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Management response to the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

In accordance with the Executive Board decision 2013/13, the present document provides the management response to the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/18](#)). The management response addresses the key elements of the evaluation report, including the progress of the evaluation function towards more impact- and outcome-level evaluations, the coverage, quality and utilization of evaluations in 2022, national evaluation capacity development and evaluation expenditure.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section V.

* [E/ICEF/2023/9](#).

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



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I. Overview

1. This management response has been prepared by the management of UNICEF in response to the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2023/18). It comments on progress within the evaluation function in 2022 in light of the forward-looking ambitions of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and the independent peer review of the evaluation function.
2. Management commends the contribution of the evaluation function to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) response, ongoing Level 3 emergencies, and the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Management supports the vision for a next-generation evaluation function and notes the progress made since the last peer review. It emphasizes the importance of impact- and outcome-level evaluations and partnerships, national evaluation capacity development, innovations and human resources.
3. The progressive increase in impact- and outcome-level evaluations is welcomed, as are the increased number of joint evaluations and evaluations covering multiple Goal Areas. Management is reassured that coverage rates remain high across regions, but urges action over the decline in coverage of disabilities and evaluation performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.
4. Management reiterates the importance of evaluation, and welcomes efforts to enhance the strategic and consultative approach to planning evaluation coverage. The revised organizational accountability framework is commended as a means to reinforce responsibilities to develop and implement management responses to evaluations.
5. The continued strengthening of the evaluation function is welcomed, but management takes note of the challenges in meeting the policy target of 1 per cent of expenditure for evaluation in 2022 and the outsized dependence on core resources for maintaining current levels of investment.
6. Management welcomes initiatives to gain more sustained support for strategic initiatives in impact evaluation and national evaluation capacity development, and reaffirms its commitment to meeting the 1 per cent expenditure target. Looking forward, management welcomes the implementation of a revised evaluation policy that builds on experience and lessons learned.

II. Background and key developments

A. Operational context

7. The emphasis on transformative impact- and outcome-level results in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 heightens the importance of an independent, credible and impactful UNICEF evaluation function. This is made even more important by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in stalling or reversing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Management welcomes the insights generated by the update on the status of the independent peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function (E/ICEF/2023/6) and the distinct but complementary review and revision of the evaluation policy, both of which will contribute to an evaluation function that is fit for the challenges ahead.
8. Management commends the work of the evaluation function to further normalize and adapt to lingering effects after the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Management is encouraged by the urgent attention given by the evaluation function

to support ongoing Level 3 emergencies throughout 2022, including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ukraine and Yemen. The prioritization of strengthening national evaluation capacity is particularly welcomed by management, as is the emphasis on strengthening measurement of impact- and outcome-level results.

9. Management underscores the clarified role (E/ICEF/2022/24) of the evaluation function in providing independent assurance alongside contributions to organizational learning objectives and programme effectiveness.

10. Management acknowledges the challenges of uneven, unpredictable and insufficient financing of the evaluation function. Management recalls decision 2022/20 of the Executive Board on the importance of sufficient and predictable regular resources for UNICEF to be able to deliver on the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 while maintaining robust internal control and accountability systems; and the concern expressed by the Executive Board about the decline of such core resources.

B. Key developments in the evaluation function

1. COVID-19 and Ukraine

11. Management appreciates the well-received evaluation of the UNICEF response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the contribution of the evaluation function to the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the COVID-19 Humanitarian Response, and the value of these evaluations in improving preparedness for future public health emergencies.

12. Management welcomes the innovations of the evaluation function in contributing to the response to the crisis in Ukraine, especially the strong focus on providing timely knowledge while minimizing unnecessary burden on front-line teams. Management is encouraged by the commitment to adapt and scale up the new tools and approaches generated through this process.

2. Strategy and vision

13. Management commends the work of the evaluation function on the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2023/3) and remains committed to addressing its recommendations for readiness. Management takes particular note of the recommendations that partly encompass the evaluation function, including: a joined-up approach to data, research, evaluation and knowledge management; intersectionality; programme and strategic reviews; and programmatic and organizational convergence towards outcomes for children.

14. Management notes the findings of the independent peer review of the evaluation function, and commends the significant progress UNICEF has made since the last peer review in 2017. Note is taken of the opportunities for further improvement in independence, credibility and utility; accountability and monitoring of roles and responsibilities; alignment of the evidence functions; and the need for stronger monitoring and data systems to feed into strategic impact evaluations. Management looks forward to a revised evaluation policy that addresses these opportunities.

15. The recent update to the UNICEF accountability framework (E/ICEF/2022/24) represents a significant step forward in strengthening accountability and enhancing the role of the Evaluation Office.

3. Impact- and outcome-level evaluations, and partnerships

16. Management notes the work of the evaluation function in responding to the ambitious focus on outcomes in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; and emphasizes the important contribution of the evaluation function in producing “more robust evaluative evidence on the efficiency and sustainability of UNICEF programming” as called for by the 2021 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN).¹ Management underscores the organizational commitment to accelerate progress in the strengthening of “monitoring, evaluation and learning processes and results-based management practices” in the management response to the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2023/4).

17. Management commends the evaluation function for its strategic partnering with the following organizations to improve evidence generation: the Development Assistance Network of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Evaluation Group Evaluation Practice Exchange, the European Evaluation Association, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

4. National evaluation capacity development

18. The strong commitment to revitalizing and rolling out initiatives to strengthen national capacity for evaluation is welcomed. The face-to-face training of 101 participants (including 65 senior-level government partners) represents a significant move in this direction that was made possible by corporate financing of the evaluation function. Management encourages the full roll-out of the face-to-face Executive Course for Evaluation Leaders to the four planned cohorts in 2023; and widespread and inclusive availability of the online Intermediate Moderated Programme for Evaluation Systems Strengthening. Management commends the complementary work of regional and country offices in steering localized solutions for national evaluation capacity development. Management notes the importance of linking these initiatives to contemporary and complementary investments, such as training on rights and results-based management, and humanitarian leadership.

5. Innovations

19. Management notes the extensive innovation in tools, technologies and methodologies to support more timely, useful and outcome-focused evaluations. Particularly welcome is the use of real-time data and existing internal data sources in emergencies. Management underscores the importance of scaling up recent lessons, experiences and innovations from Afghanistan and Ukraine to other countries and regions; and of making them available to partners in line with the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review.

20. Management commends efforts to broaden the range of evaluative products to do more to “catalyse transformational and systemic change at the outcome level”,² including meta-syntheses, evidence and gap maps, and application of artificial intelligence. Management also welcomes endeavours to expand and update the range of methodologies being practised; and underlines the necessity for supporting demand-side factors as well as supply-side gaps in ensuring maximum use of these innovations.

¹ Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, “Annual Report, 2021” (Paris, 2022).

² Ibid.

6. Human resources

21. Management welcomes the strengthening of the central evaluation function by the addition of technical capacities. The expansion of the pool of pre-approved consultants and firms from the global south is particularly notable. Management is confident that the revised evaluation policy will further strengthen the decentralized evaluation function. Management further notes the importance of having reliable access to high-level technical skills to reinforce more strategic and effective evidence functions.

III. Performance of the evaluation function

A. Number and coverage of evaluations

22. Management notes the reported increase in the number of completed evaluations to the highest-ever level of 199, alongside possible explanatory factors for this rise relating to the lingering effects of COVID-19 delays and the diversification of evaluative products. Management expects that some of these factors and their effects on evaluation will moderate in 2023 and future years. Management is reassured that coverage rates remain very high across regions, and recommits to maintaining these levels. The relatively higher incidence of multi-country evaluations in specific regions is noted, and management reiterates the importance of including high-quality individual country reports within larger evaluations.

B. Scope of evaluations, including impact and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

23. Management views the trend towards more impact- and outcome-level evaluations (and decline in output-level-only evaluations) positively, albeit that it is a relatively slow shift. Management appreciates the value of tightening the definition of “impact evaluations” used, and notes the possible explanation of weak availability of programme monitoring and data. This aligns with observations from the independent peer review, evaluability assessment and MOPAN, among others, and underscores the importance of sufficient, predictable and coherent investments across the evidence functions.

24. The well-distributed mix of summative and formative evaluations and significant increase in evaluations covering multiple goal areas are both welcomed by management. Similarly, the increase in the number of joint evaluations is commended, as it reflects the strong commitment of the organization to effective system-wide ways of working. Management anticipates that the revised evaluation policy will further incentivize these positive trends.

25. Management commends the increase in the absolute number of evaluations that incorporate gender equality, and emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming a gender lens across all evaluations. Meanwhile, management views with concern the drop in evaluation performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018–2022. While the plausible explanation of change in independent rating is noted, this must be a priority issue in 2023.

26. Similarly, a decline in coverage of disabilities is noted with concern, and management calls for improved mainstreaming of disabilities to meet commitments under the Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, 2022–2030.³

27. Management notes the changing nature of humanitarian coverage in evaluations, with an apparent reduction in mainstreaming accompanied by a significant increase in the absolute number of evaluations covering all levels of emergency. Management reiterates the importance of timeliness and a focus on utility for front-line teams in evaluations of humanitarian action.

C. Evaluation quality

28. Management commends the fact that, once again, no evaluation report was rated as unsatisfactory. Management welcomes the additional scrutiny of evaluation quality, and considers this to be part of the process of progressively tightening standards evaluations. Management is confident that the revised evaluation policy will strengthen the role and responsibility of evaluation managers to ensure that every evaluation report reaches a level of at least “satisfactory” in the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS). Management also calls on the Evaluation Office to identify further opportunities for organizational learning from evaluations rated as ‘exceptional’.

D. Evaluation use, including management responses

29. Management reiterates the importance of timely implementation of evaluation recommendations and notes that the reported growth in the number of evaluations submitted in 2022 (and 2021) has not been accompanied by the requisite maintenance of standards for submission of management responses. Management also notes the continuing inconsistency across regions in the timely submission of management responses and in the completion of agreed actions.

30. The revised organizational accountability framework and evaluation policy both provide a timely basis for reinforcing responsibilities to develop and implement management responses to evaluations. Management commends the proposed focus of the evaluation function on strengthening participatory planning of evaluations, which is a prerequisite for ownership and use of evaluative evidence; and remains strongly committed to ensuring the full and timely use of evaluations at all levels of the organization.

E. Strategic financing of the evaluation function

31. Management notes that the reported \$54.8 million spent on evaluation is a major investment that has delivered a record number of evaluations. In particular, management notes that while a central allocation of resources enabled full implementation of the 2022 global evaluation plan, there was an overall decline in the proportion of global programme expenditure on evaluation in comparison with 2021.

32. Management takes particular note of the challenges faced by the decentralized evaluation function in reaching the 1 per cent policy target, particularly business areas with expenditure over \$60 million per year.⁴ Management notes that when the very

³ United Nations Children’s Fund, *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, 2022–2030* (New York, December 2022).

⁴ Management recognizes the challenges faced by the evaluation function in securing the sufficient and predictable resources that it needs at the decentralized level, which are not unique to the function. For example, it recalls the agreed management response to the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF

largest emergency operations are excluded from the analysis, then the proportion of funds spent on evaluation is higher. This is because for the very largest emergency operations spending 1 per cent in the same year as funds are received may not be conducive to programme effectiveness or even operationally feasible.

33. In a trend continuing from 2021, the evaluation function relies disproportionately on regular resources (38 per cent of evaluation expenditure in 2022), despite an overall decline in this type of financing to 14 per cent in 2022.⁵ For example, previous investment by management in the evaluation capacity development fund was drawn from regular resources. This underscores the Executive Board “concern with the current lower level and trend of declining voluntary contributions to regular resources provided by Member States,” as noted in decision 2022/20.

34. Notwithstanding these challenges, management reaffirms its commitment to adequately resourcing the evaluation function and meeting the 1 per cent evaluation expenditure target during the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

IV. Conclusions

35. Management commends the critical contribution of the independent evaluation function in supporting evidence-informed decision-making at the heart of UNICEF work to reach the most vulnerable children. Management particularly welcomes the methodological innovations introduced in 2022 to make better and more timely use of existing data, especially in supporting humanitarian response, and in outcome- and impact-level evaluations. It encourages efforts to ensure sustainability of national evaluation capacity development and systems-strengthening initiatives.

36. Recalling the organizational commitment to a coherent evidence function (E/ICEF/2023/4), management urges the acceleration of efforts to achieve greater coordination and collaboration with complementary functions. Likewise, management commends the continuing participation of the evaluation function in United Nations system-wide coordination and reform, and welcomes increased collaboration on joint evidence synthesis.

37. Management is encouraged by the continuing high levels of coverage of evaluations and the commitment to progressively tighten standards and measures of evaluation quality. As a prerequisite for greater use, management welcomes the strengthening of integrated strategic planning across the evaluation function at all levels of the organization. It notes the forward-looking efforts to better address intersectionality and to better integrate environmental and climate change and socioeconomic considerations in all evaluations.

38. In conclusion, management commends the progress and innovations made by the evaluation function in 2022, and encourages the Evaluation Office in its efforts to implement the recommendations of the independent peer review. As a partner to the function, management looks forward to implementation of the revised evaluation policy.

Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2023/4) to support more strategic impact evaluations by financing specific inputs to evaluations produced by other evidence functions.

⁵ In 2021, the evaluation function was 49 per cent financed by other resources, whereas 71 per cent of global expenditure overall came from resources; in 2022, evaluation was 62 per cent financed by other resources, compared with 77 per cent of global expenditure.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/18](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/19](#));
 2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, its summary ([E/ICEF/2023/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/21](#)).
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