

UNHCR'S EVALUATION PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. UNHCR's evaluation function has been the subject of careful review by the Standing Committee, including its consultations held in November 2000, which focused on the need to further develop this function and to devolve evaluation activities to the organization's regional bureaux and field offices. A plan of action designed to realize those objectives was reviewed, and has been the basis of activities by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) in 2001.

2. This paper first outlines main developments in terms of the management and direction of these activities. A summary of EPAU's current work programme is provided in Part II, while the final section concerns evaluation follow-up and related issues.

II. MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF UNHCR'S EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

A. Evaluation policy, procedures and plan of action

3. A UNHCR evaluation policy is currently being finalized following extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders¹. The policy defines the role of evaluation in UNHCR and outlines the specific tasks to be undertaken by EPAU. It identifies the principles guiding UNHCR's evaluation activities, as well as the criteria to be used in the evaluation of UNHCR's programmes.

4. It includes a three-year plan of action which:

- Commits UNHCR to minimum and steadily increasing levels of evaluation expenditure and activity;
- Places new obligations on UNHCR's regional bureaux and directorates to undertake and commission evaluations; and
- Introduces new management response requirements, which are intended to ensure that the findings and recommendations of evaluations are used in an effective manner.

5. The policy will be accompanied by a step-by-step guide to the management of evaluations, which defines UNHCR's evaluation procedures, thereby ensuring that evaluations are conducted in a uniform and principled manner. An important task for EPAU in the months to come will be to ensure that these procedures are properly understood and implemented by regional bureaux, directorates and field offices as they assume new evaluation responsibilities.

¹ The policy paper will be available in draft form at the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2001.

B. Strengthening EPAU's capacity

6. Measures to increase the capacity of EPAU have included the addition of one JPO post and a request for an additional P4-level post. The latter has been suspended pending the completion of UNHCR's current prioritization exercise.

7. With earmarked funding, EPAU will shortly be engaging an external evaluation specialist on a long-term consultancy contract. The consultant will contribute to UNHCR's efforts to equip other parts of the organization with the skills and tools required to assume responsibility for evaluation activities.

8. Continued efforts have been made to provide EPAU staff members with professional evaluation training. Two of the unit's staff members participated in a three-day evaluation training course organized by the University of York in the United Kingdom. The Head of EPAU also attended a week-long training workshop for senior evaluation managers, organized by the Action Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

C. Devolving the evaluation function

9. A number of steps have been taken in recent months to devolve the evaluation function within UNHCR and to strengthen links between EPAU and other parts of the organization. These include:

- Expanding the Evaluation Committee to include representatives of all the regional bureaux;
- Establishing an evaluation fund that can be accessed by regional bureaux, directorates and field offices wishing to commission evaluations;
- Convening a second evaluation training workshop in Geneva in May 2001 which, together with the first workshop, will involve over 40 UNHCR staff members, as well as a donor State and an NGO representative;
- Establishing steering committees for all major new evaluation projects, enabling key stakeholders within UNHCR to be involved in the process of planning, implementation and follow-up;
- Developing a methodology for the organization of facilitated self-evaluation workshops, and field-testing that methodology in south-west Ethiopia;
- Organizing lessons-learned workshops on major UNHCR operations and policy issues, in association with the organization's regional bureaux and functional units. The latest initiative of this type was held in Monrovia and concerned the Liberian repatriation and reintegration programme; and
- Identifying all of those evaluations, reviews and assessments undertaken or commissioned by other parts of the organization. Recent examples include evaluations of the shuttle bus project in Kosovo (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the UNHCR programme for internally displaced persons in Colombia, UNHCR's local settlement programme in Serbia (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the UNHCR programme for urban refugees in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the mobile court project in Dadaab, Kenya.

D. Diversified methodologies

10. UNHCR has continued to pursue a diversified approach to the evaluation function, involving the introduction of alternative and innovative methodologies. A number of these initiatives, including joint evaluations with other agencies, lessons-learned workshops and facilitated self-evaluations, are referred to elsewhere in this paper. In addition, EPAU commissioned a "beneficiary-based" evaluation of the UNHCR programme in Guinea, involving extensive consultations with refugees, and undertook "real-time" evaluations of UNHCR emergency operations in Angola, Eritrea and Sudan.

E. Inter-agency cooperation

11. Steps have been taken to strengthen UNHCR's cooperation with its partners in the area of evaluation. An inter-agency evaluation (OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP) has been commissioned to examine the United Nations' humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan. A joint Danida/UNHCR evaluation of the UNHCR programme for IDPs in Angola has been completed. UNHCR has also participated in WFP evaluations of refugee assistance programmes in Sudan and Uganda. EPAU continues to be an active member of ALNAP, as well as the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation.

F. Dissemination

12. Using earmarked funding, EPAU commissioned a communications expert to undertake a review of the unit's dissemination activities. As a result of that review, EPAU has introduced a new strategy of targeted hard-copy distribution, both within and outside the organization. The release of each new evaluation report has been marked by the electronic distribution of an 'evaluation alert', providing a concise and lively synopsis of the report's findings and recommendations. Looking to the future, EPAU intends to experiment with the presentation of evaluation findings in audio-visual formats.

III. EVALUATION WORK PROGRAMME

13. EPAU's current work programme is focused on several of the key policy issues currently confronting UNHCR.

A. Refugee children

14. EPAU has commissioned an evaluation of UNHCR's role in meeting the rights and protection needs of refugee children. Work on this project began early in 2001, and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

B. Refugee women

15. EPAU has seconded a gender specialist staff member to assist in the review of the implementation of the guidelines on refugee women, which is being undertaken by the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, supported by members of the Executive Committee. The timeframe for this review, which is also benefiting from input by UNHCR's Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, is similar to that of the evaluation on refugee children.

16. In addition, EPAU has commissioned an in-depth evaluation of the firewood distribution project in Dadaab, Kenya, which is intended to address the problem of sexual and gender-based violence, and is also currently commissioning a review of the Kosovo Women's Initiative. At the

conclusion of the latter project, it is hoped to produce a broader review of lessons learned from the Women's Initiatives in Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda.

C. Statelessness

17. A review of UNHCR's activities in relation to statelessness, undertaken jointly by an external consultant and an EPAU staff member, has now been completed. Its findings and recommendations will be available shortly.

D. Refugee education

18. Working in close association with the Health and Community Development Service, in 2000 EPAU commissioned a number of studies on key aspects of refugee education. These studies, which are to be published as a collection, formed the basis of a workshop held in Washington D.C. in March 2001, attended by a wide range of experts, UNHCR, NGO and government personnel.

E. Protracted refugee situations

19. With earmarked funding, EPAU has established a project to review the way in which UNHCR and its partners manage protracted refugee situations. Working on the basis of several case studies and thematic reviews, the project will seek to determine whether new efforts could be made to promote the self-sufficiency of longstanding refugee populations, until such time as voluntary repatriation becomes possible. This project is being undertaken jointly with the Reintegration and Local Settlement Section.

20. EPAU will establish a flexible rolling work programme, enabling the Unit to respond to changing demands and circumstances and to make use of innovative evaluation methodologies. It will include major thematic reviews, evaluations of country and regional operations, and evaluations of headquarters departments, divisions and functions. This work programme will be established on the basis of a consultative process with suggestions from key stakeholders, including members of the Executive Committee.

21. Further details of UNHCR's evaluation work programme can be found on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website, < www.unhcr.org > . A list of recently completed reports is also provided in Annex I of this paper.

IV. FOLLOW-UP TO EVALUATIONS

22. The introduction of a new evaluation policy with a management response requirement will represent a significant step towards meeting the challenge of ensuring effective follow-up.

23. According to the new policy, accountability for the implementation of evaluation recommendations belongs first and foremost to the operational managers concerned. EPAU will, for its part, encourage, facilitate, track and report on the follow-up process. At the same time, renewed efforts will be made to feed evaluation findings into UNHCR's policy-making procedures, staff training activities and the preparation of management tools.

24. Follow-up action in relation to evaluations will inevitably differ from one case to another. The EPAU project on urban refugees, for example, will conclude with a stakeholder workshop and the preparation of a revised policy statement. The findings of the recent review of UNHCR's activities in Liberia will be fed into the planning process for the Sierra Leone reintegration programme, while

lessons learned from the implementation of the security package in the United Republic of Tanzania will inform the organization's efforts in operations in Guinea.

25. The findings of major thematic reviews on issues such as refugee children, refugee women and statelessness will be shared and discussed with the project steering committees, the Executive Committee and other stakeholders, so that appropriate follow-up plans can be established.

Research on refugee-related issues

26. EPAU has continued to be responsible for UNHCR's working paper series, "New Issues in Refugee Research", which provides UNHCR with an opportunity to disseminate the results of the research. While they are not evaluations in the traditional sense of the word, the papers present a critical perspective on the work of UNHCR and the international environment in which it operates. A list of recent papers is contained in Annex II to this paper.

Evaluation reports, November 2000 - June 2001

Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of New Delhi

Minimum standards and essential needs in a protracted refugee situation: a review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya

Evaluation of UNHCR's role in strengthening national NGO.

A beneficiary-based evaluation of UNHCR's programme in Guinea, West Africa.

The Sudan/Eritrea emergency, May-July 2000: an evaluation of UNHCR's response

Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of Cairo

Reintegration programmes in South-East Asia: report of a lessons-learned workshop

The WHALE: Wisdom we have acquired from the Liberia Experience: report of a lessons-learned workshop

Evaluation of the Dadaab firewood project

Evaluation of the UNHCR programme for internally displaced people in Angola

Evaluation of UNHCR's role and activities in relation to statelessness issues

Lessons learned from the implementation of the Tanzania security package

Research papers, November 2000 - June 2001

UNHCR's mandate: the politics of being non-political

David Forsythe

Environmental refugees: myth or reality?

Richard Black

Refugee aid and protection in rural Africa: working in parallel or cross-purposes?

Oliver Bakewell

Humanitarian issues in the Biafra conflict

Nathaniel H. Goetz

Statistically correct asylum data: prospects and limitations

Bela Hovy

Vital links in social security: Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps, Kenya

Cindy Horst

The trafficking and smuggling of refugees: the end game in European asylum policy?

John Morrison and Beth Crosland

The humanitarian hangover: transnationalization of governmental practice in Tanzania's refugee-populated areas

Loren B. Landau

Global migration trends and asylum

Susan F. Martin

Comfortable with chaos: working with UNHCR and the NGOs; reflections from the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis

Tim Cross

Mind the gap! UNHCR, humanitarian assistance and the development process

Jeff Crisp

The interface between migration and asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina

UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission for Bosnia and Herzegovina