

**Session 1**

**Evaluation practises**

**United Nations Evaluation Group presentation**

It is a pleasure to be here today and share with you, on behalf of the United Nations Evaluation group, some of our approaches and practices as well as the trends and challenges we face.

Let me start of by saying that this meeting is timely in these particularly challenging days, the humanitarian and development community has to demonstrate more effectiveness in less time and often with fewer resources. This in turn has created an increased demand for evaluative evidence as well as increased expectations of the evaluation functions.

In September 2000, some 150 presidents, prime ministers and other world leaders met at the United Nations to lay out a vision for the future in the Millennium Declaration . Member States agreed on specific, obtainable targets aimed at overcoming hunger and poverty, ending conflict, promoting democracy and the rule of law, protecting our environment and others with a commitment to meet those goals within a specified time-frame.

The UN Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002 was another landmark event. Monterrey led to an historic agreement on increased ODA in support of the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with an emphasis on the halving of extreme poverty by 2015.

The Monterrey Conference also highlighted the need to focus on results and raised the possibility of aid allocations being influenced by them. Perhaps most significantly, Monterrey highlighted important issues involving the aid partnership and stressed the importance of two-way accountability between donors and partners. It raised the debate on whether aid works and in doing so, emphasized the importance of the evaluation function with a central focus on results and conducting transparent evaluations that combine accountability with learning.

**1. The Evaluation Function in the United Nations**

The last few years have brought together a series of changes illustrating the increasingly strong culture of performance and accountability in the United Nations. Consequently the role of the evaluation function has grown in importance and scope as evidenced by the General Assembly Resolution 56/201 which emphasizes the importance of the

monitoring and evaluation of operational activities of the United Nations system in order to enhance their effectiveness and impact further stating that evaluations should be impartial and independent. It reiterates the need to strengthen the capacities of recipient countries to perform effective programme and impact evaluations. It also reiterates the need to strengthen efforts to ensure that lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation exercises are systematically applied.

The Secretary-General's recent reform proposals have provided impetus to redefine the organizations' capacity for monitoring and evaluation for greater accountability and management excellence. In keeping with the emphasis on results and learning there has been wide ranging change in evaluation methodology and practice. Traditionally, monitoring and evaluation focused on assessing inputs and implementation processes. Today, the focus is on assessing the contributions of various factors to a given development outcome, with such factors including outputs, partnerships, policy advice and dialogue, advocacy and brokering/coordination. The main objectives of today's results-oriented monitoring and evaluation are to enhance organizational effectiveness and development effectiveness, to ensure informed decision-making and to support substantive accountability while building capacity.

The United Nations System is currently undergoing a major effort to simplify and harmonize its procedures and the resolution (56/201) also calls upon the funds and programmes to accord these issues high priority and to take concrete steps, in particular in the areas of monitoring and evaluation reporting. The objectives of this process are to minimize transaction costs for programme countries and workloads for the UN agencies. It will increase opportunities for coordinated response and joint programmes and should improve development effectiveness, increase the impact of UN interventions and allow a better tracking of development results.

## **2. Trends and challenges**

For the United Nations the new context demands a move towards greater development impact, measuring progress towards key results and learning from progress or lack thereof to make better decisions and be more accountable. In order to respond to a constantly changing context and higher demands, the United Nations agencies have to share knowledge and experiences with other partners but also need to find ways to work together effectively. Let me highlight a few key changes in the evaluation practices that have been introduced such as partnership development and capacity building; use of evaluative knowledge and results based management.

### **• Encouraging Partnerships and capacity building**

With the introduction of results based management and the focus on development outcomes, one of the major lessons for the United Nations Evaluation Group is that for development to be effective, partners are required to make that dynamic change happen. In this context, global goals and specifically the Millennium Development Goals become

key opportunities since they represent a shared agenda with broad agreement on desirable development outcomes. But this also sets the stage for a shared accountability. Making a difference in the lives of people requires working together – even with abundant resources no single agency can individually influence development effectiveness.

Evaluation partnerships and capacity building are critical for development effectiveness and the responsibility is not one of international bodies alone

At the country level, the cooperation with the civil society is increasing and partnerships with all stakeholders are encouraged. The United Nations agencies are involving partner governments and national institutions, including the civil society, to monitor such progress and assess development impact.

In an effort to strengthen monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in countries, several capacity building initiatives have been developed, at the national and sectoral level, for governments and for civil society.

As an example, the International Development Association (IDEAS) initiative, which will also be presenting at this forum, looks specifically at strengthening the capacity of the South to promote evaluation as part of good governance. Development and evaluation practitioners from multi-lateral and bi-lateral organizations, governments, the private sector, universities and professional groups have joined together to help establish, through an international Interim Steering Committee from developing and transitional economies, a global network of professionals engaged in development evaluation. IDEAS was initiated by UNDP and the World Bank. It is a global network of development practitioners and evaluators committed to capacity building, networking, applying innovative methodological approaches, and sharing knowledge, especially in developing countries and countries in transition. The IDEAS secretariat initially based in South Africa, will serve as an important platform for advocating development evaluation as an essential aspect of transparency and good governance.

The development of partnerships and common initiatives within the UN system also represent a challenge and need to be improved. Collaboration in the form of joint evaluations needs to be further developed. Several experiences have been undertaken, such as the interagency needs assessment on monitoring and evaluation in Afghanistan or the Platform for collaboration on HIV/AIDS on which you will also be hearing more. It is a learning process, the UN agencies are still in the process of identifying the right methods and approaches. Studies or performance reviews have been carried out and often stress the need for more leadership, more time, and a better definition of responsibilities.

- **Evaluative knowledge**

Clearly, the evaluation function has a critical role in promoting knowledge and learning and it is at the heart of any organization's knowledge management strategy. The United Nations agencies are increasingly using evaluative information to improve organizational effectiveness. Most UN agencies evaluation offices are implementing knowledge management strategies and promoting a culture of learning in order to improve performance by providing timely and experiential knowledge. We are refocusing evaluation efforts towards real-time learning, policy –making and practice. We are working towards closing the gap between what is learned through evaluations

and how this is translated into informed action, practice and development effectiveness. One of the ways in which members of the United Nations evaluation group are working to increasingly facilitate the internalization and assimilation of lessons learned and good practices is through e-based discussion and knowledge networks that share not only methodologies and results but promote dialogue.

Another dynamic area of exchange is to use information technologies to provide on-line access to empirical evidence. Wouldn't it be wonderful to envisage a single platform through which empirical evidence could be accessed by all partners.

- **A results-based approach**

Over the last few years terms like “managing for results”, “results based management” and a “culture of performance” have emerged as dominant concerns of the development community. Many United Nations agencies have introduced a results based approach as a response to producing results and getting things done. Results based systems set out clear programme and management goals for an organization and establish indicators to monitor and assess progress in meeting them.

The Secretary-General proposed, in 1997, that the United Nations place greater emphasis on results in its planning, budgeting and reporting and that the General Assembly moves the budget of the United Nations from input accounting to accountability for results. For some of the agencies, such as UNDP the introduction of results based management provided an opportunity to further deepen the internal management reform processes. In this environment UNDP became less of an institution transferring resources to a more focused development agency.

An important consequence of results based management has been to reinforce the value of partnerships. RBM shifts the focus of an organization from outputs – which could feasibly be produced by one organization – to outcomes – which necessarily require the work of many groups working together. By putting the emphasis on outcomes there is a renewed interest to investing in partnerships. Within the United Nations family, this approach is intended to facilitate the formulation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). As part of the work on harmonization and simplification of procedures within the UN system is a proposal of an UNDAF Monitoring and Evaluation Plan to help identify the opportunities for significantly reducing transaction costs and increasing efficiencies in the area of monitoring and evaluation. In practical terms this means Monitoring and Evaluation planning should facilitate coordination and the identification of opportunities of collaboration and joint monitoring and evaluation.

The lessons learned and experience gained, in the introduction of results based methods point to a need for:

- Further internalization of the concepts of results-based management;
- Continuous support and guidance to departments in their management for results;
- and
- Greater utilization of findings for decision-making with respect to policy making and applying the lessons.

In order to face the growing demand for independent and cutting-edge evaluations, the United Nations System has to establish common standards and methodologies and is striving to improve internal communication and knowledge-sharing. The Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation is a major partnership initiative. It serves as a platform for communication and exchange for the UN Agencies.

## **2. Presentation of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation (IAWG)**

Let me present to you the United Nations Evaluation group. While most UN agencies have developed evaluation mechanisms and often have their own evaluation offices, the Inter-Agency Working group on Evaluation IAWG was formed as an informal network in 1984 of UN agencies

Today the UN evaluation Group includes 33 UN agencies. The size and structure of the evaluation function in the agencies varies from a large department to in some cases - half a person! You can imagine that for those smaller evaluation offices the IAWG is particularly useful.

Its objective is to provide a discussion forum on evaluation issues within the UN System organizations and to promote simplification and harmonization of evaluation reporting practices among UN agencies. It is coordinated and hosted by UNDP.

The members and development practitioners of the Evaluation group meet every year to discuss issues of evaluation policy and practices. They share experiences and information on evaluating technical cooperation programmes and projects, including those of strengthening national capacities, increasing their involvement in the evaluation process and developing practical solutions to problems. Technical information is shared with other operative bodies such as the DAC Group on Aid Evaluation.

In addition to the annual meeting, a website was created to provide a platform of communication for all member agencies. The website is intended to allow real-time sharing of information and consensus building. Various forums of discussion have been created and web discussions can be held regularly. It is also a major evaluative information resource as many agencies post their evaluation reports to the site. . The site also provides hyperlinks to all member agencies and in some cases to specific evaluation sites. The Evaluation group also provides tools for the UN evaluation community, such as a consultancy roster for instance.

There is an increased demand for credible evaluations. Today, organizational effectiveness is linked to development effectiveness; and experience and lessons from evaluation have to be relevant, accessible, knowledge driven and in real-time. The emerging challenges and agenda of the day requires all agencies to come together and

build strong partnerships and to place importance on sharing experience and linking evaluations to real time decision making.

The IAWG allows the agencies to work together on issues such as:

- Joint accountability – what are agencies jointly accountable for?
- Independence and transparency of evaluations
- Methodologies and harmonizing approaches;
- Finding opportunities for members to work collectively on the MDGs;
- Evaluation Capacity Development,
- Topics agencies can collectively work on, e.g. globalization, education for all etc.

### **The IAWG working groups**

In order to enhance programmatic work, four thematic groups have been created. Each group is coordinated by a UN agency acting as focal point.

The four working groups are the following:

- The “Norms and Standards” Group, led by UNICEF, is preparing a framework that sets norms and standards for the evaluation function within the United Nations System.
- The “Knowledge and Learning” group led by UNDP, promotes the exchange of knowledge on evaluation practices and encourages the dissemination of new ideas of common interest to all the agencies. The group focuses on encouraging learning through joint evaluations, participation in each other’s evaluations and hosting and exchanging information on the websites.
- The MDG group, led by UNIDO is striving to secure consistent interpretations of and reporting on progress towards the MDGs at the global, corporate and country level. Towards this end, it contributes to the harmonization and standardization of MDG evaluation methods and identifies good practices of interagency cooperation arrangements that would enable system-wide performance reporting.
- The Evaluation Capacity Development group, led by the World Bank, gathers all the information related to the agencies Evaluation Capacity Development activities in different countries and identifies and sets up joint activities in this field.

The Evaluation group is a modest contribution to the improvement of the overall evaluation capacity of the United Nations. The scope of the challenges that lie ahead of the development community require the UN agencies, governments and the civil society to constantly work together. In order to meet these challenges and achieve our common development goals, providing independent and useful evaluation for future effectiveness, cooperation is critical. We need to create systematic dialogue, learn together and set up lasting collaboration mechanisms.

Evaluation is no longer in the dark ages. Monterrey and Johannesburg have underlined its strategic significance in managing results, in tracking development progress and in assessing impact. In turn as evaluators and in particular as the United Nations Evaluation group we have to gear ourselves to respond to this changing context and the growing higher level demands placed on us.

We, in the United Nations Evaluation group have made efforts to transform ourselves but further progress is essential. With the demand for stronger, independent and objective evaluation functions there is an emphasis on developing new relationships which focus on the value-added provided in partnerships rather than the basis of claimed mandates. It raises an opportunity to link evaluations functions of United Nations agencies, donors and NGOs in a powerful substantive network to meet the new challenges.