



UNFPA - because everyone counts

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on

Item 11

A. UNFPA annual report on evaluation (DP/FPA/2017/5)

and

B. Lessons learned from country programme evaluations, 2014-2015

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Mr President,

Members of the Executive Board,

It is my pleasure to present to you today the annual report on the state of the UNFPA evaluation function in 2016. The report presents an overview of achievements and challenges, as well as highlights from the result of a synthesis of lessons learned from 26 country programme evaluations conducted in 2014 and 2015.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

Firstly, I will provide a review of the evaluation function at UNFPA, where progress is assessed against six key dimensions of evaluation performance.

First, on planning and management.

In conformity with the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2016-2019, eight corporate evaluations and studies were launched in 2016. In addition to the plan, the Evaluation Office undertook one further evaluation, a formative evaluation of UNFPA innovation initiative.

In 2016, the Evaluation Office completed two thematic evaluations of UNFPA support to (i) family planning (2008-2013), and to (ii) adolescents and youth (2008-2015). The results of those evaluations were presented to the Executive Board at the Second regular session 2016 and First regular session 2017 respectively. The Office also recently completed (iii) a synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations conducted during the period 2014-2015 and (iv) an Evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalisation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2014-2017. The results and recommendations of this evaluation have been presented to the UNFPA Executive Board during the third workshop on the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The joint evaluation of the H4+ joint programme supported by Canada and Sweden (Sida), 2011-2016 is currently in its final stage and will be presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session.

In September 2015, the Executive Board approved the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019 (DP/FPA/2015/12). In accordance with this plan, and in addition to the ongoing corporate evaluations and studies, the Evaluation Office will launch two corporate evaluations in 2017: (i) a joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation (2008-2017) and (ii) an evaluation of the whole of Syria response by UNFPA.

In addition to the evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office, seventeen country programme evaluations were commissioned by country offices in 2016, the results of which have been used to inform the new country programmes submitted to the Executive Board this year. In 2017, UNFPA country offices planned to commission 10 country programme evaluations.

Second, regarding quality of evaluation.

In 2016, 12 reports of country programme evaluations, managed by country offices in 2015, were submitted to the Evaluation Office for quality assessment. 11 reports were rated “good”, indicating that they could be used in confidence. This further reaffirms the positive trend observed over the past four years, and reflects the efforts made by the Evaluation Office to improve quality assurance and strengthen capacities on evaluation at regional and country levels.

In 2016, the Evaluation Office continued to work to address the limited availability of skilled evaluators to respond to the highly specialized mandate of UNFPA. The publication of an annual evaluation procurement plan for corporate evaluations and studies provides advance market notice with the aim of attracting more and better qualified individuals and consulting firms. The UNFPA consultancy roster was extended to include a specific section for evaluation consultants. Additionally, the Evaluation Office established an internal panel to vet evaluation consultants and developed guidelines for Monitoring and Evaluation staff to readily identify suitable evaluation consultants. However, access to qualified individual evaluators and specialized consulting firms on evaluation remains a challenge for both corporate and decentralized evaluations.

In 2017, the Evaluation Office has worked to further strengthen the evaluation quality assurance system at UNFPA. This has included the appointment of an independent expert quality assurance panel to review corporate evaluations at different stages of the evaluation process.

Third, regarding dissemination and use of evaluation results.

Effective dissemination and communication of evaluation results is critical to ensure transparency and accountability to stakeholders, and to improve learning and use throughout the organization. The Evaluation Office provided regular updates on evaluation results and performance to the Executive Board, Executive Committee and Audit Advisory Committee. In 2016, two issues of the

Evaluation Office newsletter were shared and the Evaluation Office produced user-friendly evaluation briefs to complement finalized thematic evaluation reports and reach a wider audience. Additionally, in 2016, the Evaluation Office presented the results of the evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation at the European Evaluation Society Biennial Conference (Maastricht) and at the first Asian Evaluation Week hosted by the Chinese Government. Recently, the results of the evaluation of the UNFPA support to family planning were presented at the eighth African Evaluation Association International Conference in Uganda.

Effective evaluation follow up is of critical importance and the Programme Division's management response tracking system indicates that the implementation rate of accepted recommendations has, again, slightly improved, reaching 78.5 per cent in 2016.

Fourth, on financial and human resources.

In 2016, the Evaluation Office launched a specific tag for evaluation-related activities as part of the UNFPA Global Programming System led by Programme Division. This allows the Evaluation Office to more accurately capture and report on programme resources allocated specifically to evaluation work across the organization.

In spite of a resourcing environment marked by continued volatility in 2016, UNFPA management maintained the budget of the Evaluation Office at USD 3.71 million, an increase from USD 2.63 million in 2015. 64.1 per cent of the evaluation office budget came from the institutional budget, while 30.7 per cent of funding was provided by other resources and 5.2 per cent came from regular resources. In 2016, the Office sought to broaden its funding base to ensure that the level of resources is (i) commensurate with the appropriate level of evaluation coverage, and (ii) aligned with changing resource mobilisation trends.

In 2016, the budget allocated to the evaluation function overall was slightly above USD 6.95 million (including staffing costs at decentralized level), representing a significant increase of 26.1 per cent from 2015. However, at a share of 0.75 per cent of UNFPA total expenditure, the investment in evaluation remains far below the suggested budget norm of 3 per cent included in the revised evaluation policy of 2013.

It should be noted that there continues to be an increase in the median expenditure of country programme evaluations to over USD 77,000 in 2016. Although this represents improvement on aggregate in ensuring that country programme evaluations are adequately resourced, there are significant disparities across regions.

In 2016, the percentage of monitoring and evaluation staff to overall UNFPA staff increased slightly, from 2.8 per cent in 2015 to 3.0 per cent in 2016. Half of UNFPA country offices are now staffed with a dedicated monitoring and evaluation officer.

As of December 2016, the Evaluation Office had seven approved positions, all of which were filled. A slight increase in midgrade staffing is envisaged in 2017 to support the wider range of roles and responsibilities required to implement the evaluation policy. The increase in the number of corporate evaluations and studies represents a significant improvement in productivity by the Evaluation Office from 2014-2015. This has been made possible by the recruitment of research analysts on individual consultant contracts. The use of this modality, however, presents significant challenges in ensuring consistency in and sustainability of support to corporate evaluations, and it would be optimal in future to create fixed-term appointments to meet these needs.

Mr President, let me briefly turn to evaluation capacity and partnerships.

In 2016, the Evaluation Office undertook a wide range of activities to strengthen the capacity and professionalization of the evaluation function. These include a training workshop, conducted in French, on how to manage country programme evaluations. This training, which reached 19 country offices within Africa, included monitoring and evaluation staff at UNFPA. Moreover, in the regions, a number of capacity development workshops were organized with the objective of strengthening capacity of both UNFPA monitoring and evaluation staff as well as government partners. In addition, six UNFPA staff participated in the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The Evaluation Office continued to prepare a professional development calendar enabling staff to easily identify and access learning opportunities on evaluation capacity development.

The strengthening of capacity is a long-term undertaking, requiring a strategic approach to ensure the best use of scarce resources. In 2016, the Evaluation Office began to develop an evaluation

capacity development strategy for UNFPA. To feed into the capacity development strategy, the Evaluation Office conducted a diagnostic survey of all monitoring and evaluation staff, follow-up interviews to allow for in-depth reflections, dialogue across departments and regional and country offices, and a mapping of available tools and best practices in evaluation capacity development.

In 2016 and 2017, the Evaluation office participated in a number of joint evaluations, notably: (i) the joint evaluation of the H4+ joint programme (2011-2016) with Evaluation Division at Global Affairs Canada and the Evaluation Office at UNICEF; and (ii) the Evaluability Assessment of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2016-2019) with UNICEF.

The Evaluation Office also actively participated in two independent system-wide evaluations, led by the Joint Inspection Unit in 2016: (a) the evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection; (b) the meta-evaluation and synthesis of United Nations Development Assistance Framework evaluations during 2009-2014. Both evaluations were part of a pilot to develop and test independent system-wide evaluations in the United Nations system.

The Evaluation Office has remained an active member of the United Nations Evaluation Group, notably as co-convener of the interest groups on (i) professionalization of evaluation and (ii) the decentralized evaluation function. The Evaluation Office also contributed to UNEG working groups on the use of evaluations; gender and human rights; and the humanitarian evaluation group.

Finally, in 2016, the Evaluation Office engaged with global communities of practice on evaluation and attended several evaluation events. The Office also participated in a number of reference and expert advisory groups, primarily for evaluations in the area of gender, sexual and reproductive health, adolescents, and use of data.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure to present to you a snapshot of the key lessons learned from the synthesis of country programme evaluations conducted in 2014 and 2015 and quality assessed as “good” or higher.

To contribute to organizational learning and evidence based programming and in light of the increased quality of decentralized evaluations, the Evaluation Office recently began conducting a

synthesis of lessons learned from country programme evaluations every two years. This is the second time the Evaluation Office has conducted this exercise, with the first covering country programme evaluations from 2010-2013.

The current synthesis exercise brings together evidence from 26 UNFPA country programme evaluations conducted from 2014-2015 and quality assessed as “good” or higher. Lessons were structured around UNFPA outcome areas (as identified in the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017) in order to facilitate use for programming.

In addition to UNFPA outcome areas, the synthesis surfaced lessons focused on additional areas of work seen as particularly important for organizational learning, strategic development, and alignment with UNFPA strategies and the International Conference on Population and Development. These include lessons on the current business model, with a focus on the modes of engagement and resource allocation, as well as learning on UNFPA engagement in humanitarian settings, including, for example, on preparedness planning and the Minimum Initial Services Packages (MISP). Lessons on the use of a human rights based approach to programming, including the imperative to ensure programming systematically targets those in marginalised and vulnerable situations, were also drawn out.

Mr President, let me turn to the key results of the synthesis.

Findings or “lessons learned” highlight the organization’s contributions to sexual and reproductive health, adolescents and youth, gender equality and population and development. Lessons vary by outcome area and across contexts and I wish to provide you with a snapshot of those that have emerged here.

Within **sexual and reproductive health**, for example, the synthesis found that support to interventions that target groups with influence on the sexual and reproductive health decisions of women – such as husbands, parents and community and religious leaders – help broaden women’s access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health services. Ongoing advocacy and sensitization efforts, particularly with communities, were found to be crucial for the sustainability of sexual and reproductive health services.

The lessons that surfaced in the area of **adolescents and youth** underscore the importance of identifying creative entry points to innovatively target adolescents and youth: connecting sexual and reproductive health education with vocational training, for example, or engaging youth as genuine partners in programme development and implementation were found to improve the effectiveness of programming.

Similarly, participatory approaches to planning and implementation that incorporate the views of civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations, have been found to better ensure the relevance of UNFPA's work on advancing **gender equality**. Working together with grassroots and community groups, including via community dialogues, have proved especially effective in promoting gender equality. On addressing gender-based violence specifically, lessons learned point to the effectiveness of using holistic approaches, combining, for example, service delivery for survivors with improved legal and policy responses, awareness-raising trainings and dialogues, including with police, and network-building. On the contrary, the absence of a consistently applied multi-sectoral approach was found to compromise UNFPA contribution in the area of gender-based interventions.

Finally, the synthesis highlighted that, within programming on **population and development**, systematically assessing the political and ethical dimensions of data collection, and the potential effect of these dimensions on the dissemination and use of data, is critical to ensure UNFPA's ability to efficiently and effectively support the production and use of data.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

Looking ahead, important lessons emerged on the business model of the current Strategic Plan (2014-2017), corroborated by the results of the recently completed Evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalisation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2014-2017. The business model provides guidance for UNFPA engagement in different country contexts, reflective of a country's aggregate need and ability to finance. As partner countries transition to middle-income status, UNFPA country offices are asked to shift modes of engagement, away from service delivery to more "upstream work", such as advocacy and policy dialogue/advice. This poses challenges for UNFPA country offices and their partners, including in sustainably addressing pockets of inequality (and

resulting need) within a country that, on aggregate, has improved development indicators. Challenges were found to be particularly pronounced in middle-income countries (including those in Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Europe and Central Asia).

Additionally, lessons suggested that the increasing emphasis on “upstream” work necessitates stronger coordination and collaboration among UN agencies, in the spirit of Delivering as One, as well as further reflection on (and potential realignment of) human resource profiles required to move the work forward. The synthesis also found that transitions between development contexts (operationalized as “quadrants” in the business model) increased the importance of systematically developing exit plans and ensuring clear communication with implementing partners, who, in some cases, may need to find alternative means of support in order to avoid backsliding on important achievements in, for example, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health.

Utilizing a human rights based approach to programming accelerates implementation of the ICPD and aligns with the imperative of the Sustainable Development Goals to “leave no-one behind”, and the importance of continuing and deepening this approach was underscored.

Toward this end, the synthesis highlighted the importance of working with and targeting those in marginalised and vulnerable situations, and building long-term, transparent, relationship-focused partnerships, grounded in collaboration.

Finally, I would like to share that the synthesis brief is currently available on the Evaluation Office webpage.

This concludes my presentation, **Mr President**. I thank the Executive Board for the continued support and guidance.