Professional Peer Review of the Evaluation Function at UNEP

Nairobi, April 2012

Background

• Conducted jointly by DAC/UNEG in line with the UNEG Framework for Professional Peer-Reviews of Evaluation Functions in UN Organizations (2011)
• Its approach reflects lessons learned from peer-reviews conducted since 2005 in UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, OIOS, GEF and UNIDO.
• UNEP volunteered to go through the peer-review in 2011.
Purpose

- Assess the evaluation function in UNEP against the UNEG norms and standards.
- Enhance the use of evaluations in the organization
- Improve the evaluation policy and practice, including stronger planning and resourcing of evaluation
- Support the efforts to ensure greater acceptance and integration of evaluations in the performance management system of the organization

Peer-review team

- Margareta de Goys, Director, Evaluation Group, UNIDO (Chair)
- Dominique de Crombrugghe, Special Evaluator for Development Cooperation, MOFA, Belgium
- Oscar A. Garcia, Senior Evaluation Advisor, UNDP, Evaluation Office
- Roland Rodts, evaluation consultant, Advisor to the Peer Panel.
Core question

“Are the agency’s evaluation function and its products independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability purposes?”

Limitations

- Light peer review involved no field visits
- No interviews with key external stakeholders such as governments and NGOs in Partner Countries
- No independent assessment of the technical credibility of evaluations carried out by the Evaluation Office
Main findings 1

- UNEP follows UNEG norms and standards in evaluation and has a well established independent evaluation function.
- Good separation between the planning, monitoring and evaluation functions.
- The evaluation policy was an important step into clarifying roles and responsibilities for the conduct of evaluation in the organization.

Main findings 2

- Systems are in place for the conduct of project evaluations following international standards.
- Evaluation management compliance is part of senior management performance assessment.
- EO contributes to enhancing the practice of evaluation in the UN system.
Main findings 3

- Absence of annual evaluation budget under the control of the evaluation office impedes its ability to choose evaluations subjects at strategic and thematic level.
- Linkage between project evaluations and normative work could be strengthened.

Independence

- Evaluations conducted transparently without interference of management and seen as independent.
- Direct reporting line to the Executive Director
- Evaluation reports are available on the external web sites
- System in place to ensure absence of conflict of interest.
Independence

- Large part of workload taken up by mandatory project evaluations
- Limited scope to undertake strategic or thematic evaluations
- Limited ability of Evaluation Office to decide about work programme
- Access to a segment within the Governing Council / CPR agenda for the head of EO has not been fully put in place.

Credibility

- Evaluations are considered rigorous, objective, innovative and matching international standards.
- Evaluation report quality rated high by the GEF, which coincides with the peer panel’s assessment.
- The professionalism of the staff is good and recognized beyond UNEP.
- Consultants seen as independent and impartial. No case of conflict of interest reported.
- Quality insurance system in place.
Credibility

• Some areas of UNEP’s work have not been sufficiently evaluated (beyond GEF and environment fund)
• Modest resources, limited partner involvement and use of national expertise seen as risks.
• Increasing demand for evaluations raises concerns as to future capacity to deliver quality evaluations

Utility

• Evaluations used for accountability, performance appraisal and learning purposes.
• Compliance with management responses used in performance assessments of Directors.
• The results of evaluations are presented to direct stakeholders and senior management but in a limited manner to staff at large.
Utility
- The link between demonstrative projects and the normative work of the organization has not been clearly established by evaluations.
- The evaluation programme of work does not sufficiently cover the strategic learning needs of the organization.

Utility
- Growing demand and interest for impact evaluations not fulfilled due to limited resources.
- Timeliness of the evaluations may become an issue with increased demand for project evaluations.
Conclusions

• Evaluation function in UNEP has been well established according to UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN
• The evaluations are conducted in a credible and independent way and have contributed to accountability and learning at project level.
• The contribution of evaluation to the strategic orientation of the organization is increasing

Recommendations to Governing Bodies

• Consider opening slot in CPR/GC for evaluation reporting by head of evaluation
• Support strategic level evaluations to feed into policy-making
• Support size and quality of evaluation staff over time, consider upgrade of Head of Evaluation position
• Make EO responsible over an adequate operating budget
Recommendations 2

- Strike an appropriate balance between strategic/thematic evaluations and project evaluation.
- Revise rules for project evaluations under responsibility of EO (threshold, relevance, etc).
- Develop a quality assurance mechanism for decentralized evaluations not conducted by EO.

Recommendations 3

- Secure predictability and adequacy of resources allocated to evaluation
- Establish mechanism to harvest lessons learned from evaluations to feed Knowledge Management
- Streamline the management response and tracking system highlighting the responsibility of management in implementing the recommendations
Recommendations 4

- For larger evaluations, establish a reference group
- Seek balance for use of international and national experts
- Mainstream gender in evaluations (and apply UNEG guidance)

Evaluation policy

- Division of responsibility between line management and evaluation office regarding management response system
- Reporting line to governing bodies
- Create budget allocation for Evaluation office
- Rise threshold for projects with mandatory evaluation to USD 1 million
Norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system

www.uneval.org