Foundation Document

UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation

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The Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation were formally approved by UNEG members at the UNEG Annual General Meeting 2008.

These Guidelines expand on the Ethical Code of Conduct for Evaluation on the UN System (UNEG/FN/CoC[2008]).

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Introduction

Basis

1. The UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation are based on commonly held and internationally recognized professional ideals. The Guidelines have been drawn up with reference to relevant texts (see Annex 1), principal among them the UN Norms and Standards for Evaluation.

2. All staff members of the United Nations are subject to the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service[1], which obliges staff to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of integrity as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (see Annex 2 for relevant extracts). These Guidelines are consistent with the Standards of Conduct.

3. These Guidelines expand on the Ethical Code of Conduct for Evaluation on the UN System.

Purpose

4. Aspiring to ethical conduct in evaluation is important for a number of reasons:

   a. *Responsible use of power* – the power to commission an evaluation implies a responsibility towards all those involved in the evaluation for the proper conduct of the evaluation.

   b. *Ensuring Credibility* – with a fair, impartial and complete assessment, stakeholders are more likely to have faith in the results of an evaluation and so take note of the recommendations arising.

   c. *Responsible use of resources* – ethical conduct in evaluation increases the chances of acceptance by the parties to the evaluation and therefore the likelihood that the investment in the evaluation will result in improved outcomes.

Application

5. These Guidelines apply to the conduct of evaluation in all UN agencies whether by staff, members, external consultants, or evaluators from partner organizations. Individual agencies may impose additional obligations related to evaluation of activities specific to their mandate.

[1] Originally prepared in 1954 by the International Civil Service Advisory Board, updated by the International Civil Service Commission in 2001, and welcomed by the General Assembly Resolution 56/244

Ethical Conduct in Evaluation – A Shared Responsibility

6. 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. The integrity of evaluation is especially dependent on the ethical conduct of key actors in the evaluation process, including:

a. *Evaluators* - conducting evaluation, whether UN staff members, external consultants, or evaluators from partner organisations and governments.

b. *Evaluation Manager* - charged with the management of evaluation exercises.

c. *Director of Evaluation* - the individual head of the evaluation office or unit charged with the management of the evaluation function within the UN agency (and, in some agencies, oversight of a decentralized evaluation function).

d. *Evaluation Office* - the office or unit within the agency carrying the primary responsibility for the evaluation function.

e. *Evaluation Commissioner* – the party requesting and/ or overseeing the evaluation (in some cases the roles of evaluation manager and commissioner may be combined)

Ethical Principles in Evaluation

Intentionality of Evaluation

Utility

7. Evaluations should be designed to help organisations address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of participants (see also 3.3 Participants). Evaluations are valuable to the extent to which they serve the information and decision-making needs of intended users, including answering the questions posed of the evaluation by its commissioners.

Necessity

8. Evaluation involves the expenditure of time and financial resources and, even where mitigated, can lead to disruption, invasion of privacy and exposure to risks. Therefore evaluations shall only be commissioned where they are necessary and the effort justified in terms of the benefits likely to accrue from the evaluation exercise.

Obligations of Evaluators

Independence

9. Evaluation in the United Nations systems should be demonstrably free of bias. To this end, evaluators are recruited for their ability to exercise independent judgement. Evaluators shall ensure that they are not unduly influenced by the views or statements of any party. Where the evaluator or the evaluation manager comes under pressure to adopt a particular position or to introduce bias into the evaluation findings, it is the responsibility of the evaluator to ensure that independence of judgement is maintained. Where such pressures may endanger the completion or integrity of the evaluation, the issue will be referred to the evaluation manager and, where necessary, the director of evaluation, who will discuss the concerns of the relevant parties and decide on an approach which will ensure that evaluation findings and recommendations are consistent, verified and independently presented (see below Conflict of Interest).

Impartiality

10. Evaluations must give a comprehensive and balanced presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the policy, program, project or organizational unit being evaluated, taking due account of the views of a diverse cross-section of stakeholders. Evaluators shall:

a. Operate in an impartial and unbiased manner at all stages of the evaluation.

b. Collect diverse perspectives on the subject under evaluation.

c. Guard against distortion in their reporting caused by their personal views and feelings.

Credibility

11. Evaluation shall be credible and based on reliable data and observations. Evaluation reports shall show evidence of consistency and dependability in data, findings, judgements and lessons learned; appropriately reflecting the quality of the methodology, procedures and analysis used to collect and interpret data. Evaluation managers and evaluators shall endeavour to ensure that each evaluation is accurate, relevant, and timely and provides a clear, concise and balanced presentation of the evidence, findings, issues, conclusions and recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest

12. Conflicts of interest shall be avoided as far as possible so that the credibility of the evaluation process and product shall not be undermined. Conflicts of interest may arise at the level of the Evaluation Office, or at that of individual staff members or consultants. Conflicts of interest should be disclosed and dealt with openly and honestly.

13. Evaluators are required to disclose in writing any past experience, of themselves, their immediate family, close friends or associates, which may give rise to a potential conflict of interest.

14. Evaluators engaged by a UN agency shall not have had any responsibility for the design, implementation or supervision of any of the projects, programs or policies that they are evaluating.

15. Under exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to engage an evaluator who has a past connection with the object of the evaluation, for example where there is very small pool of competent experts. In such a case, measures to safeguard the integrity of the evaluation shall be adopted and such measures shall be disclosed in the evaluation report. The director of evaluation shall ensure that the evaluator in question is not appointed as evaluation manager or evaluation team leader.

16. The Evaluation Office shall avoid any conflict of interest, which might arise, or appear to arise, as a result of the acceptance of any form of external support or assistance. For example, the acceptance of supplementary funding for any of its activities, from bilateral or multilateral agencies or other parties shall be carefully considered and managed. Such funding must not lead to any bias in the evaluation approach, opinion, or findings. The director of evaluation shall carefully assess any offer of assistance to ensure the necessary independence of judgement from any contributing parties and to prevent any undue influence over the work of the Office.

Honesty and Integrity

17. Successful evaluation depends on the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process. Evaluators shall:

a. Accurately represent their level of skills and knowledge and work only within the limits of their professional training and abilities in evaluation, declining assignments for which they do not have the skills and experience to successfully complete.

b. Negotiate honestly the costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from the evaluation

c. Accurately present their procedures, data and findings, including ensuring that the evaluation findings are not biased to make it more likely that the evaluator receives further commissions from the Client

d. As far as possible, prevent or correct misuse of their work by others.

e. Decline evaluation assignments where the client is unresponsive to their expressed concerns that the evaluation methodology or procedures are likely to produce a misleading result. (If declining the assignment is not feasible, the evaluator shall record his/her dissent either in the evaluation report or otherwise).

Accountability

18. Evaluators are accountable for the completion of the evaluation as agreed with the Client. Specifically, evaluators shall:

a. Complete the evaluation deliverables within the timeframe and budget agreed

b. Exercise prudence and probity in fiscal decision–making so that evaluation expenditures are properly accounted for and the client receives value for money

c. Give the evaluation manager early notice of any change to the evaluation plan or any risks to the successful completion of the evaluation and record the reasons for any changes made to the evaluation plan

Obligations to participants

19. Evaluators shall respect people's right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality. Evaluators must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source so that the relevant individuals are protected from reprisals.

Respect for Dignity and Diversity

20. Evaluators shall:

a. Respect differences in culture, local customs, religious beliefs and practices, personal interaction, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity, and be mindful of the potential implications of these differences when planning, carrying out and reporting on evaluations, while using evaluation instruments appropriate to the cultural setting

b. Keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained, providing the maximum notice to individuals or institutions they wish to engage in the evaluation, optimizing demands on their time, and respecting people's right to privacy.

Rights

21. In including individuals or groups in the evaluation, evaluators shall ensure:

a. Right to Self-Determination. Prospective participants should be treated as autonomous agents and must be given the time and information to decide whether or not they wish to participate and be able to make an independent decision without any pressure or fear of penalty for not participating.

b. Fair Representation. Evaluators shall select participants fairly in relation to the aims of the evaluation, not simply because of their availability, or because it is relatively easy to secure their participation. Care shall be taken to ensure that relatively powerless, 'hidden', or otherwise excluded groups are represented.

c. Compliance with codes for vulnerable groups. Where the evaluation involves the participation of members of vulnerable groups, evaluators must be aware of and comply with legal codes (whether international or national) governing, for example, interviewing children and young people.

d. Redress. Stakeholders receive sufficient information to know a) how to seek redress for any perceived disadvantage suffered from the evaluation or any projects it covers, and b) how to register a complaint concerning the conduct of an Implementing or Executing Agency.

Confidentiality

22. Evaluators shall respect people's right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality. Evaluators must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source so that the relevant individuals are protected from reprisals.

Avoidance of Harm

23. Evaluations can have a negative effect on their objects or those who participate in them. Therefore evaluators shall seek to: minimize risks to, and burdens on, those participating in the evaluation; and seek to maximize the benefits and reduce any unnecessary harms that might occur from negative or critical evaluation, without compromising the integrity of the evaluation.

Evaluation Process and Product

Accuracy, Completeness and Reliability

24. Evaluators have an obligation to ensure that evaluation reports and presentations are accurate, complete and reliable. In the evaluation process and in the production of evaluation products, evaluators shall:

a. Carry out thorough inquiries, systematically employing appropriate methods and techniques to the highest technical standards, validating information using multiple measures and sources to guard against bias, and ensuring errors are corrected.

b. Describe the purposes and content of object of the evaluation (programme, activity, strategy) clearly and accurately.

c. UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation - Draft

d. Present openly the values, assumptions, theories, methods, results, and analyses that significantly affect the evaluation, from its initial conceptualization to the eventual use of findings.

e. Examine the context in enough detail so its likely influences can be identified (for example geographic location, timing, political and social climate, economic conditions).

f. Describe the methodology, procedures and information sources of the evaluation in enough detail so they can be identified and assessed.

g. Make a complete and fair assessment of the object of the evaluation, recording of strengths and weaknesses so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

h. Provide an estimate of the reliability of information gathered and the replicability of results (i.e. how likely is it that the evaluation repeated in the same way would yield the same result?).

i. Explicitly justify judgements, findings and conclusions and show their underlying rationale so that stakeholders can assess them.

j. Ensure all recommendations are based on the evaluation findings only, not on their or other parties' biases.

Transparency

25. Transparency and consultation with the stakeholders are essential features of evaluation. The Evaluation Office and the evaluation team leader shall clearly communicate to stakeholders the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria applied and the intended use of findings.

26. Stakeholders shall be consulted on the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the evaluation and their views taken into account in the final TOR. The Evaluation Manager shall carefully balance the views and requirements of stakeholders, ensuring that the evaluation retains a clear focus and that sound evaluation principles are not compromised by the wishes of stakeholders.

27. Evaluation methodology shall be disclosed in advance of the evaluation and clearly described in the evaluation report, including the assumptions and values underlying the evaluator's judgements. Evaluation documents shall be easily readable and specify their information sources and approaches.

28. Evaluation reports shall make the link between evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations transparent, persuasive and proportionate to the body of evidence collected.

Reporting

29. The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and to any others with legitimate claims or rights to receive the results, in relevant language(s).

30. As a norm, all evaluation reports shall be made public. Evaluation reports will only be withheld from publication for compelling reasons and in accordance with relevant rules within each agency. The director of evaluation shall ensure high standards in accessibility and presentation of published reports and use a range of channels to reach audiences through, for example, electronic and interactive channels, knowledge networks, communities of practice, presentations at relevant conferences, as well as appropriate publications.

31. At country level, evaluation findings shall be presented and discussed at the appropriate national or local level, to enable stakeholders to respond to them, and ideally before the evaluation report is complete.

32. All materials generated in the conduct of the evaluation are the property of the agency and can only be used by permission. Responsibility for distribution and publication of evaluation results rests with the Evaluation Office. With the permission of the agency, evaluation consultants may make briefings or unofficial summaries of the results of the evaluation outside the agency.

33. Original data, including interview records and meeting notes will be retained in confidential files until completion of the evaluation. The director of evaluation shall determine an appropriate time for further retention, after which such data shall be securely disposed of in accordance with any Agency policy on the disposal of records. Databases of unpublished information on individual project activities shall be securely stored in the Evaluation Office and available for use only by the Office's staff and consultants, and only released to consultants in a manner which will maintain confidentiality and evaluation integrity.

Omissions and wrongdoing

34. Where evaluators find evidence of wrong-doing or unethical conduct, they are obliged to report it, whether or not such conduct relates directly to the evaluation Terms of Reference. Evaluators shall inform the Evaluation Manager who will in turn agree with the Evaluation Director on the most appropriate channel for reporting wrong-doing. Details of any wrong-doing, including names or events, shall only be divulged to the proper oversight authority.

Obligations of Evaluation Managers and Commissioners

35. Over and above evaluators' responsibilities, evaluation managers and commissioners have particular duties, including:

Evaluation Managers have a duty to:

a. Appoint trustworthy, competent and independent-minded evaluators with the appropriate mix of experience, expertise and competencies, and with an appropriate diversity in gender, ethnicity, religion and language.

b. Consult with evaluators and other interest groups if significant changes are required to the design or delivery of the evaluation.

c. Provide the evaluators with access to the documentation and data required for evaluation purposes.

d. Communicate openly and have respect for people involved in the evaluation and keep the evaluation team informed of changes in circumstances affecting the evaluation.

e. Respect the evaluators' duty to keep their sources of information anonymous.

f. Anticipate the different positions of various interest groups and minimise attempts to curtail the evaluation or bias or misapply the results.

g. Design the evaluation to encourage stakeholders to follow-through and maximize the use of the evaluation results.

h. Provide all evaluation team members with an opportunity to disassociate themselves from particular judgements and recommendations, with unresolved differences of opinion within the team acknowledged in the evaluation report.

Evaluation Commissioners have a duty to:

a. Consult with all parties to the evaluation to support the development of a relevant, realistic and viable specification.

b. Make clear from the outset how the evaluation report will be used and disseminated.

c. Operate a tendering procedure that is transparent and fair and accordance with agency procedure, making explicit the criteria upon which a tender decision will be made.

d. Ensure that the ideas or intellectual property provided within proposals submitted by potential evaluators is not exploited or otherwise misused.

e. Preserve the integrity of the evaluation findings, for example by not quoting selectively from the evaluation findings or publicising them out of context.

f. Disseminate interim findings and evaluation reports to intended users so they can be used in a timely fashion.

g. Provide the results of evaluations to stakeholders in countries they cover, including government ministries and other partners.

Annex 1: Source Material

1. GEF Evaluation Office Ethical Guidelines, November 6, 2006
2. CIDA evaluation manual
3. American Evaluation Society Guiding Principles for Evaluators
4. Canadian Evaluation Society Guidelines for Ethical Conduct
5. UNEG Standards for Evaluation in the UN System (2005)
6. Guidelines for evaluation commissioners, UK Evaluation Society
7. Programme Evaluation Standards (from UNICEF evaluation training module)
8. Presentation: 'Commissioning and managing evaluations', Nordic Consulting Group, EES-UKES 2006 Joint International Conference, London, UK, October 2006
9. UN Standards for Evaluation (2005)
10. Sourcebook for Evaluating Global and Regional Partnership Programs - Indicative Principles and Standards: Chapter Ethical and Professional Conduct of Evaluations Principles and Norms, World Bank, 2006
11. Ethical Guidelines for Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents – USAID, Horizons, Family Health International, UNICEF (draft 2004)]

Annex 2: Extracts from Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service (revised 2001) relevant to the work of UN staff engaged evaluation

The ICSC *Framework for Human Resources Management*, approved by the

General Assembly in 2000, illustrates the overarching nature of *the Standards of Conduct*, noting that they are linked to all elements of the *Framework and states* that "although organizations' internal cultures may vary, they face similar ethical challenges. Standards for ethical conduct promote common values and define the behaviour and performance expected of international civil servants".

#2….It is incumbent on international civil servants to adhere to the highest standards of conduct; for, ultimately, it is the international civil service that will enable the United Nations system to bring about a just and peaceful world.

Guiding Principles

#3. The values that are enshrined in the United Nations organizations must also be those that guide international civil servants in all their actions: fundamental human rights, social justice, the dignity and worth of the human person and respect for the equal rights of men and women and of nations great and small.

#5. The concept of integrity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations embraces all aspects of behaviour of an international civil servant, including such qualities as honesty, truthfulness, impartiality and incorruptibility. These qualities are as basic as those of competence and efficiency, also enshrined in the Charter.

#6. Tolerance and understanding are basic human values. If the impartiality of the international civil service is to be maintained, international civil servants must remain independent of any authority outside their organization; their conduct must reflect that independence.

#9. Impartiality implies tolerance and restraint, particularly in dealing with political or religious convictions. While their personal views remain inviolate, international civil servants do not have the freedom of private persons to take sides or to express their convictions publicly on controversial matters, either individually or as members of a group. This can mean that, in certain situations, personal views should only be expressed with tact and discretion.

#13. An international outlook stems from an understanding of and loyalty to the objectives and purposes of the international organization itself as set forth in its legal instruments. It implies… requires punctilious avoidance of any expressions that could be interpreted as biased or intolerant.

Working methods can be different in different cultures. International civil servants should not be wedded to the attitudes, working methods or work habits of their own country or region.

#14. International civil servants are expected to respect the dignity, worth and equality of all people without any distinction whatsoever. Assumptions based on stereotypes must be assiduously avoided. One of the main tenets of the Charter is the equality of men and women, and organizations should therefore do their utmost to promote gender equality.

Working relations

#18. International civil servants …should not follow verbal or written instructions that are manifestly inconsistent with their official functions or that threaten their safety or that of others. It must be the duty of international civil servants to report any breach of the organization's rules and regulations to a higher level official, whose responsibility it is to take appropriate action. An international civil servant who makes such a report in good faith has the right to be protected against reprisals or sanctions.

Conflict of interest

#21. It can happen that international civil servants are confronted with a question entailing a conflict of interest; such questions can be very sensitive and need to be treated with care. Conflict of interest includes circumstances in which international civil servants, directly or indirectly, would appear to benefit improperly, or allow a third party to benefit improperly, from their association in the management or the holding of a financial interest in an enterprise that engages in any business or transaction with the organization.

Relations with the Public

#33. It would not be proper for international civil servants to air personal grievances or criticize their organizations in public. International civil servants should endeavour at all times to promote a positive image of the international civil service, in conformity with their oath of loyalty.

Use and protection of information

#35. The disclosure of confidential information may seriously jeopardize the efficiency and credibility of an organization. International civil servants are responsible for exercising discretion in all matters of official business. They must not divulge confidential information without authorization.

Respect for different customs and culture

#36. The world is home to a myriad of different peoples, languages, cultures, customs and traditions. It is self-evident that a genuine respect for them all is fundamental for an international civil servant. Any behaviour that is not acceptable in a particular cultural context must be avoided. However, if a tradition is directly contrary to any human rights instrument adopted by the United Nations system, the international civil servant must be guided by it.