussions and decisions of the Executive Board
- Annual Reports of the UNICEF Evaluation Function
- Relevant Joint Inspection Unit reports

Analysis of existing data
- Administrative, monitoring, external quality assurance

Comparative analysis
- 5 United Nations organizations
- 1 international financial institution
- 2 governmental agencies

Surveys
- UNICEF evaluation staff
- UNICEF evaluation users
- Executive Board members

Internal consultations
- Global Evaluation Committee members and teams
- Evaluation staff at all levels
- Briefings/Q&A sessions with both groups

Executive Board consultations
- Separate focus group discussions with each of 5 regional groups

Audit Advisory Committee advice
- Feedback provided to Executive Director

Identified good practice
- Examples culled from evaluation staff and users across the organization
Identification of challenges, risks, opportunities that need to be strengthened through practical and realistic policy solutions, rather than “fixing what isn’t broken” or enshrining in policy what is better addressed through other means (e.g., day-to-day practice, organizational culture).

Firm grounding of all revisions in a mindset of proposing what we think needs to be done to achieve the end goal in mind, rather than what is popular with any individual stakeholder group.

Systematic and balanced analysis of multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative input, rather than defaulting to (or reconciling) individual preferences or relying on “faith-based” guesses to diagnose and address issues.

Clear outcome-level goal in view – to strengthen the function to help maximize organizational results – rather than merely wordsmithing or revising for the sake of revising.

One end goal in mind: ensuring that the policy enables the function to fulfil its dual learning and accountability role in order help UNICEF and its partners achieve better results for every child everywhere, as per the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Draft revised policy represents an incremental revision embodying both significant continuity with and change from the 2018 policy.

All revisions put forward are based on a clear and explicit problem statement that a policy revision can help resolve.

The specific combination of continuity and change is geared toward a singular goal: strengthening the evaluation function so that it is ideally positioned to fulfil its organizational learning and accountability role, and thus help UNICEF and its partners (including the Executive Board) achieve the best results possible for children in the Decade of Action.
## Overall approach

### Independent Peer Review of the UNICEF evaluation function – Key findings, recommendations and status

### Independence
- Policy and guidance documents give high visibility.
- Stakeholders strongly support the independence principle.
- Global independence has improved and should continue.
- Risks to independence found at the decentralized level.

### Credibility
- GEROS data suggests strong quality and geographic coverage.
- Evaluations are seen as credible.
- Investments in resources have boosted credibility.
- To boost credibility, prioritize strategic goals and evidence gaps, and secure predictable funding for timely evaluations.

### Utility
- Utility relies on demand (interest and ability to use evaluations) and supply (communication of relevant evidence and recommendations).
- Barriers to optimal utility include availability of evaluation consultants.
- To enhance the usefulness of evaluations, collaborate on scoping and produce attractive, accessible evaluation products.
- Management responses to evaluations are nearly always produced.

### Roles and Responsibilities
- Current roles do not guarantee evaluation function’s independence.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms for evaluations.

### Follow up on evaluation use
- High compliance with management response process.
- Engage more with users and stakeholders to understand values and suggestions.
- Potential for more user-friendly evaluation evidence repository.

### Enabling environment for evaluation
- Funding modalities do not support effective evaluation planning and implementation.
- Clarify confusion around the 1% evaluation target.
- Opportunity to strengthen evaluation culture outside of the function.
- Improve collaboration with other oversight, evidence, and learning functions.

### Recommendations
1. UNICEF management should ensure the sufficient and predictable funding of the evaluation function. The 1% target should be clarified including and how it is calculated and what is included.
2. The evaluation function should build on its added value by identifying, together with other knowledge functions in the organization, specific and focused ways to work more together.
3. UNICEF should maintain and further strengthen the improvements that have been achieved in its evaluation human resources and leadership capacities.
4. UNICEF should use its unique mandate and visibility to work with and influence the external evaluation environment of UN agencies, academics, voluntary evaluation organizations and foundations to promote national evaluation capacities and mobilize evaluative action in support of UNICEF’s mission.

Management response to be completed in 3Q23
Areas of continuity with 2018 policy

**MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE**
- Overall structure of the function
- Almost all management and governance arrangements
- Establishing more detailed policy positions
- Grounding in established international norms and standards for evaluation
- Central importance of independence and of arrangement to support this

**RESOURCING**
- Necessity of adequate human and financial resources
- Centrality of costed evaluation plans and IMEPS; close links with RBM/Planning

**COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS**
- Criticality of close collaboration and partnership, both internally and externally
- Reliance upon external expertise, especially for implementation and quality control
- Stakeholder rights of inclusion; intent to build counterpart and civil capacities
- Importance of partnership based on comparative advantages and common interests

**UTILITY & USE**
- Designating certain activities as mandatory
- Focus on utilization, not on just producing evaluation products
- Diverse evaluation products/activities to benefit varied contexts & stakeholders

**CULTURE**
- Importance of developing the evaluation culture as well as technical capacities
- Attention to risks and risk mitigation
Areas of change from 2018 policy

Problem statement 1
The evaluation function is not well understood throughout the organization due to the dry and overly technical language used in the current policy. It reads like standard operating procedures instead of being rooted in core principles that are important to the organization and its stakeholders. This misses an opportunity to raise awareness of the function and strengthen the evaluation culture.

1. Greater precision surrounding the purposes of evaluation
   • Promoting development effectiveness
   • Facilitating oversight and accountability
   • Fostering learning
   • Contributing to empowerment, including and especially at country level

2. Explicit explanation of the key principles underlying the evaluation function and the specific provisions contained in the policy
   • Independence, Credibility and Utility
   • Leadership & Shared Accountability
   • Efficiency & Prioritization
   • Decentralization & Coherence
   • Local Ownership (Stakeholder engagement & Capacity-building)
   • Ethics & Transparency

Problem statement 2
The standard definition of evaluation is not suitable for UNICEF’s context, which now includes a broader range of evaluative exercises. Current coverage targets are inflexible and do not allow these exercises to contribute to the organization’s evaluation commitment.

1. Contextualization of the core UNEG definition within UNICEF
   • Overlooked elements are added: Independence; rigour, basis in completed work; stakeholder rights of inclusion
   • More types of evaluative activities are covered

2. Refinement of coverage targets to reflect new realities
   • Newly added evaluation types: Impact, institutional effectiveness, and more refined thematic evaluations
   • Revised mandatory coverage targets
   • Increased flexibility, including counting global case studies towards the country offices’ needs
### Problem statement 3

Since 2018, more focus has been put on meeting quantitative key performance indicators, but it is unclear if evaluations are effectively contributing to organizational results.

### Problem statement 4

The current policy lacks specific guidance on how the evaluation function can maintain independence for credibility while staying connected to management for relevance and utility, especially within the organization's decentralized structure.

### 1. Improved guidance on evaluation planning methods

- Formal review of Country Evaluation Plan (CEP) or Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) with approval at higher levels
- Prioritizing strategically targeted evaluations over quantity
- Coordination of plans across evidence functions is encouraged

### 2. Clearer and more expanded role of evaluation managers in evaluations

- Evaluations can now be performed by UNICEF staff or external consultants
- The evaluation manager is solely empowered to accept the product

### 3. Measures to enhance evaluation use

- Management responses need updating and can be validated by the Evaluation Office
- Major evaluations can be reviewed for their effects 2-5 years after completion

### 1. Adjustment of senior management roles to the evolving context

- Executive Board and Director are co-guarantors of function independence
- Regional Directors have expanded roles
- Regional management teams create a regional evaluation strategy
- Evaluation lead must have direct access to head of office, even if reporting to someone else

### 2. Adaptation of evaluation function roles to the evolving context

- Director can modify performance standards for emergencies/special contexts
- Regional advisors’ roles are streamlined for RD/Director oversight
- Country specialists/leads assist in defining priorities and managing partnerships
- Matrix management links REAs-RDs-Director and CES-Rep-REA
## Areas of change from 2018 policy

### Problem statement 5

UNICEF’s evidence functions are not fully leveraging their common interests and comparative strengths.

1. **Demarcation between evaluation and other evidence functions and a commitment to coordination**
   - Management can request evidence plans aligned with program strategies or outcome targets
   - Potential for shared resources and common structures in field offices

### Problem statement 6

External partnerships, particularly in relation to national evaluation capacity development, have been underemphasized in the policy.

1. **More explicit commitment to partnering with governments, academia, and the private sector, in addition to traditional partners**
2. **More explicit commitment to national evaluation capacity development**
   - The capacities UNICEF seeks to help develop are now fully specified
   - The approach and concerns around country-led evaluations is fully defined
   - UNICEF’s effort is directly noted as contingent on partner co-investments

### Problem statement 7

Human resource investments in evaluation are vaguely defined in the policy, and financial investments are inconsistently applied across the organization over time.

1. **Clearer expectation-setting around human resources targets**
   - Large COs must establish a post as mandated.
   - Enhanced technical support needed after self-assessment survey.
   - Divisions can establish their evaluation capacity if matrixed with Evaluation Office.
   - Focus on skills development, career growth, and equitable recruitment.

2. **Clearer expectation-setting around financial resources**
   - The 1% is now based on “Spending” instead of “Allocation”
   - Discretionary exceptions to the 1% requirement for evaluation are possible in emergency situations
   - Non-eval spending excluded from 1%, but common interests benefit from evidence function cooperation
   - Accountabilities/strategies are highlighted to achieve funding predictability
Next steps

**FIRST QUARTER 2023**

February
Peer Review Panel presents draft report to UNICEF Global Evaluation Committee for feedback

February-March
Peer Review Panel incorporates UNICEF feedback into draft report

**SECOND QUARTER 2023**

April
Peer Review Panel issues final report to UNICEF

May-June

**THIRD QUARTER 2023**

September
UNICEF (evaluation function and management) implement management response

**FOURTH QUARTER 2023**

July
Evaluation Office finishes incorporating additional feedback, submits final revised policy to Executive Board and Audit Advisory Committee for comment

October-December
Evaluation Office drafts and issues internal guidance document to support implementation of the revised policy

**Next steps**

February
Director of Evaluation presents draft revised evaluation policy to Global Evaluation Committee and others for feedback

February-March
Evaluation Office incorporates internal feedback into draft revised policy, submits document to Executive Board and Audit Advisory Committee for comment

May-June
Director of Evaluation presents revised evaluation policy to Executive Board for discussion and feedback

June
Evaluation Office incorporates additional feedback from Executive Board, Audit Advisory Committee, Executive Director, and others solicited and incorporated into draft document

September
Director of Evaluation presents final revised evaluation policy for approval
Thank you.