



26 April 2017

## **UNFPA Management Response**

### **Report of the Director, Evaluation Office 2016**

(DP/FPA/2017/5)

Agenda Item 11: Evaluation

Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS  
Annual session 2017  
New York

## Overall management response

1. The present report has been prepared by the management of UNFPA to provide its perspective on the 2016 Report of the Director, Evaluation Office, on the evaluation function in UNFPA (DP/FPA/2017/5), in line with the goals of the revised Evaluation Policy (DP/FPA/2013/5).
2. Management welcomes the lessons and recommendations of the UNFPA annual report on evaluation (DP/FPA/2016/5) and values the Evaluation Office's work towards improving evaluation management, increasing quality of evaluations, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation capacity. Management is satisfied with the increased production of corporate-levels evaluations and reviews, and acknowledges their contribution to increased availability of evidence and lessons learned to inform decision-making; strengthened accountability at UNFPA; and addressed demand of Member States for stronger evaluation function.
3. Recognizing the global leadership of evaluation in supporting organizational learning, accountability, and overall performance and results, and that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the new UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 present new challenges and opportunities for the organization, Management looks forward to the revision of the current quadrennial evaluation plan, focusing on the remaining period (2018-2019), including lessons learned, challenges and recurrent issues emerging from the analysis of the evaluation function performance in 2018, and propose the inclusion of 2020-2021 in the plan, aligning it with the forthcoming UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021.
4. As stated in the management response to the 2015 evaluation annual report, and in reference to the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2016-2019 presented to the Executive Board in 2015, Management further encourages the Evaluation Office to monitor the progress towards operationalization of the revised evaluation policy and the contribution of the evaluation plan to organizational effectiveness in 2015-2016; thus to ensure the credibility and accountability of the evaluation function, its responsiveness to the evolving context, and its further alignment with the priorities of the next UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021.
5. Management especially welcomes the active role the Evaluation Office plays in supporting country offices to develop evaluation capacity, and in this regard encourages the Evaluation Office to fully reflect in its next year annual report the analysis of results of these activities.
6. Further, the Evaluation Office is encouraged to address the request of Member States for a more concise and shorter evaluation report.

## **Performance of the evaluation function within UNFPA**

7. Evaluation function at UNFPA is getting more mature resulting from the fund wide efforts on promoting evaluation culture, ensuring better credibility of evaluations, and engaging into thematic evaluations that are critical for the organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Progress has been made in enhancing the credibility of the function by increasing its independence and issuing better quality evaluation reports, but more needs to be done, in particular to address the use of evaluation as knowledge asset and ‘performance information’ to improve the performance of organization in planning, programming and budgeting, and bringing about better performance and results. This being said, more real-time evaluations that take place during implementation of operations with the aim of informing the implementation process, with valid performance information, in the light of their objectives (expected results); and enhancing the quality of current and future programming with real-time feedback will be welcomed in the 2017-2018 evaluation plans.
8. Regarding the professional and technical quality of the function, Management agrees that availability of competent staff and sustained resourcing of monitoring and evaluation work across the organization is important, and acknowledges that more needs to be done to support the professional development and excellence of staff. Other significant challenges include: (a) the limited use of independent quality assurance mechanisms for the quality assessment, or meta-evaluation of reports; (b) the lack of solid information about the challenges affecting quality of evaluation reports; and (c) the coverage and delayed issuance of corporate-level evaluation reports observed in 2015-2016. In this connection, better alignment is needed for the quality of the evaluation function and its products to enhance their relevance, reliability, limit transaction costs and to increase impact on organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Management further encourages close collaboration with other evaluation groups and partners, including UNEG, JIU and other global communities and active engagement in joint evaluation studies and other initiatives, as well as the UNEG peer review mechanism.
9. Management is committed to monitoring the six key performance indicators presented in the annual report for 2016 and will continue to support the efforts, which will increase the relevance and effectiveness of the UNFPA evaluation function.

## **Corporate and programme-level evaluations**

10. Management notes a consistent increase in corporate-level evaluation engagements since 2014, which remained one of the most important evaluation efforts of the organization requiring effectively coordinated follow-up and use. Towards this result, the Programme Division works on strengthening partnerships with the Evaluation Office, Monitoring and

Evaluation Regional Advisors and other headquarters-based units to ensure close collaboration, better complementarity and shared accountability over implementation of evaluation recommendations.

11. Noting the progress of on-going corporate-level evaluations and studies, commissioned by the Evaluation Office in 2016, management particularly welcomed the findings of two 2016-completed corporate evaluations, i.e., the thematic evaluations on UNFPA support to family planning (2008-2013), and of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth (2008-2015). Both evaluations highlighted the positive role and steady progress of UNFPA in advancing family planning and adolescents and youth programming worldwide. Many of the evaluation findings and conclusions are relevant, forward-looking, and timely, and are being used to inform and strengthen our leadership in advancing family planning and adolescents and youth issues in the global development agenda. Most of findings and recommendations were aligned with ongoing discussions within the Fund, and have informed the UNFPA strategic planning process, specifically for stronger positioning of the adolescent and youth agenda within the new Strategic Plan and ensuring coordinated delivery of multisectoral and holistic support. Thorough and comprehensive responses to the evaluation with detailed management action plans on how to address evaluation recommendations were presented to Executive Board at the annual and second regular sessions in 2016, and management responses made available for public view. UNFPA is committed to implement the evaluation's recommendations to ensure that the evaluation evidence is fully taken into account in future global, regional and country programme planning and reporting, keeping the Board informed of its follow-up and mitigation measures at the upcoming sessions of the Executive Board. Management takes note of the other corporate evaluations to be completed in 2017, and looks forward to learn from their outcomes.
12. Given the importance of maintaining adequate evaluation coverage, Evaluation Office is encouraged to work closely with Management to ensure that the range of evaluations to be conducted at both central and decentralized levels meet organizational accountability and learning needs, and are implemented as planned.
13. Noting the status report of programme-level evaluations planned for 2016, Management is however concerned about a low rate of implementation of both, programme - (only seventeen out of twenty two were completed) and regional-level programme evaluation (five out of 6 were cancelled). The report does not reflect on the underlying issues and proposed corrective measures affecting low implementation of evaluation plans at a country and regional levels. In this connection, Management notes that coordinated interaction between the Evaluation Office, Regional Offices and Programme Division (as a custodian of management follow up actions) throughout the evaluation planning and

management process will help ensure more systematic follow up to evaluation plans and management's commitment to evaluation processes. This is particularly important in view of a large number of upcoming programme-level evaluations planned for 2017.

14. Management notes the positive trend in the number and variety of joint evaluations and the on-going partnership with other UN agencies, emphasizing that such collaborative engagements are important instruments for assessing the effectiveness of joint approaches to achieving results, and should be continued to foster coherence and synergies among the agencies, Funds and Programmes of the United Nations development system. Management strongly supports Evaluation Office efforts to integrate good practices and experiences generated by the United Nations system-wide evaluation activities into the institutional strengthening; and is keen to learn about lessons learned and progress achieved in making joint programmes coherent, efficient, relevant and sustainable in national contexts.

### **Quality of evaluation reports**

15. The overall quality of UNFPA evaluations continued to improve over the period of 2010-2015, although noting the decline in a number of reports issues over the past 5 years. Providing that the 2016 evaluation quality assurance (EQA) results are not included in the present report, Management acknowledges the continuing systemic challenges and agrees that decentralized evaluation capacities at country level need further enhancing. In response to lower productivity in decentralized evaluation as compared to past years, noted in the report, in 2017 Management will work with the Evaluation Office to identify the root causes of coverage gaps and develop corrective strategies to close them.
16. Management supports the initiatives proposed by the Evaluation Office to enhance the evaluation quality assurance and assessment system and looks forward to learning from the Evaluation Office about how EQA can be maintained and systematized.

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

17. Management welcomes the work of the Evaluation Office in 2016 to disseminate evaluation findings for institutional strengthening. Recognizing that evaluation results are an important source of knowledge for the organization to inform programming and organizational learning, Management is keen to learn to what extent the reported evaluation dissemination activities have contributed to improved quality of programming. Stressing the importance of disseminating and institutionalizing evaluation lessons, it is expected that the Evaluation Office, through its knowledge and communication strategy and relevant activities, will contribute to the corporate knowledge management strategy and knowledge sharing culture. The Programme Division, as a custodian of the corporate knowledge management strategy and guidance, takes action to ensure that the evaluation sharing

activities are taken into account in the implementation of corporate knowledge management strategy and disseminating activities to maximize their impact.

### **Follow-up on evaluation recommendations and management responses**

18. As per the Executive Board decision 2015/11, UNFPA is continuously prioritizing and taking actions to further strengthen the evaluation function at UNFPA by implementing the evaluation recommendations as well as institutionalizing evaluation lessons. Guided by the recommendations of the review of good practices in the UN system, the Programme Division launched a new Management Response Tracking System, which offers more robust system support to follow-up on recommendations, enables automated notifications, and periodic status reports, and brings about greater clarity in roles and responsibilities related to quality assurance and the timelines of responses. The new system will help Programme Division to institutionalize routine reporting to the Executive Committee and the Audit Advisory Committee on the results of the analysis of the evaluation management responses and use of evaluation evidence. Programme Division is working on the development of user guidance and the preparation of training programme for users to be provided for all units in 2017-2018.
19. In 2016, the “percentage of accepted programme evaluation recommendations for which the actions due in the year have been completed” has continued to improve, reaching 78.54 per cent, compared to 77.96 per cent in 2015 and, 76.49 per cent in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Four out of six regions have improved implementation rates, with headquarters reaching 90 cent of implementation.

### **Resources for Evaluation**

20. The annual report provides useful detailed analysis of human resources for evaluation and recognizes the positive trends in this area in 2016. The number of dedicated monitoring and evaluation professionals has increased (50 per cent of country offices are staffed with dedicated monitoring and evaluation officers, with all posts being filled), with a positive trends towards gender and geographic balance among staff. The report further indicates that the adequacy of staffing, structure of and evaluation roles and responsibilities in the field should continue to be monitored, as they affect the ability of the organization to support results-based management and utilization of evaluation evidence at country and regional levels.
21. Management acknowledges the continuing efforts of the Evaluation Office to adjust its own capacity to meet its accountability under the 2016-2017 evaluation plan commitments,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on self-reported data; see Annex V.

and will work with the Evaluation Office to develop methods to make sure that the evaluation function receives a sufficient allocation of human resources.

22. Management is committed to the importance of continuous financial investments in evaluation and is pleased to report a positive overall trend in the budget allocated for evaluation in 2016 (42 per cent increase in comparison to 2015). Following the initial resource reductions brought by the significant reduction of the 2016 regular resources, the resource allocation to the Evaluation Office was prioritized and the originally planned 2016 allocations were restated, despite the austerity environment. In addition, recognizing the need for sustained funding of the evaluation function, and to further strengthen the evaluation capacity, the midterm review of the integrated budget (DP/FPA/2016/3) proposed an increase for the Evaluation Office budget effective 2017. The funding of the evaluation work in 2017 shows slight improvement, of both, the Evaluation Office's institutional budget and the evaluations of global (including joint) and other programme evaluations. The newly launched tagging of evaluation-related activities in the Global Programming System shall enable the organization to accurately capture and report on programme resources allocated to evaluation work, including in decentralized evaluations. Noting the ongoing austerity situation and the projected reductions in core resources, the Evaluation Office is urged to ensure that the planning of evaluation is commensurate with available resources. Management will continue its efforts to ensure that the alignment of financial investments in evaluation with UNFPA strategic plan, and its business model; and will factor the Evaluation Office budget proposal in the development of Integrated Budget, 2018-2021, aligned with the new Strategic Plan for the same period.
23. In conclusion, Management welcomes the continued progress in strengthening the evaluation function within UNFPA. Yet, the rapidly changing development context poses new challenges to the organization, such as on-going economic constraints, declining official development assistance dedicated to maternal health and family planning areas, rising humanitarian emergencies and the demand for the organization to be more focused, cost-effective and efficient in delivering its institutional commitments. UNFPA has to adapt and mobilize resources to address the need for stronger capacity and systems for results monitoring and evaluation needed for reviewing and supporting progress towards results at all levels, and therefore more efforts for undertaking practical and timely evaluation will be required to address these challenges. Management will continue to work with the Evaluation Office towards better support of evaluation to UNFPA's leadership in delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.