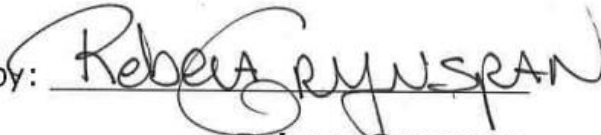


UNCTAD
EVALUATION POLICY

SECOND EDITION
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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Approved by: 
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The evaluation function is a key pillar in the overall framework for corporate accountability and learning. This document constitutes the second edition of the Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). It supersedes the previous Evaluation Policy.
2. The Evaluation Policy explains key concepts, establishes guiding principles, outlines the institutional framework and main evaluation roles and responsibilities, and delineates evaluation processes and mechanisms for the implementation of the Policy. It contains nine sections: (i) Introduction, (ii) Definition and Purpose, (iii) Evaluation Principles, (iv) Evaluation Types, (v) Institutional Framework, (vi) Quality Assurance, (vii) Resources, (viii) Organizational Learning and (ix) Periodic Review.
3. It applies to the entire spectrum of the organization's evaluation system, both self- and independent evaluations, and to all activities and funds, regular and extrabudgetary, administered by UNCTAD.
4. The Evaluation Policy is periodically revised based on developments in evaluation within the United Nations system and in the broader development context. The guiding principles (see Section III) stem from General Assembly resolutions, United Nations instructions, Trade and Development Board decisions, and the 2016 revised Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group. The Evaluation Policy is complemented by operational guidelines developed by the UNCTAD Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) and is tailored to the specific needs of UNCTAD.
5. It contributes towards building an enabling environment for evaluative thinking, behaviour and systems and promotes UNCTAD's culture of accountability and learning. Through high quality evaluations, and organizational learning through evaluation results, UNCTAD enhances its contribution towards integrated trade and development, and interrelated issues of finance, technology, investment, and sustainable development to ensure prosperity for all and leaving no one behind.
6. The Evaluation Policy is implemented through the Independent Evaluation Unit's annual workplan, which is presented to the UNCTAD Working Party at its Autumn session. Implementation is supported by a strategy that translates the Policy's vision and objectives into evaluation priorities for the organization. At a minimum, the annual workplan of IEU consists of one Subprogramme evaluation and all required independent project evaluations (typically 5-10 per year).

II. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

7. As part of the United Nations Secretariat, UNCTAD is bound by the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME),¹ which defines evaluation as "a process that seeks to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness and impact of an activity in the light of its goals, objectives and accomplishments." UNCTAD also adheres to the United Nations Evaluation Group's Norms and Standards for Evaluation, which defines an evaluation as "an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance"². To this end, evaluations at

¹ United Nations (2018). Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, ST/SGB/2018/3

² United Nations Evaluation Group (2016). Norms and Standards for Evaluation. New York: UNEG.

UNCTAD seek to analyse the level of achievement of expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality using appropriate criteria such as relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

8. Evaluation should not be confused with monitoring, auditing, investigation, or staff assessment. Although these different activities, along with evaluation, are all part of the management oversight and accountability framework, their scope and objectives remain different. However, evaluation findings can draw from, and inform, the products of other oversight activities.

The purpose of evaluation

9. Evaluation is an integral part of the work of UNCTAD in all of its substantive areas and contributes to effective programme planning, design and implementation. As an important accountability mechanism, it enhances the organization's credibility and relevance by providing important sources of evidence for decision-making. It also helps UNCTAD ensure results orientation in its activities and identify the outcomes of its interventions. Moreover, it is an important driver of institutional learning, allowing UNCTAD to make improvements and replicate good practices.
10. By promoting accountability and learning, evaluation at UNCTAD unequivocally serves UNCTAD's mission, and supports it in fulfilling its mandate. A strong culture of evaluation is a prerequisite for a learning organization, enabling the incorporation of findings and recommendations into decision-making processes, including through course-correction. Evaluations are important instruments for UNCTAD to learn from past experience and better understand what works well, and not so well, and in what contexts.

III. EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

11. UNCTAD is a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group and has adopted its Norms and Standards for Evaluation, including as revised in July 2016. These norms reflect the singularity of the United Nations system, which is characterized by: (i) its focus on people and respect for their rights; (ii) the importance of international values and principles; (iii) universality and neutrality; (iv) its multiple stakeholders; (v) its needs for global governance; and (vi) its multi-disciplinary as well as complex accountability system. The following principles guide all UNCTAD evaluations.

Independence

12. Evaluations are conducted in an independent manner. Independence is freedom from control, or undue influence, by any party. Independence provides legitimacy to the evaluation and reduces the potential for conflicts of interest that could arise if managers are solely responsible for the evaluation of their own activities. Independence is ensured at the structural, functional, and behavioural levels.
13. In the organizational structure, the Independent Evaluation Unit is located in the Office of the Secretary General, with the Head of the Unit reporting to the Secretary-General through the Deputy Secretary-General.
14. At the functional level, independence is ensured in the planning, funding, and reporting of evaluations. The Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit has the independence to commission, supervise and report on evaluations, as well as to track and follow-up management's responses to evaluations. The Head reports on evaluation matters directly to those who commissioned the evaluation, and to management or governing bodies, without

undue influence by any party. Adequate resources should be allocated by the organization to the evaluation function to ensure that it operates independently.

15. At the behavioural level, evaluators must not have any vested interest. External evaluators must not have been directly involved in the policy-setting, design, or any other work of the programme being evaluated, nor be expected to be involved in future. UNCTAD strives, within the practical limitations that may exist, to avoid engaging evaluators with vested interests. However, under exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to engage an evaluator with past connection to the object of the evaluation, for instance, where there is a very small pool of competent experts. In such cases, measures to safeguard the integrity of the evaluation shall be adopted and such measures shall be disclosed in the evaluation report.

Credibility

16. Credibility refers to the extent to which evaluation findings and conclusions are fair, impartial and complete. Credibility is determined by the independence, impartiality, transparency, methodological appropriateness and rigour applied in evaluations and is valid across all stages of the evaluation process; from design, to implementation and dissemination. UNCTAD ensures credible evaluations through processes and frameworks that are developed and updated by the Independent Evaluation Unit, based on the UNEG Norms and Standards.

Utility

17. Evaluations should be useful to decision-makers and stakeholders, informing policies, strategies and programmes with a view to improving their relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. UNCTAD enhances evaluation utility by planning and conducting evaluations in a timely way (with clear intent to use their results and inform decision-making processes), disseminating the evaluation results, and ensuring the accessibility of evaluation reports by making them publicly available.

Ethical standards and norms

18. Evaluators should have personal and professional integrity and no conflict of interest with the object of evaluation. All evaluators, whether staff of the Independent Evaluation Unit or consultants, conduct evaluations in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group's Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. Evaluators should be sensitive to the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environments in which they work, and evaluations should be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.
19. In light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights instruments, evaluators should be sensitive to, and address, issues of discrimination and gender equality.
20. Evaluators should respect the right of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence and ensure that sensitive data cannot be traced to their source, while ensuring that individual evaluation findings are triangulated so as to avoid being based solely on evidence that cannot be disclosed or verified. They do not evaluate the personal performance of individuals. Evaluations sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing. Such cases are reported to appropriate investigative bodies such as the United Nations Ethics Office or Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Internationally agreed targets and agendas

21. All development interventions aim to contribute towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and evaluations are no exception. The Independent

Evaluation Unit and evaluators respect, promote and contribute to the goals and targets set out in the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed agendas. In addition, evaluations contribute to the Paris Declaration principles of country ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for development results, and mutual accountability.

Mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion, the environment and human rights in evaluations

22. As per General Assembly resolutions³, United Nations Secretary General bulletins and related guidance (including the Office of Internal Oversight Services Methodological Guidelines and UNEG guidance related to gender equality, disability inclusion and human rights), all UNCTAD evaluations consider` throughout the evaluation cycle, issues pertaining to gender equality, disability inclusion, the environment and human rights; specifically, through key evaluation questions to be answered by the evaluation.

IV. EVALUATION TYPES

Definitions

23. The Independent Evaluation Unit participates in several types of evaluations, falling into three main categories based on the evaluative process:

- ***External evaluations*** are managed and conducted by entities outside UNCTAD such as the System-Wide Evaluation Office within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) with its UN system-wide mandate, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) with its UN Secretariat-wide mandate, or by individual or groups of donors.
- ***Internal independent evaluations*** are managed by UNCTAD and conducted by staff of the Independent Evaluation Unit or by external professional evaluators. These evaluations can be requested directly by donors, or member States through its Working Party, or identified by UNCTAD management to promote accountability and inform decision-making processes and future programmes.
- ***Internal self-evaluations*** are managed by programme or project managers. They are an integral part of the results-based management process. They can be conducted by external professional evaluators, offering impartiality to the evaluation process and report, or by the programme or project teams themselves, mainly for the purpose of self-reflection and lessons learning. Evaluations managed by programme or project managers are, as per UN ST/AI/2021/3⁴, not considered independent as, for independence, "the designated evaluation manager and team members shall not be part of the team that designs or manages the implementation of the assessed policy, plan or programme."

Evaluations commissioned by the Trade and Development Board

24. Based on the agreed conclusion of the Working Party at its twenty-fourth session,⁵ UNCTAD's programme of work includes one internal independent evaluation of an UNCTAD Subprogramme per year. Since 2012, the Working Party has considered one Subprogramme evaluation annually, on a repeating cycle. This ensures a minimum level of evaluation

³ General Assembly resolutions and Secretary-General Bulletins: human rights (A/RES/60/1; A/RES/76/6), gender (A/RES/71/243), disability inclusion (A/RES/75/154) and environment (A/RES/76/L.75 and ST/SGB/2019/7).

⁴ United Nations Secretariat, 6 August 2021, Administrative Instruction: Evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat, ST/AI/2021/3

⁵ TD/B/41(2)/11

coverage of the organization and meets the requirements of the PPBME, which states that programme managers are to undertake evaluations of all subprogrammes under their responsibility⁶ and ensure results are taken into account in the preparation of programme plans and budgets for future cycles.

25. These evaluations are undertaken by an external evaluator or an evaluation team, and managed and supported by the Independent Evaluation Unit, including by participating as team members when appropriate. The members of the evaluation team should possess a mix of evaluation skills and technical, sectoral or thematic knowledge relevant to the particular evaluation. For evaluations mandated by the Board, the team is usually composed of an external evaluator and two representatives from member States, who participate in a personal capacity as experts, bringing in the perspectives of developed and developing countries respectively. To the extent possible, the composition of evaluation teams should be gender balanced.
26. The Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit is responsible for clearance of the final report, in line with the guiding principles in this Policy and ensuring that quality standards are met.
27. The evaluation report is presented to the Working Party for its consideration, and the implementation of recommendations contained in the report monitored and reported upon in subsequent years.

Evaluations of projects and programmes

28. Evaluations of projects and programmes are usually conducted at mid-term and/or at project completion:
 - **Mid-term evaluations** are undertaken approximately half-way through project implementation. The aim is to analyse whether the project is on track and to identify any necessary corrective actions.
 - **Terminal evaluations** are undertaken at the end of the project. Such evaluations will provide assessments against the standard evaluation criteria.
29. All project documents submitted for clearance should include a project evaluation plan. The evaluation plan specifies the type of evaluation to be undertaken (independent or self), who will be responsible, when it will take place, and the resources allocated to it.
30. An independent terminal evaluation is required for any project with a budget of USD 1 million or above. IEU also manages evaluations of projects with a budget below USD 1 million for which the funding entity has requested an independent evaluation.
31. Unless an independent evaluation is required, a self-evaluation should be done for all projects with a budget of less than USD 1 million, for reflection and learning, as well as to supplement independent programme evaluations with reflections at the project-level. Self-evaluations shall be conducted by programme managers in compliance with guidelines established by the Independent Evaluation Unit, as well as related UNCTAD results-based management guidelines. IEU can support self-evaluations and ensure minimum quality standards by reviewing the evaluation plan and questions, proposed methodology, and the self-evaluation report.

V. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

32. UNCTAD's Evaluation Policy is implemented within an integrated institutional structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

⁶ PPBME (ST/SGB/2018/3) Regulation 7.2

Governing bodies

33. The General Assembly and the Trade and Development Board have the ultimate authority and responsibility to ensure that evaluation is conducted in accordance with its guiding principles so that UNCTAD discharges its responsibility on public accountability. In this regard, the Trade and Development Board in particular, usually through its Working on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance, monitors, provides guidance and takes actions, as necessary, on evaluation activities and the required institutional support. It also has full ownership of the annual internal independent evaluations conducted under its auspices.

The Secretary-General of UNCTAD

34. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD carries overall responsibility for UNCTAD's programme of work, and is accountable to the United Nations Secretary General, United Nations Member States and the members States of UNCTAD. The Secretary-General approves the Evaluation Policy of UNCTAD and safeguards its provisions. S/He ensures that the principles of evaluation are abided by and provides the required institutional support for the proper conduct of evaluation, including due independence of the evaluation function, adequate staffing of the Independent Evaluation Unit in accordance with United Nations system-wide standards, and necessary budgetary allocations for its activities. S/He ensures that the decision of the governing bodies on the outcomes of independent evaluations are monitored and implemented as appropriate.

The Senior Management Team of UNCTAD

35. By championing evaluation within UNCTAD, senior management play an important role in strengthening evaluation culture and capacity. They ensure that evaluations are adequately resourced and support accountability, decision-making, and organizational learning and improvement. Senior managers discuss and comment on evaluation results, approve management responses to evaluations, and ensure that evaluation findings are incorporated in the design and implementation of future programme activities. Specifically, Division Directors are responsible for ensuring that accepted evaluation recommendations are implemented by their respective divisions within the specified timeframe.

The Independent Evaluation Unit of UNCTAD

36. The Independent Evaluation Unit is the custodian of the evaluation function. The Unit is operationally located in the Office of the Secretary-General, as a distinct entity. The independence, impartiality and objectivity of the Unit are strictly respected so that it is free from undue influence and can ensure unbiased and transparent reporting.

37. The main responsibilities of IEU include:

- i. Develop evaluation standards, procedures, criteria and methodological guidance for UNCTAD evaluations and provide process maps, templates, checklists and technical notes for all evaluation types.
- ii. Provide a quality assurance function by clearing the Terms of Reference, selection of consultants, inception reports, and draft and final evaluations reports.
- iii. Conduct corporate, thematic, programmatic and other independent evaluations in accordance with the annual evaluation plan, including by participating as team members, to ensure strategic and representative coverage of UNCTAD programmes and results.

- iv. Participate in the review of new project concepts and proposals, as a member of the Technical Cooperation Committee, and approve project evaluation plans through the official project clearance system.
 - v. Provide guidance to UNCTAD staff on all matters related to evaluation, including internal self-evaluations.
 - vi. Disseminate evaluation reports and related evaluation products through appropriate channels to support organizational learning.
 - vii. Provide UNCTAD and its stakeholders with timely knowledge and lessons drawn from evaluations that can feed into programming and project formulation decisions.
 - viii. Follow-up and report on management responses to internal independent evaluations and the implementation of evaluation recommendations.
 - ix. Act as the focal point for UNCTAD on all evaluation function related matters, in particular, for assessments by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, Joint Inspection Unit, and System-Wide Evaluation Office of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.
 - x. Support harmonization of the evaluation function in the United Nations system by contributing to the annual work programme of the United Nations Evaluation Group, participating in their Working Groups and system-wide evaluations, and conducting joint evaluations with United Nations organizations as appropriate.
38. Within the authority delegated by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, the Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit bears the responsibility and authority to ensure that internal independent evaluations are conducted according to the principles and policies set herein, as well as to directly report, as appropriate, to the governing bodies or competent authorities such as OIOS.

Programme managers and project officers

39. Programme managers and project officers must inform the Director of their respective divisions and the UNCTAD Independent Evaluation Unit of any required independent evaluation. They should contact IEU at least six months before the completion of their programme/project to initiate the evaluation process.
40. As per the results-based framework of UNCTAD and the UN Secretariat, programme managers and project officers should monitor their performance indicators and conduct self-assessments. Programme managers and project officers also support internal independent evaluations by: (i) designing programmes or projects that are evaluable and in compliance with results-based management principles; and (ii) ensuring that all necessary information is provided to the evaluator(s); and that (iii) all officers involved in the project or programme under evaluation cooperate fully with evaluations.
41. Programme and project managers are responsible for ensuring that management responses to internal independent evaluations are prepared, and that recommendations and lessons learned are addressed in their respective areas of responsibility, to the extent possible.

The Technical Cooperation Committee

42. The Technical Cooperation Committee promotes and supports the results-based management and evaluation culture within UNCTAD. The Independent Evaluation Unit is a member of the Technical Cooperation Committee and keeps the Committee abreast of policies and developments concerning the evaluation of technical cooperation projects. It shares relevant findings and lessons learned from internal independent evaluation reports and presents recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

Independent External Evaluators

43. External evaluators must possess the requisite skills and experience to conduct evaluations in accordance with this Policy and United Nations guidance including UNEG's Norms and Standards and the PPBME. Where possible, evaluators should also possess contextual knowledge relevant to the countries/region where the UNCTAD activity took place. Experience in the area of UNCTAD's work is also considered in the selection of possible evaluators. External evaluators are selected through a competitive merit-based assessment. The Head of IEU is responsible for ensuring potential evaluators' suitability to conduct an evaluation and for monitoring that their conduct adheres to the principles of this Policy.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE

44. An appropriate quality assurance system looks at both the evaluation process and its products. With respect to the evaluation process, IEU has developed transparent and explicit evaluation processes, with due consultation and recognition of the right to respond by the evaluated party at various stages of the evaluation cycle and through the management response.
45. All evaluations should meet minimum quality standards. The key questions and areas for evaluation should be clear, coherent and realistic to ensure that information generated is accurate and reliable. Each evaluation shall employ design, planning and implementation processes that are quality oriented, and appropriate methodologies for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The plan for the evaluation design, data collection and analyses of evaluation findings and recommendations should be readily understood by target audiences.
46. The evaluation report must be void of any conjecture that is not supported by facts or observations, or analyses thereof. It must have a logical construct, where background information and evidence support findings, from which conclusions and recommendations are drawn. It must address issues and questions posed in its terms-of-reference and provide a clear explanation if certain questions were not answerable or could not be investigated in sufficient depth. It must also be written in a clear manner that would enable readers to understand the findings and conclusions without ambiguity. A quality assessment checklist is completed for each internal independent evaluation report.
47. UNCTAD, along with the remaining 75 UN Secretariat entities, is subject to a biennial assessment by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services of its evaluation function, including framework, resources, reports and their quality. The review supports the strengthening of the evaluation function at UNCTAD by providing data for management to determine which aspects of the evaluation function are operating well and where there is room for improvement.

VII. RESOURCES

48. High-quality evaluations can only be successfully undertaken and generate useful insights with adequate investment of human and financial resources.
49. The Independent Evaluation Unit must be sufficiently resourced with competent staff to effectively discharge its core functions including: prioritizing evaluation activities and initiatives to strengthen the evaluation function at UNCTAD; managing and supporting independent evaluations mandated by the Trade and Development Board or Secretary-General of UNCTAD; responding to the need to oversee or manage independent evaluations requested by funding entities and other external bodies; providing guidance and assistance

- to programme managers and project officers for their self-evaluation activities; and participating and contributing to UN-wide evaluation activities and initiatives.
50. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD will ensure that sufficient resources are identified to safeguard the independence and functioning of the Independent Evaluation Unit and allow it to fulfil core evaluation functions and provide effective quality assurance. In line with ST/AI/2021/3, the resource allocation for evaluation shall take into consideration the general view of the Joint Inspection Unit that funding for evaluation activities should fall within the range of 0.5 to 3 per cent of entity expenditure.
 51. The Proposed Programme Budget (Regular Budget) for the organization should include a separate budget line for independent evaluation, which is managed by the Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit. The allocation should at a minimum cover the Subprogrammes evaluations mandated in the PPBME and by UNCTAD's member States. The Regular Budget allocation should also cover staff costs of the Independent Evaluation Unit and the activities required to strengthen the evaluation function and the professionalization of evaluation across UNCTAD.
 52. Resources from the Regular Budget can be complemented by extrabudgetary resources that are managed by the Independent Evaluation Unit.

VIII. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Following up on evaluation recommendations and findings

53. For each internal independent evaluation, the programme/project manager responsible for the programme/project being evaluated should prepare, based on consultations with concerned colleagues and senior management, a management response consolidating their views on conclusions and recommendations made in the evaluation report, and justifying the acceptance, partial acceptance or non-acceptance of recommendations. The management response accompanies the evaluation report, as an addendum or in a separate document, but its contents are not incorporated into the body of the report.
54. Division Directors ensure that management responses to independent evaluations are developed and followed-up in a timely manner. The implementation of the recommendations agreed or accepted is usually the responsibility of the concerned programme/project manager. Recommendations that require an institutional response beyond the authority of the programme/project manager or the Division Director are addressed by the Deputy Secretary-General.
55. The Independent Evaluation Unit also requires concerned programme/project managers to submit standardized action plans upon the completion of independent evaluation exercises, based on the management response. The action plan outlines concrete actions that are to be undertaken to address each recommendation (if accepted in the management response), responsible parties, and a timeframe for implementation. The plans can be updated on an annual basis or until the evaluation exercise is closed.

Dissemination and use

56. All internal independent evaluations and management responses are publicly available and dedicated efforts are made to share evaluation reports with all stakeholders that contributed to the process. Communication and dissemination strategies targeting diverse stakeholders and affected populations are considered throughout the planning and implementation of each evaluation.
57. The Working Party considers all evaluations mandated by the Trade and Development Board, together with their management responses. UNCTAD's management monitors, and

reports upon to the Trade and Development Board, the follow-up to Subprogramme evaluation recommendations, assessing measures undertaken and implementation status, and further action required. The Working Party also considers an annual evaluation synthesis of common findings from evaluations managed by IEU and identifies systemic issues and lessons learned.

IX. PERIODIC REVIEW

58. This Evaluation Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis, usually every five years.
59. The review should consider updates and changes made to relevant United Nations guidance on evaluation, including but not limited to the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards and the programming rules and guidelines established by the United Nations Secretariat, including the UN Secretariat Administrative Instruction on Evaluation.