

Field office assessment framework

UNIDO Field Office Performance: Generic Assessment Framework

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document outlines a generic framework for the evaluation of UNIDO field office performance in the context of comprehensive country evaluations that also cover technical cooperation (TC) projects/ programmes and Global Forum activities. Adjusted to the requirements of a particular country evaluation, it can be incorporated with the TOR for that evaluation. A generic TOR for UNIDO country evaluations can be downloaded from the ODG/EVA intranet page.

1.2. Field office performance assessments are integral parts of country evaluations. Embedded in evaluations that also assess TC projects/programmes and Global Forum activities, they examine the role and contribution of the field office in a wider perspective but also more specifically in relation to TC delivery and management and Global Forum activities.

2. Background

2.1 UNIDO's field representation has been progressively transformed and strengthened since UNIDO was first established in 1966. Originally integrated with the field representation of UNDP and in part financed by UNDP, it now, in 2010, consists of 10 regional offices, 19 country offices, 18 UNIDO desks in UNDP offices, five UNIDO focal points operating from a counterpart institution, and one centre for regional cooperation. Altogether, UNIDO is represented in more than 50 countries around the world. Since the late 1990's, the field organization has been fully financed from UNIDO regular budgets, with some cost sharing and contributions by host governments.

The gradual expansion of UNIDO's field organization reflects changes within the UN-system towards closer cooperation of agencies at country level as well as a more general shift of development cooperation management and decision-making towards the country level. Field offices/desks are intended to make UNIDO more accessible to partner country clients and stakeholders, while helping UNIDO itself to ensure that its services are well tailored to

partner country needs and priorities. They are also intended to facilitate interaction with the UN country-level teams and bilateral and multilateral donors. Field presence is regarded as a precondition for efficient participation in joint UNCT planning and programming, and is normally required for leading a joint UN programme initiative. In some cases it is also required by donors.

However, the expected returns on investments in UNIDO's field representation do not come by themselves. Some field offices turn out to be more useful to UNIDO and partner countries than others, and some field offices are more efficient in, for instance funds mobilization, than others. An assessment conducted by the Office of the Comptroller General of UNIDO in 2004 found that field offices generally spent relatively little time and effort on coordination with the local UN team, although UN country level integration was already at that time a UN priority issue.¹ It also found that while field offices gave much importance to supporting TC activities, they were often more concerned with the administration and monitoring of ongoing TC activities than with the development of new ones. Since identification and formulation were activities for which field offices were considered particularly well positioned, this was not quite expected.

A more recent evaluation that deals with the performance of UNIDO desks confirms that it can be difficult for UNIDO's field representation to live up to headquarter expectations.² Although for the most part quite positive in its assessments, it notices that in some respects objectives are not fully achieved. With regard to facilitating access of stakeholders to UNIDO expertise, for example, the performance of the UNIDO desks is said to be uneven, and a similar assessment is made of desk contributions to the implementation of TC projects. According to the evaluation, these shortcomings in desk performance are to a large extent due to a mismatch between a very demanding set of responsibilities and the limited resources made available for their fulfillment.

What all this goes to show is that the performance of UNIDO field offices needs to be continuously monitored and periodically evaluated in greater depth. The performance assessments for which this document provides generic guidance are intended to fill this evaluation gap. Field office assessments are expected to be useful one by one, but will also serve as inputs to a thematic evaluation. A thematic evaluation of field office performance will be conducted in 2011.

3. Purpose

3.1. Field office assessments are assessment of the performance of field offices in conducting their mandated functions and achieving stated

1 Report on the Assessment/Evaluation of UNIDO's Field Representation. Office of the Comptroller General. 2004. V.04-51638.

2 Joint Terminal Evaluation of the implementation of the cooperation agreement between the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. UNIDO Evaluation Group/UNDP Evaluation Office, 2009.

objectives. They are organizational or functional assessments as opposed to staff assessments focusing on individuals.

Like the comprehensive country evaluation of which it forms a part, a field office assessment serves purposes of both learning and accountability. It is intended to be useful to managers and staff at UNIDO headquarters who call on field offices for services or inputs as well as to the field offices themselves. It is also expected to be useful to UNIDO's governing bodies and to external partners interested in UNIDO's field organization.

4. Scope and focus

4.1. A field office assessment covers the main functions of a UNIDO field office.

In case the field office is a regional office serving several countries, the assessment will not include all the activities for which it is responsible, but cover only those pertaining to the country in focus for the country evaluation.

The list of field office responsibilities presented below is based on UNIDO/DGB/(0).95/Add 7. dated 26 February 2010, IDB. 37/6/Add. I, dated 20 April, 2010, UNIDO's TC Guidelines of 2006, and other documents describing the responsibilities of UNIDO's field representation. These are:

- Formally represent UNIDO among clients and stakeholders as appropriate.
- Help create/increase knowledge about UNIDO among potential clients and other interested groups in the country in order to stimulate demand for UNIDO services. This is an important marketing function. In UNIDO's standardized format for field office (FO) work plans it is referred to as 'enhancing the visibility' of UNIDO and is one of five main field office outcome areas.
- Promote and facilitate Global Forum activities. The role of the field office can be that of a knowledge broker facilitating exchange of information and knowledge between national counterparts and stakeholders and transnational UNIDO networks. On the one side, the field office helps national stakeholders to get access to transnational knowledge networks. On the other side, the field office makes national expertise and experience accessible to transnational networks.
- Provide advice to national stakeholders in UNIDO's areas of expertise as requested. To a large extent UNIDO advice flow through the channels of TC programmes/projects and specific Global Forum activities. However, advice can also be provided to national stakeholders, including the national government, through other types of contact and upon a direct request.
- Keep UNIDO headquarters informed of national developments in UNIDO's areas of specialization through continuous liaising with national counterparts and stakeholders as well as representatives of international development organizations.

- Contribute to the identification and formulation of new UNIDO TC projects/programmes. In cooperation with the Regional Programme, the field office gathers information relevant to the identification and formulation of new country programmes as well as of national or regional projects. It paves the way for the formulation mission both substantively and logistically. It is expected to play an important role in ensuring that the programme to be proposed to the national government is aligned with national priorities and can be incorporated within the wider UN assistance frameworks.
- Help mobilize resources for TC interventions from the national government, international donors, and other interested actors. Conducted with support of UNIDO headquarters, the participation of field offices in resource mobilization is especially important in countries where there is a joint financing mechanism for the UN-system and/or donors have decentralized funding decisions to the country level.
- Contribute to ongoing UNIDO TC activities in the country/region through monitoring and support to implementation and evaluation. In the monitoring of programmes, field offices should regularly review implementation status with counterparts and stakeholders, brief and debrief experts and consultants, attend review meetings, and report back to the programme team on accomplishments and the possible need for remedial action. At project level, the main FO task is usually to provide administrative, technical and logistic support to project managers and experts based at UNIDO headquarters. In some cases, however, projects are directly managed by FO staff members who are then also allotment holders. Field offices also provide support to evaluation missions.
- Contribute to gender mainstreaming of TC activities at all stages.
- Support UN integration at country level through active participation in the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), and contribute as appropriate to joint UN country-level initiatives (Common Country Assessments (CCAs), United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), Delivering as One (DaO), etc.). Act as champion of UNIDO thematic interests and UNIDO itself in the UNCT.

4.2 Field office assessments do not replace the audits performed by UNIDO's Office of Internal Oversight Services (IOS). While internal audits tend to focus on compliance with UNIDO rules and regulations, the quality of systems of internal control, etc., field office assessments are more directly concerned with the contributions of field offices to development cooperation or in fulfilling UNIDO's mandate. Financial control, contracts, procurement, travel and general administration are matters that typically belong to auditing. Such matters may figure in field office assessments as variables influencing technical cooperation (TC) delivery (efficiency aspects) and results (effectiveness aspects), but would not be examined in their own right or in respect to adherence of rules and regulations.

4.3. Field office assessments are also not intended to replace the reporting by the field offices themselves on activities and results in accordance with their annual results-based management (RBM) work plans. While the RBM work

plan and the monitoring of its implementation are integral elements of field office management, a field office assessment is an independent evaluation of field office functioning. In a field office assessment both the design and the implementation of the RBM work plan are assessed. The work plan's standardized causal logic of outputs and outcomes is regarded as a hypothesis to be interpreted and validated rather than as an established fact.

In the standard RBM work plan framework for UNIDO field offices the following are currently (2010) the main outcomes:

1. UNIDO visibility enhanced at global, regional/sub-regional and country levels.
2. Responsiveness of UNIDO to national/regional priorities:
 - TC programme and project development
 - Fund raising
3. Effective participation in UN initiatives at country level, including UNDAF, PRSP, UNDG, One UN, etc.
4. Promoting Global Forum activities with direct link to UNIDO priorities and to the potential increase of UNIDO portfolio in the region and worldwide.
5. Effective management of technical cooperation activities and the UNIDO office.

Field office assessments should review the appropriateness of this categorization of outcomes and the rest of the standard RBM work plan framework (outputs, indicators, etc.) for guiding the activities listed in section 4.1 above and reporting on their results. Questions regarding the appropriateness and actual and potential use of the work plan framework are included in the attached field office evaluation framework (Annex 1).

5. Criteria and issues

5.1 Field office performance is assessed in relation to three evaluation criteria:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness,
- Efficiency

The following paragraphs define these concepts and explain how they are intended to be applied in field office assessments. Standard evaluation questions relating to each of the criteria can be found in the attached field office evaluation matrix (Annex 1).

5.2. **Relevance** is defined in much the same way as in the OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. The main difference is that while the OECD/DAC definition refers to the relevance of a specific development intervention, a field office assessment is concerned with the relevance of a subdivision of a larger organization. In both the cases, however, relevance is a criterion for assessing the extent to which the

evaluated unit matches the needs and priorities of its clients or target groups. Most of the questions about relevance in the attached evaluation matrix concern the extent to which field office services are consistent with needs and priorities formulated in the partner country PRSP and other national policy documents and are considered useful by national counterparts and stakeholders. There is also a question about the consistency of the field office work programme with UNIDO strategic priorities. Is the field office doing what it should, given UNIDO priorities in relation to the country in question?

5.3. Effectiveness is a criterion for assessing the extent to which an entity has achieved, or is likely to achieve, its objectives or fulfill its mandate. OECD/DAC defines it as 'the extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.' In an assessment of field office performance, however, it is better understood as 'the extent to which an organization, or organizational unit, has achieved, or is expected to achieve its objectives or fulfill its responsibilities, taking into account their relative importance.' So defined, effectiveness refers to achievement of objectives and/or fulfillment of responsibilities in relation to most of the field office functions listed in section 4.1 above, including that of contributing to the effectiveness of TC projects/programmes.

Note that assessments of field office effectiveness should focus on the achievement of outcome-level results, rather than the performance of activities and the delivery of outputs. The key question is always the same: has delivered outputs been useful to clients or target groups as intended, and/or is it likely that they will achieve their intended effects in the future? In a field office assessment, the client or target group is in many cases another UNIDO functional unit for which the field office provides supportive services. In other cases, the client is a partner or stakeholder outside UNIDO.

In the attached evaluation matrix (Annex 1) the effectiveness criterion is applied to all the field office functions listed in section 4.1 above one by one. With regard to each of the functions there is a package of questions covering the following points:

- Activities and outputs: What has the field office actually done in relation to the function in question during the assessment period? What were the activities? What were the outputs? Who were the target groups or clients?
- Gender mainstreaming: How were gender equality issues taken into account by the field office in these activities?
- Performance monitoring: How has the field office monitored and measured the implementation and results of its own activities in relation to this function during the assessment period?
- Observed/inferred outcomes of field office outputs: What have been, or seem to have been, the outcomes of field office services for clients and target groups?
- Achievement of objectives/fulfillment of responsibilities: How do the observed/inferred outcomes for clients and target groups compare to

intended outcomes? Are outcome-level results satisfactory in relation to field office mandates, plans and expectations?

- In case intended outcomes for clients and target groups were not achieved or mandates not fulfilled: What is the explanation for the gap between intended and achieved results?
- Ways by which the field office could make its operations pertaining to this function more effective, if required.
- Ways by which UNIDO head quarters could support field office efforts to make these operations more effective, if required.

An assessment of the overall effectiveness of a field office is a synthesis of function-by-function assessments that takes the relative importance of functions into account.

5.4. While effectiveness is about results, primarily outcomes, **efficiency** is about inputs and outputs and the relation between them. According to OECD/DAC, efficiency is 'a measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.' As long as the word 'results' is taken to refer to outputs alone, this is an appropriate definition for field office assessments. Efficiency in this restricted sense is also known as input-output efficiency.

Since a field office provides a variety of services, most of which are non-standardized and difficult to measure, its efficiency in converting resources into outputs is not readily reduced to numbers and not easily compared to that of other field offices or other organizations. In large part, however, an assessment of field office efficiency is concerned with the quality of management systems and practices and the delivery of outputs according to plans, resources and budgets. It also covers efforts to achieve higher productivity, maintain or improve quality of outputs, and reduce the costs of resource inputs. The attached evaluation matrix includes standard questions (Annex 1).

5.5. An assessment of field office performance must be grounded in an accurate appreciation of field office capacity in relation to its mandate and resource endowment and factors in the environment that may influence performance. The task of a field office assessment is not just to assess performance in relation to a set of standardized criteria, but to find explanations for differences in performance levels and constructively suggest remedies where performance seems to fall short of expectation and to identify good practices and benchmarks.

If a field office fails to achieve planned results, or does not achieve them well enough, it is perhaps because the objectives were unrealistic given the constraints of the local environment or the limitations of field office capacity. It may also be because the existing field office capacity is not well utilized, or it is perhaps due to a combination of all of these factors. Whatever the problem, it is the task of a field office assessment to come up with a useful and forward-looking diagnosis.

Similarly, when a field office is found to perform very well, a field office assessment should not be content with putting its achievements on record, but should try to identify factors explaining the good performance and draw conclusions that can be usefully applied elsewhere.

6. Approach and methodology

6.1. Field office assessments are part of country evaluations and should be planned and implemented accordingly. The evaluation team responsible for the country evaluation is usually also in charge of the field office assessment. Findings from assessments of TC project/programmes and activities pertaining to the Global Forum provide essential inputs to the field office assessment. Questions about field office contributions to TC interventions or Global Forum initiatives cannot be adequately answered without prior assessments of these activities themselves.

6.2. Field office assessments are conducted with the active participation of field office staff. They begin with a self-evaluation where field office staff members are asked to describe the functioning of the field office and make their own assessments of results in relation to the evaluation criteria explained above. In a second step the results from the self-evaluation are used as a platform for discussions between the FO staff and the evaluation team.

6.3. Data for field office assessments are also collected from actual and potential recipients of field office services inside and outside UNIDO. Since field offices are service organizations, opinions regarding the usefulness of their services to clients, as well as information on actual client satisfaction with services rendered, are essential for assessments of field office performance.

6.4. The selection of clients or target group representatives to be interviewed in connection with a field office performance assessment is made by the evaluation team in accordance with the requirements of the case at hand. The evaluation team is also responsible for other aspects of the evaluation methodology. A description of the proposed methodology should be included in the country evaluation inception report.