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UNFPA MANAGEMENT COMMENTARIES
to
Annual report on the evaluation function, 2023
Report of the Director, Independent Evaluation Office
(DP/FPA/2024/5)

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Management commentaries to the annual report on the evaluation function, 2023

I. Introduction

1. UNFPA management is pleased to present its commentaries on the annual report of the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) on the evaluation function for 2023 (DP/FPA/2024/5).
2. A strong evaluation function continues to be a priority at UNFPA and forms a critical part of ensuring oversight and transparency with regard to UNFPA interventions. Evaluation 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 on the three UNFPA transformative results (“the three zeros”): zero unmet need for family planning; zero preventable maternal deaths; and zero gender-based violence and other harmful practices against women and girls, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, all to be achieved by 2030.
3. In this paper, management responds to the independent evaluation function’s progress in the four key areas presented in the report, namely: (a) evaluation as a catalyst for accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025; (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 a catalyst for accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025

4. UNFPA management commends the IEO for its continuous efforts to become more strategic, agile, and responsive to an ever-changing context, with a goal to deliver adaptive, high-quality, and relevant programme-level evaluations. This is ever more critical now considering that the achievement of a considerable number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is off track.
5. Management believes that the revised Evaluation Policy, adopted by the Board at its first regular session 2024, and other adjustments the IEO is making in line with the peer review of the evaluation function conducted by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in 2023 are all steps in the right direction. These notably include strengthening the evaluation of humanitarian action and expanding coverage and learning from decentralized evaluations, in addition to embracing innovation and the responsible use of artificial intelligence to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation function. Furthermore, IEO and the Policy and Strategy Division (PSD) will work together to update the results-based management (RBM) capacity of the UNFPA offices by: (a) developing the new RBM Handbook to use as the overarching framework for capacity development; (b) rolling out the RBM e-modules; (c) expanding the results dialogues to share the acquired knowledge and learn from peers; and (d) scaling up the RBM SEAL initiative.

III. Performance of the evaluation function

6. Management commends the IEO for maintaining a good, overall progress in key evaluation performance indicators, despite many challenges.
7. Specifically, management is pleased to note that all new country programme documents submitted to the Executive Board for approval were informed by evaluative evidence for the fifth year in a row [*use of evaluation in programme development* (KPI 9)]; that the *management response submission* (KPI 7) remains at 100 per cent; and that all planned country programme evaluations (CPEs) were implemented in 2023 [*evaluation implementation rate* (KPI 4)] for a second year in the row.
8. Management also notes that the *implementation of management responses* (KPI 8) remained strong at 94 per cent – four percentage points above the target. In this regard, UNFPA is proud of staff efforts to help lift the implementation and reporting rates and sustain this positive trend over the past four years. Management also recognizes that the implementation of centralized evaluation actions – a subset of management responses to evaluations that for many years lagged – reached 94 per cent in 2023, maintaining a positive three-year trend.
9. Furthermore, Management notes that the *quality of evaluations (percentage of programme-level evaluations rated ‘good’ or ‘very good’)* (KPI 5) reached the target of 90 per cent and that the *evaluation coverage* (KPI 3) markedly improved, from 80 per cent in 2017 to 97.3 per cent in 2023.
10. Finally, we are pleased that UNFPA met or exceeded all performance areas of the System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) over the past three years. UNFPA was also part of the twelve-entity Task Team that developed the System Wide Gender Acceleration Plan launched on 8 March 2024 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, following the Independent Gender Review of the UN.
11. Management encourages the IEO 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 that enable these successes within the framework of the multiyear costed evaluation plan, approved by the Executive Board in January. As part of the integrated budget 2022-2025 midterm review, additional funding in the amount of \$1.3 million for 2024 and 2025 has been proposed to cover one additional position to strengthen humanitarian evaluations team, as well as the funding to enhance centralized evaluation activities.
12. As evidence of management’s ongoing and robust commitment to the evaluation function, evaluation spending has remained stable at 0.8 percent of UNFPA’s overall programme expenditures (*financial resources invested in the evaluation function*) (KPI 1). While funding for evaluation remained the same as in 2022 in terms of percentages, it actually continues to grow year to year in dollar terms as UNFPA’s overall programme expenditures continue to increase.
13. Likewise, Management reiterates its commitment to making a sustained investment in *human resources for monitoring and evaluation* (KPI 2). In this regard, Management takes

note of inconsistent application of evaluation practices most often due to capacity limitations in some countries and settings and is committed to working with IEO to mitigate them.

14. Regarding *centralized evaluations*, management is pleased to note that IEO is continuing to make sure that they remain relevant to changing needs and priorities of UNFPA. Management further notes that all centralized evaluations planned for 2023 were either completed or were on track, and that 58 per cent of those evaluations were joint or system-wide evaluations (*engagement in centralized system-wide and joint evaluations*) (KPI 10).
15. As expected, centralized evaluations continued to enhance UNFPA policies, strategies, and programmes. For example:
 - (a) In response to the recommendations of the *Formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system (2017-2022)*, UNFPA developed a draft of the strategy on how to leverage UNDS for the achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs, and has issued an internal guidance note for country and regional offices to implement the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF); and
 - (b) Recommendations of the *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls* led to the strengthening of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action. As a result of UNFPA's involvement, there is more emphasis on the participation of Women Led Organizations (WLO's) in humanitarian coordination processes and consultation with the work of the Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AOR). UNFPA also advocated for a leadership role for, and contribution of crisis affected women and girls in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of response strategies. Lastly, UNFPA also advocated to maintain focus on gender equality as central to inclusive and accountable humanitarian programming, ensured a mention of GBV risk mitigation across sectors and helped update and articulate the roles and responsibilities of clusters.
16. Management also acknowledges the value derived from *decentralized evaluations* in generating the evidence needed to develop and implement new country programmes and the role they played in optimizing, streamlining, and scaling up impactful interventions. To this end, Management welcomes the development of the new evaluation handbook which is expected to improve the methodological rigor and utility of country programme evaluations.

IV. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

17. 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 IEO to the work of UNEG, the Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation Group and the System-wide Evaluation Office (SWEO).

18. Management is also pleased to note that 58 per cent (7 out of 12) of centralized evaluations undertaken in 2023 were either joint or system-wide evaluations as joint and system-wide evaluations are more cost effective and encourage learning from the best practices of other United Nations system entities.

V. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

19. Management reaffirms its commitment to strengthening national evaluation capacities, together with major stakeholders, including United Nations entities. To that end, management commends the IEO for being an active member of global evaluation coalitions, such as the EvalPartners Executive Committee; the EvalGender+ Management Group; the Global Evaluation Initiative Implementation Committee; and the Global Evaluation Forum organizing committee.
20. Management also recognizes the IEO for its efforts to enhance meaningful participation of youth in evaluation and the demand for and use of country-led evaluation by national policymakers.

VI. Conclusion

21. UNFPA Management welcomes the continued progress in strengthening the independent evaluation function and reaffirms its commitment to greater accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making and organizational learning. Management takes note of the Independent Evaluation Office's programme of work and budget for 2024 and affirms its commitment to continuing to work with the Independent Evaluation Office to perform its vital role in supporting organizational results.
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