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S U P P O R T

PROCEDURES FOR FEEDBACK AND USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

This document has been prepared in response to Governing Council decision 86/34, I, paragraph 4, which requested the Executive Director to report in 1987 on the development and institutionalization of procedures ensuring feedback and use of lessons learned from evaluations. The document first describes the procedures for feedback and follow-up of the results concerning evaluations of individual projects. Thereafter, a proposed system for analysis and use of general lessons learned is outlined. This system has the following components: collection of reports; analysis of the reports and identification of potential lessons; classification of the lessons; computerization; analysis and synthesis of lessons; feedback of results; and follow-up and use of lessons learned.

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper has been prepared in response to Governing Council decision 86/34, I, paragraph 4, which "notes with special satisfaction the report of the Executive Director on the evaluation activities of the Fund (DP/1986/37), especially as it relates to the comparative results of past evaluations according to the major work-plan categories, including activities relating to women, endorses the continuation of the efforts of the Fund to strengthen the system of internal and independent in-depth evaluations and to improve the utilization of the evaluation results through comparative analysis and feedback of the results into Fund policies and programmes and requests the Executive Director to report to the Governing Council at its thirty-fourth session on the development and institutionalization of procedures ensuring feedback and use of lessons learned from evaluations".
2. A well functioning system of feedback and use of lessons learned from evaluations is necessary in order to maximize the usefulness of evaluations for decision-makers at the country level, in the executing agencies and in UNFPA in the planning and implementation of policies, programmes and projects. Such a system would include (a) collection of reports on the evaluation of UNFPA-supported projects; (b) analysis of the reports and identification of lessons learned; (c) classification of the lessons learned; (d) computer storage of project and evaluation information and the lessons learned; (e) analysis and synthesis of the lessons learned; (f) feedback of the lessons learned to decision-makers in an easily digested format; and (g) ongoing follow-up to ensure that data are used.
3. The feedback mechanism to provide information on an evaluation of a particular project to those involved with that project is already fairly well developed at UNFPA; it is discussed in paragraphs 5 to 8 below. A much more complicated kind of feedback system is required to provide information on the lessons learned in one or more evaluations to UNFPA and executing and implementing agency staff involved in programming and policy development. UNFPA's proposed system for this kind of feedback is discussed in paragraphs 9 to 20.
4. Although certain elements of this system of evaluation feedback existed in UNFPA at the time of the Council request, the Fund was far from having institutionalized a complete system for such feedback and follow-up. As an initial step in the establishment of a functioning and useful system, a series of consultations was conducted during the second half of 1986. On the one hand, the advice of the immediate users of the system - mostly policy, programme, technical and field staff of UNFPA - was sought regarding the kind of evaluation information they needed and how such information could best be presented to them. On the other hand, agencies in the United Nations system as well as bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations were consulted in order to learn from their experience with evaluation information systems. These consultations required more time than anticipated and, therefore, at the time of writing this report, a detailed feedback and follow-up system for UNFPA has not yet been completed. However, as explained below, the principles of the system have been designed and agreed upon, and only certain details remain to be elaborated before it can be put to full use. It is expected that the system will be fully developed by mid-1987.

I. FEEDBACK REGARDING INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

5. As mentioned in document DP/1986/37, there are two kinds of evaluation in UNFPA, namely independent, in-depth evaluations organized by the Evaluation Branch and internal evaluations, which are part of the work plan of a project and which are initiated by the project management. The full monitoring and evaluation system also includes progress reports, tripartite reviews and final reports (see UNFPA guidelines on monitoring and evaluation of UNFPA-supported projects and programmes, (UNFPA/CM/86/63)). Independent evaluations may cover one or more individual projects. In view of the expanding number of internal evaluations (which will eventually cover all projects of more than one year's duration) they increasingly deal with an overall country or intercountry programme or comparisons of substantive aspects. For example, the 1987 work programme of the Evaluation Branch includes evaluations of one country programme (United Republic of Tanzania) and one intercountry programme (World Health Organization (WHO) interregional) as well as several comparative evaluations in the areas of maternal and child health/family planning (MCH/FP), training and population and development. As for internal evaluation, one kind is the brief self-evaluation, for which a short standard form has recently been developed; this form is completed by the project management annually. Other internal evaluation exercises may be initiated by the project management, but undertaken by others, e.g., the executing agency or consultants. For these evaluations a full report is required.

6. The results of evaluations of individual projects, both independent and internal, are immediately fed back to the parties concerned (Government, executing agency and UNFPA) in the form of a report. If the evaluation is more than a self-evaluation, it is required that the evaluation report be written in the country itself and that the results are discussed with the government representatives in a debriefing session. Debriefings are also held at UNFPA headquarters and, occasionally, at the executing agency. Furthermore, discussion of any evaluation report is a required item on the agenda of all tripartite project review meetings. The evaluations are normally timed so that their results are available shortly before such meetings.

7. In the case of independent evaluations, the results are also presented to the UNFPA Policy Committee, which takes a stand on the recommendations. This official position of the Fund is then communicated to the Government and to executing agencies. The implementation of the decisions is followed up by the Evaluation Branch approximately one year after the evaluation. For this purpose inquiries are sent to programme staff at headquarters and to the respective UNFPA Deputy Representative and Senior Adviser on Population (DRSAP). This follow-up procedure, supplemented by a review of new project proposals in the Programme Review and Allocations Committee, reveals that a large number of the recommendations have been used either to revise an ongoing project or in the preparation of a project extension. Recent examples can be found in the MCH/FP project in the Syrian Arab Republic and the population education projects in Burkina Faso and Honduras.

8. In the future, the results of this follow-up will be analysed systematically in order to identify and, as far as possible, eliminate any constraints to the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

II. SYSTEM FOR LESSONS LEARNED

9. The components of the proposed system for feedback and use of lessons learned from evaluations are discussed below. Full implementation of the system will require a considerable amount of evaluation staff time. However, staff resources are already strained, and the regular evaluation work has been cut down to a minimum. In order to handle the work-load of the Evaluation Branch, in particular during the stage of finalizing the system, analysis of past evaluation reports and storage of the accumulated information on the computer, consultants will be employed temporarily. In order to ensure maximum utility of the system, special efforts will be made to make the computerized data base compatible with other data bases in the Fund, such as the existing one for financial information and the planned one for information on project plans and implementation.

A. Collection of reports

10. The proposed system for compilation of lessons learned will be based on the reports of the independent evaluations, the internal evaluation reports and, eventually, also the short-form self-evaluations. A more systematic effort than hitherto has to be made in order to ensure that all internal evaluation reports are made available to the Evaluation Branch. Initially the system will cover reports produced after the analysis of comparative results was made in 1985 (see DP/1986/37). If resources permit, previous independent evaluation reports will also be included.

B. Analysis of the reports and identification of potential lessons

11. Analysis of these evaluation reports is of key importance for the development of a successful information system. This exercise will produce, for each report, a short summary of the results (if not already contained in the report), an assessment of the quality of the evaluation and identification of the conclusions and recommendations that imply a potential lesson. In order to ensure uniformity in the assessment, existing checklists for quality control of internal evaluations (mostly dealing with the completeness of the evaluation) will be developed further. Formats will be designed for the preparation of summaries and criteria devised for the identification of lessons. The analysis will be facilitated in the future when the terms of reference for evaluations will be designed so as to ensure that the reports contain information on each one of a set of issues for each type of project as well as standardized summaries (see para. 16 below).

C. Classification of the lessons

12. A list of issues or categories will be developed for the classification of the lessons identified in the report. This list will be based on the experience gained in the 1985 analysis of comparative results and will include both technical and managerial issues, such as, for example, design of MCH/FP or teacher training in population education. Before finalization the list will be reviewed by the

potential users of the system in order to ensure that it identifies those issues they consider of importance. The list will be developed in such a way that new issues can be added when the implementation of the system indicates that such additions are warranted.

13. In addition to the classification of the various lessons identified, information must also be available for each evaluation report on the title, work-plan category, region, country, executing agency, budget and beginning and end year of the project evaluated, as well as on the date and type of report and the assessment of it. For those reports that cover more than one project, the lessons will be recorded for each one of the projects in order to allow for an analysis by substantive area.

D. Computerization

14. The information collected, analysed and classified will be stored on a computer for easy retrieval of the results by, for example, category of lesson, work-plan category or country. The information stored for each evaluation report will thus include the project title and the other project-specific data noted in paragraph 13 above, the evaluation summary, the date and type of report, the assessment of the evaluation quality and, most important, the various lessons excerpted from the report and classified using the list of issues mentioned in paragraph 12. A micro-computer will be used for this purpose, at least initially. It is expected that existing software, such as, e.g., dBASE III PLUS or PICK, can be used for this system.

E. Analysis and synthesis of lessons

15. A first effort at analysing and synthesizing evaluation results and identifying lessons learned was made in document DP/1986/37. This was a difficult exercise in view of the limited number of evaluations per sector and the lack of comparability of the data. Nevertheless, several lessons, particularly regarding managerial issues, emerged. A longer version of the report was produced and given wide distribution. At the request of some of the users, the Evaluation Branch is now in the process of preparing a checklist of issues identified in the report in order to make the results more easily available to the reader. Furthermore, a compilation of Policy Committee decisions on policy or general programme-related evaluation recommendations is being prepared for distribution within UNFPA.

16. These efforts are, however, insufficient. The computerized data base with evaluation lessons will, when a large number of reports have been entered, provide a better basis for further synthesis and analysis of such lessons. Information on results or lessons can then be requested by Governments, executing agencies or UNFPA staff. The latter are, as a rule, expected to request such information before the preparation and/or appraisal of any new project in a particular area. In this connection, UNFPA's new guidelines for project formulation (UNFPA/19/Rev.3, dated 22 January 1986) and for monitoring and evaluation (see para. 5) both require that special attention be paid to the accumulated evaluation lessons. The

Evaluation Branch will also initiate analyses and will each year select a few major issues for review and reporting to potential users. However, as was pointed out in document DP/1986/37, paragraph 2, there are constraints to generalizations, since projects are implemented in different political, social, economic, cultural and geographic circumstances. In addition, the data base will be used by the Branch to identify gaps in the evaluations' coverage of the issues listed. This information can then be used to improve the terms of reference and quality of future evaluations.

F. Feedback of results

17. In order to ensure the use of the lessons learned it is necessary not only to distribute information to potential users, but also to present the results in such a way that they are easily used. The experience with the report on comparative evaluation results has shown that it is useful but not sufficient to present information in a narrative form. Additional efforts must be made to synthesize the information further for decision-makers who lack the time to search for information on a certain type of project each time it is needed. Therefore, the general reports initiated by the Evaluation Branch (see para. 16 above) will present material in tables and checklists as well as the more detailed information. As the feedback system is further developed and implemented, more information will be collected from potential users in order to adjust the selection of issues for analysis and the presentation of results to their needs.

18. Additional efforts will also be made to ensure that potential users are made aware of the results of evaluations through the inclusion of this item in certain types of training courses. A beginning was made at the October 1986 training course for national programme officers, where one session, including an exercise, was based on the report on comparative results. Headquarters staff will be trained this year in project formulation, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation; an evaluation officer is a member of the training team. Furthermore, the Evaluation Branch intends to organize seminars to discuss lessons learned in certain sectors, in particular in connection with the conclusions of comparative evaluations. The possibility of involving potential users of evaluation results in the actual conduct of some of the independent evaluations will also be explored. Such involvement may increase the understanding of the evaluation process and of the usefulness of the results - both those of the particular evaluation and those of a comparative nature.

G. Follow-up of use of lessons learned

19. For the development or revision of policy and technical guidelines within UNFPA, it is relatively easy to ascertain that the relevant lessons are taken into account. The Evaluation Branch will participate actively in the different stages of policy development. This will, inter alia, include provision of a print-out of lessons in the sector reviewed to the drafter of the guidelines before any final version is presented to the Policy Committee. Furthermore, the Policy Committee will require that this presentation indicates to what extent and how the evaluation lessons have been taken into account before it approves any guidelines.

20. The follow-up of the use of evaluation lessons for the development of new country or intercountry projects and programmes is more difficult. However, there are certain ways of ascertaining that the lessons have been taken into account. For example, future presentations to the Programme Review and Allocations Committee of new proposals, both project and programme, will be required to indicate how evaluation lessons were used, and, if they were not, why. It is also expected that the tripartite review meetings will take into account not only any evaluation reports on that particular project, but also any reports on lessons learned that are relevant for the project under review. The same applies to country reviews of overall programmes.

III. CONCLUSION

21. Efforts have been made to develop a system for the collection, analysis and dissemination of evaluation lessons, which will improve the feedback and use of such lessons. The system is not yet fully developed, but the major principles and components of the system are established and agreed upon. Given the necessary resources the system should be ready for use in mid-1987. After about a year of operation, there should be sufficient information stored in the evaluation data base to make it possible to undertake meaningful analyses of the results. It is expected that the system for dissemination and presentation of the results of such analyses will contribute to improved planning and implementation of UNFPA-supported projects and programmes. It is also expected that, as a by-product, improved design and implementation of evaluations will increase their relevance for policy-making and programming.

