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Management response to the annual report for 2017 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

I. Introduction

1. UNICEF is pleased to provide its management response to the annual report for 2017 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2018/15), in accordance with Executive Board decision 2013/13. We welcome the annual report of the Evaluation Office and continue to be committed to an effective and efficient evaluation function, in light of the key role that the evaluation function plays in supporting organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results.

II. Governance of the evaluation function

2. In 2017, the Executive Board adopted decisions regarding the annual report for 2016 on the evaluation function (decision 2017/9) and on the final report of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)-United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) peer review of the evaluation function of UNICEF (decision 2017/17). In its decision 2017/9, the Executive Board encouraged UNICEF to address gaps in the evaluation coverage of humanitarian assistance and cross-cutting priorities, including gender equality, and also to strengthen impact-level evaluations. The Board expressed concern that the target of allocating 1 per cent of UNICEF resources for evaluation expenditures had not been met. The Board requested an update on progress on these issues at the annual session of 2018. In its decision 2017/17, the Board welcomed the commitment of UNICEF to develop a new evaluation policy to strengthen the three core principles of independence, credibility and utility and to allocate a minimum of 1 per cent of UNICEF resources to evaluation.

* [E/ICEF/2018/8](#).

III. Promoting evaluation coherence within the United Nations

3. UNICEF fully supports the key role that the Evaluation Office fulfils within UNEG to support coordination arrangements for system-wide evaluations and for carrying out joint evaluations with other United Nations agencies. We support the Evaluation Office's plan to prioritize joint evaluations of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and joint programmes and, especially, plans to evaluate jointly the common chapter of the strategic plans, 2018–2021.

4. With the increase in humanitarian action, we are pleased that the Evaluation Office is involved in humanitarian networks, specifically as a member of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation steering group, which includes several United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We also note that in 2017 the Evaluation Office continued to participate in the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action.

IV. Promoting evaluation capacity development globally

5. We note with appreciation the efforts of the Evaluation Office to support the development of national evaluation capacity. Key examples in 2017 were the support provided to the major actors in the evaluation community through the third Global Evaluation Forum; co-leadership of the EVALSDGs network, which aims to promote evaluation activities around the Sustainable Development Goals; and active membership in the EvalPartners Management Group.

6. We support the recommendation of the DAC-UNEG peer review that the Evaluation Office formulate a strategy on national evaluation capacity development to further advance UNICEF work in this area, and in that regard, we welcome the mapping by the Office of all key national evaluation capacity-development initiatives, which will serve as a basis for a corporate strategy clarifying roles and the value added of UNICEF engagement. The mapping will further inform strategies undertaken with other United Nations agencies, including capacity-development activities, technical assistance to countries, knowledge management and peer exchange.

V. Performance of the evaluation function in UNICEF

7. UNICEF monitors the eight key performance indicators presented in the annual report for 2017. While our specific comments on each indicator follow, we are pleased to note the overall improving trend from 2013, when the evaluation policy was approved, to 2017. Furthermore, the evaluation function achieved or exceeded the targets of the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017, as outlined in table 1 and figure II of the annual report.

8. We look forward to further improvements resulting from the implementation of the key recommendations of the peer review, many of which are reflected in the revised evaluation policy to be submitted to the Executive Board at its annual session of 2018. The performance indicators will be revised to reflect the revised policy and the recently endorsed plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021.

9. The revised evaluation policy will include specific provisions to enhance accountabilities. Two provisions already implemented in 2017 include: (a) the expansion of the role of the Audit Advisory Committee to include oversight of the evaluation function; and (b) the establishment of the external Evaluation Advisory Panel to advise the Director of Evaluation on improvements to methodologies, procedures, quality-assurance

mechanisms and the management-response mechanism. The new policy also strengthens the position of regional evaluation advisers to provide quality assurance for country office evaluations.

10. As noted in the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021, the Evaluation Office will seek to boost support to evaluation at the country-office and regional-office levels through facilitation, guidance, tools, training and improved systems to enhance the quality, credibility and timeliness of evaluations.

Indicator 1. Evaluation submission

11. We note the decline in the total number of evaluative products, from 101 in 2016 to 93 in 2017, but we anticipate that the number of evaluations will increase starting in 2018, as a result of increased expenditure on evaluations and the launch by the Evaluation Office of a new integrated database system. The system will provide early and timely information on the implementation of evaluation plans so that offices showing slow progress towards targeted evaluations can be supported promptly.

Indicator 2. Geographical coverage of evaluations

12. We are pleased to note the significant improvement in geographical coverage, with 87 per cent of country offices achieving the target for the period 2015–2017 compared with 76 per cent for the period 2014–2016.

13. As indicated in the annual report, to further improve the geographical coverage of offices with limited capacity, the regional offices will manage multi-country evaluations. Moreover, the new evaluation policy will provide clear criteria and time frames for conducting evaluations, which should promote compliance with the policy.

Indicator 3. Thematic distribution of evaluations

14. Each year, the Evaluation Office commissions a meta-analysis of the evaluations submitted in the previous year and assesses the thematic distribution, type and purpose of evaluations as well as their quality. The analysis considered here reflects the 2016 performance for these three indicators, as the results for 2017 were not yet available.

15. For thematic distribution, the analysis showed a balanced topical distribution across the Strategic Plan outcome areas of child survival, education and child protection and, encouragingly, showed a promising increase in the number of evaluations covering cross-cutting themes, especially gender equality, humanitarian action and social inclusion. While assessments for recent years had indicated relatively low coverage of evaluations focused on cross-cutting issues, in 2016 there was an increase in the share of sectoral evaluations that also addressed cross-cutting themes. As noted in the annual report, 48 per cent of the evaluations covered gender equality as a cross-cutting theme and 28 per cent covered humanitarian action as a cross-cutting theme.

16. Given the trend of sectoral evaluations addressing cross-cutting themes, we are pleased to note that the revised evaluation policy will provide requirements for including gender equality as a cross-cutting theme as well for an increase in the evaluation of various levels of the UNICEF humanitarian response. The plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 prioritizes these cross-cutting themes.

17. We note that an insufficient number of evaluations of humanitarian response have been undertaken in recent years and welcome the increased focus on humanitarian evaluation in the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021. The Evaluation Office took a key step in 2017

with the initiation of work on a global evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF response in complex humanitarian environments. The evaluation will support the UNICEF strategy on humanitarian action as outlined in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. A “learning phase” exercise was commissioned in 2017 to gather the views of country and regional offices on the challenges they face in achieving coverage and quality in their humanitarian response, and to identify good practices that the evaluation could investigate more fully. We also appreciate the Evaluation Office’s intent to support the capacity of regional and country offices to undertake humanitarian evaluations.

Indicator 4. Type and purpose of evaluation conducted

18. The meta-analysis of the 2016 evaluations showed a continuing trend of evaluations focusing on the impact and outcome levels (91 per cent). We welcome this continued focus on higher-level results, as it helps to clarify the contributions and achievements of UNICEF, while appreciating that such evaluations can be methodologically more challenging, especially those at the impact level.

Indicator 5. Quality of UNICEF evaluations

19. The meta-analysis of the 2016 evaluations evidenced a continuing overall trend in improvement in the quality of UNICEF evaluations. We note that there were no unsatisfactory reports.

20. The Evaluation Office plays a key role in supporting the evaluation function at the regional and country levels to improve the quality of evaluation reports. With the implementation of the recommendations of the peer review and the adoption of the revised evaluation policy, management looks forward to further improvements in quality.

Indicator 6. Use of evaluation, including management responses

21. The annual report for 2016 highlighted a significant improvement in the number of management responses entered into the Evaluation Management Response Tracking System (95 per cent) and we are pleased that the report for 2017 has noted a further increase (97 per cent).

22. However, the rate of completion of the management response actions remains an area of concern. While the percentage of actions completed during 2017 (48 per cent) represents a significant improvement over the prior year (33 per cent), management is seeking further improvements in 2018. In this regard, we look forward to the issuance of the new evaluation management response guidance, planned for 2018, together with an improved system to enable the closer tracking of management actions. We are also pleased that the Evaluation Office is committed to encouraging offices to implement recommendations.

Indicator 7. Spending on evaluation

23. Although expenditure on evaluations has increased in absolute terms (from \$18 million in 2014 to \$47 million in 2017), the target of allocating 1 per cent of total programme expenditure to evaluation has not been met. The ratio of expenditure on evaluation to total programme expenditure dropped from 0.8 in 2016 to 0.67 in 2017. The decrease in expenditure and in the number of evaluations was especially noticeable in three regions. While there could be a number of reasons for the lack of improvement, a key reason is that UNICEF has not had a dedicated budget for evaluations at the regional and country levels. The revised evaluation policy will include provisions for establishing budgets at the regional and country levels.

24. Furthermore, implementing the recommendation of the peer review to create a pooled fund, which will also be a requirement under the revised evaluation policy, will address some of the barriers relating to evaluation capacity at the decentralized level. Strengthening oversight and implementation capacity by increasing the number of regional evaluation advisers should also contribute to an increase in the coverage of evaluations (and spending), not to mention quality.

Indicator 8. Corporate-level evaluations

25. We note with appreciation the work of the Evaluation Office in initiating and finalizing a number of corporate-level evaluations during 2017, in line with the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014–2017 and the review and update for 2016–2017. Several of the corporate evaluations were carried out jointly with other United Nations agencies or evaluated a joint programme. For evaluations in progress at the end of 2017, we look forward to receiving the final report and benefiting from the lessons learned as we begin to implement the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

VI. Assessment of the evaluation function

26. In 2017 UNICEF received valuable feedback on the performance of the evaluation function from three sources: (a) the DAC-UNEG peer review; (b) the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network UNICEF institutional assessment report 2015–2016; and (c) the UNICEF review of development effectiveness, 2012–2015. While all three were generally positive in their assessment of the evaluation function and highlighted improvements that had been made, the overall assessment of the peer review against the three core UNEG norms of independence, credibility and utility highlighted the need for further improvements. Using a binary scale of satisfactory/unsatisfactory, the peer review rated the evaluation function as either “short of satisfactory” (for independence and credibility) or “close to satisfactory” (for utility).

27. UNICEF accepted the recommendations of the peer review and has made progress in implementing the management response. As previously mentioned, UNICEF has already established the external Evaluation Advisory Panel, developed the plan for global evaluations in a way that reflects the evaluation priorities for the whole organization and revised the evaluation policy to address key recommendations, including the revision of key performance indicators. The implementation status of all recommendation of the peer review is presented in the annex.

Annex

Development Assistance Committee-United Nations Evaluation Group peer review of the evaluation function of UNICEF: implementation of the management response as at 6 March 2018

Evaluation year: 2017 Person-in-charge for follow-up to management response: Executive Director/Deputy Executive Director, Management		
Peer review of the evaluation function: recommendations	Timeline	Status
Evaluation recommendation 1: <i>An independent and decentralized UNICEF evaluation function</i> <i>A new policy for the UNICEF evaluation function should be developed, that takes full account of the decentralized structure of the organization and integrates all the requirements for the independence, credibility and professionalization of the function, in line with the 2016 United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards, and with the other recommendations and actions proposed by the peer review.</i>		
1.1 Establish dual reporting lines for regional evaluation advisers: a direct administrative reporting line to the Regional Director and a technical reporting line to the Director of Evaluation at headquarters.	December 2017	Under way. Details of the dual reporting mechanism have been incorporated into the revised evaluation policy
1.2 Develop adequate impartiality provisions/safeguards for behavioural independence of staff with responsibility in planning, commissioning and managing evaluations.	December 2017	Under way. Proposals are included in the revised evaluation policy.
1.3 Make all management responses to evaluations publicly available on the UNICEF external web site.	Immediate	Under way. All evaluation reports are publicly available. Options for publicly available management responses are being explored.
1.4 Revamp the Global Evaluation Committee as a platform for substantive discussion between the Evaluation Office and UNICEF management on evaluation topics and planning, strategic management issues, emerging and compliance issues and the sharing of key evaluation findings of corporate relevance.	December 2017	Under way. Revised terms of reference for the Global Evaluation Committee are part of the revisions to the evaluation policy. Engaging the committee on substantive discussions has already started.
1.5 Development of a theory of change for the UNICEF evaluation function.	December 2017	Under way. The theory of change is included in the revised evaluation policy.
1.6 Development of an implementation strategy, in the form of an Executive Directive, for the future evaluation policy, to guide its operationalization.	December 2017	Not started. The revised evaluation policy will be presented to the Executive Board at its 2018 annual session. The Executive Directive will be developed after the policy has been endorsed by the Board.
Evaluation recommendation 2: <i>The internal governance of the evaluation function</i> <i>UNICEF should assign to the Evaluation Office full responsibility for the internal governance of the evaluation function, and adequate resources for fulfilling this role.</i>		

2.1 Revision of the key performance indicators for evaluation coverage at the country level and on the budget allocated to the evaluation function.	March 2018	Under way. The revised evaluation policy includes changes to coverage norms and a restatement of the commitment to allocate at least 1 per cent of global programme expenditure to evaluations.
2.2 Ensuring that the global evaluation plan includes strategic corporate-level evaluations and evaluation syntheses or meta-evaluations that draw on country-level and/or regional-level evaluations identified in consultation with regional evaluation advisers.	March 2018	Completed. The plan for global evaluations was drafted on the basis of an analysis of country offices' costed evaluation plans, regional plans and other considerations. The plan was endorsed by the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2018.
2.3 Country-level costed evaluation plans should be discussed with both regional evaluation advisers and the Evaluation Office. The plans should include to the extent possible evaluations that will feed into regional, multi-country and global evaluations.	March 2018	Completed. The plan for global evaluations was developed after review of the costed evaluation plans and in consultation with regional offices and regional evaluation advisers. The plan was endorsed by the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2018.
2.4 Regional costed evaluation plans should be discussed with the Evaluation Office and include as appropriate evaluations that will feed into corporate-level evaluations.	March 2018	Completed. Regional offices have provided inputs from their evaluation plans for the global evaluation plan.
2.5 Development of a corporate strategy for national evaluation capacity development, taking into account the evolution of the debate on this subject within UNEG.	March 2018	Under way. Mapping of the UNICEF contribution to national evaluation capacity development has been completed. Strategy development will follow, in consultation with sister United Nations agencies.
Evaluation recommendation 3: Financial resources for the evaluation function <i>UNICEF should establish new modalities for the funding of the evaluation function at all levels.</i>		
3.1 The allocation of 1 per cent of the financial resources of the organization spent on evaluation should be a target at the regional level, to enable a flexible and more efficient use of resources.		Disagree. The target of 1 per cent is set at the global level. The coverage norms of the revised evaluation policy will trigger spending on evaluation at the regional and country levels.
3.2 All Evaluation Office and regional evaluation staff positions should be funded from regular resources or programme resources transferred to the Evaluation Office and to the regional offices, managed under their respective direct responsibility.	January 2020	Under way. With the implementation of the integrated budget, the Evaluation Office and three regional offices have been allocated regular resources to cover six additional positions. The remaining regional offices have received non-post resources to increase the coverage of evaluations.
3.3 A sustainable pool funding mechanism should be developed to leverage resources from headquarters-based programme divisions and from country-offices to fund evaluation specialist positions that cannot be funded through	March 2018	Under way. Internal consultations have commenced on the establishment of the pooled fund for evaluations. Potential sources of funding are currently being discussed.

regular resources and for the conduct of regional and/or multi-country evaluations.		
3.4 The multi-country evaluation specialist model tested in Cambodia, Malaysia and Myanmar should be replicated across groups of countries where this may prove appropriate and useful to overcome scarcity of resources for evaluations at the country level.	Ongoing	Ongoing
<i>Evaluation recommendation 4: Human resources for the evaluation function</i> <i>UNICEF should develop a strategic human-resources plan for the evaluation function. The plan should also contain a section that defines the provisions for the selection and appointment of the Director of the evaluation function.</i>		
4.1 Establishment of the position of Deputy Director, Evaluation Office at D-1 level.	January 2020	This recommendation will be phased in based on available resources as part of the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.
4.2 Ensuring that the Director of Evaluation and the Deputy Director together provide credible evaluation experience and competence as required by UNEG norms and standards and by the UNEG competencies framework for UNEG heads.	January 2020	Under way. This has been reflected in the revised evaluation policy.
4.3 Establishment of the position of regional evaluation adviser at the P-5 level in each UNICEF regional office.	January 2020	Under way. This has been reflected in the revised evaluation policy.
4.4 Through gradual reallocation of resources over time, establishment of teams of full-time evaluation advisers and specialists in each region, at the regional, multi-country and national levels, where justified, by consolidating the resources currently used for monitoring and evaluation specialists at the country level.	January 2020	Under way. The revised evaluation policy clarifies the roles of various categories of staff.
4.5 Development of specific provisions for the rotation of evaluation staff in UNICEF that allow staff to pursue a career in evaluation while maintaining their behavioural independence.	December 2017	Under way. This has been reflected in the revised evaluation policy.
<i>The Strategic Human Resource plan for the evaluation function should include the following provisions for the selection and appointment of the Director of the UNICEF Evaluation Function:</i>		
4.6 The title of the position should become “UNICEF Director of Evaluation”.	December 2017	Completed. The revised evaluation policy also reflects this change.

4.7 The Director of Evaluation should be selected and appointed in agreement between the Executive Director and the Executive Board.	December 2017	Under way. The revised evaluation policy states that the Executive Director will appoint the Director of Evaluation in consultation with the Executive Board and the Audit Advisory Committee.
4.8 External evaluation expertise should be part of the selection panel for the Director, e.g., at the level of UNEG heads.	December 2017	Under way. This provision is reflected in the revised evaluation policy
4.9 The Evaluation Director should report directly to the UNICEF Executive Director on all matters.	Ongoing	Completed. The revised evaluation policy states that the Director of Evaluation reports directly to the UNICEF Executive Director, and heads an Evaluation Office that is functionally independent within the organization.
4.10 The terms of reference for the Director of UNICEF Evaluation should include the systematic presentation of all global evaluation reports to the Executive Board.	Ongoing	Completed. All evaluations are made available to the Executive Board.
<i>Evaluation recommendation 5: Quality of evaluations in UNICEF</i> All evaluations planned and commissioned by UNICEF, whether by the Evaluation Office, programme divisions or regional and country offices, should aim at achieving the same standards of independence, credibility and utility, and align with the guidance and procedures established by the Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office should be given the responsibility to strengthen the quality of the evaluation process in UNICEF, with an active oversight role for the decentralized evaluation function in this respect.		
5.1 Establishment of an external evaluation advisory committee.	January 2018	Completed
5.2 Development of standard guidance for the quality assurance of the evaluation process.	June 2018	Completed
5.3 Establishment of a real-time quality assurance mechanism in support of evaluations at the country level in all regional offices.	June 2018	Under way. Provisions are reflected in the revised evaluation policy.
5.4 Development and/or adaptation of evaluation guidelines and manuals to fit the UNICEF evaluation process, from inception to completion.	June 2018	Completed
5.5 Development and/or adaptation of evaluation guidelines and manuals to improve the integration of human-rights and gender-equality perspectives in evaluations.	June 2018	Under way
5.6 Revision of the criteria that differentiate evaluations from other types of assessments and reviews and consideration of a more consistent application of the taxonomy in the titles of evaluation reports.	December 2017	Under way. The taxonomy is currently under review as part of the revised evaluation policy.
5.7 In consultation with senior management and the regional evaluation advisers, revision of the quality standards for evaluation recommendations.	June 2018	Under way

5.8 Revision of the time frames for the implementation and closure of recommendations that address strategic and corporate issues.	June 2018	Under way: A new integrated system is being piloted and is expected to be launched by June 2018.
<i>Evaluation recommendation 6: Management of the Evaluation Office</i> <i>The UNICEF Director of Evaluation should revise the internal management processes of the Evaluation Office.</i>		
6.1 Improving the efficiency of the corporate-level evaluation processes and the timely delivery of all evaluation products by the Evaluation Office.	Ongoing	Ongoing
6.2 Rotation of the Evaluation Office evaluation advisers and specialists	January 2018	Completed. The new structure of the Evaluation Office fosters a more cross-sectoral approach to managing evaluations.
6.3 Inclusion of highly reputable specialists in the subject matter of the evaluation in the evaluation teams responsible for carrying out evaluations commissioned by the Evaluation Office and the decentralized evaluation function.	Ongoing	Under way. The Evaluation Office has started to engage external subject-matter specialists to advise on some evaluations.
6.4 Ensuring that all criteria and key performance indicators identified in the evaluation policy are adequately monitored and reported upon.	June 2018	Under way. The new integrated system, which combines evaluation tracking, management-response tracking and a repository of evaluations, will facilitate the monitoring of performance against the key performance indicators.