



ROOM DOCUMENT 5

UPDATE ON PROFESSIONAL PEER REVIEWS OF THE EVALUATION FUNCTION OF MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS

This document has been prepared by the co-chairs of the UNEG/DAC Evaluation Network's task team for consideration at the 8th meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 18-19 November 2008.

**8th meeting
18 – 19 November 2008**

Update on Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of Multilateral Organisations

Prepared by the co-chairs of the DAC/UNEG Task Team on Peer Reviews

Background

The DAC Network on Development Evaluation and the UN Evaluation Group have joined forces and established an internationally recognised form of professional peer review of the evaluation function of UN organisations. Based on the experience of two pilot reviews (UNDP, 2005 and UNICEF, 2006), the DAC/UNEG Taskforce established a *Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organisations* in early 2007.¹

The joint task force promotes peer reviews of interested UN organizations. It sees its work as catalytic in ensuring that peer reviews will incorporate perspectives from a broad range of professional expertise in (inter)national organizations, including perspectives of member countries, and non-governmental and private sector expertise.

The purpose of a professional peer review is to provide DAC and UNEG members as well as decision-makers in the leadership of the UN organisation at issue, its Executive Board and its evaluation office with an independent assessment of the organisation's evaluation function and the quality of its evaluation work.

A professional peer review of the evaluation function in an organization is not in itself an assessment of the effectiveness of that organization. However, it contributes to the basis for assessing the effectiveness of the organization, by testing the capacity and quality of the organization's own evaluations of effectiveness, and thus the confidence that can be placed in them. Further, while a peer review of the evaluation function is focused on one important part of an organization's performance management systems, at the same time it is also likely to shed light on other parts, such as the framework for managing for results, etc.

The *Framework* indicates three core criteria that need to be satisfied for evaluation functions and products to be considered of high quality: (i) independence of evaluations and the evaluation system(s), (ii) credibility of evaluations, and (iii) utility of evaluations.

Because the professional peer reviews are intended to assess the evaluation function against accepted international standards in a wide range of organizations, the framework has a blend of standard and flexible elements. It contains guidelines on a consistent broad normative framework using applicable norms and standards, and provides step-by-step options and practical suggestions for carrying out the review. At the same time, it is intended to allow for necessary flexibility for example, to adapt for de-centralised and centralized evaluation systems or to feature special issues or emphases for particular organizations. It recognizes that work may need

¹ A draft of the framework was presented as Room Document 14bis at the fifth meeting of the Network on Development Evaluation in November 2006

to be done to adapt the model much further in some cases – for example, to very small or highly specialized organizations, and/or those with limited existing evaluation capacities.

The peer reviews should contain the following structural elements:

- A basis for proceeding: including the necessary agreement for cooperation, and a clear question for assessment;
- A normative framework: an agreed set of principles, standards and criteria against which the evaluation function is to be reviewed;
- Designated actors and roles in the Panel that carries out the peer review; and
- A set of procedures for planning, assembling and testing the base of evidence and findings, leading to the final result of the peer review – an exchange around the conclusions drawn primarily from the diverse professional experience and judgments of the peer panellists themselves, deliberating as a group.

It should be noted that the peer reviews:

- Are not themselves full-fledged evaluations – they are less comprehensive and in-depth assessments but they should adhere to a rigorous methodology – applying the key principles of evaluation while taking full advantage of the particular benefits of a peer mechanism. The final conclusions will be a judgment by the Panel concerned.
- Must themselves reflect the accepted standards of good practice in development cooperation by seriously engaging developing country partners in the process of the review, in the learning acquired, and in the use of the results.
- Are designed to be targeted and lean – without sacrificing the rigour required for their basic validity and credibility – to avoid making unreasonable demands of time, expense and additional workload on both Panel members and the organization being reviewed.

Progress and the future of peer reviews

The peer review of the evaluation function of the WFP, led by Sweden, was conducted in 2007. It was the first review that followed the *Framework for Professional Peer Reviews in Multilateral Organisations*. The report, together with a management response of WFP to the results of the review, was discussed by WFP's Executive Board in its meeting in February 2008.

Currently, peer reviews are conducted of the evaluation function of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), supported by Belgium and Finland, and the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations (OIOS), supported by Switzerland and Norway. The peer review panel for the GEF review is composed of evaluators from Belgium, Finland, WFP, Kazakhstan and Mauritania. That for the review of OIOS includes evaluators of FAO, UNIFEM, Norad and SDC. The reviews will be finalised in 2009.

The DAC/UNEG Task Force has received feedback from the peer review panel as well as the head of the WFP's evaluation office on their perspectives on the peer review process of the evaluation function of WFP. The Task Force aims to revise the *Framework* taking into account the experiences with the peer review of the WFP as well as those of the reviews currently undertaken. Although it is not expected that there will be fundamental changes, it has emerged that the three main pillars of the review mentioned in the *Framework* namely independence, credibility and utility do not easily match the normative framework that can be derived from the *UN Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. There is a certain degree of overlap between the Norms

and Standards and the three main elements of the peer review. This issue of overlap will be taken into account by the DAC/UNEG Task Force once the two ongoing reviews are finalised.

Currently the peer review process is a voluntary undertaking both for those who undertake the review as well as organisations being reviewed. Efforts should be made to formalise the peer review process. The UN has recently discussed the possibility to set up a central UN evaluation unit which could be responsible for system-wide evaluations. Such a central unit may eventually be a home for the peer review system. The discussion has not yet been concluded. At the Annual General Meeting of UNEG in Nairobi, March 2009, the future of the peer review process will be on the agenda.

A meeting of the Joint Task Force is planned to take place in January or February to prepare for the UNEG Annual General Meeting and to discuss the further development of the *Framework*.

Finally, the Task Force has been exploring possibilities for additional peer reviews in 2009. UNIDO is a confirmed candidate.