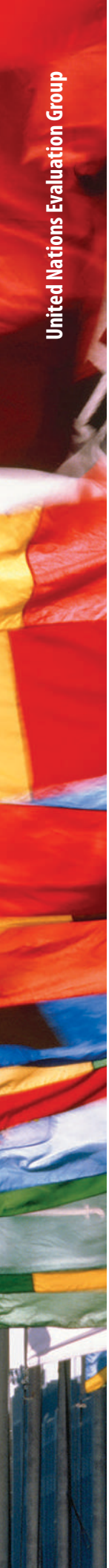
UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

Norms and Standards for Evaluation

UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

Norms and Standards for Evaluation



> As Secretary-General, one of my main roles is to continuously improve the United Nations in order to deliver for the people we serve. That means knowing whether we are achieving what we set out to do, and if not, how to do better. Evaluation is thus critical for promoting accountability and for understanding what we are doing right and what we may be getting wrong. As Member States shape a new sustainable development agenda for the post-2015 period, evaluation will only grow in importance. Evaluation everywhere, and at every level, will play a key role in implementing the new development agenda.
>
> — ***Ban Ki-moon***, *former Secretary-General of the United Nations*

> We need a culture of evaluation, independent and real-time evaluation with full transparency.
>
> — ***António Guterres***, *Secretary-General of the United Nations*

> The role of evaluations is the means by which UN organizations can acquire information and knowledge of how to become more effective, even prove their worth or ensure their assistance is most effective.
>
> — ***Peter Thomson***, *President of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly and Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN*

This publication was developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The analysis and recommendations of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or the United Nations Member States.

This publication is available in six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). Electronic versions are available at: http://www.unevaluation.org/2016-Norms-and-Standards.

Reproduction is authorized provided the source is acknowledged and the content is reproduced without changes.

Suggested citation:
United Nations Evaluation Group (2016). *Norms and Standards for Evaluation.* New York: UNEG.

© 2016, 2017 UNEG

FOREWORD

The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) *Norms and Standards for Evaluation*, adopted in 2005, has served as a landmark document for the United Nations and beyond. For the last ten years, it has been used successfully to strengthen and harmonize evaluation practice and has served as a key reference for evaluators around the globe. Since then, the evolving context, including the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and the increasing demands for accountability and national ownership in evaluation require an updated Norms and Standards document in order to ensure its continued relevance in guiding and further strengthening evaluation practices.

In June 2016, the updated United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) *Norms and Standards for Evaluation* was released. This UNEG foundational document is intended for application for all United Nations evaluations. It sheds lights onto evaluations in the UN system in the era of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Since its release, it has been in high demand among evaluators across the UN system, including those at the country and regional levels. It has also been very well received in the global evaluation community and is available in all six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

We have therefore decided to reprint it for further distribution, hoping it will further strengthen evaluation practices within and beyond the UN system.

Once again, I would like to thank the core group of UNEG members who devoted their knowledge and expertise for this updated 2016 *Norms and Standards for Evaluation*, in particular Masahiro Igarashi (FAO) and Amir Piric (UNESCO), co-Conveners of the UNEG Working Group under which the update was drafted; UNEG heads, the Executive Group, in particular the former chair Marco Segone, Secretariat and members for their contributions to finalizing the text.

Susanne Frueh
Chair, United Nations Evaluation Group
Paris, November 2017

United Nations Evaluation Group

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 5

PREAMBLE 8

DEFINITION OF EVALUATION **10**

GENERAL NORMS FOR EVALUATION **10**

NORM 1 Internationally agreed principles, goals and targets 10

NORM 2 Utility 10

NORM 3 Credibility 10

NORM 4 Independence 11

NORM 5 Impartiality 11

NORM 6 Ethics 11

NORM 7 Transparency 12

NORM 8 Human rights and gender equality 12

NORM 9 National evaluation capacities 12

NORM 10 Professionalism 12

INSTITUTIONAL NORMS FOR EVALUATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM **13**

NORM 11 Enabling environment 13

NORM 12 Evaluation policy 13

NORM 13 Responsibility for the evaluation function 13

NORM 14 Evaluation use and follow-up 14

STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION **15**

STANDARD 1 Institutional Framework **15**

STANDARD 1.1 Institutional framework for evaluation 15

STANDARD 1.2 Evaluation policy 15

STANDARD 1.3 Evaluation plan and reporting 16

STANDARD 1.4 Management response and follow up 17

STANDARD 1.5 Disclosure policy 17

STANDARD 2 Management of the Evaluation Function **18**

STANDARD 2.1 Head of evaluation 18

STANDARD 2.2 Evaluation guidelines 18

STANDARD 2.3 Responsiveness of the evaluation function 19

STANDARD 3 Evaluation Competencies **19**

STANDARD 3.1 Competencies 19

STANDARD 3.2 Ethics 21

STANDARD 4 Conduct of Evaluations **21**

STANDARD 4.1 Timeliness and intentionality 21

STANDARD 4.2 Evaluability assessment 22

STANDARD 4.3 Terms of reference 22

STANDARD 4.4 Evaluation scope and objectives 23

STANDARD 4.5 Methodology 23

STANDARD 4.6 Stakeholder engagement and reference groups 24

STANDARD 4.7 Human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming strategy 24

STANDARD 4.8 Selection and composition of evaluation teams 25

STANDARD 4.9 Evaluation report and products 26

STANDARD 4.10 Recommendations 26

STANDARD 4.11 Communication and dissemination 27

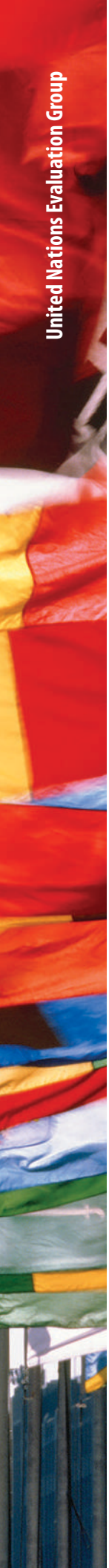
STANDARD 5 Quality **28**

STANDARD 5.1 Quality assurance system 28

STANDARD 5.2 Quality control of the evaluation design 28

STANDARD 5.3 Quality control at the final stage of evaluation 28

ANNEX: RELATION TO OTHER OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS 30



PREAMBLE

The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is an inter-agency professional network that brings together the evaluation units of the United Nations system, including United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and affiliated organizations. UNEG works to support the strengthening and harmonization of evaluation practices. The aim is to ensure that United Nations evaluation functions provide credible and useful evidence to inform and strengthen the work of the United Nations system in pursuit of its goals.

In 2005, UNEG adopted the foundational document, *Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System*. The 2005 *Norms and Standards* sought to facilitate system-wide collaboration on evaluation by ensuring that UNEG members adhered to shared basic principles and applied best practices in managing, conducting and using evaluations.

In 2015, a UNEG working group led work to revise and update the *Norms and Standards*. This work included an extensive consultation process, participatory workshops and several studies and surveys. The updated *Norms and Standards* were discussed and unanimously adopted at the April 2016 UNEG Annual General Meeting in Geneva.

The 2016 *Norms and Standards*, now consolidated into one document, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The ten general norms should be upheld in the conduct of any evaluation; the four institutional norms should be reflected in the management and governance of evaluation functions. The associated standards support the implementation of these normative principles.

The 2016 *Norms and Standards* will serve as the framework for the UNEG evaluation competencies, peer reviews and benchmarking initiatives. UNEG guidance documents provide further details and guidance on implementation of these *Norms and Standards* and on evaluation practice within their framework. In some areas, UNEG working groups are updating or developing new guidance where gaps exist, informed by the practical experience of UNEG members and global good practices.

The 2016 *UNEG Norms and Standards* will be subject to periodic review and updating by UNEG members.

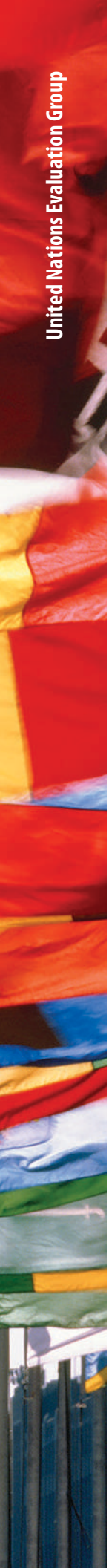
> *"We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities." A/Res/70/1 - 2015*

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development raises the bar for global development. This has profound implications for the evaluation functions of United Nations agencies and for the United Nations evaluation system as a whole. The updated *Norms and*

Standards are forward-looking, providing an aspirational and progressive framework to contribute to the improvement of all United Nations evaluation functions.

The United Nations system consists of a variety of entities with diverse mandates and governance structures. This is reflected in the size, resources and capacities encompassed by UNEG members and influences what is appropriate — or indeed possible — in terms of alignment with the *Norms and Standards* in practice.

Notwithstanding this diversity, to fulfil their common mission of contributing to greater effectiveness for the good of the world's peoples, all UNEG members commit to implementing progressively the norms and standards outlined in this document in order to bring a consistent and harmonized approach to the continual improvement of the United Nations evaluation system over time. UNEG members will continue to undertake reviews in recognition of the opportunities they present for benchmarking and reflection on alignment with the 2016 *Norms and Standards*.



DEFINITION OF EVALUATION

1. An evaluation is an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. It analyses the level of achievement of both expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality using appropriate criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide credible, useful evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations and stakeholders.

2. The purposes of evaluation are to promote accountability and learning. Evaluation aims to understand why — and to what extent — intended and unintended results were achieved and to analyse the implications of the results. Evaluation can inform planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting and can contribute to evidence-based policymaking, development effectiveness and organizational effectiveness.

GENERAL NORMS FOR EVALUATION

NORM 1 Internationally agreed principles, goals and targets

3. Within the United Nations system, it is the responsibility of evaluation managers and evaluators to uphold and promote, in their evaluation practice, the principles and values to which the United Nations is committed. In particular, they should respect, promote and contribute to the goals and targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

NORM 2 Utility

4. In commissioning and conducting an evaluation, there should be a clear intention to use the resulting analysis, conclusions or recommendations to inform decisions and actions. The utility of evaluation is manifest through its use in making relevant and timely contributions to organizational learning, informed decision-making processes and accountability for results. Evaluations could also be used to contribute beyond the organization by generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders.

NORM 3 Credibility

5. Evaluations must be credible. Credibility is grounded on independence, impartiality and a rigorous methodology. Key elements of credibility include transparent evaluation processes, inclusive approaches involving relevant stakeholders and robust quality assurance

systems. Evaluation results (or findings) and recommendations are derived from — or informed by — the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available, objective, reliable and valid data and by accurate quantitative and qualitative analysis of evidence. Credibility requires that evaluations are ethically conducted and managed by evaluators that exhibit professional and cultural competencies.

NORM 4 Independence

6. Independence of evaluation is necessary for credibility, influences the ways in which an evaluation is used and allows evaluators to be impartial and free from undue pressure throughout the evaluation process. The independence of the evaluation function comprises two key aspects — behavioural independence and organizational independence. Behavioural independence entails the ability to evaluate without undue influence by any party. Evaluators must have the full freedom to conduct their evaluative work impartially, without the risk of negative effects on their career development, and must be able to freely express their assessment. The independence of the evaluation function underpins the free access to information that evaluators should have on the evaluation subject.

7. Organizational independence requires that the central evaluation function is positioned independently from management functions, carries the responsibility of setting the evaluation agenda and is provided with adequate resources to conduct its work. Organizational independence also necessitates that evaluation managers have full discretion to directly submit evaluation reports to the appropriate level of decision-making and that they should report directly to an organization's governing body and/or the executive head. Independence is vested in the Evaluation Head to directly commission, produce, publish and disseminate duly quality-assured evaluation reports in the public domain without undue influence by any party.

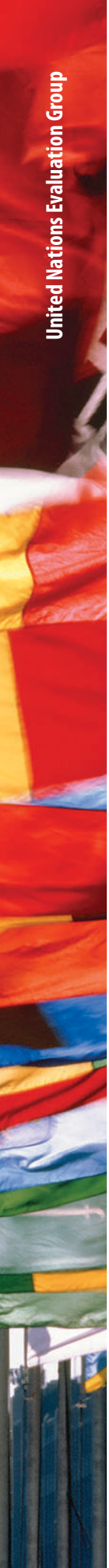
NORM 5 Impartiality

8. The key elements of impartiality are objectivity, professional integrity and absence of bias. The requirement for impartiality exists at all stages of the evaluation process, including planning an evaluation, formulating the mandate and scope, selecting the evaluation team, providing access to stakeholders, conducting the evaluation and formulating findings and recommendations.

9. Evaluators need to be impartial, implying that evaluation team members must not have been (or expect to be in the near future) directly responsible for the policy setting, design or management of the evaluation subject.

NORM 6 Ethics

10. Evaluation must be conducted with the highest standards of integrity and respect for the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environment; for human rights and gender equality; and for the 'do no harm' principle for humanitarian assistance. Evaluators must respect the rights of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence,



must ensure that sensitive data is protected and that it cannot be traced to its source and must validate statements made in the report with those who provided the relevant information. Evaluators should obtain informed consent for the use of private information from those who provide it. When evidence of wrongdoing is uncovered, it must be reported discreetly to a competent body (such as the relevant office of audit or investigation).

NORM 7 Transparency

11. Transparency is an essential element of evaluation that establishes trust and builds confidence, enhances stakeholder ownership and increases public accountability. Evaluation products should be publicly accessible.

NORM 8 Human rights and gender equality

12. The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality need to be integrated into all stages of an evaluation. It is the responsibility of evaluators and evaluation managers to ensure that these values are respected, addressed and promoted, underpinning the commitment to the principle of 'no-one left behind'.

NORM 9 National evaluation capacities

13. The effective use of evaluation can make valuable contributions to accountability and learning and thereby justify actions to strengthen national evaluation capacities. In line with General Assembly resolution A/RES/69/237 on building capacity for the evaluation of development activities at the country level, national evaluation capacities should be supported upon the request of Member States.

NORM 10 Professionalism

14. Evaluations should be conducted with professionalism and integrity. Professionalism should contribute towards the credibility of evaluators, evaluation managers and evaluation heads, as well as the evaluation function. Key aspects include access to knowledge; education and training; adherence to ethics and to these norms and standards; utilization of evaluation competencies; and recognition of knowledge, skills and experience. This should be supported by an enabling environment, institutional structures and adequate resources.

INSTITUTIONAL NORMS FOR EVALUATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

NORM 11 Enabling environment

15. Evaluation requires an enabling environment that includes an organizational culture that values evaluation as a basis for accountability, learning and evidence-based decision-making; a firm commitment from organizational leadership to use, publicize and follow up on evaluation outcomes; and recognition of evaluation as a key corporate function for achieving results and public accountability. Creating an enabling environment also entails providing predictable and adequate resources to the evaluation function.

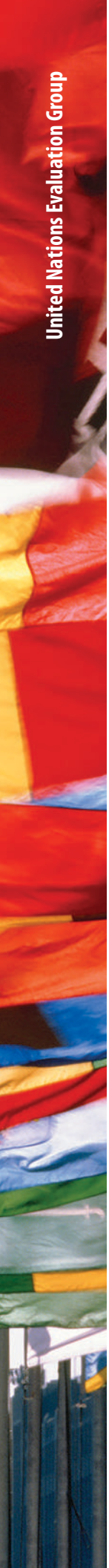
NORM 12 Evaluation policy

16. Every organization should establish an explicit evaluation policy. Taking into account the specificities of the organization's requirements, the evaluation policy should include a clear explanation of the purpose, concepts, rules and use of evaluation within the organization; the institutional framework and roles and responsibilities; measures to safeguard evaluation independence and public accountability; benchmarks for financing the evaluation function that are commensurate with the size and function of the organization; measures to ensure the quality and the use of evaluations and post-evaluation follow-up; a framework for decentralized evaluations, where applicable; and provision for periodic peer review or external assessment. The evaluation policy should be approved by the governing body and/or the executive head to ensure it has a formally recognized status at the highest levels of the organization. References to evaluators in the policy should encompass staff of the evaluation function as well as evaluation consultants.

NORM 13 Responsibility for the evaluation function

17. An organization's governing body and/or its executive head are responsible for ensuring the establishment of a duly independent, competent and adequately resourced evaluation function to serve its governance and management needs. The evaluation budget should be commensurate to the size and function of the organization.

18. The governing body and/or the executive head are responsible for appointing a professionally competent head of evaluation and for fostering an enabling environment that allows the head of evaluation to plan, design, manage and conduct evaluation activities in alignment with the *UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. The governing body and/or the executive head are responsible for ensuring that evaluators, evaluation managers and the head of the evaluation function have the freedom to conduct their work without risking their career development. Management of the human and financial resources allocated to



evaluation should lie with the head of evaluation in order to ensure that the evaluation function is staffed by professionals with evaluation competencies in line with the UNEG Competency Framework.

19. Where a decentralized evaluation function exists, the central evaluation function is responsible for establishing a framework that provides guidance, quality assurance, technical assistance and professionalization support.

NORM 14 Evaluation use and follow-up

20. Organizations should promote evaluation use and follow-up, using an interactive process that involves all stakeholders. Evaluation requires an explicit response by the governing authorities and/or management addressed by its recommendations that clearly states responsibilities and accountabilities. Management should integrate evaluation results and recommendations into its policies and programmes.

21. The implementation of evaluation recommendations should be systematically followed up. A periodic report on the status of the implementation of the evaluation recommendations should be presented to the governing bodies and/or the head of the organization.

STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION

Standard 1: Institutional Framework

STANDARD 1.1 Institutional framework for evaluation

The organization should have an adequate institutional framework for the effective management of its evaluation function.

22. A comprehensive institutional framework for managing the evaluation function and conducting evaluations is crucial to ensure an effective evaluation process.

23. The institutional framework should concretely address the following requirements in order to ensure that:

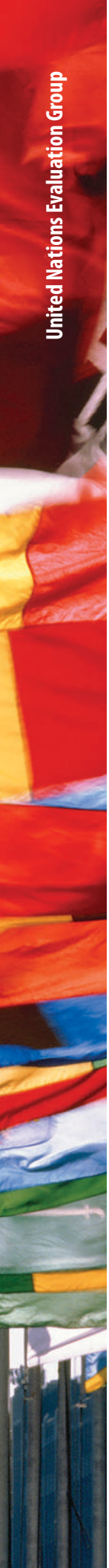
- Institutional and high-level management have an understanding of and support for the evaluation function's key role in contributing to the effectiveness of the organization;
- Evaluation is part of the organization's governance and management functions;
- Evaluations are independent, credible and useful;
- Evaluations make essential contributions to managing for results;
- The evaluation function is independent of other management functions in order to facilitate an independent and impartial evaluation process. The head of evaluation should report directly to the governing body and/or the executive head of the organization;
- There are sufficient and earmarked financial and human resources for evaluation, commensurate with the nature and size of the organization, in order to allow for efficient and effective delivery of services by a competent evaluation function and to enable evaluation capacity strengthening; and
- Partnerships and cooperation on evaluation within the United Nations system and with other relevant institutions are encouraged.

STANDARD 1.2 Evaluation policy

Organizations should establish an evaluation policy that is periodically reviewed and updated in order to support the evaluation function's increased adherence to the *UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation*.

24. The governing body and/or the executive head of the organization should approve an evaluation policy that is in line with both the *UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation* and with the organization's goals and strategies. The evaluation policy should include a clear explanation of the:

- Purpose, concepts, rules and use of evaluation within the organization;
- Institutional framework and roles and responsibilities of evaluation professionals, senior management and programme managers with regard to evaluation;



- Organization's disclosure policy for the dissemination of evaluation results;
- Measures to safeguard evaluation independence and public accountability;
- Benchmarks to ensure that evaluation function resources are commensurate with the size and function of the organization; resources for the evaluation function should allow for the conduct of high-quality evaluation activities to meet organizational needs for learning and accountability;
- Measures to ensure the quality and the use of evaluations in post-evaluation follow-up;
- Framework for decentralized evaluations, where applicable;
- Framework for evaluation capacity development, where applicable; and
- Provisions for peer or external review.

25. In determining the range of funding for evaluation, small organizations will generally need to spend more in relative terms than larger organizations. Factors to be considered when determining the range of funding include the organization's mandate and size; the types of evaluations to be considered; and the role of the evaluation function in institutionalization and support to strengthening decentralized evaluation, national capacities for evaluation and evaluation partnerships. With respect to financial benchmarking, the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2014/6) concluded that organizations should consider a range of funding that is between 0.5 per cent and 3.0 per cent of organizational expenditure.

STANDARD 1.3 Evaluation plan and reporting

Evaluations should have a mechanism to inform the governing body and/or management on the evaluation plan and on the progress made in plan implementation.

26. The evaluation plan should be based on an explicit evaluation policy and/or strategy, prepared with utility and practicality in mind and developed with a clear purpose, scope and intended use for each evaluation (or each cluster of evaluations). In order to ensure maximum utility, plan preparations should include adequate consultations with stakeholders — especially the intended users. The plan should be supported with adequate human and financial resources in order to ensure the quality of evaluations conducted under the framework.

27. There should be a mechanism for the organization's governing body and/or management to review and endorse the evaluation plan.

28. There should also be an appropriate mechanism to inform the governing body and/or management of the progress made in plan implementation.

29. Many organizations need to respond to ad hoc requests for evaluations that were not included in the initial plan (e.g. those requested by funding partners or joint evaluations proposed by other organizations). The evaluation plan should have established, clear guidelines to manage such requests. The guidelines should contain measures to ensure the quality of and financing for such ad hoc evaluations.

STANDARD 1.4 Management response and follow up

The organization should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure that management responds to evaluation recommendations. The mechanisms should outline concrete actions to be undertaken in the management response and in the follow-up to recommendation implementation.

30. The organization's management is responsible for providing a formal management response to each evaluation. The management response provides management's views of the evaluation recommendations, including whether and why management agrees or disagrees with each recommendation. The management response should detail specific actions to implement those recommendations that were agreed to by management. These actions should be concrete, objectively verifiable, time-bound and clear on the responsibilities for implementation.

31. The organization should have an oversight mechanism to ensure that there are management responses to evaluations, that the actions contained in management responses are adequate to substantially address agreed recommendations and that the recommendations are appropriately implemented.

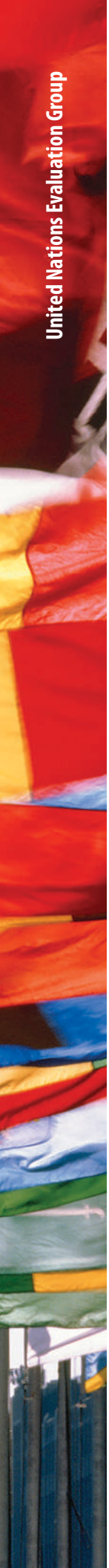
32. The organization should have a mechanism to oversee the implementation of the actions provided in management responses, such as follow-up reports or tracking systems. Ensuring follow-up is the responsibility of the management. Follow-up should be overseen by the governing body or, for those actions to be undertaken by units within the organization, by management itself.

STANDARD 1.5 Disclosure policy

The organization should have an explicit disclosure policy for evaluations. To bolster the organization's public accountability, key evaluation products (including annual reports, evaluation plans, terms of reference, evaluation reports and management responses) should be publicly accessible.

33. A disclosure policy should ensure that the public has easy access to evaluation reports. This requirement is fundamental to fulfilling evaluations' public accountability purpose.

34. Depending on the nature of the evaluated organization's work, some cases may require an exception to the disclosure rule (e.g. when protection of stakeholders' private information is required). In such cases, the disclosure policy should specify the conditions under which an exception can be granted. These conditions should be a priori agreed by the governing body.



Standard 2: Management of the Evaluation Function

STANDARD 2.1 Head of evaluation

The head of evaluation has the primary responsibility for ensuring that *UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation* are upheld, that the evaluation function is fully operational and duly independent, and that evaluation work is conducted according to the highest professional standards.

35. The institutional framework should clearly define the responsibilities of the head of evaluation, who should ensure that:

- An evaluation policy is implemented that adheres to *UNEG Norms and Standards* and applies the latest evaluation practices;
- The governing body/executive head of the organization is adequately informed and advised on the need to review or update the evaluation policy;
- An evaluation plan is appropriately developed and implemented;
- The evaluation budget is efficiently managed;
- Robust and appropriate evaluation methodologies that reflect the highest professional standards are adopted, developed and updated frequently;
- Evaluations are conducted in a timely manner and with a focus on intended use for key stakeholders/users;
- Timely and appropriate communication of evaluation results support organizational learning, including publishing evaluation products on the organization's website;
- An adequate follow-up mechanism on the implementation of actions committed to within the management response is in place and supported; and
- Evaluation findings, lessons and recommendations are distilled and disseminated as appropriate to enhance learning and organizational improvement.

STANDARD 2.2 Evaluation guidelines

The head of evaluation is responsible for ensuring the provision of appropriate evaluation guidelines.

36. The head of evaluation is responsible for ensuring the provision of evaluation guidelines within the organization both for evaluations conducted by the central evaluation function and for decentralized evaluations.

37. Evaluation guidelines should follow the *UNEG Norms and Standards* and incorporate its relevant elements. Although guidelines may need to be prepared for different types of evaluations or for different types of users, the guidelines should generally cover:

- The roles and responsibilities in setting up, managing, conducting, quality controlling, reporting and disseminating evaluations;
- The process of evaluation;
- Stakeholder involvement;
- Guidance on methodologies and quality control; and
- Reporting, dissemination and the promotion of learning.

38. For decentralized evaluations, the guidance should cover overall planning and resourcing.

STANDARD 2.3 Responsiveness of the evaluation function

The head of evaluation should provide global leadership, standard setting and oversight of the evaluation function in order to ensure that it dynamically adapts to new developments and changing internal and external needs.

39. The management of the evaluation function should include:
- Raising awareness and/or building evaluation capacity;
- Facilitating and managing of evaluation networks;
- Designing and implementing evaluation methodologies and systems;
- Ensuring the maintenance of institutional memory through user-friendly mechanisms; and
- Promoting the systematic compilation of lessons.

Standard 3: Evaluation Competencies

40. All those engaged in designing, conducting and managing evaluation activities should aspire to conduct high-quality work guided by professional standards and ethical and moral principles. This includes heads of evaluation offices/units, evaluation office staff, decentralized evaluation staff, evaluation managers and external evaluators.

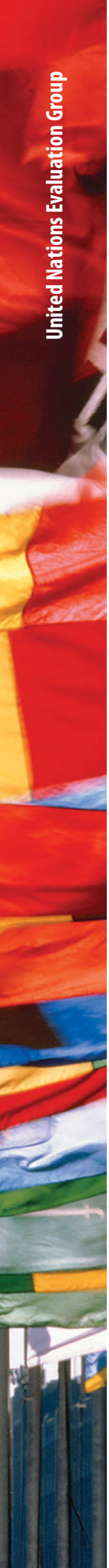
STANDARD 3.1 Competencies

Individuals engaged in designing, conducting and managing evaluation activities should possess the core competencies required for their role in the evaluation process.

41. Evaluation competencies refer to the qualifications, skills, experience, educational background and attributes required to carry out roles and responsibilities within an evaluation process as a means to ensure the credibility and quality of the process.[1]

42. Evaluators, evaluation managers and evaluation commissioners should continually seek to maintain and improve their competencies in order to provide the highest level of performance in producing and using evaluations within evolving institutional, national, regional and global contexts and needs. This may require continuing professional development and capacity-building initiatives.

[1] The *UNEG Evaluation Competencies for the UN System* provides further details on specific evaluation competencies and their use (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1915).



43. Those responsible for the design, conduct and management of evaluation are required to have core competencies related to:

- Knowledge of the United Nations System;
- Knowledge of United Nations principles, values, goals and approaches, including human rights, gender equality, cultural values, the Sustainable Development Goals and results-based management;
- Professional foundations (evaluation norms, standards and ethical guidelines and the relevant organizational evaluation policy); and
- The promotion of an evaluation culture of learning and continuous improvement.

44. Evaluators and staff whose primary responsibility is the management or conduct of an evaluation are required to possess additional professional and technical competencies related to:

- Professional foundations that include reflective practice and the ability to apply evaluation standards and ethics in practice;
- Technical evaluation skills;
- Evaluation management skills;
- Communication and interpersonal skills; and
- The promotion of evidence-based learning through the application of a utilization-focused approach and the engagement of users and beneficiaries.

45. The heads of evaluation offices or units should possess additional competencies beyond those listed above related to:

- Technical and professional skills, including a stronger knowledge base on evaluation to enable providing substantive guidance on global issues and evaluation trends;
- Mastery of evaluation ethics within complex contexts;
- Management skills, including: overseeing coordination; providing supervision; facilitating networking; mentoring and coaching evaluators, promoting a positive work environment and conveying a deeper understanding of how to foster learning; and
- Enhanced communication and interpersonal skills and the ability to promote an organizational learning culture.

46. The commissioners of evaluation should possess competencies related to the following areas:

- Sufficient knowledge of ethics, human rights and gender equality in order to assess the knowledge of evaluators who are being commissioned to undertake an evaluation;
- The ability to take a leadership role in maintaining the integrity of the selection process when engaging evaluators;
- Sufficient technical skills and knowledge to be able to assess the technical quality of a proposal submission; and
- The ability to support the use of evaluations for learning and accountability.

47. Those using evaluations and evaluation evidence also require support. Efforts are required to ensure that evaluation users understand the value of evaluation and to create an environment where evaluations are appropriately and productively used.

STANDARD 3.2 Ethics

All those engaged in designing, conducting and managing evaluations should conform to agreed ethical standards in order to ensure overall credibility and the responsible use of power and resources.

48. Ethical principles for evaluation include obligations on the part of evaluators to behave ethically in terms of:

- **Intentionality:** giving consideration to the utility and necessity of an evaluation at the outset;
- **Conflict of interest:** exercising the commitment to avoid conflicts of interest in all aspects of their work, thereby upholding the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, honesty, integrity and accountability;
- **Interactions with participants:** engaging appropriately and respectfully with participants in evaluation processes, upholding the principles of confidentiality and anonymity and their limitations; dignity and diversity; human rights; gender equality; and the avoidance of harm;
- **Evaluation processes and products:** ensuring accuracy, completeness and reliability; inclusion and non-discrimination; transparency; and fair and balanced reporting that acknowledges different perspectives; and
- **Discovery of wrongdoing:** discreetly reporting the discovery of any apparent misconduct to a competent body. [2]

Standard 4: Conduct of Evaluations

STANDARD 4.1 Timeliness and intentionality

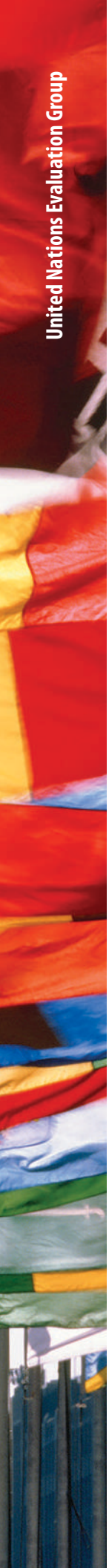
Evaluations should be designed to ensure that they provide timely, valid and reliable information that will be relevant to the subject being assessed and should clearly identify the underlying intentionality.

49. The rationale for conducting an evaluation should be clear from the outset. The evaluation plan, scope and design should be determined with a view to generating the most relevant, useful and timely information that will meet the needs of intended users and will be relevant to decision-making processes.

50. Timeliness is thus an important factor in ensuring evaluation utility.

51. In the context of limited resources, it is important to carefully plan evaluations in order to ensure optimum utility and cost-effectiveness.

[2] The *UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102) and *UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100) provide more details on the ethical principles to be upheld and specific guidance on how to do so.



52. Having a clear intention implies knowing whose decisions (and the type of those decisions) the evaluation intends to influence. This should lead to the identification of relevant evaluation questions, the appropriate scope of evaluation, the design of stakeholder engagement to promote ownership, the appropriate formulation of recommendations, an effective dissemination plan and a successful learning strategy.

STANDARD 4.2 Evaluability assessment

An assessment of evaluability should be undertaken as an initial step to increase the likelihood that an evaluation will provide timely and credible information for decision-making.

53. Ensuring evaluability is a duty of management and those responsible for programme design and results frameworks. For evaluators, the evaluability assessment implies verifying if:

- There is clarity in the intent of the subject to be evaluated;
- Sufficient data are available or collectable at a reasonable cost; and
- There are no major factors that will hinder an impartial evaluation process.

54. If evaluability is not established, the evaluator must take measures to address the problem, such as reconstructing the theory of change, readjusting the evaluation scope or timing or consulting the evaluation commissioner in order to revise the expectations.

55. Evaluability assessment can also promote evaluation readiness among those managers whose activities will be the subject of evaluation.

STANDARD 4.3 Terms of reference

The terms of reference should provide the evaluation purpose, scope, design and plan.

56. The terms of reference should include, inter alia:

- The evaluation context and purpose;
- A description and a clear definition of the subject to be evaluated;
- The scope of evaluation;
- The evaluation objectives with key evaluation questions and/or criteria;
- Evaluation methodology;
- Management arrangements;
- Expected deliverables; and
- The evaluation process and timetable.

57. Changes to the terms of reference during the conduct of the evaluation should be reviewed and, if agreeable, approved by the commissioning party.

58. The clarity of purpose is important in ensuring the intentionality of evaluation. The subject to be evaluated should be described in terms of what it aimed to achieve, how the designers

thought that it would address the identified problem (e.g. theory of change), implementation modalities and any intentional or unintentional changes in implementation. It is useful to provide an appropriate indication of the size and magnitude of the subject to be evaluated.

STANDARD 4.4 Evaluation scope and objectives

Evaluation scope and objectives should follow from the evaluation purpose and should be realistic and achievable in light of resources available and the information that can be collected.

59. The evaluation purpose provides the underlying rationale, why the evaluation will be undertaken and how it will be used. Following from the purpose, the scope and objectives concretely explain what the evaluation is expected to cover and achieve. They should be clear and agreed upon by key stakeholders.

60. The evaluation scope determines the boundaries of the evaluation, tailoring its objectives to the given situation. It should also make the coverage of the evaluation explicit (i.e. the period, phase in implementation, geographical area and the dimensions of stakeholder involvement being examined). The scope should also acknowledge the limits of the evaluation.

61. Objectives should be elaborated into evaluation questions. This allows identifying the questions that need to be investigated in order to achieve the objectives, thereby formulating the methodology to be adopted.

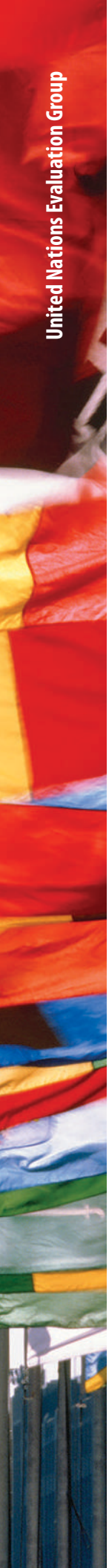
62. The scope and objectives are thus critical references to determining the evaluation methodology and required resources.

STANDARD 4.5 Methodology

Evaluation methodologies must be sufficiently rigorous such that the evaluation responds to the scope and objectives, is designed to answer evaluation questions and leads to a complete, fair and unbiased assessment.

63. Methodologies should be chosen with a clear intent to provide credible answers to the evaluation questions. The methodology should ensure that the information collected is valid, reliable and sufficient to meet the evaluation objectives and that the analysis is logically coherent and complete (and not speculative or opinion-based). Triangulation principles (utilizing multiple sources of data and methods) should be applied in order to validate findings.

64. Methodologies provide what information should be collected, from which source(s) it should be collected, for what purpose it should be collected and how the collected data will be analysed in order to answer the evaluation questions. The methodology should not be confused with the data collection strategy. The methodology must also indicate, in analysing data, what benchmarks will be used in making the assessment for each evaluation criteria or question.



STANDARD 4.6 Stakeholder engagement and reference groups

Inclusive and diverse stakeholder engagement in the planning, design, conduct and follow-up of evaluations is critical to ensure ownership, relevance, credibility and the use of evaluation. Reference groups and other stakeholder engagement mechanisms should be designed for this purpose.

65. Processes should be in place to secure the participation of individuals or parties who may be affected by the evaluation, are able to influence the implementation of recommendations or who would be affected in the long term. Stakeholders should be consulted in the planning, design, conduct and follow-up of evaluations.

66. A variety of mechanisms can be used to consult with a broad range of stakeholders (e.g. consultation meetings on evaluation design, validation workshops on preliminary findings and post-evaluation learning workshops). In addition, different types of stakeholder groups could be formed for their continued engagement (reference groups, learning groups, steering groups and advisory groups).

67. **Reference groups:** Reference groups are composed of core groups of stakeholders of the evaluation subject who can provide different perspectives and knowledge on the subject. The reference groups should be consulted on the evaluation design in order to enhance its relevance; on the preliminary findings to enhance their validity; on the recommendations to enhance their feasibility, acceptability and ownership; and at any point during the evaluation process when needed. The use of reference groups enhances the relevance, quality and credibility of evaluation processes.

68. **Learning groups:** Learning groups could be established with stakeholders to focus on the use of evaluation. Learning groups generally have a smaller role in quality enhancement or validation of findings than reference groups.

69. **Steering groups:** When appropriate, some key stakeholders could be given a stronger role as members of the steering group to ensure better ownership. Steering groups not only advise, but also provide guidance to evaluations.

70. **Advisory groups:** Advisory groups are composed of experts on evaluation or the subject matter. Because group members generally do not have a direct stake in the subject matter to be evaluated, they can provide objective advice to evaluations. Using these groups can enhance the relevance, quality and credibility of evaluation processes through guidance, advice, validation of findings and use of the knowledge.

STANDARD 4.7 Human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming strategy

The evaluation design should include considerations of the extent to which the United Nations system's commitment to the human-rights based approach and gender mainstreaming strategy was incorporated in the design of the evaluation subject.

71. United Nations organizations, guided by the United Nations Charter, have a responsibility and mission to assist Member States to meet their obligations towards the realization of the human rights of those who live within their jurisdiction. Human rights treaties, mechanisms and instruments provide United Nations organizations with a guiding frame of reference and a legal foundation for ethical and moral principles; these vehicles should guide evaluation work. Consideration should also be given to gender equality issues and hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.

72. The evaluation design might also include some process of ethical review of the initial design of the evaluation subject. More specifically, the evaluation terms of reference should:

- Indicate both duty bearers and rights holders (particularly women and other groups subject to discrimination) as primary users of the evaluation and specify how they will be involved in the evaluation process;
- Spell out the relevant human rights and gender equality instruments or policies that will guide evaluation processes;
- Incorporate an assessment of relevant human rights and gender equality aspects through the selection of the evaluation criteria and questions;
- Specify an evaluation approach and methods of data collection and analysis that are human rights-based and gender-responsive;
- Specify that evaluation data should be disaggregated by social criteria (e.g. sex, ethnicity, age, disability, geographic location, income or education);
- Define the level of expertise needed among the evaluation team on human rights and gender equality, define responsibilities in this regard and call for a gender-balanced and culturally diverse team that makes use of national/regional evaluation expertise. [3]

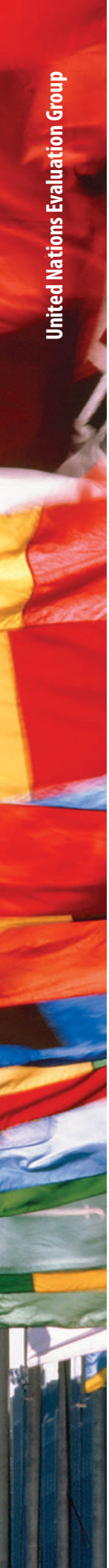
STANDARD 4.8 Selection and composition of evaluation teams

The evaluation team should be selected through an open and transparent process, taking into account the required competencies, diversity in perspectives and accessibility to the local population. The core members of the team should be experienced evaluators.

73. Commensurate with the public accountability role of evaluation, the evaluators or the evaluation teams must be selected through a transparent and competitive process. The core members of the evaluation team must be experienced evaluators with appropriate methodological expertise. When selecting external evaluators, practices that would lead to biases should be avoided, such as having those with a strong professional opinion on the subject matter. When the service of subject-matter experts who may have strong views is required, it is more appropriate to have them in advisory roles and their views should be triangulated.

74. In composing an evaluation team, care should be taken to achieve an appropriate gender balance and geographical diversity so that different perspectives are reflected. Where possible,

[3] See the UNEG guidance and handbook, *Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1616) and *UNEG UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Technical Note and Scorecard* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1452), for more details on how these principles could be integrated into evaluations.



professionals from the countries or regions concerned should be selected in order to achieve better understanding of the national and regional context and perspectives and in order to enhance the acceptability by local populations. When an evaluation requires access to the local population, factors to consider when recruiting local consultants include local language skills, cultural and gender sensitivities, ethnic or tribal affiliation and potential conflicts of interest.

STANDARD 4.9 Evaluation report and products

The final evaluation report should be logically structured and contain evidence-based findings, conclusions and recommendations. The products emanating from evaluations should be designed to the needs of its intended users.

75. The evaluation report should be presented in a way that allows intended readers to access relevant information in the clearest and simplest manner. It should not be overloaded with information that is not directly relevant to the overall analysis. Evaluation readers should be able to understand:

- What was evaluated and why (purpose and scope);
- How the evaluation was designed and conducted (evaluation questions, methodology and limitations);
- What was found and on what evidence base (findings and evidences);
- What was concluded from the findings in relation to main evaluation questions asked, and how such conclusions were drawn (conclusions);
- What was recommended (recommendations); and
- What could be learned from the evaluation if any (lessons learned).

76. Depending on the purpose of evaluation and its intended readers, evaluation reports could take different styles and formats while keeping the above logic and elements. Evaluation managers should pay attention to the design of products emanating from the evaluation to cater to different types of intended readers. For example, the products could be composed of short, summarizing reports for executive decision makers and general readers, complemented by studies containing evidence and analysis for those who wish to take a closer look. Supplementary products, such as briefs, workshop presentations, videos and web articles could be produced for lessons learning purposes or for particular groups of stakeholders.

STANDARD 4.10 Recommendations

Recommendations should be firmly based on evidence and analysis, clear, results-oriented and realistic in terms of implementation.

77. Recommendations should be firmly based on evidence and analysis (not be opinion-based) and should follow from the evaluation findings and conclusions.

78. Recommendations should be formulated with their use in mind. Depending on the subject of the evaluation, recommendations could indicate strategic directions or be more focused on operational matters.

79. Recommendations should be clear on who needs to implement them. In formulating recommendations, it is good practice to consult the likely implementers of the recommendations in order to secure their acceptance and feasibility.

80. Recommendations should not be overly prescriptive. However, it may be helpful to include operational details and proposals for practical actions for implementation in order to enhance the understanding, ownership and commitment of those who will respond.

STANDARD 4.11 Communication and dissemination

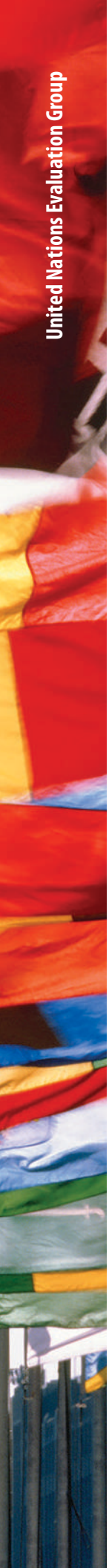
Communication and dissemination are integral and essential parts of evaluations. Evaluation functions should have an effective strategy for communication and dissemination that is focused on enhancing evaluation use.

81. Key evaluation messages should be clearly communicated to relevant stakeholders and to any potential users of the information and knowledge generated. Evaluations should be actively disseminated. Proactive and effective communication and dissemination contribute to the use of evaluation, not only for public accountability purposes but also for knowledge building and sharing, cross-fertilization of lessons learned and the promotion of good practices.

82. Effective evaluation communication informs, explains, involves, makes proposals for change, facilitates participation and engages partnerships. Evaluators should communicate to stakeholders how the evaluation results may affect them as individual entities or groups. Messages should seek to secure productive stakeholder participation in evaluation processes and to maximize the use of evaluation results and recommendations. Messages should be presented in simple and easily understandable formats tailored to the specific needs of different audiences.

83. Messages to communicate include:

- Key findings and recommendations from evaluations;
- Relevance and contribution of evaluations to the effectiveness of the organization and its operations;
- Successes and good practices identified by evaluations, including the uptake of findings and recommendations for improvement;
- The organization's evaluation experience and technical capability;
- Any outstanding evaluation innovations or products; and
- The evaluation progress.



Standard 5: Quality

STANDARD 5.1 Quality assurance system

The head of evaluation should ensure that there is an appropriate quality assurance system.

84. Typically invoked at the design and finalization stages of evaluation, an appropriate quality assurance mechanism looks at both the evaluation process and its products. Depending on the construct of the evaluation function, the mechanism can be operated with internal peer review or external review. In either case, the head of evaluation should ensure the objectivity of the review. Alternatively (or additionally), quality assurance could be provided by an internal or external expert providing guidance and oversight throughout the evaluation process.

STANDARD 5.2 Quality control of the evaluation design

Quality should be controlled during the design stage of evaluation.

85. At the design stage of evaluation, the quality should be controlled[4] by examining whether:
- The terms of reference are clear and contain all the necessary elements;
- The scope and methodology fit within the allocated budget and time;
- The methodology is appropriate to achieving the evaluation's objectives;
- The methodology ensures the collection of robust and triangulated data and lead to credible analysis and findings;
- Evaluation design adequately reflects human rights and gender equality standards;
- The evaluation processes are sufficiently consultative to ensure its relevance and usefulness;
- The evaluation team has an appropriate range of expertise;
- The process of selecting evaluators ensures the recruitment of the best-possible candidates and is devoid of conflicts of interest and other ethical issues.

STANDARD 5.3 Quality control at the final stage of evaluation

Quality should be controlled during the final stage of evaluation.

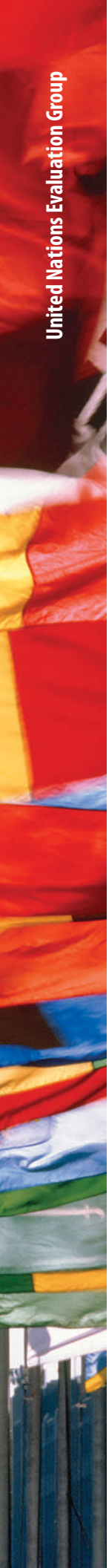
86. Quality should be controlled during the final stage of evaluation[5] by examining whether:
- The evaluation was conducted according to quality-assured methodologies and processes and that divergence from them were appropriately addressed;

[4] The *UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Terms of Reference and Inception Reports* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/608) provides a more detailed checklist to conduct quality control of the evaluation design.

[5] The *UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports* is available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/607; the *UNEG UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Technical Note and Scorecard* is available at: www.unevaluation.org /document/detail/1452.

- Data was collected from sufficient and appropriate sources to ensure credibility;
- The findings are based on valid analyses;
- The findings, conclusions and recommendations are logically coherent;
- Sufficient consultations were undertaken to ensure the evaluation's accuracy, validity, relevance and usefulness;
- The evaluation adequately addressed human rights and gender equality considerations and other relevant United Nations Principles and Standards;[6]
- The recommendations are not impractical or excessively prescriptive, are likely to be accepted and implemented and do not imply negative consequences to subjects outside the scope of the evaluation;
- The report responds to the terms of reference and answers all evaluation questions; and
- The report follows appropriate editorial style and structure.

[6] The *Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations* (available at: www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1616) provides more details to enhance quality through the integration of human rights and gender equality in evaluation processes.



ANNEX: RELATION TO OTHER OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS

A.1. There are other forms of assessment being conducted in the United Nations system. They vary in purpose and level of analysis and may overlap to some extent. Evaluation is to be differentiated from the following:

- **A› Appraisal:** A critical assessment of the potential value of an undertaking before a decision is made to implement it.
- **B› Monitoring:** Management's continuous examination of any progress achieved during the implementation of an undertaking in order to track its compliance with the plan and to take necessary decisions to improve performance.
- **C› Review:** The periodic or ad hoc, often rapid assessment of an undertaking's performance that does not apply the due process of evaluation. Review tends to emphasize operational issues.
- **D› Inspection:** A general examination that seeks to identify vulnerable areas and malfunctions and to propose corrective actions.
- **E› Investigation:** A specific examination of a claim of wrongdoing and the subsequent provision of evidence for possible use in prosecution or disciplinary measures.
- **F› Audit:** An assessment of the adequacy of management controls in order to ensure: the economical and efficient use of resources; the safeguarding of assets; the reliability of financial and other information; the compliance with regulations, rules and established policies; the effectiveness of risk management; and the adequacy of organizational structures, systems and processes.
- **G› Research:** A systematic examination designed to develop or contribute to knowledge.
- **H› Internal management consulting:** Consulting services to help managers implement changes that address organizational and managerial challenges and that improve internal work processes.

A.2. Evaluation is not a decision-making process per se, but rather serves as an input to provide decision makers with knowledge and evidence about performance and good practices. Although evaluation is used to assess undertakings, it should provide value-added for decision-oriented processes to improve present and future activities, projects, programmes, strategies and policies. Thus, evaluation contributes to institutional policymaking, development effectiveness and organizational effectiveness.

UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the UN system including the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and affiliated organizations. UNEG currently has 47 members and seven observers. UNEG aims to promote the independence, credibility and usefulness of the evaluation function and evaluation across the UN system, to advocate for the importance of evaluation for learning, decision-making and accountability, and to support the evaluation community in the UN system and beyond.

United Nations Evaluation Group
220 East 42nd Street, Room 2036
New York, NY 10017, USA
Telephone: +1 (646) 781 4218
Fax: +1 (646) 781 4213
Web Site: www.unevaluation.org

@un_evaluation
www.facebook.com/unevaluation
www.youtube.com/UNEvaluationGroup