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UNFPA MANAGEMENT COMMENTARIES

to

Annual report on the evaluation function, 2021

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

(DP/FPA/2022/5)

Agenda item 12: UNFPA – Evaluation

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Management commentaries to the annual report on the evaluation function, 2021

I. Introduction

1. UNFPA management is pleased to present its commentaries on the annual report of the Director of the Evaluation Office (EO) on the evaluation function for 2021 (DP/FPA/2022/5).
2. Evaluation is a priority in UNFPA as it plays an essential role in providing decision-makers with evidence and lessons learned on what works and what does not work. This knowledge is critical for accelerating progress to the three UNFPA transformative results (“the three zeros”): zero unmet need for family planning; zero preventable maternal deaths; and zero gender-based violence, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.
3. In this paper, management responds to the evaluation function’s progress in the four key areas presented in the report, namely: (a) evaluation as an accelerator to the implementation of the new UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; (b) performance of the evaluation function; (c) enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions; and (d) multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development.

II. Evaluation as an accelerator to the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and delivery of the 2030 Agenda

4. Management commends the Evaluation Office (EO) for its efforts to make the evaluation function fit to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. The evaluation strategy, 2022-2025, and the strategy, 2022-2025, to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management set a coherent framework for delivering adaptive, high-quality and relevant programme-level evaluations.
5. Operating during the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard for all. Management commends the efforts that the Evaluation Office made to mitigate the situation – adjusting its processes and approaches, introducing innovations and using national consultants and young evaluators in carrying out evaluations, thus simultaneously contributing to the development of national evaluation capacity.
6. Management also recognizes the continued commitment of the EO to accelerating the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action through its continued involvement in the Eval4Action Campaign – a global advocacy campaign that seeks to enhance the role of evaluation in accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

III. Performance of the evaluation function

7. Management takes note of the excellent progress in key evaluation performance indicators despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. In terms of *financial resources invested in the evaluation function*, recognizing that a strong evaluation function is key to achieving the results of the strategic plan, UNFPA has been making a sustained investment in the evaluation function. In absolute terms, investment in evaluation more than doubled from 2014 to 2021, yielding important results, as evidenced

by the high performance of the evaluation indicators. Management commits to continuing to provide the resources needed to support the evaluation function.

9. Management is pleased to note that the *quality of evaluations* (percentage of programme-level evaluations rated ‘good’ or ‘very good’), *use of evaluation in programme development* and *management response submission* have been maintained at 100 per cent. Also, the *evaluation implementation rate*, at 94 per cent, exceeded the target of 85 per cent. Performance on *evaluation coverage*, which remained strong and almost achieved the target, continues to improve, from 90 per cent in 2018 to 96.5 percent in 2021. This coverage target – which, in line with the evaluation policy, requires country offices to conduct at least one such evaluation every two country programme cycles – can vary across an eight-year period, mainly because of country programme extensions.
10. Management encourages EO to sustain its efforts to protect the gains in implementation, coverage and quality of evaluations observed in recent years. Management, for its part, remains fully committed to continuing to allocate adequate resources to maintain staffing levels that enable these successes, and is pleased to note that the indicator *human resources for monitoring and evaluation* has been achieved.
11. Management is also pleased to note that the *implementation of management responses* continued to improve, reaching 95 per cent in 2021 – the highest level in ten years – and that the implementation of centralized evaluation actions, which is a subset of management responses to evaluations, not only reached, but surpassed, the annual target for the first time over the same period.
12. Management commends the Policy and Strategy Division for its role in making this possible by enhancing related guidance and providing rigorous quality assurance and monitoring, which were key to improving the quality of management responses and ultimately their implementation and reporting rates.
13. Regarding centralized evaluations, management appreciates that the Evaluation Office is continuing to make sure that they remain relevant to changing users’ needs and priorities of UNFPA, for instance, through the:
 - (a) Formative evaluation of UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation (2020), which has helped accelerate mainstreaming of South-South and triangular cooperation in the work of the organization in thematic areas and frameworks, including its inclusion as a strategic accelerator in the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and has enabled UNFPA to be the largest contributor of documented good practices and solutions among the United Nations agencies to the United Nations system-wide South-South Galaxy Platform.
 - (b) Developmental evaluation of results-based management at UNFPA (2019) – the first-ever developmental evaluation at UNFPA – which led to the adoption of adaptive management as a key management strategy at UNFPA, development of new results-based management principles and standards, and launch of the RBM Seal initiative in 12 country offices. The process has also led to further integration of innovation as part of adaptive management.

(c) First-ever evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (2021), which helped UNFPA position its work on gender equality and gender mainstreaming and inform the design and conceptualization of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

14. Regarding '*decentralized evaluations*', management acknowledges the value derived from 59 decentralized programme-level evaluations completed over the previous strategic plan, 2018-2021, in generating evidence needed to develop and implement new country programmes, and encourages EO, the Policy and Strategy Division and the regional offices to continue to work together to implement systems to ensure the timely delivery of high-quality decentralized evaluations.

IV. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

15. Management reiterates its strong commitment to fostering coherence and synergies among the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations development system, including in the area of evaluation. To that end, management recognizes the strong contribution of the EO to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

16. We are also pleased to note that 57 per cent (8 out of 14) of centralized evaluations were either joint or system-wide, and that EO is committed to maintaining similar ratios for centralized evaluations during the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, as this allows for significant cost savings.

V. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

17. Management reiterates its commitment to strengthening national evaluation capacities, together with major stakeholders, including United Nations entities. To that end, management commends the EO for partnering with EvalYouth to enhance meaningful participation of youth in evaluation, and with the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation to increase the demand for and use of country-led evaluation by national policymakers.

VI. Conclusion

18. Management welcomes the 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's programme of work and budget for 2022 and affirms its commitment to working with the Evaluation Office to carry out its important role in supporting organizational results.
