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UNFPA MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

to

Annual report on the evaluation function, 2019

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office *

(DP/FPA/2020/3)

Agenda item 13: UNFPA – Evaluation

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Management response to the annual report on the evaluation function, 2019

I. Introduction

1. UNFPA management is pleased to present its response to the annual report of the Director of the Evaluation Office on the evaluation function for 2019 (DP/FPA/2020/3).
2. Recognizing that a strong evaluation function is key to achieving the results of the strategic plan, 2018-2021, UNFPA has been investing an ever-increasing share of its programme budget in the evaluation function. The investment is yielding results: the function posted strong performance in 2019, as shown in the 2019 annual report of the Evaluation Office.
3. In this paper, management responds to the progress of the evaluation function in the following areas: (a) collaboration with organizations in the United Nations development system and other stakeholders; (b) enhancement of evaluation use through communications and knowledge management; (c) performance of the evaluation function; (d) use of evaluation to foster change; and (e) decentralized evaluations.

II. Collaboration with United Nations organizations and other stakeholders

4. Management reiterates its strong commitment to fostering coherence and synergies among the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations development system, including in the area of evaluation. To that end, management recognizes the strong contribution of the Evaluation Office to developing, with the support of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), a new draft policy for system-wide evaluations, which articulates the roles and responsibilities for undertaking system-wide evaluations at country, regional and global levels.
5. Management acknowledges the continued active participation of the Evaluation Office in UNEG, which in 2019 included providing technical advice for the development of the United Nations Funding Compact, the revised guidance for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and the revised policy for system-wide evaluations.
6. Management recognizes the value-added of the engagement of the Evaluation Office in joint evaluations. The key joint evaluations included: (a) the first phase of the joint evaluation of the common chapter of the strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women; and, with UNICEF: (b) the evaluation of the joint programme on the abandonment of female genital mutilation and (c) the evaluation of a joint global programme to end child marriage. Furthermore, the Evaluation Office contributed to several joint evaluations at country level, for example, in Colombia and in Nepal. Lessons learned from joint programme evaluations are instrumental in making future joint programmes more effective.
7. Management acknowledges the contribution of the Evaluation Office to fostering national evaluation capacity development, enhancing meaningful participation of youth in evaluation, increasing the demand for and use of country-led evaluations by national policy-makers through its work with parliamentarians and other key stakeholders, and supporting strategic evaluation events in order to increase availability and use of country-led evaluations.

III. Strategy to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management, 2018-2021

8. Management welcomes the launch of the Evaluation Office *strategy to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management*, which is based on the premise that availability of high-quality, relevant, timely and credible evaluations and continuous dialogue with stakeholders are key to enhancing the use of evaluations. Using a results-based framework for strengthening evaluation use, the strategy focuses on providing decision makers with targeted evaluative evidence when they need it for decision-making and reporting.

9. In this context, management especially welcomes the new practice of making evaluation results much more accessible to broad audiences by accompanying each centralized evaluation with a ‘minimum communications package’, elements of which were funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Management will leverage the Evaluation Office strategy to strengthen knowledge management in the organization.

IV. Performance of the evaluation function

10. Management takes note of the consistent progress in key evaluation performance indicators and is especially pleased to acknowledge the significant improvement in:

- (a) *Evaluation coverage*, from 90 per cent to 97 per cent;
- (b) *Quality of evaluations*, with 100 per cent of programme-level evaluations rated ‘good’ or ‘very good’;
- (c) *Percentage of programme-level evaluations implemented as planned*, at 97.7 per cent;
- (d) *Use of evaluation in programme development*, at 100 per cent.

11. However, management agrees with the Evaluation Office that there is room for further improvement in some areas, most notably in the coverage and implementation of decentralized programme-level evaluations and the implementation rate of management responses, especially for centralized evaluations.

12. It is noted that the main reason underlying the continued low implementation rate of management responses to centralized evaluations is their complexity, as they often require changes in corporate policies, strategies and resources, the involvement of multiple business units and time required to implement. That said, to help keep this issue on the radar internally, management will introduce two indicators to its corporate performance dashboard to monitor timely implementation of responses. Management will also update its guide on development, reporting and tracking of management responses to evaluations in order to emphasize the importance of establishing realistic implementation due dates. Management is following up closely on the implementation of these recommendations and commits to resolving any bottlenecks to their implementation.

V. Use of evaluation to foster change

13. Management welcomes the steady progress in the use of evaluation information to inform programming. It will continue promoting this practice across the organization. In this regard, management is proud to cite examples where, in 2019, evaluation information was instrumental in informing programming.

14. The *evaluation of phase II of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on the elimination of female genital mutilation: accelerating change* brought a reflexive and learning perspective to the joint programme for adaptive management at global, regional and national levels. It led programme management to revisit the theory of programme change and how programme strategies have evolved during the three phases of the joint programme. As a result, the Fund has adapted programme interventions in order to: (a) introduce more innovative communication strategy; (b) enhance the capacity of national partners for improved data collection and analysis on female genital mutilation; and (c) refine the results framework, particularly to introduce indicators and qualitative monitoring and evaluation approaches for measurement.

15. Following the *midterm evaluation of the UNFPA supplies programme*, UNFPA: (a) implemented a bridge funding mechanism, which ensured the timely procurement and delivery of commodities to programme countries; (b) assessed and addressed supply chain bottlenecks to ensure delivery of contraceptives to the last mile; (c) explored strategies to strengthen human rights-based approaches to the provision of family planning services; and (d) fed the results of the evaluation into consultative processes, such as the Antalya global consultation on family planning, to define, in consultation with country offices and key partners, priority actions that need attention and that can be scaled up to accelerate progress towards ending unmet need for family planning by 2030. In preparation for the third phase of the programme, an interdivisional working group, under the leadership of senior management of UNFPA, has been instituted to enhance oversight and provide strategic guidance. A donor steering committee and partnership assembly (including the sub committees) will be established to improve transparency and programme oversight and to give donors more decision-making authority.

16. The strategic recommendations of the *independent evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF global programme to end child marriage* formed the basis for the design of the second phase of the programme, 2020-2023. As a result, the programme is: (a) moving the global framework towards country contextualization; (b) consolidating and strengthening the evidence base and knowledge management; (c) strengthening the programme design; and (d) finding funds or structuring the programme according to resource availability.

17. Using the leverage points proposed by the *developmental evaluation of results-based management (RBM) at UNFPA*, UNFPA is continuing to strengthen results-based management, in particular shifting its focus from measuring and reporting results to accountability, learning and adaptive management. In this regard, UNFPA introduced: (a) the *UNFPA RBM benchmarking framework*, also referred to as ‘3+5’, which aims to increase prioritization of learning and adaptive management in programming at UNFPA; (b) the *RBM SEAL*, a performance and incentive-based, self-assessment tool, which was successfully piloted in 12 country offices and will be fully rolled out across the organization starting in 2020.

18. Management looks forward to engaging with and learning from the programme of work outlined in the transitional quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2020-2023.

VI. Decentralized evaluation system

19. Management is satisfied with the positive trend in implementing decentralized evaluations, from 55 per cent in 2017 to 92 per cent in 2018 and 93 per cent in 2019. In this regard, it commends the joint efforts of the Evaluation Office and the Policy and Strategy Division for continuing to apply remedial measures, such as the financial ring-fencing of evaluation budgets, stronger monitoring mechanisms and improved expenditure tracking.

20. To that end, management is committed to continuing to set aside \$500,000 annually through the resource allocation system for the ring-fencing mechanism to support implementation of country programme evaluations.

21. Going forward, management will pay special attention to ensuring that all regional-level evaluations take place as planned.

22. Management also reaffirms its commitment to further strengthening its oversight of the planning and costing of country programme evaluations through the corporate Programme Review Committee mechanism, and planning, budgeting and implementation of evaluations.

VII. Conclusion

23. Management welcomes continued progress in strengthening the UNFPA evaluation function and reaffirms its commitment to greater accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making and organizational learning. Management takes note of the Evaluation Office programme of work and budget for 2021 and affirms its commitment to working with the Evaluation Office to carry out its important role in supporting organizational results.

24. Management fully supports the following elements of the decision proposed by the Evaluation Office for the consideration of the Executive Board. The Executive Board may wish to: (a) *take note* of the present report on the evaluation function and of the programme of work and budget of the Evaluation Office in 2020; (b) *welcome* the efforts made by UNFPA and the progress achieved in strengthening the evaluation function, in actively contributing to United Nations system-wide evaluation efforts, and in fostering national evaluation capacity development; and (c) *reaffirm* the role played by the evaluation function and underscore the importance of high-quality, independent evaluative evidence in the context of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021, and its contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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