

Review of the UN-Women Evaluation Policy

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The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the internal review of the evaluation policy as requested by the Executive Board in its Decision 2015/1. The paper also provides a recommendation based on the internal review.

1. Introduction

The evaluation policy of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (UNW/2012/12), which governs the evaluation function of UN-Women, became effective in January 2013. It is aligned with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), and it is tailored specifically to the unique mandate and role of UN-Women to conduct evaluations responsive to gender equality and empowerment of women.

The evaluation policy includes provisions for a peer review to be carried out by the UNEG in 2014 and an external assessment to be carried out by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) or the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2015. The Global Evaluation Advisory Committee (GEAC) reviewed the above-mentioned external assessments, in addition to the assessment of the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), and provided an overall assessment of UN-Women's evaluation function. The overall findings of the three assessments were aligned and complemented one another, concluding that UN-Women's evaluation function is strong. Findings from these three assessments and the overall GEAC assessment were presented by the Chair of GEAC to the UN-Women Executive Board at the First Regular Session in 2015.

After reviewing the GEAC report¹ and UN-Women's management response to the report², the Executive Board requested (Decision 2015/1) UN-Women to lead an internal review of the existing evaluation policy.³

2. Findings of the review of the UN-Women evaluation policy

The evaluation policy provides the normative framework, including guiding principles and standards, as well as roles and responsibility, to ensure UN-Women has a strong central and decentralized evaluation function, while playing a strategic role in UN system coordination on gender-responsive evaluation and national capacity development for gender-responsive evaluations. The following subsections provide a summary of the findings of the relevance and effectiveness of the evaluation policy and its implementation.

¹ UNW/2015/CPR.1

² UNW/2015/CPR.2

³ UN-Women. Decision 2015/1.

2.1 The evaluation policy establishes an evaluation function that is aligned with international norms and standards

UNEG determined the evaluation function was “sound overall” and pointed out that the practices of its staff were aligned with UNEG Norms and Standards and no ethical violations were found.⁴ MOPAN assessed the evaluation function as having “a strong structure, planning systems, and an operational framework geared to promote accountability and learning at both corporate and decentralized levels” and noted that UN-Women has “strong evaluation practices.”⁵ Key Performance Indicator 19 on evaluating results scored amongst the highest overall key performance indicator scores for UN-Women as assessed by MOPAN. The UN-Women evaluation function was ranked by JIU within the highest cluster along with the highest performing corporate evaluation functions of UN entities.⁶

2.2 The evaluation policy establishes an adequate level of independence of the evaluation function given the organization’s current stage of development

In terms of roles and responsibilities regarding the independence of the evaluation function, all assessments concluded that the current level of independence of the UN-Women evaluation function is adequate given UN-Women’s stage of development.⁷ UN-Women was ranked in the second highest category on overall independence by JIU compared with other UN entities.⁸ However, the UNEG Peer Review was of the view that, in time, the evaluation policy should be revised to strengthen its independence even further.

In terms of budgetary allocation, it was found by the JIU assessment that UN-Women was among only three UN entities that have defined norms to guide budget allocation.⁹ Nevertheless, all assessments noted that the budgetary process for the allocation of resources could be further strengthened by improving its independence¹⁰, transparency and predictability.¹¹ The implementation of the request by the Executive Board (2014/3) to establish a separate budget line for evaluation activities in the integrated budget for the biennium 2016-2017 and related recommendations of the GEAC in its report to the Executive Board (UNW/2015/CPR.1) that, “(a) *budget provisions be approved as a separate budget line in the organizational budget framework to be approved by the Executive Board, with the aim of achieving the target of 3% of programme*

⁴ UNEG, 11.

⁵ MOPAN, 23.

⁶ JIU, 20 and Vol II.

⁷ UNEG, 4.

⁸ JIU, Vol II, Annex 4.

⁹ JIU, 35.

¹⁰ JIU, UN-Women maturity matrix.

¹¹ UNEG, 19.

budget; (b) a solution be found to protect the tenure of evaluation staff”¹², are expected to further support the independence of the evaluation function.

2.3 The evaluation policy provides a clear framework for a strong evaluation function

The assessments found that UN-Women’s evaluation policy fostered a strong enabling environment for evaluations. The evaluation policy, corporate evaluation strategy, corporate evaluation plan, and Independent Evaluation Office guidelines were identified by all assessments as constituting a “comprehensive framework” that is “robust, coherent and consistent” with management principles and aligned with UNEG Norms and Standards. Furthermore, the assessments confirmed that the UN-Women corporate evaluation function was rightly supporting policy implementation for the decentralized evaluation function as well as allowing a high level of institutionalization for the implementation of the policy at the decentralized level.¹³ The UN-Women score for enabling environment, as assessed by JIU, was above the overall average with the exception of “results and accountability”, which referred to the overall results-based monitoring framework and system at UN-Women.¹⁴ UNEG identified “a strong level of support for the evaluation function” and the establishment of the GEAC as positive developments.

The three external assessments found that the evaluations managed by UN-Women are credible, and the overall quality was ranked higher than the average as compared with other UN entities, according to JIU.¹⁵ All systems are in place that contribute to a good and credible evaluation function, and the decentralized evaluation system was also found to be highly institutionalized. The unique structure of the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office, with regional evaluation specialists reporting directly to the Independent Evaluation Office was also positively highlighted by both the UNEG and JIU assessments.

The external assessments found use of evaluation for improved performance to be sound overall and making positive contributions to ensuring utility of evaluations.¹⁶ UN-Women systems were ranked by JIU in the second highest category as compared with other UN entities on issues related to the utility of evaluation. Nevertheless, the three assessments also point out room for improvement in the use of evaluation and dissemination of lessons learned¹⁷, and indicate that evaluation products could be better aligned with the Executive Board and management needs requirements.¹⁸

¹² UNW/2015/CPR.1

¹³ JIU 51, 52.

¹⁴ UNEG, 3, 13.

¹⁵ JIU, Vol II, Annex 17.

¹⁶ UNEG, 13&24; JIU, 37; MOPAN, 45.

¹⁷ UNEG, 22; MOPAN, 45; JIU, 58

¹⁸ UNEG, 23.

2.5 The evaluation policy reinforces UN-Women’s coordination role in the UN system with respect to gender-responsive evaluation

The UN-Women evaluation policy includes the role of UN-Women in supporting the evaluation progress of the UN system in relation to implementation of the Chief Executives Board system-wide policy on gender equality and related system-wide action plan. The assessments found that UN-Women has demonstrated leadership in this area, promoting gender-responsive evaluation through coordination efforts within the UN system, including at the country level. JIU recognized the efforts of UN-Women as driving the gender-responsive evaluation agenda through “persistent engagement”¹⁹ and noted the leading role in promoting gender, human rights, and diversity of perspectives in evaluation within the UN system as set out in the policy.

2.6 The evaluation policy inclusion of national evaluation capacity development is reflective of the current global development context

UN-Women was one of 3 UN entities out of 24 assessed by JIU that had incorporated national evaluation capacity development into its evaluation policy and evaluation strategy. The leading role of UN-Women in EvalPartners was highlighted with regards to strengthening national capacities for gender-responsive evaluation, as explicitly set out in the evaluation policy. The JIU assessment and the UNEG Peer Review urged UN-Women to continue its efforts in strengthening national evaluation capacity development²⁰, recognizing that the national level is in need of more gender-responsive evaluation approaches, and thus UN-Women should focus on this level through enhancing capacities of governments.²¹ The evaluation policy inclusion of national evaluation capacity development is also key given the recent General Assembly Resolution on “Capacity building for the evaluation of development activities at the country level” (A/RES/69/237) and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1).

3. Recommendations by the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee

GEAC analyzed the three above-mentioned external assessments and agreed that UN-Women has a strong central evaluation office that performs well against evaluation standards of independence, credibility and utility, and in comparison with other UN organizations. GEAC presented specific recommendations based on these assessments.²²

The recommendations were chiefly focused on the role of UN-Women and, in particular, senior management in recognizing the importance of the evaluation function to enhance the evidence base for its triple mandate, utility of evaluation, independence and allocation of resources. GEAC also recommended that an internal review of the evaluation policy be undertaken in order to inform

¹⁹ JIU, viii.

²⁰ UNEG, 26; JIU, 50.

²¹ UNEG, 26.

any need for revision. This recommendation was endorsed by management²³ and by the Executive Board decision²⁴ at the First Regular Session in February 2015.

In addition, in December 2015 GEAC met to further review the performance of the UN-Women evaluation function in 2015. GEAC²⁵ stated that they were “extremely impressed by IEO [Independent Evaluation Office] accomplishments, which are exceptional,” and “Our views were in line with those of external reviewers, including an updated assessment by UN OIOS [Office of Internal Oversight Services] and the draft UK Multilateral Assessment Report, which both praised the evaluation function for its outstanding standards and performance.”

4. Conclusion

The internal review findings led to the conclusion that UN-Women’s evaluation policy is relevant and effective in its third year of implementation. This internal review of the evaluation policy, the external assessments findings and the recommendations of GEAC all demonstrate that the UN-Women evaluation policy provides a strong normative framework for a robust evaluation function. Based on this, and also taking into consideration that as a general practice in the UN system evaluation policies are revised every five years or more, UN-Women management and the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office recommend that the policy be reviewed again in three to five years as per standard UN practice. UN-Women is seeking approval of the Board to move forward in this direction.

²³ UNW/2015/CPR.2

²⁴ UN-Women, Decision 2015/1.

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