

management response to the professional peer review of the unrwa evaluation function

general response

1. UNRWA would like to thank the panel for its comprehensive overview and sound analysis of the **Agency's** evaluation function well as with concrete recommendations on how to move forward. The peer review has provided a very good opportunity for UNRWA to reflect on the progress achieved towards the establishment of the evaluation function and to provide guidance from examples across the UN system on how evaluation functions can be strengthened.
2. UNRWA appreciates the need to formalize systems around the evaluation function including the update on the evaluation policy, a systematic involvement of the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) during strategy, programme, project and emergency intervention design, a more formalized system for quality assurance and a transparent system for recommendation follow up.
3. While UNRWA is in a very difficult financial situation, the Agency recognizes the value added by the evaluation function and its contribution to improve the results of programme, project and emergency appeal delivery. The contribution to both the accountability of programming as well as the contribution to learning is recognized. UNRWA is ready to further strengthen the function to improve results and to identify improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of UNRWA programming. UNRWA will revisit the core resources made available to the evaluation function.
4. UNRWA management is committed to further develop the evaluation culture in the Agency and has already taken steps to give the completed evaluations a higher profile. When possible, UNRWA is committed to make the evaluations publicly available and to provide a forum for discussion for completed evaluations to further enhance use of evaluations.
5. In line with the improvement of the evaluation culture measures will be taken to enhance the evaluability of projects, programmes and emergency interventions by making the development of a theory of change as well as the establishment of clear baselines and targets for the objectives of interventions a standard procedure.

responses to the specific recommendations

To the Department of Internal Oversight Services:

| Recommendation | Management Response (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): | Action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing |
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| <p>Recommendation 1: Normative framework:</p> <p>a. Turn the evaluation architecture into a comprehensive evaluation policy, which should be approved by the Commissioner-General as an organization-wide policy and organization directive.</p> <p>b. The policy should build on the current draft architecture document and clearly spell out the definition and purpose of evaluation, key responsibilities of all key stakeholders, guiding principles for evaluations, clear definition of corporate and decentralized evaluations, managing the process, planning and criteria for the selection of evaluations, what to evaluate, necessary resources, and ensuring use/dissemination of evaluations.</p> <p>c. Clarify the role of DIOS with regard to quality support (helpdesk-function).</p> <p>d. As a principle, all evaluation reports should be public. If the quality of a report does not meet minimal standards, it should be made clear (e.g. disclaimer).</p> <p>e. Selected evaluation results should be translated into Arabic (e.g. synopsis).</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>DIOS is committed to improve the Normative Framework of the evaluation function. The evaluation architecture will be turned into an evaluation policy. DIOS will explore opportunities to turn this into a separate Organizational Directive. It will clearly spell out definitions and purpose, key responsibilities of all stakeholders and clarify the role for quality assurance. (March 2016)</p> <p>All evaluation reports will be public, unless there are compelling reasons not to disclose the report (eg the quality does not meet minimal standards or the information is no longer up to date). Improvements were made to the website and, when possible, evaluation reports will be available on the website. DIOS will seek resources to make a synopsis available in Arabic. (February 2016)</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 2: <i>Central evaluation capacity/competences:</i></p> <p>Strengthen the central evaluation capacity. Possible scenarios are: <u>For immediate implementation:</u></p> <p>a. Consider assigning, on a rotational basis, internal audit staff to the Evaluation Division to participate in performance evaluations/audits;</p> <p>b. Assign full-time assistance to administrative and logistical work of the Evaluation Division, in order to free the evaluation professionals to focus on core tasks;</p> <p>c. Consider establishing at least one junior area staff position to assist with research, website management, communications activities and logistics.</p> <p>d. Simplify processes by standardization.¹</p> | <p>Partially Accept</p> | <p>DIOS will seek to establish the positions, but this will depend on the funding situation of UNRWA. A proposal will be submitted to the Department of Human Resources (April 2016). DIOS has revisited the administrative support arrangements and Evaluation has access to an administrative support staff member on a half-time basis.</p> <p>Procedures will be standardized. (March</p> |

¹ Example: prepare a concise briefing package for external evaluators including Agency information, code of conduct, travel/visa requirements, etc. in order to reduce time required to brief consultants.

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| <p><u>For mid-term consideration:</u></p> <p>e. Prepare a project proposal – a package – to “Strengthening the evaluation function in UNRWA” to be submitted to donors (to enhance the capacity to manage central evaluations, to enhance the capacity to provide quality assurance to decentralized evaluations, to improve communications products; capacity building etc.);</p> <p>f. A project proposal could also include the following elements:</p> <p>i. Ask donors for seconding evaluation experts and/or JPOs to DIOS/ED;</p> <p>ii. Funding for outsourcing part of the quality assurance work for decentralized evaluations to evaluation experts who are familiar with UNRWA and the region;</p> <p>iii. Explore possibilities to engage UNVs or similar types of volunteer schemes;</p> <p>g. Reach out to academia and develop a standing internship programme with universities offering degrees in evaluation or relevant subject matter areas; this could include also regional universities;</p> <p>h. Ensure that the annual evaluation report contains the quality assessment results, a synthesis on evaluations undertaken, recommendation tracking and data regarding the implementation of the evaluation policy;</p> <p>i. Establish a community of practice of UNRWA “evaluators” and organize regular capacity building activities, web discussions, video conferences etc. to support this CoP.</p> | | <p>2016)</p> <p>DIOS will prepare a project proposal to “strengthen the evaluation function in UNRWA” taking into account the concrete suggestions made by the Peer review and will seek to include it in the workplan of the Department of External Relations. (April 2016)</p> <p>DIOS will reach out to Academia, including from universities in the region, to establish an internship programme (December 2016)</p> <p>The annual report will be modified according to the recommendation for the 2015 Annual report.</p> <p>The community of practice is established, activities will be organized depending on available resources (staff and funding).</p> |
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| <p>Recommendation 3: <i>Decentralized evaluation capacity / competences:</i></p> <p>Strengthen the decentralized evaluation capacity. Possible avenues are:</p> <p>a. Confirm the responsibilities of the field offices and therein the Programme Support Offices (PSOs) for decentralized evaluations;</p> <p>b. Ensure the capabilities of the Programme Support Offices' to manage decentralized evaluations;</p> <p>c. As part of major emergency appeals include funding for temporary evaluation capacities to be located in the Programme Support Offices;</p> <p>d. Identify existing in-house evaluation competences among area staff with a view to establish a community of practices to provide support across field offices;</p> <p>e. M&E officers to participate in existing free learning opportunities (e.g. UNEG evaluation webinars);</p> <p>f. Establish a pool of external evaluators with a strong track-record working in the region.</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>DIOS will seek to confirm the responsibilities with regard to evaluations within the Field Offices and Headquarters departments for evaluation. (March 2016)</p> <p>A Mini IPDET course has been conducted for the decentralized evaluation function to strengthen their capacity. The evaluation function in DIOS will continuously follow up with the decentralized function and provide support where the resources allow.</p> <p>DIOS will follow up with the emergency programme management to seek inclusion of an evaluation capacity in the emergency appeal. (December 2016)</p> <p>The community of practice has been established support and support is provided according to existing available resources. (Implemented)</p> <p>DIOS will share all upcoming free learning opportunities with the community of practice. (Implemented)</p> <p>Evaluators who have performed well will be retained in a roster. The roster will be made available to the community of practice. (July 2016)</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 4: <i>Quality assurance:</i></p> <p>a. Conduct an annual or biennial quality assessment of all central and decentralized evaluation reports (central and decentral) so as to identify areas for improvement and increase the overall quality².</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>UNRWA will organize biennial quality assessments of centralized and decentralized evaluations. The results will be presented in the Annual Reports. (December 2016)</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 5: <i>Evaluability:</i></p> <p>a. Use evaluations to develop – where missing – theories of change jointly with project /</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>DIOS is being requested by the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Department, the Gender unit, External</p> |

² Such quality assessments are generally commissioned to external consultants as DIOS should not assess itself. This praxis is adhered to be several UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF, UN-OIOS, etc.)

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| <p>programme managers to promote the use of theories of change also during the planning phase of projects and programmes thereby increase the evaluability of UNRWA activities.</p> | | <p>Relations and Communications departments and other departments and units across UNRWA to assist with the development of theories of change for the respective strategies.</p> <p>DIOS will seek to advocate for an inclusion of theories of change, as well as baselines and targets for objectives at all levels as a standard item in the development of strategies, programmes, projects and emergency appeals.</p> |
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To the Department of Planning:

| Recommendation | Management Response (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): | Action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing |
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| <p>Recommendation 6: <i>Management response tracking system :</i> Set up a transparent management response tracking system for central and decentralized evaluations.</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>The Department of Planning is managing a recommendation tracking system for centralized recommendations from Evaluation and Audit. The system will be expanded to include recommendations from decentralized evaluations. (May 2016)</p> |

To UNRWA senior management:

| Recommendation | Management Response (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): | Action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing |
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| <p>Recommendation 7: <i>Consider options to enhance visibility and profile of the evaluation office:</i></p> <p>a. Strengthen the direct dialogue between the Evaluation Division and donors;</p> <p>b. Establish an internal advisory group on evaluation chaired by the Deputy Commissioner-General in order to strengthen the evaluation function, i.e. to review strategic evaluation reports, discuss lessons learned, identify possible subjects for evaluations, the group should be supported by the chief of the Evaluation Division who would report to the chair of the group; (the advisory group to be included in the evaluation policy);</p> <p>c. Establish a comprehensive evaluation plan including central and decentralized evaluations in order to identify possible synergies and strategic issues;</p> <p>d. Consider setting a target, to be achieved gradually, for funding the overall evaluation function, with particular focus on projects and emergency appeals in line with emerging best practices in the UN system.</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>Management is committed to strengthening relations with donors with regard to evaluations and will advocate to include sessions on completed evaluations on the agenda for the Advisory Commission's Sub Committee.</p> <p>The Executive Office will establish an internal advisory group on evaluation and will appoint an appropriate Chair.</p> <p>The advisory group on evaluation will ensure that the evaluation plan put forward by the Agency will include all central and decentralized evaluations, and cover strategic issues. UNRWA will further study and consider setting a funding target for projects and emergency interventions in line with good practice in the UN system.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 8: <i>Financial resources:</i></p> <p>a. Establish funding arrangements and targets for evaluations in UNRWA in line with the commitments in the policy;</p> <p>b. Ensure all donor-funded projects and emergency projects contain a dedicated line for evaluations;</p> <p>c. For projects and programmes above USD one million establish an evaluation budget in consultation with DIOS during budget</p> | <p>Accept</p> | <p>UNRWA management will support a systematic funding mechanism for evaluation in line with good practice of the UN system and in line with the evaluation policy.</p> <p>UNRWA will further study and discuss with donors dedicated funding lines for evaluations in projects and emergency appeals.</p> <p>UNRWA will consider the adoption of standardized procedures for project and programmes above USD one million in</p> |

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| preparations. | | consultation with DIOS during preparation and include a theory of change and baselines and targets for objectives at all levels. |
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To Donors:

| Recommendation | Management Response (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): | Action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing |
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| <p>Recommendation 9: Consider supporting UNRWA's evaluation function in the near to medium-term future through the provision of extra expertise (e.g. secondments, JPOs, volunteers), funding of key evaluations, and strengthening competencies for evaluations.</p> | n. a. | <p>Discussion on the Peer Review of UNRWA's Evaluation Function reaffirmed Donor recognition of the importance of evaluation towards improving results, provided an indicative validation of the outcome and recommendations of the Peer Review, in its broadest sense, and identified some specific offers of increased resources for the function. There was a constructive suggestion for interested donors to coordinate their funding of UNRWA's support services and operational functions, which will be taken up at subgroup level.</p> |

To the Advisory Commission:

| Recommendation | Management Response (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): | Action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing |
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| <p>Recommendation 10: Make evaluation a standing item on the Sub-committee of the Advisory Commission in addition to the standing item on the DIOS Annual Report. Discuss with UNRWA senior management evaluation recommendation follow-up to ensure better use of evaluation reports.</p> | n. a. | <p>Discussion on the Peer Review of UNRWA's Evaluation Function reaffirmed Donor recognition of the importance of evaluation towards improving results, provided an indicative validation of the outcome and recommendations of the Peer Review, in its broadest sense, and identified some specific offers of increased resources for the function. There was a constructive suggestion for interested donors to coordinate their funding of UNRWA's support services and operational functions, which will be taken up at subgroup level.</p> |