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For discussion

Revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF

Summary

This document presents the Evaluation Policy of UNICEF, revised in accordance with the Executive Board decision 2012/12. It presents the background and strategic context of the revised Evaluation Policy; sets out the purpose, concepts and intended use of evaluation; outlines guiding principles and standards for evaluation at UNICEF; itemizes key accountabilities and performance standards; notes human and financial resource requirements; and highlights the need for evaluation partnerships. The document concludes with a note on the implementation and periodic review of the policy.

* E/ICEF/2013/10.

Introduction

1. This document presents the revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF. It sets out the purpose and use of evaluation at UNICEF, provides definitions, principles and standards, and outlines accountabilities and performance standards for the evaluation function.
2. The revised Evaluation Policy governs the organization's evaluation function and provides a comprehensive framework for all evaluation activities undertaken by UNICEF. It addresses not only the conduct of evaluations and the use of evaluation results, but also the development of the evaluation function within UNICEF and its role in strengthening evaluation capacity among national partners. The policy is intended to inform and guide UNICEF staff and stakeholders about the purpose and contribution of evaluation at UNICEF and the organization's expectations and requirements regarding the conduct of evaluation activities. It applies to the organization's work at all levels, and across all contexts, including humanitarian situations.
3. This policy expresses the organization's commitment to demonstrate results, transparency and accountability through an independent and credible evaluation system, and supports the mission, mandate and strategic priorities of UNICEF. More widely, it is aligned with spirit and principles of the United Nations, and with the norms and standards defined by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).
4. The revised Evaluation Policy set out in this document updates and replaces the Evaluation Policy approved in 2008, and would come into effect upon approval by the Executive Board.
5. The present document sets out the background and strategic context of the revised Evaluation Policy; outlines the purpose, concepts and intended use of evaluation; presents guiding principles and standards for evaluation at UNICEF; itemizes key accountabilities and performance standards; notes human and financial resource requirements; and highlights the need for evaluation partnerships. It concludes with a note on the implementation and periodic review of the policy.

I. Background and strategic context

6. At the request of the Executive Board, UNICEF has revised the Evaluation Policy in order to respond to changes within the organization and its operating environment.¹ In recent years, significant changes have been taking place in the broad field of development cooperation and in the work of the United Nations. Expectations are rising regarding the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of development processes and the efficient use of resources allocated for development. Evaluation methods and approaches have also been enhanced to address emerging development needs and demands.
7. Meanwhile, the focus of development action continues to evolve, with growing attention to issues around sustainability, security and social inequality. While the information revolution and technological innovations are transforming social and economic life, humanitarian crises continue to cost lives and constrain human progress.
8. Within UNICEF itself, many changes have been initiated in recent years, with increased attention to innovation, efficiency, results and a renewed focus on equity in achieving results for children. A new medium-term strategic plan (MTSP), for 2014-2017, will shape the work of the organization in the years ahead.

¹ Executive Board decision 2012/12.

9. Taken together, these various factors are raising demands and expectations with regard to evaluation standards and performance. The Evaluation Policy has therefore been updated to respond to these challenges, with a view to helping UNICEF grasp emerging needs and opportunities.

10. The revised Evaluation Policy builds on the 2008 evaluation policy and recent improvements in the evaluation function. Effective systems for oversight and management of the evaluation function have been established; evaluation results, collected in the Global Evaluation Database, are publicly available through the internet; a formal management response is now prepared for most evaluations; and UNEG norms and standards are widely used in UNICEF evaluations. UNICEF supports country-led evaluations and engages in joint evaluations with other United Nations agencies and other partners.

11. Nevertheless, gaps and areas for improvement were identified while implementing the previous policy. An external review commissioned by the Evaluation Office found that the quality and coverage of evaluations needed to improve and that equity for children and gender equality were given insufficient attention in evaluations.² Evaluation planning needed to be strengthened and more closely linked to the organization's strategic objectives, and provision of human and financial resources for evaluation needed greater attention. Changes in the programming environment have created an increased demand for formative evaluation to inform ongoing policy, strategy and programme development, as well as calls for more impact evaluation to gauge results. Further, there is growing interest in strengthening the evaluation capacity of national partners. The revised Evaluation Policy seeks to address these issues and provide a framework for future improvements.

12. A draft of the revised Evaluation Policy was considered by UNICEF's Evaluation Committee. A peer review panel of four professional evaluators also provided comments. The draft was finalized in the light of comments received.

II. Purpose and use of evaluation

UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.

(UNICEF Mission Statement)

Purpose

13. Evaluation at UNICEF unequivocally serves the organization's mission, and supports UNICEF in fulfilling its mandate. By supporting organizational learning and accountability, evaluation aims to help UNICEF continually to improve its performance and results.

14. Evaluation in UNICEF serves to support planning and decision-making, and to provide a basis for informed advocacy – aimed at promoting the well-being of all children, everywhere. In focusing on the substantive rationale, value and performance of interventions and institutional functions, evaluation serves to improve results and stakeholder satisfaction. It carries out this function at all levels of the organization, applicable in all contexts, from humanitarian crisis to transition situations to more steady development environments.

² *Synthesis Report on the UNICEF Evaluation Policy and Function*, Universal Management Group, February 2013.

Concept

15. What is evaluation? The UNEG norms for evaluation define it as follows:³

... An assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. 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 United Nations 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 United Nations system and its members.

16. Evaluation asks three key questions: Is the right thing being done? Is it being done well? Are there better ways of doing it? The first question is addressed by examining the rationale and relevance of the undertaking; the second by examining the effectiveness of the results achieved and assessing efficiency and sustainability, with a view towards optimizing the use of resources; and the third by identifying and comparing alternatives, seeking best practices and providing relevant lessons learned.

17. Evaluation asks how and why results are as they are – it seeks to understand how a given result has been achieved. It is important to understand and document good practices and successful results. Equally, it is vital to identify and understand constraints and learn from any shortcomings. The factors contributing to success or failure are often to be found in the circumstances within which activities are carried out. Accordingly, evaluation seeks to take into account the context. It needs to address unanticipated outcomes and unexpected results. Evaluation is an effective tool for detecting and understanding such results, which can be missed by conventional monitoring.

18. Interventions affect the various members of any household, community or society in different ways. For this reason, evaluation should give close attention to understanding how results vary across various segments of the population by age, gender or social status, among other variables. For UNICEF, it is essential to understand the specific ways in which interventions affect children and women. Moreover, given the organization's focus on equitable development, it is critical to know how disadvantaged children are affected. In this light, evaluation needs to ask not just "What works?" but much more specifically "What works for whom; in what circumstances and in what respects; and how?"⁴

19. Evaluation is distinct from other functions in the oversight spectrum, although it draws from and informs the products of the other oversight functions (see annex). While there are some commonalities between evaluation and programme performance audit, evaluation is distinct from inspection, investigation and financial and compliance audit. Evaluation also differs from monitoring, as it gives attention to not only to whether expected results are being achieved, but also attends much more widely to issues of relevance, context, causality and eventual impact and sustainability. Evaluation and research are closely related; both contribute to the knowledge agenda of UNICEF. Research seeks theoretical knowledge and aims to test hypotheses related to a given objective while evaluation tests the achievement, relevance and sustainability of results of policies and actions.

³ [Norms for Evaluation in the United Nations System](#), UNEG, 2005.

⁴ See Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley, *Realistic Evaluation*, Sage, 1997.

20. There are many types of evaluation, depending upon when in the lifecycle of a policy or programme an evaluation is undertaken and whether the emphasis is on process or results. The present policy does not dictate use of a particular type of evaluation or evaluation method. The guiding principle here is that the choice of evaluation approach and methodology should be tailored to the use it is intended to serve.

Use

21. Evaluations should be useful. Utility and intentionality are key standards to be addressed in any evaluation activity, and the intended use of an evaluation should determine the choice of evaluation approach and methodology.

22. In UNICEF, evaluation has a range of uses, at various levels of the organization:

(a) At the global level, evaluation can be used to assess the contribution of UNICEF to global goals, strategies and targets, and is a key element within the MTSP; it can also provide evidence useful for global advocacy;

(b) At the regional level, evaluation serves the Regional Management Team and partners in the assessment of regional strategies and programmes, an aspect of growing importance as development activities become increasingly regionalized;

(c) At the country level, evaluation is especially important in supporting accountability and learning in relation to the country programme, and country teams may commission evaluations in support of national goals.

23. For UNICEF, given its highly decentralized structure, evaluation at the regional and country levels is especially important. It provides reliable evidence to inform decision-making within UNICEF and among its partners and stakeholders, and for well-founded advocacy and advice.

24. Evaluation results are of limited value unless they are acted upon by stakeholders and timely steps taken to implement evaluation recommendations. This aspect is covered more fully below in the section on performance standards.

III. Guiding principles and general standards

Guiding principles

25. *Alignment with the United Nations and UNICEF missions.* Evaluation in UNICEF is fully aligned with the overall mandate and mission of UNICEF and to the United Nations Charter and its objectives. Evaluation helps UNICEF and its partners meet the globally accepted obligations set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related agreements, including the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.

26. Evaluation also helps UNICEF to fulfil its commitment to *equity* and *gender equality*. Evaluations will assess how far equity and gender equality has been addressed in the formulation, design and implementation of policies, advocacy and programmes, in particular the steps taken to identify the needs and rights of disadvantaged and marginalized children and women and the extent to which interventions have contributed towards meeting their needs, realizing their rights and recognizing their potential. As far as possible, evaluations will be conducted in ways that allow the voices of children, women and disadvantaged groups to be heard. UNICEF follows UNEG guidance on the conduct of gender-responsive evaluation.

27. *National ownership and leadership.* Evaluation in UNICEF follows the organization's commitment to the principles of national ownership of development processes and country-led programming. UNICEF seeks to help national authorities to evaluate their own programmes and to contribute to the strengthening of evaluation capacity in programme countries. Whenever possible, UNICEF evaluations must be planned and conducted in partnership with national authorities, addressing issues relevant to the national development agenda.

28. *Innovation.* Evaluation in UNICEF should give particular attention to the identification, analysis and illumination of innovations in the work of the organization, and to developing, adapting and adopting innovative evaluation approaches.

Standards

29. UNICEF subscribes to and implements UNEG evaluation norms and standards.⁵ Where appropriate, UNICEF will also draw upon norms and standards prevailing among best practice comparators in the public and private sectors. In particular, UNICEF adheres to the UNEG standards of intentionality and utility; quality and credibility; impartiality and independence; transparency; and ethical practice.⁶

IV. Accountability for evaluation

30. Meeting the accountabilities for the evaluation function across UNICEF requires the cooperation of many professional staff. Evaluation is a *shared* function, distributed across several types of stakeholders, including among different posts in a single office. This distribution relies on the following levels:

- (a) Senior leaders and oversight bodies;
- (b) Heads of offices;
- (c) Technical evaluation staff;
- (d) Sectoral programme staff.

31. The basic accountabilities set out in general terms in the sections below should be seen as applicable to an entire office. However, within and between offices, managers are expected to arrange the distribution of responsibilities in such a way that accountabilities are met efficiently and effectively, making proper use of management tools, including staff job descriptions, work plans and performance reviews, and respecting the evaluation principles set out above. As far as possible, care must be taken to avoid conflicts of interest and to support the impartiality and independence of the evaluation function by separating programme management responsibilities from evaluation duties.

Accountabilities at global and headquarters level

32. *The Executive Board* exercises oversight of the evaluation function in UNICEF. It:

- (a) Approves the evaluation policy, considers annual reports on its implementation and on the status and effectiveness of the evaluation function, and issues decisions conveying expectations and guidance on improving performance;

⁵ See [Norms for Evaluation in the United Nations System](#), UNEG, 2005.

⁶ See [Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System](#), UNEG, 2005.

(b) Endorses the Global Evaluation Plan, listing major evaluations to be managed by the Evaluation Office;

(c) Draws on the findings and recommendations of evaluations for the purposes of oversight and approval of corporate policy, strategy and programmes.

33. *The Executive Director* safeguards the integrity of the evaluation function and its independence by:

(a) Maintaining appropriate arrangements for oversight and management of the evaluation function and protecting the independence within the organization of the Evaluation Office;

(b) Fostering a culture of accountability, learning and improvement which creates demand for and draws upon evaluation;

(c) Requiring that the necessary provision of staffing and budgetary resources for evaluation be made across the organization.

34. *The Global Evaluation Committee* advises the Executive Director on evaluation matters. The Committee reviews UNICEF evaluation reports of corporate relevance, and can endorse recommendations contained in the reports and review follow-up reports on their implementation. The Committee advises on measures to clarify and implement the evaluation policy, especially on measures to strengthen the decentralized elements of the evaluation system. The Committee is chaired by the Deputy Executive Director (Management) with membership comprising all deputy executive directors, relevant divisional directors, all regional directors, and one external evaluation specialist.

35. *The Evaluation Office* provides global leadership of the evaluation function, with accountabilities in the following areas:

(a) *Governance and accountability*, especially in updating the Evaluation Policy; reporting to the governance bodies overseeing evaluation, including the Executive Board; setting performance standards for evaluation across UNICEF and monitoring achievement against these standards; informing senior management, staff and UNICEF stakeholders about relevant and useful evaluation results; maintaining a comprehensive quality assurance system to gauge the quality and coverage of UNICEF evaluations; and providing public access through the UNICEF website to final versions of all evaluations and management responses.

(b) *Conducting evaluations*, especially preparing (on the basis of consultations with the Executive Board, senior management and other stakeholders) a Global Evaluation Plan, laying out strategic priorities for evaluation and identifying major global thematic evaluations to be undertaken independently by the Evaluation Office; designing and managing global evaluations in line with international standards of best practice; and providing timely dissemination of the results for action by management and other stakeholders.

(c) *Partnerships for evaluation*, especially by promoting national ownership and leadership of evaluation activities; supporting global partnerships and networks; and working through these to support innovation and evaluation-capacity development; engaging with UNEG to harmonize evaluation norms and practices and to build United Nations evaluation capacity; and contributing to United Nations system-wide evaluations.

(d) *Knowledge management for evaluation*, especially maintaining and managing comprehensive databases to facilitate access to all UNICEF evaluations and management responses; supporting stakeholders to determine what works for equitable results for children, based on evaluative evidence; encouraging networking efforts to link staff to one another and to external experts and resources; and developing information management systems to support evaluation planning and leadership information needs.

(e) *Development and professionalization of the UNICEF evaluation function*, especially promoting strategies and systems to build internal evaluation capacity; developing and sharing innovative approaches and methodologies for evaluation work; providing guidance and support to offices in designing and staffing the function and to staff in long-term career development.

36. *The Director of the Evaluation Office*, accountable for the commitments listed above, is appointed by the Executive Director for a term of five years, renewable once for a maximum of five years. He or she reports to the Executive Director, with day-to-day supervision by the Deputy Executive Director (Management) and direct access to the Executive Director, as needed. To minimize potential conflicts of interest, the Director of the Evaluation Office is barred from re-entry into the organization after the expiry of his or her term.

37. *Division directors* are responsible for planning, resourcing and commissioning evaluations of the global policies and initiatives for which they are accountable, and for responding to relevant evaluation lessons and recommendations. Directors implement and support actions to strengthen evaluation capacity and engagement in the headquarters units they oversee and the global networks they manage.

Accountabilities at regional and country levels

38. UNICEF evaluation activities are, to a large degree, undertaken at the regional and country levels. It is critical that accountabilities are clear at these levels. Meeting the accountabilities at these levels requires action from all professional staff. The policy depends on engaged leadership and dedicated evaluation staff as well as on understanding and support from sectoral programme staff. Heads of offices must make a careful distribution of evaluation responsibilities among all staff to safeguard familiarity with roles, provision of technical support and incorporation of evaluation responsibilities into workplans and performance reviews.

39. *Regional offices*, under the leadership of the regional director, provide regional leadership of the evaluation function in the following areas:

(a) *Governance and accountability*, especially by developing regionally specific evaluation strategies; engaging senior management attention in the regional management team and elsewhere; authorizing innovations in structuring the evaluation function and evaluation partnerships to respond to contextual variations within the region; adapting evaluation performance standards to the region and assessing compliance by country offices; and responding to performance information regarding evaluation activities;

(b) *Guidance and quality assurance*, especially organizing support and technical advice to assist country offices in achieving high-quality evaluation and in adapting evaluation methodologies to local or regional requirements; and assisting offices in properly integrating the evaluation function with research, monitoring, planning and other functions;

(c) *Conducting evaluations*, especially multi-country or regional thematic evaluations, as decided by the regional management team or regional evaluation committees;

informing regional stakeholders of relevant results; and responding to evaluation recommendations;

(d) *Partnerships for evaluation*, especially coordinating and, where possible, harmonizing United Nations system evaluation activities at the regional level;

(e) *Development and professionalization of the UNICEF evaluation function*, especially designing and implementing efforts to strengthen the evaluation competences of country-level staff, both through UNICEF initiatives or co-developed and shared with other agencies;

(f) *National evaluation capacity development (NECD)*, especially supporting the functioning of regional evaluation associations; and helping country offices design and initiate NECD efforts based on good practice from the region or South-South peer support.

40. *Country offices*, where approximately 90 per cent of UNICEF evaluations occur, represent the critical level for evaluation success in the organization. Under the leadership of the country representative, the office pays particular attention to the areas set out below:

(a) *Governance and accountability*, especially managing the evaluation function in accordance with the guiding principles and norms stated in the Evaluation Policy; establishing clear governance arrangements; ensuring the appropriate integration of evaluation items into programme review processes and staff performance reviews.

(b) *Planning and resource allocation*, especially preparing and updating annually a comprehensive integrated monitoring and evaluation plan (IMEP) for the country programme, setting out a clearly costed programme of evaluations that meet the coverage guidelines of the policy and provide timely evidence for strategic review moments; promoting joint evaluation work with the United Nations system and other partners, including United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations; allocating and managing sufficient funds; allocating and managing the necessary level of human resources, including relevant professional development opportunities; and equipping all programme staff with the knowledge necessary to meet their accountabilities.

(c) *Conducting evaluations*, engaging competent evaluators that conduct their work with due attention to UNEG evaluation standards; implementing quality-control procedures; overseeing the preparation of an appropriate management response to evaluation recommendations; monitoring action to implement agreed recommendations; and uploading completed evaluations to the Global Evaluation Database and management responses in the global tracking system.

(d) *Partnerships for Evaluation*, especially working with the United Nations country team to properly integrate evaluation into the UNDAF and inter-agency work; and guiding various agencies and other stakeholders towards common efforts to support national evaluation systems;

(e) *National evaluation capacity development*, especially supporting the design, implementation and use of country-led evaluations; advocating and promoting national evaluation systems; and supporting efforts to strengthen evaluation capacities in government and civil society.

V. Performance standards for the evaluation function

41. In keeping with the organization's commitment to managing for results, UNICEF offices are expected to work to achieve agreed performance standards. This section presents a general set of minimum performance standards for the evaluation function, drawing on the framework provided by the UNEG evaluation standards.⁷ Whatever their size, role or location, UNICEF offices are accountable for meeting the standards, although organizational arrangements within each office will vary. Corporate accountability systems will draw on the framework of evaluation standards in assessing performance.

42. The standards are grouped under the following headings:

- (a) Leadership and management;
- (b) Institutional framework;
- (c) Evaluation planning and coverage;
- (d) Conduct of evaluations;
- (e) Utilization;
- (f) Support to national evaluation capacity development.

Leadership and management

43. In UNICEF offices, management is expected to provide leadership for the evaluation function and direct management attention to planning, managing and using evaluations.⁸ In this respect, effective performance is characterized by:

- (a) *Clear norms and expectations around evaluation*, such that all stakeholders understand it is a priority across UNICEF work – with an appropriate incentive structure prioritizing evaluation, including use of relevant targets in staff job descriptions and performance reviews;
- (b) *Appropriate institutional arrangements* to safeguard the quality, impartiality and integrity of evaluation work, including systems to provide quality assurance at key stages in the conduct of evaluations;
- (c) *Attention to monitoring and evaluation requirements* in programmes and interventions: notably the identification of evaluation as a means of verification of results indicators, and establishment of adequate evaluation budgets and funding at the start of each programme;
- (d) *Effective evaluation partnerships*, established to promote the realization of evaluation goals, including strengthening national evaluation systems;
- (e) *Effective evaluation planning*;

⁷ *Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System*, UNEG, 2005

⁸ Management includes all personnel with decision-taking power over the evaluation agenda, budget and staffing, and the utilization of evaluation results. Managers include not only the head of the office, but also other professional staff, notably deputies and the heads of sections.

(f) *Annual reporting* of office performance against these standards, as an element within routine annual divisional performance reporting;

(g) *Routine disclosure* and timely communication of evaluation results.

Institutional framework

44. UNICEF offices should make arrangements for the effective management and governance of the evaluation function that protect the principles of impartiality and independence. Evaluation staff and team members must be able to conduct their work free of undue influence or restrictions, and should be aware of the relevant safeguards and other elements of the UNEG evaluation standards. This means that staff should not design or manage evaluations of programmes for which they have held direct responsibility, and that appropriate arrangements should be in place to avoid or resolve conflicts of interest. Likewise, members of the evaluation team must have had no direct responsibilities for the intervention being evaluated, nor expect such responsibilities in the near future.

Evaluation planning and coverage

45. To be useful, evaluations must contribute to organizational learning, accountability and decision-making. To achieve this, it is important to give due attention to planning, managing and funding evaluation activities. Evaluation plans, at any level in UNICEF, must be relevant, realistic and adequately resourced.

46. At the country level, the IMEP is a key tool that requires close attention to its design and implementation. It is developed by the country management team with technical advice from the monitoring and evaluation specialist. The draft IMEP and final amendments are reviewed by the regional evaluation adviser, before final approval by the Representative.

47. Evaluations plans need to fulfil the following criteria:

(a) Relevant and prioritized to focus on the most important information needs of decision-makers, while providing appropriate balance and coverage across a portfolio of evaluations, including due attention to cross-cutting issues;

(b) Oriented towards the relevant results frameworks, in particular to provide strategic coverage of key results;

(c) Explicit regarding coordination of evaluation efforts across offices, between agencies and with national stakeholders;

(d) Realistic, achievable and monitorable;

(e) Timely in terms of scheduling activities, to meet given end uses;

(f) Costed and supported by a budget for implementation;

(g) Updated annually;

(h) Approved by the head of office.

48. Coverage is a key consideration in evaluation planning. Globally, for the purpose of accountability and for organizational learning, it is important that evaluation is able to present a representative and unbiased picture of UNICEF performance and results and that the

organization's key policies, strategies and important areas for advocacy should be informed by relevant and reliable evaluation evidence. At regional and country levels, it is likewise important to address policy and programming priorities and demonstrate development effectiveness through evaluation. From an accountability perspective, areas of high programme expenditure should be matched by high levels of evaluation effort. However, evaluations should also be undertaken to support learning, innovation and risk management.

49. Evaluations will usually be undertaken:

(a) *Before programme replication or scaling up.* Innovative and pilot development initiatives designed for replication and scaling-up must always be evaluated, to ensure adequate understanding of success factors, risks and limitations;

(b) *When responding to major humanitarian emergencies;*

(c) *Following long periods of unevaluated programme implementation,* particularly where the programme has been implemented for at least 5 years without any evaluative activity.

(d) For each PCR, when expenditure has reached \$10 million;

(e) For each PCR, where the average annual expenditure exceeds \$1 million.

50. Evaluability assessments and formative evaluations should be considered early in the programme cycle, to guide design and to check that implementation is going forward as planned. Evaluation should also be undertaken where there is a specific need to understand causality within a programme; where there is a need to determine attribution or analyse contribution to results; or to analyse the impacts of multiple or complex interventions.

51. Evaluations should *not* be undertaken where sufficient reliable and relevant evidence exists from other sources that could adequately inform policy and programming choices. The guiding principle is that sufficient reliable evidence should be available at key moments to inform decisions about policies and programmes.

Conduct of evaluations

52. A high-quality evaluation is the outcome of a carefully planned and executed process. It is designed and managed in line with the relevant UNEG standards and, more specifically, the standards set out in the Evaluation Policy. It addresses issues of significance, and evaluation managers build a supporting constituency eager to receive and use it. It should be well resourced and undertaken by a technically excellent team of evaluators.

53. In country offices, the monitoring and evaluation specialist provides technical assistance at each stage: developing terms of reference; selection of consultants; finalization of reports; and advising on the format of the management response. Draft terms of reference and draft reports are sent to the regional office for technical review by the regional evaluation adviser and other colleagues, as necessary.

54. A set of key steps have been shown to lead to useful and credible evaluation results. The steps for each evaluation are as follows:

(a) Management arrangements are clearly defined from the outset. A designated evaluation manager or Evaluation Management Team (EMT) closely supervises the selection and management of external consultants and, in all phases, exercises authority, as needed, to hold the consultants to high performance;

(b) Key stakeholders, including excluded groups, as appropriate, are engaged at relevant points, starting in the design phase. It is good practice to formally establish a stakeholder reference group;

(c) The composition of the evaluation team is balanced in terms of gender and geographical diversity, and includes professionals from the region or country concerned in the evaluation;

(d) Keeping in view the eventual use of the evaluation, the key questions, focus and scope to be addressed by the evaluation are identified at the outset by the EMT, and formulated in the terms of reference, which meet UNEG standards. They are shared with stakeholders, promoting transparency and engagement, and are reviewed for quality by peers or by external specialists (in the case of country offices, the regional office should provide quality assurance);

(e) When a preliminary risk assessment deems it necessary, an ethical review is conducted by an objective and qualified body;

(f) The evaluation design and methods are clearly presented in the inception phase and are quality reviewed. The evaluation design pays explicit attention not only to the needs and capacities of children, but also to the equity and gender aspects of the programme or policy to be assessed;

(g) Close attention must be given to preparing the evaluation report. The draft report is reviewed for quality first by the EMT and then by peers or by external specialists (again, in the case of country offices, the regional office should provide quality assurance);

(h) The head of office approves the final report.

Utilization, dissemination and disclosure

55. Completed evaluations that are not properly utilized represent wasted investment and missed opportunities to improve programming for children and their communities. UNICEF offices must prepare a formal management response and make appropriate arrangements to maximize the use of evaluation results. For each evaluation, the office should:

(a) *Prepare and implement a multi-method communication plan* to disseminate the report and promote appropriate application of the results;

(b) *Prepare a formal management response*, with the active participation of concerned stakeholders, which reacts to the evaluation findings and recommendations; and takes follow-up action to implement agreed recommendations. Where recommendations are rejected or only partially accepted, the rationale should be noted.⁹ Regional offices should maintain oversight of the management response process; and

(c) *Pause programme implementation, where necessary*, in cases where evaluation results indicate that a proposed programme requires modification (for example, in cases of scale-up or follow-on programmes).

56. Effective utilization of evaluation results is supported by information management tools, which require offices to transmit key documents, as follows:

⁹ For example, in cases where recommendations are poorly formulated or lack supporting evidence.

(a) *Each IMEP* is uploaded into a corporate data base within 30 days of final approval, to permit identification of common topics for technical support and facilitate oversight;

(b) *Each evaluation* is uploaded into the Global Evaluation Database within 30 days of completion, to permit global sharing and final quality review;

(c) *Each management response* is uploaded in the tracking system within 30 days of final approval of the management response document; followed by quarterly updates on implementation of agreed actions.

57. All evaluations will be published on the evaluation pages of the UNICEF website unless, in exceptional cases, there are specific reasons not to do so. Any exceptions will be authorized by the Director of the Evaluation Office.

National evaluation capacity development standards

58. Given the diversity of development needs and situations, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system emphasized the ownership of development processes by Member States and the need for flexible, country-led development efforts, with continued support from United Nations agencies for technical assistance and capacity development, where needed. UNICEF shares this commitment to support the development of national capacities, including for evaluation.

59. UNICEF has played a significant role in NECD activities in the past and, with partners, will continue to do so. However, NECD needs are too large for UNICEF to be the main or sole supporter; therefore, the way forward is through collaboration with United Nations agencies and other partners. Although offices will need to be selective, it is expected that UNICEF would support the following:

- (a) Establishment and strengthening of national evaluation systems;
- (b) Strengthening of sectoral monitoring and evaluation or management information systems;
- (c) Training in monitoring and evaluation concepts and use of evidence;
- (d) Inclusion of NECD objectives within major programme evaluations;
- (e) Advocacy for and investment in country-led evaluations as well as use of evidence from such evaluations.

60. Although approaches to NECD are still evolving and performance standards are not yet well-defined, a sound approach will set out clear strategies tailored to the needs and capabilities of different partners – within national governments or the national authorities as a whole; various segments of civil society, including national evaluation associations; and operational partners. Strategies should take particular steps to involve disadvantaged groups or those underrepresented in national institutions. Agreement should be reached among partners about the priorities for action and the means of monitoring progress. Strategies should focus less on individual skills training and more on developing institutional capacities and building an enabling environment for evaluation. External support to local monitoring and evaluation centres, especially through South-South mechanisms, should be facilitated.

VI. Evaluation resources

61. High-quality evaluations cannot be successfully undertaken and generate useful insights without adequate investment of human and financial resources. Broad evaluation coverage, required to give a representative overview of policy and programme activities, likewise demands investment of the necessary resources. As part of their quality assurance and oversight roles, those overseeing the evaluation function – country representatives, regional directors, the Evaluation Committee or ultimately the Executive Board – may judge that evaluation planning, coverage and spending targets have been too low, and could request increased effort and expenditure, where necessary.

Human resources

62. The accountabilities presented in the policy require adequately skilled human resources. A large proportion of these persons will be contracted as consultants, in particular to execute evaluations and certain skill intensive tasks. However, evaluation accountabilities can only be fully addressed through in-house staff. It follows that every UNICEF office with policy or programme responsibilities needs some directly accountable evaluation staff capacity; and, in line with the principle that evaluation is a shared and distributed function, many leadership posts and sectoral positions will carry evaluation accountabilities.

63. External specialist assistance will often be required. Field offices should explore innovative arrangements, separately or in combination, such as pooling resources with other UNICEF offices to fund a multi-country post, or pooling resources with other United Nations agencies to fund a common United Nations country team post. Outsourcing technical elements to external centres of excellence in evaluation is an attractive option where appropriate capacity exists.

64. High-quality evaluation requires sound technical and management skills. This requires that:

- (a) Staff, consultants and other personnel engaged in designing, conducting and managing evaluation activities possess core evaluation competencies;
- (b) Evaluation specialists, whether staff or consultants, have the relevant educational background, qualification and training in evaluation, as well as relevant experience;
- (c) Evaluation staff devote adequate time to evaluation duties and organizational arrangements have been made to minimize competing roles and low-value tasks;
- (d) Evaluation staff have access to appropriate training and support;
- (e) Project staff and managers receive the training and technical support required to fulfil their evaluation accountabilities.

65. The multi-thematic, complex and evolving programme strategies employed to secure children's rights present conceptual and technical evaluation challenges often beyond the capacities of individual offices. Therefore, an office must make suitable arrangements to access technical support, for example, by using a current, quality-controlled roster of evaluators and firms or procuring high-quality consultancy services or drawing on technical skills from external centres of excellence.

Financial resources

66. High quality evaluations require adequate investment of financial resources. This has increasingly been recognized by development agencies within the United Nations as well as bilateral agencies, where up to 3 per cent of programme expenditure is earmarked for evaluation.¹⁰

67. Globally, to meet minimum evaluation coverage along the lines indicated in the previous section, UNICEF will allocate a minimum of 1 per cent of its overall programme expenditure on evaluation. Expenditure on evaluation by operational unit will be recorded through the organization's financial reporting system. Planning studies, monitoring, surveys and research should be financed separately from the evaluation pool; substantial allocations for these activities will be required to further develop and maintain the evidence base of UNICEF. Investment in monitoring systems is important not only in itself, but also to provide a basis for sound evaluation.

68. Given the decentralized character of evaluation in UNICEF, the bulk of investments in evaluation will be made at regional and country levels. However, allocations will also be made at headquarters to fund strategic evaluation activities, including the work of the Evaluation Office. Heads of offices have the responsibility to undertake careful evaluation planning and budgeting. Opportunities to pool resources by inter-office or inter-divisional collaboration within UNICEF as well as partnering with external stakeholders should be considered.

69. In country offices, representatives are expected to prepare and cost a comprehensive IMEP (with clear learning and accountability aims) as the basis for resource allocation decisions. They should then mobilize required funding, taking into consideration appropriate funding sources including government resources, public-sector and private-sector donors, as well as sister agencies, especially where country-led and joint evaluations are under consideration. Evaluation allocations should reflect the aims set out in the IMEP and the types of evaluation required generating evidence of the required quality.

70. For large country programmes spending 20 million dollars or more annually, an evaluation envelope equal to 3 per cent of programme spending should be reserved to fund a substantial programme of high-quality evaluations, covering humanitarian response as well as regular development programming. Such a programme should be designed to satisfy accountability requirements as well as providing a robust base for learning and improvement.¹¹

71. A lesser target may be justified but should not fall below 1 per cent. The lower figure is justified when it can be shown that: (a) a strong evidence base already exists, reducing the need for evaluation; (b) programming is dominated by efforts for which low-cost techniques (modelling based on monitoring data) are the accepted evaluative method; and (c) other partners will finance evaluations generating evidence that UNICEF can use. Offices whose agenda includes evaluation of innovative and pilot programmes, evaluation of complex policy areas or rigorous impact evaluations may have needs well above this minimum and should budget accordingly.

72. Regional offices should follow similar steps in mobilizing support for regional evaluation activities.

¹⁰ See, for example, the recently approved evaluation policies of UN-Women (2012) and of the United States Agency for International Development (2011).

¹¹ Large programmes spending more than 20 million dollars annually are found in about 40 countries, spending around 80 per cent of the total UNICEF country programme expenditure.

VII. Partnerships for evaluation

73. By its nature, evaluation brings a wide range of stakeholders together around common endeavours. In support of evaluation goals of accountability, learning and performance improvement, UNICEF will maintain active partnerships at all levels with a wide range of institutions, including United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, Governments, evaluation associations, non-governmental organizations, foundations and academic institutions. Notably, UNICEF will support the work of the UNEG in support of partnerships for evaluation.

Country-led evaluation

74. Evaluation should be guided by national priorities and conducted as far as possible in alignment with national systems. It should be inclusive with due attention to considerations of equity and gender equality, and take into account diverse national interests and values, including those of marginalized groups. UNICEF will support and engage with country-led evaluations managed by national authorities, including evaluation of UNICEF and United Nations contributions to national development goals and strategies. It will support and promote country-led evaluations and the use of evidence from such evaluations.

Joint evaluations

75. UNICEF has actively engaged in joint evaluations at all levels and will continue to do so, recognizing the benefits of a common approach in promoting learning, shared accountability and reduced transaction costs. Joint evaluations will continue to be conducted with national authorities and with other United Nations agencies, as well as the wide range of other partners with which UNICEF works.

National evaluation capacity development

76. UNICEF will continue to promote partnership to enhance national evaluation capacities. Partnership, especially among civil society organizations and through South-South mechanisms, is an important vehicle for capacity development.

VIII. Policy implementation and review

77. It is important to translate the revised Evaluation Policy into a clear strategy for improvement and plan of action. A number of current weaknesses in the evaluation function can be attributed to weak implementation rather than weaknesses in the policy. Accordingly, UNICEF will develop a comprehensive evaluation strategy and plan of action to carry forward effective implementation of the Evaluation Policy. This will be further supported by regional evaluation strategies addressing regional specificities. Procedural instructions and guidance will also be issued to complement the policy.

78. Independent review on the functioning of the policy will be required. It is therefore proposed that a comprehensive UNEG peer review should be undertaken in 2015.¹²

IX. Draft decision

79. UNICEF recommends that the Executive Board approve the following draft decision:

¹² UNEG, with support from the OECD/DAC evaluation network, has undertaken a series of such peer reviews in recent years.

The Executive Board,

1. *Welcomes* the preparation of the revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF, consistent with UNEG norms and standards, following the Executive Board decision 2012/12;
2. *Endorses* the revised Evaluation Policy;
3. *Requests* management to take action to comply with the policy;
4. *Requests* the Evaluation Office to report to the Executive Board on the implementation of the policy in future annual reports on the evaluation function;
5. *Urges* UNICEF to prepare a comprehensive global evaluation strategy.

Annex

Oversight functions

Evaluation should be differentiated from other forms of oversight and assessment, as listed below:¹³

(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, which 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 implement changes that address organizational and managerial challenges and improve internal work processes.

¹³ This annex is drawn from *Norms for Evaluation in the United Nations System*, UNEG, 2005.