AN EVALUATION POLICY

OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

Prepared by the Evaluation and Studies Section (ESS)
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Introduction

The present document outlines the basic policy and principles for OCHA's evaluation function and reflects OCHA management's commitment regarding the use of the evaluation function in OCHA. As such it seeks to articulate what OCHA hopes to achieve from its evaluation function and for what purpose. The policy also responds to A/RES/51/194 paragraph 15b[1] which calls upon the United Nations system to strengthen accountability in the field of humanitarian assistance. An earlier policy statement was contained in OCHA's "2002 – 2005 evaluation framework and strategy" which had outlined the role and scope for evaluation in OCHA. The present policy builds on the previous policy statement and seeks to comply with the "Norms for Evaluation in the UN System" as developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group in April 2005. The evaluation function in OCHA is entrusted to the Evaluation and Studies Unit (ESS) which is located within the Policy, Development and Studies Branch (PDSB).

1. The Role of Evaluation in OCHA

Evaluation[2] has two primary purposes in OCHA. The first is as a learning tool which OCHA and its partners can use towards the end objective of improving the international humanitarian response to disasters and complex emergencies. The second is as a management and accountability tool to measure performance, including the use of resources for the purpose of ensuring accountability in humanitarian action. Evaluation is distinct from needs assessments, management consulting, policy studies, audits, and investigations. An explanation of the relevant terms is attached in Annex 1 to this policy.

The role of evaluation is embedded within a results-based management orientation of the organization. The main function of evaluation in OCHA is as follows:
- o Achieving greater accountability;
- o Contributing to enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and impact of humanitarian coordination;
- o Demonstrating the achievements of results ;
- o Identifying, documenting and applying lessons learned;
- o Promoting institutional learning and knowledge sharing;

2. Types of Evaluations and Evaluation Principles

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[1] Calls upon the United nations system to strengthen accountability in the field of humanitarian assistance, in particular through improved monitoring and evaluation, to ensure that (…) (b) clearer arrangements are made for system-wide evaluation, that lessons learned from evaluation exercises are systematically applied at the operational level and that joint evaluation criteria are developed for humanitarian and disaster relief operations at the planning stage.

[2] Evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, institutional performance. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof…An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into decision-making processes. (UNEG Norms, April 2005)

The evaluation function in OCHA is implemented through the following evaluation activities (see also Annex 2):

- *External evaluations:* these are evaluations undertaken by external consultants and managed by the ESS. Evaluations must be <u>credible, transparent, fair, ethical, impartial and independent</u> and consultants must not have been involved in the design or implementation of the evaluation activity.

- *Real-time evaluations*: these are evaluations undertaken during critical times during an emergency response. While real-time evaluations are expected to fit the above criteria, they are also intended to allow for timely correction of ongoing programmes and activities. The RTE team will be composed of external consultants and OCHA staff. Real-time evaluations should be undertaken in up to two installments: the first "light" segment to be undertaken ideally 60 to 90 days into an emergency response, possibly followed by a second more in-depth segment six months into the response. Whether a second segment is required should be decided upon at the conclusion of the first segment.

- *Reviews:* These are mainly desk or case studies to study a specific policy or thematic aspect in more detail. Reviews are managed and/or undertaken by ESS, relevant OCHA staff and external consultants. Reviews are considered internal and therefore do not necessarily meet the criteria of impartial and independent although they require a similar professional rigor as is expected from external evaluations.

- *Lesson learning reviews (LLR):* These are participatory exercises with a focus on identifying lessons, ideally facilitated by a skilled evaluator with the main purpose of learning from past experience and to incorporate these lessons into future programming and institutional memory. They may be conducted jointly with other actors (e.g. agencies, donors, NGOs, Government, representatives of the affected population).

- *Self evaluations:* These are evaluations planned, undertaken or commissioned by OCHA field offices. They may or may not be undertaken by external evaluators although this is recommended. It is the responsibility of an OCHA field office to organize these as part of the strategic work planning process or 4 months into a new emergency. They should ideally follow the evaluation process outlined in Annex 3 (excluding the formation of a core learning group).

3. Evaluation Rationale and Process

Evaluations must respond to a management need and contribute to improved organizational effectiveness of OCHA or the broader humanitarian system. There must be a clear intent by management to use the findings of all commissioned evaluations. Evaluations must be

chosen and undertaken in a timely manner so they can inform decision-making with relevant and timely information.

An evaluation process (see Annex 3) has to be designed in a way that the purpose, nature and scope of each evaluation are clear to all stakeholders and that recommendations are acted upon.

4. Responsibility for Evaluation and Evaluation Planning

The Evaluation and Studies Section (ESS) of OCHA is responsible for planning and implementing the evaluation function. The unit reports through the chief of the Policy Development and Studies Branch to senior management. A strategic framework is developed every three years to reflect the main strategic vision of the unit and how this will be implemented. This strategic framework also includes a three year tentative evaluation plan which is then translated into annual plans. These annual plans are proposed by the ESS in consultation with OCHA branches and field offices. Such plans seek to reflect corporate management needs and priorities as well as needs expressed by OCHA field offices.

The ESS is entrusted with ensuring that OCHA's evaluations meet professional quality standards and they are carried out in a transparent, professional and independent manner. ESS main role is to manage external evaluations, ensure quality control and professional rigor of evaluations commissioned by the unit, and act as an in-house technical support office of evaluative exercises undertaken by OCHA branches and field offices. The ESS, with the support of senior management, is also responsible for monitoring the use and implementation of evaluation recommendations.

The head of the ESS has full independence to supervise and report on evaluations as well as to track and/or follow-up of management's response resulting from evaluation. In addition, the head of the ESS, in collaboration with senior management, has full discretion, in consultation with management, in submitting directly the evaluation reports for consideration at the appropriate level of decision-making pertaining to the subject of the evaluation.

5. The Role of OCHA Management

Senior management is responsible for ensuring that evaluation contributes to decision making and management. Senior management reviews and approves the annual evaluation plan and commits to ensuring management response to all evaluations requested to be undertaken by the ESS. The annual plan may be modified to reflect changing needs and priorities.

6. The Role of OCHA Branches

Relevant OCHA Branch staff may participate as members of real-time evaluations, reviews or lesson-learning reviews. As participants, they must remain neutral and accept directions

of the evaluation team leader who shall have discretion over the final contents of the report. Normally, they should not have been involved in the day-to-day management of the activity or theme evaluated, unless this is a lesson-learning review.

OCHA Branch staff will also assist with establishing the agenda for evaluation visits and ensure that relevant appointments are made.

Once an evaluation report is available, the relevant OCHA Branch staff shall comment/validate the key findings of the report and provide written comments as appropriate. They will also be responsible for ensuring a response and follow-up to those recommendations that are addressed to their branch.

7. The Role of Field Offices

All field offices should engage in regular lesson learning reviews and/or self-evaluations. At minimum, a mid-year review in June and annual self-evaluation in January must be undertaken by each office to assess performance of the annual workplan[3]. The field office should consult with the ESS on appropriate strategies and terms of reference but is otherwise solely responsible for the quality and use of the self-evaluation and its results.

For an external evaluation, OCHA field offices will ensure local planning and facilitation of the evaluation. This includes providing administrative assistance to the teams, arranging all necessary meetings and field visits, ensuring access to all key persons, and arranging for evaluation briefings and debriefings with key UN staff. The responsibility with the smooth functioning of the evaluation visit in the field rests with the OCHA field office. Once the evaluation report is available, the OCHA field office shall comment/validate the key findings of the report and provide written comments as appropriate. Field offices are also responsible for ensuring a local response, a formal management response and follow-up to those recommendations that are addressed to the field level.

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[3] Guidance for the mid-year review and the annual self-evaluation can be found in OCHA's Planning Guide, 2006.

8. The Role of Core Learning Groups (CLG) and Peer Review Groups

A Core Learning Group (CLG) composed of the main stakeholders of an evaluation can be established in order to increase ownership, transparency and learning effect of evaluations (see also Annex 4).

The CLG participates in meetings convened by the evaluation manager at critical junctures during the evaluation and assists in steering the evaluation process throughout its cycle. The CLG comments on the evaluation design and reviews the draft evaluation reports, the recommendations, the lessons identified and related follow-up Once the report has been finalized, the CLG reviews and clears the *Management Response Matrix as submitted by the responding managers*.

As a further option for ensuring the quality of an evaluation and to make sure that state of the art methodologies are applied, particularly in complex evaluation processes, a Peer Review Group may be set up. Such a group could be constituted of any senior evaluation or policy specialists knowledgeable of the theme or country or type of emergency being evaluated. They would be asked to critically review and validate the method, analysis and conclusions made in the draft evaluation report.

9. The Selection and Role of External Evaluators

External evaluators are selected through a competitive process based on their professional competence and reputation. To the extent possible, evaluators will be selected to reflect gender and regional diversity in the ESS's annual work programme. National or regional evaluators/researchers will also be utilized to the extent possible.

External evaluators are independent and will not have been involved in the design and/or management of the programme/activity evaluated. They are expected to comply with basic professional ethics and standards as outlined in the UNEG Evaluation Standards and submit a report accordingly. Whenever possible, external evaluators shall present the main findings and recommendations at debriefing meetings or workshops and discuss and validate their results with the main stakeholders (e.g. the CLG).

The quality of the evaluation report will be judged according to the UNEG Evaluation Standards and the ALNAP[4] Quality Proforma (www.alnap.org).   All external evaluation reports will also be submitted to ALNAP for inclusion in the regular meta evaluation process that rates the quality of evaluation reports.

OCHA may dispute findings and conclusions of the evaluation team in as far as these are not supported by appropriate evidence. When commenting on evaluation reports, OCHA branches and field offices shall focus on two key points: (1) in OCHA's view, does the report accurately reflect the response evaluated (validation)? If not, is there additional

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[4] ALNAP stands for "Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance" in Humanitarian Action

information that can be offered to the team? and (2) Are there any factual errors and findings that are not clearly supported by evidence (fact checking). Any outstanding disputes and/or disagreements shall be reflected in evaluation reports as a footnote.

10.   Inter-agency, joint or system-wide evaluations

OCHA is committed to promote and participate in any relevant inter-agency, joint or system-wide evaluations and lesson learning initiatives, provided it has the capacity and funds to do so. ESS will work closely with other UN agencies, NGOs, donors, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the ALNAP Network. Participation in these exercises will depend on the capacity of the ESS. System-wide evaluations should be co-financed by all participating agencies and should have a rotating lead managing agency/evaluation unit. Results from these exercises shall be reviewed, endorsed and acted upon by senior management as if the evaluation were undertaken solely by OCHA for all issues concerning OCHA.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator, when commissioning inter-agency, joint or system-wide evaluations, shall ensure that follow-up to these evaluations will be discussed and agreed to by the relevant inter-agency committee (e.g. IASC).

11.   Use of Evaluations and Follow-Up

Evaluation results and recommendations will be presented to senior management and other relevant stakeholders at headquarters and in the field. Evaluation recommendations require a formal management response by those managers and/or office targeted by the recommendation. The formal management response shall be recorded in a management response matrix which will be made public. This matrix reflects all recommendations made by the evaluation team. The responsible parties for each recommendation will provide a written response to the recommendation that will indicate agreement or disagreement (reasons for disagreement if applicable) and an action plan for implementing recommendations that have been taken on board. The responsible parties shall report back on an annual basis to the ESS on any progress made towards implementing the evaluations.

The ESS will report on an annual basis the implementation rate of recommendations. Senior management shall hold the appropriate managers accountable for the implementation/non-implementation of recommendations.

In order to encourage organizational learning relevant evaluation findings will be promoted and shared to a wider audience within OCHA through the application of the ESS communication strategy [/checklist]. OCHA shall also contribute to system-wide learning through sharing its evaluation results and actively participating in inter-agency learning networks such as ALNAP.

12.   Budgeting

The annual evaluation budget for OCHA will equal approximately at least <u>one percent</u> of anticipated funding for the year.

13.   Transparency, Disclosure, and Dissemination

Transparency and consultation with major stakeholders are essential features in all stages of the evaluation process. Evaluation terms of reference and reports will be discussed with all major stakeholder groups and are considered public documents.

All external and real-time evaluations will be made available on OCHA's internet site and on reliefweb (www.reliefweb.int). Self-evaluations and lesson learning reviews may be made available to the public as decided by the unit/office responsible for the self-evaluation. All evaluation reports, whether internal or external shall be made available to all OCHA staff on the ESS webpage (www.ochaonline.un.org/ESS). The ESS, in consultation with relevant key stakeholders will identify appropriate dissemination opportunities such as workshops, training events etc.

Evaluation summaries will be translated into the official language of the country where the evaluation took place.

The ESS will prepare an annual evaluation report that reflects evaluations undertaken during the year, key findings and learning. This report will be made public via the ESS webpage and will be shared with the OCHA Donor Support Group.

Annex 1

Glossary

Appraisal: a critical assessment of the potential value of an undertaking before a decision is made to implement it.

Audit: an assessment of the adequacy of management controls 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.

Evaluation: is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, institutional performance. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof…An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into decision-making processes

Inspection: a general examination that seeks to identify vulnerable areas and malfunctions and to propose corrective action.

Internal management consulting: consulting services to help managers to implement changes that address organizational and managerial challenges and improve internal work processes.

Investigation: a specific examination of a claim of wrongdoing and provision of evidence for eventual prosecution or disciplinary measures.

Monitoring: management's continuous examination of progress achieved during the implementation of an undertaking to track compliance with the plan and to take necessary decisions to improve performance.

Needs Assessment: an assessment of the humanitarian assistance requirements of the affected population. Utilized to plan humanitarian relief.

Policy Research: a systematic examination designed to develop or contribute to knowledge and policy making

Review: the periodic or *ad hoc* often rapid assessments of the performance of an undertaking that do not necessarily apply the due process of evaluation. Reviews tend to emphasize operational issues.

Annex 2

Types of Evaluation and Responsibilities

Type of evaluation	Subject of evaluation	Initiating entity (also responsible for management response)	Manage-ment of evaluation	Who evaluates?	Dissemi-nation
External evaluations (increased accountability as main scope)	Policy, strategic, thematic, inter-agency, organizational **issues for interest of all OCHA and it's Constituencies**	SMT with the advice of PDSB – ESS	PDSB - ESS	**External consultants** as independent as possible.. **ESS** staff to **assist as appropriate**..	**published / disseminated outside OCHA**, (published on Internet)
Real-Time Evaluations (learning during a response and improving its effectiveness)	Ongoing **major Humanitarian Operations**	SMT, IASC, …	PDSB – ESS (possibly jointly with other IASC members)	**External consultants** as independent as possible. **1 ESS staff to assist full time..**	**published / disseminated outside OCHA**, (published on Internet)
Reviews (investigating on specific or cross-cutting topics)	Case studies / desk reviews on **specific topics of interest to parts of OCHA**	SMT, branches, sections, country offices	PDSB - ESS	Can be done by **ESS or OCHA staff or consultants already involved in Programme**	**Can be published, but not systemati-cally**
Lessons learning reviews (identifying key lessons for broader dissemination & policy application)	OCHA specific **operational or organizational issues at HQ or field level**	Branches, sections, field offices in collaboration with CT	**Branches, sections, field offices with the metho-dological support of PDSB - ESS**	**OCHA field office or UN Country Team, External consultants also as facilitators**	**For OCHA internal use only** (published on **Intranet**)
Self-evaluations (critical feeding previous experience into planning as main scope	Various: Results of strategic work programme; ongoing humanitarian effort and OCHA's role	Field Offices	**Field Office (with support of ESS as required)**	**OCHA Team (can be facilitated by external consultant)**	**For OCHA internal use only** (published on **Intranet**)

Annex 3

Step-by-Step Evaluation Process

This process has to be adapted to the scope and the outreach of an evaluation.

1. Development of Approach Note
2. Invitation of key partners to join in a Core Learning Group (CLG) or Steering Committee
3. **First CLG Meeting**: Discussion of Note of Approach
4. Development of draft TOR
5. Identification/shortlisting of consultant
6. **Second CLG Meeting**: Selection of consultants
7. TOR finalized, Contracting and Inception Report
8. **Third CLG Meeting (optional)** to discuss practical implementation steps
9. Evaluation mission
10. Debriefings / end-of-mission workshop
11. Draft Report
12. **Fourth CLG Meeting** to discuss draft report (presented by consultants, chaired by ESS)
13. Final Report issued by consultants
14. **Fifth CLG Meeting** is **Final Workshop**: CLG negotiates and approves the *Management Response Matrix* containing recommendations, lessons learned and follow-up action (final Report presented by consultants, chaired by ESS)
15. Final edited evaluation report (including Management Response Matrix) discussed by SMT.
16. SMT endorses MRM.
17. Dissemination and publication (e.g. posting on Internet)

Underlined are the "classical" steps of an evaluation.

Bold are the steps including Core Learning Groups (steps 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 and 13) which are optional.

Annex 4

The Core Learning Groups (CLG)

A **Core Learning Group (CLG)** is a key evaluation mechanism that seeks to enhance ownership, transparency and learning effect of evaluations.

In cases where a CLG is constituted, the ESS evaluation manager (OCHA-PDSB) has **the following responsibilities:**
- **Design the evaluation framework** *("Note of Approach"*[5]) with participatory input from OCHA (and if applicable external) stakeholders,
- **Organize the overall process (see also Annex 3)** and convey meetings at critical junctures of the evaluation: i) discussions on Approach, ToR and Inception Report, ii) discussion on practical implementation of the evaluation, iii) comments on Draft and Final Report, iv) Management response and follow-up activities,
- **Ensure quality control** for the report (compliance to ToR) and making proposal to CLG
- **Ensure dissemination** of the evaluation report.

The CLG is responsible for:
- **Endorsing the Note of Approach and/or ToR and Inception Report**
- **Discussing implementation** of evaluation
- Discussing and **comment on Draft and Final Report**
- **Discussing and agree on recommendations** and **action** to be taken (i.e. take position on the *Management Response Matrix*[6])

The **CLG is composed of internal and/or external stakeholders in the evaluation process** who have a direct **interest in its results and outcome.** Depending on the type of the evaluation they will be members of OCHA's Senior Management Team (SMT), chiefs of section, desk officers and/or at field level heads of OCHA offices or designated HAO.

The CLG can also be extended **to members outside OCHA** if the object of the evaluation is inter-agency or sector-wide, and if OCHA managers agree on external members' potential influence on the evaluation process and its outcome.

The **size of a CLG has to be manageable** and should not exceed 10 persons. Its chair should be the most senior manager or any other person of the CLG as agreed but <u>not</u> necessarily the ESS evaluation manager.

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[5] A <u>Note of Approach</u> is an outline/idea presentation for an evaluation and should succinctly describe the purpose and key issues to be addressed, contain a rough methodology section, profile for consultants, and an indicative budget. This note should then be approved by management - once approved it will be transformed into more elaborate TOR.

[6] The agreement on the <u>Management Response Matrix</u> is a commitment by the CLG to act on agreed evaluation recommendations and illustrates stakeholders' consensus on the evaluation results and their commitment to learn from the evaluation. It can be included in the Final Evaluation Report.