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Management response to the annual report for 2019 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 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2020/12](#)).

The management response addresses the key elements of the evaluation report, including the use of innovative tools and approaches, the governance and influence of the function, its role in the context of the reform of the United Nations development system and the coverage and quality of evaluations performed in 2019.

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

* [E/ICEF/2020/6](#).



I. Overview

1. This management response has been prepared by the management of UNICEF in response to the annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2020/12](#)). It comments on the contributions of the function during the year and the key corporate evaluations referred to in the report. It also addresses the use of innovative tools and approaches by the function, its governance and influence at the organizational level and its role in the context of the United Nations development system reform.
2. Management notes that answering the Secretary-General's call to action requires renewed focus around: (a) increasing support for national evaluation capacity development and country-led evaluation of national policies and programmes; (b) continued acceleration of joint evaluations with sister United Nations agencies, with a stronger focus on the country level in support of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes; and (c) developing agile, innovative data-collection and analysis tools in support of adaptive management and continuous improvement.
3. The evaluation function is on track in implementing the evaluation policy ([E/ICEF/2018/14](#)) and the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2018/3](#)), with noticeable results in 2019. Management acknowledges the efforts and commitment of the evaluation function to improve its governance and influence at the organizational level, the use of innovative tools and approaches and the increasing coverage and quality of evaluations.
4. Management fully acknowledges the additional work required to achieve the target of 1 per cent of programme expenditure for evaluation by the end of 2019, as established by the Executive Board in its decision 2018/10. Management draws attention to the rising trend in financial resources allocated to the function, with expenditure increasing to 0.86 per cent in 2019 (from 0.80 per cent in 2018). Management is committed to making further efforts at the regional level to attain the organizational target for expenditure on the evaluation function. In the context of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the post-pandemic period, management will continue to aim to reach the target by the end of 2020, but this effort may be extended into 2021, as the pandemic may impact the organization's ability to complete evaluations.
5. Management is pleased to note that in 2019, an independent quality assessment of UNICEF evaluations rated 99 per cent of them as either "highly satisfactory" or "satisfactory". These results demonstrate the high quality of the advisory services provided by the function and the organizational confidence in the recommendations received. Management will continue to encourage assessments of emerging topics and to place learning at the centre of the organization.
6. Management commends the results of the corporate evaluations completed in 2019, notably the evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian settings, the evaluation of the two successive UNICEF Gender Actions Plans during the period 2014–2019 and the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the 2015–2018 Ethiopia drought response, among others.
7. Management expresses satisfaction that the evaluation function successfully completed its programme of work for 2019 and reaffirms its commitment to the strengthening of the function.

II. UNICEF evaluation in a changing world

8. Management notes that coping with the pressing needs for more reliable information to support decision-making requires strong internal coordination. The role of the evaluation function has been fundamental in providing UNICEF with a responsive internal source of high-quality evidence in a rapidly changing world. Management appreciates all the initiatives the function is undertaking, including innovative technologies and approaches and new products and tools.

A. Innovative technologies for evaluation

9. Management recognizes the difficulty of obtaining real-time data in the context of humanitarian action and encourages the use of innovative technologies for data collection, e.g., the use of U-Report in combination with third-party field monitoring in the collection of real-time data from an expanded group of stakeholders for the evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Level 2 crisis in Cameroon. Management supports the Evaluation Office's exploration of additional ways in which U-Report could be employed to facilitate data collection as part of broader efforts to receive direct feedback from a variety of population groups at the country level. Similarly, management welcomes the current partnership between the function and the Office of Research-Innocenti in developing the Global Development Commons, a digital-evidence platform centred around child-focused policy and programming. This platform brings together evaluation and research evidence from UNICEF, other United Nations and multilateral agencies, Member States, academia and a variety of different communities, providing ready access to vital evidence as countries consider scaling up child-focused interventions in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Innovative approaches

10. Management notes that the use of real-time evaluation methods is being consolidated to support the assessment of UNICEF humanitarian responses as they unfold. The value brought to the evaluations of the responses to the 2019 Cyclone Idai crisis in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe demonstrated the positive impact of this approach, which was piloted in 2018.

11. Management also commends the use of evaluability assessments to maximize support to UNICEF programme planning and design. This type of evaluation at the initial stages of interventions can help to confirm the evaluation-readiness of UNICEF work and, as such, to validate the underlying theory of change and results verification and measurement in programmes. In 2019, the assessments of child protection in humanitarian action, adolescent participation and empowerment and two country programmes provided the opportunity to identify the adjustments required for these programmes to be ready for future comprehensive evaluations.

C. New evaluation products and tools

12. Management further acknowledges the evaluation initiatives to support oversight, such as the humanitarian landscape analysis to identify best practices for informed decision-making in the context of complex emergencies; the readiness assessment tool to identify gaps and opportunities to boost the role of UNICEF by area of intervention, for example climate change; and the process-tracing approach to assess the organizational contributions to public policies in middle- and high-income

countries, for example the UNICEF contribution (technical assistance) to the “Yo Me Apunto” strategy of the Government of Costa Rica. The latter was based on the identification of regions of the country with high levels of school dropout to analyse their specific factors and design actions targeting communities, parents and education centres to successfully reintegrate students or increase enrolment.

III. Evaluation in the context of the United Nations reform

13. Management is pleased to highlight the contributions of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2019 to promoting joint and system-wide evaluations, in line with the reform of the United Nations development system for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

14. The partnerships built by the UNICEF Evaluation Office with other United Nations agencies, through the joint evaluation of joint programmes or country-based pooled funds, or through participation in inter-agency humanitarian evaluation groups, will strengthen the teamwork of the UNICEF evaluation function with peers in the United Nations family. These collaborative assessments will shape and enhance the future of joint initiatives, namely the programmes on child marriage and on the abandonment of female genital mutilation, and will provide lessons to improve collective humanitarian responses, efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and joint thematic evaluations at the country level.

15. Management commends the support the evaluation function has provided to the enhancement of the capacities of United Nations staff at the regional level for the evaluation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks at the country level. Management views with satisfaction the important role of regional offices in supporting these activities, particularly the role of UNICEF as co-chair of the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for East Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP), which provided an opportunity for discussion by hosting training on evaluations in the United Nations context. UNEDAP has supported several United Nations country teams for the quality assurance of evaluations in the region.

16. Management also recognizes the engagement the evaluation function undertook in 2019 to strengthen national evaluation capacities, as set out in its revised policy, particularly the contributions to country-led evaluations, the evaluations conducted jointly with Governments and the partnerships that resulted in a guidebook to help national actors incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into national planning.

17. Management recognizes the opportunities created by the evaluation function in 2019, mainly the second annual forum entitled “Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities for the Africa We Want: Towards Evidence-Based SDGs and Agenda 2063 Reporting”, held in December 2019 in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Other similar exchange opportunities have demonstrated the UNICEF contribution to enhancing capacities at the country level, engaging national actors and scaling up good practices and the resulting acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. Evaluation coverage and quality in 2019

A. Coverage

18. Management notes that the positive trend seen in 2018 with regard to the number and coverage of evaluations continued in 2019. The planning capacity of the

evaluation function, leveraged by the resources of the Evaluation Pooled Fund, resulted in an 8 per cent increase in submitted evaluations, from 107 in 2018 to 116 in 2019, plus an improvement of six percentage points in geographical coverage, from 89 per cent in the period 2016–2018 to 95 per cent in the period 2017–2019. Management acknowledges the efforts of the function to support the country offices that have not been able to submit an evaluation in the past years — the Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela — recognizing that the country offices for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have already started their evaluation processes, aiming towards completion in 2021.

19. Management also notes that the evaluation function is working to harmonize programmatic expenditure with the thematic distribution of evaluations among the five Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. As in 2018, Goal Area 1 (Every child survives and thrives), was the most covered in 2019. Management encourages efforts from the function to increase evaluations under Goal Area 5 (Every child has an equitable chance in life), and particularly Goal Area 4 (Every child lives in a safe and clean environment). The latter had the least number of evaluations in both 2018 and 2019, and thus deviated more from the current distribution of programme expenditure.

20. Similarly, regarding cross-cutting priorities, management commends the function's proactive investments in gender-equality capacity-building among staff, which resulted in an increase of 24 percentage points in the rate of evaluations incorporating a gender perspective (2019: 75 per cent; 2018: 51 per cent). An important improvement is noted regarding the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, with UNICEF exceeding requirements with an aggregate average score of 9.27 (2018: 6.15).

21. Management encourages the Evaluation Office to strive to increase the number of evaluations covering the cross-cutting priority of humanitarian action, as there was a slight decrease in coverage (28 per cent in 2019 compared with 30 per cent in 2018).

B. Quality

22. Management notes that the quality of evaluations has improved continuously since 2012. In 2019, of the 112 evaluations independently assessed for quality, 99 per cent were rated as “satisfactory” or “highly satisfactory”, compared with 87 per cent in 2018. Management encourages the Evaluation Office to continue to strengthen its technical support to all offices on quality assurance.

C. Emerging topics

23. Management acknowledges that the programmes assessed by the evaluation function have multiple dimensions and appreciates the inclusion of emerging topics, such as mental health and education for children with disabilities as well as those that link humanitarian and development programming, as part of evaluation coverage.

24. Management also takes notes of the work undertaken in Europe and Central Asia to provide evidence on good practices and scalable initiatives on mental health. It acknowledges the function's call for country offices to increase attention to inclusive education for children with disabilities through policy guidance and teacher development, particularly the recommendation for programmes to focus more on the achievement of education outcomes. It also endorses the recommendation for scaling

up the use of technology and access to learning materials for children with impairments to strengthen education systems.

25. Management welcomes the results of the multi-country evaluation of UNICEF interventions in the Latin America and Caribbean region in response to violence against children and the remarks about regional results in advocacy and legal frameworks. Management recognizes that these efforts require a more systematic approach to strengthening gender equality and the participation of young people in interventions.

26. Management acknowledges the assessment of the contributions of UNICEF to linking humanitarian and development programming. The organization's interventions have helped to bridge the gap between humanitarian relief and development by influencing the prioritization of programmes for young people. Management welcomes the recommendations regarding disaster risk-reduction interventions and the need for well-developed approaches to effectively embed child-centred disaster risk-reduction and resilience programming in education systems.

V. Governance of evaluation at UNICEF

A. Governance

27. Management welcomes the update on the implementation of the revised evaluation policy ([E/ICEF/2018/14](#)) and notes the valuable oversight guidance provided by the Executive Board, the Audit Advisory Committee and the Evaluation Advisory Panel.

28. Management acknowledges the updated terms of reference of the Global Evaluation Committee and its advisory role to the Executive Director on the use of inputs from evaluation in decision-making at the strategic and programmatic levels.

29. Management affirms the definition of top-down responsibilities, from the overall oversight of the function by the Director of Evaluation, to the increased coordination at the regional and country levels led by the regional offices and dedicated evaluation positions.

B. Resources

30. Management is pleased to observe a rising trend in financial resources allocated to the evaluation function, with 0.86 per cent of programme expenditure in 2019 compared with 0.80 per cent in 2018. This increase demonstrates progress towards achieving the target of 1 per cent set by the Executive Board in its decision 2018/10 and the revised evaluation policy. Management is strongly committed to supporting the Middle East and North Africa and West and Central Africa regions to attain the evaluation targets, not only to close the gap with other regions, but also to ensure the evaluation coverage of a significant part of UNICEF programme expenditure.

31. Management notes the capacity-building activities undertaken by the evaluation function in 2019, particularly the training programme for staff and partners initiated in collaboration with the United Nations Staff College and the orientation modules developed to showcase the latest work of the evaluation function. Management also welcomes the organization of the Global Evaluation Learning Day, which shared with different stakeholders the valuable contribution of evaluations with real-world examples.

C. Tools and quality assurance

32. Management is pleased that the Evaluation Office successfully rolled out in 2019 the new and integrated Evidence Information Systems Integration platform, which integrates UNICEF systems for planning, analysing, reporting and archiving evidence-generation activities for the research and evaluation functions.

33. Similarly, management commends the second review of the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System and acknowledges (a) that the system has contributed to the current upward trend in the quality of UNICEF evaluations; and (b) the recommendations to improve the review template to respond to emerging needs and encourage the transformation of the system into a comprehensive knowledge-sharing platform.

VI. Evaluation support to UNICEF processes

A. Implementation of recommendations

34. Management notes that implementation rates for management actions have been consistent through the period 2017–2018, with more than 90 per cent of actions in 2018 and 2017 having been implemented. Management agrees that implementation rates could be further improved and is committed to the regular monitoring and implementation of all targeted actions, with stronger efforts to be made by divisions at headquarters and by offices in the West and Central Africa region, with 17 per cent of actions not yet started, and offices in the regions of Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, with an average of 10 per cent of actions not started.

B. Evaluation influence

35. Management reiterates its conviction that evaluations are a reliable source of information to support the achievement of positive change in the organization and fully supports the efforts of the function to share evidence collected with internal and external stakeholders. It is with appreciation that management received the webinars and infographics, which, during 2019, supported not only a more effective way to communicate the results of evaluations, but also invited management to think of more user-friendly ways to present organizational information. Management anticipates that the “What Works” series on UNICEF work for children, expected to be rolled out in the second quarter of 2020, will contribute to organizational awareness on lessons learned and opportunities to better direct the delivery of results.

36. Management appreciates the concrete examples shared in the annual report on the evaluation function demonstrating the ways in which, during 2019, evaluations influenced national policies in Malawi (UNICEF community-led total sanitation and hygiene programme) and the expansion of programmes at the country level in Thailand (Child Support Grant impact evaluation). Management has also been actively committed to the implementation of recommendations for the development of a new structure and strategy for innovation and the revision of the UNICEF child protection strategy.

37. Management believes that the influence of the above-mentioned examples is based on good design, strong support, the engagement of stakeholders and the concerted approach of UNICEF to recommendations.

VII. Corporate evaluations

38. Management is pleased that the evaluation function is on schedule to conduct its plan for global evaluations, in accordance with the programme of work for 2019. Management reaffirms its support to the function and its commitment to address agreed recommendations.

39. Management wishes to commend the results of the evaluation on the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian settings and the recognition of successful advocacy for the inclusion of education as a key element of humanitarian responses. Management also acknowledges the recommendations on developing more-targeted education solutions for complex emergency contexts, as compared with responses more suitable for situations of natural disaster.

40. Management welcomes the recommendations resulting from the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan during the period 2014–2019. The conclusions indicated that the Plans included critical elements for a high-quality strategic instrument regarding the definition of gender equality and a theory of change, but that efforts were required to achieve structural change and expand ambitions beyond the organization's internal environment. Management takes note of the recommendations to improve organizational awareness of the Gender Action Plans at all levels and that senior management define clear terms of reference and responsibilities for the implementation of the Plans and communicates the existing corporate principle of gender equality.

41. Management encourages the evaluation function to continue to exercise its leadership in the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group and its active participation in inter-agency evaluations. For 2019, the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the 2015–2018 drought response in Ethiopia provided country-and global-level recommendations, with conclusions that commended the well-coordinated collective response that saved many lives and allowed respondents to receive urgent aid and respectful treatment. The evaluation report also issued recommendations for future responses to similar crises.

42. Management appreciates the collaboration with other United Nations entities during 2019 to assess progress towards the results of joint programmes and global initiatives and on strengthening the evaluation network. The joint evaluations carried out in 2019 in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund of the joint programme on child marriage and the abandonment of female genital mutilation and of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, phase I, supported the identification of complementary capabilities to face these sensitive issues and assessed if the joint response should be taken further. Such joint efforts improve the quality of responses and build the necessary coherence for moving forward with the United Nations reform agenda.

VIII. Conclusions

43. Management fully acknowledges the work in progress to achieve the target of 1 per cent of programme expenditure for evaluation by the end of 2019, which the Executive Board established in its decision 2018/10. It considers that the level of 0.86 per cent achieved by the end of 2019 demonstrates the efforts the organization has undertaken to achieve the goal, as increasing demands from programmes and operations continue. Management looks forward to analysing the expenditure on evaluation work at the regional level, with the intent of ensuring adequate expenditure on evaluation, particularly for regions with the most significant programme expenditure. Management is committed to making further efforts at the regional level

to attain the organizational target for expenditure on the evaluation function. Management will continue to aim to reach the target by the end of 2020, but this may be delayed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organization's ability to complete evaluations.

44. The work of the Evaluation Office, as demonstrated by the results of the independent quality assessment of evaluations, has improved in terms of a higher percentage of evaluations rated as "satisfactory" or "highly satisfactory". Management will continue to encourage initiatives of the evaluation function that include emerging topics and new areas to enrich opportunities for learning in the organization.

45. For 2020, management reaffirms its support to concerted efforts to improve the implementation of actions resulting from agreed evaluation recommendations. It will give particular emphasis to better understanding the reasons for the slight lag in the implementation of actions and to encouraging a prompt response by offices in the West and Central Africa region and headquarters divisions, which have had the slowest implementation rate over the past three years; and by offices in the Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia and Middle East and North Africa regions.

46. UNICEF management is committed to continue to strengthen the evaluation function and is convinced that the results of evaluations are influencing the qualitative leap in the effectiveness of programmes and the overall organizational strategy. Management is aware that the evaluation function, in the implementation of the revised evaluation policy, is mobilizing evidence to support the achievement of results for children and accelerate action towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

IX. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the following documents presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2020:

- (a) Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2020/12) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/13);
- (b) Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, its summary (E/ICEF/2020/14) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/15).