

Annual report for 2023 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

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Item 10: Annual report for 2023 on the evaluation function in UNICEF
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Performance overview

Analysis of root causes of performance shortfalls

Evaluation quality

- Lengthy **Regional Evaluation Adviser vacancies**
- Management of evaluations by “**multi-hatted**” staff
- Increasing number of **donor-driven evaluations**
- **Stricter application of quality criteria** since new firm contracted for quality assurance in 2022
- **Emphasis in previous policy** on increasing the number of evaluations, broadening coverage
- **Lack of uniformity of practice**, and of an integrated and harmonized community of practice, until recently

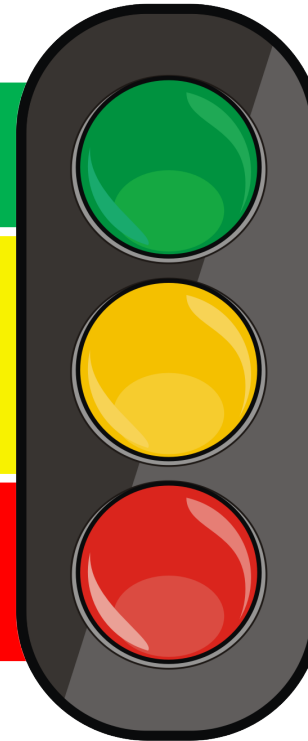
Integration of gender lens into evaluation

- **Stricter application of UN-SWAP criteria** since new firm contracted for quality assurance in 2022
- **Lack of uniformity of practice**, and of an integrated and harmonized community of evaluation practice, until recently
- High-quality guidance on gender in evaluation exists, but not reintroduced and refreshed in some time
- Lengthy **Regional Evaluation Adviser vacancies**

– **Broad and high evaluation coverage**
– **Sound integration of disability lens into evaluations**

– **Decline in number of evaluations**
– **Internal variations on most KPIs**
– **Solid evaluation quality, but key aspects need improvement**
– **High integration of gender, but low *meaningful* integration**

– **Low timeliness of management responses issuance**
– **Decline in progress towards 1% evaluation spending target**



Management Responses Timeliness

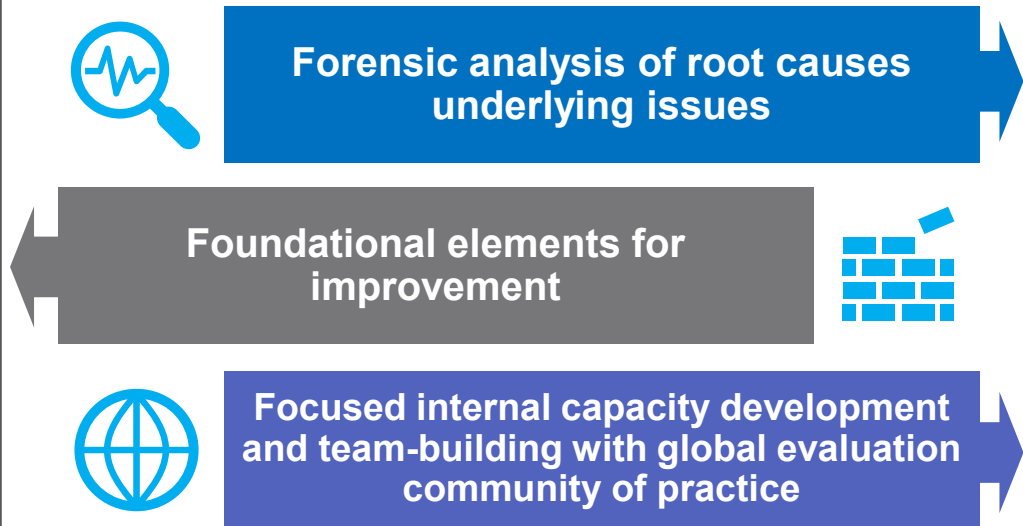
- **Causes not fully known.** “Supply-” and user-side issues to be explored further
- Potential **supply-side issues:** Timely completion of evaluations; effective communication of evaluation results; recommendation quality; lack of mechanism for ongoing monitoring and reporting on management response status
- Potential **user-side issues:** Offices adjusting to post-COVID reinstatement of 60-day deadline; absorptive capacity issues; staff mobility; lack of evaluation focal point in key offices; lack of mechanism for ongoing monitoring and reporting on management response status

Evaluation Expenditure

- Broader organizational constraints related to **restricted vs unrestricted resources**
- **Not all forms of evaluation spending being consistently counted** across the organization
- Until late 2023, **no formal mechanism for informing Regional Offices and Country Offices** of evaluation spending patterns

Actions undertaken to strengthen performance

- **Implementation of Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023) as key facilitator** of improvement by optimizing the function to succeed in fulfilling its role
- **Policy implementation strategy and policy procedure documents** (both forthcoming in 2024) as means of ensuring clarity and consistency in policy implementation
- **Enhanced mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on evaluation expenditure** and ensuring adequate and predictable resources
- **More regular dialogue** between Evaluation Office and others responsible for the success of the function (Regional Directors and Regional Evaluation Advisers, Office of the Executive Director, Executive Board members, Audit Advisory Committee)



- **Deep dive into Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS)**, using machine learning, for detailed trend analysis
- **Internal discussion within global evaluation team** to explain trends
- **Qualitative engagement with users** to understand challenges from their perspective

- **Enhanced suite of internal trainings**, including a refresher webinar on Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation (2019)
- **Development of first UNICEF Evaluation Handbook** (planned in 2023 for completion in 2024)
- **Global Evaluation Meeting** (November 2023)
- **Quarterly Evaluation Townhall meetings** with global evaluation team
- **Induction of Regional Evaluation Advisers** on revised policy and new ways of working (11–14 June 2024)

Change takes time: These actions will need time to yield results.

Qualitative performance measures

- ✓ Finalization of the **Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF** and endorsement by the Executive Board, and preparatory work leading up to its implementation beginning January 2024
- ✓ After delays in 2022, getting back on track in meeting evaluation **commitments in the Plan for Global Evaluations 2022–2025**
- ✓ All **Level 3 emergencies** evaluated and **duration of humanitarian evaluations** almost halved
- ✓ Significant **increase in demand-driven evaluations**, especially in relation to the key enablers and change strategies of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025
- ✓ **Methodological advances** for enhanced timeliness, cost-efficiency and robustness of evaluations – e.g. use of AI / Natural Language Processing to analyse large volumes of internal, unstructured and administrative data sets
- ✓ Four **Regional Evaluation Adviser vacancies** filled, with full team now in place in all seven UNICEF regions
- ✓ **Expansion of joint and inter-agency evaluation work**, support to the newly established System-Wide Evaluation Office, and leadership in the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (46 UN agencies, Governments and civil society)
- ✓ Support to **UN General Assembly resolution 69/37** to incorporate evaluation into Voluntary National Reports
- ✓ **Successful scale-up of innovative national evaluation capacity development** with government leaders and policymakers
- ✓ **Acceleration of work on impact evaluation** to help UNICEF and its partners make the best possible strategic choices
- ✓ **Evaluation synthesis** to map evidence gaps and provide UNICEF and partners an overview of our outcome-level results aggregating recurring lessons and recommendations

Transformative shifts in 2023

	Impact evaluation	Evaluation synthesis	National Evaluation Capacity Development with senior policymakers
What it is and What it does	<p>Through highly robust evaluation designs, assesses the extent to which UNICEF-supported interventions are producing the most positive impactful results possible for children (either alone or in combination with other interventions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through systematic review of large numbers of evaluations, provides a high-level overview of the state of the evidence on UNICEF’s organizational performance (what we are and aren’t achieving and why) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 weeks, on site, joint delegations of government and UNICEF staff counterparts Practical application to real-world policy problems, and localization to context Sustainability through: clinical support before, during and after workshop; establishment of country-to-country networking and “alumni group” networks; empowerment of partners to carry forward this course and custom-tailored follow-up workshops in their countries
Strategic value to UNICEF and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help UNICEF and its partners understand “what works and what doesn’t” and thus make the smartest possible choices on whether to continue investing in an intervention “as is”, whether to continue doing so but in modified form, or whether to discontinue doing so Determine the most cost-effective interventions (or combination of interventions) in the face of finite resources Help determine the innovations that merit scale-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable mapping of evidence coverage and gaps – what we know and don’t know – so that we know where to focus future evidence-gathering efforts Provide a broad overview of outcome-level results and shortfalls, and of how, why and when we succeed and failed, so that we can improve Elevate recurring lessons and recommendations, spurring action and helping reduce future recommendation (and evaluation) burden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urgency of the moment for children, and potential of evaluation as a game-changer for children at country level UNICEF and other partners to achieve results at scale without active engagement of well-capacitated governments as primary duty bearers for children’s rights Increase level of awareness and appreciation among policymakers and other senior leaders on evaluation
Progress in 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of 5 impact evaluations Capacity strengthening for impact evaluation First two calls for proposals of the Impact Catalyst Fund: (1) child marriage and social norms, and (2) adaptive social protection (in partnership with Germany) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch of first-ever comprehensive UNICEF evaluation synthesis (completed in early 2024) Completion of a more focused synthesis on UNICEF’s contributions to SDG 5 Launch of the SDG Evaluation Synthesis Coalition 	<p>81 delegations from 63 countries, 182 graduates, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43 Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors General and Parliamentarians 26 Deputy and Assistant Directors 37 Chiefs and Heads of Department

Looking ahead: Priorities for 2024 and beyond

Implementing the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF



Build on progress achieved in 2023 through:

- **sustained action to address root causes of performance shortfalls** illuminated in 2023 forensic analysis
- **deeper analysis of less-understood issues** (e.g. barriers to timelier and more meaningful management response)
- **expansion and consolidation of significant achievements** in impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development, and evaluation synthesis, and articulation of longer-term sustainability plans for these initiatives



Ensure consistently meaningful implementation of the revised policy through:

- **completion and rollout of key documents** that accompany the policy (i.e. policy procedure and policy implementation strategy)
- **closer and more regular interaction** between Evaluation Office and (a) Regional Directors and Regional Evaluation Advisers, and (b) Office of the Executive Director, particularly to ensure independence is strengthened and evaluation expenditure is adequate and predictable
- **strategic communications** to better convey the takeaways of specific evaluations, key elements of the policy, and aspects of the function
- **development of indicators** to measure the qualitative health and maturity of the function and its enabling environment



Ensure consistently strong evaluation practice across the organization through:

- **development of more robust and streamlined evaluation planning processes** that identify the most strategically significant evaluations (while reducing the number of evaluations that are of lesser relevance, quality and utility)
- **drafting of the UNICEF Evaluation Handbook** and **more focused internal capacity-building** on key areas in need of strengthening
- **adaptation of the Global Evaluation Report Oversight System** to ensure adequate quality assessment of other types of evaluative exercises covered by the revised policy (e.g. evaluability assessment, impact evaluation, evaluation synthesis)
- **greater investment in frontier technologies and in internal capacity** for harnessing underutilized data sources (e.g. administrative data)

Thank you.