

Summary for February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 UNU Midday Forum: Evaluating the  
Added Value of UN Work on the Ground  
UN Headquarters, Conference Room 7, 1:15pm to 2:45pm

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the UNU New York office organized a Midday Forum featuring Juha Uitto, Senior Evaluation Advisor with UNDP, and Lucien R. Back from the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), Coordinator of the *Delivering as One* pilots within UNICEF. The conference was introduced and moderated by Jean-Marc Coicaud, Head of the UNU ONY.

Mr. Uitto spoke first, introducing the broad context of evaluation within the UN system, and the growing emphasis on evaluation, assessment, and coordination at the country level. According to Mr. Uitto, the main drive behind new attitudes towards evaluation stems from decades of previously completed development projects, which more or less met their stated objectives, but failed to achieve increases in overall levels of development. This has prompted a move towards a more holistic evaluation process that focuses on how individual projects interact with and complement the goals of other projects and organizations, and especially how they are embedded within the host country's own strategies and policies.

This also marks a shift from evaluation driven by the demands of donor countries, who want to see direct impact from their monies, to evaluation motivated by the desire of partner countries to see meaningful progress towards broad development goals. Accompanying this shift in priorities has been a desire to better understand projects in terms of their efficiency, comparative value, coherence, and sustainability. In order to enhance this new approach to evaluation, there has also been a system-wide push towards the professionalization of evaluation.

Mr. Uitto introduced evaluation as it is practised within UNDP, as a judgment of the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts. As UNDP is active in 166 different countries, it is important to understand and act within the needs and aspirations of each individual country. UNDP's evaluation office operates independently from its program units to give both a detailed and a broader view of how any given program is operating, according to its own merits, and according to the context of its host country.

The challenge for UNDP is to carry out evaluations at the country-level, without losing sight of the fact that UNDP is but one player acting to assist and support the country's own development goals. Evaluating development is in itself a very complex task, as no counterfactuals are available, and many programs provide "soft assistance", such as policy advice, that cannot be measured empirically.

The final test of evaluation, is assuring that conclusions and recommendations prompt the necessary corrective actions. It is important that evaluations can be used to encourage a momentum of ever-improving development practises within a country.

Mr. Uitto concluded by highlighting the role of cooperation and co-ownership of development goals, with multiple organizations working with each other, with civil society, and with the host government to produce sustainable, appropriate development outcomes.

Mr. Back spoke second, building upon the themes introduced by Mr. Uitto, and adding from his experiences with the Delivering as One pilots and the UNEG. He explained that the UNEG is a 45-member group, with individuals working in evaluation for numerous UN agencies. UNEG's goal is to develop system-wide evaluation standards to encourage the independence, credibility, and usefulness of the evaluation function. UNEG has also been involved in calls for more country-level coordination of UN evaluation work.

Mr. Back then touched upon the TCPR (Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system), which has called for increased emphasis on the evaluation function within the UN system. The TCPR has challenged evaluators within the UN-system to be more relevant and effective. TCPR also underlines the central role evaluation must play in the areas of poverty eradication, economic growth, and sustainable development.

Also discussed were the Delivering as One pilot projects, which were recommended by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence. Initial stages of this work will be carried out in 2008, with evaluations being done in 2009, and results/impact assessed in 2010/2011. Their goal is to provide independent, credible assessments to meet the expectations of the countries themselves, as well as benchmarks set by intergovernmental consensus. The Delivering as One pilots will focus on three areas: national ownership and leadership; including all actors within the UN Development Assistance Framework; and following the four ones (one leader, one programme, one budgetary framework, and one office). The pilots also aim to assess progress along three substantive parameters: relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.

The pilot program in South Africa was addressed specifically as an area where the national government had requested an evaluation that would be co-funded, co-managed, and conducted by a mixed team. A special challenge in South Africa is to address the many cross-cutting areas where UN development agencies are involved: capacity development, gender equity and equality, human rights, HIV/AIDS, etc. There is also the problem of which areas are actually 'evaluable', as many projects provide soft assistance and no counterfactuals are readily available. The findings from this experiment may challenge previous ideas about cooperation between the UN and middle-income, yet still developing, countries.

Mr. Back concluded by emphasising the role of evaluation in finding the 'added-value' of UN work. To do this it must be impartial and empirically founded, and also respected by all partners and stakeholders involved. Communication and co-ownership should also be key components of UN evaluation programs moving forward. Also of great importance is the follow-up done after evaluators have delivered their reports. Management response to evaluation recommendations is absolutely key to learning, and progressing from the evaluation process.