



UNFPA - because everyone counts

Statement by Andrea E. Cook

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on

Item 12

A. UNFPA annual report on evaluation (DP/FPA/2016/5)

and

B. UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)

7 June 2016

**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 2015, as well as the key results of the thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014).

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

Firstly, I will provide a review of the evaluation function at UNFPA. Progress is assessed against six key dimensions of evaluation performance and in relation to follow-up on the recommendations made in last year's report.

First, on planning and management.

In 2015, the Evaluation Office completed three evaluation reports: (i) a thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014), (ii) an evaluation of the Bangladesh country programme (2012-2016), and (iii) a synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations during the period 2010-2013. The thematic evaluations to assess UNFPA support to: (i) family planning (2008-2013) and (ii) adolescents and youth (2008-2014) are currently in their final stage and will be presented to the Executive Board at the September and January sessions respectively.

Fourteen country programme evaluations were commissioned by country offices in 2015. The results from these evaluations are used to inform the new country programmes submitted to the Executive Board this year.

In September 2015, the Executive Board approved the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019 (DP/FPA/2015/12). In accordance with this plan, the Evaluation Office will launch eight evaluation studies in 2016. UNFPA country offices will conduct 20 country programme evaluations.

Second, regarding quality of evaluation.

In 2015, 17 reports of country programme evaluations were submitted to the Evaluation Office for quality assessment. 71 per cent were rated “good”, indicating that they could be used in confidence. This reaffirms the positive trend over the past two years, and reflects the efforts made to improve quality assurance and strengthen capacities across the organisation.

The limited availability of skilled evaluators able to respond to the highly specialized mandate area of UNFPA remains a challenge. In 2015, the Evaluation Office and the Procurement Services Branch published the first UNFPA annual evaluation procurement plan to provide advance market notice, in order to improve the number and quality of tenders. Work is also under way to improve the UNFPA consultancy roster to help business units to identify well qualified evaluators and streamline procurement processes.

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 lessons learned from 30 country programme evaluations produced during the period 2010-2013 were synthesised to identify good practices and inform programming. In view of the improved quality of country programme evaluations, it is the intention of the Evaluation Office to repeat this exercise every two years.

Effective evaluation follow up is of critical importance and the management response tracking system indicates that the implementation rate of accepted recommendations has continued to improve, reaching almost 78 per cent in 2015.

Fourth, on financial and human resources.

In 2015, effort was made to better capture budget and expenditure for UNFPA evaluation beyond the Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office has worked to provide estimated budget figures for monitoring and evaluation staffing in country and regional offices. A specific tag for evaluation-related activities will be introduced within the UNFPA Global Programming System from 2016 to enable more accurate reporting on the resources invested in evaluation by decentralized units.

In 2015, the overall budget allocated to the UNFPA evaluation function was approximately USD 3.6 million (excluding staffing costs at decentralized level), marking a slight decrease of 2.1 per cent from 2014. An estimated USD 1.9 million (of a total of USD 9.4 million) for “monitoring and evaluation” staffing in decentralized units was specifically devoted to evaluation work. When this is taken into account the total budget dedicated to evaluation is approximately USD 5.5 million, or 0.56 per cent of UNFPA programme expenditure. These figures reflect a more comprehensive picture of financial resources for evaluation, however UNFPA remains far from the budget norm stated in the revised evaluation policy of 2013.

In 2015, the Evaluation Office budget was USD 2.63 million, funded 92 per cent from the institutional budget, with a utilisation rate of almost 99 per cent. 8 per cent of funding was provided by other resources. In 2016 broadening the funding base for the Evaluation Office and the overall evaluation function is paramount 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.

It should be noted that there continues to be an increase in the median budget of country programme evaluations to over 65,000 USD in 2015. This represents a significant increase over time and almost attains the 70,000 USD recommended budget minimum. However, this progress is at risk, in light of pressures on country offices budgets resulting from the ongoing austerity context in which the Fund operates.

In 2015, the percentage of professional monitoring and evaluation staff to overall UNFPA staff remained stable, at 2.8 per cent. Almost half of UNFPA country offices are now staffed with a dedicated monitoring and evaluation officer. Staffing in the regional offices has been marked by high turnover, however I am pleased to say that all posts will be filled very soon.

As of December 2015, the Evaluation Office had seven approved positions, all encumbered. A slight increase in midgrade staffing is envisaged in 2016 to support the wider range of roles and responsibilities required to implement the evaluation policy.

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

In 2015, UNFPA undertook a wide range of activities to strengthen the capacity and professionalization of the evaluation function. These include a number of training workshops benefitting 32 country offices in the Arab States and East and Southern Africa regions. In addition, 24 UNFPA staff and national partners participated in the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET).

The strengthening of capacity is a long-term undertaking, requiring a strategic approach to make the best use of scarce resources. An evaluation capacity development specialist, seconded from Sweden, joined the Evaluation Office in January 2016 to lead this work across the organization.

The Evaluation Office continues to engage within the United Nations Evaluation Group, as well as with EvalPartners, to advocate for, and strengthen country-led evaluations systems and capacities

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

Last year, the Evaluation Office made a number of specific recommendations to address challenges in relation to the evaluation function. One year later, I am pleased to inform you that the implementation of all recommendations is well under-way:

- i. *On planning and coverage of evaluations:* the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019 provides a framework that ensures a balance between the strategic coverage and utility of evaluations.
- ii. *On financial resources and budget allocation:* the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan provides a coherent approach for the financing of corporate and programme-level evaluations, blending core and non-core funding.
- iii. *On human resources:* the Evaluation Office is working in consultation with the Division for Human Resources, the Programme Division and the regional offices to prepare a capacity development strategy for monitoring and evaluation.
- iv. *On the use of evaluation results:* the Programme Division has identified good practices in other UN organizations which will serve as a basis for the strengthening of the system for evaluation follow-up in 2016.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure to present to you the key results of the independent thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014). The evaluation assessed UNFPA support to strengthening national capacity for the production and dissemination of disaggregated, quality data and its use in evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation during the period of the 2010 world population and housing census round.

The evaluation was conducted by the UNFPA independent Evaluation Office in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team of independent evaluators and thematic experts.

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

The evaluation showed that strong strategic positioning of UNFPA during the 2010 census round as a key census player worldwide. UNFPA played an important role in creating an enabling environment for census to be conducted, providing support to over 130 countries with a total expenditure of USD 301 million. Indeed, census support is often seen as a flagship of UNFPA work at country level.

UNFPA support was well aligned with government priorities and the data needs of national and regional stakeholders. Support was characterised by efficient and adaptable (fund) management, resulting in the timely completion of censuses in even the most challenging of circumstances. In addition, the support of UNFPA proved essential in ensuring the inclusion of gender equality considerations throughout the census process. On the whole, this support was sensitive to and effective in addressing human rights considerations.

The evaluation acknowledges the widely held perception of UNFPA as a key convener around census and the census knowledge at the global level, and notes that the expertise of UNFPA staff is viewed as a key asset. Despite this, in house expertise substantially declined throughout the 2010 census round, and the lack of an organised corporate backstopping system has resulted in census support relying mostly on individual capacity, rather than on an institutionalised and systematic approach.

The evaluation found that the 2010 census round was focused predominately on enhancing the production of census and census related data, placing disproportionately less attention on data dissemination, analysis and use in policy-making. In UNFPA less emphasis was placed on support to

the use of census related data, and there was an absence of long-term strategies to develop the analytical capacities of statistical offices, ministries and civil society.

In this light, the evaluation concludes that whilst value for money is high for UNFPA support to national capacity for data production and availability, it is relatively low in terms of support to national capacity for data use. Value added in terms of corporate value is considered to be extremely high. UNFPA support to census confers a critical strategic positioning at country level, over and above that created by support to census data production and use.

UNFPA support to census features solid quality assurance mechanisms, including for census governance. These mechanisms are crucial to ensure good data quality, and guarantee the independence of the census process and subsequent results. However, the use of these mechanisms varies in practice, and are not well addressed in corporate guidance.

Population censuses are statistical operations of a technical nature, but they also carry significant socio-political implications, especially in countries with diverse political, ethnic and religious landscapes, and particularly so in fragile and conflict affected environments. The evaluation found evidence of good practice in this area. However, at present there is no UNFPA wide guidance on how to address these dimensions.

The evaluation found that UNFPA support to census is highly demand-driven. This is a positive feature, as it generates national ownership and leadership. However, there are associated risks when the approach is taken to an extreme. Country offices may be seen to merely respond to ad hoc demands, rather than working proactively and systematically to conduct high quality and timely needs assessments to address challenges and manage risks.

Finally, the evaluation revealed that UNFPA has not, as yet, prompted partner governments to fully explore the potential of linking and combining census data with national surveys or other sources of data for development, including administrative sources and big data.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

I will now present the key recommendations of the evaluation.

Firstly, UNFPA should consolidate and scale up support to population and housing censuses, drawing on a coherent corporate strategy and guidance for support to the 2020 census round. Census should be understood as the backbone of national statistical systems, and support should be envisioned as a continuous and dynamic process throughout the entire 10-year inter-censal period.

Secondly, UNFPA should adapt current strategies to address in house attrition of census expertise to ensure effective support to the 2020 census round, and activate the corporate knowledge management function to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge and experience.

Thirdly, UNFPA should work together with national statistical offices, and other partners to ensure that census related data is disseminated in a manner that fosters the use of data in policy-making. Effective dissemination is the link between data availability and use for policy-making. UNFPA should advocate for, and facilitate user-producer consultations on census data dissemination and ensure wide access to published anonymised micro-data.

Fourthly, in collaboration with programme countries, UNFPA should explore the potential uses of combining census data with other sources, including surveys, administrative records and big data to foster the full use of census data in the framework of national statistical systems. UNFPA should build upon its recognized convening role and expand upon it, by more actively participating in country forums to strengthen national statistical capacity.

Fifthly, UNFPA should explore resource mobilisation strategies, including funding mechanisms. In particular, UNFPA should explore the possibilities offered by a global-level trust fund dedicated to supporting the dissemination and use of data, including census-related data in the 2020 census round.

Finally, in line with the current UNFPA Strategic Plan, UNFPA should take action to maximise the full potential of South-South cooperation, as a key strategy of UNFPA support to the 2020 census round.

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