

UNHCR 74th EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

12th October 2023

Statement by Lori Bell (6 minutes + 4 minute video)

Head of Evaluation Office

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This week's discussions have centered around the exceptionally large number of complex emergencies globally, the growing climate crisis, and the challenges of operationalizing the triple nexus, amongst others – and, on the other hand, UNHCR's funding shortfalls. In such a dynamic landscape, where resources are limited, and the demand for humanitarian and development aid ever-increasing, the importance of evaluation cannot be overstated. It becomes not just valuable for improving our humanitarian efforts but is an essential tool for prioritization, ensuring that every dollar is spent with maximum efficiency and impact in mind.

In this context, the Evaluation office works hard to deliver objective advice. Over the past year UNHCR has completed 12 corporate and 6 decentralized evaluations, for an overall expenditure of approximately 7 million usd - or just over a tenth of one percent of overall organizational expenditure. This has been money well spent.

In terms of **learning and organizational use**, findings from our corporate thematic evaluations have contributed to the development of a number of critical policies and strategies over the last year. These include UNHCR's engagement with development actors, organizational efforts to end statelessness, child protection, voluntary repatriation, and the policy and guidance for emergency operations.

The evaluation of UNHCR's repatriation programmes, for example, has influenced the revision of operational guidance for repatriation and reintegration programming. These

revised guidelines acknowledge that organized returns are just one option amongst several. As per the evaluation's suggestions, the guidance now places greater importance on empowering and supporting refugees to make informed decisions, amplifying their voices and agency.

Country strategy evaluations are very much in demand with more requests from regional bureaus and country operations than my Office can respond to. Their use in support of multi-year planning, prioritization and to demonstrate results continues to grow. The just completed country strategy evaluation in Mozambique, for example, shows how UNHCR learned from the 2019 evaluation of the response to cyclone Idai - and documented major improvements in UNHCR's ability to respond to emergencies.

Decentralized evaluations commissioned by management are similarly prompting action. The evaluation of the Syrian Regional Refugee Response Plan, for example, conducted last year by the UNHCR and UNDP Regional Bureaus for MENA, has resulted in a number of changes including a significant scale up of joint advocacy efforts. The joint WFP/UNHCR evaluation of cash programming in Lebanon is contributing, amongst other things, to an updating of targeting criteria.

However, and perhaps not surprisingly, insufficient financial resources are often impediments to the implementation of evaluation recommendations. UNHCR has been unable, for example, to expand its joint livelihoods work with WFP and FAO to new districts in Rwanda, as was recommended by the evaluation, due to lack of funding.

My office has made a number of advances on the **transparency and accountability front**.

As you know, the updated 2022 evaluation policy now requires management to report on the implementation of recommendations. Together with the Division of Strategic Planning and Results, we have sent out the first requests for year one follow up reports. Going forward our goal is to embed actions committed to in management responses – in the routine planning and reporting systems of the organization. We hope that such measures will help improve the timeliness and traceability of management follow up.

With respect to accountability to Member States and donors, we held several informal briefings over 2022/23 and have involved a number of interested member states in evaluation advisory groups. For the upcoming evaluations on UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization and on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence, we were pleased to receive expressions of interest from the US, Sweden, Russia, Israel, Belgium and Switzerland.

Finally, there is perhaps no greater accountability than of that to the people we serve. Earlier this year we published a report which summarized findings from evaluations that spoke to how UNHCR holds itself accountable to the displaced and the stateless. We found that the organization excels in using a diverse array of channels and approaches to actively listen to the voices of the people we serve. However, an area for improvement for UNHCR, but also for the humanitarian system more widely, is in demonstrating that the organization acts on such feedback.

My office has taken this finding to heart and is working to ensure that evaluations offer not only opportunities to hear the voices of refugees and others in the course of an evaluation but also that these communities hear back on what decisions and actions will be taken in response to the evaluation. I would like to show you a 4 minute video that demonstrates these accountability principles in action, giving you an example from our recent country evaluation in Mauritania.

But before I do, I wanted to quickly mention our plans for 2024.

We are launching a global thematic evaluation that examines UNHCR's support for urban refugees and livelihoods as well as an evaluation which will set the baseline for UNHCR's climate action agenda.

We will build on innovation in 2024 – in particular our pilot use of Artificial Intelligence. With the help of Chat GPT, earlier this year we were able to summarize cross-cutting evaluation findings from several dozen evaluations in just few minutes – a task that used to

take months of consultant time. We are cautiously optimistic that AI will bring greater timeliness and efficiency gains to our evaluation work.

We will strengthen our methodologies to measure the impact of UNHCR's work on the people we serve. These efforts will require additional funding that goes beyond our core budget. To this end we will develop a resource mobilization strategy.

Now with your kind permission, madam Chair, I would like to conclude my presentation and turn your attention to a short video that speaks to the efforts we are making to strengthen the agency of the people we serve through the conduct of evaluations.

Thank you very much.
1036 words (~ 6 minutes)