

UNHCR 73^d EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13th October 2022

Statement by Lori Bell (7-10 minutes)

Head of Evaluation Office

Mr. Chairman, High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Experience tells us that evaluation can play a critical role in four ways:

- by making a contribution in real time when it is needed;
- by maintaining a focus on long-term results;
- by documenting good practices and distilling lessons and, finally
- by supporting good governance

I am happy to report that evaluation in UNHCR has demonstrated its added value in all of these ways over the last year.

For UNHCR, the ability **to adapt swiftly during a crisis** is critical. Millions of lives depend on it. Yet it is often said that evaluators come after the battle - and bayonette the dead! The Evaluation Office is working very hard to change this paradigm, to bring evidence-based insights in earlier, and to be forward looking.

Responding to the need for effective operational strategies for the implementation of Strategic Directions, this year we have quickly produced summaries of evidence and good practice on themes such as accountability to affected populations, COVID-19 and UNHCRs ability to scale up in major crisis such as in DRC, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan.

Our approach to evaluating emergency responses has evolved. We now provide support to management-led real time reviews within 3 months of the onset of a crisis response - and we are undertaking evaluations of major emergency responses earlier to support course correction and demonstrate results.

Finally, while not in real time but rather at the right time, we have, over the past year, responded to a number of operations requests for country strategy evaluations to feed directly into multi year strategic planning.

My office is also committed **to maintaining a focus on sustainable, long-term solutions** for the people we serve. Many of you will have participated in the briefing earlier this year on the seminal evaluation of UNHCR's engagement in development cooperation. Findings from this, and other evaluations, have contributed to the new UNHCR action plan for Working with Development Actors – itself part of the strategic architecture guiding the organization over the next five years.

In another example, the evaluation of UNHCR's repatriation programs and activities, is pointing to the need for UNHCR to: i) enhance refugee **agency** in repatriation programming, ii) to **scale up efforts on reintegration in countries of origin**, iii) and to continue driving forward multi-stakeholder initiatives such as area-based approaches, together with development partners, in order to reach underserved communities, regardless of their status.

However, while UNHCR and partners' efforts to promote inclusion are commendable, only States can ensure comprehensive protection and robust, long-lasting solutions for the people we serve. Our independent study on UNHCR's support to **strengthening national asylum systems** outlines the excellent progress made since our last review in 2014, while highlighting where and how UNHCRs capacity development efforts can further support States to develop fully functioning asylum systems.

Evaluations are helping UNHCR to capitalize on innovation and new opportunities **but also navigate through difficult times**. Clearly the biggest challenge over 2021/22 was **COVID-19** and a range of evaluations provided some valuable lessons.

Our joint evaluation, which looked at the protection of the rights of refugees during COVID-19, was carried out with the OECD DAC and the Governments of Colombia, Uganda and Finland. Recommendations were made, not only to UNHCR, but also to States – calling, for example, for Governments to make exceptions for asylum seekers in future large-scale emergencies and pandemics, and to leave their borders open.

In addition to the joint evaluation, a synthesis of evidence from 26 UNHCR evaluations conducted over the last 3 years has revealed that **UNHCR truly did ‘stay and deliver’** during COVID - even in the most difficult circumstances. The synthesis has also inspired lively discussions around lessons and good practices in remote approaches when access is limited – and even, in some cases, when it is not.

Particularly challenging during COVID-19 has been the prevention of and response to gender-based violence. Evidence suggests that GBV services need to be delivered face to face – and all efforts should be made in future emergencies to maintain such crucial protection services.

Nevertheless, and on a very positive note, a number of good practices were highlighted that helped UNHCR to maintain contact and services during the peak of the pandemic:

- GBV hotlines, WhatsApp chat and other social media approaches were effectively used in a number of countries during COVID-19
- Community based protection monitoring, women’s protection committees and protection desks
- The use of mobile health clinics to provide life-saving access to COVID related medical services in remote and insecure areas.

Finally, I see the increasing role that evaluation is playing through its contribution to evidence-based decision-making and **good governance** within the organization. One of the key achievements over the last 12 months has been the development of an **updated evaluation policy** – approved last week by the High Commissioner.

The new policy aligns with other organizational priorities and policies notably with respect to regionalization and decentralization, oversight coordination and the new RBM system. It outlines the norms for evaluation coverage at all levels of the organization: country operation, regional bureaux and globally, delineating and reinforcing second and third-line roles and highlighting the value addition of evaluation to a strong oversight system.

As requested by many of you, the new policy requires more systematic follow up and reporting by management on the use made of evaluation recommendations.

I would like to take this opportunity to **thank member States** who participated in the informal consultation on evaluation last month, in the margins of the Standing Committee - which allowed us to make final improvements - and which you will find reflected in the Policy itself, available on our website.

Lastly, beyond consultations around the new evaluation policy, 2021/22 has seen my Office reaching out. Through stronger engagement processes, we are helping management and even member States have better oversight over specific areas of the organizations work. We have engaged more regularly with the Senior Executive Team, Senior Management Committee and Member States, organizing more than a dozen presentations and discussions, and involving member States directly in the conduct of a number of our evaluations.

Looking forward to 2023, our main strategic focus will be on strengthening the decentralized evaluation function. Our global evaluation workplan for 2023 includes topics such as GBV, internal displacement, regionalization & decentralization, and the emergency response to the Ukraine crisis. We hope you will agree to be involved and – as always – my office remains at your disposal to provide briefings on any specific evaluations of interest.

To conclude, I would like to highlight our commitment to being true agents of change within UNHCR – contributing to both stronger RBM and oversight systems within the organization. I would like to welcome any questions you may have,
Thank you very much for your attention.