

Main results of the corporate evaluation of UNFPA Support to Family Planning (2008-2013)

The thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to family planning (2008-2013) provides an independent assessment of how the framework of the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2008- 2013) has guided the programming and implementation of UNFPA family planning interventions. The exercise also serves to facilitate learning and capture good practice as well as ensure accountability to partner countries, donors and other key stakeholders on UNFPA experience in family planning. The evaluation covers all countries where UNFPA works in family planning, with a particular focus on the 69 priority countries with low rates of contraception use and high unmet need. While the temporal scope of the evaluation assesses performance up to 2013, the exercise also reflects recent developments in 2014 and 2015 when the data collection was performed.

Key conclusions

The evaluation concludes that UNFPA has made significant progress since 2008 to reinvigorate its own commitment while contributing to raising the profile of family planning and securing its rightful place as a priority within the ICPD programme of action. In addition, the report notes that UNFPA has played an important role in the coordination of action in family planning at both the global and country level while consistently supporting governments' leadership and ownership of coordination structures and processes. The evaluation also highlights that UNFPA has been effective in promoting and supporting the integration of family planning with HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment and in humanitarian responses, but has had mixed success in other sexual and reproductive health services, such as maternal health, achieving more notable results at the level of national policies and plans. Further, the report notes that UNFPA is well placed among development partners and has been successful at linking global initiatives and national policy environments and this has improved long term prospects for family planning action by promoting national commitment and investment for family planning programmes and commodities. In particular, the evaluation shows the growing supply-side work performed by UNFPA (through its flagship programme UNFPA Supplies) and the effectiveness of its support to strengthen management of contraceptive supply chains. At the global level, the evaluation concludes that UNFPA plays a key leadership role as an advocate for a human rights-based approach to programming in family planning, and for the rights and needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups. At the national level, the evaluation shows that UNFPA serves as an effective broker between government agencies and development partner, and moreover, UNFPA country offices have a strong grasp of the country context and are attuned to the needs and priorities of their government partners.

The evaluation also highlights key challenges to UNFPA support to family planning, including that the organization at times struggles to ensure sufficient space for the important role that NGOs and civil society organizations can play in family planning. In addition, the report notes that UNFPA lacks a body of systematically organised evidence on important aspects of effective programming in family planning, especially at national level. And lastly, the evaluation reports that UNFPA country offices rely on effective and timely technical support and backstopping in family planning from headquarters divisions and from regional offices. While there is a substantial body of written guidance, the availability and quality of technical support varies widely across regions and from different divisions and branches.

Key recommendations

Looking ahead, the evaluation notes opportunities for UNFPA to harness the successes achieved in its support to family planning. Firstly, the evaluation recommends that UNFPA optimize its comparative advantages; namely, its close technical and strategic relations with governments and its central role in coordinating and programming links to a wide array of stakeholders. Secondly, to further the integration of family planning with other sexual and reproductive health services, the evaluation suggests that UNFPA adjust its organizational approach by breaking up technical silos and placing family planning firmly within a sexual and reproductive

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health and human rights context. To this end, the report also calls for a clarification of roles and responsibilities of different branches in the Technical Division, other divisions and offices (especially regional offices) for technical and programme oversight of family planning with a view to reinforcing cohesion in approach and support to country offices' staff. The evaluation also prompts UNFPA to strengthen the capacity of country offices to document and report on results of UNFPA support to family planning as well as elaborate a proactive organization-wide learning agenda to contribute to the evidence base on family planning interventions. Additionally, it recommends that UNFPA continue to take a strong stance and leadership position in promotion of a human rights-based approach and that it ensure that its operational guidance leads to a common understanding of concrete actions required for implementation of this approach by country offices and partners. Finally, the evaluation encourages UNFPA to adopt those modes of engagement in family planning where it has a strong comparative advantage and where it has adequate resources to follow through, in practice this would mean a greater focus on policy advocacy and brokering.