

Formal Remarks Indran Naidoo, Director Independent Evaluation Office

Executive Board Second Regular Session 2019

Your Excellency, Ambassador Webson, distinguished members of the Board and colleagues, it is my pleasure to present to you this afternoon the revised UNDP evaluation policy (DP/2019/29) as requested in EB Decision 2019/7 following the independent review of the policy considered by the Executive Board at its last annual session in June 2019.

The revisions to the policy presented to you today, result from a positive collaborative effort between UNDP management and the Independent Evaluation Office in responding to the findings of the independent review which is reflected in the joint management response which accompanied the presentation of the independent review to the Executive Board, document DP/2019/14. At the conclusion of my remarks, Assistant Secretary General Haoliang Xu, will also comment, underscoring our joint commitment in the successful implementation of the revised UNDP evaluation policy moving forward.

As a background to the Board's consideration today, it is worth recalling that this independent review is the third formal review of the UNDP evaluation policy presented to the Executive Board, with the first one conducted in 2010, and the

second in 2014. Each of these reviews have provided opportunities to engage internally in a continuous effort to strengthen the credibility and utility of the UNDP evaluation function and have resulted continuous refinement of the UNDP evaluation policy, in support of evidence-informed policy making. The evaluation policy adopted by the Executive Board in 2016 constitutes an important milestone in the effort to strengthen UNDP evaluation function, notably by consolidating the independence of the function within a defined institutional evaluation architecture.

Overall, the independent review provided a positive assessment of the 2016 evaluation policy and its implementation, while at the same time, recommending opportunities for further improvement. In their report, the policy review team set out 11 recommendations concerning the UNDP evaluation policy principles, evaluation architecture, procedures and quality assurance.

The revised evaluation policy presented for your consideration provide a direct response to 8 out of the 11 recommendations. In line with the joint management response presented at the last session of the Board in June, 2 recommendations were rejected by the IEO and UNDP management, related to the removal of the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee from the UNDP evaluation architecture,

as well as a suggestion to provide greater flexibility in the requirement for all Independent Country Programme evaluations to have a management response. The remaining recommendation did not require policy revisions. In the joint management response to the review provided to you at the annual session, we clarified our response to each recommendation and the actions to be taken. This revised policy has been developed to enable the achievement of the actions promised.

The most significant change proposed in this policy revision is an increase in the percentage of resources reserved for the work of the Independent Evaluation Office within the 1% of combined programmatic resources (core and non-core) allocated to the evaluation function on an annual basis. It is proposed to increase annual resource allocation to the independent evaluation office from 0.2% to 0.3% (paragraph 27 of the revised policy). This revision responds to the policy review findings on the need for concerted action to improve the quality, independence, and impartiality of the decentralized evaluation function.

There have been repeated concerns raised by the Executive Board on the quality assessment of UNDP decentralized evaluations, as a result of quality assessment findings presented in the IEO's annual report every year. While IEO's role with

regards to the decentralization evaluation has been limited to the management of the quality assessment system, UNDP management and IEO have collaborated to improve the quality of decentralized evaluation including through a strengthened quality assessment process for decentralized evaluations, the upgrade of the Evaluation Resource Centre, the conduct of regional workshops and webinars and the issuance of revised evaluation guidelines in 2019.

While continuing such collaborative efforts with UNDP management moving forward, the increase in budget allocation to IEO will enable a significant expansion of IEO oversight of the decentralized evaluation function. Under the proposed revisions to the policy, IEO oversight of the decentralized function will be expanded to (i) the assessment of regional and country offices; (ii) participation in the recruitment of independent evaluators; (iii) assess the quality and utility of evaluations commissioned; (iv) and support capacity building on evaluation. To fulfill this additional role, the IEO will deploy a cadre of IEO evaluation advisers to the regions. Regional IEO staff will report to the IEO Director, yet their proximity will allow closer engagement with regional and country level management. This new arrangement will be similar to the dispersed arrangements for UNDP Audit and Investigations personnel, and consistent with the evaluation practices at other UN agencies. This change will enable more independent oversight, while enabling

UNDP to separate its monitoring and evaluation functions. The expansion of IEO at regional level will also allow us to more meaningfully engage with UNDP country and regional offices in the context of independent country programme evaluations.

Other revisions in the evaluation policy, while having less operational significance, are also very important. The evaluation principles now include explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to universally shared value of equity, justice, gender equality, and respect for diversity. These principles are at the heart of the upcoming National Evaluation Capacities – or NEC – Conference, to be held in Egypt this October. The theme this year is *Evaluation for 2030: Leaving No One Behind*. The NEC conference should expect over 140 governments and 500 plus participants and will include 23 technical training workshops. This shall be an opportunity during the three-day conference for government officials engaged in evaluation and the SDGs, UN representatives and the international evaluation community, to exchange experiences, insights, and lessons learned in strengthening national evaluation systems to support implementation of the Agenda 2030. The NEC Conference has evolved to become the largest evaluation event globally, in terms of government participation with each of the events addressing critical evaluation and development issues.

Finally, the new policy underscores the contribution of UNDP evaluations to system wide accountability and learning, in recognition of new mandates emanating from the QCPR and the Secretary General's UN Development System reforms.

Conclusion

Your Excellency Ambassador Webson, distinguished members of the Board and colleagues. In concluding these remarks, I would like to thank you for your continued interest and support for the work of the IEO, and also my sincere appreciation to the UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner and his management team, for the excellent engagement and collaboration that has further strengthened UNDP and its evaluation policy.