Peer Review of

Evaluation Function at

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

FINAL REPORT

May 15, 2006

Table of Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACMA	Advocacy, Communications, Monitoring and Analysis Programme (Ghana)
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AGEI	African Girls Education Initiative
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability in Performance in Humanitarian Action
CBO	Community-based Organization
CCC	Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies (for UNICEF response in emergency situations)
CCH	Coordination Committee on Health
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEE/CIS/B	Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States region
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document (previously CN and Country Programme Recommendation)
CPE	Country Programme Evaluation
CPAP	Country Programme Action Plan
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	United Kingdom – Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DPP	Division of Policy and Planning (UNICEF Headquarters)
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission
EO	Evaluation Office (UNICEF Headquarters, New York)
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HQ	Headquarters
HRBA(P)	Human Rights based Approach (to Programming)
IMEF	Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
IMEP	Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
IPDET	International Programme for Development Evaluation Training
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey
MOWAC	Ministry of Women and Children (Ghana)

MTR	Mid-Term Review
MTSP	Medium Term Strategic Plan (currently 2002-2005, new 2006-2009)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NYHQ	New York Headquarters (UNICEF)
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OLDS	Organizational Learning and Development Section (in the Division of Human Resources)
OR	Other Resources
OVC	Orphans and vulnerable children
PPPM	Programme Policy and Procedure Manual
RD	Regional Director
RO	Regional Office
RR	Regular Resources
SWAp	Sector-wide approach
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

The Peer Review of UNICEF's evaluation function aims to assess and enhance the organization's evaluation capacity and performance, thereby helping to improve its development performance. At the same time, the review also aims to foster the increased use of UNICEF's own evaluation products by member states and partners as an alternative to costly and time-consuming externally-led evaluations of performance.

The UNICEF Peer Review is the second effort to apply a new assessment approach designed under the auspices of the Evaluation Network of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The approach is based on assessment against defined and agreed-upon international benchmarks and best practices, articulated in the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System approved by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in April 2005.

The review of UNICEF's evaluation function was conducted by an independent Review Panel made up of professional evaluators with a wide range of experience and excellent understanding of the application of the norms and standards for evaluation. The review was led by the Evaluation Division of the Canadian International Development Agency.

The Peer Review Panel was comprised of six members and two alternates:

- Ms Françoise Mailhot: Evaluation Manager, Evaluation Division, Performance and Knowledge Management Branch, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), who chaired the Panel.

- Mr. Finbar O'Brien, Head of Evaluation and Audit, Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, who also participated actively in the Ghana country reference case.

- Ms Agnete Eriksen, Senior Evaluation Manager, Evaluation Department, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Norway.

- Dr Sulley Gariba: Independent Evaluation Expert and Executive Director, Institute for Policy Alternatives, Ghana; former President of International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS).

- Mr. Giorgis Getinet: Director, Operation Evaluation Department, African Development Bank, Tunisia (retired February 2006).

- Ms Donatella Magliani: Director, Evaluation Group, Bureau for Organizational Strategy and Learning, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Vienna and Co-chair of the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Quality Stamp Task Force.

- Ms Beate Bull (alternate to Norway representative): Evaluation Adviser, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Norway.

- Mr. Patrick Empey (alternate to Ireland representative): Senior Evaluation Manager, Audit and Evaluation Unit, Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland.

The Panel received invaluable assistance from two advisers, Ruth Baldwin (Canada) and Ingrid Eide (Norway), both of whom are experienced consultants in the field of evaluation.

A peer review is conducted on a consultative basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the entities involved, as well as their shared confidence in the process. The Peer Panel has appreciated the full cooperation of UNICEF in this process. The Panel conducted extensive documentary research, numerous interviews with UNICEF staff, Board members and evaluators, both internal and external. It engaged in intensive discussions with UNICEF's Evaluation Office. It also undertook a study of how evaluation is implemented in one country (Ghana), not as an evaluation of the country or regional offices, but to gain a more in-depth understanding of the systems and processes that guide UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function.

The <u>central question</u> for the Peer Review was:

> *Whether UNICEF's evaluation function and its products are independent, credible, and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed against UNEG norms and standards by a panel of evaluation peers.*

The short answer to this question is a qualified 'Yes'. The central Evaluation Office demonstrates a high level of independence and produces evaluations which are credible and useful for learning and decision-making within the organization. The decentralized evaluation system is appropriate for the operational nature of the organization, but its credibility and usefulness are limited by critical gaps in resources. Before the evaluation function's potential to strengthen accountability and organizational learning can be fully realized, some organizational constraints must be addressed.

The Executive Summary provides commentary on the Panel's judgment and recommendations to enhance UNICEF's evaluation function and performance assessment. The findings have been discussed with UNICEF senior management and will be presented to the Executive Board meeting in June 2006.

The report is intended for decision-makers and other users of evaluation. The information will be of particular interest for UNICEF, but will also be relevant for the OECD-DAC Evaluation Committee and the UN Evaluation Group.

We hope that UNICEF as a whole – its Executive Board, senior management and staff – will be able to make use of the Peer Review Panel's assessment and recommendations to strengthen the conduct and use of evaluation in the organization.

Françoise Mailhot   Goberdhan Singh
Chair of the Peer Review Panel   Director

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Background

1.   The UNICEF Peer Review is the second effort to apply a new assessment
     approach designed under the auspices of the Evaluation Network of the
     Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic
     Co-operation and Development (OECD). The approach aims to enhance
     <u>multilateral agencies' own evaluation capacity and performance</u> by reviewing an
     agency's evaluation systems and processes.

2.   The Peer Panel has greatly appreciated UNICEF's collaboration and full support
     throughout this review. The Evaluation Office has engaged with the Panel in an
     open and constructive dialogue, sharing information, thoughts and ideas.
     Executive Board members, senior management, regional directors, evaluation
     staff at UNICEF headquarters and in the field have all facilitated the collection of
     data and discussion of findings. The West and Central Africa Regional Office and
     Ghana Country Office provided essential support to complete the Ghana country
     reference case. This high level of engagement has enabled the Panel to come to its
     conclusions with confidence. Further, the Panel commends UNICEF for its
     willingness to engage openly and candidly in discussions about its capacities and
     performance.

3.   The conclusions and recommendations in the report reflect the Panel's judgment.
     However, the Panel recognizes that UNICEF must decide which approach is best
     suited to the particularities of the organization.

Purpose of the Review

4.   The purpose of the review was to determine:

     *Whether UNICEF's evaluation function and its products are independent,
     credible, and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed against
     UNEG norms and standards by a panel of evaluation peers.*

Methodology

5.   The three crucial aspects of evaluation – *independence, credibility and usefulness*
     – were assessed against defined and agreed-upon international benchmarks and
     best practices, articulated in the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN
     System approved by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in April 2005.

6.   The UNICEF Peer Review was able to draw from, and build on, the experience of
     the UNDP review completed in December 2005. The UNICEF Peer Review
     followed the same general methodology, but the Panel made some adjustments to

reflect the particularities of UNICEF's evaluation system:

- A country reference case (Ghana) was introduced to provide illustrative information about UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function.

- The partner countries' role as stakeholders and users of evaluation was included to reflect UNICEF's emphasis on national ownership and capacity development.

- Three issues of interest to UNICEF were included and assessed against relevant UNEG standards: fostering evaluation capacity building in member countries, facilitating stakeholder participation in evaluation, and mainstreaming gender in evaluation.

Limitations of the Review

7.   Although the review looked at UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function in a systematic manner, the Peer Panel recognizes that it has been hampered in drawing strong conclusions about the decentralized elements by the limitations of the data collected from the regional and country levels.

8.   The Panel felt that the OECD-DAC assessment approach was too limiting and consequently made changes as described above to better suit the UNICEF context.

9.   The requirement to follow the UNEG Norms and Standards posed some challenges in so far as they do not fall neatly into the categories of independence, credibility and usefulness. The Panel generally followed the 'sorting' approach used for the UNDP Peer Review normative framework. However, the Panel will make a recommendation to the OECD-DAC Evaluation Network to review the assessment approach in light of this difficulty.

Overall Assessment

Purpose of the Evaluation Function

10.   The primary purposes for UNICEF's evaluation function are consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards. They are: [1]

- To *inform decision-making* by identifying and understanding results and their impacts;
- To identify lessons in order *to facilitate improvements* in on-going or future operations;
- *To provide information for accountability* purposes.

11.   UNICEF also identifies secondary purposes for evaluation which relate to issues that are important to the organization - (1) using participatory processes *to expand*

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[1] UNICEF, *Report on the evaluation function in the context of the medium-term strategic plan*, (E/ICEF/2002/10), 11 April 2002.

ownership of the evaluation, and (2) using the results of evaluation as "impartial and credible evidence"[2] *to advocate for children's and women's rights* in global and national policies and programmes.

12.   In practice, UNICEF places the major emphasis for evaluation on <u>learning</u> to inform decision-making and future planning and less on accountability.[3] To improve the use of evaluation for accountability purposes, the Panel believes that the organization will have to enhance its systems for planning and performance measurement (Results-Based Management).

Central Evaluation Office

13.   The central Evaluation Office has strengthened the role and performance of the evaluation function in UNICEF over the past five years. It demonstrates a high level of independence and professional credibility. Evaluation's contribution to management and decision-making for both programmes and policies is considered by the Panel to be strong, timely and useful. The EO has played an important leadership role in UN harmonization through the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). However, the Panel agrees with the EO's self-assessment that improvements are needed in the areas of (1) strengthening evaluation capacity at the decentralized levels (regional/country offices, partner countries), and (2) disseminating evaluation results and lessons more effectively.

Decentralized Evaluation System

14.   The majority of UNICEF evaluations (96%) are undertaken at the country level. The Panel recognizes that a decentralized system of evaluation is well suited to the operational nature of the organization, given UNICEF's intent to act as an authoritative voice on children's issues in the many countries where it works and the necessity to reflect the differences and particularities of each country and region. However, the systems, capacities and outputs of evaluation at the regional and country levels exhibit critical gaps that must be addressed in order to ensure that the evaluation function serves the Organization effectively. The Panel notes that evaluation at the regional and country level serves learning and decision-making purposes well but it is less useful for accountability purposes at those levels. In addition, evaluation results are not yet being aggregated from the country level to the regional or Headquarters level to provide information on overall organizational performance.

Resources for Evaluation

15.   The Panel notes that there are limitations in the *level and predictability of core resources for evaluation*, especially for the Evaluation Office. The EO's core budget from Regular Resources provides assured funding for approximately two corporate evaluations per year. The EO is heavily dependent on Other Resources,

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[2] UNICEF, *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual*, May 2005, p. 124, paras. 20-21.
[3] UNICEF Evaluation Office, *Self-Assessment Report – UNEG Quality Stamp Task Force,* October 2005, p. 6.

which generally come from donors and may be designated for specific evaluations (e.g. Tsunami, Real Time evaluations). The EO may also manage evaluations for other Headquarters Divisions if requested to do so. These evaluations are generally identified and funded by the Division.

16.   No funding has been allocated by UNICEF for activities related to *evaluation capacity development* at the country and regional levels or for Country Programme Evaluations. The EO Director has been authorized to seek funding from donors for these activities, estimated to be 64% of the EO budget for 2006-2007.

17.   The Panel acknowledges UNICEF's intention to allocate 2-5% of country programme funding to monitoring, evaluation and research. However the present UNICEF financial management system does not disaggregate commitments and expenditures for M&E and it is not possible to verify whether the targets are being met.

18.   It was reported that country-level evaluations are most often undertaken in response to donor requests, although the frequency of this practice varies between countries and regions.

19.   The Panel believes that the limited core budget for evaluation and the heavy reliance on Other Resources has an impact on planning, prioritization and evaluation coverage at all levels. The capacity to identify and carry out evaluations of strategic importance is reduced when evaluation is funded on a project-by-project basis.

20.   UNICEF has an on-going need for credible and independent assessment of results to demonstrate that the organization is meeting its mandate and is accountable to all stakeholders, including partner governments and beneficiaries. Evaluation is an essential tool to demonstrate impact and sustainability. In the Panel's view, evaluation should be considered *a core function* and should be provided with a *predictable and adequate budget*.

Results-Based Management

21.   The Panel's mandate did not include a comprehensive analysis of UNICEF's system for Results-Based Management. However, in the course of data collection and interviews it became apparent that weaknesses in the organization's RBM systems have an impact on the quality of evaluations, and their credibility, particularly at the country level. These weaknesses are not unique to UNICEF; the challenges are the same for other development cooperation agencies and for bilateral donors. As UNICEF endeavours to focus more on policy advocacy and joint programming, it becomes harder to define results, measure progress and determine attribution.

22.   UNICEF has made progress since 2002 in creating a stronger organizational framework for results-based management, as demonstrated in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that accompanies the current corporate plan (MTSP 2006-2009), the requirements at the country level for IMEPs and a summary results matrix in the Country Programme Document (CPD).

23.   UNICEF's participation in the UNDAF process at the country level is also placing greater emphasis on results-oriented planning as "the UNDAF Results Matrix describes the results to be collaboratively achieved". [4]

24.   The Panel concluded that the EO has contributed towards strengthening UNICEF's Results-Based Management systems, most notably through its contribution to development of the integrated monitoring and evaluation framework and detailed performance indicators for the MTSP 2006-2009. However, there is a gap between high level, organization-wide indicators and the systems used for planning and performance assessment at the programme/ project level.

Evaluation Policy

25.   The Panel concluded that the culture and practice of independent evaluation seems well established at UNICEF but it is not supported by an up-to-date and comprehensive evaluation policy which reflects the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System. The Panel believes that the independence, credibility and usefulness of the evaluation function would be strengthened by updating the current policy statements into a comprehensive policy document that provides a clearer framework for implementation of the evaluation function.

Independence

26.   The Panel considers that UNICEF's Evaluation Office is meeting the UNEG Norms and Standards related to independence, including:
   - Fostering an enabling environment for evaluation;
   - Independence and impartiality of evaluators;
   - Ensuring access to information required for evaluations;
   - EO's freedom to report to the appropriate level of decision-making on evaluation findings.

27.   The Panel believes that independence of the evaluation function should be formalized in an *updated evaluation policy document* that is approved by the *Executive Board* and disseminated and implemented throughout the organization by way of an *Executive Directive*.

28.   Clarifying the EO's reporting line and responsibilities would provide assurance against any infringement on independence, real or perceived. The Panel

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[4] UNICEF, *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (PPPM)*, May 2005, p. 45, para 29.

recommends that the Director of the Evaluation Office should report directly to the Executive Director.

29.   The Panel considered the option of a direct reporting line to the Executive Board but concluded that such an arrangement would not significantly increase the EO's independence. Board members have not identified a direct reporting relationship as a priority and it would be inconsistent with the reporting lines for other elements of the decentralized system. Frequent rotation of Board members and lack of evaluation experience were identified as potential barriers to ensuring strong oversight for an Evaluation Office that reported to the Board.

30.   Engaging Executive Board members in a discussion of an updated evaluation policy document would afford an opportunity to explore ways in which the evaluation function could make a stronger contribution to the Board's decision-making. In particular, the Board could consider:
   •   Commissioning evaluations on specific subjects;
   •   Greater use of evaluation (including Country Programme evaluations) to validate results of self-assessments undertaken at the country level;
   •   Requesting aggregation of evaluation information to assess performance at the organizational level.

31.   It is important to note that, in the Panel's view, <u>independence of the evaluation function does not mean isolation</u>. Evaluation has *intrinsic links* to all stages of the project/programme cycle. It provides essential information to determine whether results are being achieved, the impact of those results, the need for change, and the potential for a project/ programme to be sustainable. Evaluation is a key management tool for learning and for performance accountability. In fact, it has been argued that, "rigorous program evaluations are the lifeblood of good governance."[5]   In this respect, the Panel considers evaluation as a *core function* that should have a *predictable and adequate budget* to ensure credible and independent information to assess whether UNICEF is fulfilling its mandate.

32.   The Panel considers the *ability to budget for evaluation* as a key element of independence. Having limited Regular Resources in the EO's core budget and having to negotiate with other Divisions for evaluation funding restricts the EO's capacity to choose evaluation topics that it considers strategically important for accountability. Similarly, having to raise almost two-thirds of its budget from Other Resources makes the EO potentially vulnerable to donor demands.

33.   <u>Relation between Evaluation and Audit</u> – The Panel notes that UNICEF intends to review the mandates of the Audit and Evaluation functions. This is timely in light of the current discussions within the UN system about co-locating these functions. The Panel discussed the relation between the two functions but did not undertake a review of options for locating the evaluation function within various

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[5] David Zussman, *"The Accountability Act should also account for money well spent",* The Ottawa Citizen, April 24, 2006. This is a quotation from Canada's Auditor-General.

organizational structures. The UNEG Norms and Standards indicate that the EO Director should report either to the Board or to the Head of the organization to ensure independence of the evaluation function. The consensus of the Panel was not to make a specific recommendation on structure, but instead, to encourage UNICEF to ensure that evaluation remains a strong, independent and credible function that addresses programme effectiveness, value and impact results.

Credibility

34.   The Panel considers that UNICEF's Evaluation Office is meeting the UNEG Norms and Standards related to credibility as follows:
- Setting quality standards and providing guidance on key aspects of evaluation;
- Highly competent and credible professional staff;
- Transparency in selection and management processes for EO evaluations;
- Impartiality of EO evaluations;
- Participation of country governments and other partners in EO-led evaluative activities;
- Building evaluation capacity in member countries, especially through CPE methodology and the facilitation and support of evaluation networks.

35.   The Panel notes that UNICEF's approach to evaluation at the country level *fosters partnership* and *builds ownership* for development results. This process of mutual accountability enhances UNICEF's overall credibility with its partners.

36.   Weaknesses were noted in the following areas, especially related to country-level evaluative activities:
- Lack of clear organizational criteria for the selection of evaluations;
- Inconsistencies in applying guidance provided by the EO to ensure that all evaluations, and evaluation reports, meet the required quality standards;
- No clear separation of responsibilities for evaluation, monitoring, programming, fund raising and advocacy functions at the country level;
- Uneven participation by stakeholders, including beneficiaries, in roles other than information sources;
- Inconsistent assessment of gender issues, especially analysis of the impact of results for women/ girls and men/boys;
- Inconsistent assessment/ analysis of how the human-rights-based approach was applied;
- No mandatory use of end-of-project evaluations for pilot projects;
- Limited capacity to aggregate information on results in order to assess performance at the organizational level.

37.   <u>Budget limitations</u> have reduced the EO's ability to strengthen UNICEF's internal evaluation capacity at the decentralized levels, in spite of the Executive Board's having identified this as a priority focus. The Panel notes that approximately half of UNICEF's 126 country offices do not have a level 3 M&E officer (level 3 is

the desired minimum level to ensure competence). The EO reports that these offices are less able to consistently deliver high quality evaluations.

38.   Poor quality of country level evaluations was first identified as a problem following a meta-evaluation commissioned by the Evaluation Office in 2004.[6] Since then, the EO has provided guidance for Terms of Reference, and quality standards for conducting evaluations and reporting on them. The EO carries out an annual quality review of evaluation reports submitted from all levels (HQ, region, country). The EO's latest *Evaluation Report Quality Review* indicates that there has been some improvement in the quality of evaluation reports submitted for review over the past two years, but the low number of reports submitted suggests that training on the standards or other support is still needed.

Usefulness of Evaluation Evidence

39.   The Panel considers that UNICEF's Evaluation Office is meeting the UNEG Norms and Standards related to usefulness of evaluation evidence as follows:
   - Intentionality by the Executive Board and senior management to use evaluations to inform decision-making;
   - Transparency of the evaluation process, disclosure policy and public accessibility of reports;
   - Contribution to strengthening UNICEF's Results-Based Management systems;
   - Contribution to policy making, organizational effectiveness, and development effectiveness;
   - Contribution to UN harmonization in evaluation and humanitarian assistance.

40.   <u>Timeliness</u> – Evaluations are generally well-timed to feed into the planning cycle for country programmes and for decision-making at the Board level. Evaluation's contribution to management and decision-making for both programmes and policies is considered by the Panel to be strong at all levels. There is also evidence that evaluation is contributing to improving the development effectiveness of UNICEF interventions.

41.   <u>Learning</u> – Evaluation's contribution to learning is stressed at all levels of the organization and there are good indications that evaluation findings are used to improve programming and policies. At the same time, however, the Panel notes that organizational systems for knowledge sharing and institutional learning are not yet adequately developed.

42.   <u>Contribution to UN harmonization</u> – Senior managers and other agencies recognize the EO's leadership within the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) to create professional Norms and Standards for implementation of evaluation across the UN system.

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[6] UNICEF Evaluation Office, *The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001*, September 2004.

43.   UNICEF's active role in promoting the improvement of best practices across UN agencies has also been recognized.[7] The EO is presently providing leadership for three UNEG task forces:
- Country Level Evaluation – intended to build strategies for joint evaluations at the national level and to undertake case studies on joint evaluations;
- Evaluation Capacity Development – which will contribute to the professionalization of evaluation in the UN system by developing generic competencies for Evaluation Officers and a curriculum for evaluation training tailored to the needs and specifications of the UN system;
- Evaluation Practice Exchange – in which agencies will share 'better practice' using examples of (a) proven and transferable experience, and (b) innovations with potential for wider application.

44.   UNICEF's participation in the area of <u>humanitarian assistance</u> has increased significantly in the past few years. The EO has made a contribution to developing more effective methodology for evaluation in disaster and crisis situations. EO-led evaluations of Iraq, Darfur, Liberia, Tsunami-affected countries, and two major evaluations of humanitarian capacity building, have helped set a new agenda to improve humanitarian response. The Darfur evaluation was used as an illustrative case by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) to promote discussion and learning through its network of organizations that provide humanitarian assistance.

45.   <u>Information provided to the Executive Board</u> – The Panel notes that the Executive Board has repeatedly requested more results-oriented reporting from UNICEF. During this Review, some Executive Board members expressed the view that the information provided on evaluation is still not adequately substantive or analytical. Some also indicated that the time available for discussion of evaluations is too limited. Some members indicated that a management response should be included with evaluation reports.

46.   <u>Tracking System</u> – The Panel commends the recently undertaken initiative to track management response to global/ corporate evaluations. Management response and implementation of evaluation recommendations are fundamental indicators of the importance of an evaluation function to an organization. In addition to the new tracking system at Headquarters, efforts should also be made to strengthen tracking of management response at the field level.

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[7] *The Mid-Term Review of the UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan 2002-2005 – Synthesis Report – final draft, June 2004, and Reference Case: UNICEF's Contribution to UN Reform and Its Impact on UNICEF, 2004.*

Summative Judgment of the UNICEF Peer Review Panel

Evaluation at UNICEF is highly useful for learning and decision-making purposes and, to a lesser extent, for accountability in achieving results.

UNICEF's central Evaluation Office is considered to be strong, independent and credible. Its leadership by respected professional evaluators is a major strength. The EO has played an important leadership role in UN harmonization through the UN Evaluation Group.

The Peer Review Panel considers that a decentralized system of evaluation is well-suited to the operational nature of UNICEF. However, there are critical gaps in quality and resources at the regional and country levels that weaken the usefulness of the evaluation function as a management tool.

Suggestions for Action:

A clear and comprehensive evaluation policy document, consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards, a more predictable budget for evaluation, additional interventions to strengthen and support field offices, and improved use of results-based management throughout the organization would strengthen the evaluation function overall.

Summary of Recommendations to UNICEF's Executive Board, Executive Director and the Evaluation Office

To the Executive Board

Evaluation Policy

i.   The Executive Board should request that UNICEF update previous policy statements into a comprehensive policy document on evaluation that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to the present UNICEF context. The Board should subsequently discuss and approve the evaluation policy document.

ii.   It is recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should report on the implementation of the evaluation policy in the biennial report on the evaluation function.

Resources for Evaluation

iii.   The Executive Board should ensure that the evaluation function has adequate Regular Resources to operate in an independent and credible manner.

iv.   For transparency and accountability purposes, the Executive Board should be presented with costed evaluation workplans as well as documentation of evaluation expenditures at HQ, regional and country levels.

Use of Evaluation by the Executive Board

v.   Reports from the EO and Regional Directors should inform the Executive Board on the implementation of evaluation recommendations and management plans of action.

vi.   The Executive Board could take more advantage of the evaluation function by requesting specific evaluations to inform its decision-making.

vii.   The Executive Board could consider holding more frequent informal sessions to discuss evaluation reports.

To UNICEF's Executive Director

Evaluation Policy

viii.   UNICEF should update previous policy statements into a comprehensive evaluation policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to the present UNICEF context.

- The evaluation policy should be a stand-alone document that is approved by the Executive Board.

- The evaluation policy should assert the independence of the evaluation function and specify that the Director of the Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Director.

- The evaluation policy should be developed in consultation with stakeholders, including partner countries.

- The policy should be disseminated and implemented throughout the organization by way of an Executive Directive.

- The *Executive Directive* should:

   o Clearly identify how evaluation contributes to learning, accountability and decision-making within the organization;

   o Spell out roles, responsibilities and accountabilities at the central, regional and country levels;

   o Address the highly decentralized nature of the evaluation function and the need to ensure quality, credibility and usefulness of evaluations at all levels;

- o Define protocols for consultation with, and participation of, internal and external stakeholders (especially partner countries) and beneficiaries;

- o Address issues that are specific to UNICEF's work which have implications for the evaluation function (HRBAP, RBM, CCC etc).

Evaluation Resources

ix.   The Panel recommends that evaluation should be considered a *core function* for UNICEF, similar to Audit. To strengthen independence and credibility of the evaluation function at all levels, and to ensure adequate evaluation coverage, a *more predictable budget* should be provided. Specific suggestions include:

- Regular Resources assigned to the evaluation function both in HQ and in the field should be increased.

- The Regular Resources should be sufficient to cover strategic evaluations on corporate priorities.

- Other Resources should be committed for strengthening internal evaluation capacity at all levels and for evaluation capacity development of country partners.

x.   Regional office allocations for evaluation should be sufficient to support thematic and strategic evaluations, quality assurance of evaluations at the country level and professional networking activities.

Evaluation Coverage

xi.   Consideration should be given to identifying explicit criteria for selection of evaluations that will ensure good coverage of UNICEF's corporate priorities. These criteria should guide the selection of evaluations at all levels. They should be related to the organization's strategic and programming priorities in order to inform decision-making and investment in a timely manner.

Results-Based Management

xii.   To enhance the relevance of evaluations for assessing results, efforts to strengthen the use of performance measurement systems identified within the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (at HQ level) and Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plans (at regional and country levels) should be given high priority.

xiii.   Consideration should be given to mandatory use of end-of-project/programme evaluations when an approach or methodology is being piloted. It is also recommended that aggregation of evaluation information should be integrated within the RBM system to assess performance at the organizational level, ensure accountability and provide information for learning.

xiv.   Consideration should be given to:

- Mandatory training on results-oriented monitoring and evaluation;

- Formal participation of evaluation officers at the project/ programme design stage when possible to strengthen evaluability;
- Use of an Intregrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) at the regional level;
- Greater scrutiny by Regional Offices of country IMEPs and evaluation TOR.

Quality Assurance

xv.   Organizational links and accountability for quality assurance of all evaluations (most notably at the country and regional levels) should be more clearly defined and implemented at all levels. In particular, the EO's role in assuring quality of evaluations carried out at the regional level should be specified and adequately resourced.

xvi.   UNICEF management should give higher priority to strengthening the capacity of Regional Offices to provide technical support, oversight and quality assurance to evaluations carried out at the country level, including opportunities for professional networking.

xvii.   To increase the credibility of evaluations at the country level, advocacy and fund-raising should be separated from the evaluation function to the extent possible.

Management Response and Plans of Action

xviii. Efforts to document and track management response to evaluations at the decentralized levels should be strengthened. The tracking system should be designed in such a way that it is also possible to follow-up at reasonable intervals to assess the impact of evaluation recommendations.

To the Evaluation Office

Evaluation Policy

xix.   The EO should update previous policy statements on evaluation into a comprehensive policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards. Stakeholders, including partner countries, should be consulted in updating the policy.

xx.   The EO should prepare an Executive Directive on the updated evaluation policy to ensure its implementation throughout the organization.

Reporting on the Evaluation Function

xxi.   It is recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should report on the implementation of the evaluation policy in the biennial report on the evaluation function which is presented to the Executive Board.

xxii. It is also recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should put more emphasis on lessons learned from evaluations in the biennial report on the evaluation function which is presented to the Executive Board.

Evaluation Workplan

xxiii. The Panel recognizes that the EO's current focus on institutional reviews is strategically important at present. However, in the future, it is recommended that the EO give more emphasis to evaluation of development effectiveness in strategic policy and programme areas.

xxiv. It is recommended that the EO develop a costed evaluation workplan which includes all EO evaluations, capacity development activities at the regional and country level, dissemination of evaluation results and lessons learned, and other items as appropriate.

Quality Assurance

xxv. Existing materials for training, guidance and support should be reviewed by the EO and supplemented as necessary to improve the quality of evaluations at the regional and country levels.

xxvi. Consideration should be given to strengthening guidance on the following issues:
- a Code of Conduct for evaluators;
- options to increase participation by stakeholders (especially beneficiaries) in evaluations;
- assessment of issues arising from the human-rights based approach;
- disaggregation of results information according to sex;
- assessment of gender equality issues, especially how results affect women/ girls and men/boys;
- scrutiny of consultant qualifications and suitability;
- training on evaluation reporting standards;
- compliance with the requirement to provide all evaluations to the EO for quality review.

Dissemination

xxvii. It is recommended that the EO should develop a strategy for dissemination of evaluation results and lessons learned in order to strengthen knowledge sharing within the organization.

Section 1: Introduction

A.   Background

1.   The Peer Review of UNICEF's evaluation function was initiated in September 2005, with the majority of work being undertaken between December 2005 and April 2006. It is the second effort[1] to apply a new assessment approach[2] designed under the auspices of the Evaluation Network of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

2.   This approach aims to assess and enhance <u>multilateral agencies' own evaluation capacity and performance</u>, thereby helping to improve their development performance. At the same time, it also aims to foster the increased use of a multilateral agency's evaluation products by stakeholders and donors as an alternative to costly and time-consuming external evaluations of performance. The approach is based on assessment against defined and agreed-upon international benchmarks and best practices, articulated in the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System approved by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in April 2005.

B.   Purpose of the Peer Review

3.   The purpose of the UNICEF Peer Review was to determine:

> *Whether UNICEF's evaluation function and its products are independent, credible, and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as tested against UNEG norms and standards by a panel of evaluation peers.*

4.   The review therefore focused on three aspects:
   i)   the <u>independence</u> of UNICEF's evaluations and evaluation systems;
   ii)   the <u>credibility</u> of UNICEF's evaluation process and evaluation reports; and
   iii) the <u>use of evaluation evidence</u> by UNICEF, programme countries and donor countries.

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[1] The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) volunteered for the first pilot, completed in December 2005.

[2] OECD-DAC, *New Approach to Assessing Multilateral Organizations' Evaluation Performance*, June 2005.

C. *Peer Review – Characteristics and Panel Members*

Text Box 1

> *"Peer review can be described as the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an entity by counterpart entities, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed entity improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The examination is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the entities involved in the review, as well as their shared confidence in the process."[3]*

5.   Peer review is a well tested approach in the development field, which is particularly appropriate for this type of initiative. A peer review is not a formal evaluation; it is a less comprehensive and in-depth assessment. However, it still adheres to a rigorous methodology applying the key principles of evaluation. It is carried out by independent professional peers, whose knowledge and experience provides a strong and realistic foundation for assessing the evidence collected. A peer review is conducted in a cooperative fashion with strong emphasis on reaching consensus wherever possible.

6.   The review of UNICEF's evaluation function was led by the Evaluation Division of the Canadian International Development Agency. It was conducted by an independent Review Panel made up of professional evaluators with a wide range of experience and excellent understanding of the application of the norms and standards for evaluation[4]. The Peer Review Panel was comprised of senior evaluators from three bilateral donors, Canada, Ireland and Norway; the Director of the African Development Bank Evaluation Office (retired); the Director of Evaluation for UNIDO, who is also the Co-chair of the UNEG Quality Stamp Task Force; and an evaluation expert from Ghana. The Peer Panel was assisted by two advisers from Canada and Norway, both of whom are experienced consultants in the field of evaluation.

7.   The conclusions and recommendations in this report reflect the Panel's judgment. However, the Panel recognizes that UNICEF must decide which approach is best suited to the particularities of the organization.

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[3] Adapted from "Peer Review: a tool for co-operation and change: An Analysis of an OECD Working Method, OECD, 2002", quoted from *Peer Review: UNDP Evaluation Office,* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark Evaluation Department, 16 December 2005, p. 17.
[4] See Appendix 1 for a list of Panel members and alternates.

D.   *Methodology*

8.   The Peer Review of UNICEF's evaluation function was able to draw from, and build on, the experience of the UNDP assessment completed in December 2005. The UNICEF Peer Review followed the same general methodology, namely:

- Development of a normative framework in consultation with the Evaluation Office[5];

- Collection of data through extensive documentary research, including six reference cases selected from recent evaluations carried out by the Evaluation Office[6];

- Structured and semi-structured interviews with 50 participants and/or intended users of evaluations[7];

- Analysis of the information collected against the normative framework;

- Agreement by the Panel and EO on the accuracy of evidence and findings against the frameworks;

- Development of conclusions and recommendations by the Panel for discussion with the Evaluation Office in a mutual learning process.

9.   The Panel agreed that <u>adjustments were required to the general methodology</u> to reflect the particularities of UNICEF's evaluation system and issues that UNICEF identifies as priorities. The Panel believes that expanding the methodology has added value to the review by providing a stronger evidence base for the Panel's assessment. The information collected also reflects more accurately the way the evaluation function is operationalized across UNICEF.

10.   Since the evaluation function at UNICEF is highly decentralized, the Panel decided that focusing only on the central Evaluation Office (as originally proposed) would not provide the information necessary to achieve a full assessment of the whole evaluation function. As a result, the Panel decided to introduce a <u>country reference case</u> to provide a more in-depth review of the systems and processes that guide UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function. The country reference case focused on Ghana and was carried out by Dr. Sulley Gariba (Ghana) and Finbar O'Brien (Ireland).

11.   The country reference case was designed to provide:

- insight into the working relationship between the central Evaluation Office and the country and regional level offices;

- a more in-depth review of the systems and processes that guide UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function;

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[5] See Appendix 2 for the UNICEF Peer Review normative framework.
[6] See Appendix 3 for evaluation reported reviewed.
[7] See Appendix 4 for a list of persons interviewed.

- information to assess whether the current systems and processes are appropriate to produce quality evaluations;
- information to address questions related to participation of country programme stakeholders in the evaluation process, the use of UNICEF evaluations at the country level and UNICEF's role in fostering evaluation capacity development.

12. Information from the country reference case is incorporated into the text of the report where appropriate. For the complete report see Appendix 5.

13. It should be understood that the country reference case was <u>not</u> intended as an evaluation of either the Ghana country office or the West and Central Africa Regional office. In addition, the Panel recognizes that regional differences may affect decentralized evaluation functions as well as cooperation with stakeholders.

14. The <u>second adjustment</u> to the methodology reflects the UN's emphasis on national ownership and capacity development [General Assembly resolution 59/240 (2004)] and UNICEF's focus in this area. The Review Panel decided that the partner countries' role as stakeholders and users of evaluation must be included as a dimension of the assessment. This additionality was reflected in the methodology and instruments used for the review.

15. Three <u>issues of particular interest to UNICEF</u> were added to the normative framework and assessed against the relevant UNEG standards: fostering evaluation capacity building in member countries, facilitating stakeholder participation in evaluation, mainstreaming gender in evaluation.

16. For consistency with the UNEG Norms and Standards, the Panel chose not to refer to the DAC definitions of independence, credibility and utility. Instead, the <u>definitions</u> that appear at the beginning of each section of the report are distilled from the norms and standards that provide the benchmarks for each of these concepts.

17. The <u>core question</u> for the UNICEF assessment was adjusted slightly from the previous pilot to better suit the particularities of the UNICEF system. See Section B – *Purpose of the Peer Review* above.

E.   Limitations of the Review

18. Although the review has looked at UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function in a systematic manner, the Peer Panel recognizes that it has been hampered in drawing strong conclusions about the decentralized elements by the limitations of the data collected from the regional and country levels.

19. Only a limited amount of information produced at the country level was reviewed (4 Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plans (IMEP), 2 Country Programme Action Plans). Additional information related to UNICEF's evaluation practice in the field was collected through the Ghana country reference case, which included a review of pertinent documents, interviews with UNICEF staff at the country and regional offices, and consultations with a number of government and civil society stakeholders.

20. Information on evaluation activities at the regional level was gathered through a review of Regional Directors' 2005 reports to the Executive Board, interviews with Regional Directors and a consultation meeting with a number of regional M&E officers who were in Canada in October 2005, before the Panel and methodology were confirmed.

21. The Panel felt that the OECD-DAC assessment approach was too limiting and consequently made changes as described above to better suit the UNICEF context.

22. The requirement to follow the UNEG Norms and Standards posed some challenges in so far as they do not fall neatly into the categories of independence, credibility and usefulness. The Panel generally followed the 'sorting' approach used for the UNDP Peer Review normative framework. However, the Panel will make a recommendation to the OECD-DAC Evaluation Network to review the assessment approach in light of this difficulty.

F.   Intended Audience

23. Although evaluation is a fairly specialized subject, the report is intended for decision-makers and other users of evaluation. The information will be of particular interest for UNICEF, but will also be relevant for the OECD-DAC Evaluation Committee and the UN Evaluation Group.

G.   UNICEF's Participation

24. The Peer Panel has appreciated the full cooperation of UNICEF in this review. Executive Board members, senior management, regional directors, evaluation staff at UNICEF headquarters and in the field have all facilitated the collection of data and discussion of findings. The West Africa Regional Office and Ghana Country Office provided essential support to complete the Ghana country reference case.

25. The Panel also notes UNICEF's active participation in other evaluative exercises, including the UNEG Quality Stamp Self-Assessment (October 2005), DFID's Assessment of Multilateral Organisational Effectiveness (MEFF – March 2005),

and The Multilateral Organisations Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN – 2003 and planned for 2006). We commend UNICEF for its willingness to engage openly and candidly in discussions about its capacities and performance.

H.   Organization of the Report

26.   The report is divided into six sections. Sections Two to Five include the Panel's analysis, conclusions on the issue and suggestions for future action.

- Section One is the Introduction.
- Section Two provides an overview of UNICEF's evaluation function.
- Section Three assesses the independence of UNICEF's evaluations and evaluation systems.
- Section Four focuses on credibility of UNICEF's evaluation process and evaluation reports.
- Section Five assesses the use and usefulness of evaluation information.
- Section Six summarizes the Panel's conclusions and recommendations.

27.   Information from the Ghana country reference case has been included throughout the report as appropriate. The full text of the Ghana report can be found in Appendix 5. Other reference cases are also cited to illustrate points in the text. Appendix 3 provides a list of the reference cases included in the Review.

A.   Description of UNICEF's Evaluation Function

This section provides an introduction to UNICEF's evaluation function to enable the reader to understand the basis for the detailed analysis and commentary in the following sections.

Evaluation in the Organizational Context

28.   Evaluation is one element in UNICEF's overall performance monitoring and oversight framework. Evaluation differs from inspection and audit, in the sense that it is a non-controlling function, from monitoring, which is defined as a self-assessment management tool, and from research as it does not yield scientific findings such as those emanating from fundamental research[8].

29.   <u>Four documents guide evaluation</u> at UNICEF:

- The 2002 *Report on the evaluation function in the context of the medium-term strategic plan* (E/ICEF/2002/10), which the Executive Board endorsed as "the policy statement on the evaluation function" (Executive Board Decision 2002/9), outlines the purpose of evaluation, its place within the performance monitoring and oversight framework of UNICEF, the structure of the decentralized evaluation system, and the roles, functions and accountabilities at each level (HQ, regional office, country office).

- Executive Board Decision 2002/9 also emphasizes, *inter alia*, the importance of preserving the decentralized nature of the evaluation system at UNICEF; the need to ensure transparency, independence, impartiality and professional conduct of the evaluation process; and the Board's request that the evaluation capacities of programme countries should be strengthened to ensure their full participation in evaluation.

- Executive Board Decision 2004/9 requests further strengthening of the evaluation function with particular emphasis on the following areas: improving the efficiency and strategic value of the evaluation function, continuing to improve the standards of evaluation at the country level, accelerating progress towards joint evaluation work with national authorities, the United Nations system and other partners, and strengthening national capacity for evaluation.

- *UNICEF's Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (2005)* (PPPM) provides detailed guidance on important evaluation issues such as: criteria to

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[8] UNICEF, *Report on the evaluation function in the context of the medium-term strategic plan*, (E/ICEF/2002/10), 11 April 2002, pp. 5-6, paras. 14, 16, 17.

guide evaluations, specific criteria for evaluating humanitarian action, participation of stakeholders, quality standards, Terms of Reference, management of resources, disclosure of reports, follow-up and contribution to learning.

30.   The Panel notes that none of these documents is a comprehensive, stand-alone evaluation policy document that meets the UNEG Norms and Standards. This issue is discussed further in Section 3 – Independence.

Purpose of the Evaluation Function

31.   UNICEF identifies three main purposes for evaluation, which are consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards. They are:[9]

- To *inform decision-making* by identifying and understanding results and their impacts;
- To identify lessons in order *to facilitate improvements* in on-going or future operations;
- *To provide information for accountability* purposes.

32.   UNICEF also identifies secondary purposes for evaluation which relate to issues that are important to the organization - (i) using participatory processes *to expand ownership* of the evaluation, and (ii) using the results of evaluation as "impartial and credible evidence"[10] *to advocate for children's and women's rights* in global and national policies and programmes.

33.   In practice, UNICEF places the major emphasis for evaluation on <u>learning</u> to inform decision-making and future planning.[11]

Structure and Organization of the Evaluation Function

34.   UNICEF has a decentralized evaluation function which operates at three levels: Headquarters (HQ), Regional offices and Country offices. There is no formal reporting link between the country office/ evaluation focal point and the HQ Evaluation Office. Figure 1 on the following page illustrates the organization of UNICEF's evaluation function.

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[9] UNICEF, *Report on the evaluation function in the context of the medium-term strategic plan,* (E/ICEF/2002/10), 11 April 2002.
[10] UNICEF, *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual*, May 2005, p. 124, paras. 20-21.
[11] UNICEF EO*, Self-Assessment Report – UNEG Quality Stamp Task Force,* October 2005, p. 6.

Figure 1

Evaluation at UNICEF
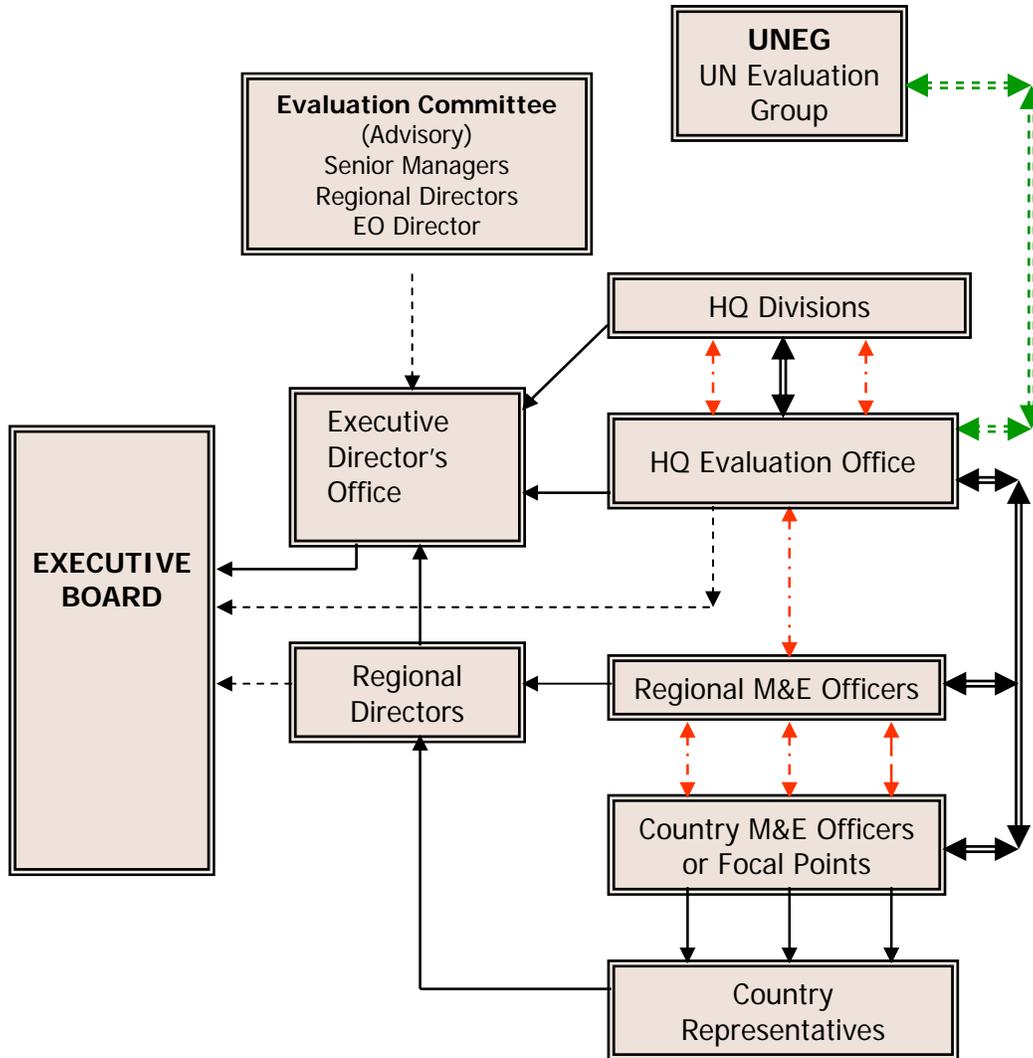
KEY TO ARROWS:

Solid line = accountability/ reporting relationship

Dashed line = reporting for information

Double line = quality review of reports

Dot/ dashed orange line = guidance, support, training, networking

Double dashed green line = information exchange, networking and mutual learning

35. <u>Staffing for Evaluation</u> - As of September 2005, there were 100 professional staff involved in evaluation (of a total 9,276 staff). The HQ Evaluation Office employs 11 staff - 8 professionals, of which 3 positions are tied to specific project funding[12] and 3 support positions[13]. Eighty-three professionals are employed in the field offices, as Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officers or M&E focal points. Approximately half of UNICEF's 126 country offices do not have a level 3 M&E officer (level 3 is the desired minimum level to ensure competence).

Headquarters Level – Evaluation Office

36. The Evaluation Office (EO) has been an independent office since 2001; the EO Director currently reports to a Deputy Executive Director. The EO Director also has access to the Executive Director as required. At the request of the Executive Director, the EO Director presents its quadrennial work programme and a biennial progress report on the evaluation function to the Executive Board.

37. The EO's responsibilities include:[14]
     - functional leadership and overall management of the evaluation system;
     - commissioning and conducting independent evaluations;
     - providing guidance on policy and technical matters to regional and country offices;
     - screening evaluation reports carried out by COs, ROs and Headquarters Divisions to assess their quality using the reporting standards developed by the EO;
     - maintaining a publicly accessible database of evaluations that meet the quality standards;
     - disseminating evaluation results and lessons learned;
     - contributing to internal evaluation capacity building in UNICEF by developing training materials and providing a limited amount of training through annual meetings of M&E officers;
     - helping to build evaluation capacity in partner countries by supporting and cooperating with regional and local network organizations.

Regional Offices

38. UNICEF has 7 Regional Offices (RO), which provide oversight and support for evaluations undertaken by country offices and in particular, oversee the methodological rigor of the evaluation of country programmes. The ROs also conduct thematic evaluations related to regional strategies, which usually involve multiple countries in the region.

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[12] Tsunami, Country Programme Evaluation, Database management.
[13] Progress Report of the Evaluation Function in UNICEF, 23 February 2006, page 5.
[14] See Annex 6 for a full description.

39.   Regional Directors are accountable to the Executive Director. Regional Directors provide annual reports to the Executive Board including summarized information on all Mid-Term Reviews and selected evaluations in their region.

40.   Each RO has a senior M&E officer position although these positions have not been fully staffed in the last two years.[15] The M&E officer reports to the Regional Director. Regional M&E officers have a variety of responsibilities. It is estimated that only 15% of their time is devoted to evaluation per se. The EO estimates that the <u>total amount of time devoted to evaluation</u> by all regional M&E officers represents the approximate equivalent of <u>one</u> full-time evaluator.[16]

Country Offices

41.   UNICEF has 126 Country offices[17]. Country offices are responsible for strategically selecting and conducting evaluations at the country level in collaboration with national partners and other stakeholders. The Country Representative reports annually to the Regional Director on evaluation findings.

42.   Every Country office is supposed to have an M&E focal point who is accountable to the Country Representative. Approximately 15-20 % of the time of the M&E focal point is used for evaluations; the rest is devoted to planning, monitoring, reporting, communications, advocacy and other duties. The EO estimates that the <u>total amount of time devoted to evaluation</u> by all country-level M&E officers represents the approximate equivalent of <u>ten</u> full-time evaluators.[18]

Evaluation Committee

43.   The Evaluation Committee, which is chaired by the Executive Director, is comprised of all senior managers at HQ level. The EO acts as Secretariat. The Committee meets at least three times a year, generally in conjunction with meetings of Global Management Team (GMT) which includes the Regional Directors.

44.   The Evaluation Committee provides advice to the Executive Director and to UNICEF senior staff. It is described as "the forum where the oversight of the evaluation function will be exercised." [19]

45.   The EO has reported that the Evaluation Committee is playing a very important role in promoting/ advocating the use of evaluations in the organization and for

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[15] One position is currently vacant. The TACRO position was vacant for 18 months before it was filled in September 2005; another RD reported that the position is being filled temporarily by a person who also has full-time duties as a planning officer.

[16] EO Report to the Evaluation Committee, 3 June 2005

[17] Executive Board, *Biennial Support Budget for 2006-2007*, January 2006, E/ICEF/2006/AB/L.1 Annex VI

[18] EO Report to the Evaluation Committee, 3 June 2005

[19] Evaluation Committee Rules and Procedures, (August 29, 2003)

ensuring management response. This perception was confirmed by senior managers and Regional Directors.

Funding for Evaluation

46.   The Evaluation Office's current total budget is a combination of funds from five separate sources.[20] Table 1 below shows the allocation by funding source for 2006-2007.

Table 1: EO Two-year Budget 2006-2007 (excluding staff)		
Regular Resources	890,000	9%
OR – Tsunami	1,950,094	20%
OR/DFID-Real-Time	719,361	7%
OR-Evaluation Strengthening & CPE (Authorized to seek funding-Funds not obtained)	6,255,732	64%
Total	9,815,187	100%

47.   Table 1 demonstrates that the amount of core funding (Regular Resources) committed by UNICEF for EO evaluations represents only 9% of the total EO budget for the next two years (excluding staff costs). Regular Resources provides assured funding for approximately two corporate evaluations per year. The majority of the EO budget comes from Other Resources (OR), which may be designated for specific evaluations. For the next biennium, OR funds have been committed for Tsunami evaluation and Real Time evaluations.

48.   No funding has been allocated by UNICEF for activities related to strengthening evaluation capacity at the country and regional levels and for Country Programme Evaluations. The EO Director has been authorized to seek funding from donors for these activities (64% of the budget).

49.   It was reported that country-level evaluations are most often undertaken in response to donor requests, although the frequency of this practice varies between countries and regions.

50.   The UNICEF *Programme Policy and Procedures Manual* indicates that 2-5 per cent of country programme expenditure should be spent specifically on monitoring, evaluation and research each year.[21] However the present UNICEF financial management system does not disaggregate commitments and expenditures for M&E and it is not possible to verify whether the targets are being

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[20] Support budget – staff; Support budget – non staff; Regular Resources; Other Resources – committed; Other Resources – to be found.
[21] *PPPM* (2005), p. 130, para. 48.

met. The EO indicates that financial investment in evaluation at all levels is inadequate and that resources are not well used.[22]

Evaluation Output

51.   The vast majority of UNICEF evaluations are carried out at the country level. Total evaluation output from 2002 - 2005 was as follows:

- Evaluation Office – 41 evaluations including 7 Country Programme evaluations (CPE). This was 26 more than originally planned.
- Regional Offices – 14 thematic evaluations conducted by 4 of the 7 ROs.
- Country Offices – 1251 evaluations – average 2 per office per year. The country offices also completed 3106 studies and surveys. These evaluative activities often create baselines for later evaluations.

Figure 2 [23]

UNICEF Evaluations 2002-2005 by Country, Regional, Global Level

Regional (14), 1%
Global (41), 3%
COs (1251), 96%
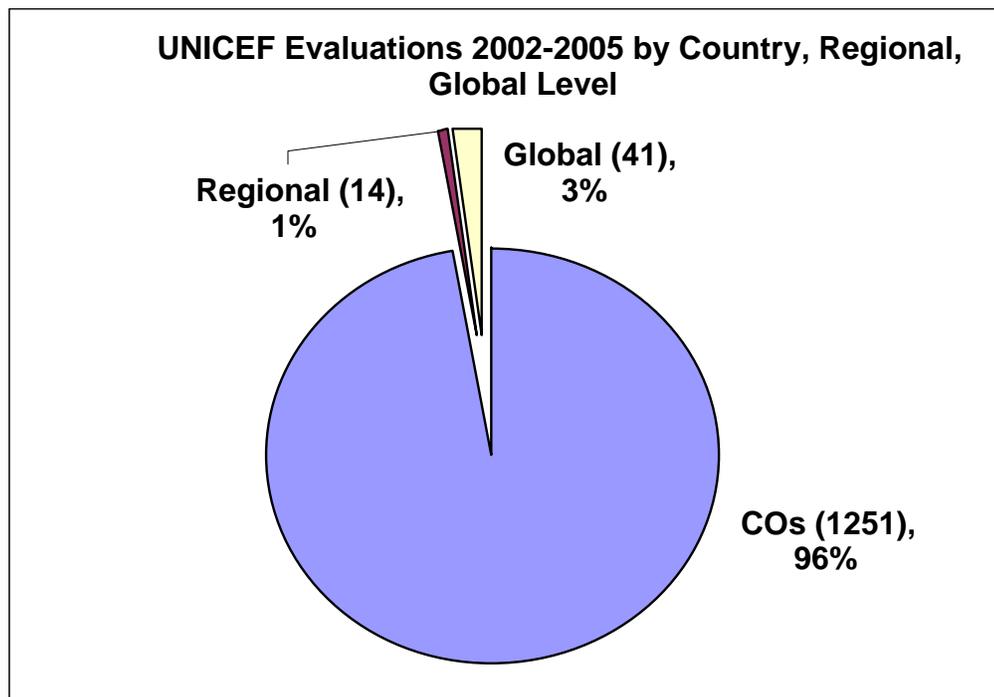
Evaluation Work Programme

52.   UNICEF's overall evaluation priorities are set out in the Medium Term Strategic Plan 2006-2009 (MTSP) and the accompanying Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (IMEF)[24]. The preparation of the current MTSP involved

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[22] Self-Assessment Report – UNEG Task Force, October 2005, page 12, para 8.

[23] *Progress Report of the Evaluation Function at UNICEF*, 23 February 2006.

[24] E/ICEF/2005/11, approved by the UNICEF Executive Board September 2005.

all units of UNICEF as well as Executive Board members. The EO coordinated the preparation of the IMEF, in consultation with other UNICEF units. The MTSP and IMEF were approved by the Executive Board in September 2005. Management and budgeting arrangements for evaluation are not clearly specified in the MTSP.

53.   The Evaluation Office has a two-year evaluation work programme; corporate performance evaluation topics have been given priority for 2006-2007. The work programme is approved by the Evaluation Committee and presented to the Executive Board.

54.   Technical Divisions at Headquarters carry out evaluations in their areas of expertise and have their own budgets for these evaluations. The EO may provide support to HQ Divisions for evaluation methodology if requested. In some cases, the EO manages or carries out evaluations for other HQ Divisions.

55.   Evaluations at the regional level are guided by the MTSP and selected by the Regional Office according to regional priorities. There currently is no Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the Regional level. It has been proposed that ROs should begin to use the IMEP as of 2006.

56.   Evaluation at the country level is expected to conform to the priorities of the MTSP. Country-level evaluations are identified in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP), which accompanies the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP). County-level evaluations usually focus on specific projects. Country offices demonstrate a high level of autonomy in working with partners. End-of-project-cycle evaluations are not mandatory; mid-term reviews of the country programmes are.

B.   Approach to Evaluation

Conducting evaluations

57.   UNICEF underlines the importance of a participatory process when conducting evaluation at all levels. Steering committees chaired by the stakeholders are frequently used to guide the evaluation process.

58.   In terms of methodological rigor, the *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (2005)* provides detailed guidance on how to conduct evaluations, and how to ensure that a quality process takes place. Evaluations must include the 5 OECD DAC criteria[25] and comply with UNEG Norms and Standards. The EO Programme Evaluation Standards are available on the Intranet.

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[25] Relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, *PPPM (2005)*, p. 122-23, para 15.

59.   The Evaluation Office has developed technical notes to guide the preparation of Terms of Reference, and ethical guidelines related to the participation of children in evaluations.

60.   Selection of independent evaluation consultants is carried out through competitive processes at both Headquarters and field levels. At the field level, the availability of qualified consultants has been identified as a limitation.[26] Some ROs have established lists of qualified consultants to make the selection process easier for country offices. The EO is also making efforts to establish a roster of pre-screened consultants that could be made available across the organization.

Follow-up to Evaluations

61.   UNICEF is currently in the process of developing a system to track <u>management response</u> to global/ institutional evaluations and implementation of evaluation recommendations. The Evaluation Office has responsibility for developing the system and the Evaluation Committee is overseeing the process. Responsibility for tracking evaluations at the field level is specified in UNICEF's *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (2005)*. Management response is discussed further in Section Five – Use of Evaluation Evidence.

62.   Each level of the decentralized evaluation system has specific responsibilities for <u>dissemination of evaluation findings</u> which are identified in the *PPPM (2005)*.

63.   <u>UNICEF's disclosure policy</u> states that all reports are assumed to be suitable for public dissemination unless they contain information of a sensitive nature. In that case, release may be delayed. The EO reports that only 2 evaluations have not been posted on the Internet due to sensitive content since 2000.

Quality Review of Reports

64.   UNICEF *Evaluation Report Standards* were issued and adopted in September 2004 following an independent Meta-evaluation of country evaluations which was highly critical of the quality of evaluation reports[27]. The *Evaluation Report Standard*s include all of the UNEG standards for reporting as well as additional requirements.

65.   The Report Standards are used by the EO to assess the quality of evaluations conducted at the country office, regional or HQ level. Reports that meet the quality standards are posted on the public area of the Evaluation and Research Database. The EO prepares an annual report on the quality of the reports received.

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[26] Interviews.
[27] *The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001* (2004).

66. Since 2000, the EO has received and reviewed only **315** evaluations (of more than 1200 completed). Of the evaluations reviewed, 85 evaluations (27%) did not meet the quality standards and were not posted on the Internet.

67. The rate of submission of reports is low – 36% for the period 2000-2003 and only 25% for 2004. This is a relatively small sample on which to base an assessment of the overall quality of UNICEF evaluation reports. The 2004 *Report* acknowledges this problem and adds, "The low submission rate not only affects the sample size but may indicate self-selection by the Country Offices. The reports received by the Evaluation Office may be those that the Country Offices believe are better."[28] The report also notes an uneven regional distribution of reviewed reports, resulting in a bias to English language reports.

68. In addition to the Evaluation & Research Database, the EO also maintains a repository of all evaluations and studies commissioned by COs, ROs or Headquarters regardless of quality, for accountability purposes.

C. *Contribution to UN Harmonization through UNEG*

69. UNICEF has demonstrated a strong commitment towards harmonization of the evaluation function in the UN system. It has taken an active role in the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG), a professional network made up of all evaluation units of UN agencies. The EO has gained credibility in UNEG for its leadership in creating a framework for implementation of the evaluation function – the "UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System".[29] The UNEG Norms and Standards have been widely recognized as the framework against which an evaluation function should be assessed.

70. UNICEF's active role in promoting the improvement of best practices across UN agencies has also been recognized.[30] The EO is presently providing leadership for three UNEG task forces:
   - Country Level Evaluation – intended to build strategies for joint evaluations at the national level and to undertake case studies on joint evaluations;
   - Evaluation Capacity Development – which will contribute to the professionalization of evaluation in the UN system by developing generic competencies for Evaluation Officers and a curriculum for evaluation training tailored to the needs and specifications of the UN system.

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[28] *UNICEF Evaluation Report Quality Review 2004*, Evaluation Office, December 2005, p4.
[29] Interviews.
[30] *The Mid-Term Review of the UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan 2002-2005 – Synthesis Report – final draft, June 2004, and Reference Case: UNICEF's Contribution to UN Reform and Its Impact on UNICEF, 2004.*

- Evaluation Practice Exchange – in which agencies will share 'better practice' using examples of (a) proven and transferable experience, and (b) innovations with potential for wider application.

71.   The EO makes evaluations available to all UNEG members through the UNICEF Intranet and the UNEG Web site. It is also an active participant in UNEVALFORUM, a mechanism for knowledge sharing.

D.   *Humanitarian Assistance*

72.   UNICEF's participation in the area of humanitarian assistance has increased significantly in the past few years. The EO has made a contribution to developing more effective methodology for evaluation in disaster and crisis situations. EO-led evaluations of Iraq, Darfur, Liberia, Tsunami-affected countries, and two major evaluations of humanitarian capacity building, have helped set a new agenda to improve humanitarian response. The Darfur evaluation was used as an illustrative case by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) to promote discussion and learning through its network of organizations that provide humanitarian assistance.

E.   *Support for Evaluation Networks*

73.   In an effort to develop evaluation capacity at the country and regional levels, the EO has established working relationships with evaluation associations in Africa (AfrEA), Latin America (ReLAC) and Eastern Europe/ CIS (IPEN). At the global level, UNICEF works in partnership with the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), the Active Learning Network for Accountability in Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) and the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG). Depending on the organization, UNICEF provides technical assistance as well as funding support to cover workshops, conferences, publications, secretariat support and website management. We have not gathered information on the results of this support for regional networks. However, members of UNEG acknowledge the importance of UNICEF leadership and support in revitalizing the group.

Section Three: Independence

The Governing Bodies and/or the Heads of the UN Organizations are responsible for fostering an enabling environment for evaluation and ensuring that the role and function of evaluation are clearly stated, reflecting principles of the UNEG Norms for evaluation, taking into account the specificities of each organization's requirements. The Governing bodies and/or Heads of organizations are responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to enable the evaluation function to operate effectively and with due independence. Evaluations have to be conducted in an impartial and independent fashion. The evaluation function has to be located independently from the other management functions so that it is free from undue influence and that unbiased and transparent reporting is ensured. (Definition derived from UNEG Norms 2.1-2.4; 6.1-6.5)

A.   Role of the Executive Board and Executive Director

Do the Executive Board and the Executive Director foster an enabling environment for evaluation? (Norms 2.1 & 2.2)

74.   The Executive Board has strongly endorsed the evaluation function in decisions taken in 2002 and 2004. Since 2000, UNICEF's Board-approved corporate plans[31] have emphasized a results-oriented approach to UNICEF cooperation, within a human rights framework. The current Medium-Term Strategic Plan (2006-2009) includes, for the first time, an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, specifying results and indicators for each of the five focus areas. The need for UNICEF to report on results increases the importance of the evaluation function.

75.   The Executive Board positively affects the environment for evaluation by regularly making time on its agenda to consider evaluation issues, approving the EO's four-year evaluation plan and receiving biennial progress reports. It has been pro-active in identifying principles to guide evaluation and in requesting more results-oriented reporting.

76.   To date, the Executive Board has not taken full advantage of the opportunity to request specific evaluations. The two evaluations it has commissioned produced results that made significant contributions to decision-making.[32]

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[31] Multi-Year Funding Framework (2000), Medium Term Strategic Plan 2002-2005 (2001) Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2006-2009 (2005).

[32] Fast Track Evaluation of the Pacific Programme of Cooperation in the Pacific Island Countries 1997-2001 – at the request of the Australian delegation (2002) – shaped the design and funding for a new programme; Evaluation of the Coordination Committee on Health (WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA) - resulted in the committee being disbanded.

77.   The Executive Director has contributed to an enabling environment for evaluation by revitalizing the Evaluation Committee, which was established in 2002. Over the past eighteen months, the Committee has met three times to discuss evaluation issues, including the EO work programme and various EO evaluation reports. Chairing of the Committee by the Executive Director and participation of senior managers demonstrates management commitment to the evaluation function. The Evaluation Committee is playing a very important role in promoting/ advocating the use of evaluations in the organization and for ensuring management response. It has commissioned the EO, which acts as its Secretariat, to develop a system for tracking management response to evaluation and implementation of evaluation recommendations.

78.   There was general agreement among those interviewed that the visibility and importance of the Evaluation Office has increased over the past five years. The demand for the EO to manage evaluations and/or provide technical assistance to other HQ divisions has increased beyond the capacity of the Office to respond. In addition, the increased importance of evaluations related to institutional performance demonstrates the openness of management to using evaluation for decision-making purposes. All of these changes are generally indicative of a strong enabling environment.

Has the Executive Board and/or the Executive Director made sure that the role and function of evaluation are clearly stated, reflecting principles of the UNEG Norms for evaluation, taking into account the specificities of each organization's requirements? (Norm 2.1)

79.   In 2002, the Executive Board endorsed the EO's *Report on the evaluation function in the context of the medium-term strategic plan* (E/ICEF/2002/9) as "the policy statement on the evaluation function of UNICEF."[33] Although this document contains sections related to the purpose of evaluation, characteristics of good evaluations, UNICEF's decentralized evaluation structure and accountabilities at each level, it is not a stand-alone policy document.

80.   Following the EO Director's presentation of the 2004 progress report on the evaluation function, Executive Board decision 2004/9 identified areas that the Board wished to see emphasized or encouraged by evaluation.

81.   Taken together, these documents comprise the policy framework for UNICEF's evaluation function. However, there is no single, clear and comprehensive policy document that addresses all of the issues identified in the UNEG Norms and Standards. An up-to-date policy document adjusted to the UNICEF context would have to address the decentralized nature of the organization as well as the implications for evaluation of UNICEF policies such as the Human Rights-Based

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[33] Executive Board Decision 2002/9

Approach to Programming (HRBAP), Results-Based Management (RBM), and the organization's Core Commitments to Children in Emergencies (CCC).

82.   The UNICEF Self- Assessment[34] identified the need for a new evaluation policy to reflect the UNEG Norms and Standards. The EO Annual Work Programme for 2006-2007 identifies a new policy as a priority. In the meantime, the EO is working on an Executive Directive related to evaluation. The Panel considers that an updated policy, approved by the Executive Board, should precede the development of an Executive Directive on evaluation.

B.   Oversight of Independence and Impartiality

Does the Executive Board and/or the Executive Director ensure that evaluations are conducted in an impartial and independent fashion? Do they ensure that evaluators have the freedom to conduct their work without repercussions for career development? (Norm 2.4 & 6.2-6.5)

83.   This issue must be discussed from two different perspectives: the way that specific evaluations are conducted, and the level of independence of the Evaluation Office and the overall evaluation function.

Independence in Carrying Out Evaluations

84.   The Executive Board has given direction to UNICEF on how evaluations should be conducted in two Executive Board decisions (2002/9 and 2004/9). In 2002/9, the Board requested that UNICEF:

- "ensure transparency and impartiality of evaluations and to make sure that the evaluation process is conducted in a professional manner while also taking into account the views of all concerned actors;
- " . . enhance the independence of evaluation by making more extensive use of external evaluators, from both programme and donor countries, particularly the country concerned".

85.   Executive Board decision 2004/9 encouraged the further strengthening of the evaluation function by, *inter alia*, "Continuing to improve the standards of evaluation at the country level, with the guidance of national authorities and building on United Nations system-wide norms and standards for evaluation, with the technical support of the Evaluation Office and regional offices."

86.   Various documents provide guidance for staff on independence and impartiality, including the *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (2005)*, the EO's Evaluation Standards (posted on the Web site) and Technical Notes on preparing a Terms of Reference, as well as the general standards of conduct that apply to

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[34] Conducted for the UNEG Quality Stamp Task Force, 2005.

UN employees. The Panel considers that adequate guidance has been provided to ensure independence of specific evaluations. However, the Panel agrees with the EO's assessment that it would be helpful to have a Code of Conduct for evaluation that would bring together in one document all of the relevant information related to independence, impartiality and other ethical considerations.

87. It should be noted that other HQ Divisions also carry out evaluations within their areas of expertise. The EO may be requested to provide technical guidance related to evaluation methodology, but the EO has no formal responsibility for the quality of these evaluations. However, the EO does review the reports for quality using UNICEF's reporting standards.

88. Beyond providing guidance on evaluation standards, the EO has no responsibility for overseeing the quality and independence of evaluation at the regional or country level. This is the responsibility of the Regional Office. Regional offices provide various types of support to country M&E officers and focal points, including reviewing the TOR and, in some places, reviewing the technical qualifications of consultants or providing a list of approved consultants.[35] However, several regional M&E positions have not been fully staffed for some time, resulting in a reduced level of oversight for countries in the region.

89. The Panel considers that practices used by the EO (such as open bidding for evaluation contracts, and competitive selection processes) help to ensure the independence of evaluators. Such practices are employed both at Headquarters and at the field level, although the availability of qualified consultants at the field level has been identified as a limitation.[36] Users of the evaluations at Headquarters expressed satisfaction with the EO's selection processes and viewed the presence of an external consultant as a safeguard for independence of the evaluation.

90. Feedback from consultants who participated in a selection of EO-led evaluations indicates that they did not feel constrained in carrying out the evaluation, nor did they feel pressure to adjust the views expressed in their reports. One external interviewee, who compared draft EO reports with the final versions, indicated that critical comments had not been edited.

91. The only practice that was identified by the Panel as having any potential for constraining the independence of an evaluation conducted by the EO was the use of a Steering Group, which is usually chaired by a Deputy Executive Director or a senior manager with responsibility for the Division that is the 'client' for the evaluation or the main user of its results. The EO has adopted this practice in order to increase management's commitment to the evaluation process and enhance the potential for evaluation recommendations to be implemented. Since the Steering Group usually includes a range of participants, the client or user does

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[35] West and Central Africa.
[36] Interviews, October 2005, January 2006.

not control the process. However, the Steering Group can play a very active role, especially in the development of the TOR. To ensure the greatest level of independence, the Panel believes that the EO should maintain final authority for approving the TOR and for selection of consultants.

92.   No instances have ever been reported of an evaluator's career being adversely affected by producing a critical report.[37] In fact, UNICEF demonstrates a strong culture of self-assessment. The EO describes one of its functions as "shining a light" on problem areas in order to begin the discussion of solutions. Some evaluations that have been critical of UNICEF practice were also reported to have been widely read and influential in shaping new approaches.[38]

Independence of the Evaluation Office and the Evaluation Function

93.   The UNEG Norms and Standards prescribe that the EO Director should report directly either to the Board or to the Head of the organization to ensure the function's independence and impartiality.

94.   At UNICEF, the EO Director is appointed by the Executive Director but the EO Director's formal reporting relationship is to a Deputy Executive Director. The EO Director has access to the Executive Director as required. The EO Director presents the EO quadrennial work programme and a biennial progress report on the evaluation function to the Executive Board at the request of the Executive Director. The EO Director must also present the EO work programme to the Evaluation Committee for approval and negotiate its budget with the Programme Budget Review Committee.[39] In short, the EO's reporting and accountability lines are varied and not clearly defined.

95.   There is some debate as to whether the EO Director should report to the Executive Director or to the Executive Board. Reporting to the Executive Director identifies the evaluation function as a key component of UNICEF's oversight and performance assessment system. Evaluation is one tool in a results-based management system (RBM); the others are performance monitoring by management and internal audits of programme management practices. Results-Based Management assesses whether UNICEF programmes achieve their objectives and are effective and relevant. An effective RBM system provides the information needed to enable the Executive Director to manage the organization and to be accountable to the Executive Board.

96.   If the Evaluation Office were to report directly to the Executive Board, the function could operate independent of management but would require a different

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[37] *Draft report to the Joint Inspection Unit*, January 2006.
[38] Examples: *The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001 (2004); UNICEF Response to the Darfur Emergency (2004).*
[39] The budget negotiating process is the same for all Divisions except the Office of Internal Audit.

working arrangement of the Board to allow proper supervision of the evaluation function.

97.   Given the decentralized nature of the evaluation function, and the fact that the Regional Directors are accountable to the Executive Director for evaluation activities (among other things), creating a different reporting line for the EO seems impractical and risks fragmenting the evaluation function.

98.   Executive Board members consulted by the Panel have expressed different viewpoints on the question of whether the EO Director should report directly to the Board. While there is some support for a direct reporting line, it has not been identified as a priority. The benefits of having the EO as an internal function were acknowledged (e.g. engaging colleagues, contribution to learning, participation in follow-up). However, it was suggested that the independent status of the Evaluation Office should be formalized. Those Board members who think it is not necessary for the EO Director to report to the Board, point to the fact that the Board does not have a sub-committee with specific responsibility for evaluation. The frequent rotation of Board members and lack of evaluation experience were also identified as potential barriers to ensuring strong oversight for an Evaluation Office that reported to the Board.

99.   Board members indicated they are satisfied with the frequency of reports from both the Evaluation Office and the Regional Directors. Board members' biggest concerns revolved around the need for clear reporting that is evidence-based and focused on outcomes and impact. Board meeting documents indicate that this has been an on-going concern.[40] Some Board members also felt that reporting did not demonstrate sufficiently that UNICEF internalized learning from evaluations. It was also suggested that evaluation reports should include a management response when they are presented to the Board.

Text Box 2

> *"It would be helpful if evaluation reports could focus more on results at output/outcome level . . . with analysis included to give the reader a good sense of strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of UNICEF's approach/ contribution for use in decisions related to subsequent policy, programmes and advocacy work. We would also like their evaluations/ reports to be more open and frank, and show willingness to talk about lessons from bad experience as well as the good examples."*
>
> *Executive Board member interview*

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[40] E/ICEF/2003/9/ Rev.1, para 276; E/ICEF/2004/9; E/ICEF/ 2005/8, para 4, 9 June 2005.

C.   Independence and Impartiality of Evaluators

Do evaluators operate in an independent and impartial manner? (Norms 2.5, 5.3, 6.3 & 6.4)

100.   The Director has substantial responsibility for selection and performance appraisal of professional staff within the EO. Selection is competitive and based on competencies required for the position or project. All of the current EO staff has been recruited from outside of UNICEF based on an assessment of their experience and professional skills. One person has previous experience working for UNICEF as an M&E officer at the field level.

101.   UNICEF staff is required to adhere to the UN Staff Regulations and Rules, 2001 Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service as well as to UNICEF policy. Their basic duties and obligations and standards of conduct as international civil servants are reiterated in Chapter 1 of the UNICEF Human Resources Policy and Procedure Manual.

102.   Individual contractors are also required to respect the impartiality and independence of the United Nations, to follow the standards of conduct for UN staff and to respect the confidentiality of information they have collected during their work.

103.   EO staff performance appraisals are done annually by the EO Director using UNICEF's standard Performance Evaluation Report and procedures. The performance of individual contractors and consultants is assessed annually or at the end of the project period. In principle, working in the Evaluation Office should not adversely affect future opportunities on compensation, training, tenure and advancement within UNICEF, and no problems were reported related to any of these issues.

104.   The EO Director's annual performance appraisal is signed by the Deputy Executive Director and the Executive Director. This is standard procedure for the Director level. The EO Director is not restricted from taking another position at UNICEF following his/her tenure. The issue of whether the EO Director can move to another position in the organization should be addressed in the evaluation policy.

105.   EO evaluations consistently require that evaluators must not have been involved in planning or managing the entity under evaluation. It is not clear whether this same requirement is applied systematically at the country and regional levels. The Ghana reference case demonstrated that evaluations were generally managed by the Programme Departments with little input or technical support from the M&E officer.

106. In relation to consultants, impartiality and independence are identified in UNICEF's Evaluation Standards, which are available on the UNICEF Web site. Evaluation Technical Note # 2 – *What Goes into a Terms of Reference* indicates that this issue should be addressed in the TOR (*Evaluation process and methods*).

D.   Transparent Links between Evaluation Planning and Budget

Are the EO budget and plan of evaluations linked so that it is clear that adequate resources are allocated to enable the EO to operate effectively and with due independence? (Norms 2.3, 2.6 & 4.2)

107. Overall, the basis for <u>selection of evaluation topics</u> at UNICEF is the five focus areas identified in the MTSP as well as several supporting and cross-cutting strategies of the MTSP. All corporate evaluations noted in the 2006-2009 MTSP are tied to a specific focus area or strategy. In the course of the program period, it is intended that all focus areas will be covered, but there is no intent to evaluate all UNICEF-supported activities.

108. The MTSP is approved by the Executive Board. However, it does not include a costed workplan that identifies the funding required for evaluations at each level (Headquarters, Region, Country).

109. Regional and country level evaluations are planned at those levels, with the RO having responsibility to review country-level evaluations for their strategic importance and for potential links among countries. Although there has been an effort to focus on fewer and more strategic evaluations at the country level, the bulk of evaluations still focus on the implementation of specific projects/ programmes.

110. The <u>budgeting process</u> for the EO follows the same procedures as used for other parts of UNICEF. The EO negotiates a biennial budget with the Programme Budget Review Committee (PBRC). In order to increase its budget, the EO must justify its request; all requests are assessed by the PBRC, taking into consideration past funding levels, number of staff, the number of evaluations and other activities programmed.

111. The PBRC presents a consolidated budget to the Executive Board at its meeting in September. The EO budget is approved by the Board as part of the overall UNICEF budget. The Board does not see an itemized list of the components of the EO budget and their source of funding. Only the allocation from Regular Resources is shown. Board members consulted by the Panel indicated that they were not fully aware of the size of the EO's budget.

112. The EO's budget for 2006-2007 is discussed in Section One – paragraphs 48-49. The Regular Resources allocation of $445,000 per year represents only 9% of the EO's budget (excluding staff costs). This amount will allow the EO to carry out

approximately 2 corporate evaluations per year. The EO has full discretion to identify evaluations that will be carried out within the EO budget. For 2006 and 2007 the EO will focus on issues of corporate and strategic importance related to organizational performance.

113.   The EO is heavily dependent on Other Resources (OR), which generally come from donors and may be designated for specific evaluations. For the next biennium, OR funds have been committed for Tsunami evaluation and Real Time evaluations.

114.   No funding has been allocated by UNICEF for activities related to underline evaluation capacity development at the country and regional levels and for Country Programme Evaluations. The EO Director has been authorized to seek funding from donors for these activities (64% of the budget).

115.   The EO has a good history of finding Other Resources to carry out various activities. However, the fundraising challenge is significant ($6.25 M over two years). Since the Executive Board has stressed the need to strengthen evaluation capacity at the national level, it might be expected that UNICEF would commit funds to this core activity.

116.   It should be noted that the EO's Annual Report for 2005 indicates that limited resources prevented the Office from investing sufficiently in: capacity building, proactive communications with Regional Offices, regular dissemination of evaluation findings, and learning from other professional networks.

117.   In some cases, a Division may commission the EO to manage or carry out an evaluation and provides the funding for it. Several managers interviewed indicated that they preferred to work with the EO rather than doing the evaluation themselves because the EO provided a strong, independent assessment.

118.   The Panel considers the ability to budget for evaluation as a key element of independence. Having limited resources in the EO's core budget and having to negotiate with other Divisions for evaluation funding restricts the EO's capacity to choose evaluation topics that it considers strategically important. Similarly, having to raise almost two-thirds of its budget leaves the EO vulnerable to donor demands.

119.   Donor demand was identified by M&E staff as a key factor driving evaluative activities at the country level, though the level of donor demand varied among the regions. The overall effect of donor demand for evaluation is to place a strong emphasis on project evaluation, with the result that the evaluation function becomes reactive; its independence to identify and carry out strategic evaluations is reduced.

E.   Separation from Line Management

Is the evaluation function located independently from the other management functions so that it is free from undue influence and that unbiased and transparent reporting is ensured? (Norm 6.1)

120.   The Panel recognizes the importance of the evaluation function having a clearly separate identity from other aspects of management in order to protect its independence and impartiality. However, in the Panel's view, <u>independence does not mean isolation</u>. Evaluation has intrinsic links to all stages of the project/programme cycle. It provides essential information to determine whether results are being achieved, the impact of those results, the need for change, and the potential for a project/ programme to be sustainable. Evaluation is a key management tool for learning and for performance accountability. In fact, it has been argued that, "rigorous program evaluations are the lifeblood of good governance."[41] In this respect, the Panel considers evaluation as a *core function* for the organization.

121.   UNICEF's Office of Evaluation (HQ level) was established as an independent unit in 2001. The EO operates within the management structure of the organization, but "as an independent agent free from management interference."[42] Interviews with senior managers confirmed the very strong perception that the EO operates independently. In interactions with the Panel, EO staff demonstrated a high degree of intellectual independence and freedom to express differing views. The EO Director signs off on evaluations completed by the EO and the Director indicated that he has never experienced any interference in the process of conducting or reporting on an evaluation.

122.   The level of independence which the EO currently enjoys, especially in carrying out its day-to-day functions, is based on informal arrangements established by the current EO Director rather than on a clear institutional framework that sets out the EO's independence. Without a clear organizational commitment to the independence of the evaluation function, articulated in a comprehensive policy document that specifies reporting and accountability lines and the linkages among the levels of the decentralized system, the current level of independence is potentially vulnerable. In addition, clarifying the EO's reporting line and responsibilities would provide assurance against any infringement on independence, real or perceived.

123.   At the regional and country levels, the evaluation function is not at all separated from other management activities. M&E officers at both levels have multiple tasks in addition to evaluation (e.g. monitoring of the situation of children,

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[41] David Zussman, *"The Accountability Act should also account for money well spent",* The Ottawa Citizen, April 24, 2006. This is a quotation from Canada's Auditor-General.
[42] UNICEF, EO Quality Stamp Self-Assessment, 2005.

performance monitoring, planning, policy analysis and advice). Under these conditions, the line between monitoring and evaluation tends to become blurred.

124. UNICEF generally adheres to the UNEG Norms and Standards definitions related to evaluation versus self-assessment. Self-assessments (or self-evaluations) are conducted / managed by programme staff, whereas evaluations are conducted by professional evaluators within or outside the organization (the latter being consultants). Formal evaluations at the regional and country levels are carried out by independent consultants contracted through competitive processes. However, programme officers often manage evaluations with little reference to the M&E officer, as illustrated by the Ghana reference case.

125. Where evaluation is closely linked to management functions, there is greater potential for evaluation products to be considered less credible. Impartiality of the findings may be questioned and/or the evaluation may be considered self-serving. The Panel notes that UNICEF does not routinely carry out independent validation of self-assessment exercises, which would serve to improve credibility.

Text Box 3

Promoting independence of the evaluation function at the country level

The Ghana country reference case suggests that greater attention is needed to ensure that the principle of independence is clearly articulated and adhered to throughout the evaluation process. Elements that should be strengthened include:

- Technical direction from the M&E officer to programme staff in preparation of the TOR according to UNICEF standards;
- Provision of adequate funding for the selection of qualified team members who have no involvement with the project/ issue that is being evaluated;
- Selection of competent team leaders;
- Development of a governance model for evaluation that promotes ownership while also ensuring independence (e.g. use of a steering group);
- Greater level of oversight from the Regional office.

F.   Relationship between Evaluation and Audit

126. The Panel notes that during 2006, UNICEF intends to review the respective roles of internal audit and evaluation. The relationship betweens these two functions has been the topic of on-going discussion among UN agencies and donors for some time. The discussion has become more focused with the release of the UN Joint Inspection Unit's report, "Oversight Lacunae in the United Nations System" (JIU/REP/2006/2), which proposes to consolidate the functions of evaluation, audit, investigation and inspection into a single unit under the head of internal oversight reporting directly to the executive head.

127. Given the current level of attention to this issue, the Peer Panel agreed that it should be considered in the Review from the perspective of what is needed to maximize the contribution of the evaluation function to UNICEF management and decision-making, in order to enhance the organization's credibility, accountability and learning.

128. To ensure the independence of the evaluation function, the UNEG Norms and Standards prescribe that the head of evaluation should supervise and report on evaluations and should report directly to the Governing Body and/or Head of the Organization.

129. The Panel sees significant differences between the audit and evaluation functions in terms of focus, methodology, professional training requirements and public accountability for reports. Evaluation is a non-controlling function that engages stakeholders in collaborative assessment and learning. It can play a key role in promoting partnership, building capacity at the country level and sharing best practices.

130. Cooperation between Evaluation and Audit is recognized as important. Each function provides specific information to strengthen management and accountability throughout the project/ programme cycle. Evaluation is particularly important for identification of programme effectiveness – what works and why, how different groups are affected by programmes and whether initiatives can be made sustainable.

131. The Panel did not undertake a review of options for locating the evaluation function within various organizational structures. The consensus of the Panel was to encourage UNICEF to ensure that evaluation remains a strong, independent and credible function that addresses programme effectiveness, value and impact results.

G.   Ensuring Access to Needed Information

Does the independence of the EO impinge on the access that evaluators have to information on the subject being evaluated? (Norm 6.5)

132. There is no evidence that the perceived independence of the EO has led to any widespread restrictions on evaluators' access to information. Evaluations undertaken for other Headquarters divisions usually have a high degree of involvement of internal stakeholders. In one reference case considered by the Review, UNICEF staff was able to facilitate access to information that might otherwise have been inaccessible. However, one case was reported where the country office limited access to relevant stakeholders during a country programme evaluation.

H.   Freedom of Reporting

Does the EO have full discretion to submit its reports for consideration to the appropriate level of decision-making related to the evaluation? (Norm 6.1)

133.   The EO Director indicates that he has discretion to submit reports to the appropriate level of decision-making. Drafts of EO evaluation reports are usually shared directly with the division/ office involved in order to ensure factual accuracy and promote learning on substantive conclusions and recommendations. Findings are also often validated through workshops with all relevant internal and external stakeholders (including staff from divisions/ offices).

134.   Reports commissioned by the Executive Board have been presented directly to the Board. The Board has also requested that key findings from evaluations of MTSP areas should be presented for discussion.

135.   The EO Director has indicated that the EO can hold informal consultations with the Board on evaluations that it has not commissioned, and the EO frequently makes evaluation reports available at Board meetings.

136.   The Evaluation Committee is charged with reviewing evaluation reports that have relevance at the global governance level. The Committee may refer discussion of an evaluation report to another UNICEF committee/ group for due consideration.

I.   Tracking Management's Response to an Evaluation

Does the EO have the independence to track follow-up of management's response to an evaluation? (Norm 6.2)

137.   Management responses have not been systematically required until recently and there has been no system for tracking follow-up. However, the need for such a system has been recognized by management as a priority since the MTSP identifies "an official management response to at least 75% of evaluations" as a goal (para 123-f).

138.   The Evaluation Office identified development of a tracking system in its Office Management Plan (OMP) 2006-2007, which has been approved by the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board. Management follow-up protocols and systems are being developed by the EO and will be applied to the Evaluation Office and other corporate level evaluations in 2006-7.

139.   The responsibility for tracking management response to global/institutional evaluations and implementation of evaluation recommendations rests with the EO as the Secretariat of the Evaluation Committee. At the regional level, tracking is the responsibility of the Regional Management Team (in most cases the Regional

M&E Officer). At the country level, the Country Management Team is responsible for the tracking. However, it seems that not all ROs and COs have implemented a tracking system.[43]

140. Some staff and senior managers expressed the view that the responsibility for tracking follow-up should not be placed in the EO since it is a form of compliance monitoring that would be better suited to the Audit function. Another issue that was raised in relation to tracking follow-up is that UNICEF has no systematic incentives or sanctions to ensure that evaluation recommendations are implemented. Placing tracking of follow-up with the Audit function was perceived as more likely to strengthen implementation of recommendations.

J.   Conclusions Related to Independence

Role of the Executive Board and Executive Director

141. UNICEF has a strong enabling environment for evaluation and a corporate culture that is disposed to self-assessment. The visibility and importance of the evaluation function has increased over the past five years as the demand for clear evidence of results has increased.

142. The Executive Board has been pro-active in defining operational expectations for the evaluation function. It has reviewed and approved the evaluation workplan included in the Medium-Term Strategic Plan as well as the Evaluation Office's four-year workplans. It regularly receives and discusses reports on evaluations carried out at the regional and country levels as well as reports from the Evaluation Office.

143. However, the Executive Board has not requested UNICEF to develop a comprehensive evaluation policy document. Neither has the Executive Board taken full advantage of the evaluation function by requesting evaluations to inform its decision-making.

144. In revitalizing the Evaluation Committee, the Executive Director has engaged senior management in promoting the use of evaluations in the organization and taking responsibility for ensuring management response. The Panel considers this senior level committee to be an example of good practice that could have wider application.

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[43] The Ghana reference case demonstrated that no tracking system is in place in either the CO or RO.

Oversight of independence and impartiality

With respect to the conduct of evaluations

145.   The Panel considers that UNICEF is providing adequate guidance and has adopted effective practices (such as open bidding for evaluation contracts and competitive selection processes) that ensure independence in conducting specific evaluations.

146.   The Panel agrees with the EO's assessment that it would be helpful to have a Code of Conduct for evaluation that would bring together in one document all of the relevant information related to independence, impartiality and other ethical considerations.

147.   When an evaluation Steering Group is chaired by the client or user of the evaluation, the Panel believes that independence may be negatively affected unless the EO keeps final authority for the TOR and selection of consultants.

With respect to the independence of the Evaluation Office and the overall evaluation function

148.   UNICEF appears to respect the unique and important contribution that a strong evaluation function makes to both learning and accountability for results. The PPPM identifies procedures and standards that recognize the added value of the evaluation process to foster participation, dialogue and consensus-building. Interviews with senior managers confirmed the very strong perception that the EO operates independently. However, UNICEF has not taken steps to clearly recognize and formalize the independence of the evaluation function through a comprehensive policy document that meets UNEG Norms and Standards.

149.   Since 2001 when the EO became an independent office, there is no evidence that either the Executive Board or UNICEF's senior management have attempted to curtail the independence of the EO. In the Panel's view, the present systems, approaches and behaviours generally meet the relevant UNEG Norms for independence, with the exception of the EO Director's current reporting line. To meet the UNEG Norms and Standards, the EO Director should report <u>either</u> to the Executive Director <u>or</u> to the Executive Board, rather than to a Deputy Executive Director.

150.   Senior management felt strongly that it was not necessary for the EO to report to the Board in order to preserve the independence of the evaluation function. Board members also expressed the view that it was not necessary for the EO to report to the Board, as long as the Board receives clear reports that are evidence-based, focused on results (outcomes and impact) and indicative that learning is taking place.

151. In the current framework of accountabilities, the Regional Office is key to improving the quality of country-level evaluations. However, <u>resources for evaluation oversight and support at the regional level are minimal</u>. The lack of a financial commitment from Regular Resources for this essential element of the EO's work programme seems to run counter to the Executive Board's specific request for strengthening evaluation capacity at the field level.

Independence and impartiality of evaluators

152. Independence and impartiality are clear requirements specified in contracts for staff and consultants. The EO ensures that staff does not evaluate programmes/ projects that they have been involved in planning or managing. It is not clear whether this same requirement is applied systematically at the region and country level.

153. In interactions with the Panel, EO staff demonstrated a high degree of intellectual independence and freedom to express differing views. There is no evidence to suggest that working for the EO has had any negative effects on a person's career at UNICEF.

Links between evaluation and planning

154. The Panel considers that it is the Executive Director's responsibility to ensure that the evaluation function is adequately funded to carry out a reasonable number of evaluations selected on a strategic basis.

155. The current low level of funding provided from Regular Resources influences the type and number of evaluations the EO can undertake.

156. Evaluation at all levels is heavily dependent on Other Resources, making the function potentially vulnerable to donor demands.

157. The Panel believes that the limited core budget for evaluation and the heavy reliance on Other Resources has an impact on planning, prioritization and evaluation coverage at all levels. The capacity to identify and carry out evaluations of strategic importance is reduced when evaluations are carried out on a project-by-project basis.

158. The Executive Board is not well informed about the level of funding provided for evaluation because it does not receive a costed workplan for either the MTSP or the Evaluation Office workplan.

Separation from line management

159. The EO is an independent unit that operates free from management interference. However, it is the Panel's view that the EO's high level of independence is based

more on informal arrangements established by the current Director than on a clear institutional framework that sets out the independence of the function. Without a clear organizational commitment to the independence of the evaluation function, articulated in a comprehensive policy document that specifies reporting and accountability lines and the linkages among the levels of the decentralized system, the current level of independence is potentially vulnerable.

160. At the regional and country levels, the evaluation function is not at all separated from other management activities. <u>This situation is likely to have the greatest impact on the credibility of self-assessments and evaluations managed by programme officers</u>.

Relation between Evaluation and Audit

161. The consensus of the Panel was to encourage UNICEF to ensure that evaluation remains a strong, independent and credible function that addresses programme effectiveness, value and impact results.

Ensuring access to needed information

162. There is no evidence that the perceived independence of the EO has led to any widespread restrictions on evaluators' access to information.

Freedom of reporting

163. The Panel considers that the provisions for the EO to present reports to the appropriate level of decision-making are sufficient to ensure independence in reporting.

Tracking management's response to an evaluation

164. It is too soon to make a judgment on whether the newly-developed system for tracking management response to global/ institutional evaluations and implementation of evaluation recommendations will be effective. It is worth noting that the EO has had almost double the responses it had expected for the pilot phase of the tracking system.

165. Although tracking of regional and country level evaluations is identified as the responsibility of the RO and CO, it appears that tracking is not being done systematically in all offices.

K.   Recommendations Related to Independence

Given all of the evidence considered in the Review, the Panel recommends:

Evaluation Policy

166.   UNICEF should update previous policy statements into a comprehensive evaluation policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to the present UNICEF context.

- The evaluation policy should be a stand-alone document that is approved by the Executive Board.

- The evaluation policy should assert the independence of the evaluation function and specify that the Director of the Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Director.

- The evaluation policy should be developed in consultation with stakeholders, including partner countries.

- The policy should be disseminated and implemented throughout the organization by way of an Executive Directive.

- The Executive Directive should:

   o   Clearly identify how evaluation contributes to learning, accountability and decision-making within the organization;

   o   Spell out roles, responsibilities and accountabilities at the central, regional and country levels;

   o   Address the highly decentralized nature of the evaluation function and the need to ensure quality, credibility and usefulness of evaluations at all levels;

   o   Define protocols for consultation with, and participation of, stakeholders (internal and external), partner countries and beneficiaries.

   o   Address issues that are specific to UNICEF's work which have implications for the evaluation function (HRBAP, RBM, CCC etc).

167.   It is recommended that the Director of Evaluation should report on implementation of the evaluation policy in the biennial report on the evaluation function which is presented to the Executive Board.

Resources for Evaluation

168.   The Panel recommends that evaluation should be considered a *core function* for UNICEF, similar to Audit. To strengthen independence and credibility of the evaluation function at all levels, and to ensure adequate evaluation coverage, a

more predictable budget should be provided. Specific suggestions include:

- The Executive Board should ensure that the evaluation function has adequate Regular Resources to operate in an independent and credible manner.
- Regular Resources assigned to the evaluation function both in HQ and in the field should be increased.
- The Regular Resources should be sufficient to cover strategic evaluations on corporate priorities.
- Other Resources should be committed for strengthening internal evaluation capacity at all levels and for evaluation capacity development of country partners.

169.   Regional office allocations for evaluation should be sufficient to support thematic and strategic evaluations, quality assurance of evaluations at the country level and professional networking activities.

170.   For transparency and accountability purposes, the Executive Board should be presented with costed evaluation work plans as well as documentation of evaluation expenditures at HQ, regional and country levels.

Relation between Evaluation and Audit

171.   The Panel encourages UNICEF to ensure that evaluation remains a strong, independent and credible function that addresses programme effectiveness, value and impact results.

Section Four: Credibility

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

Impartiality increases the credibility of evaluation, provides legitimacy to evaluation and reduces the potential for conflict of interest. Impartiality is the absence of bias in due process, methodological rigor, consideration and presentation of achievements and challenges. It also implies that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account. Evaluation reports must present in a complete and balanced way the evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations (Definition derived from UNEG Norms 3.1; 5.1-5.3; 8.1-8.2)

In this section, the Review Panel has also included an assessment of UNICEF's efforts towards (a) fostering evaluation capacity building at the country level, (b) facilitating stakeholder participation in evaluation, and (c) mainstreaming gender equality in evaluation. The Panel considers that each of these approaches can significantly enhance the credibility of evaluations.

A.   Evaluation Policy

Does UNICEF have an evaluation policy that explains the concept of evaluation, roles and responsibilities and how evaluation evidence will be used? (Norm 3.1)

172.   The need for an updated comprehensive policy document on evaluation that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to suit the UNICEF context was identified in the previous section on Independence. It is the Panel's view that an updated policy, approved by the Executive Board and disseminated throughout the organization, would also strengthen the credibility of UNICEF's evaluation function.

Does the evaluation policy explain how evaluations are planned, managed and budgeted? (Norm 3.1)

173.   The current documents that guide the evaluation function do not provide a clear explanation or systematic criteria for selecting and prioritizing evaluations at HQ or field levels. Interviews suggest that evaluations at country level are undertaken primarily in response to donor demand rather than strategic priorities. Similarly, the EO often undertakes or manages evaluations that have not been identified in the MTSP because they are requested to do so by other HQ Divisions that have funding.

174.   Since fund-raising and advocacy are important elements for the whole organization, interviews suggest that, in practice, evaluation plays an important role in supporting these functions. These considerations appear to have an important influence on the selection and use of evaluations. The Panel recognizes the need for both advocacy and fund-raising, but believes that these activities should be separated from the evaluation function in order to preserve both independence and credibility.

175.   The Panel noted that the EO's focus for 2006-2007 is directed towards institutional/process reviews (e.g. human resource management, supply function), activities that could be construed as management consulting rather than evaluation. The EO explains that these reviews have strategic significance for UNICEF at this time. While the Panel recognizes that the EO's current approach may be temporary, in the future <u>it would seem more desirable for the EO to re-establish its focus on evaluating development effectiveness in strategic policy or programming areas</u>.

176.   Planning documents such as the MTSP/ IMEF and country-level IMEPs identify what UNICEF intends to do in the field of evaluation. What is not readily apparent is why this selection of evaluations was made. Some bilateral donors have indicated that they would like UNICEF to be more explicit in identifying the criteria used for the selection of evaluations, and ensure that the criteria provides good coverage of UNICEF programming, especially in priority areas.

 Is there a clear statement on disclosure and dissemination? (Norm 3.1)

177.   <u>UNICEF's disclosure policy</u> states that all reports are assumed to be suitable for public dissemination unless they contain information of a sensitive nature. In that case, release may be delayed. The EO reports that only 2 evaluations have not been posted on the Internet due to sensitive content since 2000.

178.   There is no formal <u>dissemination strategy</u> although the *Policy and Procedure Manual (2005)* identifies responsibility for dissemination of evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons at the country and regional levels. The PPM specifies a variety of methods for dissemination including, formal presentations with national stakeholders, local level community meetings, regional knowledge networks, the CO Annual Report and the Regional Director's Regional Analysis Report. The Panel's findings indicate that all of these methods are being used to some degree.

179.   <u>Dissemination of evaluation results</u> and lessons is one of the EO's accountabilities. The 2005 EO Annual Report indicates that little was done in this area because of limited resources. In addition, the *Self-Assessment Report* indicates that UNICEF does not yet have a systematic method of compiling

findings and lessons learned from evaluations undertaken by all levels, HQ-RO-CO.

B.   *Quality Assurance*

Do evaluations use design, planning and implementation processes that are quality oriented? (Norm 8.1)

180.   The Panel notes that although the EO provides "functional leadership and overall management of the evaluation system", it does not have responsibility for quality assurance of evaluations conducted by other HQ divisions or by Regional Offices. Nor is it responsible for quality assurance at the country level – this is the responsibility of the Regional office. The EO has pointed out that it would be impossible for the central evaluation office to undertake quality control for such a highly decentralized evaluation system. However, the Panel believes that the links and accountabilities for quality assurance across the whole system should be more clearly defined.

181.   <u>Strengthening evaluation capacity at the country and regional levels has been a priority for the EO for a number of years</u>. Quality standards and guidance have been developed for TOR, evaluation implementation and reporting (all discussed in other sections of this report). Feedback from regional M&E officers indicates that this guidance is helpful and used in some cases. The Ghana country reference case suggests that ensuring the quality of evaluations is hampered by the blurring of monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, and by the CO placing stronger emphasis on participation and local ownership of the process than on an objective assessment of results. It should be recognized, however, that UNICEF's strong engagement with communities and partner institutions in Government and civil society provides the foundation for its credibility in the country. Balancing these factors is obviously a challenge at the country level.

182.   The EO has worked with Regional Offices to develop a plan for strengthening the decentralized evaluation function and is seeking funds to carry out its plan.

183.   Strengthening evaluation capacity at the country level is important not only for UNICEF's own programmes but also to enable UNICEF to engage substantially in joint evaluative processes with other UN agencies. The Ghana reference case provided one example of a joint evaluation that produced information for learning and decision making at the programme level, the level of the national government and for the international partners.

Text Box 4

Ghana Guinea Worm Eradication Programme

Ghana's Guinea Worm Eradication Programme has made little progress in reducing the incidence of the disease over the last ten years. In 2005 it was agreed that an evaluation should be carried out to make recommendations to accelerate the work of the Programme.

The evaluation included the full range of national and international partners that are actively involved in the Ghana Guinea Worm Eradication Programme: World Health Organization, UNICEF, Carter Foundation, Red Cross, Ghana Health Service, Community Water and Sanitation Agency, and the Ministry of Local Government.

The seasonal timing of the evaluation was useful as it allowed corrective action before the transmission season. However, the broader picture should also be considered. It had been 10 years since the last external review, and this had been a period of limited progress. *It might have been useful to have had an external review at an earlier point in the programme.*

Some attempt was made to introduce independence into the evaluation process by including external independent consultants and senior staff from the participating organizations. However, some staff who were actively involved in the programme were also on the evaluation team. This compromised independence to some degree.

In general, the exercise was more of a programme review than an evaluation of key strategic choices, and it involved limited critique of the roles of the major partners. However, it made a series of recommendations for adaptation of the programme and also some policy recommendations. The findings from the evaluation were considered by the Programme's coordinating committee and appropriate actions were identified and agreed.

In the evaluation report, learning from the experience of other countries is not raised explicitly, even though UNICEF has had successful experience in eradicating guinea worm in other locations. Cross-country learning across the region may have been facilitated by participation of a UNICEF team member who came from the Abidjan Regional Office. *The Ghana experience with guinea worm eradication should also be fed into UNICEF's knowledge base for greater learning across the agency.*

The evaluation is an example of UNICEF working with other partners to identify barriers to programme implementation and to promote learning within the partnership. The evaluation results offer opportunities for UNICEF to expand its learning in a key area.

C.   Basic Criteria for Evaluation

Do the EO's evaluations meet the criteria identified in the UNEG definition of an evaluation? (Norm 1.2 & 1.4)

184.   The UNEG Norm 1.2 specifies that an evaluation:

"focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system."

185.   The UNICEF Evaluation Office has undertaken a number of reviews of evaluation quality, the most recent being the independent Meta-evaluation of country office evaluations, which was completed in 2004.[44] The Meta-evaluation analyzed a sample of 75 evaluation reports that had been submitted to the EO, along with the terms of reference for 31 of these evaluations. It found that UNICEF evaluations at the country level were not consistent in quality – approximately 20% of the evaluation reports reviewed were excellent but "the worst third are sufficiently poor to constitute a serious problem."[45]

186.   The five aspects of quality on which the UNICEF evaluations did best were:
   - The statement of evaluation objectives and questions was clear and complete;
   - The objectives and questions reflected UNICEF's mission and approach;
   - The qualitative and quantitative information gathered by many evaluations was, in aggregate, adequate to answer the evaluation questions;
   - Recommendations were often well based on evidence and analysis;
   - Many evaluation reports were clear, transparent and easily accessible to the reader.

187.   The five aspects of quality on which UNICEF evaluations did worst were:
   - Costs were not well described and were seldom compared with results;
   - The 'outputs' of the programme or project were often not adequately described or measured, causing a break in the causality chain from activities to outcomes;
   - Ethics review was seldom undertaken at the research design stage and the topic of research ethics was seldom addressed in the reports;
   - The evaluations generally did not describe the degree to which the initiative might be replicable in other contexts;
   - Lessons learned were often not generalized beyond the immediate intervention to indicate wider relevance for UNICEF.

188.   The EO has taken the Meta-evaluation very seriously and has followed up on many of the recommendations – e.g. developing reporting standards, guidelines for Terms of Reference and for ethical considerations; updating the PPPM to provide better guidance on results-based management and evaluation issues; developing monitoring and evaluation training materials that are accessible on-line; and reviewing all evaluation reports for quality on an annual basis.

189.   The Evaluation *Report Quality Review* for 2004 conducted by the EO indicates that the quality of evaluation reports submitted for review is improving. The number of Very Good evaluations increased by 18% while the number of Poor

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[44] *The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001*, Evaluation Office, September 2004.
[45] Ibid, page ii.

evaluations decreased by 19%. The majority of evaluations received Satisfactory or better on half of the 20 standards identified.

190. The areas identified as still needing improvement in the reports were: description of stakeholders' role and contribution; consideration of core issues such as the human rights based approach (HRBAP), gender analysis and RBM; and description of ethical issues, an element that was identified as potentially reducing validity of the report for outside readers.

191. Participation in the quality review process is identified as mandatory in the PPPM (2005) but the rate of participation is low enough to be considered problematic. Only 25% of the evaluations undertaken in 2004 were reviewed and there was a bias towards reports in English.

192. Evaluation reports reviewed as reference cases also varied in quality. When additional information from interviews and questionnaire responses was considered, it became apparent that reports were often not sufficient to assess the quality of the evaluation process.

193. Methodology was generally well described in the reference cases and appropriate, with limitations identified. In two cases the methodology had to be adjusted to deal with changes in the evaluation team. Support and guidance from the EO evaluation manager was identified as key to ensuring the quality of the product in these cases.

Text Box 5

Strengthening Methodology for Country Programme Evaluation

Cambodia was one of the first countries involved in UNICEF's project to develop the CPE methodology. It proved to be a challenge. The evaluation team had to be replaced; the timing was not the best as it followed shortly after a Mid-Term Review and the evaluation team had little discretion in setting/ adjusting the agenda. However, the evaluation did produce some good results. Most of the recommendations were accepted or partially accepted and implementation is underway.

Perhaps most important, the evaluation manager indicated that the evaluation taught them "what NOT to do/ compromise when carrying out an evaluation."

Does the evaluation provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful? (Norm 1.2)

194. The Panel's mandate did not include a comprehensive analysis of UNICEF's system for Results-Based Management. However, in the course of data collection and interviews it became apparent that weaknesses in the organization's RBM systems have an impact on the credibility of evaluations, particularly at the country level.

195.   Although guidance on Results-based management is provided in the *PPPM (2005),*[46] interviews with senior managers and programme staff indicate that RBM is not yet well integrated into UNICEF operations A recent study, undertaken by the Division of Policy and Planning and co-managed by the EO, indicated significant weaknesses in the results framework for country programme planning.[47]

196.   The <u>evidence base</u> was identified as a weakness in 3 of the 4 thematic evaluations reviewed. Difficulties were identified in collecting evidence to demonstrate the outputs and outcomes achieved. A second weakness was the lack of a logframe or RBM performance framework identifying performance indicators. These problems suggest weaknesses at the planning/ design stages where results, indicators and sources of information should be identified.

197.   Without a strong evidence base, it is difficult for UNICEF to demonstrate the effectiveness or impact of its programmes. This fundamental issue has been raised numerous times by the Executive Board; it clearly must be addressed at the organizational level.

198.   <u>Cost analysis and cost efficiency</u> were generally not addressed in the evaluations reviewed by the Panel because pertinent information was not available. Cost analysis may be a significant factor to demonstrate effectiveness and impact, particularly for pilot projects, which UNICEF often undertakes. Weakness in this area was identified in the Meta-evaluation of country-level evaluations. However, in the management response to the Meta-evaluation, the EO indicated that "it is neither consistent with an utilization-focused approach nor realistic to expect cost analysis in every evaluation." [48] The EO indicated that it would include reference to, "the importance of well-planned cost analysis of priority and high-cost programmes, project, or activities", in guidance to COs on preparing an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP).

199.   Other areas that were weak or not addressed in the reference cases include: lessons learned, sustainability of the initiative and discussion of how the human-rights based approach (HRBAP) was reflected in the initiative.

200.   The <u>desk reviews</u> that were considered as reference cases identified well the purpose of the exercise, the methodology and the broader context for findings. One review focused explicitly on UNICEF's contribution to UN reform and one on UNICEF's strengths and weaknesses.

201.   The Panel noted that <u>end-of-project evaluations</u> are not mandatory at UNICEF, primarily because of the relatively small size of many interventions. In the Panel's

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[46] PPPM, pp. 45-49.

[47] *Improving the Quality of Programme Planning Process for Results*, Division of Policy and Planning, June 2005, p. 6.

[48] *Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices*, Management Response, p. 101.

view, such evaluations provide vital information to assess the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of projects/ programmes. Without this information it is impossible to aggregate results to assess performance at an organizational level. The Panel considers that aggregation of results is basic to assessing development performance. It should be integrated within a results-based management system to ensure accountability and to provide important information for organizational learning.

202. End of project evaluations are also particularly important when a methodology or approach is being piloted. They can provide key information to assess the feasibility of scaling-up a project.

203. While the Panel recognizes that attribution of results can be difficult, especially within the context of joint programming, country-level evaluations should at least be able to assess the relative contributions of various partners.

D.   Evaluability

Does the EO verify if there is clarity in the intent of the subject to be evaluated, sufficient measurable indicators, assessable reliable information sources and no major factors hindering an impartial evaluation process? (Norm 7.1& 7.2)

204. The document review indicates that the EO has a good understanding of the concept of evaluability and has provided guidance for HQ Divisions, ROs and COs. Regional M&E officers indicated that ensuring evaluability of country programmes is one of their responsibilities. Evaluability is normally included in TOR and the need to address this issue is included in the Technical Note on TOR. Guidance is also provided in the PPPM addressing the need for a results-based framework that sets clear objectives, results and indicators.

205. However, two of the four thematic evaluations reviewed showed problems in relation to evaluability – one because of problems in the initial design of the programme, the other because of relations between the CO and the country government. Evaluability is of particular importance in Country Programme Evaluations and for pilot projects. It should be addressed at both the design stage and during implementation.

206. Weaknesses in the application of RBM during the planning process have been identified as an institutional problem in DPP's assessment of the quality of programme planning.[49] Recommendations from the report address, among other things, capacity building and the need for more systematic use of a results-oriented approach and planning frameworks. We have not seen the management response to this study so cannot comment on its adequacy.

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[49] *Improving the Quality of Programme Planning Process,* June 2005.

E. Competencies of Evaluation Staff

Is the professional competence and capacity of the Director and staff to deliver credible evaluations assured? (Norm 2.5 & 9.1- 9.3)

EO Staff

207. The job descriptions and recruitment qualifications for the Director and professional evaluation staff of the EO specify the technical and management competencies and experience required. These criteria are applied during the selection process which follows standard UNICEF recruitment policies. Criteria for selection of EO professionals are fully applied at the HQ level. There has been no rotation of staff from other Divisions into the Evaluation Office. Expertise on gender analysis and evaluation has been ensured through recruitments.

208. There has been a conscious effort at the EO to increase M&E skills by recruiting from outside the organization. The current Director was selected through an open competition.

209. The composition of the current EO professional staff is: P5 level – 3 senior officers; P4 level – 1 officer, P2 level – 1 assistant officer (JPO); P1 level – 1 consultant. The EO also employs 3 professionals (level L5, L3 and L2) with external funding designated for specific projects – Tsunami, Country Programme Evaluation and Database management. Only one of the professional staff is female.

210. Competence and performance are assessed annually by the Director using UNICEF's standard Performance Evaluation Report and procedures.

211. The capacity of the EO to respond to requests from other HQ Divisions is limited by the number of staff available and the level of their current workload.

Field Level

212. According to the EO's 2006 *Progress report to the Executive Board*, 83 of UNICEF's 100 evaluation professionals are employed in the field offices. Traditionally, M&E officers at the regional level are selected from internal candidates who have experience at the country level. The EO has reported that selection criteria related to evaluation vary and are applied unevenly at the field level.[50]

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[50] *Self-Assessment Report, UNEG Task Force*

213. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of evaluation professionals (level 3 and higher)[51] grew by 35%, with a growth of 53% for professionals from partner countries. However, approximately half of UNICEF offices do not have a level 3 M&E officer. The EO reports that these offices are less able to consistently deliver high quality evaluations[52] for a variety of reasons, including a multiplicity of tasks and lack of experience in evaluation management.

Consultants

214. The availability of qualified evaluation consultants is limited in many countries. Some ROs have developed rosters of pre-screened consultants to support COs in managing the evaluation process.

215. As the major part of evaluation work is carried out by consultants, credibility depends on the competence of the Evaluation Team Leader and the team. This was one of the issues that were considered in reviewing the six reference cases which were completed by the EO. Analysis of the reference cases indicated mixed results for the competence of the consultants involved:
- The competence of the consultants who completed the desk reviews was judged to have been excellent.
- For the 4 thematic evaluations:
    - One team was judged to have been competent and capable across the range of tasks required;
    - One team was judged to have been lacking in sector expertise;
    - One consultant had to be replaced because of illness, resulting in a significant change in methodology. The replacement consultant was judged to have been competent in carrying out the revised task satisfactorily. Support from the EO Evaluation Manager was judged to have been crucial to ensure the quality of the evaluation product;
    - One team was replaced because of questions related to competence. The EO Evaluation Manager took an active part in ensuring that the evaluation was completed successfully.

216. Questionnaire responses related to the reference cases indicate that evaluation managers, team leaders and team members thought that their evaluation team had all of the skills needed to carry out the evaluation (one exception where sector specialist skills were needed).

217. Regional Directors and M&E officers indicated that they are hampered in hiring local consultants because of limited supply of well qualified people and budget constraints. In some areas, they work with academic institutions to carry out evaluations.

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[51] *Draft Progress Report of the Evaluation Function at UNICEF*, 23 February 2006, p. 3, "Level 3 is the 'desired minimum level to ensure systemic competence".
[52] *Ibid,* pp.3-4.

218. The EO has indicated that all seven Country Programme Evaluations, and most evaluations that include country case studies, involve developing country consultants in the evaluation teams. The reference case on the African Girl's Education Initiative provides a good example of the use of developing country consultants. Participation of qualified consultants with good knowledge of the country context is viewed by the Panel as a factor to strengthen credibility.

Efforts to Strengthen Evaluation Competence

219. The EO has developed a plan for strengthening UNICEF's evaluation function in conjunction with plans prepared by Regional Offices. These plans will be carried out in 2006-2007 if funding can be obtained from Other Resources.

Text Box 6

Building UNICEF's Evaluation Capacity

The Ghana reference case provides some insight into possibilities for building UNICEF's capacity for evaluation at the country level:

- Raising awareness among management staff so that they can promote a culture of evaluation and develop skills for a range of staff to help them manage evaluations more effectively.
- The Regional Office can help support this internal capacity development but, even with a full-time evaluation officer, the support that could be given across twenty-four countries is limited.
- Another option would be to focus on capacity development among all the UN partners at country level and to pool resources to achieve this.

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220. The EO has taken steps to strengthen UNICEF's capacity for monitoring and evaluation of emergency situations by making available a roster of pre-selected expert consultants who can act as on-the-job coaches for monitoring and evaluation in emergencies. The EO is considering developing an expanded list of approved evaluation consultants, selected through a competitive process, which could be made available throughout the organization.

221. The EO has participated in developing on-line training material for UNICEF staff, including the RBM section of the Programme Process Training and the Monitoring and Evaluation Training Kit (also available on CD). However, staff indicated that heavy workload and limited time are constraints to on-the-job training.

222. Most Regions have annual workshops for M&E officers with training on various topics. Two EO staff will participate in professional training in 2006 through the International Programme for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) or the Evaluator's Institute.

223.   The EO is working with UNEG to develop a generic description of competencies for Monitoring and Evaluation that could be applied for evaluation across all UN agencies. Having a common set of standards is viewed by the EO as a first step to improving recruitment and professionalization of the evaluation function.

224.   The EO is working to increase training opportunities for UN Staff and external evaluators in cooperation with UNEG by developing a core curriculum, virtual Masters' program and other training materials.

225.   The EO also works with national and international evaluation networks to strengthen evaluation capacity at national and regional levels through training, workshops, seminars, publications and networking.

F.   Impartiality of Evaluations

Are systems and approaches in place to ensure the impartiality of EO evaluations? Does the evaluation take account of all stakeholder views? Does the evaluation reflect the different views of interested parties in analysis and reporting?
(N5.1-5.3 & N 11)

226.   Impartiality refers to the absence of bias in the conduct of an evaluation, respect for the participation and views of all stakeholders, reflection of different points of view in reporting and the presentation of both achievements and challenges.

227.   Independence and impartiality are clear requirements specified in the guidelines for TOR, the PPPM and in contracts for staff and consultants. Review of the EO reference cases indicate that team members, leaders and evaluation managers carried out the evaluation in an impartial manner. At the country level, however, impartiality may be reduced where staff has been involved in planning, managing or monitoring the initiative being evaluated.

228.   The Panel notes the strong participation of country governments and other partners in many field-level evaluative activities. Broad representation of stakeholders can help to ensure impartiality. However, to the extent possible, officials who participate in evaluations should not be directly involved in the implementation or management of the initiative being evaluated. UNICEF is unlikely to have control over selection of partner representatives but may be able to influence the choice.

229.   Questionnaire responses from evaluation managers, team leaders and team members indicate that, for the most part, the team was able to reach consensus on the views expressed in the evaluation report. Where this was not possible, differing views were reflected (demonstrated in one reference case).

230.   The Panel considered that the reference case reports were generally well balanced in reporting both achievements and challenges, although there were some questions about how the evidence was assessed, given the lack of strong data.

231.   Some evaluations do include <u>workshops with stakeholders</u> to consider findings and recommendations and decide on next steps. In one of the reference cases, this was planned but not carried out when the evaluator and methodology had to be changed. The Ghana reference case indicates that multi-stakeholder forums are routinely used to validate the evidence from evaluations and that this approach has been important in establishing UNICEF's credibility.

232.   The EO has commissioned a number of evaluations that have been very openly critical of UNICEF practices. There has been no effort to suppress these reports and, in fact, they seem to have been widely discussed and considered in making changes in training, policy and the management of similar projects.

G.   Ethics

Do evaluators have personal and profession integrity? What control is there over compliance with ethical standards? (Norm 11.1 – 11.5)

233.   Ethical behaviour, including confidentiality, is required of UNICEF staff and consultants through UN regulations and UNICEF policies. The EO also provides guidance on ethical issues in evaluation through several documents.[53] These documents address issues such as: participation of children, confidentiality and its limits, discrimination and gender inequality, sensitivity to beliefs, manners and social customs. The EO has indicated the need for a comprehensive Code of Conduct for evaluators that would address all ethical considerations, including methods of reporting wrong-doing.

234.   The 2004 *Evaluation Report Quality Review* indicates that a description of ethical considerations is generally absent from evaluation reports and may be a critical issue for credibility of the evaluation. This suggests that more attention should be paid to ensuring that consultants understand both their ethical obligations and the information that is required in reporting.

H.   Stakeholder Participation

To what degree are stakeholders identified and consulted in planning an evaluation and kept informed throughout the evaluation process? Are country governments

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[53] Technical note # 1 on participation of children in evaluations, Technical note # 2 on preparing a TOR, and evaluation standards available on-line.

considered primary stakeholders and do they participate in the evaluation process?
(N 1.6; S3.11.15; 3.11.23)[54]

235. Policy and programme guidance emphasize the participation of stakeholders, including national governments and civil society, in evaluative activities.[55] The document review indicated that participation of these groups was particularly high in Country Programme Evaluations, Mid-Term Reviews and Annual Reviews. The Ghana reference case also indicated very strong collaboration on evaluation with national government and civil society institutions.

236. Participation of stakeholders varied in the EO evaluations reviewed. UNICEF staff was often the main stakeholder group and questionnaire responses indicate that only UNICEF stakeholders (Divisions/ Units, Steering Group) were highly involved in the planning aspects of these cases.

237. Participation of beneficiaries was generally limited, except as information sources. The Morocco CPE (which was reviewed but not in detail) was exemplary for the wide range of female stakeholders who were involved in the evaluation. However, the other reference cases did not document significant consultation with stakeholders, nor whether women and men, girls and boys were consulted equitably. Depending on the evaluation, the range of stakeholders involved, and the level of their participation, could significantly affect the credibility of findings.

Do evaluation reports describe the level of participation of stakeholders and the rationale for selecting that level? (S 4.10.17)

238. The Evaluation Report Standards require a description of the level of stakeholder participation, but this area has been identified as an on-going weakness in reports reviewed by the EO. The 2004 *Evaluation Report Quality Review* notes that interviewing primary stakeholders as a data source is often equated with stakeholder participation. The Review indicates that " . . this is participation in its most limited sense and justification for not using a higher degree of participation is now a necessary element for evaluation reports."[56]

I.   *Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Evaluation*

Do evaluations follow UN treaties, mechanisms and instruments related to human rights and especially the rights of women and children? Do evaluations demonstrate sensitivity to issues of discrimination and gender equality, and address these issues?

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[54] It should be noted that UNICEF considers the Norms and Standards unclear on the definition of stakeholders and their level of participation.

[55] General Assembly TCPR 2005; UNICEF Ex Board 2002/9; PPPM 2005

[56] *UNICEF Evaluation Report Quality Review. 2004*, p. 13

Do evaluation reports indicate the extent to which gender issues and relevant human rights considerations were incorporated? (S 3.9.19; 3.15.31; S 4.8)

239.   Gender equality issues are addressed in both UN and UNICEF policy documents. The MTSP (2006-2009) identifies gender equality as a guiding principle in the context of the human-rights based approach to programming. However, document review and interviews indicate there is general agreement that UNICEF should be doing more to promote gender equality. The EO has been commissioned to undertake an evaluation of UNICEF's corporate performance in gender mainstreaming in 2006-2007. The evaluation will include two phases: an internal phase of self-assessments undertaken at HQ, regional and national levels, and an independent external evaluation anticipated for 2007.

240.   In relation to the evaluation function, the 2004 Meta-evaluation recommended that every UNICEF evaluation should include a human-rights-based analysis and a gender analysis. The EO has addressed this issue in its technical guidance on developing a TOR and in the evaluation report standards, which were developed following the Meta-evaluation. However, the current evaluation report standards do not ask for information to be disaggregated according to sex – essential information to inform further analysis. Another element that is missing is guidance on how to analyze actions/results in relation to their impact on women and girls, men and boys – for example, whether different results were achieved for each group and/or whether results had different impacts for each group.

241.   All evaluations submitted for quality review that had Gender Equity as the theme (4) were rated Satisfactory from 2000 – 2004.

242.   Evaluations at the field level in the past two years have addressed issues such as domestic violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, maternal health, prevention of rape, harmful practices (i.e. genital mutilation), gender roles in households, migration, empowerment of women, education for girls and adults and other issues that affect women and girls specifically.

243.   Three of the evaluations reviewed demonstrate some effort to address gender issues, through explicit questions and in reporting. The evaluation of the African Girls' Education Initiative focuses primarily on these issues in a thematic manner. The country programme evaluation for Morocco included significant consultation with female stakeholders and detailed reporting on gender issues. The evaluation of UNICEF's response to Darfur identifies issues related to gender-based violence but does not include data disaggregated by sex or a gender focus in its analysis. Moreover, the evaluation report tends to give attention to gender issues by referring to 'women and children' without providing an analysis of information related to girls and boys.

244.   The EO assesses itself as generally achieving gender balance in evaluation teams (which is believed to enhance access to specific populations and thus to data,

inputs and findings). Gender balance in evaluation teams was confirmed through a review of evaluation consultants hired for the past three years and review of the evaluation teams for the reference cases. Overall the gender breakdown for consultants hired was as follows: [57]

2003 – Evaluations M4 - F4; Coaches M2 - F5;

2004 – Evaluations M9 – F7; 2005 – Evaluations M5 – F14.

The large increase in female consultants in 2005 results from the Tsunami evaluation which involved 8 women.

Consultant teams for the reference cases included female participants in all but the desk reviews.

J. Human Rights Based Approach

Do evaluations follow UN treaties, mechanisms and instruments related to human rights and especially the rights of women and children? Do evaluations demonstrate sensitivity to issues of discrimination and gender equality, and address these issues? Do evaluation reports indicate the extent to which gender issues and relevant human rights considerations were incorporated? (S 3.9.19; 3.15.31; S 4.8)

245.   The *Mid-Term Review of the UNICEF Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2002-2005* (June 2004) indicates that UNICEF has played a leadership role in securing inter-agency consensus about human rights based approaches, including a consistent effort to promote the rights of women and children in partner countries . However, the review also indicates that "more needs to be done to develop capacities of both UNICEF staff and partners in the use of the HRBAP". It identifies training, guidance, good practice development, improved operational tools and cross-regional sharing as requirements to systematize the approach across all sectors and within all evaluations.

246.   The Evaluation Office cooperated with the Director of the Innocenti Research Centre to develop a concept paper on the Human-Rights Based Approach. The EO has also provided guidance on HRBAP through two Technical Notes: # 2 – *What Goes Into a Terms of Reference* specifies the need for a human-rights-based approach and describes measures to ensure the evaluation process is ethical; # 1: *Children's Participation in Research, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) – Ethics and Your Responsibilities as a Manager* refers to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides guidance on the ethics that should be applied to the involvement of children in evaluations.

247.   The EO's 2004 *Evaluation Report Quality Review* indicates improvement from 2003 for reviewed evaluations addressing the question of whether the UNICEF programme incorporated the HRBAP. However, only 35% of the reports reviewed

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[57] Note that internal consultants hired for HQ projects – e.g., database, archiving – are not included in these figures.

were rated as Satisfactory or better on this standard while the rest were either missing information on this issue or were rated as Poor for this standard.

248. The EO evaluation reports considered by the Peer Review generally did not address the extent to which HRBAP principles were applied, or the results/ impact of such interventions, in the projects/programmes evaluated. Since the human-rights based approach is central to UNICEF's work, mainstreaming this issue into evaluations should be given greater focus in the future.

K. Evaluation Capacity Building in Member Countries

Does the evaluation process foster evaluation capacity building in member countries? Are evaluations undertaken jointly with governments or other stakeholders? Does the evaluation include activities to raise awareness of evaluation and/or build evaluation capacity in government and civil society? (Norms preamble, S3.14.29; S1.7.9)

249. Building national capacity was identified as a goal in the last MTSP and is included again as a principle in the MTSP 2006-2009. Joint implementation of project/programme evaluations, CPEs and MTRs is identified as a major strategy.

250. The EO indicated that CPE evaluations are always carried out in cooperation with the country government as well as the CO and other UN Agencies. The EO has completed 7 CPEs and has received direct requests from another 2 governments to do a CPE. Regional Directors' reports indicate significant cooperation with, and participation of, governments and other stakeholders in evaluative activities.

251. In the past two years, a lot of effort has gone into supporting government departments to develop the capacity to collect data in order for the DevInfo system. While not a specific part of developing evaluation capacity, accurate data is important for measuring results and assessing impact. The Ghana reference case indicates that data collection systems are robust. The availability of a reference point for all crucial monitoring evaluation data is seen as an important factor in shaping M&E thinking and practices at the local level.

Text Box 7

"Learning by Doing" – Building Evaluation Capacity

The Ghana country reference case provides some good examples of how UNICEF is building evaluation capacity with government institutions.

- UNICEF has provided training and support to the central government to collect development data from a variety of sources for the DevInfo system. Now the CO is working with regional and district levels to enable those offices to collect data at the levels where UNICEF programming takes place.

- UNICEF ensured that the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Health took a leadership role in carrying out the Accelerated Child Survival and Development evaluation. This cooperative approach helped to ensure appropriate governance structures for the evaluation while, at the same time, promoting government ownership and strengthening evaluation capacity.

- The CO recently assisted the newly-formed research unit of the Ministry of Women and Children (MOWAC) to undertake evaluative studies on child labour in the cocoa sector.

- The CO is also working with partner institutions to introduce participatory M&E that uses community scorecards to assess performance on critical issues that UNICEF supports.

Do evaluation teams include qualified, competent and experienced professional firms or individuals from concerned countries?

252. All seven CPEs completed by the EO, and most evaluations that include country case studies, involve developing country consultants in the evaluation teams.

253. The EO cites the lack of suitable candidates and the increased costs for travel as the major reasons for not hiring more evaluators from developing countries. Regional Directors and M&E officers confirmed that that they are hampered in hiring local consultants because of limited supply of well qualified people and budget constraints. In some areas, they work with academic institutions to carry out evaluations.

Are evaluation networks facilitated and supported?

254. Support to evaluation associations has been seen by the EO Director as an important strategy to increase the availability of qualified consultants at the country and regional levels. The EO has working relationships and provides small grants to evaluation associations in Africa (AfrEA), Latin America (ReLAC) and Eastern Europe/ CIS (IPEN) It also works with the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), the Active Learning Network for Accountability in Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) and the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

255. Conferences and training activities are often carried out in partnership with evaluation associations. Government officials and policy makers may also participate in these events.

K.   Conclusions on Credibility

256. The Panel believes that a <u>comprehensive evaluation policy document</u>, which meets UNEG Norms and Standards, is approved by the Executive Board and is disseminated throughout the organization, would strengthen the credibility of UNICEF's evaluation function.

257. Current policy documents do not provide a clear explanation of systematic <u>criteria for selection and prioritization of evaluations</u> at HQ or field level. The availability of funds, fund raising and advocacy appear to be important influences on the selection and use of evaluations. The Panel believes that current limitations on funding for evaluation have an impact on planning, prioritization and evaluation coverage at all levels.

258. The Panel recognizes that the EO's current focus on institutional reviews is strategically important for UNICEF at the present time. However, the Panel considers that this type of review could be construed as management consulting rather than evaluation.

259. The Panel also recognizes that the EO is involved in other evaluations that have a greater focus on development effectiveness and coordination across the UN system (such as Country Programme Evaluations, Real Time evaluations and evaluations of humanitarian aid). However, these evaluations are funded through Other Resources rather than the EO's core evaluation budget. The Panel is concerned that evaluations of development effectiveness currently depend on funding that is unpredictable and/or must be raised by the EO itself.

260. The Panel considers UNICEF's current policy on disclosure to be adequate. Both disclosure and dissemination should be addressed in a comprehensive evaluation policy document.

Quality Assurance

261. The EO has contributed towards quality assurance by developing standards and guidance that can be applied at HQ and the field levels. However, it does not have overall responsibility for quality assurance. The links and accountabilities for quality assurance across the whole system should be more clearly defined.

262. The <u>level of participation</u> in the EO's annual review of the quality of evaluation reports is low enough to be a concern. Further initiatives will be required to

ensure that technical guidance is adequately known and used, so that field-level evaluations meet the evaluation and reporting criteria.

263.   The Panel notes that UNICEF's approach to evaluation at the country level fosters partnership and build ownership for evaluation results. This process of mutual accountability enhances UNICEF's overall credibility with its partners.

264.   On the other hand, UNICEF's engagement with the stakeholders for evaluation at the country level sometimes affects the objective assessment of results. This balance between these factors has to be carefully weighed.

265.   Efforts to strengthen evaluation capacity at the regional and country levels are important not only for UNICEF's own programmes but also to ensure substantive and quality participation by UNICEF in joint evaluative processes with other UN agencies. These efforts are currently hampered by the lack of human resources at the Regional Office and the lack of committed funding for HQ initiatives in this area.

Basic Criteria for Evaluation

266.   The general weakness in implementing RBM across the organization is reflected in weaknesses in the evidence base for some of the evaluations reviewed. If results and indicators for assessing performance have not been established, and if appropriate data to demonstrate results is not available, the credibility of evaluation findings is decreased.

267.   The EO has made a substantial contribution towards guidance on RBM but it is not, and cannot be, responsible for ensuring that RBM is implemented across the organization. The full implementation of RBM must be addressed at the organizational level by senior management.

268.   Cost analysis and cost efficiency are generally not discussed in the evaluations reviewed. Other issues that were weak or not addressed include: lessons learned, sustainability of the initiative and discussion of how the human-rights based approach was reflected in the initiative.

269.   The Panel considers that aggregation of information is basic to assessing development performance. The mechanisms for aggregating information on results (end-of-project evaluations) are currently not mandatory; as a result, UNICEF's capacity to assess performance at the organizational level, demonstrate accountability for results, and expand its organizational learning is reduced. Again, this is an organizational problem, not one that falls within the EO's sphere of responsibility. Aggregation of information should be one component of the organization's RBM system.

Evaluability

270.   <u>Evaluability</u> is an element of the RBM approach, requiring clear objectives, results and indicators at the planning stage. Weaknesses in the application of RBM reduce the evaluability of projects/ programmes, as demonstrated in several of the evaluations used as references for the Review. An assessment of evaluability does not seem to be consistently required in evaluations undertaken by the EO or field offices. The EO provides support on evaluability when requested but this input is not required and the EO's capacity to provide it is limited by its workload.

Competencies of Evaluation Staff

271.   The <u>professional competence and intellectual leadership</u> of the EO Director and staff is amply demonstrated and is also rated very positively by interviewees from both inside and outside of UNICEF. Senior UNICEF managers, in particular, expressed great confidence in the professional capacity of the EO to manage external evaluators and evaluation activities in a transparent, participatory, efficient and effective way.

272.   The professionalism and management skills of EO evaluation managers were demonstrated in their capacity to reorient two of the reference case evaluations when difficulties were encountered. The evaluations were carried out successfully and produced useful recommendations.

273.   Competence of consultants was not consistent over the evaluations reviewed. Two of the 4 reference cases demonstrated some problems with the competence of consultants. However, feedback on other evaluations that were reviewed (but not in detail) indicates that those consultants were well qualified.

274.   The small size of the EO team and its current workload militate against the EO's taking on significantly greater responsibility related to corporate evaluations and quality assurance.

Impartiality

275.   Review of EO evaluations indicates that team members, leaders and evaluation managers carried out the evaluation in an impartial manner. At the country level, impartiality may be reduced where staff has been involved in planning, managing or monitoring the initiative being evaluated.

276.   Good practices to ensure impartiality were identified, including: participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including government; multi-stakeholder forums to validate evaluations findings; balanced reporting; reflection of differing views in reports; and a corporate culture that is generally open to self-assessment.

Ethics

277.   Although ethical behaviour is considered mandatory for staff and consultants, the fact that ethical issues are not addressed in evaluation reports suggests that more work is required to ensure that ethical obligations are understood, met and reported on. A Code of Conduct such as the EO has proposed would provide clear guidance on a range of ethical issues in one document.

Stakeholder Participation

278.   Stakeholder participation varies depending on the evaluation. Participation of beneficiaries is low in almost all instances reviewed. Participation in planning was generally restricted to only UNICEF stakeholders. The Panel supports the EO's distinction between interviewing primary stakeholders for data and true participation. The Panel commends the EO for strengthening the evaluation standard related to reporting on stakeholder participation and suggests that some effort should be made to develop greater awareness concerning this issue.

Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Evaluation

279.   It is expected that the evaluation on UNICEF's corporate performance on gender mainstreaming will produce recommendations to strengthen gender equality in the context of the human-rights based approach to programming.

280.   In relation to the evaluation function, the EO has made an effort to address this issue in the technical guidance it provides to HQ Divisions and field offices, and in the composition of evaluation teams. Reporting standards could be strengthened by requesting the disaggregation of evaluation information by gender and analysis of the impact of results for women/girls and men/boys.

281.   The Panel notes that country evaluations over the past two years have addressed key issues related to gender equality; EO evaluations have also made efforts to address gender issues through explicit evaluation questions and detailed reporting.

Evaluation Capacity Building in Member Countries

282.   The Panel notes good cooperation with country governments, UN agencies and other stakeholders in MTRs and CPEs. Positive contributions to developing national capacity have also been demonstrated through training and support for implementing DevInfo, cooperative approaches to evaluation management, support to government departments to undertake evaluative activities, a partnership approach at the country level (as demonstrated in the Ghana reference case), and involvement of developing country consultants and academic institutions in evaluation teams.

283. Efforts to build national and regional associations and to develop a variety of training opportunities are also examples of good practice.

L.   Recommendations related to Credibility

284. UNICEF should address credibility issues in a clear, comprehensive evaluation policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to suit the UNICEF context.

285. Consideration should be given to identifying explicit criteria for selection of evaluations that will ensure good coverage of UNICEF corporate priorities. These criteria should guide the selection of evaluations at all levels. They should be related to the organization's strategic and programming priorities in order to inform decision-making and investment in a timely manner.

286. The Panel recognizes that the EO's current focus on institutional reviews is strategically important at present. However, in the future, it is recommended that the EO give more emphasis to evaluation of development effectiveness in strategic policy and programme areas.

287. Organizational links and accountability for quality assurance of all evaluations (most notably at the country and regional levels) should be more clearly defined and implemented at all levels. In particular, the EO's role in assuring quality of evaluations carried out at the regional level should be specified and adequately resourced.

288. UNICEF management should give higher priority to strengthening the capacity of Regional Offices to provide technical support, oversight and quality assurance to evaluations carried out at the country level, including opportunities for professional networking.

289. To increase the credibility of evaluations at the country level, advocacy and fundraising should be separated from the evaluation function to the extent possible.

290. Existing materials for training, guidance and support should be reviewed by the EO and supplemented as necessary to improve the quality of evaluations at the regional and country levels.

291. Consideration should be given to strengthening guidance on the following issues:
    - a Code of Conduct for evaluators;
    - options to increase participation by stakeholders (especially beneficiaries) in evaluations;
    - assessment of issues arising from the human-rights based approach;
    - disaggregation of results information according to sex;

- assessment of gender equality issues, especially how results affect women/ girls and men/boys;
- scrutiny of consultant qualifications and suitability;
- training on evaluation reporting standards;
- compliance with the requirement to provide all evaluations to the EO for quality review.

292.   To enhance the relevance of evaluations for assessing results, efforts to strengthen the use of performance measurement systems identified within the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (at HQ level) and Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plans (at regional and country levels) should be given high priority.

293.   Consideration should be given to greater use of end-of-project/programme evaluations when an approach or methodology is being piloted. It is also recommended that aggregation of evaluation information should be integrated within the RBM system to assess performance at the organizational level, ensure accountability and provide information for learning.

294.   Consideration should be given to:
- Mandatory training on results-oriented monitoring and evaluation;
- Formal participation of evaluation officers at the project/ programme design stage when possible to strengthen evaluability;
- Use of an Intregrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) at the regional level;
- Greater scrutiny by Regional Offices of country IMEPs and evaluation TOR.

Section Five: Use of Evaluation Evidence

There is a clear purpose for evaluation and a clear intention to use the information it provides. Evaluation feeds into management and decision making processes, and makes an essential contribution to managing for results. The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of Organizations and of the evaluation function are responsible for ensuring that evaluation contributes to decision-making and management. They should ensure that a system is in place for explicit planning for evaluation and for systematic consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in evaluations. Evaluation requires an explicit response by the governing authorities and management addressed by its recommendations. Evaluation contributes to knowledge building and organizational improvement. Evaluation findings and lessons drawn from evaluations should be accessible to target audiences in a user friendly way. (Definition derived from UNEG norms 1.1; 1.3; 2.6; 4.1; 12.1-12.3; 13.1-13.2)

A.   Purpose of Evaluation

Evaluation is: an important source of evidence of the achievement of results and institutional performance; . . .an important contributor to building knowledge and to organizational learning; . . .an important agent of change and plays a critical and credible role in supporting accountability. (N1.1)

295.   The *2002/9 Report* identifies a number of inter-connected purposes for UNICEF's evaluation function. The primary purpose is to "inform decision making and distil lessons learned to be used for future planning at each level of results management within the organization."[58] Other purposes identified in the same document are:

- To provide <u>information for accountability</u> by explaining what results have been achieved and why;

- To provide <u>information on results and learning</u> to stakeholders and the public;

- To <u>build ownership and participation</u> in the evaluation process through fair, impartial and participatory formative evaluation processes.

296.   UNICEF's *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (PPPM) (2005)* indicates an additional purpose for evaluation: *advocacy* – "to strengthen global and national policies and programmes for children's and women's rights through providing impartial and credible evidence."[59]

297.   The Executive Board has also given UNICEF a strong mandate to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation capacities of field offices and government counterparts.

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[58] *2002/9 Report*, p. 9, para. 29.
[59] UNICEF, *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual,* May 2005, p.124, paras. 20-21.

298. The Panel's observation is that the evaluation function has been given a rather broad mandate, particularly in light of the limited resources (both human and financial) dedicated to the function at all levels of the organization.

299. Interviews with staff and senior management suggest that the learning aspects of evaluation are given high priority and are highly valued at UNICEF. This has been the case for some time, since the 2000 peer review identified evaluation in UNICEF as "oriented toward programme guidance".[60] The fact that evaluation reports are read, and generate discussion both inside and outside UNICEF, demonstrates that the function is helping to build knowledge and is contributing to institutional learning.

300. Regional Directors' reports indicate that many evaluations at the country level (or evaluative activities such as MTRs) contribute to redesign of UNICEF programming. They also may be used by UNICEF to advocate for changes in government policies and programming.

301. The Ghana reference case demonstrates that, at the country level, the evaluation function is integral to the process of programme development and management. Monitoring and evaluation help to ensure efficiency in programme delivery as well as identifying lessons for advocacy and scale-up of the models that work. The purpose of evaluation at the country level is, therefore, more towards shared learning among those involved in development and those, at community levels, for whom development activities are carried out. This country example also demonstrates the formative role of evaluation in building participation and ownership at the level of beneficiaries, partners and government.

302. For evaluation to be able to play a "critical and credible role in supporting accountability", it must be able to provide evidence to demonstrate whether expected results are being achieved. It must also be able to analyze success factors and constraints and comment on issues such as cost effectiveness and sustainability. The capacity of the evaluation function to produce such information is hampered by the weaknesses of UNICEF's results-based management system, discussed previously in Section Four.

303. The Panel is <u>not</u> suggesting that UNICEF evaluations never provide the information to answer accountability questions. Only that it is harder to do so if the appropriate information for analysis has not been identified from the outset and collected throughout implementation of a programme. One of the reference cases clearly stated that there was very little concrete information about results – and yet everyone knew the programme had been quite successful.

304. It should be noted that UNICEF has made progress since 2002 in creating a stronger organizational framework for results-based management, demonstrated in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that accompanies the

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[60] *2002/9 Policy*, p. 8, para 23(f).

current corporate plan (MTSP 2006-2009), as well as the requirements at the country level for IMEPs and a summary results matrix in the Country Programme Document (CPD). Instituting the IMEP at the regional level in 2006 will enhance the integration of planning and contribute to greater coherence across the whole organization.

305. UNICEF's participation in the UNDAF process at the country level is also placing greater emphasis on results-oriented planning as "the UNDAF Results Matrix describes the results to be collaboratively achieved". [61]

Text Box 8

> *One senior UNICEF manager described evaluation as "the backbone of the organization" – essential to both management and organizational learning.*

B.   Intention to Use Evaluation

Is there a clear intention to use evaluation findings and are evaluations planned and targeted to inform decision-making with relevant and timely information? Is there a system in place for explicit planning of evaluation and for systematic consideration of findings, conclusions, recommendations and follow-up? (N4.1; 2.6)

Intentionality

306. The Panel has found that there is a clear intent at the senior management level to use evaluations to inform decision-making, especially when planning new programmes and management strategies. There is also clear intent to make greater use of the EO to carry out or manage evaluations if and when resources become available.

307. The Executive Board has signaled its intention to use evaluation evidence by requesting that key findings from evaluations of the thematic areas of the MTSP be presented and discussed at the Board, and that they should be fully integrated into the annual report of the Executive Director.[62]

Relevance and timeliness

308. Regional Directors' reports demonstrate that evaluation is built into the planning cycle for country programmes (annual reviews, MTRs and supporting evaluative activities, CPEs). It provides the basis for programme adjustments and advocacy at the country level. Evaluation information also provides the basis for funding decisions at the Executive Board level.

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[61] *PPPM (2005)*, p. 45, para 29.
[62] E/ICEF/2004/9; E/ICEF/2005/8

309.   Evaluation results are also used in negotiations with bilateral donors and other funding sources. Bilateral donors have indicated that findings from evaluations help to inform their decision-making on specific thematic and/or country-level initiatives.

310.   In the four thematic reference cases examined, the timing of the evaluation was appropriate to feed into the planning or decision-making process in three instances. In the fourth, the timing was described as not optimal but the recommendations were still used for future planning. Two other evaluations that were reviewed, but not in depth, also provided timely information for decision-making.

Management Response

311.   As noted previously, UNICEF has had no systematic requirement for a management response to evaluation until recently. However, the Panel notes there is *strong evidence* of management response to EO evaluations even without such a formalized system. The creation of a system to track management responses to global/headquarters evaluations is a positive step. The system for tracking management response at the regional and country levels should also be reviewed and strengthened as needed.

C.   Transparency and Consultation

Is the evaluation work programme published? Is there a set of guidelines for evaluation? Is there transparency and consultation with major stakeholders at all stages of the evaluation? Are evaluation TOR and reports available to major stakeholders? Are they public documents? Is documentation on evaluations available in forms that are readable and easy to consult? (N4.1; 10.1-10.2; S1.6.8)

312.   The EO substantially meets the Norms and Standards for transparency. Its work programme is available on the UNICEF public Web site along with the MTSP (2006-2009). It has detailed guidelines for evaluation that are available on the Evaluation section of the public and internal Web sites. Evaluation reports that meet UNICEF's quality standards are publicly accessible and generally include the TOR for the evaluation. The Evaluation and Research data base is easy to consult and can be searched by country, year or topics.

313.   While guidance is available on consultation with stakeholders and beneficiaries, this area has been identified as a major weakness in a number of evaluations cited in *UNICEF's Strengths and Weaknesses* and *Strengthening Management Effectiveness at UNICEF*.

314.   Questionnaire responses for the EO evaluations selected as reference cases indicate that participation of major stakeholders in the reference cases varied by

groups and whether or not they were directly involved in a particular aspect of the evaluation process.

- Where there was a Steering Group, its participation was judged as Strong or Very Strong in all aspects of the evaluation.

- Participation of the relevant Division or Unit was identified as Very Strong or Strong for everything except data collection and data analysis, areas for which evaluators had the primary responsibility.

- Participation of UNICEF country offices was identified as Very Strong or Strong only for data collection, validation of information and review of the report. In one instance, participation was Strong in development of the terms of reference. For other aspects, responses indicate that participation was Weak or Very Weak.

- Participation of partner countries was identified as Weak or Very Weak in all aspects of the evaluation, except for one instance where the partner's participation in validation of findings was Strong.

- Participation of relevant NGOs/ CBOs was identified as Weak or Very Weak in all aspects of the evaluation, except for one instance where participation in data collection was Very Strong.

- Questionnaires related to two reference cases indicated that there was extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders, including women and children, although the consultation was informal.

315. Regional Directors' reports indicate that there is a good level of participation of major stakeholders, including civil society organizations, in CPEs and other evaluative activities such MTRs.

316. Text Box 9 (below) highlights information from the Ghana reference case which demonstrates significant levels of consultation, participation and evaluation use at the country level.

In Ghana, UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function serves most the needs of the partners with whom these activities are carried out. From conception to conclusion, evaluative activities have been geared primarily towards programme improvement, advocacy and scale-up. In-country evaluations are characterized by:

- Conscious planning of evaluations as part of the project cycle
- Relevance to Partners' needs
- Strategic timing to feed into reviews and policy processes
- Multi-stakeholder involvement

Findings on Use of Evaluations

Evaluations as Part of the Project Cycle

Nearly all sizeable projects planned and implemented by, and through UNICEF, have one form of evaluation or another, designed as part of the project cycle. As a standard feature, most projects incorporate a baseline study and, at some point in the life of the project, an evaluation is scheduled and implemented. While there was no evidence of end-of-cycle evaluations, the evaluative activities carried out on most projects have become common features of their design and associated "requirements" of funding agencies. This led some staff to characterize in-country evaluations as being "donor-led" and therefore limited in scope to the specific projects funded by donors. Since most projects initiated by UNICEF are of a pilot-demonstration nature, the evaluations tend to be undertaken at critical moments to feed the prospects of scale-up or for policy/programme advocacy.

Relevance to Partners' Needs

Notwithstanding the source of funding for projects and therefore for the evaluative exercises associated with them, the Ghana case suggests an overwhelming attention to partner involvement in the processes of evaluations. There was ample evidence in all interviews to suggest that:

- The commissioning of most evaluations emerged out of assessments by the relevant stakeholders of the need to examine the specific programmes. The two reference cases reviewed emerged out of trends in health status which raised concerns about worsening child mortality and frustrations with progress in guinea-worm eradication.
- The timing of the evaluations subsequently fed into major national reviews and policy processes, associated with the Health SWAP and multi-stakeholder review of the guinea-worm eradication programme.

Multi-stakeholder Participation

Another strategy for promoting use of in-country evaluations has been the multi-stakeholder involvement in their implementation. At one level, this principle of participation guaranteed optimum use of the results; at another, it may have compromised the extent of critical analysis of the findings thereby limiting the options to which the evaluation results might have been used.

Management Response

The use of evaluation findings is related to the manner in which UNICEF treats the recommendations arising from an evaluation. The Panel notes that the practice whereby all evaluation findings are thoroughly discussed by the key stakeholders has resulted in the development of matrices which designate the nature of follow-up actions and assigns responsibilities for such follow-up. Within UNICEF itself, management discusses the implications of recommendations, but there does not appear to be a mechanism of tracking the progress in the implementation of recommendations of evaluations on a routine basis.

D.   Contribution to Managing for Results

Does evaluation make an essential contribution to managing for results? Does it aim to improve relevance, results, the use of resources, client satisfaction and maximizing the contribution of the UN system?

317.   Executive Board members indicated that reporting on the evaluation function had improved over the past five years. They now receive annual Executive Director's report, the biennial report of the Director of the Evaluation Office, and the annual reports of the seven Regional Directors on evaluation activities at the regional level. All Country Programme Documents (CPD) submitted to the Executive Board for approval contain a section on, "Key results and lessons learned from previous cooperation". Board members consider this an important part of the CPD. However, some Board members expressed the view that the information provided on evaluation is still not adequately substantive or analytical. They would like to see more emphasis on outcomes, impact and learning derived from evaluations. Some also indicated that the time available for discussion of evaluation is too limited. Some members indicated that a management response should be included with evaluation reports.

318.   Interviews with senior managers, programme managers and Regional Directors indicate that evaluations have contributed to management decisions at all levels. Country Programme Evaluations were cited as particularly valuable inputs to the process of planning the next country programme.

319.   Weaknesses in UNICEF's results-based management system are discussed in Section Four. These weaknesses are not unique to UNICEF; the challenges are the same for other development cooperation agencies and for bilateral donors. As UNICEF endeavours to focus more on policy advocacy and joint programming, it becomes harder to define results and measure progress and determine attribution. Nevertheless, we have seen evidence that some evaluations (as well as broader evaluative activities such as MTRs) contribute to programme planning and decision-making. In other cases, EO evaluations and reviews have been influential in providing information to initiate or speed up the process of institutional change.[70]

320.   It should be noted that country evaluations reports have improved in the past two years for the quality standards related to the evidence-base presented:[71]

- Conclusions were substantiated by findings consistent with data and methods – 70% were rated Satisfactory or better;

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[70] Examples: *UNICEF's Response to Darfur,* 2004*; The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001,* 2004.
[71] *Evaluation Report Quality Review 2004*, p. 8. Self-assessment carried out by the EO.

- In presenting findings, inputs, outputs and where possible outcomes/impacts were measured (or an appropriate rationale given why not) – 62% were rated Satisfactory or better;
- Recommendations were firmly based on evidence and analysis – 62% were rated Satisfactory or better.

Contribution of the Evaluation Office to improving RBM

321.   The EO participated very actively in developing the current MTSP and its accompanying Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The EO has developed RBM training materials and provided RBM training. The EO's work programme and reports to the Executive Board generally demonstrates the RBM approach.

Satisfaction of Clients

322.   The satisfaction of clients or beneficiaries was addressed to some degree in three of the evaluations reviewed through informal consultation with beneficiary groups. However, this has been noted as an area needing improvement in the 2004 *Evaluation Report Quality Review.*

UNICEF Contribution to UN System

323.   The Panel notes the strong role that the EO has played in developing methodology for Country Programme Evaluations, the UNEG Norms and Standards, collection of data related to the MDGs, and other efforts to increase harmonization among UN agencies.

324.   Some examples of specific evaluations that have contributed in this area include:
- Testing a methodology for CPE in conflict-affected area (e.g. Afghanistan);
- UNICEF's evaluation of the effectiveness of the ChildInfo system ultimately led to the creation of DevInfo, which has been adopted for use across the UN system to collect the information necessary for assessing progress towards meeting the MDGs;
- Developing a comprehensive framework for SWAp (e.g. Sri Lanka – Education).

E.   Contribution to Policy Making and Improving Development Results

Does evaluation inform policy making and guide the improvement of present and future strategy, projects and programmes? (N1.5)

325.   Executive Board members have reported that findings from evaluation reports (including MTRs) have been helpful in the Board's review of major policy and

strategic planning documents submitted by UNICEF, particularly the Mid-Term Strategic Plan for 2002-2005 and the current MTSP (2006-2009) which was adopted in September 2005.

326. Documentation and interviews have provided the Panel with examples of how specific evaluations have provided information that led to <u>policy changes</u>. A few examples are cited below:

- The Meta-evaluation of the quality of country evaluations led to increased emphasis on strengthening country-level capacity, new resource materials and training, as well as funding from DFID to support initiatives in this area.

- The evaluation of the Innocenti Research Centre was discussed at the January 2006 meeting of Evaluation Committee and will result in stronger integration between the Centre's research agenda and UNICEF's research needs.

- The UNICEF Executive Board commissioned the EO to evaluate the Coordination Committee on Health (CCH), a long-standing committee created by the Executive Boards of WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA. The three Boards discussed the evaluation report, and each adopted the decision to abolish the CCH.

Does evaluation contribute to development effectiveness in programme countries, and organizational effectiveness? (N1.5)

327. Making a contribution to improving development is the most important outcome of any UNICEF programme. Some examples of evaluations that resulted in <u>changes to increase development impact</u> include:

- Evaluations in Ghana and Malawi demonstrated that community participation is essential for success of the Child Survival Strategy. Following the evaluation, the Government of Ghana adopted this approach as national policy and is negotiating with bilateral donors for resources for expanded programming.

- Evaluation of HIV/AIDs programming in CEE produced an enhanced knowledge base, greater recognition of issues and options to address them, and identification of effective strategies to engage young people in programme and policy areas.

- The evaluation of a deworming program in Nepal documented cost-effective health programming strategies that could be adapted for other countries and other UN organizations' programming.

- The Afghanistan CPE identified effective strategies to move from emergency response to development.

- Evaluations of Iraq, Darfur, Liberia, Tsunami and two major evaluations of humanitarian capacity building have helped set a new agenda for the improvement of humanitarian response and the focus of new funding applications to DFID and ECHO for 2005, 2006.

328. The Panel's ability to make a strong judgment on this question has been hampered by limited information from the country level and weaknesses in the knowledge management systems identified below.

F.   Contribution to Knowledge Building and Institutional Learning

Does evaluation contribute to knowledge building and organizational improvement? Are evaluation findings and lessons accessible to target audiences in a user-friendly way? Is there a clear dissemination policy that facilitates the sharing of learning among stakeholders, including the organizations of the UN system? Is evaluation knowledge and experience processed for peer learning and as training material? (N13.1-13.2)

329. UNICEF does not yet have a systematic policy for <u>knowledge management</u>. Responsibility for knowledge management currently rests with the Division of Policy and Planning (DPP) not with the Evaluation Office. DPP – Strategic Planning Section is responsible for preparing an annual "Synopsis Of Innovations And Lessons Learned In UNICEF Cooperation", which is available to UNICEF staff through the Intranet.

330. While evaluation reports are publicly available on the Evaluation section of the UNICEF Web site, there is no system for consolidating the results and lessons from all evaluations undertaken at Headquarters (EO and HQ Divisions), regional and country levels. The EO reports that lack of resources has hampered its ability to distill and disseminate lessons learned from evaluation on a regular basis. Given UNICEF's frequent focus on piloting new approaches, sharing of lessons across countries and regions seems particularly important.

331. UNICEF also has no policy for <u>dissemination of information</u>. EO evaluation reports are distributed to key people across the organization (usually senior managers) and also to Divisions that were involved in, or have an interest in, the topic of the evaluation. Reports are not routinely distributed to stakeholders. The Panel found that some evaluations are not reaching people who could benefit from the information – for example, CPEs that included significant participation by women and strong gender analysis had not been sent to gender focal points.

332. In spite of these systemic limitations, there is evidence that the evaluation function does contribute to institutional learning as well as providing information to networks of evaluation practitioners:
   - The EO disseminates a variety of information and resource material to M&E officers through UNICEF's internal computer systems (Intranet and listservs).
   - Regional M&E officers indicated that they use the evaluation and research database to find out about evaluations in other countries/ regions on specific topics. They find the information helpful if they are planning a similar evaluation.

- The EO reports that there is an increasing demand from other HQ Divisions for evaluation materials.

- UNICEF evaluations are now available to all UNEG members through the UNICEF Intranet and through UNEG's Web page.

- UNICEF is an active participant in UNEVALFORUM, a mechanism for knowledge sharing.

- Lessons learned from evaluations related to humanitarian capacity building have been shared through the Active Learning Network for Accountability in Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) and have helped set a new agenda for the improvement of humanitarian response.

- The important contribution of UNICEF's Evaluation Office in the UNEG has been appreciated by members of the network.

G. Conclusions Related to Use of Evaluation Evidence

333. The evaluation function has a very broad mandate with limited resources. Evaluation addresses different purposes to differing degrees depending on which level of the decentralized structure is involved.

334. Evaluations are generally well timed to feed into the planning cycle for country programmes and for decision-making at the Board level. Evaluation's contribution to management and decision-making for both programmes and policies is considered by the Panel to be strong at all levels. There is also evidence that evaluation is contributing to improving the development effectiveness of UNICEF interventions.

335. Evaluation's contribution to learning is stressed at all levels of the organization and there is good evidence to indicate that evaluation findings are used to improve management, programming and policies. At the same time, the organizational systems for knowledge sharing and institutional learning are not well developed.

336. The Panel considers that intentionality by the Executive Board and senior management to use evaluation evidence to inform decision-making is very strong. The importance of evaluation findings for management and learning is widely recognized.

337. UNICEF is making progress in strengthening its RBM system and the EO is making a strong contribution. However, the capacity of the evaluation function to provide credible information for accountability purposes remains a challenge in view of the current weaknesses in RBM.

338. UNICEF management has taken a significant step towards institutionalizing the practice of developing formal management responses to evaluation by having the

EO develop a system to track management response to evaluations and plans of action to implement recommendations.

339. The Panel considers that <u>transparency</u> in evaluations generally meets the Norms with the exception of consultation with/participation of major stakeholders, including beneficiaries. This area has been identified as a weakness in UNICEF evaluations for some time. However, it is also noted that the level of consultation/ participation and the methods used varies with the type of evaluation; some have been very strong while others do not include enough information to assess this area.

340. The Panel notes that EO evaluations have made a strong contribution to maximizing the effects of the UN system through new methodology (CPE, DevInfo data collection system), norms and standards for evaluation (UNEG), professional qualifications and training (UNEG) and analysis of lessons applicable across the UN system (e.g. moving from conflict to development).

H.   Recommendations related to Use of Evaluation Evidence

341. An updated evaluation policy should clarify the purpose of evaluation and the links between evaluation, knowledge management and institutional learning. It should also include a dissemination strategy.

342. UNICEF should define protocols for consultation with, and participation of, internal and external stakeholders (especially partner countries) and beneficiaries.

343. Efforts to document and track management response to evaluations at the decentralized levels should be strengthened. The tracking system should be designed in such a way that it is also possible to follow-up at reasonable intervals to assess the impact of evaluation recommendations.

344. The Executive Board could consider holding more frequent informal sessions to discuss evaluation reports.

Section Six: Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

A.   Introduction

345.   Sections Three, Four and Five concluded on specific aspects related to the
        independence and credibility of UNICEF's evaluation function as well as the use
        of evaluation findings within the organization. The recommendations in each
        section address issues that the Panel considers important to strengthen the
        evaluation function. This section provides an overview of the Panel's conclusions
        and recommendations in order to answer the central question of the peer review:

        *Whether UNICEF's evaluation function and its products are independent,
        credible, and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed
        against UNEG norms and standards by a panel of evaluation peers.*

B.   Summary of Conclusions

Central Evaluation Office

346.   The central Evaluation Office has strengthened the role and performance of the
        evaluation function over the past five years. It demonstrates a high level of
        independence and professional credibility. Evaluation's contribution to
        management and decision-making for both programmes and policies is considered
        by the Panel to be strong, timely and useful. The EO has played an important
        leadership role in UN harmonization through the United Nations Evaluation
        Group (UNEG). However, the Panel agrees with the EO's self-assessment that
        improvements are needed in the areas of (1) strengthening evaluation capacity at
        the decentralized levels (regional/ country offices, partner countries), and (2)
        disseminating evaluation results and lessons more effectively.

Decentralized Evaluation System

347.   The Panel recognizes that a decentralized system of evaluation is well suited to
        the operational nature of the organization, given UNICEF's intent to act as an
        authoritative voice on children's issues in the many countries where it works and
        the necessity to reflect differences and particularities of each country and region.
        However, the systems, capacities and outputs of evaluation at the regional and
        country levels exhibit critical gaps that must be addressed in order to ensure that
        the evaluation function serves the organization effectively.

348.   The Panel notes that evaluation at the regional and country levels serves learning
        and decision-making purposes well but it is less useful for accountability purposes
        at those levels. In addition, evaluation results are not yet being aggregated from

the country level to the regional or Headquarters level to provide information on overall organizational performance.

Resources for Evaluation

349. The Panel notes that there are limitations in the *level and predictability of core resources for evaluation*, especially for the Evaluation Office. The EO's core budget from Regular Resources provides assured funding for approximately two corporate evaluations per year. The EO is heavily dependent on Other Resources, which generally come from donors and may be designated for specific evaluations (e.g. Tsunami, Real Time evaluations). The EO may also manage evaluations for other Headquarters Divisions if requested to do so. These evaluations are generally identified and funded by the Division.

350. No funding has been allocated by UNICEF for activities related to *evaluation capacity development* at the country and regional levels or for Country Programme Evaluations. The EO Director has been authorized to seek funding from donors for these activities, estimated to be 64% of the EO budget for 2006-2007.

351. The Panel acknowledges UNICEF's intention to allocate 2-5% of country programme funding to monitoring, evaluation and research. However the present UNICEF financial management system does not disaggregate commitments and expenditures for M&E and it is not possible to verify whether the targets are being met.

352. It was reported that country-level evaluations are most often undertaken in response to donor requests, although the frequency of this practice varies between countries and regions.

353. The Panel believes that the limited core budget for evaluation and the heavy reliance on Other Resources has an impact on planning, prioritization and evaluation coverage at all levels. The capacity to identify and carry out evaluations of strategic importance is reduced when evaluation is funded on a project-by-project basis.

354. UNICEF has an on-going need for credible and independent assessment of results to demonstrate that the organization is meeting its mandate and is accountable to all stakeholders, including partner governments and beneficiaries. Evaluation is an essential tool to demonstrate impact and sustainability. In the Panel's view, evaluation should be considered *a core function* and should be provided with a *predictable and adequate budget*.

Results-Based Management

355. The Panel's mandate did not include a comprehensive analysis of UNICEF's system for Results-Based Management. However, in the course of data collection and interviews it became apparent that weaknesses in the organization's RBM

systems have an impact on the quality of evaluations, and their credibility, particularly at the country level. These weaknesses are not unique to UNICEF; the challenges are the same for other development cooperation agencies and for bilateral donors. As UNICEF endeavours to focus more on policy advocacy and joint programming, it becomes harder to define results, measure progress and determine attribution.

356.   UNICEF has made progress since 2002 in creating a stronger organizational framework for results-based management, as demonstrated in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that accompanies the current corporate plan (MTSP 2006-2009), the requirements at the country level for IMEPs and a summary results matrix in the Country Programme Document (CPD).

357.   UNICEF's participation in the UNDAF process at the country level is also placing greater emphasis on results-oriented planning as "the UNDAF Results Matrix describes the results to be collaboratively achieved". [72]

358.   The Panel concluded that the EO has contributed towards strengthening UNICEF's Results-Based Management systems, most notably through its contribution to development of the integrated monitoring and evaluation framework and detailed performance indicators for the MTSP 2006-2009. However, there is a gap between high level, organization-wide indicators and the systems used for planning and performance assessment at the programme/ project level.

Evaluation Policy

359.   The Panel concluded that the culture and practice of independent evaluation seems well established at UNICEF but it is not supported by an up-to-date and comprehensive evaluation policy which reflects the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System. The Panel believes that the independence, credibility and usefulness of the evaluation function would be strengthened by updating the current policy statements into a comprehensive policy document that provides a clearer framework for implementation of the evaluation function.

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[72] UNICEF, *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual (PPPM)*, May 2005, p. 45, para 29.

Text Box 10

Summative Judgment of the UNICEF Peer Review Panel

Evaluation at UNICEF is highly useful for learning and decision-making purposes and, to a lesser extent, for accountability in achieving results.

UNICEF's central Evaluation Office is considered to be strong, independent and credible. Its leadership by respected professional evaluators is a major strength. The EO has played an important leadership role in UN harmonization through the UN Evaluation Group.

The Peer Review Panel considers that a decentralized system of evaluation is well-suited to the operational nature of UNICEF. However, there are critical gaps in quality and resources at the regional and country levels that weaken the usefulness of the evaluation function as a management tool.

Suggestions for Action:

A clear and comprehensive evaluation policy document, consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards, a more predictable budget for evaluation, additional interventions to strengthen and support field offices, and improved use of results-based management throughout the organization would strengthen the evaluation function overall.

C.   Summary of Recommendations to UNICEF's Executive Board, Executive Director and the Evaluation Office

<u>**To the Executive Board**</u>

Evaluation Policy

360.   The Executive Board should request that UNICEF update previous policy statements into a comprehensive policy document on evaluation that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to the present UNICEF context. The Board should subsequently discuss and approve the evaluation policy document.

361.   It is recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should report on the implementation of the evaluation policy in the biennial report on the evaluation function.

Resources for Evaluation

362.   The Executive Board should ensure that the evaluation function has adequate Regular Resources to operate in an independent and credible manner.

363.   For transparency and accountability purposes, the Executive Board should be presented with costed evaluation workplans as well as documentation of evaluation expenditures at HQ, regional and country levels.

Use of Evaluation by the Executive Board

364.   Reports from the EO and Regional Directors should inform the Executive Board on the implementation of evaluation recommendations and management plans of action.

365.   The Executive Board could take more advantage of the evaluation function by requesting specific evaluations to inform its decision-making.

366.   The Executive Board could consider holding more frequent informal sessions to discuss evaluation reports.

To UNICEF's Executive Director

Evaluation Policy

367.   UNICEF should update previous policy statements into a comprehensive evaluation policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards and adapted to the present UNICEF context.

- The evaluation policy should be a stand-alone document that is approved by the Executive Board.

- The evaluation policy should assert the independence of the evaluation function and specify that the Director of the Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Director.

- The evaluation policy should be developed in consultation with stakeholders, including partner countries.

- The policy should be disseminated and implemented throughout the organization by way of an Executive Directive.

- The *Executive Directive* should:

  o Clearly identify how evaluation contributes to learning, accountability and decision-making within the organization;

  o Spell out roles, responsibilities and accountabilities at the central, regional and country levels;

  o Address the highly decentralized nature of the evaluation function and the need to ensure quality, credibility and usefulness of evaluations at all levels;

  o Define protocols for consultation with, and participation of, internal and external stakeholders (especially partner countries) and beneficiaries;

  o Address issues that are specific to UNICEF's work which have implications for the evaluation function (HRBAP, RBM, CCC etc).

Evaluation Resources

368.   The Panel recommends that evaluation should be considered a *core function* for UNICEF, similar to Audit. To strengthen independence and credibility of the evaluation function at all levels, and to ensure adequate evaluation coverage, a *more predictable budget* should be provided. Specific suggestions include:
- Regular Resources assigned to the evaluation function both in HQ and in the field should be increased.

- The Regular Resources should be sufficient to cover strategic evaluations on corporate priorities.

- Other Resources should be committed for strengthening internal evaluation capacity at all levels and for evaluation capacity development of country partners.

369. Regional office allocations for evaluation should be sufficient to support thematic and strategic evaluations, quality assurance of evaluations at the country level and professional networking activities.

Evaluation Coverage

370. Consideration should be given to identifying explicit criteria for selection of evaluations that will ensure good coverage of UNICEF's corporate priorities. These criteria should guide the selection of evaluations at all levels. They should be related to the organization's strategic and programming priorities in order to inform decision-making and investment in a timely manner.

Results-Based Management

371. To enhance the relevance of evaluations for assessing results, efforts to strengthen the use of performance measurement systems identified within the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (at HQ level) and Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plans (at regional and country levels) should be given high priority.

372. Consideration should be given to mandatory use of end-of-project/programme evaluations when an approach or methodology is being piloted. It is also recommended that aggregation of evaluation information should be integrated within the RBM system to assess performance at the organizational level, ensure accountability and provide information for learning.

373. Consideration should be given to:
- Mandatory training on results-oriented monitoring and evaluation;
- Formal participation of evaluation officers at the project/ programme design stage when possible to strengthen evaluability;
- Use of an Intregrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) at the regional level;
- Greater scrutiny by Regional Offices of country IMEPs and evaluation TOR.

Quality Assurance

374. Organizational links and accountability for quality assurance of all evaluations (most notably at the country and regional levels) should be more clearly defined and implemented at all levels. In particular, the EO's role in assuring quality of evaluations carried out at the regional level should be specified and adequately resourced.

375. UNICEF management should give higher priority to strengthening the capacity of Regional Offices to provide technical support, oversight and quality assurance to evaluations carried out at the country level, including opportunities for professional networking.

376. To increase the credibility of evaluations at the country level, advocacy and fund-raising should be separated from the evaluation function to the extent possible.

Management Response and Plans of Action

377. Efforts to document and track management response to evaluations at the decentralized levels should be strengthened. The tracking system should be designed in such a way that it is also possible to follow-up at reasonable intervals to assess the impact of evaluation recommendations.

To the Evaluation Office

Evaluation Policy

378. The EO should update previous policy statements on evaluation into a comprehensive policy document that is consistent with UNEG Norms and Standards. Stakeholders, including partner countries, should be consulted in updating the policy.

379. The EO should prepare an Executive Directive on the updated evaluation policy to ensure its implementation throughout the organization.

Reporting on the Evaluation Function

380. It is recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should report on the implementation of the evaluation policy in the biennial report on the evaluation function which is presented to the Executive Board.

381. It is also recommended that the Director of the Evaluation Office should put more emphasis on lessons learned from evaluations in the biennial report on the evaluation function which is presented to the Executive Board.

Evaluation Workplan

382. The Panel recognizes that the EO's current focus on institutional reviews is strategically important at present. However, in the future, it is recommended that the EO give more emphasis to evaluation of development effectiveness in strategic policy and programme areas.

383. It is recommended that the EO develop a costed evaluation workplan which includes all EO evaluations, capacity development activities at the regional and country level, dissemination of evaluation results and lessons learned, and other items as appropriate.

Quality Assurance

384. Existing materials for training, guidance and support should be reviewed by the EO and supplemented as necessary to improve the quality of evaluations at the regional and country levels.

385. Consideration should be given to strengthening guidance on the following issues:
   - a Code of Conduct for evaluators;
   - options to increase participation by stakeholders (especially beneficiaries) in evaluations;
   - assessment of issues arising from the human-rights based approach;
   - disaggregation of results information according to sex;
   - assessment of gender equality issues, especially how results affect women/ girls and men/boys;
   - scrutiny of consultant qualifications and suitability;
   - training on evaluation reporting standards;
   - compliance with the requirement to provide all evaluations to the EO for quality review.

Dissemination

386. It is recommended that the EO should develop a strategy for dissemination of evaluation results and lessons learned in order to strengthen knowledge sharing within the organization.

Appendix 1: UNICEF Peer Review Panel Members

The Peer Review Panel was comprised of six members and two alternates:

- Ms Françoise Mailhot: Evaluation Manager, Performance and Knowledge Management Branch, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), who chaired the Panel.

- Mr. Finbar O'Brien, Head of Evaluation and Audit, Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, who participated actively in the Ghana country reference case.

- Ms Agnete Eriksen, Senior Evaluation Manager, Evaluation Department, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Norway.

- Dr Sulley Gariba: Independent Evaluation Expert and Executive Director, Institute for Policy Alternatives, Ghana; former President of International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS).

- Mr. Giorgis Getinet: Director, Operation Evaluation Department, African Development Bank, Tunisia (retired February 2006).

- Ms Donatella Magliani: Director, Evaluation Group, Bureau for Organizational Strategy and Learning, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Vienna and Co-chair of the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Quality Stamp Task Force.

- Ms Beate Bull (alternate to Norway representative): Evaluation Adviser, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Norway.

- Mr. Patrick Empey (alternate to Ireland representative): Senior Evaluation Manager, Audit and Evaluation Unit, Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland.

Appendix 2: Normative Framework for the UNICEF Peer Review
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1. The **Normative Framework** clusters the UNEG Norms and Standards under three main aspects of evaluation: **independence, credibility** and **usefulness of evaluation information**. The Panel adjusted the framework to avoid repetition and duplication and made a few wording changes for clarity (shown in *italics*). Other issues of relevance to UNICEF were also identified – capacity development, participation and gender equality. These issues were assessed against relevant UNEG Standards (see pages 10 -12).

2. The UNICEF Peer Review Panel adjusted the methodology by:

    - Introducing a country reference case (Ghana) to provide a more in-depth review of the systems and processes that guide UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function. The country reference case also addressed questions related to participation of country programme stakeholders in the evaluation process, the use of UNICEF evaluations at the country level and UNICEF's role in fostering evaluation capacity development. See Appendix 5 for a report on the Ghana reference case.

    - Strengthening the assessment of : (i) participation of partner countries as stakeholders and users of evaluation, and (ii) development effectiveness in partner countries. These issues were included in the questionnaires developed for the review and were a focus of the Ghana reference case.

3. The Normative Framework guided the document review and country reference case. It provided a reference for interviews with UNICEF Evaluation Office staff, senior management and Executive Board members, relevant persons at the country and regional levels and other UN agencies.

4. The following information sources were included in the research:

    - Review of UNICEF documents pertaining to evaluation (including documents that are in use and proposed);
    - Review of selected evaluations as 'reference cases' (see Appendix 3);
    - UNICEF's response to the UNEG 'Quality Stamp' Self-Assessment Exercise;
    - Discussions between the UNICEF Evaluation Office staff and the Peer Panel and Advisers;
    - Questionnaire responses from persons who had various roles in the selected evaluation reference cases;
    - Interviews by the Peer Panel with senior UNICEF Managers and Executive Board members and representatives of other UN agencies.

5. The findings and evidence were presented to the Evaluation Office for validation. Revisions were made to the findings based on the feedback from the EO. Where necessary, further research was undertaken to address outstanding issues.

SECTION ONE: INDEPENDENCE OF EVALUATIONS AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Norms 2.1 – 2.4 (Responsibility for Evaluation)

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

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

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

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

Norms 6.1- 6.5 (Independence)

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION TWO: CREDIBILITY OF EVALUATIONS
Norm 1.2 An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance, etc. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system. An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of the organizations of the UN system and its members.
Norm 1.4 There are other forms of assessment being conducted in the UN system. They vary in purpose and level of analysis, and may overlap to some extent. Evaluation is to be differentiated from appraisal, monitoring, review, inspection, investigation, audit, research, and internal mgt. consulting (all defined in the full text of the Norm).
Norm 2.5 The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations are responsible for appointing a professionally competent Head of evaluation, who in turn is responsible for ensuring that the function is staffed by professionals competent in the conduct of evaluation.
Norm 3.1 Each organization should develop an explicit policy statement on evaluation. The policy should provide a clear explanation of the concept, role and use of evaluation within the organization, including the institutional framework and definition of roles and responsibilities; an explanation of how the evaluation function and evaluations are planned, managed and budgeted; and a clear statement on disclosure and dissemination.
Norms 5.1 – 5.3 (Impartiality) Impartiality is the absence of bias in due process, methodological rigour, consideration and presentation of achievements and challenges. It also implies that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account. In the event that interested parties have different views, these are to be reflected in the evaluation analysis and reporting. Impartiality increases the credibility of evaluation and reduces the bias in the data gathering, analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations. Impartiality provides legitimacy to evaluation and reduces the potential for conflict of interest. The requirement for impartiality exists at all stages of the evaluation process, including the planning of evaluation, the formulation of mandate and scope, the selection of evaluation teams, the conduct of the evaluation and the formulation of findings and recommendations.

Norms 7.1 -7.2 (Evaluability)

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

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

Norm 8.1 (Quality of Evaluation)

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

Norm 8.2 (Reporting)

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

Norms 9.1 – 9.3 (Competencies for Evaluation)

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

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

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

Norms 11.1- 11.5 (Evaluation Ethics)   (*Review Panel addition in italics*)

Evaluators must have personal and professional integrity.

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

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

In light of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality. [*For UNICEF, the following will also apply - Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)*]

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

ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO UNICEF – CONSIDERED UNDER CREDIBILITY

1. Fostering Evaluation Capacity Building in Member Countries   (*Review Panel addition in italics*)

Norms – Preamble

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

Standard 1.7.9 (Management of the Evaluation Function)

In particular the management of the evaluation function should include

- raising awareness and/or building evaluation capacity *(in government and civil society)*;
- facilitation and management of evaluation networks

Standard 3.14.29 (Selection of Team)

Qualified, competent and experienced professional firms or individuals from concerned countries should be involved, whenever possible, in the conduct of evaluations, in order, *inter alia*, to ensure that national/local knowledge and information is adequately taken into account in evaluations and to support evaluation capacity building in developing countries. The conduct of evaluations may also be out-sourced to national private sector and civil society organizations. Joint evaluations with governments or other stakeholders should equally be encouraged.

2. Facilitating Stakeholder Participation in Evaluation   *(Review Panel addition in italics)*

Norm 1.6

. . .An important consideration is for the evaluation approach and method to be adapted to the nature of the undertaking, to ensure due process, and to facilitate stakeholder participation in order to support an informed decision-making process.

Standard 1.1.2 (Institutional Framework)

. . . Encourage partnerships and cooperation on evaluation within the UN system, as well as with other relevant institutions.

Standard 3.11.23 (Evaluation Process)

Stakeholders must be identified and consulted when planning the evaluation (key issues, method, timing, responsibilities) and should be kept informed throughout the evaluation process. *(Partner country governments should be considered a key stakeholder in evaluations.)* The evaluation approach must consider learning and participation opportunities (e.g. workshops, learning groups, debriefing, participation in the field visits) to ensure that key stakeholders are fully integrated into the evaluation learning process.

Standard 4.10.17 (Evaluation Reports)

The level of participation of stakeholders in the evaluation should be described, including the rationale for selecting that particular level. While not all evaluations can be participatory to the same degree, it is important that consideration is given to participation of stakeholders, as such participation is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the use of conclusions, recommendations and lessons. A human rights-based approach to programming adds emphasis to the participation of primary stakeholders. In many cases, this clearly points to the involvement of people and communities. Also, including certain groups of stakeholders may be necessary for a complete and fair assessment.

3. Mainstreaming Gender in Evaluation *(Review Panel addition in italics)*

Norm 11.4 (Evaluation Ethics)

In light of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality. [*For UNICEF, the following will also apply - Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)*]

Standard 3.9.19 (Evaluation Design)

UN organizations are guided by the United Nations Charter, and have a responsibility and mission to assist Member States to meet their obligations towards the realization of the human rights of those who live within their jurisdiction. Human rights treaties, mechanisms and instruments provide UN entities with a guiding frame of reference and a legal foundation for ethical and moral principles, and should guide evaluation work. Consideration should also be given to gender issues and hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.

Standard 3.15.31 (Implementation)

Evaluations should be carried out in a participatory and ethical manner and the welfare of the stakeholders should be given due respect and consideration (human rights, dignity and fairness). Evaluations must be gender and culturally sensitive and respect the confidentiality, protection of source and dignity of those interviewed.

Standard 4.8 (Evaluation Reports)

The evaluation report should indicate the extent to which gender issues and relevant human rights considerations were incorporated where applicable.

Standard 4.8.15 (Relevant excerpt)

The evaluation report should include a description of, inter alia:
- how gender issues were implemented as a cross-cutting theme in programming, and if the subject being evaluated gave sufficient attention to promote gender equality and gender-sensitivity

SECTION THREE: USEFULNESS OF EVALUATION EVIDENCE
Norm 1.1 (Purpose) Purposes of evaluation include understanding why and the extent to which intended and unintended results are achieved, and their impact on stakeholders. Evaluation is an important source of evidence of the achievement of results and institutional performance. Evaluation is also an important contributor to building knowledge and to organizational learning. Evaluation is an important agent of change and plays a critical and credible role in supporting accountability.
Norm 1.3 Evaluation feeds into management and decision making processes, and makes an essential contribution to managing for results. Evaluation informs the planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting cycle. It aims at improving the institutional relevance and the achievement of results, optimizing the use of resources, providing client satisfaction and maximizing the impact of the contribution of the UN system.
Norm 1.5   *(Review Panel addition in italics)* Evaluation is not a decision-making process per se, but rather serves as an input to provide decision-makers with knowledge and evidence about performance and good practices. Although evaluation is used to assess undertakings, it should provide value-added for decision-oriented processes to assist in the improvement of present and future activities, projects, programmes, strategies and policies. Thus evaluation contributes to institutional policy-making, development effectiveness (*in programme countries*) and organizational effectiveness.
Norm 1.7 Evaluation is therefore about *Are we doing the right thing?* It examines the rationale, the justification of the undertaking, makes a reality check and looks at the satisfaction of intended beneficiaries. Evaluation is also about *Are we doing it right?* It assesses the effectiveness of achieving expected results. It examines the efficiency of the use of inputs to yield results. Finally, evaluation asks *Are there better ways of achieving the results?* Evaluation looks at alternative ways, good practices and lessons learned.

Norm 2.6

The Governing Bodies and/or Heads of organizations and of the evaluation functions are responsible for ensuring that evaluation contributes to decision making and management. They should ensure that a system is in place for explicit planning for evaluation and for systematic consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in evaluations. They should ensure appropriate follow-up measures including an action plan, or equivalent appropriate tools, with clear accountability for the implementation of the approved recommendations.

Norm 2.7

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

Norm 4.1

Proper application of the evaluation function implies that there is a clear intent to use evaluation findings.

In the context of limited resources, the planning and selection of evaluation work has to be carefully done.

Evaluations must be chosen and undertaken in a timely manner so that they can and do inform decision-making with relevant and timely information.

Planning for evaluation must be an explicit part of planning and budgeting of the evaluation function and/or the organization as a whole. Annual or multi-year evaluation work programmes should be made public.

Norm 4.2

The evaluation plan can be the result of a cyclical or purposive selection of evaluation topics.

The purpose, nature and scope of evaluation must be clear to evaluators and stakeholders.

The plan for conducting each evaluation must ensure due process to ascertain the timely completion of the mandate, and consideration of the most cost-effective way to obtain and analyze the necessary information.

Norms 10.1 & 10.2

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

Evaluation Terms of Reference and reports should be available to major stakeholders and be public documents. Documentation on evaluations in easily consultable and readable form should also contribute to both transparency and legitimacy.

Norms 12.1 – 12.3 (Follow-up)

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

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

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

Norms 13.1 – 13.2 (Contribution to Knowledge-building)

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

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

Appendix 3: Evaluation Reports Reviewed for the UNICEF Peer Review

Reference Cases

Assessment of UNICEF's Contribution to UN Reform and Its Impact on UNICEF: UN Reform under the UN Development Group, Evaluation Office, September 2004.

Changing Lives of Girls: Evaluation of the African Girls' Education Initiative, Evaluation Office, December 2004.

Country Programme Evaluation – Royal Government of Cambodia/ UNICEF 2001-2005, Evaluation Office, June 2005.

Education as a Preventive Strategy Against Child Labour: Evaluation of the Cornerstone Programme of UNICEF's Child Labour Programme, Evaluation Office, December 2003.

Joint UNICEF-DFID Evaluation of UNICEF Preparedness and Early Response to the Darfur Emergency, Evaluation Office, March 2005.

Strengthening Management at UNICEF, John J. Donohue, Evaluation Office, December 2004.

Others

Evaluation of the Innocenti Research Centre, Evaluation Office, 2005.

Morocco-UNICEF Country Programme Evaluation, Evaluation Office, 2004.

The Quality of Evaluations Supported by UNICEF Country Offices 2000-2001, Evaluation Office, September 2004.

UNICEF's Strengths and Weaknesses – A summary of key internal and external institutional reviews and evaluations conducted from 1992-2004, Evaluation Office, September 2004.

UNICEF's Contribution to UN Reform and its Impact on UNICEF, Evaluation Office, September 2004.

Appendix 4:   Persons Interviewed

1. Evaluation Office Staff

    - Jean Quesnel, Director Evaluation Office (EO)
    - Lucien Back, Senior Programme Officer, EO
    - Joaquin Gonzalez-Aleman, Project Officer, EO
    - Simon Lawry-White, Senior Programme Officer, EO
    - Xavier Foulquier, Assistant Programme Officer (JPO), EO
    - Sam Bickel, Senior Adviser, Research and Evaluation, EO
    - Ada Ocampo, Programme Officer, EO
    - Rema Venu, Programme Assistant, EO
    - Wayne MacDonald, Senior Project Officer, Tsunami, EO
    - Elizabeth Santucci, Project Officer, Evaluation Database Manager, EO
    - Lourdes San Agustin, Administrative Assistant, EO (Database, budget, personnel)

2. Regional Directors (*and Evaluation Committee Members*)

    - Ezio Murzi, West and Central Africa region (WCARO)
    - Maria Calivis, Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic States region (CEECIS)
    - Nils Kastberg, Americas and the Caribbean region (TACRO)
    - Per Engebak, Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESARO)
    - Thomas McDermott, Middle East and North Africa region (MENA)
    - Cecilia Lotse, South Asia region (ROSA)
    - Anupama Rao Singh, East Asia and the Pacific region (EAPRO)
    - Philip O'Brien, Geneva Regional Office (National Committees)
    - Marta Santos-Pais, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence

3. UNICEF Management
    Global Management Team and Evaluation Committee Members

    - Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director
    - Toshi Niwa, Deputy Executive Director
    - Kul Gautam, Deputy Executive Director
    - Karin Hulshof, Director, Programme Funding Office
    - Stephen Jarrett, Deputy Director, Supply Section
    - Steven Allen, Director, Division of Human Resources
    - Richard Morgan, Chief, Division of Policy and Planning / Strategic Planning and Programme Guidance
    - Alan Court, Director, Programme Division
    - Phillip Gerry Dyer, Chief, Humanitarian Response Unit, EMR

- Karin Landgren, Chief, Programme Division, Child Protection
- Saad Houry, Director, Division of Policy and Planning

4. Other UNICEF Staff

- Ndolamb Ngokwey, Secretary of the Executive Board, Office of the Executive Board
- Sigrid Kaag, Deputy Director, Programme Division, Regional and Interagency Affairs Section
- Bo Pedersen, M&E Officer, Ghana Country Office
- Xinggen Wang, Chief, Asia Desk
- Noreen Khan, Programme Officer, Division of Policy and Planning
- Mark Hereward, Programme Officer, Regional and Interagency Affairs Section
- Heli Mikkola, Programme Officer, Capacity Building Child Protection, Child Protection Section, Programme Division
- Susan Ngongi, Project Officer, EMR
- Aboubacar Saibou, NYHQ Desk Officer, Africa Cluster, Regional and Interagency Affairs Section
- Cream Wright, Chief, Education Section, Programme Division
- Peter Bult, Learning Officer, Division of Human Resources, Organizational and Learning Development Section (OLDS)
- Peter Crowley, Director, Office of Public Partnerships (OPP)

5. External
- UNDP – Saraswathi Menon, Director Evaluation Office
- UNDP – Nurul Alam, Deputy Director, Evaluation Office
- UN/DESA – Maurice Clapisson, Senior Evaluation Officer
- UNFPA – Oliver Brasseur, Director, Office of Internal Oversight Services
- United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services:
    - Eddie Yee Woo Guo, Chief, Evaluation Section, Monitoring , Evaluating and Consulting Division
    - Chandi Kadirgamar, Self-evaluation Officer
    - Demetra Arapakos, Evaluation Officer

Appendix 5:   Report on Ghana Reference Case

Context for the Reference Case

In finalizing the methodology for the UNICEF Peer Review, the Peer Panel recognized the highly decentralized nature of the organization's evaluation function. As a result, the Panel decided to incorporate a country case study which it believed would provide an insight into the systems and processes that guide UNICEF's evaluation function, as well as addressing questions related to participation of country programme stakeholders in the evaluation process. It is important to note that the country reference case was neither designed as, nor intended to be, an evaluation of either the country office or its related Regional Office. Merely, the Panel wanted to be sure that it fully understood how the decentralized evaluation function actually operates, the challenges it faces and the results that are possible. By strengthening the evidence base for its assessment, the Panel believes that UNICEF will be more accurately represented and the credibility of the peer review process will be increased.

The Panel selected Ghana as the reference country. This was partly because one Panel member lives in the country and another Panel member was quite familiar with UNICEF's work in that country.

The country reference case study undertook:

- A Desk Review of material related to UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function and evaluation reports from the country level.

- In terms of approach, the assessment was based on (i) a focus group session of key staff of UNICEF regional and country office, to review the form, function and capacity of UNICEF's decentralized evaluation systems, as it is manifested in Ghana; (ii) semi-structured interviews with UNICEF evaluation specialists and consultants (particularly those involved in the selected cases) at the country and regional offices, relevant government officials and civil society organizations involved in UNICEF evaluations; staff of the National Development Planning Commission; (iii) semi-structured interviews with representatives from other UN agencies and bilateral donors who have cooperated with UNICEF both in their programming and/or evaluations at the country level;

- A validation session with key UNICEF country office staff and other interlocutors confirming the main findings of the case study.

ASSESSING UNICEF'S EVALUATION FUNCTION
A REFERENCE CASE OF GHANA

Prepared for

UNICEF PEER REVIEW

By

SULLEY GARIBA (Ghana)

FINBAR O'BRIEN (Ireland)

MARCH 2006

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Ghana reference case is an attempt to understand the decentralized nature of UNICEF's evaluation function. This report discusses the results of the reference case by focusing on the three dimensions of the evaluation function namely: **independence, credibility** and **usefulness of evaluations** at the country and regional levels of UNICEF.

- The report begins by examining the context of evaluation within the country office and the changes that are emerging in the exercise of this function, including reflections within the regional office.
- The specific findings on each of the three dimensions are enumerated and analyzed.
- A number of general findings regarding the balance between monitoring and evaluation as well as evaluation capacity development are presented.
- Recommendations peculiar to Ghana reference case are offered.

Two specific reference cases were selected for consideration in the detailed assessment of the evaluation function at the country level. These are:

1. Report of the Review of the Accelerated Child Survival and Development Programme in the Upper East Region of Ghana, November 2004.

   ❑ *This is considered the "best" example of a blend between "independent evaluation" and "partner participation in evaluation". A thorough baseline study is available and provides a reference point. The results, according to UNICEF, have been widely acclaimed and, because of the high-level of partner participation and outside "expert" leadership of the process, they consider this to be credible. The Review is being used by the Government of Ghana to facilitate the scale-up of key elements of the process and methods introduced by the program.*

2. Report on Evaluation of Ghana's Guinea-worm Eradication Programme, June 2005.

   ❑ *A joint evaluation involving a large pool of specialists from various partner institutions involved in the partnership programme for Guinea-worm Eradication. UNICEF-Abidjan was represented, and there were strong links here with the Regional Evaluation Officer. Findings are widely disseminated and in the process of being used by various stakeholders.*

Evaluation at the UNICEF Country Office

The records and interviews at the Country office show an evaluation function which is integral to the process of programme development and management. In this sense, monitoring and evaluation are part of the process of ensuring efficiency in programme delivery and teasing out lessons for advocacy and scale-up of the models that work. The purpose of evaluation is therefore oriented more towards shared-learning among those involved in development and those, at community levels, for whom development activities are carried out. Staff of the CO referred to the MTSP and the Country Programme Action Plan 2006-2010 as important sources that determine the selection of priorities for the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP). Much of the planned evaluative activities reflect project and programme-driven requirements.

The planning of evaluative activities has focused primarily on the project cycle, documenting all studies, surveys, evaluations as part of the M&E function. An analysis of the IMEP completion reports from 2002 to 2005 suggests that a third were classified as evaluations, with the majority being studies and surveys.

Year	Classification				Total
	Evaluation	Studies	Surveys	Other	
2002	4	4	4	0	12
2003	5	6	3	0	14
2004	5	3	2	0	10
2005	1	2	2	1	6
Total	15	16	11	1	42

The decentralized evaluation function in Ghana has therefore been characterized by five main tendencies:

1. A very heavy focus on formative studies and surveys commissioned by UNICEF, but implemented by partner institutions, including an increasing number which are commissioned by UNICEF and implemented by UNICEF (with outside consultant inputs).
2. Evaluations are sometimes implemented by outside consultants, with UNICEF participation or by partner institutions themselves.
3. Joint evaluations, including joint donor evaluations where programming has involved a wide range of partners.
4. A strategic focus on building capacity for system-wide data-bases -- GhanaInfo, targeted at the policy level in Government – National Statistics and the National Development Planning Commission.
5. Selective (and rare) use of independent evaluations, where those who have been directly involved in programme planning and implementation are not involved in the conduct of the evaluations.

Each of these tendencies has implications for the Ghana reference case in relation to the three main dimensions of Independence, Credibility and Use of evaluations.

For the <u>partner-led studies and surveys</u>, they provide:

❑ Very rich baseline situational assessments (ex-ante), and monitor trends in the conditions of UNICEF's primary targets – welfare and sustenance of women and children.
❑ Involve partner institutions in their planning and implementation, with some of them actually initiated and fully implemented by partner institutions.
❑ Build capacities within partner institutions, often through learning-by-doing.

For <u>evaluations commissioned by UNICEF and implemented by partner institutions</u>, they have been of:

❑ Quite high quality, relying on substantive databases of the partner institutions (but with little additional primary data).
❑ Use some of the best human resources within the institutions themselves, and in some cases relying on specific units that have the mandate for data collection, monitoring and evaluation.[73]
❑ Themes of these evaluations are often very strategic at levels that are associated with broad policies (not specific programmes).
❑ Findings are sometimes quite critical of the institutions themselves.
❑ Recommendations have tended to be less strategic.

<u>Evaluations conducted by independent consultants</u> (some of them from Universities) have exhibited:

❑ An appreciable level of independence
❑ But with relatively lower technical quality in terms of access to and use of adequate data or collection of primary data
❑ Analyses and recommendations have been moderated by UNICEF's participation, directly or indirectly, in relation to the understanding of the developmental context and the priorities for "advocacy, communication and scale-up".[74]

<u>Joint evaluations</u> are few; the most significant one reviewed is the Guinea-worm Evaluation, which has been:

❑ Widely participatory in its approach
❑ Generated very strong and critical findings
❑ Widely used by all stakeholders in terms of reforms and planning for future programming

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[73] It is noteworthy that nearly all studies at the local government levels where UNICEF's work is concentrated tend to rely on the District Planning and Coordinating Units – the units responsible for monitoring and evaluation.
[74] UNICEF staff interviewed noted that the completion of reports of evaluations by independent consultants has often been a challenge because of their limited knowledge of UNICEF's operating environment and the strategic dimensions of recommendations required.

Re-thinking M&E in response to changing country circumstances

The Country Programme Action Plan sets out priorities for monitoring and evaluation for the programme cycle and this is reflected in an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP). Hitherto, the IMEP has often amounted to the summation of all M&E activities associated with programme management, a situation which has led both RO and HQ to insist that these activities be prioritized and that fewer, more focused, evaluative activities be planned and implemented.

In the 2006-2010 CPAP, the country office has established the *Advocacy, Communications, Monitoring and Analysis (ACMA) Programme,* in response to the changing architecture of development assistance and the growing need for systematic management of the M&E function to provide evidence for both policy leverage and advocacy. In designating ACMA as a programme domain, the peer panel notes the significant shift towards an M&E function which seeks to serve both UNICEF programmes as well as UNICEF's role as a promoter of children's' and women's' rights among the increasingly harmonized regime of development partners in Ghana.

The key interventions planned under this programme reflect a wide variety of purposes, including the traditional functions of information gathering for programme planning and delivery, for monitoring and reporting on CRC and CEDAW and for communication and advocacy. ACMA's programme monitoring and evaluation strategy includes the strengthening of use of objective indicators to monitor progress in key targets, such as MDG targets through a range of surveys – DHS for 2008[75] and two MICS. Policy analysis is now included in this strategy, to focus on the social protection policies and the rights of OVCs as particularly vulnerable children.

The panel observed that, while ACMA provides a bold initiative towards institutionalizing M&E as a basis of evidence for scaling up UNICEF's advocacy functions, the role that evaluation plays in this new construction remains somewhat unclear, as the substantial emphasis appears to focus on more monitoring with some evaluative studies on public policy measures. The fact that the IMEP for 2006-2010 focuses on fewer "evaluations" (a total of 5 are planned for the period) depicts progress in limiting numbers, but these still appear to be related more to specific UNICEF programmes than they are to wider strategic considerations. The planned evaluation of "Impact of Capitation Grant Scheme on Education for All" represents a significant piece of strategic evaluation that has the potential of shaping advocacy measures beyond UNICEF programme.

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[75] The Demographic and Health Survey for 2008 may not be a fully UNICEF-funded activity, but it is a crucial instrument for assessing the results of many UNICEF-funded interventions.

Independence

In the Ghana Country Office, evaluation activities are planned and funded almost entirely within programmes and projects. Designated programme coordinators have primary responsibility for planning and managing evaluations; the M&E officer coordinates and reports on evaluations within the overall context of Annual Reports; and this role is subsumed under, and reports to the Programme Coordinator. As the lines between monitoring and evaluation are blurred, with a higher volume and emphasis on monitoring activities, the evaluation function at the country office is associated more with learning about development processes and progress, often within the context of partner-driven development planning, implementation and monitoring.

The review found that:

1. *Evaluation function and funding at Country level and Regional level are embedded in Programme Management rather than independent of it. In this sense,*

   - The coverage of evaluation has been highly restrictive to the specific projects or programmes being evaluated. While there have been subjects of evaluation which go beyond specific projects, these have been few and far between.

   - In the planning and conduct of these evaluations, there is no evidence that participants are articulating the principle of independence as defined by the desirability of independence in evaluation and following through to ensure it happens in practice. In the two reference cases we reviewed for Ghana, there was a conscious decision to involve key partners (both donor and implementing partners) directly in the implementation of the evaluations. The principles of *partnership* and *ownership* held precedence over *independence*.

   - In the management of the evaluation function, it was observed that the development of TOR used various consultative mechanisms within UNICEF to elicit contributions from colleagues, but the designated programme coordinator led this process and concluded the TOR. The long absence of a substantive M&E officer in the Country Office meant that there was limited technical oversight for the preparation of TOR, the recruitment/composition of evaluation teams and the management of the evaluation process itself. Given the large quantity of evaluations commissioned and implemented at the Country office, the Regional M&E officer could not have been involved in providing oversight for these evaluations.[76]

2. *The governance of evaluation is directed more towards implementation – the design of TOR and the day-to-day support for the conduct of the evaluations, rather than oversight:*

   - Programme officers are the de-facto persons steering the evaluation activities.[77]

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[76] Only one M&E officer is responsible for covering a region with over 20 countries and working on an extremely limited budget.

[77] While there was no evidence of undue influence on evaluators by Programme Officers, the potential exists to shape the issues, questions and findings.

- Some evidence of the use of multi-stakeholder reference groups exists (as was the case of the Guinea-worm evaluation), but this does not appear to be a routine practice for all evaluations in the UNICEF Country Office.

Recommendations on Independence

1. The Country and Regional Office need to create space and funding for evaluations that have strategic implications beyond the country programme or projects. This would ensure that the CO plans far fewer, but substantive evaluations than it is currently undertaking. For these evaluations ensure that the principle of independence is clearly articulated and adhered to throughout the evaluation process, including technical direction in the preparation of TOR; the provision of adequate funding for the selection of qualified team members; designating competent team leaders.

2. In keeping with the principles of partnership, the CO should develop a governance model for the management of evaluations which promote ownership while also ensuring independence. This could be done through the use of steering committees comprising key partners while ensuring that the teams that conduct the evaluations are independent of the specific programmes/issues they are tasked to evaluate.

Credibility

As an organization, UNICEF has invested substantial effort in establishing its credibility in-country. From planning projects through implementation and evaluation, UNICEF has been strong in its engagement with communities and partner institutions in Government and civil society. This engagement has been carried forward in the implementation of its evaluative activities, which have been characterized by:

- Credible use of existing data
- Inclusion of community-level data and stakeholders in the evidence for evaluations
- Participation of international team members in some evaluations
- Use of multi-stakeholder forums for validating evidence from evaluations

Findings on Credibility

Credible use of existing data

UNICEF has been described by some interlocutors as a data-rich organization, in that, almost every step the organization takes is driven by either a baseline study or an evaluative survey. In the two reference cases we reviewed, the use of existing data (DHS and Guinea-worm status data) prompted the specific evaluations, and most evaluations rely on this data for their analyses.

Evaluating Accelerated Child Survival and Development
in the Context of National Poverty Trends

The report of ACSD evaluation presented a crisp national context, of poverty and health status at the very outset, relying on national-level data. The analyses that followed set the parameters of the evaluation as one which was location-specific but had a national context. In its conclusions, the report draws on the implications of specific local trends to inform recommendations that are meant for national adoption.

Community-level data and credibility

UNICEF's strong links to communities adds credibility to their evaluative activities, as most evaluations tend to use community-level data collection instruments, and involve communities in the evaluative processes.[78] The manner in which the evidence is presented in the evaluation reports did not reflect the analysis of community-level observations and perspectives. The bulk of evidence relied on secondary sources and records. Triangulating secondary with primary data sources can result in considerable credibility of the findings of evaluative activities undertaken by UNICEF.

Use of International Experts in Evaluation Teams

In the two reference evaluations reviewed, it was observed that a conscious effort was made to include persons in the evaluation teams who had international experience. In one case, UNICEF's contribution was to include a team member with experience in the same subject matter in a neighboring country. These efforts notwithstanding, the evaluation reports did not reflect the cross-country learning opportunity available in the team, although there was testimony that such experiences were shared among team members.

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[78] The CO is presently developing instruments for the use of community score cards as a means of measuring the performance of developmental interventions from the perspective of communities, especially women and children.

Application of Quality Control Measures

The Ghana case needs to be understood in the context of the long absence of an M&E officer for about 2 years. At the time of the peer review, an M&E officer had been in place for less than a year. This fact, combined with the blurred lines between routine monitoring and substantive evaluation has led to inadequate attention to quality control throughout the evaluation process. This is manifested in part in:

- Limited methodological rigour, around the development of Terms of Reference (TOR), which have been initiated and completed through a consultative process among Program and Project Managers;
- Framing of evaluation questions often restricted to the specific project with limited scope for exploring alternative strategies – "did we do the right things; did we do things right?"
- Difficulties in finding competent evaluators to be part of evaluation teams, resulting in the fielding of teams which are strong on program/project content and short on evaluation methods and analysis.

Oversight for Evaluations

Of particular significance in the assessment of credibility has been the question of oversight for the evaluation exercises which were reviewed. The pre-occupation with acceptability and ownership of the evaluation process and outcomes appear to have led to a blurring of the implementation with management and oversight of the evaluations. In these evaluations there did not appear to be a clear distinction between the implementing teams and those, within UNICEF or partners, who are meant to have oversight. Consequently, the analysis of findings and the corresponding recommendations they offered remained focused on implementation issues, more so than substantive aspects of programme design and their implications for programme results and outcomes.

Recommendations on Credibility

1. Stronger quality control of key strategic evaluation exercises. This recommendation is directed at the three levels of the UNICEF Evaluation function:

   - At the country level, the M&E officer needs to support programme officers with guidance on the framing of TOR in accordance with the requirements established by HQ. Where a multi-disciplinary team is established for the evaluation, the role of the team leader needs to be clearly designated and set apart from the other team members.
   - At the Regional level, the significance of strategic evaluations needs to be stressed, and the oversight for their implementation at the country-level improved to include reviewing and commenting on the TOR as well as some guidance on methods, suggestions on team members, where regional expertise exists, and the reflection on the findings for any regional comparisons.
   - At the HQ level, strategic evaluations commissioned at the country level may well have significant bearing on issues already identified in the MTSP. Guidance and

advice from HQ might improve the chances of the results being of sufficient quality to be published by HQ in order to promote cross-country and corporate learning.

2.   Strengthen cross-country learning in substantive evaluations, through Regional Office expertise and resources, as well as the possibility of using country case studies.

Usefulness

UNICEF's decentralized evaluation function at the country-level serves most the needs of the partners with whom these activities are carried out. From conception to conclusion, evaluative activities have been geared primarily towards programme improvement, advocacy and scale-up. This use component of in-country evaluations is characterized by:

- Conscious planning of evaluations as part of the project cycle
- Relevance to Partners' Needs
- Strategic timing to feed into reviews and policy processes
- Multi-stakeholder involvement

Findings on Use of Evaluations

Evaluations as part of the project cycle

It has been observed that nearly all sizeable projects planned and implemented by, and through UNICEF, have one form of evaluation or another, designed as part of the project cycle. As a standard feature, most projects incorporate a baseline study and, at some point in the life of the project, an evaluation is scheduled and implemented. While there was no evidence of the frequent use of end-of-cycle evaluations, the evaluative activities carried out on most projects have become common features of their design and associated "requirements" of funding agencies. This led some staff to characterize in-country evaluations as being "donor-led" and therefore limited in scope to the specific projects funded by donors. Since most projects initiated by UNICEF are of a pilot-demonstration nature, the evaluations tend to be undertaken at critical moments to feed into the prospects of scale-up or for policy/programme advocacy. The absence of end-of-cycle evaluations has made the recording of results difficult and, correspondingly, the aggregation of results of various projects has been difficult.[79]

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[79] It should be noted that most UNICEF-funded pilot projects are relatively small interventions, often managed by partners. The cost in money and time of "end-of-cycle" evaluations may not be worth the value of these evaluations in the larger context.

Relevance to Partners' Needs

Notwithstanding the source of funding for projects and therefore for the evaluative exercises associated with them, the Ghana case suggests an overwhelming attention to partner involvement in the processes of evaluations. There was ample evidence in all interviews to suggest that:

- The commissioning of most evaluations emerged out of assessments by the relevant stakeholders of the need to examine the specific programmes. The two reference cases reviewed emerged out of trends in health status which raised concerns about worsening child mortality and frustrations with progress in guinea-worm eradication.
- The timing of the evaluations subsequently fed into major national reviews and policy processes, associated with the Health SWAP and multi-stakeholder review of the guinea-worm eradication programme.

Multi-stakeholder Participation

Another strategy for promoting use of in-country evaluations has been the multi-stakeholder involvement in their implementation. At one level, this principle of participation guaranteed optimum use of the results; at another, it may have compromised the extent of critical analysis of the findings thereby limiting the options to which the evaluation results might have been used.

> **Multi-stakeholder participation promotes use but may constrain options**
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> Stakeholders analyzing the results of an evaluation of Guinea-worm eradication observed that, by involving all funding and implementing partners in the evaluation, there was a greater commitment to the use of the evaluation results. However, they also suggested that certain approaches for funding guinea-worm eradication that target endemic villages may have been too limited to adequately address urgent crises. Could this have been a question for the evaluation? What answers might have emerged? Could the evaluation have influenced the behavior of the donors themselves?

Management Response

The use of evaluation findings is related to the manner in which UNICEF treats the recommendations arising from an evaluation. The Panel notes that the practice whereby all evaluation findings are thoroughly discussed by the key stakeholders has resulted in the development of matrices which designate the nature of follow-up actions and assigns responsibilities for such follow-up. Within UNICEF itself, management discusses the implications of recommendations, but there does not appear to be a mechanism of tracking the progress in the implementation of recommendations of evaluations on a routine basis.

Use of Evaluations Beyond Projects -- ACMA

UNICEF Ghana has established a new programme referred to as the Advocacy, Communications, Monitoring and Analysis (ACMA), whose objectives are to improve the use of evidence from monitoring and evaluation for advocacy and communication. This initiative has a high potential for moving evidence around UNICEF's core mandate – the rights of children and women – into public policy forums, including the emerging Multi-donor Budget Support mechanisms to which UNICEF is an observer.

Recommendations on Use

The Panel notes and endorses the practice within UNICEF which emphasizes partner participation in evaluations as a strong impetus towards ownership and use of findings, and encourages this practice.

Further, the establishment of the ACMA programme as a manifestation of how the use of evaluations might be institutionalized in the process of advocacy is also noteworthy. It is however recommended that care will need to be taken to separate "public relations" communication from the credibility and use of critical evaluations for improving practices and policies, including internal UNICEF practices.

Capacity Building for Evaluation

Capacity Building for Evaluation in UNICEF-Ghana has focused on training and technical assistance for improving evaluation capacity; assistance to implementing partners in use of data for monitoring and evaluation; and support for "learning by doing".

❑ *System-wide capacity for collecting development data (and its integration into a DevInfo environment).* UNICEF has been an acknowledged leader, among the UNDG, in supporting the evolution of the software, from Childinfo, through DevInfo and subsequently its adoption in Ghana as GhanaInfo.[80] UNICEF's value-added is in pushing harder for this process to be decentralized, down to the regional and district levels, where UNICEF's programming is targeted. With technical assistance to locate GhanaInfo in the National Development Planning Commission and the Ghana Statistical Services (GSS), the software is gaining momentum as the sub-structure of Ghana's M&E architecture. Training for decentralized adoption (again facilitated by UNICEF), has been a timely occurrence, as the process of developing a Medium-Term Development Plan among all of Ghana's 138 Local Government establishments is just beginning. The availability of a reference point for all crucial monitoring and evaluation data is therefore seen as an important factor in shaping M&E thinking and practices at the local levels.

❑ *Location and institution-specific capacity development of partners to develop a robust system for M&E,* starting from baseline studies, through formative evaluations to assessment of impact. Plans are underway to introduce participatory M&E with community score cards for assessing performance on critical issues that UNICEF supports.

❑ *A "learning-by-doing" approach to evaluation capacity development.* This process was recently tried with the nascent research unit of the Ministry of Women and Children (MOWAC), which was assisted by UNICEF to undertake evaluative studies on child-labor in the cocoa sector. In 2004-2005, regional reviews of key development indicators by the three poorest regions located in the North of Ghana led to a major capacity

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[80] This fact is related to an Evaluation on DevInfo conducted by HQ, which enabled the transformation of the software into a useful tool for partner countries.

development thrust in how regions and districts can collate and analyze performance data. This process is being repeated in 2006, with an emphasis on how local-level performance affects the achievement of the MDG targets.[81]

Missed Opportunities

It should be noted, however, that active support for database management at the local and national levels is not yet translated into the development of a national M&E system, backed by policies. M&E is still rather fragmented and dominated at the national level by sector-specific monitoring and the tracking of PRSP and MDG-related progress through annual monitoring exercises.

The panel observed a vibrant evaluation grouping, both among the UN agencies (UNAIDS, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, World Bank among others) and within the bilateral agencies (DfiD, in particular). While these are in constant dialogue around critical issues on evaluation capacity in government, the opportunity to examine evaluative practices among the development partners themselves does not appear to have been actively pursued.

UNICEF has had a long tradition in Ghana, of supporting critical research, on the status of children and women; on the impacts of structural adjustment on women and children; and lately, was among the leaders in raising issues within the multi-donor budget support group, around the implications of this funding modality on vulnerable groups, especially rural women, children and the urban poor.[82] This critical voice is not yet being transformed into a systematic support for institutionalized research of an evaluative nature under the current discourses of harmonization, simplification and active monitoring.[83]

The panel also observed that there has been no capacity building for consultants and country evaluation associations. This has been due in part to the absence of a substantive M&E officer for many years, as well as weaknesses/fragmentation in the local evaluation network. The Regional M&E office has been developing ambitious plans to engage a wide range of institutions in the sub-region in the development of evaluation awareness, in supporting evaluation associations (where they exist)[84], and encouraging UNICEF staff to share their experiences within regional and international conferences on evaluation

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[81] This priority was established at a meeting convened by the leadership of the three regions with UNICEF and other development partners in late April 2006.

[82] Observations noted during interviews.

[83] Some interview respondents among the multi-donor budget support group noted that independent research institutions are not yet participating in the type of critical reflections required to engage the new funding modalities. Much of the monitoring of the MDBS is still conducted within government and in relation to its funding partners.

[84] The Regional M&E officer is one of the principal participants providing technical assistance towards the staging of the African Evaluation Association (Afrea) conference in Niamey, Niger in 2007.

Recommendations on Evaluation Capacity Development

The task of evaluation capacity building, at the policy level, within government, Parliament and among independent research and civil society institutions is not a simple one, nor should it be the role of UNICEF alone. It is recommended that:

1. UNICEF continue to raise the issue of evaluation capacity development within the multi-donor budget group, and share its experiences of approaches elsewhere, notably in East and Southern Africa, where major success has been achieved in mobilizing and working through country and regional level evaluation associations.

2. Support the convening of independent institutions to reflect upon the critical issues of vulnerability and rights of children and women in the context of new modalities for aid delivery.

3. Strengthen institutions responsible for oversight on the rights of children, such as the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children (MOWAC) and leading civil society organizations to demand accountability for policies, programmes and budgets affecting children, and to undertake evaluations of same.

4. Continue its pioneering role in building capacity for decentralizing monitoring and evaluation to levels where development effectiveness is manifested (at the district and regional levels), where UNICEF is most active.

Examples and Comments

Changing Aid Architecture and Implications for Evaluation

The international emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Reduction Strategies and harmonised donor practices has led to changes in the environment for development cooperation. In conjunction with these changes, there has been a change in aid modalities with many development partners moving from project to programmatic support.

In Ghana, UNICEF has had to rethink its position within this changing landscape and much of its work in health and education now takes place within the broader framework of sector-wide approaches. With the development of multi-donor budget support in Ghana, UNICEF has also decided to become involved as an observer of the process, positioning itself as an advocate for the rights dimensions of development.

These changes have implications for evaluation. Many organizations, including UNICEF, employ Monitoring and Evaluation Officers, but these tend to focus on monitoring (with the strong international emphasis on the achievements of targets), and they may be able to devote very little time to evaluation. This is certainly the case with UNICEF Monitoring and Evaluation Officers at both country and regional level. Evaluation can be squeezed out by an almost exclusive focus on monitoring and indeed, within key partnerships such as the multi-donor budget support group, the voice for independent evaluation is weak.

The changes also provide opportunities, and UNICEF is well placed to take advantage of these. UNICEF is often involved in strong partnerships at local levels combined with multi-partner arrangements at national level. These provide new opportunities for ensuring that evaluative evidence from different levels feeds into high level policy dialogue. To some extent, this has already begun to happen, but the challenge will be to ensure that UNICEF is able to advocate within the multi-donor budget support group for strategic evaluations that address issues related to UNICEF's mandate.

Accelerated Child Survival and Development

When the health sector partners in Ghana reflected on the results from the Demographic and Health Survey (2003), they noted that the trend for child mortality in Upper East Region was different from that in other parts of the country. Child mortality continued to fall in the Upper East Region whereas there was stagnation elsewhere. This led to a decision to evaluate the interventions supported by UNICEF and other partners in the Upper East Region.

It is encouraging to see the active use of monitoring data to pose evaluation questions. It is also significant that the demand for an evaluation at the country level arose within the context of a health sector review as this created the expectation that the results would be presented back to this forum in a way that could promote learning across the sector.

There can be a tension between attributing results to an individual agency and presenting results in a way that is acceptable to all the partners involved. The evaluation reflected some of these tensions in relation to the relative contributions made by UNICEF and other partners. However, the report was ultimately accepted by the sector review and there was an adoption in principle of country-wide scale up of Accelerated Child Survival and Development interventions (including by other partners and Government's own health services).

The final report was published as a UNICEF document and it appears that UNICEF was responsible for its dissemination. There is a danger that this could undermine the ownership of the process (a process in which the Ministry was actively involved).

UNICEF could give consideration to developing two products from an evaluation: first, the official report, which is produced by government and fully acknowledges the role of different partners and secondly, a briefer internal document for organisational learning and public relations which is more focused on the role of UNICEF.

This evaluation is a good example of how interventions by UNICEF at a local level have been evaluated in a way that can lead to a nation-wide impact. It also showed how the participation by Government's own Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit enabled some learning within the sector.

Partnerships and Implications for Evaluation Function

UNICEF's culture places a strong emphasis on working with and through partners. Its range of partners includes other UN agencies, government at national and local level, non-governmental organisations and other development partners. This emphasis on partnership is often reflected in the way that evaluations are carried out.

Partnership, and how it is conceived, can influence the design and implementation of evaluations. The involvement of key partners can help build ownership and can lead to more effective implementation of evaluation recommendations.

Within UNICEF, the balance between independence and the involvement of stakeholders is often perceived as a trade-off. The Review Panel would argue that the relationship between independence and the involvement of stakeholders does not need to be seen as a trade-off. Appropriate involvement of partner organizations within the governance arrangements for an evaluation can lead to ownership (e.g. an appropriate evaluation function within government having overall responsibility for management of the evaluation with other partners involved in a Steering Committee). A strong governance arrangement for the evaluation can also safeguard independence of the evaluation ensuring that a critical distance is created from those directly involved in the implementation of the programme. If the implementation of the evaluation is led by an independent team leader who has full responsibility for the evaluation report then this should help ensure that independence is maintained even if stakeholders are also involved in the evaluation process.

In managing evaluations the principle of independence should be safeguarded while still finding appropriate ways for involvement of stakeholders and promoting local ownership.

Capacity Development in Evaluation

In Ghana, UNICEF is involved in building evaluation capacity in a number of different ways. A major approach to capacity development is through participation in individual evaluative activities supported by UNICEF. This can allow less experienced UNICEF staff, local partners and local consultants to "learn by doing". The success of this as a strategy for capacity development is dependent on the approach being consciously designed and adequately supported. If mentoring is to be a significant aspect of an evaluation, it is important that this is explicitly stated, and that an experienced team leader is employed to ensure that the evaluation is designed and implemented in a way that facilitates mentoring.

Another important aspect of capacity development in evaluation is through the strengthening and use of the evaluation functions within government partners. A number of examples were seen in Ghana including the Accelerated Child Survival and Development Evaluation where the appropriate unit in the Ministry of Health (the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit) played a leadership role in carrying it out. This approach helps ensure appropriate governance structures for the evaluation whilst promoting government ownership and strengthening evaluation capacity.

In the West Africa region, UNICEF is committed to the use of local capacity in evaluations, but the availability of qualified evaluators is variable throughout the region. One way of building the capacity of evaluators is through the support of evaluation associations; UNICEF's participation in this type of activity within the region is constrained by few active associations at the national level.

Another way of building capacity at local level is to direct support to independent institutions, such as research centres and universities, which can support evaluation activities and to encourage these to work in collaboration with government institutions which have evaluation mandates. This option is being promoted by some partners, notably DfiD, within the multi-donor budget support framework.

In addition to the need for capacity development in partner organisations, there is also a need for capacity development within UNICEF. This would include raising awareness among management staff so that they can promote a culture of evaluation and skills development with a range of staff to help them manage evaluations more effectively. The Regional Office can help support this internal capacity development but, even with a full-time evaluation officer, the support that could be given across twenty-four countries is limited. Another option would be to focus on capacity development among all the UN partners at country level and to pool resources to achieve this.

Ghana Guinea Worm Eradication Programme

Ghana's Guinea Worm Eradication Programme has made little progress in reducing the incidence of the disease over the last ten years. In 2005 it was agreed that an evaluation should be carried out to make recommendations to accelerate the work of the Programme.

The evaluation included the full range of national and international partners that are actively involved in the Ghana Guinea Worm Eradication Programme: World Health Organisation, UNICEF, Carter Foundation, Red Cross, Ghana Health Service, Community Water and Sanitation Agency, and the Ministry of Local Government.

The seasonal timing of the evaluation was useful as it allowed corrective action before the transmission season. However, the broader picture should also be considered. It had been 10 years since the last external review, and this had been a period of limited progress. *It might have been useful to have had an external review at an earlier point in the programme.*

Some attempt was made to introduce independence into the evaluation process by including external independent consultants and senior staff from the participating organizations. However, some staff who were actively involved in the programme were also on the evaluation team. This compromised independence to some degree.

In general, the exercise was more of a programme review than an evaluation of key strategic choices, and it involved limited critique of the roles of the major partners. However, it made a series of recommendations for adaptation of the programme and also some policy recommendations. The findings from the evaluation were considered by the Programme's coordinating committee and appropriate actions were identified and agreed.

In the evaluation report, learning from the experience of other countries is not raised explicitly, even though UNICEF has had successful experience in eradicating guinea worm in other locations. Cross-country learning across the region may have been facilitated by participation of a UNICEF team member who came from the Abidjan Regional Office. *The Ghana experience with guinea worm eradication should also be fed into UNICEF's knowledge base for greater learning across the agency.*

The evaluation is an example of UNICEF working with other partners to identify barriers to programme implementation and to promote learning within the partnership. The evaluation results offer opportunities for UNICEF to expand its learning in a key area.