

UNHCR 68th EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

5th October 2017

Statement by Ritu Shroff

Head of Evaluation Service

Madame Chair, High Commissioner,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure be presenting today the work of our Evaluation Service as the newly-appointed Head of Evaluation. It is a really important time at UNHCR to focus on evaluation as one of the major tools that we have to generate useful, credible, independent and impartial evidence for better decision making. As we discuss and consider key global developments such as the CRRF and Global Compact, implicitly, we are thinking about how we can find more effective and sustainable ways to provide protection, assistance and solutions to refugees. These changes in the landscape of our work point to greater collective and shared accountability to refugees, our partners and Member States. For us to fulfill these accountabilities, we need data and evidence on what works, what does not, and whether we are having the desired impact through our work.

Last year, my predecessor, Ewen Macleod presented our new Evaluation Policy and the 4 principles that set the stage for a multi-year action plan on Evaluation. We have provided an update to the ExCom on the many activities taken since the issuance of the policy to professionalise and stand up an independent Evaluation Service that does not have any overlap with policy development. We have also provided an update on the evaluations conducted in line with the new policy and lessons learned in our first year.

Today, I would like to take a few minutes and share the broad directions of our strategy going forward. Since taking up my position three months ago, I have prioritized the preparation of a multi-year plan and strategy to help convert the Eval Policy into practice.

This five year strategy has now been approved by the High Commissioner, and we have developed it with extensive in-house consultation and by benchmarking against sister UN agencies, UNEG norms and guidelines and what is considered as best practice in terms of evaluation practice.

In developing our strategy, we took note of that fact that our mandate requires us to continue to play a unique catalytic and representational role in relation to all stakeholders as they engage in efforts for refugees, stateless persons and other persons of concern. Therefore, our strategy needs to ensure that our evaluative evidence will continue to be incredibly valuable for our own learning and accountability, as well as a global “public goods” for other organizations and governments as they develop effective approaches and responses to refugee movements. Further, we need to better connect our evaluative evidence, particularly on performance and impact of our work with our ongoing efforts to strengthen the data we have on refugees and other persons of concern, and the direct and indirect results of our work and that of other stakeholders.

For this reason, our strategy aims to contribute to a larger, longer-term vision where the generation and use of evaluative evidence and other evidence becomes normal and habitual in efforts of governments and other stakeholders to provide protection, solutions and assistance to persons of concern. We are excited about this ambitious vision and look forward to engaging with you as governments and the main providers of international protection as we take our work forward.

Our strategy is being developed for a five year period. Why five years? Simply because we want to take the time needed to really build our evaluation practice throughout the organization. For us to be successful, we want to see that evaluations contribute to us having a greater impact and that findings are used consistently and appropriately to strengthen our strategies, policies and programmes and therefore in the lives of those who have been forced to flee. Indeed this is in keeping with our desire to become a learning, evidence-based organization. This focus on utilization of evaluation and integration of evaluative evidence in our planning, management and course correction is critical to our success, we believe. To ensure that we are encouraging the most meaningful and appropriate use of evaluation, we must ensure that the evidence that we generate through evaluations is independent, impartial and credible.

Following from the above rationale, our strategy therefore focuses on four pillars of work: increasing coverage and quality of evaluations; improving the utilization of evaluations; building capacity to undertake evaluations; and connecting our evaluation function with organization-wide efforts to use data, results, and evidence in our decision making. We feel confident that these four pillars of work will help us build a practice of evaluation—and we also know that implementing them will need to be gradual, and is associated with some level of risk.

Our first pillar focuses on expanding coverage and improving the quality of our evaluations. Part and parcel of professionalizing an evaluation service requires us to be clearer and more systematic about what we evaluate and what we don't, and when we evaluate. In looking at our current practice, we saw two immediate opportunities: one is to introduce an annual planning approach to identify evaluation topics systematically and proactively based on an identified set of evaluation triggers or parameters and two is to expand our evaluation methodologies to give us better evidence. By proceeding with these two actions, we should gradually expand the number of evaluations—both decentralized and centralized over the next 5 years, focus on evaluating some of our most significant areas of work; and improve the quality and usefulness of the findings.

Our second pillar, which focuses on utilization of evaluations, is of course deeply connected to the first pillar. In addition to the supply of evaluative evidence, we have specific tactics to disseminate findings, develop more actionable recommendations, and ensure better follow-up on recommendations. As you may know, we have already committed to putting our evaluations with management responses in the public domain. Part of our focus on evaluation going forward will be to produce evidence not just for us but also the wider community on what works and what is most effective to provide protection to refugees. For this reason, we want to make sure that we have a dissemination and diffusion strategy for our evaluations that goes beyond putting evaluations in the public domain, and reaches our partners and other stakeholders.

Our third pillar, building capacity for evaluation, is currently focused on having greater expertise in commissioning, managing and using evaluations within UNHCR. As we mentioned in our update, this year, we have reclassified positions to focus on evaluation rather than policy development and evaluation. We now have a team of three colleagues

recruited from within UNHCR and five colleagues including myself recruited from outside UNHCR,—combining evaluation expertise with UNHCR in-house knowledge. We will hire additional consultants and staff over the coming years, particularly to work on decentralized evaluations.

Finally, we want to maintain the integrity of our evaluation service and our overall evaluation function as a stand-alone independent body that can provide objective, impartial information about our impact, our achievements, and our effectiveness. For us to fulfill our responsibilities, we must also recognize that evaluation is one building block in a range of functions related to oversight, data, results-based management and strategic thinking. In the coming five years, we want to ensure that our evaluation function is not developed in a disjointed way from other functions, and that we are taking concrete and intentional steps to ensure that our evaluations can use data and results from monitoring and planning and can connect with oversight functions more broadly.

With these four pillars, we are confident that we will reap the benefits of much greater value for and use of evaluation in our strategies, policies and programmes. Ultimately we hope this will contribute positively toward a culture of greater accountability, learning and evidence-based decision making within UNHCR and our broader stakeholders, which is essential for our impact. We look forward to engaging with ExCom and member states as we unfold this plan, and to receiving your strong support and commitment.

Many thanks for your attention.