United Nations Evaluation Group
(UNEG)

Norms for Evaluation in the
UN System

Towards a UN system better serving the peoples of the world; overcoming
weaknesses and building on strengths from a strong evidence base

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Preamble

The United Nations system consists of various entities with diverse mandates and governing structures that aim to engender principles such as global governance, consensus building, peace and security, justice and international law, non-discrimination and gender equity, sustained socio-economic development, sustainable development, fair trade, humanitarian action and crime prevention. Above all, the UN system is collectively committed to furthering the Millennium Declaration.

The regulations that govern the evaluation of United Nations activities were promulgated on 19 April 2000 in the Secretary General's bulletin[1]. Similar regulations and policies have been issued in recent years in several UN system organizations. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), as a group of professional practitioners, undertook to define norms that aim at contributing to the professionalization of the evaluation function and at providing guidance to evaluation offices in preparing their evaluation policies or other aspects of their operations. This initiative was undertaken in part in response to General Assembly resolution A/RES/59/250[2] of December 2004, which encouraged UNEG to make further progress in a system-wide collaboration on evaluation, in particular the harmonization and simplification of methodologies, norms, standards and cycles of evaluation.

Resolutions of the General Assembly and governing bodies of UN organizations imply particular characteristics for the evaluation function within the United Nations system. Evaluation processes are to be inclusive, involving governments and other stakeholders. Evaluation activities require transparent approaches, reflecting inter-governmental collaboration. In addition, the General Assembly has requested that the UN system conducts evaluations in a way that fosters evaluation capacity building in member countries, to the extent that this is possible.

The norms seek to facilitate system-wide collaboration on evaluation by ensuring that evaluation entities within the UN follow agreed-upon basic principles. They provide a reference for strengthening, professionalizing and improving the quality of evaluation in all entities of the United Nations system, including funds, programmes and specialized agencies. The norms are consistent with other main sources[3] and reflect the singularity of the United Nations system, characterized by its focus on people and respect for their rights, the importance of international values and principles, universality and neutrality,

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[1] Document ST/SGB/2000/8 of 19 April 2000.

[2] Document A/C.2/59/L.63 of 17 December 2004, paragraph 69.

[3] These sources include, *inter alia,* the evaluation policies and guidelines existing within the various organizations of the United Nations system; OECD/DAC evaluation principles; national standards of OECD countries; evaluation policies of the international financial institutions; evaluation policies of the European Union; standards of evaluation associations; evaluation guidance developed by ALNAP for humanitarian action.

its multiple stakeholders, its needs for global governance, its multidisciplinarity, and its complex accountability system. Last but not least, there is the challenge of international cooperation embedded in the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals.

To fulfil their mission of contributing to the greater effectiveness and the greater good of the world's peoples, evaluation units within the UN system will strive for excellence and relevance by following the norms as outlined in this document.

Norms for Evaluation in the UN System

0 Introduction

0.1 The present document outlines the norms that are the guiding principles for evaluating the results achieved by the UN system, the performance of the organizations, the governing of the evaluation function within each entity of the UN system, and the value-added use of the evaluation function.

0.2 Complementary to these norms, a set of standards has been drawn from good practice of UNEG members. These will be revised from time to time and are intended to be applied as appropriate within each organization.

1 N1 - Definition

1.1 Purposes of evaluation include understanding why and the extent to which intended and unintended results are achieved, and their impact on stakeholders. Evaluation is an important source of evidence of the achievement of results and institutional performance. Evaluation is also an important contributor to building knowledge and to organizational learning. Evaluation is an important agent of change and plays a critical and credible role in supporting accountability.

1.2 An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance, etc[4]. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system. An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of the organizations of the UN system and its members.[5]

1.3 Evaluation feeds into management and decision making processes, and makes an essential contribution to managing for results. Evaluation informs the planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting cycle. It aims at improving the institutional relevance and the achievement of results, optimizing the use of resources, providing client satisfaction and maximizing the impact of the

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[4] Hereinafter referred to as an "undertaking".
[5] This definition draws on Regulation 7.1 of Article VII of ST/SGB/2000/8 and from the widely accepted Principles for Evaluation of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC).

contribution of the UN system.

1.4 There are other forms of assessment being conducted in the UN system. They vary in purpose and level of analysis, and may overlap to some extent. Evaluation is to be differentiated from the following:

a) *Appraisal:* a critical assessment of the potential value of an undertaking before a decision is made to implement it.

b) *Monitoring:* management's continuous examination of progress achieved during the implementation of an undertaking to track compliance with the plan and to take necessary decisions to improve performance.

c) *Review:* the periodic or *ad hoc* often rapid assessments of the performance of an undertaking, that do not apply the due process of evaluation. Reviews tend to emphasize operational issues.

d) Inspection: a general examination that seeks to identify vulnerable areas and malfunctions and to propose corrective action.

e) *Investigation:* a specific examination of a claim of wrongdoing and provision of evidence for eventual prosecution or disciplinary measures.

f) *Audit:* an assessment of the adequacy of management controls to ensure the economical and efficient use of resources; the safeguarding of assets; the reliability of financial and other information; the compliance with regulations, rules and established policies; the effectiveness of risk management; and the adequacy of organizational structures, systems and processes.

g) *Research:* a systematic examination designed to develop or contribute to knowledge.

h) *Internal management consulting:* consulting services to help managers to implement changes that address organizational and managerial challenges and improve internal work processes.

1.5 Evaluation is not a decision-making process per se, but rather serves as an input to provide decision-makers with knowledge and evidence about performance and good practices. Although evaluation is used to assess undertakings, it should provide value-added for decision-oriented processes to assist in the improvement of present and future activities, projects, programmes, strategies and policies. Thus evaluation contributes to institutional policy-making, development effectiveness and organizational effectiveness.

1.6 There are many types of evaluations, such as those internally or externally-led, those adopting a summative or formative approach, those aimed at determining the

attribution of an organization's own action or those performed jointly to assess collaborative efforts. An evaluation can be conducted in an ex-post fashion, at the end of phase, mid-point, at the terminal moment or real-time. The evaluation approach and method must be adapted to the nature of the undertaking to ensure due process and to facilitate stakeholder participation in order to support an informed decision-making process.

1.7   Evaluation is therefore about *Are we doing the right thing?* It examines the rationale, the justification of the undertaking, makes a reality check and looks at the satisfaction of intended beneficiaries. Evaluation is also about *Are we doing it right?* It assesses the effectiveness of achieving expected results. It examines the efficiency of the use of inputs to yield results. Finally, evaluation asks *Are there better ways of achieving the results?* Evaluation looks at alternative ways, good practices and lessons learned.

2   N2 – Responsibility for Evaluation

2.1   The Governing Bodies and/or the Heads of organizations in the UN system are responsible for fostering an enabling environment for evaluation and ensuring that the role and function of evaluation are clearly stated, reflecting the principles of the UNEG Norms for Evaluation, taking into account the specificities of each organization's requirements.

2.2   The governance structures of evaluation vary. In some cases it rests with the Governing Bodies in others with the Head of the organization. Responsibility for evaluation should be specified in an evaluation policy.

2.3   The Governing Bodies and/or the Heads of organizations are also responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to enable the evaluation function to operate effectively and with due independence.

2.4   The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations and of the evaluation functions are responsible for ensuring that evaluations are conducted in an impartial and independent fashion. They are also responsible for ensuring that evaluators have the freedom to conduct their work without repercussions for career development.

2.5   The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations are responsible for appointing a professionally competent Head of the evaluation, who in turn is responsible for ensuring that the function is staffed by professionals competent in the conduct of evaluation.

2.6   The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations and of the evaluation functions are responsible for ensuring that evaluation contributes to decision making and management. They should ensure that a system is in place for explicit

planning for evaluation and for systematic consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in evaluations. They should ensure appropriate follow-up measures including an action plan, or equivalent appropriate tools, with clear accountability for the implementation of the approved recommendations.

2.7   The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations and of the evaluation functions are responsible for ensuring that there is a repository of evaluations and a mechanism for distilling and disseminating lessons to improve organizational learning and systemic improvement. They should also make evaluation findings available to stakeholders and other organizations of the UN system as well as to the public.

3   N3 – Policy

3.1   Each organization should develop an explicit policy statement on evaluation. The policy should provide a clear explanation of the concept, role and use of evaluation within the organization, including the institutional framework and definition of roles and responsibilities; an explanation of how the evaluation function and evaluations are planned, managed and budgeted; and a clear statement on disclosure and dissemination.

4   N4 - Intentionality

4.1   Proper application of the evaluation function implies that there is a clear intent to use evaluation findings. In the context of limited resources, the planning and selection of evaluation work has to be carefully done. Evaluations must be chosen and undertaken in a timely manner so that they can and do inform decision-making with relevant and timely information. Planning for evaluation must be an explicit part of planning and budgeting of the evaluation function and/or the organization as a whole. Annual or multi-year evaluation work programmes should be made public.

4.2   The evaluation plan can be the result of a cyclical or purposive selection of evaluation topics. The purpose, nature and scope of evaluation must be clear to evaluators and stakeholders. The plan for conducting each evaluation must ensure due process to ascertain the timely completion of the mandate, and consideration of the most cost-effective way to obtain and analyse the necessary information.

5   N5 – Impartiality

5.1   Impartiality is the absence of bias in due process, methodological rigour, consideration and presentation of achievements and challenges. It also implies that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account. In the event that interested

parties have different views, these are to be reflected in the evaluation analysis and reporting.

5.2   Impartiality increases the credibility of evaluation and reduces the bias in the data gathering, analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations. Impartiality provides legitimacy to evaluation and reduces the potential for conflict of interest.

5.3   The requirement for impartiality exists at all stages of the evaluation process, including the planning of evaluation, the formulation of mandate and scope, the selection of evaluation teams, the conduct of the evaluation and the formulation of findings and recommendations.

6   N6 – Independence

6.1   The evaluation function has to be located independently from the other management functions so that it is free from undue influence and that unbiased and transparent reporting is ensured. It needs to have full discretion in submitting directly its reports for consideration at the appropriate level of decision-making pertaining to the subject of evaluation.

6.2   The Head of evaluation must have the independence to supervise and report on evaluations as well as to track follow-up of management's response resulting from evaluation.

6.3   To avoid conflict of interest and undue pressure, evaluators need to be independent, implying that members of an evaluation team must not have been directly responsible for the policy-setting, design, or overall management of the subject of evaluation, nor expect to be in the near future.

6.4   Evaluators must have no vested interest and have the full freedom to conduct impartially their evaluative work, without potential negative effects on their career development. They must be able to express their opinion in a free manner.

6.5   The independence of the evaluation function should not impinge the access that evaluators have to information on the subject of evaluation.

7   N7 – Evaluability

7.1   During the planning stage of an undertaking, evaluation functions can contribute to the process by improving the ability to evaluate the undertaking and by building an evaluation approach into the plan. To safeguard independence this should be performed in an advisory capacity only.

7.2   Before undertaking a major evaluation requiring a significant investment of resources, it may be useful to conduct an evaluability exercise. This would consist of verifying if there is clarity in the intent of the subject to be evaluated, sufficient measurable indicators, assessable reliable information sources and no major factor hindering an impartial evaluation process.

8   N8 – Quality of Evaluation

8.1   Each evaluation should employ design, planning and implementation processes that are inherently quality oriented, covering appropriate methodologies for data-collection, analysis and interpretation.

8.2   Evaluation reports must present in a complete and balanced way the evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations. They must be brief and to the point and easy to understand. They must explain the methodology followed, highlight the methodological limitations of the evaluation, key concerns and evidenced-based findings, dissident views and consequent conclusions, recommendations and lessons. They must have an executive summary that encapsulates the essence of the information contained in the report, and facilitate dissemination and distillation of lessons.

9   N9 - Competencies for Evaluation

9.1   Each organization of the UN system should have formal job descriptions and selection criteria that state the basic professional requirements necessary for an evaluator and evaluation manager.

9.2   The Head of the evaluation function must have proven competencies in the management of an evaluation function and in the conduct of evaluation studies.

9.3   Evaluators must have the basic skill set for conducting evaluation studies and managing externally hired evaluators.

10   N10 –Transparency and Consultation

10.1   Transparency and consultation with the major stakeholders are essential features in all stages of the evaluation process. This improves the credibility and quality of the evaluation. It can facilitate consensus building and ownership of the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

10.2   Evaluation Terms of Reference and reports should be available to major stakeholders and be public documents. Documentation on evaluations in easily

consultable and readable form should also contribute to both transparency and legitimacy.

11 N11 – Evaluation Ethics

11.1 Evaluators must have personal and professional integrity.

11.2 Evaluators must respect the right of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence and ensure that sensitive data cannot be traced to its source. Evaluators must take care that those involved in evaluations have a chance to examine the statements attributed to them.

11.3 Evaluators must be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environments in which they work.

11.4 In light of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality.

11.5 Evaluations sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing. Such cases must be reported discreetly to the appropriate investigative body. Also, the evaluators are not expected to evaluate the personal performance of individuals and must balance an evaluation of management functions with due consideration for this principle.

12 N12 - Follow-up to Evaluation

12.1 Evaluation requires an explicit response by the governing authorities and management addressed by its recommendations. This may take the form of a management response, action plan and/or agreement clearly stating responsibilities and accountabilities.

12.2 There should be a systematic follow-up on the implementation of the evaluation recommendations that have been accepted by management and/or the Governing Bodies.

11.3 There should be a periodic report on the status of the implementation of the evaluation recommendations. This report should be presented to the Governing Bodies and/or the Head of the organization.

13   N13 – Contribution to Knowledge Building

13.1 Evaluation contributes to knowledge building and organizational improvement. Evaluations should be conducted and evaluation findings and recommendations presented in a manner that is easily understood by target audiences.

13.2 Evaluation findings and lessons drawn from evaluations should be accessible to target audiences in a user-friendly way. A repository of evaluation could be used to distil lessons that contribute to peer learning and the development of structured briefing material for the training of staff. This should be done in a way that facilitates the sharing of learning among stakeholders, including the organizations of the UN system, through a clear dissemination policy and contribution to knowledge networks.