
Professional Peer Review of the UNRWA Evaluation Function



“The evaluation function in UNRWA is like a small plant that requires nurturing and an enabling environment in order to flourish.”

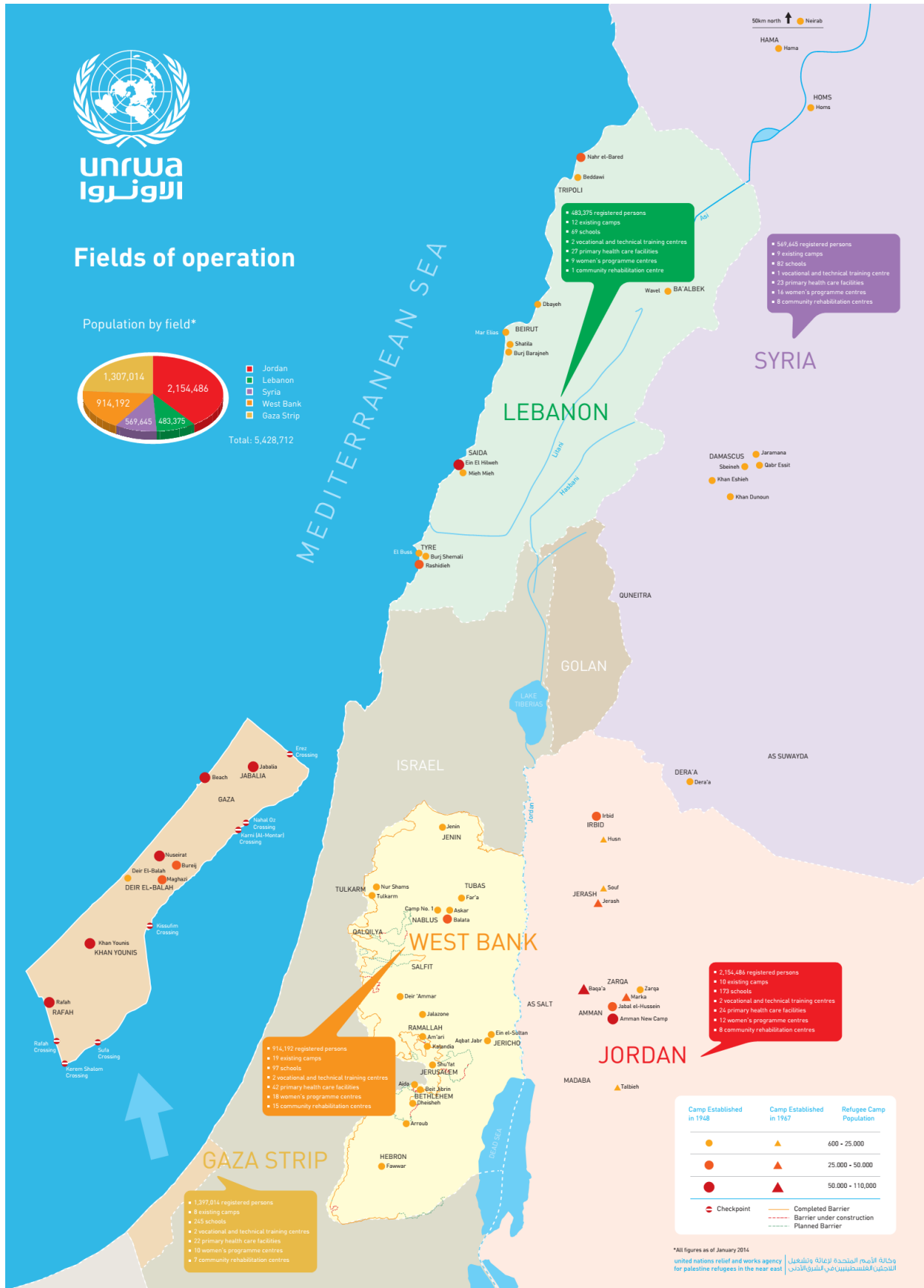
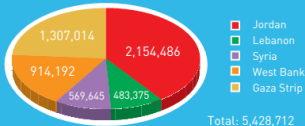
Target audience	The main target audience of this report comprises the UNRWA Department for Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) and in particular the Evaluation Division, UNRWA senior management, UNRWA departments and field offices and UNRWA donor governments. Background information on UNRWA is kept to a minimum assuming that readers are familiar with the Agency. Additional information can be found on the UNRWA website (www.unrwa.org).
Panel Members	<p>The Peer Review Panel was comprised of four members:</p> <p>Ms. Susanne Frueh, Director, Internal Oversight Service (IOS) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Chair of the Panel</p> <p>Mr. Andrew Fyfe, Head, Evaluation Unit, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)</p> <p>Ms. Siv Lillestøl, Senior Evaluation Advisor, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)</p> <p>Mr. Urs Zollinger, Independent Evaluation Expert, (King Zollinger & Co. Advisory Services), Senior Advisor to the Panel</p>
Acknowledgement	The Panel would like to thank the Director of the Department of Internal Oversight Services and the Chief of the Evaluation Division and his entire team for stimulating discussions among peers and for providing outstanding support to the Panel. The Peer Review was a highly rewarding experience. The Panel would also like to thank all UNRWA staff and senior management as well as other key stakeholders met by the panel for their open and frank engagement with the panel.
Disclaimer	The views expressed in this report are those of the members of the Peer Review Panel in their individual capacities.



unrwa
الأونروا

Fields of operation

Population by field*



483,375 registered persons
12 existing camps
69 schools
2 vocational and technical training centres
27 primary health care facilities
9 women's programme centres
1 community rehabilitation centre

510,615 registered persons
9 existing camps
82 schools
1 vocational and technical training centre
23 primary health care facilities
16 women's programme centres
8 community rehabilitation centres

914,192 registered persons
19 existing camps
97 schools
2 vocational and technical training centres
42 primary health care facilities
18 women's programme centres
15 community rehabilitation centres

1,307,014 registered persons
8 existing camps
245 schools
2 vocational and technical training centres
22 primary health care facilities
10 women's programme centres
7 community rehabilitation centres

2,154,486 registered persons
10 existing camps
173 schools
2 vocational and technical training centres
24 primary health care facilities
12 women's programme centres
8 community rehabilitation centres

Camp Established in 1948	Camp Established in 1967	Refugee Camp Population
●	▲	600 - 25,000
●	▲	25,000 - 50,000
●	▲	50,000 - 110,000

*All figures as of January 2014
united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east
وكالة الأمم المتحدة لإغاثة وتشغيل
اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في الشرق الأدنى

About UNRWA

- **Beneficiaries:** UNRWA currently provides services to approximately 5.3 million Palestine refugees.
- **Locations:** UNRWA serves Palestine refugees in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank including East Jerusalem.
 - o Ten camps in Jordan with 2,034,641 refugees
 - o Thirteen camps in Syria with 499,189 refugees,
 - o Twelve camps in Lebanon with 448,599 refugees,
 - o Nineteen camps in West Bank with 741,409 refugees, and
 - o Eight camps in Gaza with 1,221,110 refugees.
- **Areas of work:** (a) education, (b) health care, (c) relief and social services, (d) camp infrastructure, (e) microfinance, and (f) emergency assistance including in times of armed conflict.
- **Some results (2013):**
 - o educated more than 470,000 children
 - o provided access to primary health care services to families comprising 3.5 million individuals
 - o provided social safety net assistance to 283,000 persons
 - o UNRWA's Microfinance Programme delivered over 225,000 loans from 1991 to 2010 valued at almost US\$ 257 million
- **Staff:** UNRWA provides direct services through a workforce of some 30,000 persons primarily Palestine refugees themselves. The workforce includes:
 - o 23,000 education staff,
 - o 3,300 health staff,
 - o 1,100 sanitation labourers,
 - o 300 social workers working in over 900 facilities (including schools, health centres, technical and vocational training centres) across its five fields of operation,
- **Country offices:** Gaza Strip, West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan
- **Annual budget:** 1.2 billion USD; UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.
- **Commissioner-General:** Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl (Swiss), since 30 March 2014. (level of Under-Secretary-General)
- **Central Evaluation Function:** Established in 2007. Since 2010 the Evaluation Division is located in the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) and reporting to the Director of DIOS.
- **Number of Evaluation staff:** 3
- **Regular budget allocation for evaluation (GF 2015):** \$USD 170,000 (not including staff)
- **Total annual evaluation budget (2015 est.):** \$ USD 890,000 (not including staff)

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This Professional Peer Review of the evaluation function of UNRWA was carried out under the provisions contained in the United Nations Evaluation Group Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations. It is the first Peer Review of UNRWA's evaluation function and was carried out at the request of UNRWA.

The purpose of the Peer Review is to:

- a) Enhance knowledge, confidence and use of evaluation within UNRWA;
- b) Advance UNRWA's evaluation normative framework;
- c) Stimulate/encourage dialogue between various key stakeholders on expectations and the role of the evaluation function leading to strengthened organizational performance;
- d) Encourage a culture of evaluation, learning and accountability within UNRWA.

The Peer Review looked at the evaluation activities carried out between 2012 and 2015 and considered both central and decentralized evaluation functions. The Panel which was composed of two UN evaluation heads, a senior evaluator from a donor country and a senior advisor, reviewed relevant documents and assessed the quality of evaluation reports. A visit by the Panel to UNRWA headquarters and the field offices in Amman, Beirut and Jerusalem took place from 28 June to 8 July 2015. Beyond the UNRWA Evaluation Division, the Panel met with a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including UNRWA senior management, heads of relevant departments/programmes, members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and members of the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (by phone) as well as representatives of donor governments.

Assessment

Strengths - The Panel found several strengths of the UNRWA evaluation function on which the function can build.

Since its establishment in 2007, UNRWA's central evaluation function has gradually created space within the organisation for independent evaluation. The Evaluation Division has managed to put evaluation "on the map" and has commissioned or conducted some important evaluations. While the quality of the evaluations varies, a number of reports were perceived to be useful by UNRWA staff.

The new evaluation architecture and guidelines provide an opportunity to strengthen the evaluation function. The Panel commends the consultative process chosen to discuss the draft within the Agency. This has created a momentum for evaluation as it puts evaluation on UNRWA's strategic agenda and creates ownership among UNRWA staff.

The current Chief of the Evaluation Division and his team are focusing on developing the evaluation function in line with the norms and standards of the UN Evaluation Group. Several initiatives, like the new evaluation architecture, the new guidelines, trainings or the present Peer Review, are beginning to show results and are positively perceived by many UNRWA staff.

The Panel found a strong link between planning and evaluation at the central level in UNRWA which provides opportunities to better target subjects for evaluation within broader planning

processes as well as increase the profiling of evaluation results within the Department of Planning's reporting cycle.

Opportunities – The Panel identified several factors which offer opportunities to further strengthen the evaluation function.

The Panel found a good appetite for evaluation to support evidence-based decision making among UNRWA staff, including at the senior management level. There is an openness and growing demand for evaluation which potentially enhances the usefulness of the evaluation function in future.

In recent years, UNRWA has strengthened its system of results-based management, in particular, the systematic collection of data. The new MTS emphasises the importance of results-based management and includes a Common Monitoring Matrix (CMM) with indicators, baselines and targets.

The Agency has recently established a new e-tracking system for DIOS recommendations. It is expected that the tracking system will strengthen the implementation of recommendations at all levels.

At the decentralised level, many projects include a budget for evaluation. This ensures that, even in times of austerity measures, some activities of UNRWA are being evaluated.

Challenges - While the Panel found several strengths and opportunities, it is concerned about a number of issues and challenges:

The overall evaluation culture in UNRWA is weak. There are several aspects to this: a weak learning culture, a weak knowledge management system, decentralized evaluations perceived as donor-driven accountability instruments rather than as learning tools, and the sensitive political context discouraging a stronger evaluation culture.

Staffing of the Evaluation Division in DIOS is unsatisfactory. Given the size of UNRWA, the central Evaluation Division, with 3 staff and one JPO – who will soon leave – is very small.

The resources for conducting central evaluations are very limited and unpredictable. The total 'regular' resources available for the central evaluation function of approximately USD 625,000 annually (including staff cost) is less than 0.1% of the total annual General Fund which is significantly below the average of 0.3% of most UN system organizations.

The Panel found that while the organisational space for evaluation has widened over the past few years, the profile and the visibility of the Evaluation Division are still limited.

The space and capacity for evaluation in field offices is inconsistent. M&E officers and the M&E working group focus to a large extent on (valuable) monitoring and reporting tasks, while evaluation has – with few exceptions – limited to no space. Evaluations at the field level are conducted *ad hoc* and mainly upon request from donors.

The quality of the evaluation reports varies significantly. Only four out of 15 reports assessed are rated as "adequate". The mixed quality of evaluation reports potentially undermines the credibility and demand for evaluation over time.

The workload for managing and conducting professional evaluations is underestimated. The management of evaluations requires more than the actual conduct of an evaluation and includes the preparation of terms of references, the selection of consultants, logistical support, dialogue

between evaluation managers and evaluation team, quality assurance, communication of evaluation results and follow-up.

There is a limited pool of experienced evaluation consultants available or willing to conduct evaluations for UNRWA.

UNEG Norms

Independence - While the location of the central evaluation function and the behavioural independence of evaluation staff and external evaluators are satisfactory, significant financial constraints and the non-availability of evaluation reports to the public limit the independence of the evaluation function of UNRWA.

Credibility of evaluation - The Evaluation Division is pushing hard to increase the credibility of evaluations. The new Evaluation Architecture and guidelines will be major steps. Yet, there are multi-layered challenges to build evaluation capacities and competencies across the Agency (e.g. limited staff capacity to support evaluation at both central and decentralized levels; staff turnover).

Utility of evaluation – Stakeholder engagement during the evaluation process has recently been strengthened and the use of evaluation results for decision making enhanced. The Evaluation Division has ambitious plans for communicating evaluation results and thus increasing use.

Enabling environment – This criterion scores the lowest because of the weak evaluation culture, the very limited resources available for evaluation at the central level, the missing evaluation leadership role of UNRWA Management, and the constrained evaluability of UNRWA projects and programmes.

The *central* evaluation function is judged to be “under development”. The rating of UNRWA’s *central* evaluation function assessment is visualized in a spider diagram (paragraph 42).

Overall, the Panel views the evaluation function (central and decentral) in UNRWA as an emerging function that requires nurturing and an enabling environment in order to flourish. While there are strengths and opportunities, the evaluation function is faced with significant challenges.

Recommendations

The review provides recommendations to senior management in UNRWA, to the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS), the Department of Planning, to UNRWA’s donors and the Advisory Commission in order to further improve and strengthen the evaluation function. The recommendations focus on:

- the normative framework,
- the financial resources,
- the central and decentralized evaluation capacities,
- the quality assurance of evaluation reports,
- the evaluability of UNRWA’s projects and programmes,
- the visibility and profile of the evaluation office, and
- the use of evaluation results.

1. Introduction

About the Peer Review

1. This Professional Peer Review (hereafter Peer Review) of the evaluation function of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was carried out under the provisions contained in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations.¹ This peer review was undertaken jointly with the DAC Evaluation Network and was conducted using a framework developed by a collaborative task team of UNEG and the DAC Evaluation Network. While peer reviews in the past have focussed on central evaluation functions, this Peer Review has – to the extent possible - also looked at the decentralized evaluation function as it has recently gained significant attention within UNEG.² It is the first Peer Review of UNRWA’s evaluation function and was carried out at the request of UNRWA based on UNEG’s recommendation that evaluation functions undergo a review every five years.³ The panel included two UNEG evaluation heads, a senior evaluator from a donor country (representing the DAC Network for Development Evaluation) and a senior advisor to the panel (see Annex 9 for the panel’s background).
2. Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides the background to the Peer Review and the UNRWA evaluation function. Chapter 2 (Overall Assessment) presents strengths and opportunities as well as key issues emerging from the analysis of UNRWA’s evaluation function. In Chapter 3 (Assessment against UNEG Norms) the Panel assesses the central and decentralized evaluation functions in UNRWA along the UNEG Normative Framework, i.e. independence, credibility, utility and enabling environment. In Chapter 4 (Recommendations) the Panel offers some recommendations for DIOS, UNRWA senior management and donors. The annexes include analytical tools and interim products (e.g. SWOT analysis, quality assessment, etc.).

Purpose of the Peer Review

3. The Peer Review is part of an on-going process to improve UNRWA’s evaluation function as suggested by the UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews.⁴ The review provides recommendations to senior management in UNRWA, to the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) and to UNRWA’s donors in order to further improve and strengthen the evaluation function. The report also intends to provide insights to UNRWA’s Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (ACIO) on the functioning of the evaluation function.
4. The purpose of this Peer Review is to:
 - e) Enhance knowledge, confidence and use of evaluation within UNRWA;
 - f) Advance UNRWA’s normative framework for evaluation;

¹ UNEG, 2011. UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations. http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=945

² UNEG, 2011. UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations. http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=945

³ UNEG Norms 4.1 and 4.2.

⁴ UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations, 2011, para.4.

- g) Stimulate/encourage dialogue between various key stakeholders on expectations and the role of the evaluation function leading to strengthened organizational performance;
- h) Encourage a culture of evaluation, learning and accountability within UNRWA.

Subject and Scope

5. This is a second-generation Peer Review designed to be lean in order to avoid making unreasonable demands of time, expense and additional workload on both panel members and the organization being reviewed.⁵ This is reflecting in the terms of reference attached to this report (Annex 10). The panel therefore used an existing self-assessment conducted by UNRWA for the 2013/2014 JIU review of the evaluation function as well as the results of the JIU review and allocated sufficient time for panel discussions and conclusions during the panel's visit.

6. Considering both central and decentralized evaluation functions, this report includes an assessment of the:

- *Internal normative framework for evaluation:* The impact of existing policies and procedures of the evaluation function, including the extent to which they conform to UN norms and standards.
- *Evaluation quality:* (i) Quality of evaluation processes, products and resulting decisions made using evaluation products. This includes the planning process, the conduct of evaluations, the impartiality/independence of evaluations, the quality of evaluation reports, the independence of evaluation teams and team leaders, and the ability to produce credible and timely reports. (ii) Assessment of the quality assurance system, including the application of methodology and of the production of knowledge management products.
- *Evaluation follow-up and use:* (i) Extent and utility of follow-up to evaluations, including the actual impact of evaluations, how evaluation results are disseminated and lessons used both within UNRWA and external stakeholders; (ii) The responsibility for the follow up of recommendations and how follow up is undertaken and monitored.
- The broader *enabling environment* for evaluation within and outside UNRWA.

The Peer Review looked at the evaluation activities carried out between 2012 and 2015.

Core Assessment Criteria

7. The Peer Review used the following criteria for review of the evaluation function, based on UNEG norms and standards (Annex 2 for details):

- a) *Independence of evaluation and evaluation systems:*** The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process concerned with the policy making and programme management. The planning and selection of evaluation subjects should be an impartial and independent process.
- b) *Credibility of evaluation:*** Credibility requires evaluations to report successes and failures in a transparent and rigorous manner, and provide technically credible findings in the subject area being assessed. This depends on the expertise and independence of the

⁵ UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations, 2011, para.17.

evaluators, as well as the degree of transparency and involvement of key stakeholders in the evaluation process.

- c) Utility of evaluation:** To have an impact on decision making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way, fully reflecting the different interests and needs of parties involved.
- d) Enabling environment:** The requirement for an appropriate enabling environment and institutional framework that supports the evaluation function was a key element of the JIU report and is expected to feature more prominently in the revised Norms and Standards currently being developed.

Approach and Process

8. As an initial basis for its work, the review team used an existing self-assessment conducted by UNRWA for the 2013/2014 JIU review of the evaluation function. In conducting its work, the Panel utilized a peer exchange approach in order to enrich its independent assessment and to promote learning through discussions on ways to meet common challenges related to evaluation practice. Beyond the UNRWA Evaluation Division, the Panel met with a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including UNRWA senior management, heads of relevant departments/programmes and field offices in Beirut, Jerusalem and Amman, members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and members of the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (by phone) as well as representatives of donor governments (Annex 5).

9. The review process unfolded as follows:

- a) Preparation phase (March - May 2015): Mobilization of the Panel, agreement on ToR (Annex 11), selection of senior advisor;
- b) Fact-finding phase (mid-May – late June 2015): The senior advisor and the Panel undertook an extensive document review (Annex 6) and consultations with UNRWA staff. In addition, 15 evaluation reports were quality assessed - more than half of the 27 evaluation reports prepared since 2012. Of the 15 reports, five were managed by the Evaluation Division, and 10 are decentralized evaluations (Annex 3). The selection was largely based on the availability of the reports (not all decentralized reports were readily available). Inception and preliminary assessment reports were prepared and shared with UNRWA prior to the arrival of the Panel in Amman;
- c) Visits by the Panel to UNRWA headquarters and the field offices in Amman, Beirut and West Bank (28 June 2015 – 8 July 2015) in order to interview UNRWA staff in departments and field offices as well as representatives of the UNRWA Advisory Commission/donor governments (Annex 5). In addition, the Panel had an opportunity to participate in a presentation of preliminary findings of an ongoing evaluation.⁶ Also, the Panel observed a meeting of the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group (1 July 2015). Towards the end of the visit, the Panel conducted a SWOT-Analysis (Annex 1), rated the UNRWA's Central Evaluation Function along the UNEG Norms (Annex 2) and analysed the DIOS Draft Evaluation Architecture (Annex 4). Finally, the Panel presented and discussed preliminary

⁶ Preliminary Findings - Evaluation of Security Risk Management Programme, 29 June 2015.

findings with the Chief of the UNRWA Evaluation Division, the Director of DIOS and the Deputy Commissioner-General.

- d) Preparation of a draft Report of the Professional Peer Review of the UNRWA Evaluation Function (by end July).
- e) Submission of the draft report (September 2015) for UNRWA comments.
- f) Submission of the final report (November 2015).

Limitations

10. No self-assessment by the UNRWA Evaluation Division was conducted as the team made use of the 2013/14 JIU review of UNRWA's evaluation function as a quasi-self-assessment. In addition, the Chief of the Evaluation Division provided useful updates on key developments in the period since 2014.

11. Since this is a review and not an evaluation, triangulation of data is limited. An originally envisaged survey among UNRWA staff was not conducted adhering to the lean approach of second-generation peer reviews. Given time and security constraints, the UNRWA field offices in Gaza and Syria were not visited.

12. However, the Panel is confident that the close to 50 interviews conducted and the document analysis provided sufficient data to identify credible findings.

UNRWA's Evaluation Function

13. The evaluation function of UNRWA was first established in 2007, as part of the Programme Coordination and Support Unit. Since its establishment, the evaluation function has undergone significant changes, including being moved in 2010 to its current location within the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS). Over the past five years the evaluation function has been gradually strengthened and is approaching a level of maturity that would benefit from a peer review. The Peer Review for UNRWA was included in the annual work programme for UNRWA endorsed by the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight and part of the UNRWA work programme for 2015.

14. The evaluation function of UNRWA is comprised of a central evaluation function in DIOS and decentralized evaluation functions in headquarter departments and field offices. The Evaluation Division within DIOS assumes functional leadership and oversight over UNRWA's evaluation system and is responsible for conducting centralized evaluation and providing quality assurance for decentralized evaluation. Since 2012, seven reports have been issued by the Evaluation Division, while some 20 reports were prepared by the decentralized evaluation functions.

The Normative Framework of the evaluation function of UNRWA consists of the Organization Directive -14 (OD-14), Operating Procedures and a draft Evaluation Architecture.⁷

15. The evaluation function of UNRWA was extensively reviewed by the JIU in 2013-14.⁸ The assessment for UNRWA, which built on a self-assessment by the UNRWA Evaluation Division,

⁷ Some of the operating procedures and the architecture were still under development when the peer review panel visited which provided for an opportunity for their panel to provide their views on them.

resulted in a low maturity scoring for the function pointing to the need for its significant strengthening. Since then, processes for the centralized evaluation function have been more formalized, the centralized function has engaged with the decentralized functions to start harmonizing their approach to evaluation, and evaluation planning has been aligned with strategic programming in order to move UNRWA's evaluation further up the maturity scale.

16. This Peer Review is part of UNRWA's strategy to build a stronger evaluation function.

⁸ JIU/REP/2014/6 Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System:
https://www.unjiu.org/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2014_6_English.pdf

2. Strengths, Opportunities and Challenges

17. The Panel conducted a SWOT analysis (Annex 1) from which the following strengths, opportunities and challenges emerged.

Strengths

More space for evaluation created

18. Since its establishment in 2007, UNRWA's central evaluation function has gradually created space within the organisation for independent evaluation. Much of this has been achieved by a very participatory evaluation process which engages internal key stakeholders throughout the process and by identifying and working with champions for the evaluation function. Furthermore, the Evaluation Division has managed to put evaluation on the map and has commissioned or conducted some important evaluations in recent years. While the quality of the evaluations varies, a number of reports were perceived to be useful by UNRWA staff.⁹ The expanding space for evaluation can be attributed to the *participatory* approach of the Evaluation Division thereby engaging and consulting with UNRWA departments and field offices during the entire evaluation process. In addition, the Evaluation Division is providing advice and support to evaluations managed by headquarter departments and field offices (decentralized evaluations). This support, while still rather ad-hoc, is seen as very helpful and has enhanced appreciation of the evaluation function.

New evaluation architecture and guidelines provide opportunity to strengthen evaluation function

19. A new evaluation architecture for UNRWA is currently being developed.¹⁰ The Panel would like to commend the consultative process chosen to accompany the development of this new architecture across the Agency. This has created a momentum for evaluation as it puts evaluation on the agenda and creates ownership among UNRWA staff. The Panel has made several suggestions on how the architecture could be further strengthened (para. 50 and Annex 4). In parallel, the Evaluation Division is currently developing guidelines for operating procedures to implement the new evaluation architecture.¹¹ A revised architecture and guidelines provide an opportunity to strengthen the evaluation function in UNRWA by clarifying processes, roles and responsibilities as well as setting quality standards.

Dedicated Chief of the Evaluation Division

20. The current Chief of the Evaluation Division and his team are advancing the evaluation function - in spite of major constraints (see challenges below) - in the right direction of the UNEG Norms & Standards. Several initiatives, like the new evaluation architecture, the new guidelines, trainings or the present Peer Review, have been initiated by the Evaluation Division. These efforts

⁹ Examples: High Level Evaluation of the Organizational Structure in LFO, DIOS, 2014; Evaluation of the Family Health Team Approach, DIOS, 2014; Medium Term Strategy (MTS) Mid-Term Evaluation, DIOS, 2013. Review of UNRWA's Fleet Management, DFF International Limited/DIOS, 2011.

¹⁰ DIOS Evaluation Architecture, UNRWA, Draft, June 2015.

¹¹ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015.

are beginning to show results (e.g. inclusion of the evaluation plan in the Medium Term Strategy) and are positively perceived by many UNRWA staff interviewed.

Strong link between planning and evaluation enhances value of evaluation as management tool

21. The Panel found a strong link between planning and evaluation at the central level in UNRWA. Interviews confirmed that a close collaboration between the Department of Planning and the Evaluation Division which provides opportunities to better target subjects for evaluation within broader planning processes as well as increase the profiling of evaluation results within the Department of Planning's reporting cycle. The Agency has developed a long-term evaluation plan for the period 2015-2021 for the centrally-managed evaluation function which is included in the Medium-term Strategy (MTS) 2016-2021.¹² This demonstrates an intention to use evaluations as a strategic management tool. There is also an interest to applying evaluative techniques such as theory of change approaches to the planning and approval processes of programmes and projects which if followed through would increase the measurability of UNRWA interventions.

Opportunities

Strong interest for evaluations by several stakeholders

22. The Panel found a strong interest for evaluations to support evidence-based decision making among several UNRWA staff, including at the senior management level. There is an openness and growing demand for evaluations which potentially enhances the usefulness of the evaluation function in future. Interviewees mentioned different types of evaluations they would like to see, such as real-time evaluations and impact evaluations. The Panel also found a demand for evaluations and support for a strong evaluation function (central and decentralised) among the five donor government representatives the Panel met in Jerusalem. Encouragingly, the demand from donors is not only motivated by accountability reasons, but as much by the desire for learning. This opens interesting opportunities for the evaluation function.

Strengthened RBM system enhances evaluability of UNRWA's work

23. In recent years, UNRWA has strengthened results-based management. In particular, the systematic collection of data has been advanced, field offices conduct quarterly management reviews and the Agency holds a mid-year results review to assess Agency-wide progress. Moreover, the new MTS emphasises the importance of results-based management and includes a Common Monitoring Matrix (CMM) with indicators, baselines and targets.¹³ UNRWA staff members consider the unified monitoring of common indicators by all departments and field offices a significant progress. UNRWA also provides reporting to the Advisory Commission and its Sub-Committee in the form of an annual Harmonised Results Review. The strengthened RBM system and the availability of data enhance the evaluability of UNRWA's work (the data provides a solid basis for quantitative and qualitative analysis).

¹² Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021, Annex 3.

¹³ Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021, Annex 1.

New tracking system should contribute to implementation of recommendations

24. The Agency has recently established a new e-tracking system for DIOS recommendations. It is expected that the tracking system will strengthen the implementation of recommendations at all levels (see para. 63).

Resources for project evaluations

25. At the decentralised level, many projects include - at the request of donors - a budget for evaluations. This ensures that, even in times of austerity measures, some activities of UNRWA are being evaluated.

Challenges

26. While the Panel found several strengths and opportunities (above), it is concerned about a number of issues and challenges.

Weak evaluation culture

27. While some stakeholders seem keen on evaluation, the overall evaluation culture in UNRWA is weak. There are several aspects to it.

28. First, many of the interviewees stressed that UNRWA has a weak *learning culture*. The weak learning culture stems from a number of factors. One reason given is related to the cultural virtue of oral communication. This makes conveying *documented experiences* challenging. Another reason is language. A majority of UNRWA's national staff is not fluent in English (evaluation reports are mostly in English). Furthermore, criticism – even if constructive - is – according to some interviewees - mainly perceived as a threat and not as an opportunity. Finally, learning is also affected by a very basic constraint – lack of time.

29. Second, there is a weak *knowledge management system* to systematically collect and share experience and lessons learned in UNRWA. UNRWA *communities of practices* do not exist. Several interviewees mentioned the use of knowledge networks outside of UNRWA, i.e. communities of practices managed by other agencies. Also, accessing evaluation reports is not easy. The UNRWA website on the Internet does not provide access to evaluation reports. While the Agency's Intranet has a site for evaluation reports, it is not a complete depository and the Evaluation Division does not exactly know how many decentralized evaluations are being produced. In addition, there are only few evaluation plans at the level of field offices or departments.

30. Third, the Panel found that decentralized evaluations are - at least partly - perceived as donor-driven *accountability instruments* rather than as *learning tools*. In that sense, evaluations are managed as bureaucratic requirements thereby weakening the learning dimension.

31. Finally, the sensitive political context in which UNRWA operates may also discourage a strong evaluation culture as evaluative evidence can sometimes be overridden by political considerations.¹⁴ The Panel was repeatedly told that given the political context, any change is a challenge.

¹⁴ An example mentioned to the Panel was the evaluation of the Qalqilya Hospital (2013) which concluded that the Hospital should be closed. However, for political reasons, it remained open.

Small and fragile staff capacity in Evaluation Division and growing expectations

32. The staffing of the Evaluation Division in DIOS is inadequate. Given the size of UNRWA the central Evaluation Division's size with 3 staff positions (2 international posts and one local senior area staff post) is rather small and fragile (see also para. 55).

33. The small and shrinking capacity contrasts with increasing demand and expectations vis-à-vis the Evaluation Division. The Panel is of the view that while some efficiency gains might be feasible, the increasing demand for evaluations will overwhelm the capacity of the Division to deliver credible and useful evaluations. This could be exacerbated by some of the additional tasks for the Evaluation Division set out in the draft evaluation architecture, in particular with regard to quality control¹⁵ and the communication of evaluation results, including preparation of summaries, lessons learned exercise, evaluation briefs and an evaluation newsletter.¹⁶

34. The Panel's concern is that given planned evaluations¹⁷ and the current and future staffing situation, the draft Evaluation Architecture/Policy cannot be implemented, at least not in the short-term.

Very limited and unpredictable resources for conducting central evaluations

35. Not only is the number of staff in the Evaluation Division limited, but so are the financial resources to conduct evaluations (see paras 67-69). The Panel confirmed what is stated in the DIOS annual work plan 2015: the funding situation for the Evaluation Division is highly variable, depending on the overall funding situation of UNRWA and voluntary contributions from donors. Resources available from the General Fund for central evaluations are budgeted at USD 175,000 for 2015.¹⁸ A central evaluation is budgeted between USD 75,000 and 150,000, in a few cases up to 250,000 (not including ED staff cost). The Evaluation Division is required to spend significant efforts to raise funding from donors to implement its work plan. While this challenge has been overcome for 2015¹⁹, the Panel is concerned that current financial pressure might further limit resources available for evaluation. The Panel realises that during times of financial constraints forcing the organization to implement broad austerity measures it is not possible to increase capacity. At the same time it is the Panel's task to highlight the imperative for appropriate investment in the function and to compare UNRWA with the resources spent on evaluation in other UN agencies (see para. 67).

Limited profile and visibility of the Evaluation Division

36. The Panel found that while the organisational space for evaluation has widened over the past few years, the profile and the visibility of the Evaluation Division is still limited. This is partly because of its location in DIOS. Being located in the same department with internal audit and investigation impedes to some extent the identity of the evaluation function while also situating the function squarely as a purely oversight function and not a learning function. This set-up is comparable to several other UN agencies but, as highlighted in the JIU system-wide review of the evaluation function, combined functions seem to struggle more and, on average, were ranked lower

¹⁵ DIOS Evaluation Architecture, draft June 2015, para. 19.

¹⁶ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft June 2015, para. 88.

¹⁷ Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021, Annex 3.

¹⁸ Work Plan 2015, DIOS, UNRWA, 2015, para. 70.

¹⁹ Work Plan 2015, DIOS, UNRWA, 2015, para. 67.

in most key performance areas (see Annex 7). Hence, the panel believes that while co-location certainly can have benefits, additional measures are required to give the central evaluation function improved and sufficient visibility and to ensure that the dual function of accountability and learning is fully understood by key stakeholders (see para 43).

Inconsistent space and capacity for evaluation in field offices

37. UNRWA has a number of monitoring and evaluation officers in field offices and headquarter departments. In addition, there is a working group for monitoring and evaluation. Discussions with M&E officers and the participation in one of the working group meetings (video conference) revealed that M&E officers and the working group focus to a large extent on (valuable) monitoring and reporting tasks, while evaluation has – with few exceptions – limited to no space. It appears that evaluations at the field level are conducted *ad hoc*, and only if included in project documents and upon request from donors. Evaluation plans prepared by field offices or departments are the exception rather than the rule. More worryingly, some staff in charge of evaluations were on consultancy contracts, which had to be terminated due to austerity measures. The uneven space for evaluation is also a challenge for future capacity building efforts (who do you train?).

Varying quality of evaluation reports

38. The Panel has assessed the quality of several UNRWA evaluation reports (see para. 51 and Annex 3). Overall, the quality of the reports varies significantly. Only four out of 15 reports assessed are rated as “adequate”. The mixed quality of evaluation reports potentially undermines the credibility and demand for evaluations over time. There is scope for standardisation in terms of quality (minimal standards) and format (e.g. common report structure). The Panel therefore fully supports the currently ongoing development of new guidelines with the provision of standard procedures.

Underestimated workload for managing and conducting evaluations

39. It seems to the Panel that the varying quality of evaluation reports is partly due to an underestimation of the workload for managing and conducting professional evaluations. The management of useful evaluations requires more than the actual conduct of an evaluation (i.e. the collection and analysis of data). The preparation of terms of references, the selection of consultants or the logistical support require significant time. The conduct of the evaluation is also time-consuming. The complex environment in which UNRWA operates requires time for the evaluation consultant or team to become acquainted with the region. During the evaluation, the dialogue between the evaluation managers and the evaluation team as well as with key stakeholders requires time. Emerging professional practices also point to the need to create evaluation reference panels or expert advisory groups. While a good process investment, these need to be managed. Quality assurance is a continued process for the evaluation manager. After the evaluation report has been finalized, the communication of evaluation results and the follow-up require significant attention of the evaluation manager in order to make the evaluation most useful and to make its key findings influenced in a timely manner policy and decision making. In the case of UNRWA’s Evaluation Division, the fact that the Division does not count on support staff to ensure logistical support to the teams means that this task is undertaken by the professional staff or interns, thus absorbing a significant amount of professional staff time on logistical issues and bottlenecks.

Limited pool of experienced consultants

40. Another reason for the varying quality of evaluation reports might be related to the selection of consultants. During discussions with UNRWA staff, the Panel was repeatedly told that it is difficult to recruit evaluation consultants who meet the required competences, i.e. have the necessary knowledge about UNRWA (e.g. specificities of a direct implementing agency), political understanding of the region, evaluation skills, gender expertise and thematic know how. Given the fact that most teams are small due to funding constraints it can also be difficult to find a consultant who combines all the requirements. In addition, it appears that there is a rather low interest of consultants to conduct evaluation for UNRWA. Interviewees mentioned several possible reasons. The security situation in the region might prevent potential candidates from applying. Also consultancy fees offered by UNRWA are not fully competitive (approx. USD 550 per day for a senior consultant).²⁰

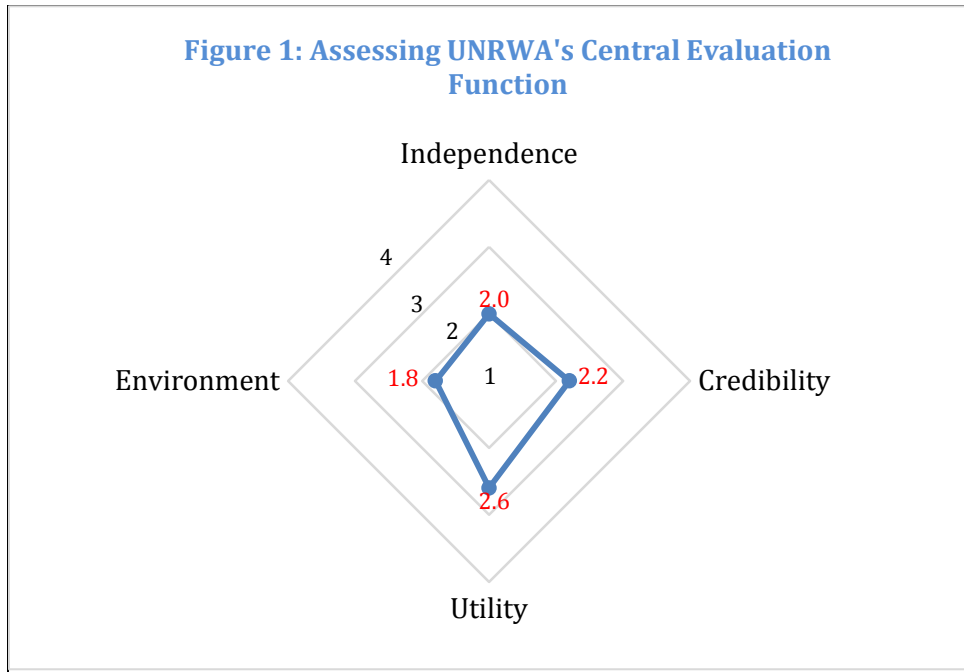
Overall, the Panel views the evaluation function in UNRWA as an emerging function that requires nurturing and an enabling environment in order to flourish. While there are strengths and opportunities, the evaluation function is faced with significant challenges.

3. Assessment against the UN Evaluation Group Norms

41. In this chapter, the Panel systematically assesses the central and decentralized evaluation functions in UNRWA against the UNEG Normative Framework, i.e. independence, credibility, utility and enabling environment. First, the Panel rated the *central* evaluation function along the key questions and norms. In parallel, this report provides a narrative assessment of both the central and decentralized evaluation function.

42. Figure 1 summarizes the rating of UNRWA's *central* evaluation function. Overall, the central evaluation function is judged to be "under development" with the criterion of Utility scoring the highest (2.6) and Enabling Environment scoring lowest (1.8). These ratings reflect the average of the ratings of several sub-questions for each criterion (see Annex 2) which are all further elaborated below.

²⁰ Other UN agencies offer similar or slightly higher fees to evaluators. Fees offered by bilateral agencies and the International Financial Institutions can be twice as high.



Key: 4: good practices, 3: satisfactory, 2: under development, 1: nascent
Source: Peer Review Panel, 2015 (Annex 2).

Independence

While the location of the central evaluation function and the behavioural independence of evaluation staff and external evaluators are satisfactory, significant financial constraints and the non-availability of evaluation reports to the public limit the independence of the evaluation function of UNRWA.

Structural independence of the central evaluation function is satisfactory – direct dialogue of head of the evaluation division with senior management and donors is encouraged by the Panel

43. The UNRWA Evaluation Division is not a stand-alone office but a dedicated evaluation office embedded in the multifunctional Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) together with the internal audit, investigations and the ethics functions. The DIOS Director – not the head of the evaluation division - reports and is directly accountable to the UNRWA Commissioner-General who is advised by the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (ACIO).²¹ While the central evaluation function has no full structural stand-alone independence, it is sufficiently independent and the set-up is comparable to several other UN agencies.²² Still, the Panel is of the view that the head of the evaluation division should be enabled to engage in regular, direct dialogue with senior management, e.g. the Deputy Commissioner-General, and donor representatives in order to hear first-hand their priorities and to update them on latest evaluation matters and their relevance to key policy and programmatic developments (see also para. 36).

²¹ Organization Directive No. 14, para. 7.

²² E.g. the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Internal Oversight Services (IOS) of UNESCO, Internal Oversight Division (IOD) of WIPO.

Very limited financial independence

44. The Organization Directive No. 14 states, that “DIOS shall be provided with the necessary resources in terms of adequate funds and professional staff to maintain its independence and objectivity”.²³ This is in line with the UNEG Norms that state: “The Governing Bodies and/or the Heads of Organizations are also responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to enable the evaluation function to operate effectively and with due independence.”²⁴ However, UNRWA’s overall financial difficulties have direct implications on the evaluation budget. Resources available from the General Fund for central evaluations - allocated by the Commissioner-General through the Director of Finance - are budgeted at USD 175,000 for 2015.²⁵ This small budget constrains the Evaluation Division in “freely” selecting evaluation subjects to be assessed and makes evaluations largely dependent on donor funding. (see also para 67 for more details).

Sufficient independence in selecting evaluation subjects

45. At the central level, it is the Evaluation Division in DIOS that has the lead in selecting evaluation subjects and in preparing the work plan. The overall responsibility is with the Director of DIOS. The planning methodology takes into account UNRWA specific risks and the opportunity to contribute to accountability and learning. The Evaluation Division aligns the planning process with the MTS.²⁶ The final work plan is reviewed by the ACIO and approved by the Commissioner-General. The approval of evaluation plans by the head of the agency (or the governing body) is in line with UNEG Norms.²⁷

46. The selection of evaluation subjects in field offices (decentralized level) is *ad hoc* and to a large degree project and donor-driven which also pre-empts an independent selection of evaluation subjects.

Behavioral independence and impartiality of evaluation staff and evaluators largely guaranteed

47. Based on interviews and document review²⁸, it seems to the Panel that the behavioural independence and impartiality of evaluation staff and evaluators are to a large extent guaranteed. Independence of the evaluation function is maintained by the use of external consultants for agency-wide initiatives and a mixed team approach for sectoral initiatives. In several instances, departments and fields have requested the Evaluation Division to manage their evaluations to ensure a higher level of independence.²⁹ Behavioural independence in the recent past was affected by a ban on most mission travel in the region and the inability to use funds, even extra-budgetary, to hire consultants. Regarding travel, the security situation and passport regulations also at times adversely affected evaluation planning. All restrictions related to the financial austerity were lifted one month after the panel’s visit, following the 41st meeting of the ACIO. As a matter of principle,

²³ Organization Directive No. 14, para. 19, c.

²⁴ Norms for Evaluation in the UN System, UNEG, 2005, para. 2.3.

²⁵ Work Plan 2015, DIOS, UNRWA, 2015, para. 70.

²⁶ DIOS work plan 2015, paras 61-63, with Evaluation Plan annex 5; Evaluation Plan also included in MTS 2016-2021, p.71.

²⁷ Norms for Evaluation in the UN System, UNEG, 2005, Norm N2, p. 7.

²⁸ In particular a) Organization Directive No. 14, para. 19 and 20; and b) Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015, para 15.

²⁹ DIOS work plan 2015, para. 58.

the Director of DIOS should have full authority, within the budget, to approve travel plans even during times of overall financial difficulties. Moreover, the political environment might occasionally narrow the space for independent and impartial evaluations as political considerations might prevail over evidence from evaluations in decision-taking.

Evaluation reports not publicly available

48. The availability and accessibility of UNRWA evaluation reports are currently very limited. The public UNRWA website³⁰ has no dedicated space for evaluation and evaluation reports are not online in spite of the good intentions stated in the Organization Directive No. 14: “*DIOS’s evaluation responsibility includes: ... ensuring that internal and external stakeholders have access to evaluation findings and recommendations*”.³¹ The Panel is encouraged to see that DIOS is working on a disclosure policy for all reports and the Evaluation Division on a new website to make evaluation reports publicly accessible. Currently all centralized evaluation reports – if considered of sufficient quality by the Evaluation Division - are made available to the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight. The non-approval by the Evaluation Division – based on quality arguments - may at times impede the availability of reports.

49. The UNRWA *Intranet* has a site for the Evaluation Division that contains many central and decentralized evaluation reports. However, the repository is incomplete as the Evaluation Division does not receive all evaluation reports managed at the decentralized level. Moreover, navigation is not straightforward - a view shared by several UNRWA staff.

Credibility of evaluations

The Evaluation Division is working hard to increase the credibility of evaluations. The new Evaluation Architecture and guidelines will be major steps. Yet, there are multi-layered challenges to build evaluation capacities and competencies across the Agency.

Normative framework for evaluation processes in development

50. A new set of norms and procedures for the UNRWA evaluation function is currently being drafted (Evaluation Architecture) and supplementing guidelines “Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA” (see also para. 19) have already been developed. The basis is the Organization Directive No. 14 of 2012. The Panel has analysed the draft Evaluation Architecture document and has made several suggestions on how the architecture could be further strengthened (Annex 4). Most importantly, the Evaluation Architecture should be transformed into an agency-wide *evaluation policy*, comparable to those of other UN agencies. Such an evaluation policy together with the guidelines would – once approved by the Commissioner General - constitute a solid normative framework. It will also respond to the request of some stakeholders, including donors, to clarify and formalize the evaluation process and to establish clear criteria for what should be evaluated and what not.

³⁰ unrwa.org.

³¹ Organization Directive No. 14, para. 14, g.

Varying quality of evaluation reports

51. The Panel has assessed the quality of 15 evaluation reports prepared between 2012 and 2015 (Annex 3). Five of the 15 evaluations were managed by the central Evaluation Division in DIOS. Overall, the quality of the 15 reports varies significantly (highest score: 39 points of max. 45, lowest score 10 points). Assessing against relatively high standards only four of the 15 evaluation reports assessed are “adequate” (Annex 3, Table 1, report no. 2, 10, 12, and 14). The reports have the lowest score when it comes to the evaluation design. This criterion demands – among other things - the use of a theory of how objectives and results are to be achieved, baseline data and comparison with a control group. Other areas that have received relatively low scores are the description of the evaluation scope and limitations. Cross-cutting issues, in particular gender, should receive more attention. There are also several criteria which overall are of adequate quality, like the use of evaluation criteria or the quality of recommendations. Generally speaking, the evaluation reports are very heterogeneous, both in terms of quality and format. Some reports might be better called reviews rather than evaluations.³² (see also para 38).

Gender and Human Rights analysis are not systematic

52. Lack of systematic gender analysis was evident in some of the evaluation reports reviewed. In general, and not surprisingly, central evaluations had high ratings for addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender and human rights. Only 4 out of the 10 reviewed decentralized evaluations received top ratings in this area. A number of interviewees also flagged their concern about the lack of gender analysis. UNEG has developed guidance on gender and human rights sensitive programming and these should be applied broadly. The Panel recognizes that it may not be possible to reflect relevant expertise on all teams but more needs to be done to integrate and reach out on both issues as part of the evaluation process.

Quality assurance processes are under development

53. Quality assurance during all phases of an evaluation (i.e. design, conduct, reporting) is a key concern to the Evaluation Division. The present Peer Review, initiated by the Evaluation Division, is also an initiative to strengthen the quality of evaluation.

54. Currently, quality assurance for the design, methodology and conduct of evaluations throughout the organisation is provided when possible by the central evaluation function. However, it is provided on an *ad-hoc* basis and is overall rather limited in view of the lack of capacity. This has been recognized by the Evaluation Division and several measures are being taken, most notably the development - with support from DFID - of guidelines for evaluation design and management, with standard operating procedures, including templates and checklists. The guidelines respond to the need to clarify and embed a division of labour for evaluation across the Agency in order for the decentralized evaluation system to work most effectively. This will no doubt also add responsibilities to the Evaluation Division. The idea in the draft guidelines is to make the Evaluation Division responsible for the quality assurance of *all* evaluations (central and decentralized) by signing off terms of reference, inception reports and final reports.³³ In principle, the new guidelines should certainly help to establish minimal quality standards in the Agency.

³² Review: *The periodic or ad hoc often rapid assessments of the performance of an undertaking, that do not apply the due process of evaluation. Reviews tend to emphasize operational issues.* (UNEG Norms, 2005, para. 1.4)

³³ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015, p. 11.

55. Yet, the Panel is concerned that these good intentions might overburden the Evaluation Division. This in particular with regard to making the Evaluation Division responsible for the quality assurance of *all* evaluations (central and decentralized) by signing off terms of reference, inception reports and final reports.³⁴ The Panel is of the view that this would not only overburden the Evaluation Division, but also shift part of the accountability for decentralized evaluations to the Evaluation Division and risk disempowering the decentralized evaluation function. Ownership of and full responsibility for decentralized evaluations should remain at the field or department level, a view shared by many stakeholders. The Evaluation Division should have a help-desk and advisory role with regard to quality assurance. Reaching out to in-house technical units (e.g. gender) or external advisors could also help strengthen the quality of evaluation reports. Of particular importance and highlighted by several stakeholders is the preparatory phase, i.e. the development of strong *terms of reference (ToR)* and the selection of competent external evaluators. The *Quality Assurance Checklist for UNRWA Evaluation Terms of Reference* as put forward in the new guidelines should help.

Multi-layered challenges to build evaluation capacity and competences

56. Given the size of UNRWA, the central Evaluation Division is very small. At the time of the panel's visit, there were three regular budget positions: two international staff (P5 and a temporary P3 against a budgeted P3), one senior area staff (local/national staff), as well as three short-term temporary staff: one Junior Professional Officer (JPO), one assistant with a consultancy contract and one intern. Due to the UNRWA austerity measures, the assistant's contract had just been terminated. The JPO and intern are also leaving the Division by September 2015, reducing capacity significantly at a time when a number of critical evaluation activities are ongoing. Already today, the permanent staff spend a significant amount of time with logistical work required to manage evaluations in the challenging environment, leaving less time to focus on substantive work. With three short-term staff leaving the situation is expected to further aggravate, also as a possible temporary DIOS relocation for a few months might disrupt the evaluation work and vicinity to stakeholders. The panel perceives a risk of burn-out of existing staff and a suboptimal implementation of the current evaluation programme due to staff turn-over.

57. The capacity to manage and conduct evaluations is not only a question of staff numbers, but also a question of staff experience and skills. The JIU report noted that UNRWA does not have a substantial number of staff in the higher professional grades (P4-D2) to carry out evaluations.³⁵ Seniority can contribute to the credibility of the evaluation function. The importance of training is recognized by the Evaluation Division in order to further develop the competencies of its staff as well as of potential decentralized evaluation focal points. For 2015, a four day specialized training by IPDET³⁶ was organized thanks to funding by DfID. The excellent attendance record by all field offices and HQ Departments confirms the need and appetite for such training.

58. At the decentralized level, UNRWA has a number of M&E officers in field offices and headquarters departments. In 2013 and 2014, the Evaluation Division trained over 200 staff during a two-day course on the basics of evaluation, a remarkable achievement.³⁷ However, during visits

³⁴ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015, p. 11.

³⁵ Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, UN Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, p. 21.

³⁶ IPDET, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training, is a recognized training initiative of the World Bank and Carleton University.

³⁷ DIOS work plan 2015, para. 81.

to field offices and discussions with staff, the Panel got the impression that M&E officers are mainly dealing with data collection, monitoring and reporting. While monitoring is important as it can enhance the evaluability of UNRWA's work, the capacity for managing evaluations appears rather limited. In the words of one M&E officer: "0% of my time is devoted to evaluations". In addition, some of the staff in charge of monitoring and evaluation are on uncertain consultancy contracts given the current austerity measures (see para. 37). More generally, it seems that M&E capacities vary between field offices and over time. The Panel observed that the situation in the Lebanon field office appeared to be more adequate than in other locations visited. The Panel was told that in the Gaza field office the M&E capacity is comparatively better off due to the availability of well-trained area staff. However, several interviewees expressed the view that – overall - departments and field offices lack the capacity and expertise to manage evaluations properly. Another concern raised was the availability of data and the need to improve the collection of disaggregated data. The lack of gender-segregated data may also be one of the reasons that the gender analysis in the reports reviewed received mostly low ratings. In short, the challenge to build decentralized evaluation capacity is multi-layered.

Utility of evaluations

Stakeholder engagement during the evaluation process has recently been strengthened and the use of evaluation results for decision making enhanced. The Evaluation Division has ambitious plans for communicating evaluation results.

Stakeholder engagement strengthened

59. Several UNRWA staff expressed the view that in the past centrally-managed evaluations have not always been conducted in a sufficiently participatory manner thereby reducing their value. However, it appears to the Panel that stakeholder engagement has recently been strengthened during all phases of the evaluation process, i.e. during the selection of evaluation subjects, during the evaluation and after the evaluation. Interviewees confirmed to have fruitful interactions with the Evaluation Division. The planning of evaluation is done systematically and in consultation with several stakeholders, i.e. headquarters departments, field offices, audit division, Advisory Commission and the ACIO.³⁸ Linking evaluations to the MTS and the establishment of the Evaluation Plan 2015-2021 have increased ownership among management. Member States of the Advisory Commission are viewed as key stakeholders and are included in steering committees established for high-profile evaluations. This is appreciated by stakeholders.

60. At the decentralized level, the Panel was not in a position to establish a clear picture regarding stakeholder engagement. Language seems to be an issue as most documents are in English (i.e. TOR, inception reports, evaluation reports). Language limitations also impede possible stakeholder consultations.

Ambitious plans to communicate evaluation results – too ambitious?

61. In the past, the communication of evaluation results was rather weak according to UNRWA staff and donor representatives. For example, some senior management miss not receiving immediate debriefings after evaluation missions have taken place. In another case, evaluation

³⁸ DIOS work plan 2015, para. 64.

results were not shared as the quality of the evaluation was considered inadequate.³⁹ While this may have been the right decision it raised questions amongst key stakeholders, in particular as they seemed unaware why the evaluation report was not shared. Balancing credibility and transparency in communication is not easy. The Panel is of the view that transparency should prevail and credibility can be managed by proper communication, i.e. low quality evaluation reports should be identified as such.

62. The Panel supports planned efforts to improve the communication of evaluation results, in particular the new disclosure policy, the new public website and the use of evaluation results in the Donor Harmonised Results Report.⁴⁰ At the same time, the Panel would like to caution that the planned activities may be overly ambitious and all add up to significant additional work (e.g. to prepare summaries, conduct lessons learned exercise, disseminate evaluation briefs and publish an evaluation newsletter).⁴¹ Given limited resources, priorities must be set and the implementation of the communication plans must be phased.

63. Finally, as mentioned previously, language is of course essential for communication. Depending on the target audience, selected evaluation results (full report or summaries) should be translated into Arabic.

System for follow-up expected to capture decentralized evaluations

64. Currently, follow up and tracking of evaluation recommendations is only done for evaluations conducted and commissioned by the central Evaluation Division (Table 1). However, the Agency has recently established a new e-tracking system for DIOS recommendations. The centralized evaluation recommendations have been moved to the system very recently and other evaluation recommendations are currently being moved (e.g. from JIU, OIOS evaluations). Tracking should strengthen the implementation of recommendations at all levels but in particular at the decentralized level and will be monitored in the Common Monitoring Matrix of the MTS 2016-2021, which includes as an indicator the “*degree of implementation of accepted evaluation recommendations*”.⁴²

³⁹ E.g. Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Evaluation, Preliminary Findings, 2013.

⁴⁰ UNRWA .. provides reporting to the Advisory Commission and its Sub-Committee in the form of the annual Harmonised Results Review. This reporting uses a prescribed sub-set of indicators from the biennium plans, complemented by a narrative analysis used to report on progress and achievements of Strategic Objectives. The Harmonised Results Report is produced in accordance with the Aid Effectiveness Agenda and the Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. (Field Implementation Plans 2014-2015, UNRWA, 2013).

⁴¹ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015, para. 88.

⁴² MTS 2016-2021, p. 68.

Table 1: Status of implementation of recommendations – 2014 (DIOS Evaluations)

Evaluation	Total recommendations	Open recommendations December 2014
(2011) Fleet Management Review	12	9
(2012) Organizational Development Evaluation	10	3
(2013) MTS Mid-Term Evaluation	12	0
(2014) Family Health Team Approach Evaluation	9	9
(2014) Evaluation of the Organizational Structure in LFO	12	7

Source: DIOS Annual Report 2014, para. 102.

Enhanced use of evaluation results for decision-making

65. The 2013/14 JIU review revealed a weakness with regard to the use of evidence from evaluations for decision-making in UNRWA, also in comparison to other UN organizations.⁴³ This is aggravated by the fact that most of UNRWA's work is never formally evaluated in the first place. In 2013, the Evaluation Division estimated that less than 30% of UNRWA's work was covered by evaluations.⁴⁴

66. However, the Panel had the impression that the use of evaluation results has improved. Several examples were mentioned by stakeholders demonstrating that evaluations had an immediate effect on decision making (see para. 18). Also, the new guidelines clearly stipulate the responsibility of senior management: *"It is the responsibility of senior management to ensure that evaluation findings and their implications for organisational improvement are discussed and addressed formally within the organisation. This means that such discussion of evaluations should be a regular item on the agenda of top and senior management meetings such as the Programme Directors' meetings with the Deputy Commissioner-General and Management Committee meetings (on a quarterly basis). In addition the UNRWA Annual Planning round should include inputs on relevant evaluation findings to inform the evidence base of Annual Reviews, Reports and Harmonized Results Reports."*⁴⁵ The Panel can only encourage senior management to adhere to this.

67. The foreseen increase in decentralized evaluations combined with a more strategic focus of corporate evaluations will bring new opportunities to feed synthesized evaluation findings into decision-making. For instance, a series of camp management evaluations could be presented in a lessons learned or discussion document. Briefings could be subsequently organized for key stakeholders. As the evaluation function matures it needs to become more strategic in how, when and where evaluation results are presented so as to inform decision-making.

Enabling environment

Inadequate resources for the evaluation function

68. Resources available for evaluation at the central level are not adequate. The estimated funding situation for the Evaluation Division for 2015 is shown in the Table 2 below (not including

⁴³ Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, UN Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, p. 41.

⁴⁴ Survey of the Decentralized Evaluation Function, UNRWA Questionnaire, JIU, 2013.

⁴⁵ Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, draft, June 2015, para. 89.

decentralized evaluations). Resources available from the General Fund for central evaluations are estimated at USD 175,000 annually. Adding the staff cost of the Evaluation Division (approx. USD 450,000), the total 'regular' resources available for the central evaluation function is approx. USD 625,000 annually. This is less than 0.1% of the total annual General Fund of approximately USD 670 million.⁴⁶ Central evaluation functions of most UN system organizations operate on average with 0.3% of organizational expenditures.⁴⁷ Even this is considered under-resourced. It impedes the ability of the Evaluation Division to conduct evaluations of sufficient rigour and size which also affects the credibility and utility of the evaluation function. According to the Evaluation Division, a central evaluation is budgeted between USD 75,000 and 150,000, in a few cases up to 250,000 (not including ED staff cost), depending on subject and scope. Funding for the UNRWA central evaluation function is not only very limited, it is also highly variable and depends on contributions from donor countries and UNRWA departments. Earmarked resources from donors for the central evaluation function for 2015 were provided by DFID, SDC and AusAid.⁴⁸ While welcome and much needed, these funds are not predictable and need to be mobilized for each evaluation, increasing the workload for the Department. It does also limit the department's ability to pursue strategic evaluations for which no funding is being made available, thus potentially skewing the evaluation work plan.

Table 2: Estimated Funding Situation of the Evaluation Division 2015
(not including staff cost)⁴⁹

	General Fund (\$)	Emergency (\$)	Earmarked GF (\$) ²²	Project (\$)	UNRWA Departments (\$)	Total (\$)
Travel	65 000					65 000
Other Contractual Services	100 000		145 000	36 317		281 317
Consultancy Services	10 000		275 000	18 000	150 000	453 000
Training			35 017			35 017
General Reserve			54 776			54 776
Total	175 000	0	509 793	54 317	150 000	889 110

Source: DIOS Workplan 2015, para. 70.

69. The Panel is aware that the critical funding situation for the central evaluation function mirrors the overall funding situation of UNRWA. However, given the size of some of UNRWA activities - like the USD 345 million reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared Camp (NBC) - the inclusion of an evaluation budget⁵⁰ seems not only necessary but also feasible from a financial point of view.

⁴⁶ Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - 1 January-31 December 2014, United Nations, New York, 2015, p.22.

⁴⁷ Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, UN Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, para. 73.

⁴⁸ DIOS work plan 2015, para. 71.

⁴⁹ Funding situation as of May 15 subject to change due to austerity measures and changing priorities of the Agency.

⁵⁰ The project had been audited revealing a number of planning and other shortcomings.

70. For projects, the situation is better as many projects have included a budget line for evaluations. However, “projects” accounted for only 25% of total UNRWA expenditures in 2014.⁵¹ In addition, resources for project evaluations are very small. The average budget for a project evaluation is estimated at around USD 15,000. These are typically one person evaluations which limits the right skills mix and national capacity building.

Management has a positive attitude towards evaluations but no leadership role yet

71. The Panel had an opportunity to meet with several senior managers in UNRWA, including the Deputy Commissioner-General.⁵² Based on various discussions, the Panel got the impression that senior managers have a positive attitude towards evaluations (see also para. 22). Also the fact that the evaluation function receives considerable attention in the MTS can be seen as indication for management appreciating the evaluation function as an essential management and decision-making tool. While there is openness and a positive attitude for evaluations, management does not yet *champion* the evaluation function. As stated by one senior manager: “*evaluation is not part of the thinking*”. To change that, it was suggested to the Panel that evaluation should be part of *quarterly management reviews*, thereby strengthen the institutionalization of the evaluation function. Given current capacities this is not a workable proposition.

Weak evaluation culture

72. As elaborated in paras 27 to 31, UNRWA has a weak evaluation and learning culture. The following example mentioned to the review team can serve as an illustration. The current effort to rebuild the Nahr el-Bared Camp (NBC) in the Lebanon following the 2007 conflict is a major undertaking including the reconstruction of 5,223 homes, 1,696 commercial units and all camp infrastructure. Efforts have yielded significant gains and UNRWA has learned many lessons related to reconstruction of this scale. However, the important participatory element of the project was never evaluated and the Evaluation Division could not facilitate the learning process. This was a missed opportunity as a similar reconstruction work in the Gaza may well have been able to benefit from the lessons learned in Lebanon.

73. At the same time, the Panel noticed a well-developed video-conferencing practice. This offers an opportunity for sharing experiences and lessons learned in building on the oral communication culture.

74. The Panel also registered regular HQ meetings. For example, the chiefs of infrastructure meet twice a year face-to-face. Each meeting is an opportunity to also share lessons from evaluations.

Strengthened RBM system

75. As seen above (para. 23), UNRWA has strengthened RBM in recent years. Data collection has been strengthened and systematized. However, the *analysis of the data* - what do the data tell us - is lagging behind. This offers an opportunity for the evaluation function, as the qualitative analysis of data is a core function of evaluations.

⁵¹ Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - 1 January-31 December 2014, United Nations, New York, 2015, para. 77.

⁵² The Commissioner-General was travelling at the time of the Panel’s visit to UNRWA.

76. The visits to the Lebanon field office highlighted the lack of systematic gender related data collection, monitoring and analysis which was also confirmed by other interviewees.

77. While the strengthened monitoring enhances the evaluability of UNRWA's work, two factors constrain the evaluability. First, it is, according to some interview partners, not always clear what the basis for an evaluation is, i.e. a documented strategy as a point of reference. Second, the use of *theory of change* to present the intervention logic is not yet widely used and therefore has to be reconstructed ex-post.

78. The existing collaboration between the Evaluation and Planning Divisions around evaluation planning and the application of evaluative techniques such as theory of change and evaluability techniques provides a good opportunity for evaluation to play a key role in strengthening the culture of results-based measurement and management within UNRWA. (see also para. 21.)

4. Recommendations

To the Department of Internal Oversight Services:

1. Normative framework:

- a. Turn the evaluation architecture into a comprehensive evaluation policy, which should be approved by the Commissioner-General as an organization-wide policy and organization directive.
- b. The policy should build on the current draft architecture document and clearly spell out the definition and purpose of evaluation, key responsibilities of all key stakeholders, guiding principles for evaluations, clear definition of corporate and decentralized evaluations, managing the process, planning and criteria for the selection of evaluations, what to evaluate, necessary resources, and ensuring use/dissemination of evaluations.
- c. Clarify the role of DIOS with regard to quality support (helpdesk-function).
- d. As a principle, all evaluation reports should be public. If the quality of a report does not meet minimal standards, it should be made clear (e.g. disclaimer).
- e. Selected evaluation results should be translated into Arabic (e.g. synopsis).

2. Central evaluation capacity/competences:

Strengthen the central evaluation capacity. Possible scenarios are:

For immediate implementation:

- a. Consider assigning, on a rotational basis, internal audit staff to the Evaluation Division to participate in performance evaluations/audits;
- b. Assign full-time assistance to administrative and logistical work of the Evaluation Division, in order to free the evaluation professionals to focus on core tasks;
- c. Consider establishing at least one junior area staff position to assist with research, website management, communications activities and logistics.
- d. Simplify processes by standardisation.⁵³

For mid-term consideration:

- e. Prepare a project proposal – a package – to “Strengthening the evaluation function in UNRWA” to be submitted to donors (to enhance the capacity to manage central evaluations, to enhance the capacity to provide quality assurance to decentralized evaluations, to improve communications products; capacity building etc.);
- f. A project proposal could also include the following elements:
 - i. Ask donors for seconding evaluation experts and/or JPOs to DIOS/ED;
 - ii. Funding for outsourcing part of the quality assurance work for decentralized evaluations to evaluation experts who are familiar with UNRWA and the region;

⁵³ Example: prepare a concise briefing package for external evaluators including Agency information, code of conduct, travel/visa requirements, etc. in order to reduce time required to brief consultants.

- iii. Explore possibilities to engage UNVs or similar types of volunteer schemes;
- g. Reach out to academia and develop a standing internship programme with universities offering degrees in evaluation or relevant subject matter areas; this could include also regional universities;
- h. Ensure that the annual evaluation report contains the quality assessment results, a synthesis on evaluations undertaken, recommendation tracking and data regarding the implementation of the evaluation policy;
- i. Establish a community of practice of UNRWA “evaluators” and organize regular capacity building activities, web discussions, video conferences etc. to support this CoP.

3. *Decentralized evaluation capacity/competences:*

Strengthen the decentralized evaluation capacity. Possible avenues are:

- a. Confirm the responsibilities of the field offices and therein the Programme Support Offices (PSOs) for decentralized evaluations;
- b. Ensure the capabilities of the Programme Support Offices’ to manage decentralized evaluations;
- c. As part of major emergency appeals include funding for temporary evaluation capacities to be located in the Programme Support Offices;
- d. Identify existing in-house evaluation competences among area staff with a view to establish a community of practices to provide support across field offices;
- e. M&E officers to participate in existing free learning opportunities (e.g. UNEG evaluation webinars);
- f. Establish a pool of external evaluators with a strong track-record working in the region.

4. *Quality assurance:*

- a. Conduct an annual or biennial quality assessment of all central and decentralized evaluation reports (central and decentral) so as to identify areas for improvement and increase the overall quality.⁵⁴

5. *Evaluability:*

- a. Use evaluations to develop – where missing – theories of change jointly with project/programme managers to promote the use of theories of change also during the planning phase of projects and programmes thereby increase the evaluability of UNRWA activities.

⁵⁴ Such quality assessments are generally commissioned to external consultants as DIOS should not assess itself. This praxis is adhered to be several UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF, UN-OIOS, etc.)

To the Department of Planning:

6. Management response tracking system :
 - a. Set up a transparent management response tracking system for central and decentralized evaluations.

To UNRWA senior management:

7. Consider options to enhance visibility and profile of the evaluation office:
 - a. Strengthen the direct dialogue between the Evaluation Division and donors;
 - b. Establish an internal advisory group on evaluation chaired by the Deputy Commissioner-General in order to strengthen the evaluation function, i.e. to review strategic evaluation reports, discuss lessons learned, identify possible subjects for evaluations, the group should be supported by the chief of the Evaluation Division who would report to the chair of the group; (the advisory group to be included in the evaluation policy);
 - c. Establish a comprehensive evaluation plan including central and decentralized evaluations in order to identify possible synergies and strategic issues;
 - d. Consider setting a target, to be achieved gradually, for funding the overall evaluation function, with particular focus on projects and emergency appeals in line with emerging best practices in the UN system.

8. *Financial resources:*
 - a. Establish funding arrangements and targets for evaluations in UNRWA in line with the commitments in the policy;
 - b. Ensure all donor-funded projects and emergency projects contain a dedicated line for evaluations;
 - c. For projects and programmes above USD 1 million establish an evaluation budget in consultation with DIOS during budget preparations.

To Donors:

9. Consider supporting UNRWA's evaluation function in the near to medium-term future through the provision of extra expertise (e.g. secondments, JPOs, volunteers), funding of key evaluations, and strengthening competencies for evaluations.

To the Advisory Commission:

10. Make evaluation a standing item on the Sub-committee of the Advisory Commission in addition to the standing item on the DIOS Annual Report. Discuss with UNRWA senior management evaluation recommendation follow-up to ensure better use of evaluation reports.

Annex 1: SWOT Analysis of the UNRWA Evaluation Function

Strengths

- a) Reasonably independent central evaluation function (in DIOS)
- b) Several past evaluations were useful to various in-house stakeholders
- c) Recognition of UNRWA staff of value of evaluation – considered to be useful
- d) Good appetite for evaluation in UNRWA
- e) Close collaboration between planning and evaluation
- f) Central evaluations included in Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021 (evaluation plan)
- g) Evaluations included in many project budgets at the decentralized level
- h) Dedicated Chief of the central Evaluation Division pushing in the right direction following UNEG Norms & Standards
- i) Participatory approach by Evaluation Division has created space for evaluation
- j) Key donors want a strong evaluation function and want to see it strengthened

Opportunities

- a) Growing in-house demand for evaluations (real-time evaluations, impact evaluations, etc.)
- b) New Evaluation Architecture and new quality guidelines in the making (there is a momentum)
- c) Growing demand for evaluations and support for the evaluation function by donors
- d) Emphasis on learning supported by donors
- e) New Evaluation Architecture developed in a consultative process
- f) New tracking system will further strengthen implementation of recommendations at the decentralized level
- g) Strengthened RBM system incl. M&E working group; growing availability of data (Common Monitoring Matrix, Results Review; etc.); management commitment to planning and managing for results.
- h) Senior management supports transparency

Weaknesses

- a) Weak evaluation culture in UNRWA; no systematic learning culture; limited sharing of experience; limited use of lessons learned; limited access to evaluation reports; fear of criticism; weak knowledge management
- b) Quality of evaluation reports varies a lot; undermines credibility
- c) Overall limited number of evaluations conducted (central and decentral)
- d) Small and fragile staff capacity in *central* evaluation function
- e) Very limited and unpredictable resources for conducting central evaluations
- f) Profile and visibility of ED is limited both within senior management outside UNRWA
- g) Unclear and inconsistent space for evaluation in field offices; more space for monitoring
- h) Very limited evaluation capacities at the *decentral* level; mostly junior staff on short-term contracts
- i) Mostly ad-hoc evaluations at decentral level (only few evaluation plans)
- j) Work load for managing and conducting evaluation underestimated (for staff and consultant)
- k) Limited pool of consultants experienced enough with UNRWA and the region
- l) Low interest in UNRWA evaluations by consultants

Threats

- a) Financial pressure might further limit resources available for evaluation
- b) More staff leaving; challenge to evaluation capacity building at central and decentral level
- c) Mixed quality of evaluation reports might undermine credibility and demand for evaluations over time
- d) Increasing demand for evaluations might overwhelm capacity to deliver credible and useful evaluation
- e) Over-commitment and overambitious evaluation function might risk raising expectations which cannot be met; might undermine support
- f) Evaluation perceived as donor-driven accountability instrument rather than as learning tool
- g) Political environment might narrow the “space” for and scope of independent and impartial evaluations

Annex 2: Rating the UNRWA's Central Evaluation Function

When assessing UNRWA's central evaluation function, the Peer Review Panel used the Normative Framework below, which is based on an interpretation of UNEG Norms and Standards as relevant to the evaluation function of UNRWA.

Key: 4: good practices, 3: satisfactory, 2: in development, 1: nascent

	Questions	Norms	Rating	
Independence	Is the location of the central evaluation function sufficiently independent?	--	3	2.0
	Is there adequate funding for the evaluation function?	1.2, 2.3	1	
	Does the planning and selection of evaluation subjects result in a work plan that contributes to learning and accountability?	1.1, 4.1, 4.2	2	
	Are evaluation processes (planning and conduct) independent and impartial?	1.2, 7.1	3	
	Are evaluations publicly available?	10.2	1	
Credibility	Does the normative framework provide good practice for centralized evaluation processes?	3.1	2	2.2
	Is a system in place to ensure the professional competence of the evaluation team that is necessary for arriving at credible and accurate evaluation reports?	9.1-9.3, 11.1-11.5	2	
	Does the evaluation function provide an advisory role during the planning stage of undertakings to improve their evaluability?	7.1	2	
	Is a system in place to ensure the quality of evaluations in their design, methodology, conduct of evaluation and reporting?	1.2, 8.1	2	
	Are evaluations conducted transparently and impartially?	5.1, 10.1	3	
	Are evaluation findings communicated in an impartial way with adequate levels of technical and political credibility?	8.2	2	
Utility	Does the evaluation process engage stakeholders in ways that make evaluations useful, while maintaining independence and credibility?	4.2, 5.1, 10.2	2	2.6
	Are evaluation findings communicated in a useful, constructive and timely manner?	--	2	
	Is there a system in place to ensure appropriate follow-up action?	12.1-12.3,4.1	3	
	Does evaluation feed into management and decision making processes?	1.2, 1.3, 4.1	3	
	Are evaluation reports easy to understand, to the point and present evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations in a complete and balanced way?	8.2	3	
Enabling Environment	Are adequate resources allocated to the function by senior management and by donors? Is there a defined normative framework to guide resource allocation?	--	1	1.8
	What has been senior management's leadership role and are they promoting the use of evaluation as an essential management, decision-making and knowledge tool?	--	2	
	What is the organizational culture for results, accountability, evaluation and learning fully rooted in organization?	--	2	
	Strategic alignment with other knowledge, oversight/audit and inspection, and decision support systems?	--	2	
	Quality of M&E systems?	--	2	

Annex 3: Quality Assessment of UNRWA Evaluation Reports (sample, 2012-2015)

	Criteria	Maximum Points	Score per Evaluation Report (list of reports on next page)															Total	Average	%
			central					decentral												
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15			
A	Purpose of the evaluation clearly stated	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	3	2	1	2	0	1	0	27	1.8	60%
B	Evaluation objectives	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	0	0	17	1.1	57%
C	Organization of the evaluation	5	3	4	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	5	2	5	3	2	2	52	3.5	69%
D	Subject evaluated is clearly described	4	3	3	2	4	4	4	2	3	2	4	4	3	2	4	1	45	3.0	75%
E	Scope of the evaluation	4	3	3	1	4	4	3	2	2	1	3	0	2	2	2	1	33	2.2	55%
F	Evaluation criteria	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	3	5	4	5	3	3	1	5	0	56	3.7	75%
G	Multiple lines of evidence	5	4	5	2	4	4	2	4	4	3	4	3	3	1	5	1	49	3.3	65%
H	Evaluation design	5	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	2	1	2	0	4	1	3	0	20	1.3	27%
I	Evaluation findings and conclusions are relevant and evidence based	6	4	5	2	4	4	5	5	4	3	5	3	4	4	4	3	59	3.9	66%
J	Evaluation limitations	3	1	0	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	16	1.1	36%
K	Evaluation Recommendations	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	33	2.2	73%
Total (A-K)		45	27	30	25	39	33	35	24	29	26	33	18	32	18	27	10	406	27.1	60%
G+H+I		16	8	11	5	10	9	9	9	10	8	11	6	11	6	12	4	129	8.6	54%
<p>Required to have a minimum of 27 points overall (=60%) and 11 of which should be from Criteria G, H and I (=69%) to be considered as adequate.</p> <p>■ = adequate ■ = not adequate</p>																				

Source: Peer Review Panel, 2015. The assessment is based on a quality assessment template with 11 criteria and a total of 45 sub-criteria (see below). The assessment was conducted by one person. While the assessment was done as objectively as possible, some criteria require a judgment by the assessor.

List of UNRWA evaluation reports quality assessed

No.	Year	Title	Location	Theme/Sector	Managed by
Evaluation reports managed by DIOS (central)					
1	2015	Evaluation - Analyzing the Cash Component of the "Protecting Vulnerable Palestine Refugees in Syria - Special Measure for Syria 2011" Project	Syria	Relief & Social Services	DIOS
2	2014	Evaluation of the Family Health Team Approach	All	Health	DIOS
3	2014	High Level Evaluation of the Organizational Structure in LFO	Lebanon	Institutional	DIOS
4	2014	Evaluation of the Emergency Cash Assistance Component of the Syria Emergency Response Programme of UNRWA	Syria	Emergency Response	DIOS
5	2013	Medium Term Strategy (MTS) Mid-Term Evaluation	All	Strategic evaluation	DIOS
Evaluation reports managed by departments or field offices (decentral)					
6	2015	External Evaluation of UNRWA Project PQ B01: Child and Family Protection in Marka Camp Through a Consolidated Case Management Approach and Multidisciplinary Team	Jordan	Relief & Social Services	UNRWA Jordan
7	2015	External Evaluation - PQ 913 - Protecting Vulnerable Palestine Refugees in Syria Special Measures for Syria 2011	Syria	Emergency Response	UNRWA Syria
8	2014	Evaluation of UNRWA's Gender Mainstreaming Strategy	All	Cross-cutting	UNRWA Jordan
9	2013	External Evaluation of the Microcredit Community Support Programme (MCSP)	All	Microfinance	RSSP
10	2013	Mid-term Evaluation of Relief and Rehabilitation Support to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon	Lebanon	Relief & Social Services	UNRWA Lebanon
11	2013	Qalqilya Hospital and UNRWA Hospitalization Programme in the West Bank	West Bank	Health	UNRWA West Bank
12	2013	Health and education efficiency in UNRWA	All	Health & Education	Health and Education Departments
13	2012	Impact Assessment of Relief and Social Service Program: Micro-Credit Community Support Program and Women's Program	Lebanon	Relief & Social Services	UNRWA Lebanon
14	2012	Engaging Youth: Addressing Palestinian Refugee Youth Exclusion to Prevent Radicalization and Conflict	Syria	Relief & Social Services	UNRWA Syria
15	2012	Evaluation of the Legal Function and the Administration of Justice System	All	Institutional	UNRWA Jordan

Quality assessment template for evaluation reports⁵⁵

Evaluation Title:

Year and no. of pages of report incl. annex:

Managed/commissioned (central or decentral):

Reviewer and date of review:

	Points for criteria scored	Max. Points	Score
A	Purpose of the evaluation clearly stated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why the evaluation was done (1) • what triggered the evaluation (including timing in the project/programme cycle) (1) • how evaluation is to be used (1) 	3	
B	Evaluation objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluation objectives are clearly stated (1) • objectives logically flow from purpose (1) 	2	
C	Organization of the evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • logical structure to the organization of the evaluation (1) • evaluation report is well written (1) • clear distinction made among evidence, findings, conclusions, <u>lessons</u> and recommendations (1) • report contains executive summary and annexes (2) 	5	
D	Subject evaluated is clearly described Evaluation describes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the activity/programme being evaluated (1) • the programme's expected achievements (1) • how the programme addresses the development problem (1) • the implementation modalities used (1) 	4	
E	Scope of the evaluation Evaluation defines the boundaries of the evaluation in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time period covered (1) • implementation phase under review (1) • geographic area (1) • <u>dimensions of stakeholder involvement being examined</u> (1) 	4	
F	Evaluation criteria Evaluation criteria include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevance of activities and supported projects/programs (1) • efficiency of operations in support of projects / programs (1) • the achievement of development objectives and expected results (including impacts) (1) • cross-cutting issues: inclusive development which is gender sensitive and environmentally sustainable (1) • the sustainability of benefits and positive results achieved (1) 	5	
G	Multiple lines of evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one point (1) for each line of evidence used (document review, case <u>studies</u>, surveys, interviews, focus groups, direct observation, etc.), up to a maximum of five points (5) 	5	
H	Evaluation design Elements of a good evaluation design include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an <u>explicit theory of how objectives and results were to be achieved</u> (1) 	5	

⁵⁵ Based on UNDP template.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specification of the level of results achieved (output, outcome, impact) (1) • <u>baseline data</u> (quantitative or qualitative) on conditions prior to programme implementation (1) • comparison of conditions after programme delivery to those before (1) • a qualitative or quantitative comparison of conditions among programme participants and a <u>control group</u> (1) 		
I	<p>Evaluation findings and conclusions are relevant and evidence based</p> <p>Evaluation report includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluation findings relevant to the assessment criteria (1) • findings that are supported by the chosen methodology (1) • evidence from different sources triangulated and converge or non-convergence of evidence from triangulation explained (1) • a clear logical link between the evidence and the finding (1) • <u>conclusions which are clearly linked to the evaluation findings as reported</u> (1) • alternative / competing explanations considered (1) 	6	
J	<p>Evaluation limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statement of the limitations of the methodology (1) • impact of limitations on evaluation (1) • <u>attempts made to remedy limitations are stated</u> (1) 	3	
K	<p>Evaluation Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>evaluation contains recommendations that flow from findings and conclusions</u> (1) • recommendations are directed to one or more authority that can act on them (1) • recommendations are action oriented and aimed at improving effectiveness of the programme / investment(1) 	3	
Total (required to have a minimum of 27 points overall, 11 of which should be from Criteria G, H and I, to be considered as adequate)		45	

Annex 4: Analysis of DIOS Draft Evaluation Architecture (draft June 2015)

Analysis of DIOS Draft Evaluation Architecture (Draft June 2015)		
Section	Content/Heading	Panel Comments
1	Background	too detailed; could be cut or moved to the guidelines
2	Mandate	duplicates section 11. lacks discussion on overall responsibilities
3	Independence	could be integrated into a new section on responsibilities
4	External/internal stakeholders	this should be more clearly labelled responsibilities and start with the CG at the top; it can also include external stakeholders, e.g. Advisory Commission and donors at large
5	Definition and purpose	definition should be shorter as it mixes issues; should appear earlier. Define what is not evaluation
6	What to evaluate/ evaluation plans	no criteria for what to evaluate; should be more clear on CE and DE evaluation criteria
7	Methodology	this is about the DIOS evaluation process and thus mislabelled. Too long and most could be in guidelines
8	Follow-up	ok
9	Communications	this would be better as part of a section on use and how to communicate evaluation results to promote use
10	Quality assurance and monitoring	too detailed and better placed in the guidelines. Clearly state that DIOS has QA role. Discussion on QA role in the report
11	Structure	repeats section on mandate
12	Standards and procedures	not much on procedures; refers to guidance material. Could be linked to a new section on 'operationalization the policy'
13	Resources	needs a firmer top commitment; maybe also threshold for as of when to evaluate? Good idea on project documents and emergency appeals but a target would give this more teeth.
	General comments	<p>In the view of the panel UNRWA should develop a full-fledged policy of which the architecture would be one element. In addition, the nature of the document needs to be clarified. Whose policy is it? If it is the CG and organization's policy the tone, content needs to be changed. It may need to be issued as a OD to show top commitment and support. Additional features of the policy should include a discussion on guiding principles (e.g. protection, gender sensitive, impartiality), criteria for selecting evaluations at CE and DE levels, a discussion on partnerships, duration and review of the policy and a clear disclosure statement.</p> <p>Some visuals may help quick readers to get an overview (e.g. architecture with roles and responsibilities)</p>

(See next page for a rapid comparison of the Draft Evaluation Architecture with other UN Evaluation Policies)

Rapid Comparison of DIOS Draft Evaluation Architecture with other UN Evaluation Policies							
Content/sequence of sections in policy	UNDP draft 2015	UNFPA 2013	UN Women 2012	UNICEF 2014	UNESCO 2015	DIOS draft 2015	Panel Comment on DIOS placements
Definition and purpose	1	2	1	1,2	1	5	definition and purpose comes too late
Responsibilities	3	4	9	4	2	2,4,1	in several sections
Guiding principles	2	3	2	3	3	12	standards and procedures section but no guiding principles
Defining the system	3,4	n/a	n/a	5	4	4	not clear; could benefit from graphic presentation
Managing the process	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	5	7,8	methods section; duplicative as same process for both CE and DE
Planning/criteria	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	6	6	planning for CE only; no criteria
Resources	n/a	n/a	5	10	7	13	vague
Use/communications	4	7	5	8	8	9,8	little on promoting and communicating use
Quality assurance	y	6	7	n/a	9	10	too lengthy; could be in guidelines
Partners/system-wide	y	5	5	9,11	10	n/a	absent
Review	y	n/a	n/a	12	11	n/a	absent
Disclosure	y		y		y	n/a	absent

Reading example: The “Definition and purpose” is in most policies the first (1) or second (2) element in the evaluation policy. It comes on fifth position (5) in the DIOS draft which is rather late.

Annex 5: List of persons met in Amman, Beirut and Jerusalem (28 June to 7 July 2015)

UNRWA Headquarters Amman

Ms. Sandra Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner-General
Ms. Katherine Reyes, Special Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner-General
Mr. Thierry Rajaobelina, Director Internal Oversight Services, Department of Internal Oversight Services
Mr. Neil Ashcroft, Director of Administrative Support Department, Administrative Support Department
Dr. Akihiro Seitani, Director of Health Programme, Department of Health
Ms. Laila Baker, Director of Relief and Social Services, Relief & Social Services Department
Mr. Robert Hurt, Director of Planning, Department of Planning
Mr. Mark Gibb, Chief of Safety & Security, Safety & Security Division
Mr. Robert Stryk, Chief, Evaluation Division, Department of Internal Oversight Services
Mr. Raed Tailakh, Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Division
Mr. Dario Valderrama, Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Division
Ms. Manuele Bucciarelli, Associate Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Division, Department of Internal Oversight Services
Ms. Amelia Davidson, Evaluation Assistant, Evaluation Division
Mr. Victor Tricaud, Intern, Evaluation Division
Ms. May Pettigrew, Independent Evaluation Consultant
Ms. Sana Jelassi, Gender Adviser, Relief & Social Services Department
Mr. Edwin Berry, Senior Programme Officer, Department of Planning
Ms. Homaira Sikandary, Planning Consultant, Department of Planning

UNRWA Jordan Field Office Amman

Mr. Vickram Chhetri, Field Programme Support Officer, Programme Support Office
Ms. Sweta Pokharel, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer
Dr. Orouba Subhi Al-Musa, Chief Field Technical and Vocational Education & Training Programme
Ms. Maha Al Rantisi, Chief Field Relief and Social Services Programme
Ms. Katherine Kelly, Project Advisor, Field Relief and Social Services Programme

UNRWA Lebanon Field Office, Beirut

Ms. Katie M. Travers, Donor Relations and Projects Officer, Donors Relations Unit
Ms. Julia Lieser, Donor Relations and Projects Officer, Donor Relations and Projects Office
Mr. Oliver Bridge, Operations Support Officer CLA & BEQAA
Mr. John Whyte, NMU Project Manager, NMU-Site Office, Old Camp-NBC, Tripoli
Dr. Najeh El Sadek, Chief Field Health Programme, Health Department
Dr. Suha K. Ismail, Deputy, Chief Field Health Programme, Health Department
Mr. Daoud Naji Korman, Acting Chief, Field Infrastructure & Camp Improvement Programme
Mr. Fadi M. Fares, Deputy/Chief, Field Relief & Social Services Programme

Ms. Anne Colquhoun, Field Programme Support Officer
Ms. Barbara Boekhoudt, Psychosocial Support Coordinator, Programme Support Office
Ms. Brooke Winterburn, Programme Analyst, Disability Division
Mr. Salem M. Dib, Acting Chief Field Education Programme, Education Department
Ms. Madhumita Sarkar, Gender Advisor, Programme Support Office

UNRWA West Bank Field Office/UNRWA Headquarters Jerusalem

Mr. David Hutton, Deputy Director of UNRWA Operations (Programmes)
Mr. Lance Bartholomeusz, Director of Legal Affairs
Dr. Umaiye Khammash, MD MPH, Chief Field Health Programme
Ms. Jane Saba Giacaman, Chief Microfinance Operations, Department of Microfinance
Ms. Virginia Villar Arribas, Chief Donor Relations Division, External Relations and Communications Department
Mr. Bakhtiyor Babaev, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

Donor Government Representatives (Jerusalem)

Ms. Ségolène Adam, Deputy Director of Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Swiss Cooperation Office Gaza & West Bank, Jerusalem
Ms. Samah Khoury, U.S. Consulate, Jerusalem
Ms. Samar Sayegh, Program Advisor, Norwegian Representative Office to the Palestinian Authority, Jerusalem
Mr. Michael Mansour, Task Manager, Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA), Jerusalem
Mr. Paul Roche, Head of Cooperation, Australian Representative Office, Ramallah

UNRWA Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (ACIO)

Mr. Suresh Sharma, Chair, UNRWA Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (by phone)
Ms. Ivory Yong Prötzel, Member, UNRWA Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (by phone)

Annex 6: Documents reviewed

DIOS Evaluation Architecture, UNRWA, Draft June 2015.

Ensuring the Quality of Evaluative Activities in UNRWA, Draft, June 2015.

Update – Self Assessment Evaluation Function UNRWA, Robert Stryke, June 2015.

Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - 1 January-31 December 2014, United Nations, New York, 2015

Work Plan 2015, DIOS, UNRWA, 2015.

Annual Report 2014, DIOS, UNRWA, 2015.

Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2016-2021, UNRWA, 2015.

Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, UN Joint Inspection Unit, 2014 (JIU/REP/2014/6).

Survey of the Decentralized Evaluation Function, UNRWA Questionnaire, JIU, 2013.

Field Implementation Plans 2014-2015, UNRWA, 2013.

Organization Directive No. 14 – Charter of the Department of Internal Oversight Services, UNRWA, September 2012.

Organization Directive No. 24 - Charter of the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight, UNRWA, October 2012.

Norms for Evaluation in the UN System, United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), April 2005.

UNRWA evaluation reports (see Annex 3).

Annex 7: JIU Findings on Level of Development by Location of the Evaluation Function

Table 4: Level of development of the evaluation function by size of the organizations' overall annual budgets and the location of the corporate evaluation function

	Small		Medium		Large	
	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Grade</i>
Stand Alone	UNODC	5.2	ILO	6.7	WFP	6.7
	UNIDO	6.4	UNEP	5.8	UNDP	7.1
	UN Women	6.2	UNFPA	6.0	UNICEF	6.3
					FAO	5.9
Co-Located/ Management	ITC	4.9	UNAIDS	5.3	UNHCR	3.8
	UNCTAD	4.4				
	UN-Habitat	4.2				
Co-Located Oversight/Audit	IMO	3.7	UNESCO	6.1	UN-OIOS	6.2
	WMO	3.5	UNRWA	3.4	WHO	4.7
	ICAO	3.9	WIPO	5.2		
			IAEA	5.9		

Source: JIU/2014/5 Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System, Vol.I. p. 20.

Annex 8: Acronyms

ACIO	Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight
AusAid	Australian Agency for International Development
CCM	Common Monitoring Matrix
CG	Commissioner-General
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
DIOS	Department of Internal Oversight Services
ED	Evaluation Division
ERCD	Department of External Relations and Communications
GF	General Fund
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
MTS	Medium Term Strategy
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD/ DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development /Development Assistance Committee
RSSP	Relief and Social Services Programme
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Annex 9: Peer Review Panel Members

Susanne Frueh, Panel Chair, UN Evaluation Group

Susanne Frueh has some 30 years of work experience with international organizations combining operational experience with evaluation, risk management, results-based management and strategic planning expertise. Following work in consulting and programme management during her earlier career, she has worked at senior leadership level in the evaluation functions of several UN organizations (UNCDF, WFP, UNOCHA and UNESCO). While at the UN Joint Inspection Unit she contributed to the JIU's review of the evaluation function in the UN System. She has been a member of the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) since 1999 - serving on its Board for two years, and is currently the Vice-President of the Advisory Board of the German Institute for Development Evaluation Institute (DEVAL). In 2011, she was nominated by the UN Secretary-General to be a member of the Interim Coordination Mechanism for system-wide evaluation responsible for developing and negotiating a new UN policy on independent system-wide evaluation. She also chaired the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) from 2005-2007, served as an Advisory Board member of the mid-term review on the Hyogo Framework for Action (2011-12) and was as a peer panelist/advisor on the evaluation functions of FAO (2004), WFP (2007, 2013-14), the UN Office for Internal Oversight Services (2012) and a member of the High Level Panel of Experts on IFAD's 2nd edition of the evaluation manual (2015).

Andrew Fyfe, Panel member, UN Evaluation Group

Andrew Fyfe has been Head of the Evaluation Unit in the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) since 2011, with responsibility for designing and managing external evaluation in line with UNEG norms and standards and supporting the embedding of evaluation into UNCDF's strategic planning and management systems. Prior to that, he worked for the European Commission initially as a programme manager in both Brussels and in an EU Delegation in Central Asia and after that as an independent evaluator implementing a system of real-time evaluation of EU development cooperation in Africa and Asia.

Siv Lillestøl, Panel Member, DAC Network for Development Evaluation

Siv J. Lillestøl is Senior Adviser in the Evaluation Department in the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) responsible for designing and managing independent evaluations of development cooperation activities following OECD/ DAC evaluations standards. Prior to joining the department in 2008, she worked for UNAIDS in Geneva and gained operational work experience at the country level with WFP in Malawi and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Madagascar. She has served at the governing boards of the Norwegian Evaluation Society and the Network for evaluation in the Norwegian public administration. She participated on this panel as a representative of the OECD/DAC Network for Development Evaluation.

Urs Zollinger, Senior Advisor to the Panel

Urs Zollinger is an economist with extensive experience in strategic planning and evaluation in the context of international cooperation. He is an advisor to international organisations and has been team leader or team member of many strategic, thematic and project evaluations. As consultant, he has participated in several peer reviews of evaluation functions of international organisations, in particular in the peer reviews of the GEF evaluation function, the evaluation function of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations (OIOS) and the evaluation function of the Council of Europe (CoE). Before co-founding King Zollinger & Co. Advisory Services in 2003, he worked with the UN division of the Swiss Foreign Ministry. Earlier, he served in the UNDP Evaluation Office in New York and gained operational work experience at the country-level with UNIDO in India.

Annex 10: Terms of Reference

PROFESSIONAL PEER REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION FUNCTION OF UNRWA

Terms of Reference

Introduction

This Professional Peer Review (hereafter Peer Review) of the evaluation function of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will be carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations.⁵⁶ It will be the first Peer Review of UNRWA's evaluation function and is carried out following UNEG Peer Review group suggestion that evaluation functions undergo a review every five years.⁵⁷

This document identifies the primary elements of the Peer Review of the evaluation function of UNRWA. It describes the background of the evaluation function of UNRWA, the purpose, the scope, the general approach, the method and the composition of the Peer Review Panel.

Background

The evaluation function of UNRWA was first established in 2007, as part of the Programme Coordination and Support Unit. Since its establishment, the evaluation function has undergone significant changes, including being moved in 2010 to its current location within the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS). Over the past five years the evaluation function has been strengthened gradually and is approaching a level of maturity that will benefit from a peer review. The Peer Review for UNRWA has been included in the annual work programme for UNRWA that is endorsed by the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight and part of the UNRWA work programme for 2015.

The evaluation function of UNRWA is comprised of a central evaluation function in DIOS and decentralized evaluation functions in headquarters departments and field offices. The Evaluation Division within DIOS assumes functional leadership and oversight over UNRWA's evaluation system and it is responsible for conducting centralized evaluations and providing quality assurance for decentralized evaluations. Since 2012, seven reports have been issued by the ED, while some 20 reports have been prepared by the decentralized evaluation function.

The Normative Framework of the evaluation function of UNRWA consists of the Organization Directive -14 (OD-14), Operating Procedures and the Evaluation Architecture⁵⁸.

The evaluation function of UNRWA was extensively reviewed by the JIU in 2013-14⁵⁹. The assessment for UNRWA which built on a self-assessment by the UNRWA ED resulted in a low maturity scoring for the function pointing to the need for significant strengthening of the function. Since then processes for the centralized evaluation function have been more formalized, the centralized function has engaged with the decentralized functions to start harmonizing their approach to evaluation, and evaluation planning has been aligned with strategic programming has been done to move UNRWA's evaluation further up the maturity scale. The peer review team will consider the JIU assessment as a quasi self-assessment of the UNRWA ED and thus not require an additional self-assessment prior to the review.

This Peer Review is part of UNRWA's strategy to build a stronger evaluation function.

Purpose of the Peer Review

The Peer Review is part of an on-going process of improvement of its evaluation function as suggested by the UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews.⁶⁰ This Peer Review will therefore contribute to that process through an assessment of the independence, credibility and utility of UNRWA's evaluation function. It will provide an assessment of the evaluation function of UNRWA against UNEG norms. The review will provide recommendations to senior

⁵⁶ UNEG, 2011. UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations. http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=945

⁵⁷ UNEG Norms 4.1 and 4.2

⁵⁸ Some of the operating procedures and the architecture are still under development but should be at least at an advanced stage of development or finalized when the peer review will happen.

⁵⁹ JIU/REP/2014/6 Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System: https://www.unjiu.org/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2014_6_English.pdf

⁶⁰ UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations

management in UNRWA and the director of the Department Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) in order to further improve and strengthen the evaluation function. The report is also intended to provide insights to UNRWA's Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight (ACIO) on the functioning of the evaluation function.

The purpose of the Peer Review is to:

- i) Enhance knowledge, confidence and use of evaluations;
- j) Advance UNRWA's evaluation normative framework;
- c) Stimulate/encourage dialogue between various key stakeholders on expectations and the role of the evaluation function leading to strengthening organizational performance
- d) Encourage a culture of evaluation, learning and accountability.

Subject, Scope and Limitations

The Peer Review will use a 'reduced' framework to acknowledge the fact that UNRWA is a smaller agency with a specific mandate.⁶¹ The framework allows for review of UNRWA's current evaluation arrangements according to the core assessment question, "*Are the Agency's evaluation function and its products: independent; credible; and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed by a Panel of professional evaluation peers against the UN Norms and Standards (2005) and the evidence base?*"⁶² The aspects of these criteria to be focused on are detailed in the annexed Normative Framework.

The scope of the Peer Review is limited to the evaluation activities carried out from 2012 until 2015. Considering both central and decentralized evaluation functions, it will include an assessment of the:

Normative framework for evaluation: The impact of existing policies and procedures of the evaluation function, including the extent to which they conform to norms and standards.

The enabling environment for evaluation

Evaluation quality: (i) Quality of evaluation processes, products and resulting decisions made using evaluation products. This includes the planning process, the conduct of the evaluations, the impartiality/independence of evaluations, the quality of the evaluation reports, the independence of evaluation teams and team leaders, and the ability to produce credible and timely reports. (ii) Assessment of the quality assurance system, including the application of methodology and of the production of knowledge management products.

Evaluation follow-up and use: (i) Extent and utility of follow-up to evaluations, including the actual impact of evaluations, how evaluation results are disseminated and lessons used both within UNRWA and to external stakeholders; (ii) The responsibility for the follow-up of recommendations and how follow-up is undertaken and monitored.

Approach

The Peer Review will pilot the approach developed in the UNEG Peer Review group, including the 'Stages of Peer Reviews' chart currently under discussion. The panel will test a light version of the UNEG Peer Review, entailing a shorter period for the peer review, the use existing PR instruments such as a list of meta evaluation criteria developed for prior peer reviews, and the use of the 2013/14 JIU review of UNRWA's evaluation function as a quasi self-assessment. In conducting its work, the Peer Review Panel will utilize the peer exchange in order to enrich its independent assessment and to promote learning through discussions on ways to meet common challenges related to evaluation practice. Beyond the evaluation department, the panel will seek to speak with all relevant stakeholders, including UNRWA senior management, heads of relevant departments/programmes and field locations, members of the UNRWA Advisory Committee, members of the AICO, consultants involved in prior UNRWA evaluations.

⁶¹ UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations (2011)

⁶² UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations (2011)

Core Assessment Criteria

The Peer Review will use the following criteria for review of the evaluation function, based on UNEG norms and standards:

- e) Independence of evaluations and evaluation systems:** The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process concerned with the policy making and programme management. The planning and selection of evaluation subjects should be an impartial and independent process.
- f) Credibility of evaluations:** Credibility requires evaluations to report successes and failures, as well as sufficient participation of stakeholders. This depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators, as well as the degree of transparency of the evaluation process.
- g) Utility of evaluations:** To have an impact on decision making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way, fully reflecting the different interests and needs of parties involved.
- h) Enabling environment:** An adequate enabling environment and institutional framework that supports the evaluation function was a key element of the JIU report and is expected to feature more prominently in the revised Norms and Standards currently being developed.

Panel Composition and Responsibilities

A number of important considerations were taken into account when composing the Panel membership: (i) relevant professional experience; (ii) independence—to avoid any potential or alleged conflict of interest or partiality, the peer review members do not have any close working relationships with UNRWA that might influence the review panel's position and deliberations.

The composition of the panel also took into consideration UNRWA's mandate and structure as well as the purpose of this Peer Review. The combination of these criteria together with the voluntary nature of serving on the Peer Review Panel resulted in the following composition:

- Susanne Frueh, Director, Internal Oversight Service (IOS) of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Anita Haslie, Senior Evaluation Advisor, NORAD
- Andrew Fyfe, Head, Evaluation Unit, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)
- Urs Zollinger, Senior Advisor to the Panel

The Peer Review Panel will be chaired by the Director of IOS at UNESCO. The Chair will be responsible for managing the peer review process and the contribution of other members in addition to overseeing the preparation of the Peer Review Report and ensuring that lessons from the Review are communicated to UNEG. The chair will also be the main interface between the panel and senior management of UNRWA, including the director of IOS of UNRWA and the head of the evaluation department as well as the Advisory Commission on Internal Oversight (ACIO).

The panel as a whole will be responsible for finalizing and adopting the ToR of the Peer Review including those of the consultant, review relevant key documents as provided by UNRWA, review, comment on and approve the inception report prepared by the consultant, participate in a visit to UNRWA in late June/July, review/comment and approve the key issues report drafted by the consultant and provide contributions to the final report as agreed within the panel. The panel is fully responsible for the quality and contents of the final report.

A consultant will be engaged, who will report to the review panel and work within the agreed ToR (see attachment).

Reporting & Use

The Peer Review Panel will share an inception paper prior to the field visit as well as a draft report with stakeholders for comments no later than four weeks after the visit. The Panel will review the comments before finalizing and submitting the final report to UNRWA. UNRWA will be able to submit the report with a Management Response to the Advisory Commission on Internal Oversight (ACIO) and is expected to share the report with the Advisory Commission (AC). The final report will be made public. In addition, the report will be shared with the Peer Review group for dissemination to interested cooperating partners and will be posted on the UN Evaluation Group Website.

The Peer Review Panel will provide feedback on the process and outcome of the Peer Review in the form of a 'Lessons Learned' document (due by end 2015), to facilitate strengthening of the peer review mechanism and enable others to learn from UNRWA's experience.

Responsibility of UNRWA

UNRWA's evaluation division will be the internal initiator, principal organizer, and substantive collaborator on the review within UNRWA. UNRWA's evaluation division will be responsible for submitting a draft ToR and Normative framework for the Peer Review as well as assisting the Peer Review Panel including providing relevant documents and data, arranging for the panel's visit to UNRWA including to possible 1-2 decentralized locations; interacting with the Panel on preliminary findings (inception paper, key issues report, draft final report) and contributing feedback on the peer review process to UNEG. UNRWA's management is expected to allocate appropriate time for meeting and discussing with the panel and to provide a management response to the final report and to ensure implementation of the agreed to recommendations

Documents to be consulted (not exhaustive):

Organization Directive - 14

Medium Term Strategy (MTS)

Evaluation Architecture Document

Work Plan 2015

Evaluation v. Other Comparison Chart

Annual Plans

Medium Term Plans

Centralized and Decentralized Evaluation Reports

Guidelines, templates, and other evaluation tools as published by UNRWA in addition to relevant UNEG documents.

Other relevant UNRWA documents, e.g. concerning knowledge management, communication, website policy, etc.

Review Process and Schedule

The Peer Review process has four main phases (indicative timing is shown in brackets):

- 1. Preparation (March - May 2015):** Mobilization of the Panel and agreement on ToR;
- 2. Fact-finding (mid-May - late June 2015):** The consultant and the panel will undertake extensive document review and consultations with UNRWA staff and share an inception paper/ preliminary assessment with UNRWA (at the latest upon arrival to Amman);
- 3. Visit by the Panel to UNRWA HQ (28 June 2015 - 8 July 2015):** Interviews with selected UNRWA staff in headquarters departments and field offices; representatives of the UNRWA Advisory Committee and other relevant key stakeholders/partners, validation of the self-assessment (JIU review) based on analysis and triangulation of findings; preparation of key findings; visit of 3 UNRWA offices to review the decentralized function (Jerusalem, Beirut, Amman)
4. Preparation of the Key Issues Report (by end July)
5. Presentation of the draft report (September 2015)
6. Presentation of Final Report (October 2015).

Resources

The participation costs of the Peer Review Panel members (excluding the Panel Chair) will be covered by in-kind contributions from their respective organizations, which will bear necessary costs such as travel and accommodation.

The budget for the Peer Review (consultancy costs including travel, travel of chair) will be covered by UNRWA. UNRWA's contribution to the Peer Review will also be in-kind, in terms of the staff time used in organizing and facilitating the process.

Annex 1 (to the ToR) : Normative Framework

When assessing UNRWA's evaluation function, the Peer Review Panel will use the Normative Framework below⁶³, which is based on the UNEG Norms and Standards

	Questions	Norms
Independence	What criteria determine the funding of evaluations?	1.2, 2.3
	Does the planning and selection of evaluation subjects result in a work plan that contributes to learning and accountability?	1.1, 4.1, 4.2
	Are evaluation processes (planning and conduct) independent and impartial?	1.2, 7.1
	Are evaluations publicly available?	10.2
Credibility	Does the normative framework provide good practice for evaluation processes, both centralized and decentralized?	3.1
	Is a system in place to ensure the professional competence of the evaluation team that is necessary for arriving at credible and accurate evaluation reports?	9.1-9.3, 11.1-11.5
	Does the evaluation function provide an advisory role during the planning stage of undertakings to improve their evaluability?	7.1
	Is a system in place to ensure the quality of evaluations in their design, methodology, conduct of evaluation and reporting?	1.2, 8.1
	Are evaluations conducted transparently and impartially?	5.1, 10.1
	Are evaluation findings communicated in an impartial way with adequate levels of technical and political credibility?	8.2
Utility	Does the evaluation process engage stakeholders in ways that make evaluations useful, while maintaining independence and credibility?	4.2, 5.1, 10.2
	Are evaluation findings communicated in a useful, constructive and timely manner?	10.2
	Is there a system in place to ensure appropriate follow-up action?	12.1-12.3, 4.1
	Does evaluation feed into management and decision making processes?	1.2, 1.3, 4.1
	Are evaluation reports easy to understand, to the point and present evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations in a complete and balanced way?	8.2
Enabling Environment	Are adequate resources allocated to the function by senior management and by donors? Is there a defined normative framework to guide resource allocation?	
	What has been senior management's leadership role and are they promoting the use of evaluation as an essential management, decision-making and knowledge tool?	
	What is the organizational culture for results, accountability, evaluation and learning fully rooted in organization?	
	Vision and strategy grounded on organization	
	Strategic alignment with other knowledge, oversight/audit and inspection, and decision support systems?	
	Quality of M&E systems?	

⁶³ As finalized following the inception report

Annex 11: Management Response

This part will contain UNRWA's overall management response to the Peer Review.