



UN-HABITAT EVALUATION BRIEF

Professional Peer Review of the Evaluation Function UN-Habitat

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As a United Nations Programme, the mandate of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is to promote sustainable urbanization. It has a broad mandate derived from the outcome of conferences such as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the global conference of United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1976 and the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, as well as various United Nations General Assembly and Governing Council resolutions. Over the years, UN-Habitat has developed from a small technical agency to a fully-fledged agency with both regional and country level presence.

UN-Habitat's activities are both normative and operational or project-related. Normative activities focus on helping countries implement the Habitat Agenda by enhancing their capacities. Operational activities, on the other hand, put into practice the policies and strategies identified by the normative programmes. At present, UN-Habitat has project cooperation programmes and projects under execution in 75 countries and more than 30 other countries benefit from support from global or regional programmes. In 2007, a Medium-Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) (2008-2013) was approved by the Governing Council resolution 21/2 to sharpen the focus of the work of UN-Habitat and broaden its funding base; strengthen programme alignment and coherence; and apply results-based management to enhance value for money, transparency and accountability.

The MTSIP is implemented in phases that correspond with the biennial work programme cycles. The evaluation function of UN-Habitat is mandated by the

Secretary-General's Bulletin 'Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation' (SGB/2000/8). The monitoring and evaluation of organization-wide work is coordinated and managed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (now Evaluation Unit).

The Unit was created in 1997, following the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recommendation that United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) should establish a mechanism for performance monitoring, evaluation and reporting that is separated from the planning function. To give it independence from the substantive divisions, it was decided to locate the Unit in the Office of the Executive Director and with a mandate to report to the Governing Bodies through the Executive Director. The Unit performs two distinct but complementary functions of managing and coordinating both the monitoring and evaluation functions. The Unit operates according to a *Monitoring and Evaluation Manual* and the *Programme and Project Cycle Management Manual*; and an evaluation policy, aligned to United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards, is under preparation.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the Professional Peer Review was to assess the functioning and quality of the evaluation function of UN-Habitat, and support the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in its efforts to ensure greater acceptance and use of evaluation findings in UN-Habitat's performance management system and to improve planning and resourcing of evaluations. The strong demand for multi-donor evaluations of United Nations organizations and the recognition of the need to standardize evaluation practices were other key factors driving the need for the peer

review. The peer review was conducted by a panel of evaluation experts: Margareta de Goys (chair), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Dominique de Crombrughe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium, Oscar A. Garcia, United Nations Development Programme and Roland Rodts, consultant, between October 2011 and January 2012. It was conducted in line with UNEG's *Framework for Professional Reviews of the Evaluation Function of United Nations Organizations*. The assessment of various issues reviewed focused on three evaluation criteria: Independence of evaluations and evaluation systems, credibility of evaluations, and utility of evaluations. The panel reviewed key documents, including evaluation reports, and engaged in open and constructive dialogue with stakeholders in governing bodies, peers in the evaluation office, and operational management—sharing information, thoughts and ideas. The Panel interviewed staff at UN-Habitat Headquarters and also took part in discussions. However, it was not possible to conduct interviews with external stakeholders such as government and Non-Governmental Organizations cooperation partners, no field visits were undertaken, and the technical credibility of evaluations conducted was not assessed.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

The peer review panel found that evaluation is increasing in importance within UN-Habitat and has been influential in promoting organizational change and the ongoing reform process with increased emphasis on results and accountability is expected to further strengthen its position. Specifically, the panel found that:

Independence of evaluations and evaluation system

- The evaluation function in UN-Habitat is not fully independent. Currently, the evaluation function is imbedded in a unit responsible for both monitoring

and evaluation and this is not in line with United Nations best practices.

The separation of the evaluation function from monitoring was in the process of being achieved but the resource endowment had not yet been decided upon.

- There is an urgent need to finalize and approve UN-Habitat's Evaluation Policy. The absence of an overall evaluation policy can undermine the authority of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and the scope of its work. Currently, the evaluation of most of the operational activities of UN-Habitat is not within the purview of the Unit and undertaken independently by other parts of the organization.
- By having a direct reporting line to the Executive Director, structural independence is ensured and this should be maintained.
- Evaluations are conducted in an independent manner; when necessary, this independence is championed by the leadership of the Chief of the Unit.
- The current evaluation programming process lacks a systemic approach and predictable resources, which is detrimental to ensuring evaluation coverage in line with strategic priorities and learning needs.

Credibility of evaluations

- Evaluation reports were found to be of adequate or good quality and in line with existing benchmarks.
- The evaluation process is adequate and transparent and ensures stakeholder involvement in all stages of the evaluation. The credibility of UN-Habitat's evaluation function is affected by the low scope and coverage of the current evaluation programme. Many projects and areas of strategic interest are excluded.
- The overall competence and professionalism of the Unit is adequate.
- The present and future staffing and funding levels of the evaluation function is a concern as it affects its capacity to implement its mandate in a credible manner. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit's budget in 2011 was approximately USD 1.1 million, with three professional and four national support staff.

Utility of evaluations

- The panel found that the evaluations conducted in UN-Habitat have been useful and had influence and especially at project and programme levels.
- The base of understanding of evaluation and its importance is reasonably strong in UN-Habitat and has been getting stronger in recent years. However, there is still room for improving the evaluation culture in UN-Habitat whereby management and staff fully accept the potential role and utility of evaluations.
- The capacity of the evaluation function to provide credible information for learning and accountability purposes remains a challenge in view of the current weaknesses in results-based management. UN-Habitat is, however, making progress in strengthening its results-based management system and the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit has played an important role in this respect.

4. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UN-Habitat Evaluation Policy aligned to UNEG norms and standards should be finalized and endorsed by the governing bodies. The policy should outline guiding principles, roles, responsibilities and types of evaluations to be conducted.
- Direct reporting lines to the Executive Director should be kept to avoid interference with line management functions of the newly to-be-created Executive Office. A direct reporting should also be established to the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- UN-Habitat should further promote conditions in independent and high-quality evaluation is regarded as a basic instrument for learning and to strengthen accountability to the general public and partners. Specifically, it is recommended that evaluation feed into higher-level policy making and strategic planning.
- The human resource capacity of the Unit should be further strengthened. The panel recommends additional professional staff and the

reinforcement of authority of the Chief of Evaluation Function.

- The Panel also recommends developing proper evaluation consultant rosters, including external reference groups reflecting an adequate balance between international and national experts.
- UN-Habitat management should ensure that the evaluation function has an adequate level of predictable budgetary resources to operate in an independent and credible manner.
- The Evaluation Office needs to do more in terms of volume and coverage. Consideration should be given to identifying criteria for selection of evaluations that ensure good coverage of UN-Habitat's work programme and thematic priorities.
- UN-Habitat should, both in principle and in practice, establish a clear division of responsibility between the evaluation function and the organization's line management regarding the management of the response to evaluation system. Efforts to document and track management response to evaluations, including those managed outside the Unit, should be further strengthened.
- The Unit should establish mechanisms to systematically harvest lessons from existing evaluations. An annual evaluation synthesis report should provide information on main findings and learning stemming out of evaluations. Information on generalized findings and recommendations of evaluation should be discussed at the Senior Management Board and in the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- UN-Habitat should give high priority to address the disconnect between its various results-focused data collection, reporting and monitoring tools. Specifically, a strategy should be prepared to strengthen feedback links between planning, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective learning, performance improvement, decision-making and policy.