Guidance for Management response to evaluations

INTERNAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

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Purpose and Justification

The purpose of this internal guidance on Management Response is to strengthen the use of evaluation by UNAIDS management and, to the maximum extent possible, its partners, thus fostering greater ownership over the process of change and ultimately ensuring accountability for results. It does so by facilitating strategic engagement on evaluation findings and appropriate follow-up actions through a formal process that includes:

- Holistic consideration of the evaluation report.
- An indication whether management agrees, partially agrees, or disagrees with the recommendations in the evaluation report.
- A written formulation of time-bound action-plans, and those responsible for ensuring their implementation; and
- Implementation and monitoring of the planned actions.

The Evaluation Management Response Tracking System documents management's response and follow-up actions to all evaluations managed by UNAIDS, including joint evaluations. It provides a written record of what actions are planned in response to evaluations and what is actually done. In this sense, it not only strengthens organizational accountability for results, but also transparency in the process of determining how results will be achieved.

UNAIDS is expected to respond to evaluations in an appropriate manner. Country Directors, Regional Directors and, as appropriate, Directors at Headquarters should ensure that recommendations are fully considered with concerned partners, that accepted recommendations are acted on, and that there are reports on the status of evaluation follow-up. Preparation and availability of management responses and relevant follow up is a requirement for all evaluation reports.

Management response is a formal mechanism that helps ensure that evaluations are used, contributing to organizational effectiveness, learning and accountability.

When is a Management Response needed

A Management Response is required for every evaluation where UNAIDS has had partial or complete decision-making power: in the evaluation process, and/or UNAIDS has fully or partially financed the evaluation. This requirement extends to evaluations that UNAIDS manages directly or jointly with partners. Management responses are required only for evaluation reports (and not studies, surveys, research, reviews, etc.).

The only case a Management Response is not required by UNAIDS is when UNAIDS has a role that does not rise to the level of decision-making power. i.e.: a) UNAIDS sits only on the advisory committee or reference group in which opinions are offered but the decisions are

taken by others; and b) UNAIDS has been consulted as a stakeholder but the decisions after the consultation were taken by others. Key elements of decision-making power are: a) whether or not to undertake an evaluation; b) evaluation's objectives; c) approval of the terms of reference; d) budget; e) selection of evaluation team; e) approval of the actual methodologies to be employed; f) quality assurance of the evaluation process and products; g) acceptance of the deliverables.

In the case of UNDAF (or UN Cooperation Framework) related evaluations, UNAIDS should facilitate, in cooperation with UNCT members, a joint management response. UNAIDS is accountable to develop a management response only for recommendations directed to UNAIDS or the Joint Programme (individually or as a joint partner together with other stakeholders).

In these cases where a Management Response by UNAIDS is not required, UNAIDS may be asked by those that managed the evaluation to support the development of their own Management Response (i.e. by offering technical advice) or respond to recommendations addressed to UNAIDS. If UNAIDS decides to support or act in response, it will not need to share the response with the UNAIDS Evaluation office for inclusion in the tracking system. In the case of Country-led evaluations managed by UNAIDS partners, UNAIDS should always offer technical assistance to develop the Partner's Management Response. This, in addition to strengthening national evaluation capacities, maximizes the use of evaluations to influence policy, programme and projects relevant to HIV and AIDS.

Extracts from UNAIDS Evaluation Policy

The Executive Director and the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations (CCO), as appropriate are responsible for ensuring that evaluation recommendations are implemented and that evaluation results contribute to organizational decision-making and management. The Director of Evaluation facilitates the development and tracking of management responses to evaluations, with clear accountability for implementation of approved recommendations, to ensure that relevant evaluation results inform future activities.

(UNAIDS, 2019)

Roles and accountabilities

Managers are those with the power to take decisions as a result of the evaluation. The types of actions that might be needed determine which managers must be involved. Responses often require a combination of financial, human resource, planning, implementation, partnership, advocacy, M&E, and communications actions, and should involve the appropriate managers.

UNAIDS Secretariat Directors/Managers. Within the UNAIDS Secretariat, there are different lines of accountabilities, which may engage different people:

- Leadership to ensure the Management response is developed and implemented: this is the responsibility of the HQ, Regional and Country Directors.
- Development and implementation of actions is the responsibility of Senior Managers/Advisers for the area evaluated.
- Coordination of development and tracking of the management response, and overall technical support: this is the responsibility of the Evaluation office.

Cosponsors agencies. If the Evaluation covers the Joint Programme (joint evaluation with some of all Cosponsors), the Management Response should be developed and tracked jointly with Cosponsors agencies (Global Coordinators, Cosponsor Evaluation Group or others).

External stakeholders. In the case a UNAIDS-led evaluation has recommendations addressed to external stakeholders, it's important to make the distinction between UNAIDS partners bound through partnership agreements, and other stakeholders without any formal agreement with UNAIDS. In the former case, UNAIDS should solicit the partner engagement within the framework of the partnership agreement. In the latter, UNAIDS should solicit their voluntary engagement in the Management Response process. However, if they choose not to commit to actions that UNAIDS feels are needed, they cannot be forced but this information can be noted in the Management Response.

Timeframe

Management responses should be developed with two key periods in mind:

The first three months after the report is delivered. In this period the aim is to accomplish three things:

- Fully disseminate the report and stimulate stakeholder interest
- Develop a clear view of the quality of the report
- Prepare the actual Management Response describing all actions to be undertaken.

The first year after the report is delivered. Usually, the Management Response is only required to cover a one-year period (maximum). Managers are welcome to add actions beyond year 1 but this is for their use and will not be tracked by the Evaluation Office tracking system. The one-year period forces team to consider practical actions actually implementable in a year.

In cases where it is not possible to project within three months what the full response should be or can be over the year – and if Management Response discussions are better combined with already planned consultations - the Management Response can be pragmatic. It can

include conditional statements or future milestones where more complete parts of the response will be determined. For example: *"If, as is now projected, a consultation is held around the HIV strategy in mid 20XX, the findings of the report will be shared with stakeholders and advocacy conducted to increase attention to vulnerable young girls as recommended in the evaluation"*. These future actions and conditional commitments must be included along with concrete near-term action, and updates made later about what actually occurred.

What needs to be responded to and the response options

There are two things to be responded to, which are discussed in turn:

1. **A response to the main recommendations of the evaluation** (options include):

   Fully Accepted: Responsible managers consider that this recommendation should be completely implemented, and the response should show how, by whom and by when that is to be done.

   Partially Accepted: Responsible managers consider that part of the recommendation is off target and you will not be responding to it, but accept and will take action on other parts; an explanation for a partial acceptance should be provided.

   Not Accepted: Responsible managers consider that the recommendation is based on inaccurate findings or does not address the findings in the correct way; the reason for non-acceptance must be explained.

   In the case the evaluation team includes a very large number of recommendations, managers are not required to respond to each one. Instead, the Evaluation Office will ask the consultant to prioritize the recommendations, and then limit the response to the most important 5-10 recommendations. Consultants/evaluators should be offered the chance to prioritize to avoid managers picking only easy recommendations to respond to.

2. **Key Findings that are not covered by consultant recommendations**. For many reasons consultants may choose not to address certain findings with follow-up recommendations. The two most likely are that they are limiting the recommendations to a priority few, or that they do not understand the programming context well enough to know how important the specific findings are. Managers should weigh all the evidence in the report and judge if additional responses are needed. In effect, managers in a situation like this are adding their own recommendations to the evaluation. When this occurs, managers only need to describe the additional actions intended to be taken.

Calendar of the Management Response process

Stage 1: Include Management Response within the Terms of Reference (ToR) during the evaluation planning phase

Preparation for Management Response starts when an evaluation is planned. Evaluation Terms of Reference should clearly state the intended use by the intended users (how the evaluation process and results will be used and by whom). The ToRs should suggest [but not limit to] a maximum number of recommendations and should clearly ask the evaluation team to prioritize the top (up to 10) for action. It should state that a management response will be done afterwards.

It should be remembered that the Terms of Reference are not only the overall directions for the consultants. They are a management overview and contract for all that will participate. The TORs can include accountabilities and deliverables beyond what the consultants will produce. It is good practice to state in the TORs who (Unit/office/stakeholders) will lead the Management Response process.

Stage 2: Arriving at well-designed recommendations during the implementation phase

During the report writing phase, the evaluation team should pay close attention to formulating good recommendations. The following are most likely to lead to good recommendations:

- Key stakeholders are consulted during the development of recommendations, which increases programmatic and technical relevance.
- An appropriate sequencing in the implementation of recommendations is noted, especially when one part of the response is contingent upon a prior action being completed.
- The recommendations clarify where change is needed to solve problems and also where positive aspects should be continued or enlarged.
- Recommendations are referenced at the point where the finding evidence and analysis is made, to show the logical connection. The full recommendations can be fully presented in a concluding chapter but referencing them within the document is helpful.
- The specific organizations that the recommendation is directed to should be noted, so there is no mistake about who should respond. It is not necessary to specify who within the organization needs to respond.

Under the coordination of the Evaluation Office, UNAIDS staff, as well as Cosponsors and key stakeholders as relevant, should review the evaluation report, and comment on it, with particular attention to the draft recommendations. However, after the advice is given, it is up to the evaluation team to decide to accept it or not.

Stage 3: Developing the Management Response through a formal process

Designating lead persons or units and placing the Management Response process firmly in the organizational calendar is imperative. Announcing it to counterparts and advocating their engagement in the Management Response by UNAIDS leaders signal that it is important. Developing a timetable and putting it into necessary event agendas creates the space for consideration. Recording the results of the Management Response discussions and, where possible, getting formal acceptance, creates an expectation of follow-up.

Note that the formality need not be overly rigid. For example, how to record the Management Response agreements and get stakeholder acceptance can take many forms, but simple possibilities like a consensus reached through a well participated webinar are acceptable.

Stage 4: Uploading the Management Response to the UNAIDS Evaluation office webpage: initially in excel format, with possible improvements (database application) at a later stage according to the number of evaluations.

Stage 5: Implementing and monitoring/tracking the Management Response

The designated units implement actions by the expected completion date. Progress on management response implementation is reviewed by relevant managers twice a year, where any necessary update and adjustment is discussed. The Evaluation office should follow-up on implementation and uploading of progress/updates in the Management Response template online, as well as any documentary evidence on the progress of actions. The management response monitoring should continue until all the actions are taken or cancelled.

The Evaluation office collect some key performance indicators in relation to Management Responses. Possible Key Performance Indicators are the following:

- number of evaluation reports with Management Response finalised and uploaded in the OEV FileShare
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management - referring to evaluation reports of the previous years) completed
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management - referring to evaluation reports of the previous years) underway
- % of actions (for recommendations agreed by management - referring to evaluation reports of the previous years) not started

The Evaluation office, in cooperation with other UNAIDS units and offices, tracks Management Responses as a key corporate indicator.

For additional information, guidance and feedback, please consult the Evaluation office at UNAIDS: evaluation@unaids.org

UNAIDS Evaluation Management Response Template

Link: please refer to the management response template (excel) – see an extract below

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND TRACKING	
Evaluation title	
Office/Region	
Year *of the report*	
Overall response to the evalu...	*Please include here Senior Management impression on the process and outcomes of the evaluation, adequacy of evidence and concurrence with findings. Were there limitations in the process and outcomes? Are there any additional insights not articulated in the recommendations?*
Planned use of evaluation	*Please include here what's the process to facilitate the intended use, focusing on how evaluation findings will affect the programme and contribute to evidence-based decision making*

Recommendations and responses						Tracking	
No	**Recommendation**	**Management response**	**Actions planned**	**Responsible**	**Timeframe**	**Mid year (20xx)**	**End of year (20xx)**
	Please list the recommendation from the Evaluation Report	*Please indicated if: – Accepted – Partially accepted (please report reasons) – Not accepted (please report reasons)*	*Please indicate the concrete actions planned by UNAIDS and partners to implement the recommendations*	*Please be specific and indicate who (Staff or Unit/office) in UNAIDS is responsible for the actions. If it is a joint response it should list who these are specifically*	*Please be specific and indicate a completion date (the overall timeframe is usually one year)*	*Please indicate status of implementation and actions taken. If an action is no longer relevant due to a changed context, please provide a justification and indicate if it should be cancelled or reformulated.*	*Please indicate status of implementation and actions taken*
1							
2							
3							
4							